

crete, it is described in its visual aspects, and a gesture is agreed upon so that further reference can be made to it without the description process (the agreement is usually accomplished in a split second: "This gesture OK?"; "OK."). The gesture agreed upon may be a gesture incorporating a visual aspect of the thing described, or it may be a fairly arbitrary gesture borrowed, say, from the sign language of either the speaker or the viewer.

If the concept is more abstract, the idea is symbolized by a gesture readily recognizable ("love" by a heart with an appropriate facial expression, and so on). Once a new gesture is understood (either by explanation or simply by the context), it is considered automatically established for use in the group and becomes part of the group's lexicon. Often explanations of new vocabulary include a liberal use of the gestures for "same" and "different": it is "same" (or like) such-and-such, or it is "different" (or not quite the same) from so-and-so. This whole process, of course, occurs in an atmosphere of doing whatever is necessary to be understood; the process is a natural one arising from the need to communicate and a willingness to try various ways to get one's message across.

Most linguists would agree that in foreign-language learning the acquisition of vocabulary is something that happens naturally in practicing one's new language: as one has need of a certain word, it is learned. More important is the acquisition of the sentence structures which lie behind the vocabulary. The same could be said of international gesturing: as a gesture is needed, a speaker will find it (or a viewer will help to find it). As to the putting together of the gestures, native signers in all sign languages are especially sensitive to facial and manual cues that sign languages seem to have in common: localization in space of persons and things whether they are present or not; incorporation of subjects and objects by modifying the direction of the gesture; subtle changes in body posture to clarify who is doing what or who is speaking to whom; nuances in the speed, size, and intensity of movements that, when exaggerated, contribute to a theatrical "acting out" of what one is saying; facial expressions and head movements which transform sentences into questions or commands. In addition, signers are attuned to a mode of communication in which eye contact is especially important, and, in fact, in international gesturing there is a kind of continual eye dialogue saying, "You understand? Good. Not clear? How about this?"

Linguists who studied sign languages in the 1960s and 1970s often minimized the pantomimic elements in their studies to concentrate on the "arbitrary," but sign languages do include much more imitation of actions than spoken languages include imitations of sounds (onomatopoeia). And this fa-

cility of signers to visualize and to imitate, to "act out" what they mean, has contributed to the spontaneous evolution and success of international gestures.

#### IMPORTANCE

International gestures are important for several reasons. They evolved naturally among deaf persons without the arbitrary invention of a pseudo-language like Esperanto. If they depend more on creativity (in the use of symbols and metaphors they often attain the level of poetry) than on a set vocabulary and a strict syntax, and if they are not as efficient as a conventional language, they *are* the basis for persons from different cultures to search together for a common ground of understanding without interpreters and intermediaries.

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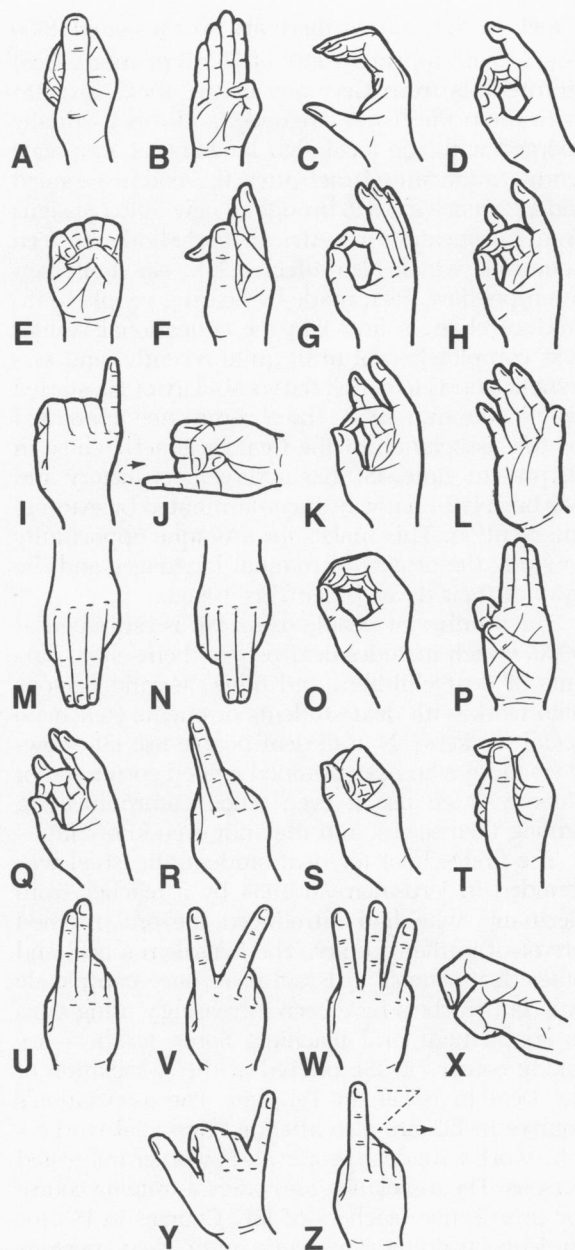
#### Irish

