



University of Maribor



Communication challenges in inclusive education faced by deaf and non-deaf people

National Report – Slovenia

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Abstract

This report is the first step towards advancing inclusive education through International Sign. It looks at what support systems are in place in how the education of deaf is performed in Slovenia. The report presents the current situation and legal status of Slovene sign language and International Sign in Slovenia and discusses how used and accepted they are. We perform a survey among participants in higher education to gauge the understanding of the condition of the deaf community in this environment and get an understanding of interest in sign language.

Additionally, we also talk to a selection of people from and working with the deaf community in the form of guided interviews to collect their feedback and their understanding on the status of International Sign in Slovenia - how much and where it is used, how understandable it is to those who know Slovenian sign language etc. This is partially also necessary because, given the relatively small community in Slovenia, there is very little recorded or publicly available information on these subjects.



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List of Abbreviations

ASL	American Sign Language
IS	International Sign
SSL (slo. SZJ)	Slovenian Sign Language (slo. Slovenski znakovni jezik)
WFD	World Federation of the Deaf

1. Introduction

Due to their hearing loss, deaf people communicate by other means, most expressive and non-limiting of which is arguably sign language. Sign language is a visually-sign language system with a particular setting, position, direction and movement of hands and fingers, and face mimicking.

In Slovenia, the used and taught sign language is the Slovenian Sing Language. Because the country does not have many inhabitants, the deaf community is also relatively small. Deaf people usually live in closely-knit communities, which is also true in Slovenia, but the relatively small national community of deaf people brings some additional challenges for the people that might not be as pronounced in larger countries.

1.1. Statistics

According to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clubs Association of Slovenia, there are about 1500 deaf or hearing impaired persons in Slovenia (from a population of 2 million). About 1000 of them use the Slovenian sign language as their first language. [1]

Although deaf are considered seriously handicapped persons in Slovenia, an old Federal self-management agreement categorises deafness as a 70-percent physical impairment, which is not recognised as a disability. Therefore, they do not have the right to technical aids or the status of a disabled person. [1]

According to [1] there are 1500 deaf people in Slovenia. For around 1000 of them, Slovene sign language is their mother tongue. It has to be noted that Slovenia only has around 2.000.000 inhabitants, with the capital Ljubljana having around 300.000 inhabitants and the second-largest city, Maribor, around 100.000 inhabitants. On average, there are somewhere between 40 and 50 new deaf children identified every year [2].

Most deaf people acquire a vocational education, less secondary education, and very few choose to pursue higher education. This is primarily due to poor literacy and poor knowledge of the Slovenian language. Deaf people in Slovenia are the least educated among all disabled people, as only 10% of them have completed secondary school, and less than 1% have completed higher education [3].

1.2. Support System

Attendance for the first 9 years of school (i.e. primary school) is compulsory in Slovenia. Meaning that all children, regardless of their nationality or disability, have the right to study, and the state has to provide them admission to a suitable school. For deaf children, there are two possibilities, either a special school or an integration school.

The special schools are specialised in children with learning difficulties, as the disabilities among the children are not the same. These schools have their own focus, and for deaf students, the focus is on Hearing and Communication.

There is a central national deaf association, called the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clubs Association of Slovenia, which is divided into regional sub-associations [4].

Assistive technology is in most cases funded or co-funded by health insurance, rehabilitation centres or national social service institutions. The website of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clubs Association has a list of different types of assistive technology for deaf people [5]. Most of these Assistive Technologies are general and not specific to Slovenia. A special assistive technology specific for Slovenia is the Dictionary for the Slovene Sign Language [6].

Those unable to communicate in any other language than sign language get the right to use an interpreter. get a given number of hours they can use the service for free every year. Additionally, they can ask for a free interpreter for any business in public institutions (e.g. court of law, doctor appointments within the national health service, different administrations, etc.) [7]. In Slovenia, there are currently 61 professional interpreters. In 2020 they reported approximately 21000 hours of interpreting [8].

2. Slovenia Sign Language

Sign language is a visual and manual language, in which the signs are mainly composed of hand signals, mimic and body posture. People with severe or profound hearing impairment normally use it to communicate. It is a language with rich vocabulary coverage and its own grammatical rules [9].

The Slovenian Sign Language - SSL (slo. Slovenski znakovni jezik - SZJ) is the official language for people with hearing impairment. It is based on the use of hands, facial expressions, eyes and lips and body movement. A finger alphabet can be used together with sign language. Sign language typically does not have the same grammar as a spoken language in the same geographical area as sign language is independent of the spoken language and is developed within the deaf community.

The adoption of the Act on the Use of Slovenian Sign Language had brought a significant step forward [10]. It enabled deaf people to use sign language in everyday life and public service. It also provides the right to use sign language in all other life situations in which a deaf person's deafness presents an obstacle. More specifically, this means the right of deaf people to use Slovenian sign language in communication, the right of adapted techniques of communication, and the right of an interpreter for the SSL. The rights also include all forms of social life, with equal rights and equal opportunities as those enjoyed by people without a hearing impairment. The European Union supports the minority languages of the deaf community as a unique expression of the linguistic diversity of the European cultural area, and the Member States calls for their preservation and promotion [9].

2.1. Characteristics

Sign language is realised in gestures, facial expressions and body movements. True sign language does not use articulation, while the finger alphabet and lip-reading are only accompanying elements that are dependent on understanding the spoken/written language. Within the natural sign language system, there are various sign subsystems or models, which are related to spoken language and are combinations of gestures and spoken language [11].

