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## The Long Road Towards Bilingualism of the Deaf in the German-speaking Area

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### Abstract

This lecture attempts an outline of essential aspects of bilingualism of the deaf from a historical, linguistic, and educational perspective, with a focus on the situation of the deaf in the German-speaking area.

The historical starting-point consists, among other things, in the ideas of a deaf teacher of the deaf, Friedrich-Wilhelm Runge from Schleswig, who demanded in several publications as early as in the mid-nineteenth century that both spoken and sign language should be used in the education of the deaf. These thoughts are further elaborated in terms of linguistics by taking into consideration some recent findings of sign language research as well as psycho- and sociolinguistics. The attention will be focussed on the special importance of language in general and sign language in particular for the development of deaf children.

From this, some implications are derived for an educational concept of bilingualism which also includes the goal of improving the acquisition of spoken and written language by deaf people.

In conclusion, an attempt will be made to define the situation in the German-speaking area. The focus will be on the development in the last ten years and on a discussion of problems of sign language research over here and also of the educational and social recognition of the sign language of the deaf and their rights as an independent language community.

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Throughout foreign countries the one-sided monolingual oral language method is known as the *German Method*. It goes back, among others, to Samuel Heinicke who, in the second half of the 18th century, worked as a committed teacher of the deaf in Hamburg and Leipzig.

Contrary to the so-called *French Method* of his contemporary de l'Epée in Paris, who used signs – although only as an artificial sign system – in teaching, Heinicke emphasized the build-up of oral language, in particular the learning of speech. His views, which were rather moderate, were later aggravated more and more by his successors. On the Milan Congress of 1880 the oral language method then started its world-wide victorious campaign in deaf education.

The consequence was: Deaf education was largely reduced to an education of speech, an education of 'de-muting'. Sign language was banned from the education

of deaf people, and deaf teachers were dismissed, even in Paris. The deaf community was felt to be a hoard of dangers for the oral development of the deaf, and therefore disappeared from the institutionalized educational concept. It was not in demand any more. Its constant warnings, pleas and demands for its sign language died away without being heard. Hearing people worked with the deaf in and for oral language. The main educational objective was not the comprehensively formed personality of self-confident deaf individuals and their wholistic development any more, but rather everything was dominated by the formation of oral language. The level of education among the deaf decreased and was far below the level of hearing people. But how can you obtain anything from the source of knowledge if you are only allowed to use a sieve for this purpose, and if you are prevented from using a scoop?

In terms of the basic approach this situation continued in Germany up until the post-war period. Despite some efforts in German deaf education to include the sign language of the deaf (like, for example, by Heidsiek), sign language has been banned from the education of the deaf for 100 years.

The reason for this rigid perseverance solely in spoken German may have been the political development of a nation which was primarily focussing on the common language. For many centuries the German nation basically existed only through its culture and language, but not in the form of a unified governmental structure. Germany consisted of several dozens of small principalities, and demands for their unification into a federation of states were becoming ever-stronger. Liberal nationalism from the mid-19th century was hardened in a conservative way by the foundation of 'Prussian Germany' in the late 19th century. The ideal of uniformity, of the majority standard, the patronizing dominance of the strong over 'persons in need of protection' may have contributed to a situation where the institutional side showed less and less understanding for the deaf and their independent linguistic community, too. Being different then turned into a threat for life later, at the time of national socialism, when genetically deaf people were considered as 'unworthy life', and many of these deaf people were forced to undergo sterilization (Biesold 1988).

It is obvious that in such an environment deaf people must hide themselves, or at least their deafness. Their sign language would betray them, but unfortunately their articulation will do so, too. As a result there is the isolation of a minority. After hardly anybody listened to the deaf earlier, they could now not even be heard.

But it would be too easy to just simply consider the German Method as a problem of the Germans. We just seem to have operated it once again with truly German thoroughness. As mentioned earlier, the German Method was dominant worldwide in the last century, and not only in Central Europe. Lane's history of deafness documents this in a very impressive way (Lane 1989). I think it is a general human attitude to be afraid of what is alien, unknown, to fend it off, and refusing to perceive it.

And what can be more alien, more terrifying to hearing people than being unable to hear. But it is not only the lack of a sense organ. Because then blind people would have to be looked upon in the imagination of hearing people just as negatively as the deaf. But the blind person does in fact always and fully represent the seer who looks intensively to the inside and beyond the horizon of the 'normal human being'. The deaf person, however, turns into the 'deaf-mute' in the eyes of the hearing, and is included among dumb people not only in terms of the history of language (the deaf-and-dumb). Deaf persons quite frequently had to assume the role of the local half-wit, who doesn't know anything, the idiot; for it is not only that they can't hear, but in the experience of hearing people they also cannot sufficiently speak and understand.

