

Copyright 2020. De Gruyter Mouton. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

DE GRUYTER
MOUTON

SIGN LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES IN PRACTICE

*Edited by Annelies Kusters, Mara Green,
Erin Moriarty and Kristin Snoddon*

SIGN LANGUAGES AND DEAF COMMUNITIES

EBSCO Publishing / EBSCO Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 2/9/2023 9:24 PM
via
AN: 202010 ; Anne Kusters, Mara Green, Erin Moriarty, Kristin Snoddon. ;
Sign Language Ideologies in Practice
Account: 335141 Ishara Press

DE
GRUYTER

ISHARA
PRESS

Sign Language Ideologies in Practice

Sign Languages and Deaf Communities



Editors

Annika Herrmann, Markus Steinbach, Ulrike Zeshan

Editorial board

**Carlo Geraci, Rachel McKee, Victoria Nyst,
Marianne Rossi Stumpf, Felix Sze, Sandra Wood**

Volume 12

Sign Language Ideologies in Practice

Edited by
Annelies Kusters, Mara Green, Erin Moriarty
and Kristin Snoddon

DE GRUYTER
MOUTON

The logo for Ishara Press features a stylized eye icon above the word "ISHARA" in a bold, sans-serif font. Below "ISHARA" is the word "PRESS" in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font, enclosed within a horizontal rectangular border.

ISBN 978-1-5015-1685-6
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-1-5015-1009-0
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-1-5015-1002-1
ISSN 2192-516X
e-ISSN 2192-5178

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020938531

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

Chapter “Sign language ideologies: Practices and politics” © Annelies Kusters, Mara Green, Erin Moriarty and Kristin Snoddon

Chapter “The ideology of communication practices embedded in an Australian deaf/hearing dance collaboration” © Gabrielle Hodge

Chapter “‘Goat-Sheep-Mixed-Sign’ in Lhasa – Deaf Tibetans’ language ideologies and unimodal codeswitching in Tibetan and Chinese sign languages, Tibet Autonomous Region, China”
© Theresia Hofer



These chapters are licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 License. For details go to <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

© 2020 Walter de Gruyter Inc., Boston/Berlin and Ishara Press, Lancaster, UK
Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

www.degruyter.com

Contents

Introduction – Sign language ideologies: Practices and politics

Annelies Kusters, Mara Green, Erin Moriarty and Kristin Snoddon

Sign language ideologies: Practices and politics — 3

Part I: Sign language ideologies: Setting the scene

Joanne Weber

**Interrogating sign language ideologies in the Saskatchewan deaf community:
An autoethnography — 25**

Anne E. Pfister

**Bla, Bla, Bla: Understanding inaccessibility through Mexican Sign Language
expressions — 43**

Gabrielle Hodge

**The ideology of communication practices embedded in an Australian deaf/
hearing dance collaboration — 59**

Theresia Hofer

**“Goat-Sheep-Mixed-Sign” in Lhasa – Deaf Tibetans’ language ideologies
and unimodal codeswitching in Tibetan and Chinese sign languages,
Tibet Autonomous Region, China — 83**

Part II: Sign language ideologies in teaching

Cindee Calton

**The impact of student and teacher ASL ideologies on the use of English in the
ASL classroom — 111**

Aron S. Marie

**Finding interpreters who can “OPEN-THEIR-MIND”: How Deaf teachers select
sign language interpreters in Hà Nội, Việt Nam — 129**

Kristin Snoddon

Teaching sign language to parents of deaf children in the name of the CEFR: Exploring tensions between plurilingual ideologies and ASL pedagogical ideologies — 145

Part III: **Sign language and literacy ideologies**

Ruth Anna Spooner

Permissive vs. prohibitive: Deaf and hard-of-hearing students' perceptions of ASL and English — 167

Julia Gillen, Noah Ahereza and Marco Nyarko

An exploration of language ideologies across English literacy and sign languages in multiple modes in Uganda and Ghana — 185

Erika Hoffmann-Dilloway

Feeling what we write, writing what we feel: Written sign language literacy and intersomaticity in a German classroom — 201

Annelies Kusters

Interplays of pragmatism and language ideologies: Deaf and deafblind people's literacy practices in gesture-based interactions — 223

Part IV: **Sign language Ideologies in language planning and policy**

Audrey C. Cooper

Bj and being: Spoken language dominant disability-oriented development and Vietnamese deaf self-determination — 245

John Bosco Conama

35 years and counting! An ethnographic analysis of sign language ideologies within the Irish Sign Language recognition campaign — 265

Christopher A.N. Kurz, Jeanne E. Reis and Barbara Spiecker

Ideologies and attitudes toward American Sign Language: Processes of academic language and academic vocabulary coinage — 287

Erin Moriarty

**Exploring sign language histories and documentation projects in
post-conflict areas — 309**

Part V: Conclusion – Ideology, authority, and power

Joseph J. Murray

Ideology, authority, and power — 333

Language Index — 353

Subject Index — 355

Introduction – Sign language ideologies: Practices and politics

Annelies Kusters, Mara Green, Erin Moriarty and
Kristin Snoddon

Sign language ideologies: Practices and politics

While much research has taken place on language attitudes and ideologies regarding spoken languages, research that investigates sign language ideologies and names them as such is only just emerging. Actually, earlier work in Deaf Studies and sign language research uncovered the existence and power of language ideologies without explicitly using this term. However, it is only quite recently that scholars have begun to explicitly focus on sign language ideologies, conceptualized as such, as a field of study. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first edited volume to do so.