Historically, deaf education in the Republic of Ireland has been centered in the city of Dublin, which now has a deaf population of approximately 800. The largest schools there, referred to as the Cabra schools (in Cabra, Dublin), are St. Joseph's School for Deaf Boys, with approximately 300 students, and St. Mary's School for Hearing-Impaired Girls (formerly St. Mary's School for Deaf Girls), with approximately 350 students.

The sign systems used at these schools are historically related to a French sign system that was used in the 1800s at a school in Caen, Normandy, called Le Bon Saveur. This manual code for French was devised by Abbé Jamet of Caen, a disciple of Abbé Sicard.

Two Dominican Sisters, Sr. Mary Magdalen O'Farrell and Sr. Mary Vincent Martin, and two deaf girls studied the teaching techniques at the Caen school in 1846 and brought it to St. Mary's, where at least two changes were imposed on the borrowed French signs. An Irish Vincentian priest, Father John Burke, C.M., modified the French sign system so that it could be used to express English grammar instead of French grammar. The signs were also modified to make them more "soft and feminine" for the girls at St. Mary's and more "bold and masculine" for the boys at St. Joseph's, a school started by the Christian Brothers in 1856. Thus gender-specific vocabularies were developed, which today are said to diverge by 30 percent.

No record is available concerning the origin of the sign changes in the manual alphabet from the original French system. However, it appears from an engraving of Abbé Jamet, which was published



The Manual Alphabet was originally published by Abbé Jamet in 1847; the letter "T" was modified toward the end of the 1800s at St. Joseph's and used in the Catholic Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, in Cabra, Dublin.

in the first report of the Catholic Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in 1847, that he had a role in the changes, which became distinct to Ireland. Toward the end of the 1800s, the handshape for "T" was modified at St. Joseph's. However, the older form for "T" as well as the older form for "X," which involved use of both hands, were retained at St. Mary's.

Today there are at least three types of sign systems used in the Dublin deaf community—the old,

the new, and the informal. Most deaf people and hearing educators acknowledge only the old and new forms as legitimate, since both are manual codes for English, and are said to be grammatical systems. The informal system, unofficially called Deaf Sign Language, is used by deaf people in informal settings. This informal type of signing is said to be an abbreviated form of the old Cabra school signs because it shares the same vocabulary and does not follow English grammar. Initial observations suggest that this informal variety does have a grammar with structural features, such as directional verbs, like that of other indigenous sign languages.

Both the informal system and the old system use gender-distinct vocabularies. Preliminary research indicates that differences exist in basic areas, such as religious, color, and family terms, as well as with other nouns, verbs, and adjectives. However, deaf males and females do not seem to have problems understanding each other. Women report that they learn the men's signs once they start dating, and use them with their husbands after marriage. However, it also appears that the women do not stop using female signs after marriage, but continue to use them with women and girls and for discussing so-called women's topics, such as certain aspects of childrearing.

The new or unified sign system, which many call Irish Sign Language, is a manual code for English that has only one vocabulary for both males and females. This system was introduced in the late 1970s, largely in response to the absence of instruction in the old signs at the Cabra schools. Since the implementation of oralism at St. Mary's in the late 1940s and at St. Joseph's in the late 1950s or early 1960s, signing has not been taught at Cabra, with the exception of the manual sections. The manual sections are reserved for multiply handicapped children and some profoundly deaf children without multiple handicaps who have been unable to succeed through the use of the oral method alone.