And that brings us to a crucial point: being unable to speak and understand sufficiently does mean the same for many hearing people as being speechless.

And originally all the prejudices against the deaf are based on this false assessment. Seen from a historical perspective, it all started as early as in the 4th century BC with the Greek philosopher Aristotle. He assumed that all learning processes happen through hearing, and that deaf people are therefore less suitable for education than, e.g., blind people. The subsequent comments on Aristotle aggravated this view even more. As a consequence, deaf people were considered, up until modern times, as being unsuitable for education and law. In the Middle Ages another view was added, namely that the deaf are not suitable for any belief, which at the time originally meant the same as not being a real human being. The justification given for this was that deaf people cannot perceive the word of God, because according to the Letter to the Romans, faith comes from hearing the word of Christ (*Ergo fides ex audito, auditur autem per verbum Christi*).

In the rural, pre-industrial type of economy it still was relatively easy to integrate the manual and gestural communication of the deaf. With the rise of bourgeois and town occupations, particularly in trade and crafts, the learning and practise of activities and with it the overall communication characterized by it would shift more and more towards the verbal sector. This made the situation of the deaf even more difficult (Spikofski & Viefhues 1989:24).

But it was also at this time that the first attempts were started towards a deaf education with the objective of transmitting belief and education. This was expanded more and more in the 18th and 19th century – and all this happened by means of oral, written and sign language.

In parallel to this, however, the old prejudice of the speechless deaf person who therefore is largely unable to learn and think continues to be passed on without any change in the language philosophy of the 18th and 19th century. Thus Kant, e.g., in his *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Sicht* [Anthropology from a Pragmatic Perspective] of 1793 points out several times that the non-iconic semiotic character of linguistic sounds "is the most skillful means of naming things, and deaf-mute

people (...) can never arrive at more than an analogon of reason." (1980:49)

For a person who was deafened at an early age "the sense of *seeing* from the movement of the speech organs must change the sounds you have elicited from him while teaching him into a feeling of the own movement of the speech muscles of the same; although in doing so he will never arrive at real concepts because the signs that he will need for this are not able to carry a generalness." (1980:54f.)

For Schopenhauer (1911:71), too, the deaf don't have direct access to reason, because in his opinion, as well, the use of reason is linked up with language – and at the time this always meant only oral language. Based on this lack of reason Schopenhauer, like Sicard (1840) before him, also ascribes to the deaf an unbridled emotionality and sexuality, and he even compares them to orangutans and elephants.

In all these assessments the sign language of the deaf is hardly ever found to be worth mentioning. According to the understanding of language at the time it is considered to be no real language, and thus in the eyes of most contemporaries it cannot alleviate and least of all do away with the linguistic handicap of the deaf. In the German-speaking area it basically was only the psychologist Wundt (1911) who in his ethnic psychology made some initial attempt of dealing with the sign language of the deaf.

In the neighboring discipline of linguistics, however, the sign language of the deaf failed to be accepted as an object of linguistic studies. This may in particular be explained by the fact that according to de Saussure (1916/67) languages were all along regarded as distinct semiotic systems, and that the partial iconicity of sign language was regarded as proof of its inferior value. According to this view signing is gesticulation and mimicry, which is wholistic and a concrete, but reduced representation of reality, in the style of pantomime, without structural hierarchies, without grammar, and without the ability for abstraction. This misjudgment is not shared any more today by any serious linguist; on the contrary, modern sign language research has by now clearly proven it to be wrong.

But let's go back into the past!

At that time deaf people were regarded as speechless 'deaf-mutes', unless they succeeded in sufficiently acquiring spoken or at least written language. Applied Linguistics tells us in many ways about the grave negative consequences of a lack of any language for the development of human beings – and not only for linguistic development. It makes clear how important language is for the social, emotional, and intellectual development of a child's personality (see Prillwitz 1982, Wisch 1990).

The fundamental **value of language** must be seen in its application in communication. The social, emotional, and intellectual exchange between human beings happens to a large extent through linguistic communication. By means of language we can set up contacts with other human beings, make ourselves understood to

them, and establish and expand social relations. Living together, cooperation, and interaction largely take place through linguistic communication. It is by means of language that we follow our interests, inform ourselves and others, present arguments, convince, persuade.

