Braille is NOT a Language
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A Position Statement of the Braille Authority of North America
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The Braille Authority of North America (BANA) often receives requests to verify the status of braille as a language, in order that students may use it to qualify for language credit at high schools and sometimes colleges. It is the position of BANA that braille is not a language but a code. While BANA applauds high schools and colleges which wish to give credit for learning braille, it cannot accept the premise that braille is a language.

In *Foundations of Braille Literacy*, Rex et.al (1994) state, "Braille is *not* a language; since it is a portrayal of print, with special rules and multiple uses of each sign (configuration), it is a code. English is the language, one that can be conveyed in any number of ways as long as the code is systematic and is agreed to by those who use it" (pp. 30-31). In fact, the language does not need to be English. Any language can be conveyed in braille, and numerous languages around the world are reproduced in braille with the code differing, of course, based upon the language being encoded.

Perhaps those who assert that braille is a language are confused about the status of braille relative to American Sign Language. ASL is so often associated in people's minds with braille, possibly because of their familiarity with Helen Keller, who used both braille and ASL due to her Deafblindness. However, while ASL meets the definition of a language, it is generally arbitrary in the use of signs, and uses complex syntax (Comrie, 2008), whereas braille does not.

Languages have the major components of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics (Comrie,2008). Braille is developed and concerned with the representation of the symbols used in print. To call braille a language would be comparable to calling "print" a language. Print and braille are similar in that each reproduces the various sounds of language to represent speech, but neither is a language.

Another indication that braille should not be considered a language is found in consulting the Ethnologue, a comprehensive listing of the known living languages of the world, compiled by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Gordon, 2005). Braille is not included in the Ethnologue as a separate language but is mentioned under the heading of "Blind population" with the comment that "information about the availability of [b]raille codes and [b]raille literature is given under specific languages." This confirms the

connection of braille as a code to specific languages, rather than as a language by itself.

Comrie, B. (2008). Language. MSN Encarta Encyclopedia. Retrieved May 5, 2008 from Http://encarta.msn.com/text_761570647___0/Language.html

Gordon, R. G. (ed). (2005). Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Fifteenth Edition. Dallas, Tex: SIL International. Online version: http://www.ethnologue.com/ Retrieved on September 28, 2006 from http://www.ethnologue.com/ethno_docs/introduction.asp

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