

Black American Sign Language: Implications for Speech-Language Pathologists

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Purpose and Background: The purpose of this study was to review the literature regarding linguistic variations seen in Black American Sign Language (ASL) and determine the clinical implications for speech-language pathologists (SLPs). SLPs not only work with people who use spoken language but also those who sign. In fact, it is common for Schools for the Deaf in the US to employ SLPs to assist deaf students in acquiring ASL, particularly those who have expressive-receptive language disorders. It is the position of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (1988) that dialects are not speech-language disorders. Regardless of whether the client is using a mainstream or nonmainstream dialect, SLPs must be able to identify whether a disorder is present or not. Generally, SLPs in the US learn the characteristics of Standard American English, but then modify that information to work with people who speak other dialects. Information to aid in this modification has been provided by decades of sociolinguistic research. Similarly, SLPs need sociolinguistic research to assist them in working with the signing population. **Method:** A critical review of the literature was conducted using six different search engines. To be included, articles must have: (a) been published between 1970 and 2010 in scholarly journals, (b) included research questions or hypotheses, (c) described the participants in detail, and (d) described the research design. **Results:** A total of seven articles met the inclusion criteria. All seven addressed differences between Black ASL and mainstream ASL. A comparison of findings will be presented. **Discussion:** A very limited number of peer-reviewed articles meeting the criteria of this review were revealed, and they included a limited number of researchers (five of the seven articles were recent articles written by R. Bayley and C. Lucas). This evidence suggests that this is a field of study in its infancy. However, the work so far has significant implications for SLPs in the US.