



GOSPEL HANDS

Your partner with national missionaries around the world

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Importance Of Facial Expressions In Communication By James Campbell, IPM Instructor/Evangelist

Do people sometimes think you are angry when you are not? Or that your facial expression during conversation implies a negative effect? This happens to me at times. I was asked with those questions, why do some deaf look angry? And why do some sign language interpreters look silly.

Ten years ago, I met a Deaf Ukrainian gentleman at my church, he asked me to spell my name out as he was not familiar with the English names. I spelled my name out and got an unwanted response in return. I got astonished as his face was showing anger, and he shrugged his shoulders with his hands out, saying that I was spelling my name too fast. I saw his eyebrows turned downward. So, I spelled my name out slowly for him to follow. After this first bad experience, I was being careful around him for a few years. Now I realized that he is the sweetest gentleman who cares for everyone very much. He grew up in Ukraine and moved to the U.S.A. when he was 61 years old, his facial expressions and gestures are still unchanged as it is a norm in the Eastern Bloc countries. Now he is 79 years old, I spoke with him recently that our first meeting and his facial expression, which I thought was an angry response and it turned out to be a frustration or an annoyance response.

Twenty-one years ago, my wife was in the hospital, about to deliver our micro preemie who is twenty-six weeks too early and there was a nurse who was taking care of my wife during her stay. My wife shared with her nurse her concerns, pains, and anxieties and we were shocked by the nurse's stoic facial expression to every issue she brought up. We couldn't understand her and felt her emotionally cold. There was no affirmation to my wife's issues. As the result of the lack of affirmation, my wife's blood pressure went thru the roof. I went out of the room and spoke with the head nurse about our concerns, pointing out that we rely facial expressions quite a lot to understand. As I explained her that we grew up communicating with facial expressions every day and this nurse did not intend to be emotionally cold, it was just the cultural differences between us and the nurse. They willingly switched nurses since that style of communication did not work for us. Facial expression is a critical part of sign language.



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The facial expressions pictured below have grammatical significance in the sign language. Signers do not read those facial expressions as meaning “silly or angry.” They read those facial expressions as meaning “new” or “danger” or “slow” or “strong” or whatever the facial expression happens to mean. These expressions are not what is considered "normal" expressions used by speakers of English, additionally, the signer is moving their hands and arms - "gesturing" quickly and often with specific moves that look forceful to non-signers. Signers might sign a little “bigger” than they would in a typical conversation to make sure they understood. To signers, that does not look angry, but it could look like the equivalent of shouting to a non-signer who doesn’t know anything about sign language.



Many non-signers mistakenly believe that sign language happens only on the hands. But that is not true. Sign language is a visual-gestural language, not only a manual language. The face and head are every bit as much a part of the language as the hands are.

For a comparison, English does have tonal fluctuations and stresses. People are so used to the sound constructions that they take it for granted.

YOUR NAME WHAT? The signer will raise eyebrows with ‘YOUR’ then level out with ‘NAME’ and turn eyebrows down when they say ‘WHAT.’

What is your name? The ‘What’ in this sentence starts at a higher pitch then levels out.

It is not silly faces for the sake of silliness. We sometimes have to convey emotion, such as the severity or urgency of a warning. With auditory speech non-signers can use tone, inflection, pitch, and other things to convey sarcasm, urgency, humor etc. With sign language we use the face to convey these things and must be animated for the proper point to come across.

Since Deaf cannot hear the tone in your voice they utilize exaggerated facial expressions when communicating. It makes an enormous difference when communicating. They rarely use articles so it provides clarity to the conversation. Much like texting there is a lack of tone in voice. They are highly animated to get their point across clearly. Please remember to use your facial expressions when communicating with your Deaf community, they will thank you for this.

Getting Past The Facial Expressions

By Jim Bracelin, Deaf Ministry Leader - Valley Forge Baptist Temple

I think it is important that we all realize that God made us to be able to communicate with our hands, our eyes, our facial expressions, our body language, and our voice. We need to take the time to consider how we represent God with all of these. Each of us needs to be careful about using only facial expression, or body language to judge what is in the heart of a person. I want to share some experiences I have had that I hope will encourage you. There are two different Deaf preachers that I was very nervous to be around. Each of these men are men that I highly respect. Their ministries in my own life and ministry have been very important. I have gotten wonderful advice from them over the years, but I also have seen them demonstrate faithfulness to God. When I first met each of these Deaf preachers, I was scared to try to talk to them. Why? Because when I looked at their facial expressions, they looked like they were mad at me. I even thought that they did not like me or were against me! I wondered if it was because I was a Hearing person working with the Deaf. I thought maybe they thought that I should have stayed in the Hearing world, and not tried to help the Deaf. I was totally wrong! Each of these men have served with me and have been a great blessing to me. They both have become a very good friend to me. I have asked them for advice, and they have been a great blessing to me with their wisdom and experience. They have helped me to understand the differences that are between the Hearing and Deaf culture. The point I am trying to make is that we should not judge others by their facial expressions. There are times that people have challenges we don't know anything about, and it might affect their facial expressions and body language. Rather than judging them for being mean, or sad; we ought to spend time with them to get to know them more personally. You might find some of your biggest blessings if you will take the time to get past the facial expressions, or body language. Other people are looking at us, and we need to be careful that we show others our love for God with everything we have in us!

Facial Expressions – Right or Wrong?