Language and social behavior, acting and learning are closely interconnected: With their language children will acquire a tool at a very early age in order to make clear and implement their needs and objectives in many situations. On the other hand they thus also have the prerequisites for being able to understand opposite influences and to be reachable through verbal argumentation.

In doing so, language enables us to communicate in an almost unlimited way about all kinds of subject matters, irrespective of whether they are present in the actual communicative situation or not. The semiotic system of language as the second signal system is able to re-create or newly create thought, experienced or even invented 'reality', it represents, as it were, the reality in a form which makes it widely decodable even for other persons.

It is only with this tool of a conventionalized language that the restriction of communication to the actual situation of *Here and Now* is broken up. 'The past may be entered in the actual communication as something that is remembered or has been experienced, future things may be constructed or anticipated. Fictitious things, wishes, fears, and even unreal things may become real, present, and communicable on a linguistic level. Language thus provides us with unthought of degrees of freedom in thinking and communicative self-realization.

If such a language, like in the case of the deaf, fails to be available in a sufficient way and early enough, then the consequences will involve more than merely a reduced linguistic competence.

For it is in the socialized communicative language usage that a large part of the social and intellectual development of the child takes place. The child's socialization is closely linked with its active and passive linguistic skills. Rules of behavior, social norms and values as well as complex knowledge of the world are not only obtained by way of direct experience, but rather elaborated by being verbally conveyed.

Children must be told or will themselves ask for the reasons why they should or should not do certain things. Within their possibilities to understand they must produce links to their world of previous experiences in their thoughts and in their actions and expressions, they must question contradictions and be able to discuss. They want information, reasons and explanations for certain connections, modes of behavior, rules and norms as well as to explain their environment. If no or insufficient communication on the contents of subject matters is possible here, then the child's horizon of understanding remains confined and centered on the ego, and the consequence will at best be a rigid keeping with stereotyped forms of behavior acquired by learning.' (Wisch 1990:114-5)

The whole acquisition of knowledge before, at and after school is most closely linked with the ability for linguistic communication, and it won't be feasible without a sufficient common linguistic competence of those involved in the learning process (Prillwitz 1983, ch. 3).

On the other hand, however, language is not merely a means of communicative action and of building up knowledge, but it is at the same time acquired in these close-to-life contexts. Language will only be efficient as an instrument of acting and learning if it has been able to be developed spontaneously in close linkage with the child's day-to-day experience. Only that way can language fulfill its intrapersonal cognitive functions: Intellectual imagination, memory, recognizing, formation of concepts, awareness and reflection, assessment, solution of problems, thinking and learning are all mental processes, which would hardly be thinkable on a demanding level without an internalized linguistic sign system.

I do not want to further elaborate on the cognitive functions of language at this point. I have described these contexts in detail in Volume 130 of the series published by the Federal Minister for Youth, Family, Women and Health, under the title of *Zum Zusammenhang von Kommunikation, Kognition und Sprache mit Bezug auf die Gehörlosenproblematik* [On the connection of communication, cognition and language with reference to the problems of deaf people] (Prillwitz 1982). A brief and informative description can also be found in Wisch 1990.

The major importance of language for the child's development has in fact never been denied on the part of the oral language method. Quite on the contrary, it has itself derived its commitment to intensive oral language education from these very contexts. It does everything in order for deaf people to learn spoken language and obtain an efficient linguistic competence. That way the foundation is at the same time to be laid for an emotional, social and particular intellectual development which is as 'normal' as possible. The deaf person is to be torn out of the above-mentioned fate of the 'deaf-mute' and enabled for a human life in the majority world of hearing people.

Anyone will welcome this objective if it is formulated in such a way. But unfortunately it remains out of reach for the majority of those concerned. The results of the monolingual oral language method so far all over the world are demonstrating its failure. Only a small minority of deaf people who fell deaf early can speak in a way which is intelligible for outsiders. The German Federation of the Deaf quotes a rate of 0.5 percent for the Federal Republic of Germany (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung of 6 Nov. 1985). Even if you start from ten times more, the result would still fail to be satisfactory. Moreover, speaking deaf people will hardly be motivated by the hearing society; most outside observers will rather be strangely affected by their unusual articulation (Ebbinghaus/Heßmann).

But even in terms of written language the results are disappointing. All the way deaf people won't get beyond the reading and writing level of third graders. This has

unanimously been confirmed time and again for decades by several Anglo-American studies which included several thousand hearing-impaired persons.