Influenced by our backgrounds in anthropology and applied linguistics, in this volume we bring together research that addresses *sign language ideologies in practice*. In other words, this book highlights the importance of examining language ideologies as they unfold on the ground, undergirded by the premise that what we think that language can do (ideology) is related to what we do with language (practice).¹ All the chapters address the tangled confluence of sign language ideologies as they influence, manifest in, and are challenged by communicative practices. Contextual analysis shows that language ideologies are often situation-dependent and indeed often seemingly contradictory, varying across space and moments in time. Therefore, rather than only identifying language ideologies as they appear in metalinguistic discourses, the authors in this book analyse how everyday language practices implicitly or explicitly involve ideas about those practices and the other way around. We locate ideologies about sign languages and communicative practices, which may not be one and the same, in their contexts, situating them within social settings, institutions, and historical processes, and investigating how they are related to political-economic interests as well as affective and intersubjective dynamics.

Sign languages are minority languages using the visual-kinesthetic and tactile-kinesthetic modalities. It is important to recognize both that the affordances of these modalities are different from those of the auditory-oral (spoken) modality, *and* that signers, like speakers, often make use of multilingual and multimodal

¹ This assertion is indebted to the work of Silverstein and Hanks, among others. See for example Silverstein 1979, Silverstein 1985 (cited in Hill and Mannheim 1992), and Hanks 1990 (also cited in Hill and Mannheim 1992).

language repertoires. This book explores how signers and people with whom they interact (be they signers or non-signers) understand sign languages and their relationships to other languages (signed or spoken) and modalities (including speech and writing). The authors look at ideologies regarding sign languages and connect them to ideologies regarding spoken and written languages in order to interrogate how ideologies are part and parcel of how people think about and experience multimodal communication and understanding in everyday life. In doing so, the book contributes to current theoretical trends that focus on how on-the-ground language practices draw on multimodal, and often multilingual, repertoires, conceptualized in neologisms such as translanguaging. In this body of work, there is a strong emphasis on connecting the study of language practice with the investigation of language ideologies. Yet within this research, there is a dearth of scholarship on ideologies about sign language (whether visual or tactile) and gesture, as well as their relationship to speech and writing.

In this remainder of this introduction, we draw on our own research and that of many others in order to (1) orient the reader to the concept of language ideologies; (2) review prior work on sign language ideologies, even if not named as such; (3) interrogate the relationship among various conceptual tools, such as “ideology,” “theory,” “insight,” and “fact,” used by scholars to describe what people inside and outside of academia think about, and enact in, language practices, (4) analyse several key sites where sign language ideologies consistently manifest, such as the practice of naming sign languages; and (5) review the contributions that each of the chapters makes to this volume.

Here, it is helpful to briefly introduce ourselves and our academic and linguistic backgrounds. Annelies Kusters is a deaf anthropologist from Belgium, who has conducted extensive ethnographic work with signers in Paramaribo (Surinam), Mumbai (India), Adamorobe (Ghana), and in various transnational contexts. Mara Green is a hearing anthropologist from the US. Her long-term fieldwork focuses on deaf persons in Nepal. Erin Moriarty is a deaf anthropologist from the US, whose primary research has been with deaf people and NGOs in Cambodia, as well as deaf tourism in Indonesia. Kristin Snoddon is a deaf applied linguist from Canada. Her work on sign language learning by deaf children and their hearing parents is based in Canada. All of us are white; all of us are women; all of us are fluent in at least one sign language and at least one written/spoken language. Both this introduction and our editorial work for this volume have been shaped by our particular professional and personal experiences as deaf and hearing academics working within and across modalities and languages.

1 The concept of language ideologies

An overview of the rich field of language ideology study, both within and beyond linguistic anthropology, is beyond the scope of this book (but see Woolard and Schieffelin 1994; Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998; Irvine and Gal 2000; and Kroskrity 2000a). Put simply, language ideologies are thoughts and beliefs about languages, varieties, modalities, and the people who use them. Attitudes about what language is (or is not), how and where languages are used, their value, and their origins are expressed as language ideologies (Kroskrity 2000b: 5). Language ideologies have consequences for individuals and communities, and within politics, scholarship, and education, among other domains. Language ideologies have been used to naturalize the boundaries of particular social groups, including or excluding people who may or may not use languages in accordance to a dominant group's norms and expectations (Lippi Green 1997; Errington 2000). Language use is a way of enacting social identities and belonging to certain intersecting categories such as ethnicity, gender, disability, sexuality, social class, and nationality. In this way, ideologies about everyday language practices can create shifting categories of sameness and difference.