By Kevin Maki, Director of IPM Deaf Ministries

Facial expressions encode a part of our language. This is true across the human race. A furrowed eyebrow, a straight face, or a pouty lip, and even the squinting of eyes all can convey that something is NOT right. This is doubly true in the deaf world where facial expressions modify the meanings of signed words. A furrowed eyebrow denotes a question word will follow. A raised eyebrow indicates a shift in topic or even an expectation that you will answer with a simple 'yes' or 'no.' A straight face, in contrast to teeth or tongue being shown, will help a person understand that the extent or amount is 'normal' or even 'average' in contrast to being very near/far or few/many! In other words, the proficient signer encodes language slightly differently than auditory languages tend to do so.

For this reason, the expression of anger in the deaf world is an area of communication to be understood with a certain degree of caution. A stomping foot in the hearing world is a childish expression of impatience while it is a common way to get another person's attention, in a polite way, across a room. And while some deaf may indeed encode a part of an angry expression within the standard facial expressions common to humans around the world, there is a far more common means in which they encode anger: through the EXTENT and SPEED of their sign language. Another way to say this is the 'level-of-animation' exhibited. For instance, a person who normally finger-spells quickly and smoothly may suddenly S-P-E-L-L each letter very slowly, very precisely, and with emphasis in an attempt to say 'Did you S-E-E what I just said?!?' Likewise, a person who signs within a relatively tight window may suddenly have an outburst of signs that are either much larger (or smaller) in size in the same way a hearing person might YELL or whisper a phrase to place emphasis on it. And while it is culturally acceptable for a deaf person to throw a soft object in front of another person if the stomping foot or waving hand did not get their attention, an angry deaf person would encode anger by throwing a large or hard object with intent to actually hit the person who is irritating him.

Which brings us to the conclusion that anger, unless dealt with in a righteous manner like our Lord Jesus Christ removed the problem of buying and selling in the temple area, will be destructive. If it is the kind of 'blow up' anger, then it is destructive to other people. If it is the 'clam up' anger that is held inside and builds, builds, until it causes an ulcer or a heart attack then it is self-destructive. In either case, it does not resolve the heart problem that is being expressed in anger. Anger is a problem. It is not unique to the hearing or deaf worlds. It is a sin problem in which pride rears an ugly head and becomes manifest in our communication. May God help us to have right speech, right facial expressions, right body language and the right extent and speed of communication that demonstrates self-control of a life yielded to the Holy Spirit.

Story from the mission field – as told by IPM national missionary, BK

On a visit to the deaf training center, I mentioned some of the counselling situations that I had faced in the U.S. related to deaf and anger expressed as "domestic violence". Sometimes this is between spouses and other times between parents and children. According to BK, one of the deaf men came to Christ and decided to repent of his sin of anger towards his parents. Prior to becoming a Christian, he would beat his parents with a stick! When he came to Christ, this deaf man took his Pastor with him to interpret for his parents and first explained that he no longer wanted to be angry with them. As a gift of love, he gave his father the stick and promised no more beatings. Just as in the times of Jesus, salvation affected a complete change in the way people behaved, today the gospel is still at work in solving anger.



Why are people so angry?

By Marta L. Galdamez, IPM Deaf Ministries Assistant

The issue of dealing with people (deaf or hearing) responding negatively is one that is bubbling under the surface for many of us, from all walks of life, deaf people are not the exception. In some situations when interpreting for the deaf a message has to be signed clearly. There are grammatical parts of ASL, indicators of questions, that are conveyed

by lowering your eyebrows, or raising them, the same with mouth shapes. To a person who doesn't know ASL, they're assuming that the expression is solely emotional and not grammatical. It's both. To a deaf person, the Sign Language interpreter is providing grammar and punctuation. They might be conveying anger, if the message contains anger.



Looking at a portrait of Beethoven we might think that he was angry most of his life, he had to deal with a violent childhood, he was angry at people, especially since he became deaf.

There are many reasons why people get angry, a few of them are: (1) Unmet expectations, (2) Rudeness, and (3) Lack of Communication.

Unmet Expectations

People can get angry when their expectations are not met. This could be anything from expecting a friendly greeting to acknowledging someone's presence in a conversation or event. In a relationship one person may have expectations about another person which in reality could be the opposite of what was expected.

Rudeness

If a deaf person feels that he or she is being treated rudely or unfairly by a hearing person, it can cause them to become angry very quickly. A situation like this can also be experienced by a hearing person. This is why it is so important for us to make sure we know how to interact with everybody in a respectful and polite manner. Sometimes, this happens because we do not exercise patience towards others.

Lack of Communication

Poor communication is often the cause of misunderstandings. And misunderstanding can often lead to anger. People just want to be kept in the loop and not feel like they're being ignored. Failing to provide regular communication in a situation will only frustrate an already angry person. Understanding Sign Language and/or English Language can be a challenge for some people. Misunderstandings happen all the time even between two hearing people and/or two deaf people.

In conclusion, we need to ask the Lord Jesus Christ to give us the wisdom and understanding in dealing people from different groups (deaf, hearing, blind, etc.). To be patient and demonstrated love as He did to mankind.

"Many expressions of hostility and anger are easily recognizable - others are not. Those who are inwardly and quietly seething with anger may not even recognize it in themselves. Such people typically learn to use words that can be masked expressions of anger. These include "I'm annoyed," "I'm irritated", "I'm fed up," "I'm hurt," or "I'm frustrated." In all honesty, words such as these might more accurately be replaced with,, "I'm angry.""

from "The Many Faces of Anger" in "WHY AM I so Angry" by Debi Pryde (c. 2002) published by Iron Sharpeneth Iron Publications, Newberry Springs, CA