Representatives of the oral method, like van Uden, Csany, Diller, Kröhnert, Juszen and others, have also repeatedly mentioned this clear underachievement. It is perfectly within the logic of the above-mentioned interaction between linguistic competence and the acquisition of knowledge that, parallel to the deficits in speech and written language, massive deficits can also be found in most material subjects. What else can be expected if the largest part of the learning process must be tackled by means of an oral language instrument which has been proven to be inefficient for deaf people.

So far deaf education in our country – but not only here – tried to hold as a consolation that there still are some few deaf persons who manage, i.e. have comparatively good speech and written language skills. On the other hand expectations have been lowered with reference to the linguistic problems connected with deafness in such a way that people could subjectively be satisfied with what they achieved. Moreover they kept searching for new opportunities for improvements, but quite often they had excessive expectations of it. It was the hearing aids in the 1960's and the reliance on early recognition and early intervention as well as new grammar models in the 70's. The 80's focussed on the new technological opportunities of hearing aid acoustics, computer-assisted speech perception like phonator and visible speech, and at the moments it's implants or the intensive auditory training in the first years of life.

With this reference I do not mean to deride the said fields. They are in fact justified within an overall conception and may be very helpful for certain problem groups and work areas, but at least for the overwhelming majority of those concerned they fail to be able to solve the basic problem of a 'normal' acquisition of language.

All these attempts originally started from a model of deafness which has as its primary objective to 'fix' the hearing impairment. The other perspective that deafness might include some values on its own part which might contribute towards a solution of the language problem and its consequences has so far largely been avoided by deaf education. This might be connected with the fact that a recognition of sign language would turn upside down – or more fittingly: give into new hands – the whole previous ideology of deaf education, which has so far been very much in line with the social and historical development.

For the oral argumentation will only continue to be logical as long as you take it for granted that oral language is the only possible language. Up until thirty years ago there seemed to be a clear answer to this question: Only oral languages are full-fledged linguistic systems, signing is at best an inferior form of makeshift communication. It allegedly offers merely a diffuse picture of reality, does not have any clearly structured signed, only a very limited sign vocabulary, does not have any

grammar, lacks differentiation, and impedes abstractions. However, these deriding assessments do not only prevail in oral deaf education, but even deaf people partly have difficulty even today to regard their sign language as being on equal standing with oral language.

It took more recent linguistics to challenge these prejudices, which grew historically, as we have seen before. Landmarks were formed by the works of Stokoe and his linguistic research institute at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., the world's only deaf university. As early as in 1960 Stokoe, in his classic book entitled *Sign Language Structure*, showed the basic structures of sign language. His fellow student Ben Tervoort from Amsterdam University started almost at the same time to do research on sign language from the point of view of its application. In the following three decades there literally was an explosion in sign language research in most Western countries. Sign language research not only turned into an attractive part of modern linguistics, but also found access to specialized disciplines like psychology, neurology, sociology, anthropology, communication science, and last but not least also in education, in deaf education.

Here in the 1970's various forms of a sign usage with an orientation at spoken language were primarily favored. Under the umbrella of so-called "Total Communication" various forms of sign-supported or signed language, partly assisted by the manual alphabet, came into existence, particularly in the United States. The common feature in all of them is their basic intention to just make spoken language more and better visible than it would be possible through mouth patterns alone. The contents-related side of teaching was then supposed to benefit from such an improvement in the intelligibility of spoken language. In terms of the underlying pedagogical approach, however, all these methods continue to be committed to the oral method. Sign language got 'schoolable' only insofar as it promised to support the acquisition of spoken and written language by deaf children. However, it remained suspect as an independent language.

Linguistically speaking it has been proven for several years now that this attitude of *Signed oral language: Yes! – Sign language: No!* is wrong. The results of international sign language research which have been presented so far don't leave any doubt that sign languages are full languages. Clear evidence of this is formed by the principles for the recognition of national sign languages of the deaf which were adopted by the *3rd European Congress on Sign Language Research* in Hamburg in 1989 (Prillwitz & Vollhaber 1990a).

This does not mean that sign-supported speech doesn't continue to be a reasonable method for the visualization of spoken language, and that it might be very helpful in particular areas of learning and application like e.g. the teaching of German or in interpreting for hard-of-hearing or deafened people. But on the other hand sign language must be accepted as the full-fledged minority language of the deaf, which – as in the case of other linguistic minorities – must have repercussions in their educational processes.



