



DEAF STUDIES TRUST

English in the DST Summer School 2019

Background and Philosophy

There are many routes to mastery of a language and there are a wide range of methods available. Deaf people have experienced a range of variations on the direct method – whereby English is taught through English by English speakers/users. At its extreme, there is oralism or auralism – whereby the students are expected to speak and lip-read English using their residual hearing and other hearing aids which from time to time are made available.

Alternatively, students are taught to self-improve through the use of structured texts in written English of increasing complexity and speech is not relied upon. Such an approach can be applied in distance teaching without formal classes. In all cases, the approaches do not recognise the value of the native language of the students. For over 200 years, such methods have had limited success with those students who have some hearing and almost complete failure with those who are not able to hear at all.

Immersion approaches appear to work for hearing students as they can experience fully the cultural interaction among second language speakers. It works best by placement in the country where that second language is in the majority and is most efficient where the student is learning to interact in speech with the native speakers as well as having formal classes wholly in the second language.

For deaf students, such immersion creates a complex experience but one quite different from that of hearing students. In effect, they do not participate in interactions and are unable to access the cultural interplay between speakers of the second language. This circumstance is likely to reduce the effect of this method. If deaf students are unable to experience the typical language use and they are unable to discuss their experiences with the teacher (who may be monolingual in the second language) then the effect of the tuition is very limited. It is likely to have benefit only when there is reliance on written communication, but such communication is hindered by lack of access to natural grammar and interaction.

The fundamental difference in approach at DST, compared to other English (ESL) teaching, is the creation of an interaction medium for students and teacher and for observation and participation in the community and culture. Deaf students are introduced to BSL first as a means of opening up this possibility for interaction and as a means of communicating effectively regardless of which sign language they use in their home country. We provide classes in British Sign Language (BSL) as a support to interaction with other Deaf people in the UK and with additional tutors.

International Sign is not ideal in this context as it is not meant to be an English code – it has different grammatical structure used by deaf people when they meet others with a different sign language. International Sign, as a contact language, is naturally created by deaf people but differs according to which sign languages are in contact. By promoting BSL, the students are more effectively exposed to the cultural aspects of life in the UK. The approach which we have used for several years, opens up the possibility of comparative language teaching, where the differences in grammar can be explained and where meaning can be established prior to dealing with reading and writing of the target second language, English.

Schedule and Outcomes

The objectives for the Language Skills Erasmus Summer School are necessarily limited by its short duration. A great deal has to be compressed into a short time period. The primary objectives are therefore to provide a taste of a BSL-led approach to English and to indicate how this might be transferred to use of own sign language in tackling English learning. This is to be supported by online materials available in advance of the summer schools. Presentations by students within the summer school will be critiqued by tutors and fellow students. By the end, we will see some progress in English, but also in the potential for different approaches to teaching and learning.

English Teaching Components

Writing English and Reading English are the main components the DST Summer School:

1) Writing

In this component, the students will be encouraged to express themselves in English in written (or spoken form) as appropriate to that individual student. This will be linked to a themed set book which will be used from the beginning of the Summer School. Students will be encouraged to keep a diary/report but will also be expected to present their ideas in BSL and English at a 'mini-conference' on "Deaf Culture & Community". This may involve creating powerpoint presentations in English to support their 10 minutes of explanation. Each student will prepare material in advance of arrival at Summer School and will be guided during the sessions on how to develop this in English. The mini-conference will be attended by all fellow students and potentially members of the teachers' workshop which is conducted in parallel.

2) Reading English

The focus of this component will be on comprehension of written texts relevant to general professional content. There may be some teaching of grammar but it is intended that more emphasis will be given to functional skills in comprehension. Reading will also be treated as a valid incidental activity where all sources of English, signs, advertisements and television subtitles, will be examined.

Content and Tuition

The content of teaching will be established depending on the level and interests of students. This may draw on academic texts as well as general texts on English. Primary tuition will be by bilingual Deaf teachers, fluent in BSL and English. There will be a set book and materials online and in hard copy. The extent of the tuition is constrained by the length of the summer school.

Preparatory Work

All students will be expected to have some level of skills in English prior to the start of the Summer School. Data on this will be collected in test materials distributed in advance and should be returned at least three months prior to the start of the summer school. The students will also be given some initial material in written English and comprehension. This is to be brought to the Summer School and will be used as part of the initial assessment.

The Summer School presumes that students have already progressed in Higher Education in their home country and have some competence in English in the professional or academic domain

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