

Childhood memories

(signed by Avril Langard-Tang)

Introduction:

Many people love to watch British Sign Language because they see it as expressive and engaging. What they don't always understand is that the facial expressions and movements that they see are adding subtle levels of meaning to the verbs and nouns, and are an integral part of the grammar.

Activity aims:

This activity will help you develop your understanding of BSL verbs and examine how they can change to include extra information, e.g. how something is done or where it is done.

Level:

Confident Beginner

Time needed:

Approx 2-3 hours

Pre-task activity:

1. Watch through the BSL clip a few times and write down the gist of the story. Don't worry if you don't get all the information first, second or even third time as the activity will give you extra clues about the meaning.
2. Read through the following terms and if you are not confident in their meaning have a look at the glossary. Jot down a definition in your own words next to the term.

- Subject _____
- Object _____
- Adverb of manner _____
- Verb _____
- Noun _____

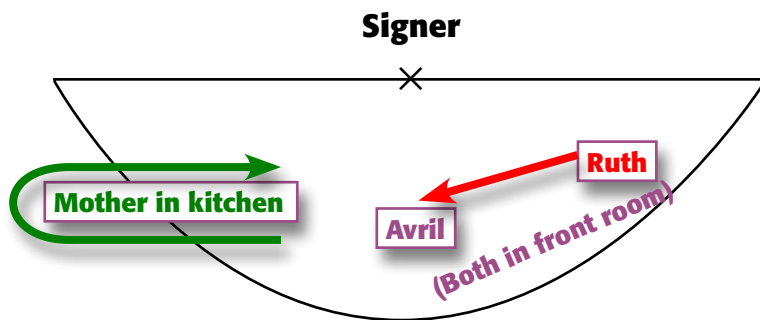
Language awareness activities:

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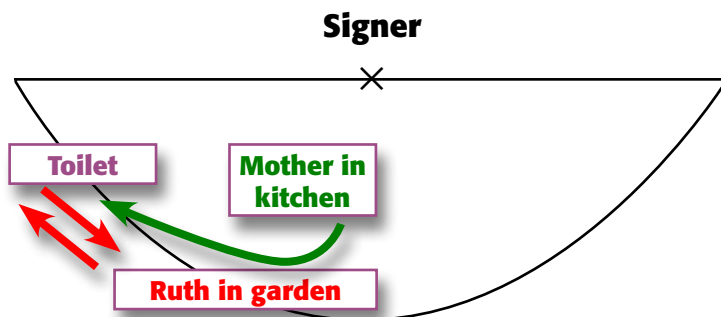
a) Who and what does the signer place in her signing space? Make a note of the people and locations in the semi circles below.

Tip: There are different ways to place a person or object in your space. Often the signer will just point, but have you observed any other ways? Look at how the signer places the kitchen.

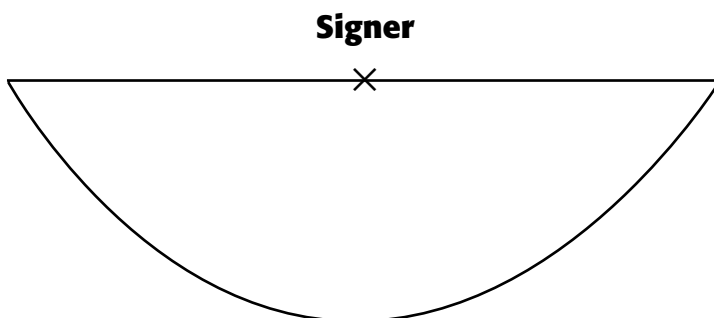
Story 1 (Hammer)



Story 2 (Sand)



b) Think of a light-hearted story from your childhood involving a few different people and locations. Draw where you would place them in the semicircle below and then transfer the placement to your actual signing space. Pay attention to *how* you place them.



a) Some BSL verbs are very flexible and can incorporate a lot more information than English verbs. All of the words in the box below are verbs that the signer uses.

come	go	hit	grab	cry	cook	check
run	put	explain	watch	play	walk	carry
wash	scoop (sand)	tip/pour	look/watch	forget		

Verb shows location	Size/shape of object	Adverb of manner
Come	hit	All verbs except play
Go	grab	
Cook	cook	
Run	put	
Put	watch	
Watch	carry	
Walk	wash	
Carry (only in conjunction with the person classifier 2.22)	scoop	
Wash	Tip/pour	
Tip/pour	look	
look		

Find some coloured pens and circle the different verbs according to the instructions below: (Verbs can have more than one circle)

- Circle in **red** if you think the verb can change direction/move across the space to show *where* things are happening (location). (E.g. **LOOK** 0.51)
- Circle in **blue** if the verb can change shape to give information about the size and shape of the object. (E.g. **CARRY** 2.23)
- Circle in **green** if the verb uses facial expression or change of pace to show adverb of manner (E.g. **GRAB** 0.55)

b) Looking at the table above, which verbs can convey the most information?

Verbs that move across the signing space can convey more information. The verbs that are body-anchored (signed on or close to the body,) such as forget and play, convey the least. This means that in order to show information about location, subject, object or adverbs of manner, you will need to add separate signs.

Tip: You can find your answers from the video clip, but you can also draw from examples of BSL you already know.