Irvine and Gal (2000: 35) focus on the ideological aspects of language differentiation, defining ideologies both as “conceptual schemes that are suffused with the political and moral issues pervading the particular linguistic field” and as “folk theories,” meaning how people think about and understand their own language. These authors also highlight how the study of linguistics and languages is in itself an ideological enterprise, a point with which we agree. In sign language linguistics, this can be glimpsed in the historical application of a spoken language framework to research and theory about sign languages, in the now-receding avoidance of studying gesture, and in assumptions materialized in delineating and naming sign languages (e.g., that languages are or should be fairly homogenous and geographically bounded; see below). As we discuss more fully later in this introduction, how we think about and represent ideologies as they manifest in both academic and non-academic settings is a complicated endeavor.

2 Ideologies in sign language and Deaf Studies research

At the end of the nineteenth century, the conflation of gesture and signing, as well as their marginalization as “not language,” was a core tenet of structural linguistics, in part because it focused on the spoken word in its written (transcribable) form. From the late 1950s onwards, research in sign language linguistics has tended toward an ideological resolve to separate gesture and signing, and to show that sign languages bear features such as parts of speech, morphosyntax, and duality of patterning which were first identified in spoken languages (Branson and Miller 2007; Haviland 2015). Sign language researchers have often appeared to gloss over differences between signed and spoken languages and also have strived to demonstrate complexity in sign languages as a way of showing that they are true languages (Taub 2001: 37; Vermeerbergen 2006; Haviland 2015). This concern about sign languages’ status as “real” tends not to occur with other minority languages such as Spanish in the USA (Reagan 2011) and is seemingly rooted in ideologies about the superiority of the spoken modality (Senghas and Monaghan 2002; Hill 2012).

These ideologies and their ramifications are not, of course, confined to academic settings. Scholars in Deaf Studies have long recognized how the denigration and suppression of sign languages has influenced deaf people’s lives and ways of seeing their languages. Indeed language ideologies have been a central aspect motivating sign language-related research for many decades. Generally held misconceptions about sign languages include the ideas that sign languages do not have grammatical structures, are merely gesture, are universal, portray only concrete situations and mime, and cannot be used to express abstract ideas (Burns, Matthews, and Nolan-Conroy 2001). Other commonly held ideologies include the folk belief that sign languages are always directly derived from and not merely influenced in complex ways by spoken languages (contradicting the idea that they are universal). Grounded in and reaffirming such misconceptions, oralist educational policies intended to keep deaf people from signing have meant that many deaf people learn to sign quite late in life, and many deaf signers have historically internalized negative perspectives regarding sign languages (Ladd 2003). On the other hand, sign languages have also carried covert prestige inside deaf communities that, as with other conscribed minority languages, contribute to their ongoing transmission and maintenance (Padden 1990; Supalla and Clark 2015). Murray (2017) describes how from the 1960s onward, deaf signers in the USA came to accept American Sign Language (ASL) as a named language indexing national boundaries, in place of what was previously known by deaf people

in this context as “signing” or “the sign language.” As Humphries (2001) earlier noted, changing discourses and perceptions of deaf people and sign language have meant recalibrating not only ideas of inferiority and equality but also ideas of difference and sameness: the ways in which sign languages correspond with, and not only differ from spoken languages.

3 Terminological and epistemological questions

In the frame of this book, we find it important to address both the slippage and separation of concepts used by academics to think about how people think about language, such as “theory” and “ideology,” and, tangled up in this, a sometimes-misunderstanding of language ideology as meaning something like “false beliefs people have about languages.”² We think, for example, that saying “all languages are equal in worth” is true, but it is also ideological. Saying “some languages are better than others” is, we think, false (though some languages may be better at specific things than others, or have different affordances), and it is also ideological. Sometimes people attribute “ideology” only to the latter; that is, to ideas about language that have been deemed false.

Another term that comes to mind while thinking about language ideologies is “insight.” What should we call ideology and what should we deem to be something else, such as “insight” or “fact”? For example, if we posit that when two interlocutors who are respectively monolingual in, say, English and Chinese try to have a conversation, then they are unlikely to understand each other, but if two interlocutors who are respectively monolingual in American Sign Language and Chinese Sign Language try to do so that they will have a bit more success, is such a statement an insight or an ideology? What about statements such as “sign language is not universal,” “sign languages are languages,” “sign languages are not the same as co-speech gesture,” “sign languages are not based on English/Spanish/Khmer,” “sign languages are not sign systems,” or “sign languages have

² We recognize that the conflation of “language ideologies” with “false beliefs about languages” has a historical grounding in Marxist conceptions of ideology as masking relations of exploitation. However, as the term “language ideologies” currently circulates, the Marxist sense of ideologies as having a particular relationship to class and labor, along with “power, hegemony, and contradiction” (Povinelli 1998: 597) is often unmentioned. Thus we want to bring to attention, and into question, the way in which “language ideologies” as a generalized analytic often seems to imply that language ideologies are what (other) people (and usually not academics) believe, falsely, to be true about language(s).

grammar”? Are these statements facts or ideologies, or both? Indeed, the opposites of these claims are often seen as “false beliefs” (see Krausneker 2015, and the chapters by Calton, Spooner, Marie, and Kurz et al.), but we if take seriously the idea that ideologies are always part and parcel of practices, then the claims we put forth are also ideological — although, we would argue, true.