Here Sweden might have taken the first step towards true bilingualism when about ten years ago deaf people were politically recognized as a language minority with a legally documented right to a development in both spoken and sign language. Sweden was followed by Denmark and other European countries, and recently also by the USA, in testing this approach. In the following presentations you will have a chance to get more detailed insight into some of these bilingual approaches, and you can get a picture of your own on the state of the art in this development (Prillwitz & Vollhaber 1990b).

From the point of view of pedolinguistics – and we were able to hear and/or see Prof. Oksaar, a recognized representative of pedolinguistics, at this congress (Oksaar 1990) – there is no doubt about the positive effects of a bilingual education of deaf children in both oral and sign language. Let me just give you a list of the most important items:

- Development of adequate linguistic and communicative competence
- Spontaneous language acquisition with an intuitive acquisition of rules
- Language acquisition as motivated linguistic acting within social contexts
- Experience-related connection of concept formation and language usage
- Development of an age-level functional language usage in the fields of regulation of actions, behavioral control, interaction, conveying knowledge, asking about knowledge, skills and achievements in emotional, social and cognitive contexts
- Development of a positive feeling of self-value and of a stable identity as a deaf person

On such a basis not only the processes of learning and development at school might go off better, but even the acquisition of spoken and written language might produce better results, provided that preparations for the development of spoken language, too, are made as early as in the first years of life. It is important in this respect that full-fledged language models are available to the child for the different modes of language usage. This means that the child must have a chance to grow up in contact with competent adult signers. This assigns a major role to deaf instructors and teachers in any concept of bilingualism, which at the same time opens up high-quality professional prospects for adequately trained deaf individuals.

These are the perspectives of a bilingualism which has largely been put on the safe side within the context of argumentation in this field of science. But still they have hardly ever been tackled in the German-speaking area, and in part they haven't even been discussed.

But at some point earlier things looked different. Prior to the turn-around towards the monolingual teaching method in the late 19th century, deaf teachers for the deaf were no rare event even in our country, and sign language had its traditional place in deaf education, too.

Thus, for example, a deaf German, **Otto Friedrich Kruse**, who worked as a teacher for the deaf at Schleswig, wrote the following on page 183-4 in his book published in 1853 under the title of *Über Taubstumme, Taubstummen-Bildung und Taubstummen-Anstalten nebst Notizen aus meinem Reisetagebuch* [On Deaf-Mutes, the Education of Deaf-Mutes, and Institutions for Deaf-Mutes along with Notes from my Travel Diary]:

Sign language is the true equipment of mental life of the deaf-mute; he thinks and communicates only in such a form, and he receives in this same way the concepts and ideas to be communicated to him. It is the first mental utterance which also for this reason precedes any other language, and it is thereby that he, insofar as it paves him the way towards thinking, can learn to grasp the word, and that the idea of language can spiritualize as a form of thought. It is an indispensable means of communication between teacher and pupil, and it renders essential service to teaching in the classroom for the purpose of explaining concepts and words. Not only does it initially pave the way for teaching, but it must continuously support the same in a mediating and explanatory way.

Not only does he emphasize the close connection between the usage of sign language and the development of thinking and learning in deaf children, but after his visit to Paris he also utters the same rejection with regard to the orally oriented sign usage that has more and more clearly been formulated in recent years from a linguistic perspective. Instead he stresses the independence of the sign language of the deaf:

The sign, by the way, is an independent language delimited in and for itself, the real value of which cannot be determined under the yardstick of word language. The effort to approximate it as much as possible to word language or at least to give to it a form which is analogous to the same and in a sense deputizing for the same, would reveal a full lack of knowledge about its nature and its essence, it would mean manslaughter to the deaf-mute's native language and to his mental life. One should think, on the contrary, that it turns perfect to the degree in which it is kept free from the influences of word language and in which you freely permit nature to follow its nature fully and freely. It can therefore best be developed by a society of deaf-mutes, and it will definitely reach the highest level of perfection in those institutions where it is still kept in high esteem.

The sign, as it is the deaf-mute's true mental element, is all of his life, his health, the activity and business of his mind, his comfortableness, and his good mood. It is his mental homeplace which he rarely leaves without deteriorating mentally at the same time. If his arms and hands were tied up, then he will gesticulate with it in his thoughts or even with his feet.

Against this background of his findings and attitudes, which grew from his own experience, and recognizing at the same time the need for educational work on oral and written language, he emphasizes time and again how important sign language is for learning processes at school:

Nor is the value of sign language confined to primary, or elementary, teaching. It rather extends throughout school education, because once the pupil has finally acquired some proficiency in the word, he is still far from being able to do without the mediation accomplished by it [sign language]. Even in some cases, irrespective of the fact that not **everybody** can achieve the required level of language education/formation, sign language is and remains the only sheet-anchor for the unlucky ones.