The new sign system is the product of the Unified Sign Language Committee, which consisted of deaf people and hearing people interested in at least four primary goals. First, they wanted to produce a dictionary of Irish signs that could be used by professionals who work with deaf people (a dictionary of new signs entitled *The Irish Sign Language* was published by the National Association of the Deaf in 1979). Second, the committee wanted to make sure that the sign system had all of the signs needed to express every grammatical unit of English. The committee invented new signs where there were apparently no signs available in the old Cabra system for particular English words or grammatical units. Third, the committee wanted to standardize the vocabulary for use by both men



and women. The committee decided which of two signs for a given concept would be maintained, either the female sign or the male sign. The majority of signs chosen for this unified system were the male signs. Fourth, the committee perceived a need for a written record of grammatical signing (that is, Manual English) for deaf people's reference. Since educators no longer teach signing in the Cabra schools (except in the manual sections), some people have become concerned that deaf people will forget their grammatical signing or that young people will never learn how to sign properly.

The majority of signs in the new system are based on the initial letter of the corresponding English word and are usually grouped into classes of related ideas. For example, the signs for the words "busy," "do," "exercise," "practice," "serve," and "work" are identical except for their different handshapes. Despite goodwill from the adult deaf community toward the projects, this reformed language has not been absorbed by the community; many deaf people are said to prefer the older signs. However, it is used in the manual departments of both Cabra schools and in some sign language classes throughout the country.

**Irish Signs in Other Countries** Irish signs were imported to several schools in other countries: the Dominican School for Deaf Children at the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, which was founded by six nuns from Cabra in 1863; the Waratah School for Deaf Children in New South Wales, Australia, founded by a deaf nun from Cabra, Sr. Gabriel Hogan, in 1875; and St. Gabriel's School for Deaf Boys at Castle Hill, New South Wales, Australia, founded by two Brothers from Cabra in 1922. For several decades, Irish signs were also used at St. Vincent's School in Toolcross, Scotland, before being dropped in favor of native British signs.

**Current Status** In the past, protagonists of oralism disapproved of using sign language in public and on television (often preventing its usage), but today sign language is more accepted. The adult deaf community increasingly has asserted its rights. Sign classes now are offered throughout the country, with the new manual code for English the form of signing being recognized and accepted. *See IRELAND, REPUBLIC OF.*

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### **Israeli**

Israeli Sign Language (ISL) is used, with minor dialectal variations, by deaf people in the State of

Israel. In that nation there are an estimated 4500 people with a hearing loss of 75 dB or more. Deaf immigrants from Germany in the 1930s brought with them their sign language, and this gradually merged with the local sign language. Large-scale immigration into Israel after the country gained independence in 1948 brought a new influx of signs from European, North African, and Middle Eastern countries, which also affected ISL. No significant attempts have been made by hearing people to introduce changes into ISL; the educational system was completely oral until quite recently, and systematic efforts to enrich the vocabulary of ISL started only in the mid-1970s (by a committee appointed by the Association of the Deaf in Israel). Thus, in its present state, ISL has a very short history and has been left relatively uncontaminated by external intervention. This makes for a unique opportunity to study the origins of manual languages and the laws of their development. *See ISRAEL.*

The number of people using ISL is estimated at 5000, which includes deaf people themselves, parents of deaf children, and other hearing persons who work with deaf students or clients (teachers, social workers). Not all deaf people use ISL, however; those who have attained a good command of Hebrew often use it even when communicating among themselves, and may not even know ISL.

The first school for deaf students in Israel was founded in Jerusalem in 1934 by a teacher from Germany, who had introduced the oral method prevalent in that country. The Jerusalem school and other deaf schools in Israel were once completely oral, but teachers have been increasingly using signs to supplement oral teaching. Some teachers are taking courses in ISL offered at the Association of the Deaf in Israel, in Tel-Aviv. The association's courses in ISL are also attended by social workers who work with deaf people and by other interested persons. The association also offers a training course for prospective teachers of ISL. Courses in ISL for students training for work with deaf persons (teachers, social workers) are also offered at Tel-Aviv University.

Deaf people appearing before law courts or the rabbinical courts or those who come into contact with the police are provided with ISL translators as a service by these agencies. The Association of the Deaf in Israel now offers a course for translators, with counseling from Gallaudet College. Simultaneous translating into ISL is also occasionally provided by the public television network. *See GALLAUDET COLLEGE.*

A fingerspelling system for Hebrew was designed in 1976 by a committee of the Association of the Deaf in Israel. Sixteen handshapes for Hebrew letters were taken over from the American manual alphabet, and those for others were newly devised.