Relatedly, one of the questions we grappled with when editing this book is the difference between vernacular ideologies and scholarly theories. We tend to talk about local ideas and understandings of language as “language ideologies,” while the subjects of academic writing are described as “theory.” The way we see it, vernacular ideologies are (at least sometimes) also theories of language, and theories of language are also ideological. In a very different context, anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2001: 209) cautions us to be “attentive to the elisions any process of translation entails, especially when the language of social science claims a self-transparent universalism, and the language used by ‘ordinary people’ is understood as a poor approximation of their reality.” In trying to trouble this hierarchical dichotomy, one might avoid the word ideology altogether, as Green (2014a, b) has done. Another way of negotiating this issue is using the term ideologies for both disciplinary/academic and vernacular/local understandings, as Austin and Sallabank (2011) and Kusters and Sahasrabudhe (2018) have done.

Academic language ideologies inform and are informed by explicit theories as well as implicit assumptions built into research projects. For example, in trying to avoid influencing local language practices, sign language linguists studying village sign languages have attempted not to use the linguists’ own national sign languages with study participants (Erard 2019). Everyday language ideologies are those uttered by (lay) participants in research. For example, Moriarty Harrelson (2019) describes how deaf tourists in the Global South have taken up these discourses regarding not exposing deaf people in the Global South to the tourists’ sign languages. As these examples illustrate, however, a strict dichotomy between everyday and academic language ideologies does not work since academic ideologies can be circulated in common everyday discourses (Murray 2017, Kusters and Sahasrabudhe 2018), and either conform to, or differ from everyday language ideologies. And of course, the academy is its own “everyday” space.

We might also ask whether the strategies that people use, and their reflections on those strategies, are ideological or practical, or both. For example, if a deaf person chooses a particular way of communicating with a hearing person, such as writing, over another way of communicating, such as speaking or gesturing, and explains that they expect the first way of communicating to be more successful, is their explanation an ideology or an insight leading to pragmatic decisions (see Kusters, this volume)? Another important question is how we know when practices reflect ideologies or not. When people choose to commu-

nicate using certain language modalities instead of others, does their choice of modality reflect implicit ideologies about these modalities and their affordances, experiential knowledge about the effects of these modalities and their affordances, or both?

Returning to our earlier theme, we can ask more broadly: When is it useful to think of statements as facts, as insights, as ideologies, or as theories? How might we understand the relationship between ideologies and pragmatic choices influenced by (among other things) the effects of ideologies? In a different but fundamentally intertwined sense, how do we as authors and editors decide when to frame certain ideologies about sign language as wrong or right? While recognizing that we may not be able to answer these questions, we can remain conscious of these issues in the study of the relationships between language ideologies and practices. There is a fine line between asserting, as we have done, that all beliefs about language are ideological (including our academic “truths”) and rendering oneself unable to say that some things are untrue (e.g., the idea that sign languages lack grammar). Calling certain statements about languages ideologies and not others has political implications. For political reasons, we need and want to support certain ideologies (or insights, facts, and theories), but we should be transparent about doing so. In this book we have tried, and encouraged the authors to try, to focus on specific discourses and statements about languages, language modalities, and their relationships to each other (whether these discourses and statements are disciplinary or vernacular, and whether we call them ideology, insight, fact or theory) and to also recognize that ideology can be implicit in practice and that practice can also conflict with ideology, as when there is a conflict between what people think they (should) do versus what they are actually observed to do.

4 Key sites for manifestation and investigation of sign language ideologies

4.1 Naming languages

The naming of a sign language, even as it has practical applications in creating an object of study and political applications in creating an identifiable target of policy, is in itself an ideological act. While only a few of the chapters in this book address this phenomenon explicitly, each of them (this one included) takes part in it, as all our chapters use language names.

In many cases, as in the earlier cited example of ASL (Murray 2017) the naming of sign languages is a result of intellectual and political trajectories driven by specific research and political goals. In some circumstances, sign languages as named and bounded systems appear to only come into existence when they have been recognized or documented by a researcher or any other official person or entity, such as a deaf association or NGO (see Moriarty, this volume). This can be in (partial) accordance or contrast to how deaf people themselves talk about their communicative practices, which we discuss in more depth below.

