

Deaf Culture Question of the Week – September 26 - 30, 2011b
Bill Newell, Principal Washington School for the Deaf

SIT – CHAIR SELL – STORE FLY-AIRPLANE

These sign pairings are an example of what linguistic principle occurring in ASL?

- a. Iconicity – Use picture-like gestures
- b. Word order – Verbs always come before nouns
- c. Morphology – Deriving nouns from verbs
- d. Use of Space – The first sign of each pair signed on the left side and the second sign in each pair signed on the right side

Scroll down for the answer.

Answer: “c” – Morphology – Deriving nouns from verbs

Certain nouns in ASL are derived from verbs. These noun-verb pairs differ in their movement. Verbs in noun-verb pairs have single movement. The noun is formed with the same handshape, location and palm orientation but the movement is repeated. In the examples above the verb SIT has a single downward movement while the noun, CHAIR, has a repeated downward movement; the verb SELL has a single forward-arching, rotating-from-the-wrists movement, while the noun STORE has a repeated forward-arching, rotating-from-the-wrists movement; and the verb FLY has a single movement in neutral space at approximately eye level, while the noun AIRPLANE has a repeated movement in the same location.

Noun – Verb pairs are not unique to ASL. English also uses an internal change in the stress on syllables to distinguish nouns from verbs. For example, consider the pronunciation of these noun-verb pairs in English.

Verbs	Nouns	(Note: Bold indicates the syllable that is stressed in pronouncing the word.)
segment	segment	
insult	insult	
rebel	rebel	
conflict	conflict	

Not all nouns are derived from verbs. Both ASL and English also use another morphological process; adding a morpheme to the verb to create the noun. Consider these examples which use the same process in both English and ASL of adding a morpheme to the base verb.

English Examples		ASL Examples	
teach	teach+er	TEACH	TEACH+person-affix
preach	preach+er	PREACH	PREACH+person-affix
work	work+er	WORK	WORK+person-affix

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