In Slovenia, there are three signing models [11]:

1. Slovenian Sign Language is a natural sign system with a highly developed manual-visual mode of expression.
 - A different structure than the Slovene language;
 - It is not used in conjunction with spoken Slovene;

- It is used by deaf adults and deaf children and by hearing children of deaf parents.
2. Slovene in signs is a combination of elements of Slovene sign language and spoken language.
- It is used at the same time as spoken Slovene;
 - The order of gestures is the same as the order words in Slovene (without declension, i.e. suffixes);
 - It is used by the deaf in conversations with the hearing and vice versa, by teachers who also have hearing students in the class and by interpreters when interpreting spoken or written language;
 - Gestures follow words, which we call simultaneous communication, and is unique because it uses two languages at the same time.
3. A literal translation from Slovenian:
- Follow Slovenian words by adding suffixes using the finger alphabet;
 - Used in class (e.g. dictations);
 - Adult deaf people do not use it.

The elements of sign language include gestures, facial expressions, body movements and the finger alphabet [11]. In general, SSL is similar to German and Austrian sign language.

Each gesture has a phonological structure and consists of four elements (handshape or fingers, movement, palm orientation, and location). Changing any of the elements changes the meaning of the gesture. In Slovene sign language, different gestures are a specific shape of one or both hands in motion. Possible hand shapes consist of 29 letter shapes/signs (25 Slovenian and 4 foreign – see Figure 1) and some other shapes. Altogether there are 44 hand shapes. With different movement and speed of the same gesture, we can change the gesture's meaning (e.g. tree -> trees -> forest). Movement can be slow, normal or fast. This communicates some additional significance of the event.

Signs are performed in the area from the top of the head to the width of the shoulders and down to the waist. With the size of the gesture itself, we tell whether the object is large or small. When this is not possible, we can use gestures that mean small/big.

When performing gestures, the palms have many different possible different positions and can be performed one-handed or two-handed. By changing the location of the same gesture, we change

the meaning (e.g. small/big). The location of a certain gesture can tell what is happening in a certain place (e.g. headache/stomach ache if the gesture is performed next to the head/stomach).

When telling stories about several people, each person is named by spelling their name or their characteristic gesture, place them in a certain place, which we mark with the pointing gesture "it/this" and always return to the same place when we talk about that person without spelling their name again.

The gestures are performed:

- One-handed with or without touching the body.
- Two-handed, where both hands are equally active.
- Two-handed, where one hand is active, the other passive, both with the same finger position.
- Two-handed with different finger positions.

Slovene Sign language has many compound gestures. Usually, two (rarely three or four) gestures for one concept. Such compound gestures are used to name people, professions, nationalities, possessive adjectives, adjective gradability, in the naming of spaces, and some plants, and in cases where the meaning of a gesture (word) is combined from two or more gestures.

Facial expressions are a very important element of sign language. It can be used alone or combined with a gesture that it emphasises. With it, we form the structure of sentences and texts. Facial expressions include many expressions and movements, which can be done with the head, mouth, cheeks, eyebrows, eyes, nose and shoulders. Emotions, mood and thinking are shown and expressed on the face, on which, more than on gestures, the listeners gaze is focused. Even facial expressions, without gestures, can show a certain meaning. With facial expressions, we can confirm and deny or express the meaning of adjectives and the intensity of verbs.

Body movement (pantomime) accompanies gestures and facial expressions. With pantomime, without gestures, we can describe an event, tell a story. With a simple movement of the body, we can also express certain statements (e.g. shrug with the shoulders = I don't know).

The finger alphabet is not a real element of sign language because it is tied to the knowledge of spoken/written language, which is not a part of the sign language. The finger alphabet is just an accompanying element. It is used for names of persons and places, words for which we do not know the gestures, foreign words, and declension endings (suffixes) when learning Slovene. There are a

few alphabets: one-handed alphabet (see Figure 1), two-handed alphabet, speech therapy signs for individual letters, and a combination of the previous three at the same time is also used.

One of the more specific properties of the written Slovene language is the so-called declension. This means the ends of the words change depending on circumstances. In the Slovenian language, nouns are declined for six cases and three numbers. Adjectives and most pronouns additionally decline for three genders. Slovene sign language omits this and uses additional/adapted (e.g. for plural) gestures where necessary. The exception to this is, previously mentioned literal translation signing model where declensions are also included (by spelling); used when learning written Slovene.