Rather than using locally authored terms or signs to name sign languages, researchers have frequently named languages by connecting them to locations, as with the examples of British Sign Language, or BSL (the national sign language of the United Kingdom), Adamorobe Sign Language (a village sign language in Ghana), and Bamako Sign Language (an urban sign language in Mali). Researchers also use different standards to group varieties as language. As Palfreyman (2018) argues, there are several implications connected to naming sign languages. If, in the tradition of James Woodward, each regional and urban variety is given a different name, that would mean that there would be more than 500 named sign languages in Indonesia alone. When Indonesia's deaf national association gave sign language practices in Indonesian the name Bahasa Isyarat Indonesia or BISINDO, they chose to adhere to what are seen as politically strategic moves to gain official recognition of a single, unified sign language and thereby more supports and services for deaf people (Palfreyman 2018). But who decides what counts as a language? When does the goal of increased human rights and public services for deaf people justify, or not, making an ideological claim for a unified sign language for each nation?

Naming sign languages involves organizing them into precise categories based on their characteristics, the implication being that sign languages are clearly and neatly bounded, as are their users. Naming sign languages territorializes them, fixing them to a place and group of people. In some contexts, this can be empowering, as in the case of ASL; however, it also becomes problematic when ASL becomes fixed to the United States, obscuring the use of ASL in Canada and in other countries, as glimpsed in ongoing Canadian deaf Facebook community discussions regarding substituting the term "Canadian Sign Language" or CSL. This discussion, however, leads to further problems regarding which of the multiple sign languages used in Canada is to be termed CSL. ASL can also become fixed to a specific ideology of the identity of ASL users, leading to the erasure of Black deaf ASL signers in the United States (McCaskill et al., 2011), for example, or to ideas that ASL has spread through the world like a virus, contaminating and/or displacing "local" sign languages (see Moriarty Harrelson 2017). This does not mean, however, that there are not cases where sign languages actually do

displace other sign languages, such as in the case of Thai Sign Language and Ban Khor Sign Language (Nonaka 2004) or Cambodian Sign Language (see Moriarty, this volume).

4.2 Standardisation and purism

Sign languages, their boundaries, and their use have a way of arousing strong emotions in both deaf and hearing people. Social media, especially Facebook, has become a forum where deaf people throughout the world elucidate, clarify, and debate the origins and “correctness” of certain signs. For example, a recent vlog posted on Facebook by a deaf woman from the USA criticized a name sign used to denote the state of Louisiana. The sign starts with one hand making the “L” handshape, then enclosing the thumb of the “L” into a “A” handshape made by the opposing hand, which then becomes a sign signifying defecation. The Louisiana vlogger claimed that the origin of this sign was in “trash talk” at a basketball tournament for schools for the deaf in the southern US and that it is not the correct sign. She then demonstrated what she considers to be the correct sign, a combination of fingerspelling “L” and “A” with a single hand. This discussion is only one of many examples of how deaf people are engaging in “grassroots” efforts to standardize ASL. Some ASL users have started using “new” signs, de-initializing signs such as “culture,” “philosophy,” “family,” and “interview.” We have seen this process referred to as the purging of English from ASL. This, too, has been debated on Facebook by duelling vloggers. The Facebook vlogs show the emotional investment of many deaf ASL users in maintaining the boundaries of their sign language, which has been referred to as the “precious heritage of the Deaf community” (Moore and Levitan 1992) and “the core of a culturally Deaf identity” (Benedict and Legg 2012).

This investment is not limited to ASL users. Moges (2015), for example, has addressed the removal and addition of certain signs from Eritrean Sign Language, a process she refers to as demissionization. In the United Kingdom, a popular show on the website BSL Zone, *Deaf Funny*, has a recurring sketch featuring the “BSL police,” a parody that shows how commonplace it is for policing and correction of particular signs or ways of signing to occur among sign language users. This is an activity fraught with ideology. For example, it would be considered by many deaf and hearing signers to be wrong for a hearing, non-native signer to correct a native deaf signer. In turn, this point brings another issue to the forefront: Who is a native signer? This question is especially relevant to sign language users because of the small number of people who are born into families that use sign language as a primary language.

4.3 Classifying and evaluating languageness

When a deaf person does not use a named spoken or signed language (which could be a national, regional, urban, or local sign language), they are often said to “have no language,” even when they do communicate (Moriarty Harrelson 2019). Indeed, an indirect implication of naming sign languages is that deaf communicative practices sometimes seem to be forced into existing linguistic paradigms. Certain elements like gestures and pointing are marginalized because recognizing their communicative potential may be seen to challenge the truism that a given sign language is a “bona fide” language based on its close fit with conventional definitions of languages as established in spoken language research (Kendon 2008; McBurney 2012). Indeed, some language scholars have suggested that different forms of gesturing and signing can be classified on a developmental cline (see Figure 1). Importantly, there usually is, at some point, the construction of a break between sign and/or gesture as (homesign) “system,” and “sign language” (see Goldin-Meadow and Brentari 2017).

