

9.30 – 10.00

Karel Redlich: *Plains Indian Sign Languages*

In my paper, I would like to clarify the origin and development of the Indian sign languages in North America and touch on Australian Aborigines' sign languages or those of other indigenous cultures. Professional literature affirms profusely that the indigenous languages are alternative languages (in contrast to primary deaf sign languages), which is not, however, an apposite perspective as users of the indigenous sign languages comprised the Deaf, too. It is also educative to realize that modern deaf sign languages are, to a certain extent, affected by spoken languages (contact varieties between a spoken and a sign language, methodical signs at schools for the Deaf, finger alphabet, initialization, using facial expressions etc.). Unlike the primary deaf sign languages, the alternative Indian sign languages fulfilled, at their time, their function of a lingua franca among individual Indian tribes (i.e. highly formalized requirements for international communication), and in certain Indian tribes the sign language also served for special communication among the tribe members (hunting, dance and storytelling).

The paper shall attempt to summarize previous research on the Indian sign languages by the major figures who participated in the research (Mallery, Kroeber, West, Stokoe). I strive to interconnect the knowledge of the Indian sign languages with the knowledge of the deaf sign languages. In this respect, I would like to point out especially the universal validity of selected principles within the sign languages and their potential use for the hearing community (Deaf/Sign Gain), thus marginally following in the thinker J. A. Comenius' footsteps, who searched for a universal language for mankind. The paper also aims to outline what potential this field poses for further research, which may bring interesting results not only for the research of the deaf sign languages but also for description of the spoken languages by linguistic disciplines such as philosophy of language, cognitive linguistics, theory of signs, the relation between the lingual and non-lingual (verbal and non-verbal, gestures / facial expressions and signs).

Paper-Related Bibliography:

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KOMENSKÝ, J.A. *Obecná porada o nápravě věcí lidských (III. Svazek - Pangelottia) Praha: Svoboda, 1992.*

KOMENSKÝ, J.A., FLOSS, P. *Poselství J. A. Komenského současné Evropě. Brno: Soliton, 2005.*

MALLERY, G. *Introduction to the Study of Sign-language among the North American Indians as Illustrating the Gesture-Speech of Mankind (Introduction Series no. 3). Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, Government Printing Office 1880.*

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MALLERY, G. *Sign language among North American Indians, compared with that among other peoples and deaf-mutes.* "In *First Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution for 1879-1880*, ed. J. W. Powell. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office 1881.

SETON, E.T. *Sign talk - Universal Signal Code, Without Apparatus, for Use in the Army, the Navy, Camping, Hunting, Daily Life and Among the Plains Indians. New York: Garden City, 1918.*

STOKOE, W.C. *Language in hand: why sign came before speech. Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2001.*

TOMKINS, W. *Universal Indian Sign Language of the Plains Indian of North America, 1926.*