



DCAL and See hear



See Hear, the BBC's magazine programme for the deaf community, has carried special features on the work of DCAL over the last few months.

In January, the programme looked at the work DCAL is doing to explore whether BSL is processed by the brain in a different way to spoken language. It explored how brains can adapt and also tested whether deaf and hearing people show differences in vision, sensory perception and even in remembering. DCAL Director, Bencie Woll was interviewed, and Centre Secretary Martine Laverty was one of the test subjects.

In April, the programme looked at DCAL's research into variation and change in British Sign Language. Dr Adam Schembri discussed the centre's BSL Corpus project, along with fellow team members Jordan Fenlon and Ramas Rentelis. The Corpus project is recording the different dialects in British Sign Language, as well as how they are changing, Dr Schembri said

"The main aim of the Corpus project is to collect British Sign Language vocabulary that will be stored online as a resource.

We want to share this with the Deaf community. This will be helpful to sign language tutors and interpreters, and any Deaf person who is interested.

The BSL Corpus Project has now filmed 128 participants out of a planned 240 and finished filming all 30 participants in Glasgow, Birmingham and Bristol, with more filming to come in London, Manchester, Cardiff, Belfast and Newcastle. The project is due to be completed at the end of 2010.

The programme also featured DCAL's Frances Elton who discussed the history of sign language over the last 1,000 years.

Innovative Safety arrangements at DCAL

DCAL has introduced an alarm system for Deaf employees and students that can act as a good practice example for other workplaces and educational establishments.

Deaf staff and students at DCAL and across UCL will be able to raise alarm by dialling a dedicated extension number using a text phone and conveying the nature of the emergency. Staff at UCL's security centre, who have been trained in using a textphone, will then be able to receive the message and communicate with the caller and where necessary provide direct assistance.

Hands and mouth and British Sign Language

DCAL researchers have produced the first experimental study to clarify the role of hands and mouth in producing BSL signs. Spoken language uses one kind of articulator (the voice) but signed language involves use of multiple articulators (hands, face, mouth and body). A particular kind of mouth action used in BSL is derived from the pronunciation of words in a spoken language. This resembles the physical act of saying the word but without overt articulation.

Some of these mouthings (as the mouth action is known) are useful to distinguish between ambiguous signs. A good example is the BSL signs for BREAKFAST and LUNCH. These are only distinguished by English-derived mouthings. Mouthings, however, are also commonplace in non ambiguous signs, occur spontaneously. For these reasons, they are often considered to be part of the signs themselves.

Dr David Vinson and colleagues asked if mouthings are part of the sign or if they dissociate and also whether there may be differences for deaf and hearing native signers. This latter could be the case because hearing but not deaf signers would be used to produce the mouthing as part of the English spoken word and not only as part of a sign.

The results of the DCAL study clearly show that mouthings and hand movements of signs are produced independently and can dissociate during signing. Moreover, no difference was observed between deaf and hearing native signers. These findings indicate that mouthings are not an intrinsic property of signs and lead to the speculation that signers always activate their second language (English) while producing utterances in BSL.

Its my future again!

Five young d/Deaf people were awarded prizes at a Parliamentary reception on 5th May for winning a competition on the future of d/Deaf research. The 2009 competition was run by Deafness Research UK, with support from DCAL and was again judged and sponsored by chair of the All Parliamentary Party Group on Deafness, Malcolm Bruce MP.

It's My Future was a competition for young d/Deaf people to write about their ideas on how research might change things for d/Deaf people by 2019 or even 2029. All the entries provided a real insight into the hopes and expectations of young d/Deaf people for the 21st century and will contribute to the work of Deafness Research UK and DCAL over the coming years.

The young people want to be able to be included in every aspect of their community and for technology, design and medical research to work as hard for them as for mainstream society. Ideas from solar powered cochlear implants to contact lenses that could carry subtitles were suggested. There were also calls for changes to be made to require all new buildings to have an inbuilt loop system or sign field and DVDs to have an option for sign translation or subtitling.



(From left to right) Vivienne Michael, Deafness Research UK CEO and DCAL Advisory Board member, Rosie Cooper MP, winner Jordan McGrath, Liz Blackman MP, Mr and Mrs McGrath"

For more information visit <http://www.dcal.ucl.ac.uk/news/news.html>

DCAL and Serbia connect

DCAL's Robert Adam and Dr Christopher Stone travelled to Serbia in March on a visit organised by two local interpreters and Colin Allen, a World Federation of the Deaf, board member. The trip was supported by the Serbian Association of the Deaf and hard of hearing and enabled DCAL to provide advice on language documentation. It also provided a forum to influence policy makers in Serbia on the development of accessibility legislation, interpreting training, assessment and access.

Discussions were centred around the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and World Federation of the Deaf policy. Mr Adam and Dr Stone spoke about the work being done at DCAL and the different strands of research; as well as Deaf people working as sign language researchers.

During their presentation, Dr Stone and Mr Adam were able to demonstrate the research partnership between Deaf and hearing people that all should strive to achieve so that the knowledge of the Deaf community leads and influences research, policy and legislative agendas.

Mr Adam and Dr Stone went on to lead "Working between the Deaf community and sign language Interpreters" which discussed how a good, strong and healthy interpreting profession cannot grow without support from and collaboration with the Deaf Community. Sign language and spoken language skills are both of equal importance. It is also vital that Deaf people are included at the various levels of interpreter training. Finally Mr Stone led a workshop "Is a National Association of Sign Language Interpreters necessary?"



Following the sessions it was agreed that the Serbian Deaf community, interpreters and the Serbian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy would work together to take these issues forwards.

Meeting the growing demand to learn BSL at UCL

DCAL have just been awarded a grant from UCL Futures for "BSL at UCL". This project aims to meet the substantial and increasing demand for BSL as a language option at UCL through the creation and provision of a one term on-line introductory course in BSL using a self-directed e-learning approach. The course will be based on the HE curriculum for BSL teaching, developed in DCAL's recently completed HEFCE funded project and led by Bencie Woll, Robert Adam and Frances Elton.



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