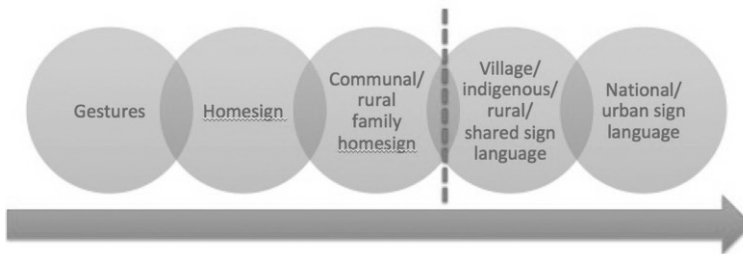


Figure 1. Developmental cline.

Categories such as “homesign” and “shared sign language” are infused with ideas about what they are, what they can do, and where, how, and by whom they are used. The idea that language and not-language can be neatly separated, and that forms of signing can be organized in accordance to a classification system is in itself an ideology, based on the idea that language(s) have neat or clear boundaries. In these debates, forms of signing often become abstracted from the contexts in which they are used, as Green (2017) argues. It is through linguistic ethnography that researchers have been able to reach a deeper understanding of these forms of signing and their sociolinguistic contexts, often through investigating naming practices and ideologies of deaf signers, and by challenging the classifications themselves (Le Guen, Safar, and Coppola 2019; Hou and Kusters 2020). For example, studying the use of gestures by fluent users of Indian Sign

Language when communicating with hearing non-signers disrupts the classification of gesture as neatly separated from other language forms and situates the use of gesture squarely in everyday language practices (Kusters 2017).

Green (2014a) demonstrates how following local naming practices not only respects those practices but also challenges the tendency of researchers to focus on national, urban, and regional sign languages *or* on other forms of signing. Rather, Green (2014a: 26) writes that in Nepal, “sign” can encompass multiple kinds of signing, which get further differentiated as needed: “The sign *sign* may be used to refer to signing-in-general as well as to a specific form or instance of signing, which may be *categorically* [classified by signers as] NSL, natural sign, or a foreign sign language.” She further resists classifying the emic term “natural sign” used by deaf signers in Nepal into already-existing typologies created by researchers, asserting that it is not, for example, commensurable with either “gesture” or “home sign.”

A similar master category of “sign” (that includes what in some schema might be classified as gesturing) has elsewhere been identified as intuitive for many deaf people (see Kusters 2014; Kusters and Sahasrabudhe 2018). A study of everyday ideologies of deaf people in Mumbai showed either an analytical collapse of gesture and sign or a distinction between them, depending on the context. In this study, as compared to academic ideologies regarding the difference between gesture and sign that are more focused on form, deaf people were more focused on hearing status and other contextual factors when deciding whether something counted as gesture or sign (Kusters and Sahasrabudhe 2018).

These issues may also arise when thinking about how best to support hearing parents of deaf children in their efforts to communicate. The following question came up during a workshop we held in Edinburgh, Scotland, as part of the process of creating this book: Is it more productive to emphasize to parents that the particular sign language they are learning is a real language, with its own grammatical structure, or is it more productive to validate non-standard gestural communication and encourage them to focus on effective and unselfconscious communication over “correct” signing?

Questions of how to categorize diverse signed communicative practices are further complicated by considerations of the complexity of signers’ lived experiences. Around the world, many deaf people communicate in something other than what has been regarded as a conventional, full or standard sign language. On the one hand, it is critical to recognize the richness, creativity, and possibilities of these deaf people’s linguistic and communicative repertoires. On the other hand, it is important not to ignore the everyday struggles of deaf people who do not use a standard or widely shared sign language. Writing about these practices brings up many questions. Do we call what they are using a language,

home sign, natural sign, family sign? How is this question related to the degree to which communication in these modes can be considered successful or not? As analysts, according to what standards do we judge success, and where do we locate failure — in the system, in the interaction? As Green (2014a) has argued, interlocutors' willingness or refusal to do the work of communicating plays as important a role in how conversations unfold (or not) as do the affordances and limitations of semiotic resources.

It is also important to note that in both academic and non-academic discourse, we have noticed anachronistic ideas in efforts to classify communicative practices. Our sense is that these ideas, bearing a resemblance to a global evolutionist scheme, often surface in discourses about deaf people of color and/or those living in the global South. Such signers are often described as isolated and having “no language” if they have not had the experience of formal education in a setting with other deaf students or the means to interact with other deaf people who use a shared sign language (Moriarty Harrelson 2019). While taking into account the complexities of such situations, it is critical to be cognizant of how such discourses are reminiscent of colonial ideologies about indigenous language complexity and indigenous people's civility and intelligence, historically situated in areas of colonialism and missionization such as in Africa (Irvine and Gal 2000) and in Asia and the Pacific (Jourdan and Angeli 2014).