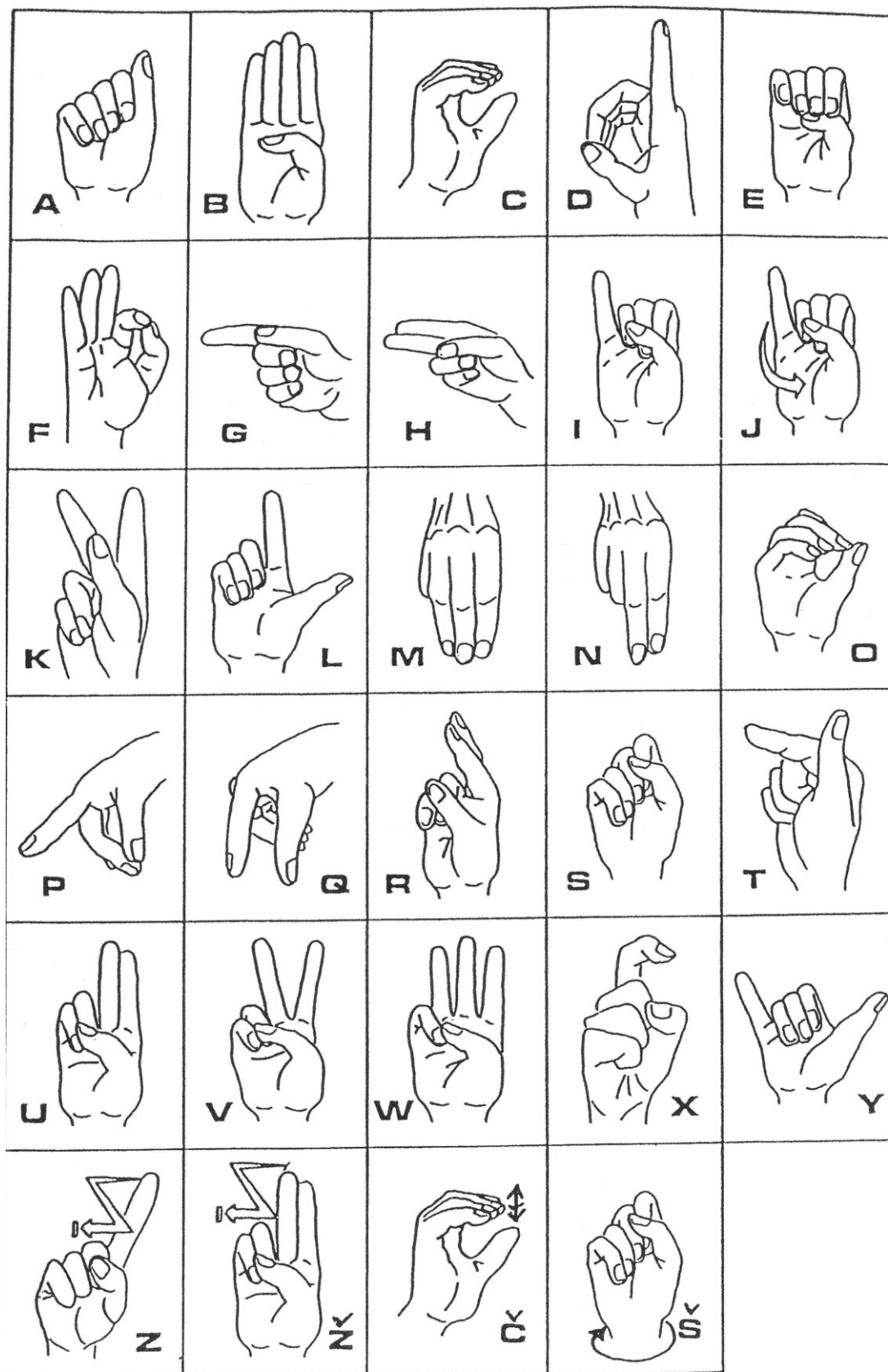


Figure 1: Slovene one-handed finger alphabet.

2.2. Policies and Legal Status

The area of sensory disability and rights of persons with hearing impairment is covered by a set of legal regulations and documents with which this group of people with disabilities, at least at the legislative level, is guaranteed equal opportunities in education, employment, health and social care and other forms of assistance to meet their specific needs. In 2021 the right to use and development of SSL was confirmed to be added into the country's constitution. Slovenia will be the fifth country in the EU, after Austria, Finland, Hungary, and Portugal, to write the right to sign language into their constitution [12].

Key regulations and programs which provide equal opportunities and eliminate discrimination based on disability are:

- Article 14 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, which explicitly "guaranteed equal human rights and fundamental freedoms irrespective of national origin, race, sex, language, religion, political or other beliefs, financial status, birth, education, social status, disability or any other personal circumstance" [9] [13].
- The Use of Slovenian Sign Language Act [10] provides deaf people with the right to use Slovenian sign language in proceedings before any state or local public service. It also recognises the right to use sign language in all other life situations. A deaf person is given the right to access information in an appropriate format. The right shall be exercised by means of an interpreter for Slovenian Sign Language. Among other things, the law defines sign language as a language of communication of deaf persons or natural means of communication of deaf people.
- The National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, at the 37th meeting on 2 April 2008, ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

There is also other legislation which is related to the deaf and hearing-impaired persons: The Act on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, The Act on the Placement of Children with Special Needs, The Rules on additional technical and physical assistance for children with special needs [14]–[16].

There is also prohibition and prevention of discrimination on the grounds of disability provisions contained in the Act on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment [17], the Labour Act [18], the Act on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities [19], and the Act on the prevention of domestic violence [20].

Additionally, there is a Resolution on the National Program for Language Policy 2014-2018 [21], an Action Plan for language features [22], an Action Plan for language learning and a Program of Action for the disabled in 2014 – 2021 [23]. The purpose of these programs is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of human rights of persons with disabilities and promote respect for their dignity. The program includes three core objectives with a total of 91 measures, which comprehensively regulate all spheres of life of people with disabilities.

2.3. Learning

In the 18th century, the first organised school for the deaf was started in Paris by Abbé Charles-Michel de l'Épée, where the teaching with the sign language was used. The first institution for deaf children, which operated in Slovene (and Italian), was established in 1840 in Gorizia [11].

However, in 1880, international deaf educators meet in what is known as the Conference of Milan. There they declared that oralism is the superior method for teaching the deaf, and sign languages were banned. In Slovenia first forms of lectures (not in education) on Slovene Sign Language began again in 1979 (the deaf community did use them before, but they were not taught and were sometimes forbidden in schools) [1]. In Slovenia, sign language was included back into the education of the deaf only in 1990 (other components of what is called total communication were already included) after the European Parliament's Resolution on Sign Languages for Deaf People in 1988. It started with specific courses teaching Slovene sign language and is now, depending on the education stage, an elective or mandatory subject in schools for the deaf. Today there are three institutions in Slovenia (in Portorož, Ljubljana and Maribor) intended for the education of the deaf. All three institutions offer education for preschool children until the end of primary school. The institute in Ljubljana also offers a secondary vocational and technical school with education, graphics, woodworking, metallurgy, and vocational media technology. Sign interpreters are also used in classrooms to interpret the lessons to sign language as necessary [11].