Tip: The more information a verb can convey by movement or facial expression, the less you need to rely on extra vocabulary items. The less information a verb can convey (e.g. FORGET) then the more signs you need to express your meaning.

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a) Look at the verbs that you have circled in **red**. Some BSL verbs can give information about location by their movement through the signing space. The verbs COME and GO are good examples of this and are demonstrated in each story of the signed clip. Using the placement that you have drawn in the semicircles, draw arrows to reflect where the characters in both stories move.

b) What sign do you know for the verb **GO**? Have a look at the sign that is used when describing the mother *going* into the kitchen (0.40) or Ruth *going* between the toilet and the garden (2.22). Why does the signer use this particular sign – what extra information does it give?

c) Now using the same placement as the signer (have a look at your semicircles again), see if you can sign the following sentences by moving the same verb around the signing space:

- Ruth **goes** to the kitchen.
- Mother **goes** to the garden.
- I (the signer) **go** over to Ruth.



Tip: If you don't place the locations/people in your signing space, the verb has nowhere to go and your sentence becomes ungrammatical. This lack of placement is often the reason why beginners fall back on English grammatical structure.

The standard form for GO involves a flat hand with palm facing sideways that moves across the space to the appropriate location. This can show where you go but has limitations. It is physically quite difficult to move this in many different directions, which limits the locations it can show. In the video clip, the signer modifies the sign GO by using a handshape with one finger pointing upwards. This gives extra information by showing that a person is going and is also easier to move backwards and forwards around the space – try it and see. You can also show how you are walking (e.g. bobbing the finger up and down a little)

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a) Look again at the verbs you have circled in **blue**. These verbs can change from their original form to show the size and shape of the object or location they are interacting with. (E.g. **PUT** – How do we know the signer is using a spade or shovel to put the sand in the bucket when she doesn't state this explicitly? 2.16) What extra information does the verb handshape give about the size or shape of the object in the following examples on the video?

- **Hit** (1.00) **her handshape shows she is holding a hammer**
- **Cook** (1.10) **she is using a pan**
- **Wash** (1.57) **she is washing something small and flat (plate)**
- **Carry** (2.23) **she is carrying a bucket by the handle**
- **Scoop** (3.29) **she is taking large handfuls of heavy sand**

b) How would you sign the same verbs with different objects?

- **Hit** the drums
- **Cook** pancakes
- **Wash** a child's hair
- **Carry** the tray
- **Scoop** up a child



Tip: Think of other verbs you know that change like this (e.g. How does the standard sign for EAT change to show soup, burgers or crisps?) When you learn a new verb, ask your tutor if it changes according to the object it represents.

a) Draw the shapes of the wooden blocks that the signer is playing with.



b) What handshape does the signer use to show that the same wooden blocks are dropping through the holes in the box (0.34)? This is still the sign for BLOCK, so why is it so different from her original sign? What does the change of handshape allow her to do?

Tip: These alternative handshapes are referred to as classifiers in sign linguistics and are very common.

- Closed hand with index finger pointing up
 - This alternative handshape (classifier) allows the signer to show how the object moves. This would be difficult with the original sign - try it with SQUARE and see
 - The classifier also gives you the flexibility to show how the object fits into its environment (prepositions e.g. through, next to) in the most efficient way.

c) We have already seen that many verb signs can change to reflect the shape of an object, and in this task we're going to look further at examples of *noun* signs (e.g. BLOCK) behaving in the same way.



Find the dictionary sign for the noun in the left hand column, and then consider how your handshape would change to communicate the context on the right.

Dictionary sign		How would you change the sign in this context?
Person		Person moving from one place to another
Water		Water flooded out of the toilet
Book		A book on a shelf
Car		A parked car

Tip: If you watch the video, you'll see that the 'dictionary sign' (or an equivalent) will always come before the classifier. This is because certain classifier handshapes can represent many things. For example, the classifier for car could also represent a bed or a table.

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a) Finally, look again at the verbs you have circled in green. In the examples below, the signer incorporates an adverb of manner into the verb by changing her facial expression. Translate these into English and fill in the blanks below:

I was playing **contentedly/happily** with my hammer and blocks. (0.48)

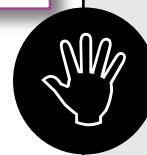
Ruth hit me **violently** with the hammer. (1.00)

Mother watched Ruth **secretly/suspiciously** as she filled her bucket with sand. (2.56)

b) In English the adverb of manner tends to come after the verb. When does it occur in BSL?

Adverbs of manner (facial expressions/body movements) happen at the same time as the verb.

c) As a learner, you might look at the following words and think that you don't know the signs for them.



Reluctantly thoughtfully timidly

Think again! Most BSL adverbs don't have separate signs but are shown through facial expressions, and most of us have shown feelings of reluctance, thoughtfulness or timidity at some time in our lives. Translate the following sentences into BSL and incorporate the adverb of manner through Non-Manual-Features.

- I wrote the letter **thoughtfully**
- I gave money **reluctantly**
- I put my hand up **timidly**

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Well done – you've nearly completed the worksheet. Your final learning activity is to take a moment to think back over the tasks you have attempted and the language you have seen. Jot down what you have learned, or any areas where your understanding has deepened (e.g. new signs, new linguistic terms, BSL grammatical features etc.)