4.4 Understanding

In thinking about the analysis of ideologies and practices involving both more and less “standard” or “conventional” practices, the issue of understanding is critical. When two or more people are engaged in a communicative interaction, when do each understand, misunderstand, or not understand each other? Is this experience mutual, or does one person understand more, less, or differently than the other? Goffman (1964) points out that in everyday conversations, our understanding of each other just has to be “good enough.” What counts as “good enough” varies according to context and is influenced by both ideology and experience, which in turn influence each other. In certain situations, it may be that deaf persons expect to (not) understand other deaf or hearing people. The experience of signing together may at times supersede the goal of deep referential understanding. As an example, our editorial meeting in October 2017 included a workshop attended by a number of deaf and several hearing academics from different countries; we communicated primarily in International Sign including heavy use of both ASL and BSL. At the end of the workshop, there was general agreement that we had not understood everything that was said in a referential

sense. But there was also consensus that we had understood enough, and that our experience of direct communication was worth the loss of referential understanding. Thus, a moral commitment (Green 2014b) to communicate directly as signers influenced our willingness to tolerate understanding less than we might have, had our workshop been conducted with interpreters and/or in a context of a single signed or spoken language. In other settings, moreover, our expectations and tolerance would have been different. For example, Friedner (2016) describes how the value of understanding is foregrounded and made active by a deaf sign language teacher working with deaf students who were previously taught by hearing individuals who did not know sign language. Indeed, in this context and others, failing to reveal to another deaf signer when one does not understand may be to breach a cultural taboo; i.e., if you don't understand and don't tell the other signer, you are violating a cultural norm that values understanding.

Another way that understanding may impact sign language ideologies is in relation to signers' devaluation or criticism of specific kinds of signing. Here, we are thinking about signing that closely follows the grammar and/or lexicon of a spoken language, especially but not only when that signing includes signs that specifically represent grammatical features of the spoken language (e.g., Signed Exact English, Signed Nepali). In these contexts, there is often a spectrum of signing practices, and signing that appears to be based on a spoken language is often both denigrated and considered better by diverse interlocutors. In some cases, resistance to such practices are about a symbolic disavowal of the power-laden influences of a dominant language, taking the form of language policing and language purism. However, we wonder whether more general resistance to spoken-language-based signing (or signing that appears to reference spoken languages) may be because *it is (or can be) difficult to understand for many signers*. In other words, what may be expressed as dislike of a kind of signing used by other deaf people because of its perceived origins in speech may instead or also be a profound discomfort with seeing (or touching) a modality that is "accessible" but a grammatical structure that is not. When people do not understand each other, we suggest, they often look for a reason why; and if that reason can be captured by something like "that kind of signing looks more English" it may be more the Englishness and less the not-understanding that circulates in discourse.

We might also consider how our own experiences of being able to take understanding or being understood for granted (or not) influence our expectations. One of us, Mara, is hearing and grew up in the USA, a country where she speaks the dominant language. During fieldwork in Nepal, she found herself at times frustrated with a close friend and research associate, when she realized that he did not always, or even often, ask for clarification when they were conversing and

he did not understand something. After thinking about this for a long time, she has come to the perspective that growing up and into adulthood, he did not have the privilege of regularly understanding people; she posits that *he had to learn how to be okay with partial understanding*. This does not, of course, mean that her friend does not deeply value spaces where understanding is easy, such as among deaf friends, but rather that not-understanding or partial-understanding is far more a “social fact” for him than it is for her.

Another question emerges when a novice hearing signer finds it easy to communicate with a deaf signer (often because the deaf signer is performing skilled accommodations). Will this sense of ease lead to the hearing signer being further motivated to increase her fluency, or will she assume that she is far more competent than she actually is? Similarly, we wonder whether signing tourists (whether deaf or hearing) sometimes think they have learned more of the sign language of the place they are visiting than they actually have, because they are indeed, at least to some degree, understanding and being understood by the signers they are meeting. Indeed, we may even misunderstand the degree to which we have (been) understood. What is of importance to this book is that understanding, not understanding, partial understanding, and mis-understanding are inherent to language practices. Moreover, when people don’t understand each other, they often try to understand why, and this in turn impacts language ideologies.

5 Structure of the book

As this introduction suggests, thinking through sign language ideologies in practice is a vast undertaking filled with questions and contestations about everyday experience, analytic approaches, and ethical issues.³ In the remainder of this book, the authors of the chapters present situated analyses of what people do with languages in everyday life, and how they experience and rationalize their linguistic actions, such as language choice, language switches, language creation, and translation. We have grouped the chapters into four sections, though there are resonances across sections as well.