In Slovenia, there is no consensus on which type of communication should be used – oral method or bimodal education. Slovene sign language is also an elective and mandatory subject in the Faculty of Education in Ljubljana and in the master's program in the Faculty of Education in Koper. [11]

Interpreters in Slovenia are certified by the Slovene Association of Interpreters. The certification includes a more theoretical side on the issues of the deaf; however, a large part of it is more practical where the candidate has to show their knowledge of interpreting from the spoken language into sign language and vice versa. The certification committee includes three certified interpreters and, sometimes, actual deaf people [1]. There is a training program for interpreters

that they can take before trying to get certified. The training takes 2 years and is done over weekends [24].

In order to raise the public's awareness about the need for recognising Slovene sign language, the Association of Slovene sign language interpreters prepared a publication project for a practical multimedia dictionary. The dictionary today contains almost eighteen thousand entries for the most frequently used words in Slovene spoken language, structured in individual contents chapters. A constituent part of this dictionary is a guidebook for teaching and learning sign languages based on grammatical rules of Slovene. This manual was elaborated on the basis of observation of the language used among deaf people. Publication of the dictionary means the implementation of the Resolution on Sign Language, passed by the European Parliament in 1998 in which the Parliament invites all the EU Member States to recognise the sign language of deaf persons, the profession of a sign language interpreter and the right of deaf people to an interpreter.

3. International Sign in Slovenia

International Sign (IS) is used in international conferences/events and in communication between signers with no other language in common. IS signs are combined from signer's own national sign language mixed with highly iconic signs that can be understood by a large audience.

International Sign is not a significant subject in the deaf community of Slovenia. There are people who know and can use it, but they are not a typical representative of the community.

3.1. Characteristics

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) uses the term IS, rather than International Sign Language, to indicate that IS does not have full linguistic status but is a translanguaging practice. It is unlike Esperanto as IS is not a planned language with a fixed lexicon and a fixed set of grammatical rules. Although the use of such a language was attempted in the 1970s by the WFD, but was unsuccessful and abandoned [25]. Since then, the WFD has taken the position that standardisation of a global language – defining a single word or one sign for a concept cannot combine natural variations of the different languages [26].

IS is an invented system of signing to help facilitate cross-language communication or is a translanguaging practice used between signers from different countries. In IS, signs can change depending on who is talking to who. Signers from different places in the world, signing IS, use different signs, which they negotiate (based on their primary sign languages of the communicating parties) [25]. A signer with a background in American Sign Language (ASL) will sign a more ASL-heavy form of IS [27].

The development of the IS was centred in Europe and is strongly influenced by the American Sign Language (which is also of European descent), where it is also predominantly used [25].

3.2. Policies and Legal Status

International Sign has no legal standing in Slovenia.

3.3. Learning

There is no official learning of International Sign in Slovenia. However, from some interviews [1] with the more prominent Slovenia Sign interpreters, it is obvious that at least some of them are very interested in international communication and are putting a lot of effort into studying it.

In higher education, International Sign is discussed, but based on the referenced curriculum [28] the emphasis is on the national sign language.

Even the World Federation for the Deaf give, as the best advice for learning International Sign, to be fluent in at least one sign language, and to actually see and meet people using International Sign [25]. The knowledge will basically be collected through experience.

4. Communication Challenges Between Deaf and Non-deaf in Education

4.1. Survey on Communication between the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Slovenia

The survey was done in Slovene in order not to limit the participation to only those who know English. However, the questions were previously agreed upon by all the partners of the project and translated, so all the partners have collected the same type of data.

The questionnaire was promoted and disseminated by our faculty and university (Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, University of Maribor) and the Slovenian Association of Disabled Students [29]. The responses are therefore primarily from students but do also contain educators (predominately working in higher education). The questionnaire was anonymous and available from June 2020 to January 2021. In this time, we have collected the data from 190 participants. The questions and possible answers (where applicable) are accessible in Appendix A, while the basic results for all the close-ended questions in Appendix B.

Interestingly 60% of the participants would be interested in learning Slovene sign language, and 61,6% would be interested in learning the international sign. Bigger interest in international sign can also be explained as almost 60% of the participants who have contact with deaf people, and 80% of the deaf participants already know Slovene sign language.

One of the first questions the participants answered was whether they have any contact with deaf people (or if they are themselves deaf). The breakdown of the answers is available in Figure 2 (top values in the pie chart is the absolute number of participants, and underneath it is the share of responses in percentage). We will use this information going forward to look at whether or not participants that have a personal connection to the deaf community have answered questions differently.

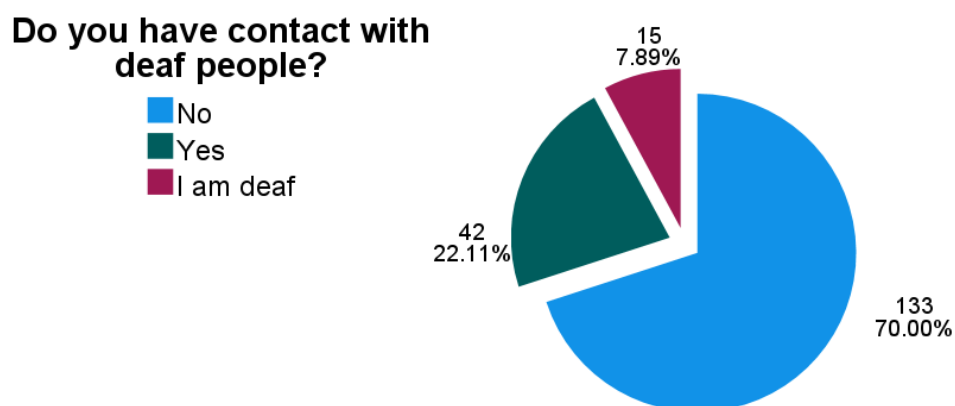


Figure 2: Participants' contact with deaf people.

