**LAUNCH OF 2ND EDITION OF**

**INDIAN SIGN LANGUAGE DICTIONARY**

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C.D. Deshmukh Auditorium

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**Introduction**

A comprehensive Indian Sign Language Dictionary is a need of the hour to facilitate communication, to create a primary database for further policy making, advocacy and promote extensive use of ISL. The Dictionary is an initial step in meeting the communicative needs of the Deaf community. Any natural language that has thousands of native users needs to have a well-documented database on its structural and pragmatic descriptions. Indian Sign Language is no exception.

There are currently very few comprehensive dictionaries of Indian Sign Language. Many hearing people like family, friends and colleagues of Deaf are interested in learning ISL. Professionals in the field like teachers and interpreters working with Deaf often need to look up signs. Deaf people are also interested in learning the English or Hindi words for particular signs. Therefore, to meet this requirement of both Deaf and hearing people, ISLRTC started work on developing an ISL dictionary.

The idea of compiling an Indian Sign Language Dictionary was conceived in the first ISLRTC staff meeting held on 29th September 2016. At the initial stage, a small team of ISLRTC faculty and staff was constituted to carry out the project. Soon it was found that the project is so big that it needs more hands to work and consequently at different stages of development of ISL dictionary, many other faculty and staff members of ISLRTC joined hands.

**Timeline of the Development of the ISL Dictionary**

*29th September 2016*: It was decided to develop the ISL Dictionary with terms from five categories namely, everyday, academic, legal, medical and technical, with the target being 1000 terms from each category.

*31st January 2017*: The word list for the dictionary with 6000 terms in English and Hindi with their grammatical categories was uploaded on DEPwD website for feedback and suggestions.

*February 2017*: Recording and editing of 1000 signs of everyday usage

*20th– 21stMarch 2017*: A draft version of the ISL Dictionary with 1000 sign videos of everyday terms was distributed at ISLRTC’s 1st National Conference for feedback and suggestions.

*April 2017 – January 2018*: Based on the feedback received, all videos were re-recorded and new videos from all five categories were added. Videos were also uploaded on ISLRTC’s YouTube channel.

*7th– 9thFebruary 2018*: To get representation from the larger Deaf community, ISLRTC held the 1st National Workshop on ISL Dictionary. The main aim of the workshop was to validate the signs recorded by ISLRTC and record regional signs. Thirty six participants from different regions of India and with expertise in various areas reviewed the videos and gave feedback and suggestions. One medical expert and one legal expert were present to help explain the complex medical and legal terminologies.

*23rd March 2018*: The 1st Edition of the ISL Dictionary with 6000 terms was launched and free DVDs of the ISL Dictionary were distributed to the audience members. The dictionary had mostly everyday terms and 200 terms from the academic, legal, medical and technical categories.

*May 2018 – December 2018*: ISLRTC continued the work on the ISL Dictionary and added more terms in all the 5 categories. New terms were continuously discussed, and new videos were recorded, edited and reviewed.

*22nd–24th January 2019*: The 2nd National Workshop on ISL Dictionary was held with 38 participants from various parts of India and two legal experts and one medical expert. Like the 1st Workshop, the participants reviewed the new videos, discussed them and shared feedback. Regional signs were also recorded.

*27th February 2019*: The 2nd Edition of the ISL Dictionary is launched with 6000 terms from all five categories.

**Features of the ISL Dictionary**

Some salient features of ISLRTC’s Dictionary are:

* Synonyms are labelled as ‘sign 1’, ‘sign 2’ and so forth.
* For English terms that do not have direct corresponding signs, the meaning is explained in ISL. For some terms, both the sign and the meaning have been given.
* For English words that are homonyms, for example *light*, the two different signs in ISL are recorded.
* Some English terms like *wash* cannot be directly translated without referring to what is being washed. ISL has different signs for *wash face*, *wash hands* and *wash utensils*. All these signs have been recorded and labelled for easy understanding and correct usage.
* The sign videos contain English term.
* The sign videos contain pictures of the concept which make them relevant and appropriate.
* Some regional signs have been recorded in the Dictionary, for example, numbers and colour terms used in Hyderabad, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Munger (Bihar). These reflect the variation that exists in ISL and the richness of ISL.
* In the academic, legal, medical and technical categories, the complex terms are explained in ISL with examples.
* Signs for proper nouns like cities and states in India, countries, famous people, brands, etc. have been included in the Dictionary.

**Selection of Signs**

In India, little research exists on the variation in signs due to region, age, gender, educational background, etc. Therefore, due to a lack of data, ISLRTC developed the dictionary based on the vast experience of its Deaf ISL instructors and master trainers. The following criteria were followed for inclusion and exclusion of signs:

* The signers record signs that they use themselves in their daily communication with other members of the Deaf community.
* The signs selected are those that are widely used and have wide recognition among the community. The signers have seen other Deaf using the signs.
* The signs have been in use for a long time. (An exception has been made for signs like NEWS (signed at the eye) that have spread rapidly in a short span of time.)

It should also be noted that the dictionary is not a complete solution to the communication gaps between the Deaf and hearing communities and to the educational needs of deaf children. Like any language, a dictionary of a language only represents the vocabulary of that langauge, not the grammar. Further, even the vocabulary represented in a dictionary cannot completely cover the vast and ever changing vocabulary of a language.

An ISL Dictionary is only part of the solution and many more steps are needed for improving the quality of education for deaf children and for removing the communication barriers.

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* We are grateful to the National Institute of Speech & Hearing, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, for sharing the technical vocabulary that they have developed.
* Many dictionaries and vocabulary resources of various sign languages have been referred to during the development of the ISL Dictionary. These resources are mentioned below:
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* Garner, B.A. (1999). Black’ Law Dictionary, West Publishing Co.
* Black’s Law Online Dictionary from <https://thelawdictionary.org/>
* Legal Eye from The Hindu, National English Daily
* Development of Signs for Tools. R.Narasimham Consultant (Vocational Rehabilitation) Chennai
* **Internet resources/Apps:**
* New Zealand Sign Language Dictionary: [www.nzsl.nz](http://www.nzsl.nz)
* British Sign Language Dictionary: [www.bslsignbank.ucl.ac.uk](http://www.bslsignbank.ucl.ac.uk)
* Australian Sign Language Dictionary: [www.auslan.org.au](http://www.auslan.org.au)
* [www.spreadthesign.com](http://www.spreadthesign.com)
* [www.indiansignlanguage.org/dictionary/](http://www.indiansignlanguage.org/dictionary/) (by Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University)

**We welcome feedback and suggestions for the ISL Dictionary. Contact us at:**

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