SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU

The Benefit of Early Exposure to Sign Language

Ljubica Pribanić PhD
University of Zagreb
Croatia

Overview of the talk

- Medical approach
- Cultural approach
- Sign language
- Hearing mother – deaf infant communication
- Deaf mother – deaf infant communication
- The benefits

Medical approach

- "pathological" or "deficit" model
- verbo-tonal method – SUVAG – Guberina 1963
- CI (cca 150 children & adults)
- hearing screening test for newborns in every delivery hospital in Croatia – OAE (2002)

Cultural approach

- Deaf community - share experience, common interests, norms of behavior
- linguistic minority - common language (ASL, BSL, HZJ) - natural symbolic activity of Deaf people
- environment needs to be changed in order to meet the deaf person's needs

Sign language

- **Linguistic research** – Stokoe 1960; Kyle & Woll 1985; Slobin 1985; Valli & Lucas 1992; Wilbur 1987, 2004
- **Neurolinguistic research** – Poizner, Klima & Bellugi 1987; Corina 1989; Emmorey 2002
- **Psicholinguistic research** – Stuckless & Birch 1966; Erting, Prezioso & Hynes 1994; Mayberry 1998; Chamberlain, Morford & Mayberry 2000
- **Educational and rehabilitational research** – Vernon & Koh 1970; Ahlgren & Hyltenstam 1994; Mahshie 1995; Hoiting & Slobin 2002

Sign languages

- acquired in infancy (from birth) in communication with adults
- without formal teaching
- in a relatively short period of time from birth to age 3 or 4
- community of users

Spoken languages

- acquired in infancy (from birth) in communication with adults
- without formal teaching
- in a relatively short period of time from birth to age 3 or 4
- community of users

Hearing mother – deaf infant communication

- increase eye contact
- visual activities
- facial expression and touch
  - ✓ even when the infant is no more than 9 months old
  - ✓ they do it considerably more often than mothers of hearing children do (Wedell-Monning & Lumley 1980; Spencer 1991)

What is missing?

symbolic language - not developing

Deaf mother – deaf infant communication

- modify SL in the same way hearing parents do - baby talk ("motherese")
  - ✓ the location of the sign is always closer to the child
  - ✓ repeat and simplify gestures
  - ✓ face is kept totally visible
  - ✓ facial expressions transmit important linguistic messages
  - ✓ convey affective messages, emotions

Deaf mother – deaf infant communication

- Deaf mothers possess intuitive knowledge of how to communicate with their deaf infant
  - ✓ how to win over and sustain the infant's attention
  - ✓ how to direct attention to the signs
  - ✓ how to relate language to the child's surroundings in a meaningful way
- deaf children exposed to sign language watch their language from birth just like hearing children listen to their language from birth

DCDP – SL communication

- Story telling 1

"Ugly Duck"

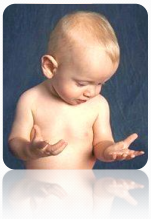
- Story telling 2

"Three Little Pigs"

DCHP – SL support

Maria is telling the story in Croatian Sign Language (HZJ):
"Chicken and its Friends"
(video)

The benefit of early SL acquisition



- communication skills
- better results in language and academic skills, as well as in general knowledge
- cognitive, emotional and social development

Stuckless & Birch 1966; Israelite, Ewoldt & Hoffmeister 1989; Strong & Prinz 1997; Hoffmeister 2000; Prinz 2002

Hearing baby and baby signs

- signs helps babies communicate before they can talk
- parant attachment
- cognitive, emotional and social development
- better results in oral language aquisition