Almost two thirds (62,6%) of the participants believe deaf people can read fluently and understand written language. However, when these results are grouped by whether or not the participants have contact with the deaf community, there are noticeable differences between groups (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). Those that do not have contact are more than twice more likely to think deaf people can read and write. Complete reverse is observed for the deaf participants who have almost twice as many times answered in the opposite. Participants that have contact with the deaf community are more or less split down the middle. This does show that there is some misconception in the general public as the deaf do often struggle with learning the written language.

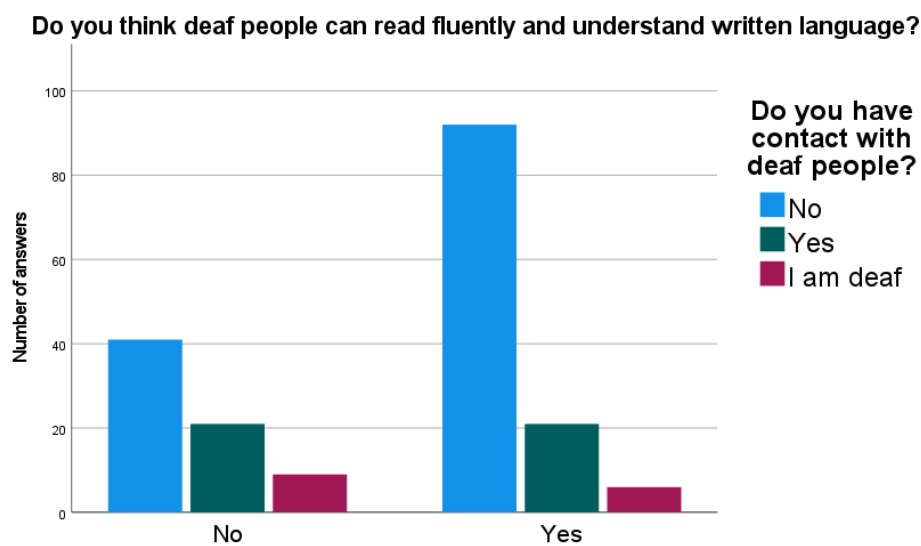


Figure 3: Perceived ability to read and write grouped by contact with the deaf community.

On the question on how deaf people communicate with each other, we can see (Figure 4) a relatively steady rise through the four possible answers (participants could mark as many of the methods as they wanted), where writing is the least common, followed by gesturing (common gestures, not a language or some sort of an established system), lip reading and then finally sign language which was the most commonly given answer with very close to 100% response rate.

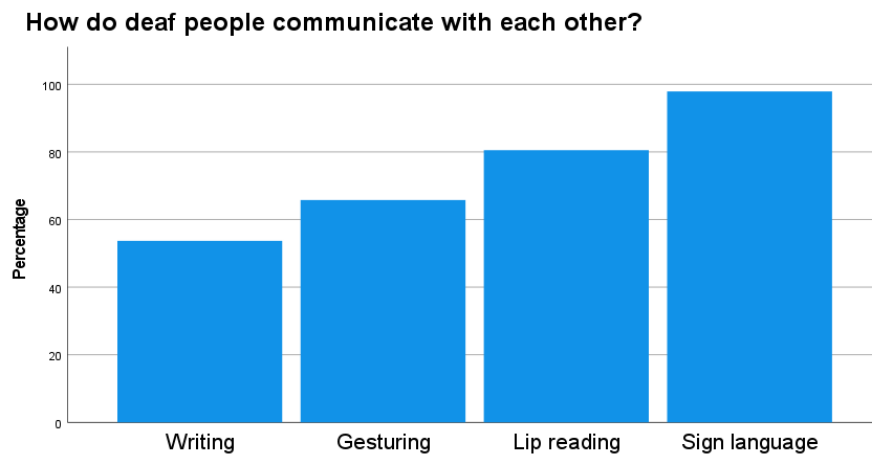


Figure 4: Answers on how deaf people communicate with each other.

The same order is true, regardless of the participants' contact with the deaf, but the difference between them becomes more pronounced (see Figure 5). People who know somebody that is deaf were less likely to select writing and gesturing lower as a method of communication, while deaf people have also rated lip-reading lower.

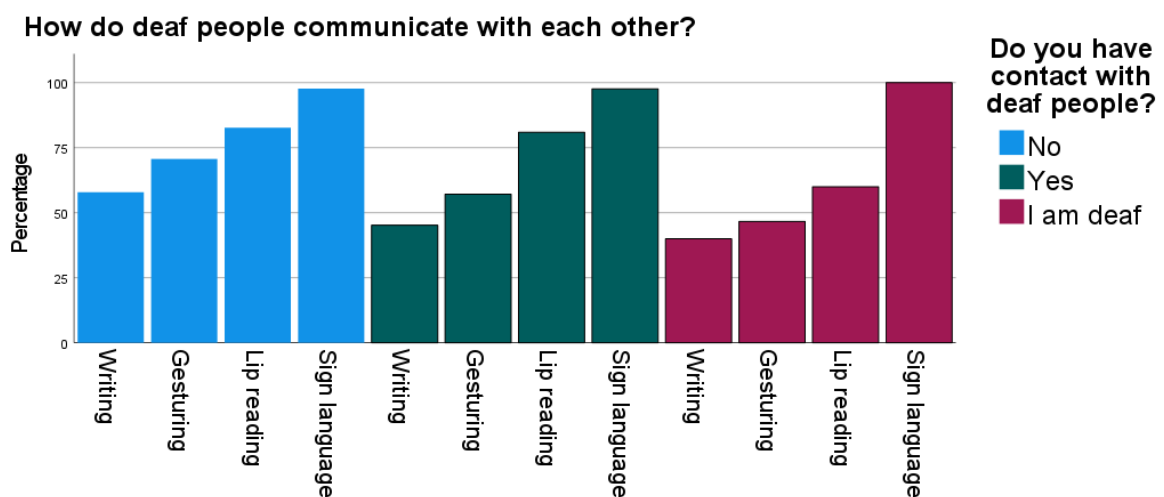


Figure 5: How deaf people communicate with each other, grouped by contact.

