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Comparisons of American Sign Language, Pidgin, and English Sign

American Sign Language, ASL, is a visual language that uses hand gestures, facial expressions, and body position. Although those who use ASL are in constant contact with the English language, ASL is completely independent from the English as possible (Robinson). It has its own grammatical rules that allows the person signing to leave out unnecessary words like articles and other filler words. In addition it switches the sentence around so it is TOPIC + COMMENT/ACTION in most cases. An example of this would be CHAIR BLUE (point) YOU SIT. The chair is the topic and the blue color is a description and instead of using filler words the person would simply point then give the action.

Pidgin Sign English, PSE, is a mixture of ASL and English sign. Pidgin uses the basic sentence structure of the English language and then incorporates many ASL grammar rules, like no filler words (Grushkin). This is normally used when people are first learning ASL so people can get used to no articles and unneeded words before moving into the different sentence structure that ASL has. This is also common when deaf individual is trying to communicate with a hearing person because it is easier to understand than straight ASL if you are not experienced (Robinson). An example of PSE in a sentence would be YOU SIT (point) BLUE CHAIR. This has a more English structure, but once again it takes out the filler words and adds the point to identify the action.

Signing Exact English, SEE, is when a person uses English grammar. This means that the person signing has to sign every single word in the sentence, even the articles. SEE is not considered an official language and is predominantly used by people who are learning sign. This can be confusion to those who have grown up signing because they are not used to filler words and suffixes. An example of this would be SIT IN THE BLUE CHAIR. For this the person would have to sign everything in the sentence including “IN THE”, which were left to out in the previous two.

Although ASL, PSE, and SEE all use signs to communicate they are very different. ASL is the most commonly used in the deaf community. By cutting out filler words people signing are able to get their point across faster and able to communicate easier. An example of this can be found in a YouTube video done by ASL THAT. In this video he signs using the three methods to describe a part of his house. The ASL version takes 29 seconds, PSE takes 37 seconds, and SEE takes 52 seconds. The SEE takes almost double the amount of time as regular ASL (THAT). With this being said it makes perfect sense why people in the deaf community use ASL and made their own grammar rules to help them better communicate to those in the community.

References

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