

## LANGUAGE FOR THE SCHOOL GOING DEAF CHILDREN •

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In many states of the country the students have to study three languages in their school curriculum. The languages became a great barrier for the deaf children who try to be integrated in the schools for the normals. The problem gains in perspective when we remember that *Language* is the biggest problem for the deaf child.

We at the Institute of Speech and Hearing in Mysore are interested in helping the deaf children stay at home, attending normal schools and growing up like their hearing peers. We find that this is the best approach in terms of professional philosophy and we also find it the most practical solution for the problem of an astronomically large number of deaf children in this country (N. Rathna *et al*, 1976). Handicapped children attending normal schools is an education for both the handicapped and the non-handicapped.

A deaf child in a normal school who is acquiring with difficulty one normal language and who is learning to speak, read and write *cannot easily take the burden of more than one language*. When learning one language well is itself a problem, the deaf children have to learn three languages in many school systems around the country which is rather cruel and frustrating.

Language is primarily a tool for communication, information gathering and dissemination. Keeping this definition in our view, we have been concerned with the implications of the 'Three Language Formula' with reference to the deaf children.

The existing school curriculum is forcing a polylingual situation on all school-going children by making them learn three languages which in many cases becomes four if the mother tongue is different from the regional language. Because our language of education is so different from the language of use, even in rural areas, we may consider that the children learn four languages including a different version of their mother tongue. This does cause difficulties to many normal children and in some children the interference of one language on another seems to contribute to inefficiency in all languages (N. Rathna *et al.*, 1976).

Weinreich, as quoted by Rathna and George Samuel, puts forward the view that any individual who speaks two or more languages will experience inter-

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ference due to the contact between them. Thus multilingualism affects language proficiency. The studies made by McCarthy, D. Smith, M. E. and Seidle have all revealed reduced language proficiency of multilinguals in comparison to monolinguals.

In the light of these studies, we may consider that the existing school curriculum of the study of the three languages as an unreasonable burden on the normal children and therefore more so on the deaf children. It is this that makes us advocate a single language education to the deaf at our Institute.

From the present school curriculum it is apparent that more time is spent on teaching languages than on any other teaching. Unfortunately the children spend less time on each language and less time on the other subjects, such as, science, mathematics, social studies, etc., than a monolingual school will. Other things being equal time available for teaching and learning should be directly proportional to proficiencies achieved. To this extent, at least, three language teaching is a definite load because it takes time away from other subjects which are more useful in today's pragmatic world. That makes it imperative that the best use of time should be made to provide more information, more education and more facility with other tools for today's world and we must infact provide more proficiency in one language, the regional language which for a great majority is also the mother tongue.

Monolingualism should be adopted to provide one strong language and a stronger education which would help us in the effective integration of deaf children with the normals. And this is one of our major concerns in respect of rehabilitation in India. The UNESCO and the World Congress of the Deaf have unanimously recommended a single language for the education of the deaf children.

At the Institutewe have received quite a number of representations from the parents of the school-going deaf children to provide exemption to the deaf children from the study of two languages. They represented that these children find it extremely difficult to learn all the three languages. Moreover their performance has been very low in the languages when compared to other subjects. So these children who get good marks in other subjects are held back only because they do not pass all language test.

On our request in this regard the Government of Karnataka and the Government of Tamil Nadu have allowed the deaf children studying in the normal schools, to study only one language upto matriculation. Thus in the State of Karnataka, a deaf person can now pursue education all the way to a doctoral degree with only one language. This can be done either in English or Kannada the regional language.

The Governments of Kerala and the Maharashtra are considering our proposal fox exemption and response from other states are awaited. However, if

a concerted effort is made by the professional bodies to approach the Union Government to give a national policy on this problem the deaf children throughout the country would get a big relief from the language burden and integration would be easier and more meaningful.

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