The differences between different communication methods are less evident in the communication between the deaf and non-deaf (Figure 6). There is no large disparity between answers from people who have and those who don't have contact with deaf people (Figure 7). Participants that have contact with or are themselves deaf only show less communication using gestures. While all groups have small numbers of participants who believe deaf people do not communicate with non-deaf only, the deaf themselves have 0%.

How do deaf people communicate with non-deaf?

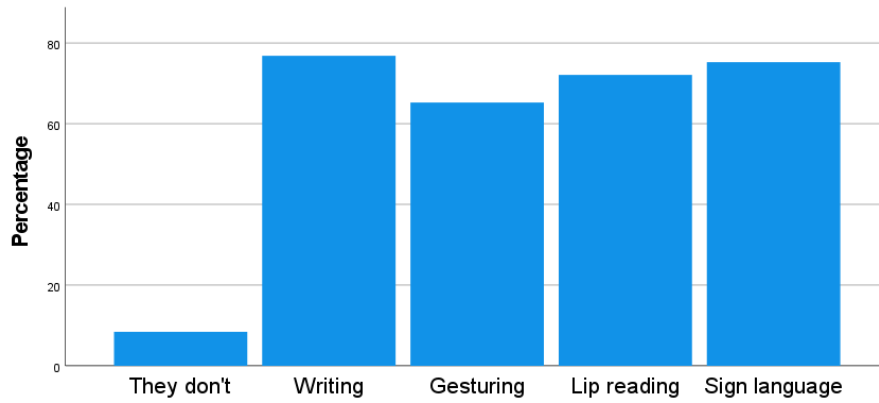


Figure 6: Answers on how deaf people communicate with non-deaf.

How do deaf people communicate with non-deaf?

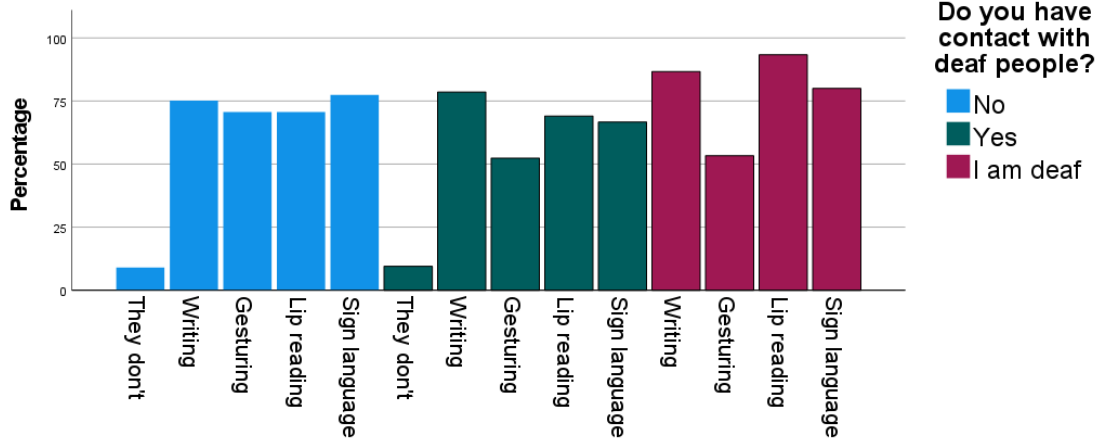


Figure 7: How deaf people communicate with non-deaf, grouped by contact.

One of the more revealing questions was whether the participants think sign language is different from country to country. Almost one quarter (22.6%) believe sign language does not change across different countries. However, when grouped by contact with deaf people (Figure 8), we notice that basically all of the participants who believe there is only one sign language do not have contact with the deaf community.

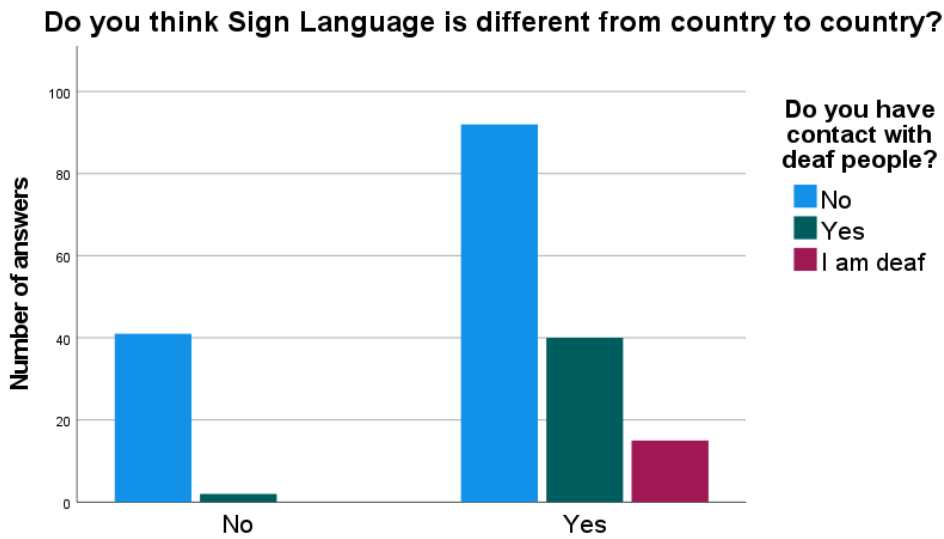


Figure 8: Is sign language different from country to country, grouped by contact.