And he does not fail to point out: *By the way, it is the deaf-mute who is the inventor of the language he brings along with him to the institute – and not hearing people.*

This positive attitude towards sign language is characteristic of many deaf people. They have maintained it for generations even during the period of oralism, and time and again they demanded that sign language or at least their signs should be used in the various walks of life. In the past, however, the 'professionals' hardly ever listened to them.

The reason for this may be on one hand that methods with a long unchallenged tradition show great obstinacy, and after all we are the country of the German Method and have always had difficulty accepting things which are different and considering minorities an enrichment rather than a disturbance of social life.

On the other hand, many things changed in the last ten years, even in our country. The BMJFFG [Federal Ministry for Youth, Families, Women and Health] has promoted for more than one decade the development of a comprehensive educational program for deaf children in families, early education, kindergarten and at school by considering both sign-supported speech and sign language (Der Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung 1989). It also supports the so-called Blue Sign Books – sign dictionaries which are compiled by deaf and hearing people from all over the Federal Republic of Germany (Maisch & Wisch 1987 ff.). The DFG [German Research Foundation] supports a research project on the connection between mouth patterns and DGS [**D**eutsche **G**ebärdensprache – German Sign Language] at the Free University in Berlin (Ebbinghaus & Heßmann 1990a). The same team from Berlin received funding for important basic work on sign language interpreting at the FU (Ebbinghaus & Heßmann 1990b). The BMAS [Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare] has just begun commissioning the development of a specialized computer sign dictionary for approx. 20,000 terms from the field of technology as a model for the restructuring of vocational training for the deaf (Prillwitz & Schulmeister 1989). The BMFT [Federal Ministry of Research and Technology] did and does support the development of the Hamburg Notation System for Sign Language [HamNoSys] and related follow-up programs on research into and multilingual use of signs and sign language, which might be interesting even outside the German-speaking area (Prillwitz & Zienert 1990).

More and more deaf people are waking up and demanding for their sign language. By now they are teaching DGS at several German universities, and in most cases their seminars are more than crowded. People with early deafness now begin to study in our country, too, and in doing so they are integrated into a normal mainstream study course. For this purpose the costs for sign language interpreters are paid for them without any problems – at least in Northern Germany.

Many practical areas and associations become more and more open-minded towards scientific arguments and towards the demands of the persons concerned,

and they begin to gradually correct their earlier misconception about sign language.

It is particularly positive that the general public shows an increasing interest in deaf people's visual language. The New Media are discovering this spatial language of body, eyes and hands, and they hardly have any difficulty accepting it as a full language.

But despite this positive development we are all in a difficult situation, because even today we do at best have the beginnings of a basis for a new orientation towards bilingualism, comprehensive sign language research and teaching for DGS. Substantial fundamental work is yet to be done for a practical implementation in the fields of interpreting, sign language teaching, teaching materials and resources, and particularly in the field of education and training.

Unless adequate opportunities have been worked out, we should be very careful not to put to high a burden on the backs of our colleagues in schools for the deaf by way of excessive demands. First of all sign language would have to be included as an essential component in the further education and on-the-job-training in deaf education. Even today this has not happened at any training institution in the field of deaf education. Under this aspect the long way towards sign language and bilingualism of the deaf via sign-supported language may well be a supportive means for coping with the pressure arising from this discrepancy between intention and ability, between pretense and reality for years and even for decades.

In all countries, after all, with the exception of Burundi (Lane 1990), the development towards sign language has so far been made by way of sign-supported speech.

That way the rethinking could take place gradually and in a way which could be handled by the (previously) oral practice. At the same time there was research on sign language, although often only for the purpose of providing sign dictionaries for sign-supported speech. Simultaneously the first prerequisites were set up – mostly by deaf people – for adequate sign language teaching.

Today it is quite obvious, however, from a scientific and also from a social perspective, that with sign-supported speech the goal has not yet been reached by far; the ultimate acceptance of the deaf and their linguistic community can only be ensured after there has been an educational recognition of sign language within the scope of a comprehensive concept of bilingualism.

Currently the most important common task of sign language research and deaf education might consist in outlining, developing, drafting and testing the essential points of such a concept in an international exchange. The *International Congress on Sign Language Research and Application* in Hamburg in 1990 has enabled us to make a further step ahead towards achieving this goal.

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