The results about the comparison between the spoken language and sign language (Figure 9) show that participants in very similar percentages believe the sign language to have a fewer or similar number of signs. This is surprising considering this is also true for deaf survey participants (perhaps they were thinking in terms of expressiveness rather than unique words/signs). Those that think sign language has more signs than a spoken language is fewer and predominantly from people not in contact with deaf people.

In comparison with the spoken language vocabulary, the comparable Sign Language has:

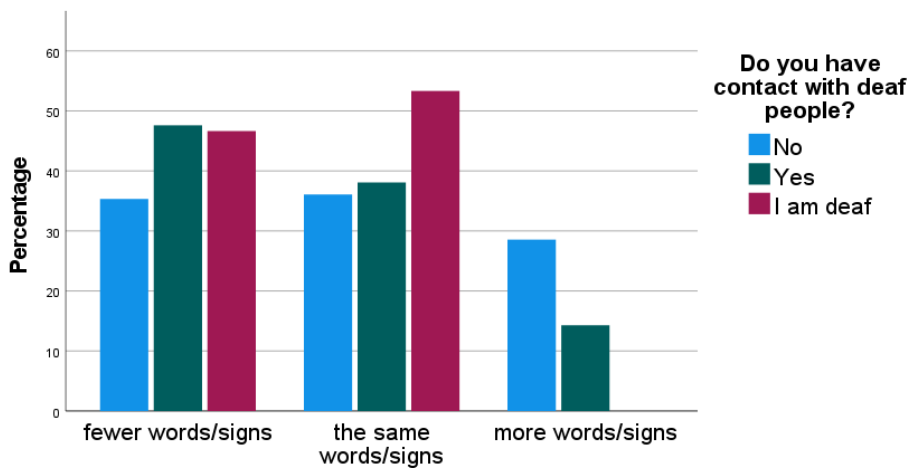


Figure 9: Sign language in comparison to written language, grouped by contact.

The survey also contained two open-ended questions where we asked participants about their experiences communicating with the deaf and if they have any suggestions on how to make student life easier for deaf students. The participants that do have contact with deaf students have primarily mentioned speaking a little bit slower or enunciating words more for easier lip reading. Communication over text was also mentioned fairly often. There are a few reasons these two methods were prevalent even among those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Firstly, the majority

of participants are not deaf and do not know sign language, and therefore have to fall back on hoping the other party knows lip-reading or writing messages between them. The second reason is the nature of the survey. Participants have to be able to read to fill in the survey, and therefore, the deaf participants are all able to read and write. Consequently, when meeting people lip-reading or writing messages are the most successful methods of communication because they are most likely to be useful with anybody.

Regarding improvements to the student experience, the majority of suggestions were along the lines of customised lecture contents. This ranges from more detailed study materials (more complete lecture slides), access to study materials before lectures so the deaf students (and possibly interpreters) can familiarise themselves with the relevant concepts and vocabulary. Modern software solutions for automatic and live translation of spoken language to either text or sign language was also suggested.

4.2. Guided Interviews on International Sign in Slovenia

We have interviewed 12 people. The majority of them were women, and only three were men. Four were deaf, one was hard of hearing, and the rest can hear. We interviewed two students. One of them was deaf but did not know sign language (she has a cochlear implant), while the other does know Slovenian sign language but is not deaf. The remainder of the interviewees were older than 40 years. Four of them were interpreters for SSL, and three can communicate in IS. They were all very well connected with the deaf community: researchers/educators in the field of disabilities, teachers of deaf children or other positions in education that often brings them into contact with the deaf, and members of the World Federation of the Deaf, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clubs Association of Slovenia, or local deaf clubs. The interviewees were not average members of the deaf community and were, on average, very highly educated.

1. How commonly is International Sign language used?

The answers collected from the interviewees indicate IS is not commonly used, and there are not many people who know it. It is not used within the Slovenian deaf community. It has been previously used on international events (where there were deaf from different countries) in Slovenia, even though there are no certified IS interpreters in Slovenia. Some use it in international meetings (predominately online) or on social media. The general feedback was that IS is more well known and accepted among the younger generations.

2. Does the interviewee use International Sign language?

Three interviewees use IS, mostly on international conferences, visits abroad, online international meetings (business and/or personal), and social media.

3. How do you learn International Sign language?

The majority of those that know about IS were of the opinion that you learn it from looking and conversing with others who already know IS. There is basically no written literature. There are some videos online that show the basic signs (for the international audience, not in Slovene). There is no school for IS in Slovenia, but there have been workshops on IS organised by the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clubs Association of Slovenia. However, we were not able to find any record of them in our research. Similarly, there is a partial IS dictionary [30], but it is not freely available (only a physical copy from a few libraries). We have also learned there are currently ongoing preparations to have a seminar on IS that will be part of pedagogical training.

4. How do you communicate with a foreigner deaf if you don't know IS?

Based on the answers, people use the best methods they can. Those who know SSL use basic and natural signs that are understood in other languages in combination with face mimic and body language to get their message across. Others who do not know any sign language either use interpreters if they have access to one or they write or draw their message.

5. How easy is it to understand the International Sing language for someone skilled in national sign language?

Interviewees who know both SSL and IS and those that only know SSL but have had the opportunity to see IS being used report that only knowing SSL is enough to understand at least the general meaning of the communications performed in IS. It is much more difficult to understand technical terms.

6. Have you ever seen International Sign language in use?

Ten out of the twelve interviews have already seen IS in use. Mostly on international events, some have seen it as an addition to online videos. However, this is probably a very bad representation of an average deaf person's contact with IS. Interviewees were mostly employed in different deaf organisations or in their education. As such, they have much more contact with international events where IS would be used. In fact, the two students, who do not work in the field, were the only ones who have not seen IS used before.

7. How difficult do you find International Sign language compared to your national sign language?

The majority had problems comparing the two, as generally, one knows a natural sign language before you can learn IS and therefore picking up IS is easier. But the general consensus was that the SSL, which is an actual language and has more elements, would be harder to learn.

8. Do you think that it would be an advantage if only International Sign language would exist?

For different reasons ranging from the natural evolution of languages to national/communal identity, the answer was a resounding no.

9. What are the advantages/disadvantages of the International Sign language?

The main advantage of the IS is that it is understood to a wider audience. One of the disadvantages, or more like a complaint against IS, was its predominant anchoring in the ASL.

10. Does International Sign language have any legal standing in your country?

The response was a unanimous “No”.

11. Do you know of any variations in the International Sign language?

Those that are familiar with the IS know there are variations in the IS across the world, but Slovenia is too small, and there are too few IS speakers for any differences to be noticeable.

12. Do deaf people use IT courseware and digital content frequently?

It depends on an individual, but generally and appropriately to the times we live in, the deaf do use digital solutions and content.

13. Are technological solutions (e.g. cochlear implants) well accepted?

Based on the responses, the opinion in the community is very divided. People are afraid of the possible consequences, loss of their language, friends, values, etc. Some look at it like something forced upon them by the medical professionals to make them “normal”. Some who have them really appreciate them, while some say they are only a distraction. The only interviewee that has one was very happy with it. She communicates like she is not deaf and does not know SSL.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This report shows the current situation of deaf people in Slovenia. Even though it is a small country with a quantitatively speaking low number of deaf people, institutionalised support structures help them lead a more normal life and allow them to have the same opportunities in life. The situation is not perfect, but the education options and interpreter services give the deaf the ability to integrate into the world that would be difficult otherwise.

Slovenian sign language is accepted, and significant effort has been put into preserving it and teaching it to newer generations of speakers. The language is also constantly developed to include the new signs for new things/concepts/ideas that are very common in the current globalised world. The International Sign, on the other hand, is a very different story. It has no legal status in the country, and any freely available materials on the IS itself are basically non-existing. Deaf people are somewhat aware that the IS exists, but very few know it in any detail.

The survey has shown that people from the general public have a few misconceptions about what sign language is and how it works. However, their responses indicate that they are very interested in learning sign language. Interest in both Slovene Sign Language and International Sign was very high. The interviewees have shown that there are parts of the deaf community that know IS and can use it efficiently, although there are no certified interpreters of IS in Slovenia. They have also been very specific about IS not being a complete language and the importance of national sign language.

This and other national reports produced in this project give the readers information on the current situation and differences on how national and International Sign languages are accepted, how well known and understood they are, and how they are supported in individual partner countries. Ultimately, this and other national reports will support the projects' main goal to promote and provide new materials for learning International Sign.

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7. Appendixes

Appendix A

List of questions in the performed survey.

1. Do you have contact with deaf people?
(Yes, No, I am deaf)
2. Do you think deaf people can read fluently and understand Slovene?
(Yes, No)
3. How do deaf people communicate with each other?
(Writing, Gesturing, Lip reading, Sign Language)
4. How do deaf people communicate with non-deaf?
(They don't, Writing, Gesturing, Lip reading, Hand signs)
5. How do you communicate with a deaf person?
(open question)
6. Do you know Sign Language?
(Yes, No)
7. Do you think Sign Language is different from country to country?
(Yes, No)
8. Would you like to learn a Sign Language?
(Yes, No)
9. Would you be interested in taking an elective course in International Sign if available?
(Yes, No)
10. In comparison with the Slovene vocabulary, the Slovene Sign Language has:
(fewer words/signs, the same words/signs, more words/signs)
11. Are you aware of International Sign?
(Yes, No)
12. Add any suggestions to assist deaf students in education, classroom, academic life:
(open question)

Appendix B

Frequency tables for all close-ended questions from the survey in Slovenia.

Do you have contact with deaf people?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	133	70.0	70.0	70.0
	Yes	42	22.1	22.1	92.1
	I am deaf	15	7.9	7.9	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

Do you think deaf people can read fluently and understand written language?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	71	37.4	37.4	37.4
	Yes	119	62.6	62.6	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

How do deaf people communicate with each other?

		Responses		
		N	Percent	Percent of Cases
Valid	Writing	102	18.0%	53.7%
	Gesturing	125	22.1%	65.8%
	Lip reading	153	27.0%	80.5%
	Sign language	186	32.9%	97.9%
	Total	566	100.0%	297.9%

How do deaf people communicate with non-deaf?

		N	Percent	Percent of Cases
Valid	They don't	16	2.8%	8.4%
	Writing	146	25.8%	76.8%
	Gesturing	124	21.9%	65.3%
	Lip reading	137	24.2%	72.1%
	Sign language	143	25.3%	75.3%
	Total	566	100.0%	297.9%

Do you know Sign Language?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	126	66.3	66.3	66.3
	Yes	64	33.7	33.7	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

Do you think Sign Language is different from country to country?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	43	22.6	22.6	22.6
	Yes	147	77.4	77.4	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

Would you like to learn a Sign Language?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	76	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Yes	114	60.0	60.0	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

Are you aware of International Sign?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	155	81.6	81.6	81.6
	Yes	35	18.4	18.4	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

Would you like to learn International Sign?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	73	38.4	38.4	38.4
	Yes	117	61.6	61.6	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

Would you be interested in taking an elective course in International Sign if available?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	73	38.4	38.4	38.4
	Yes	117	61.6	61.6	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

In comparison with the spoken language vocabulary, the comparable Sign Language has:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	fewer words/signs	74	38.9	38.9	38.9
	the same words/signs	72	37.9	37.9	76.8
	more words/signs	44	23.2	23.2	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	