The first section, titled “Sign language ideologies: Setting the scene,” focuses on the embodiment of sign language and of sign language ideologies (by deaf or hearing bodies) and more specifically, what knowing, learning, and embodying

³ In this section of the introduction, we use the terms deaf or Deaf in accordance with the author whose chapter we are discussing.

sign language means to new and long-time signers. It analyses how being-in-the-world unfolds in relationship to sign languages; for example, how sign language learning is experienced as transformational by both deaf and hearing learners, and how it is paired with learning about deaf ways of being-in-the-world (deaf cultures, deaf epistemologies, deaf ontologies). The chapters in this section are based on research in a variety of settings, including classrooms, deaf communities, and non-governmental organizations. Joanne Weber's chapter presents the case of Saskatchewan, Canada as a microcosm of ideologies and attitudes surrounding sign languages. She provides an autoethnographic account of her journey in late acquisition of ASL in the context of diminished access to ASL role models and the use of ASL in an educational environment primarily mediated by signed English transliterators. Anne E. Pfister's chapter reveals how learning Lengua de Señas Mexicana (Mexican Sign Language, or LSM) was a life-changing event for deaf participants in Mexico City, most of whom were exposed to sign language relatively late in life. This chapter draws attention to particular language use — in the form of colloquial expressions and related descriptive concepts — to describe deaf participants' memories and contemplations of language learning. Gabrielle Hodge's chapter explores the semiotic ecology of a contemporary dance collaboration between deaf signers of Auslan (Australian Sign Language) and hearing speakers of English and other spoken languages. The chapter describes how a densely indexed, multimodal and multilingual composition unfolded, grounded in: one that is grounded in — and therefore reflects — the semiotic (and ideological) ecologies in which signers and speakers live, and what happens when they merge. Theresa Hofer's chapter is an ethnography of the signing practices of 25 deaf Tibetans living in Lhasa, capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in China, who use sign language as their main or preferred form of communication with one another. The chapter explores diverging sign language ideologies with regard to deaf Tibetans' language use, including Tibetan Sign Language (TSL) and a local variety of Chinese Sign Language (CSL), neither of which are static or bounded entities.

The second section, titled "Sign language ideologies in teaching," starts with a chapter by Cindee Calton exploring the connection between ideologies about ASL and pedagogical choices in college ASL classrooms in the United States. She analyzes the language ideologies expressed in interviews with ASL and other second language teachers, the ideologies expressed in the textbooks selected by ASL and other language teachers, and pedagogical choices encountered in the classrooms. Drawing on an ethnographic study of a community-run center for teaching sign language in Hanoi, Vietnam, Aron S. Marie's chapter explores how language ideologies shape the stakes of sign language interpreting, the positionality of interpreters, and the criteria Deaf community leaders use to screen

potential interpreting students. In this setting, the stakes of language ideologies and their impact on interpreting are high: like many countries, Vietnam has multiple and often competing ideologies surrounding the use of sign language. The chapter by Kristin Snoddon discusses the ideological impact of introducing the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) into the domain of sign language teaching, in relation to findings from ongoing ethnographic action research studies of developing CEFR-aligned courses for teaching ASL to hearing parents of deaf children. In this context, ideologies inherent to the CEFR and its implementation in both European and Canadian settings are met by ideologies regarding teaching hearing parents ASL, and instructors' own ideologies surrounding ASL curricula and pedagogy.

The third section, titled "Sign language and literacy ideologies," focuses on everyday experiences of the use of written language by deaf signers. It highlights deaf persons' experiences of learning written language (both in the form of writing spoken languages and writing sign languages through SignWriting) and using written language in everyday life (often in alternation with sign language, spoken language, or gestures), in customer interactions, in peer-to-peer teaching, and in classrooms. Ruth Anna Spooner's chapter presents findings from a qualitative research study with fifteen deaf and hard-of-hearing high school students about their language and literacy experiences. Under the misconception that ASL is a language with "no rules" and "complete flexibility," the students delight in the apparent linguistic freedom they have in ASL and view English more negatively on account of it having "too many rules" and being "too complicated." The chapter by Julia Gillen, Noah Ahereza, and Marco Nyarko examines literacy and language practices in Uganda and Ghana in regard to the everyday life experiences of deaf sign language users in multiple modalities, with a particular focus on their experiences with English literacy, including in online domains, where in literacy practices deafness may potentially be unmarked. The chapter by Erika Hoffmann-Dilloway explores how the use of SignWriting, a movement-based writing system, affects German students' ideologies regarding the sensory and social underpinnings of the production and perception of language. This chapter attends to the ideological mediation through which physical sensations can be thought to be transformed across modalities into visible signs and written markings, and, purportedly, back into physical experience, and how, in this particular ethnographic setting, these processes in turn affect users' ideological framings of writing practices and social relations. Annelies Kusters' chapter focuses on deaf and deafblind people's use of writing, and ideologies connected to writing, in interactions in Mumbai that involve deaf customers, baristas, shopkeepers, and commuters communicating with hearing customers, drivers, and shopkeepers. This chapter provides insight into practices and ideologies regarding the comple-

mentarity of different modalities, how they exist in hierarchies, and how different literacies come into play.

The final section, titled “Sign language ideologies in language planning and policy,” includes Audrey C. Cooper’s chapter, which examines the circumstances of hearing people’s ideological stance toward Deaf people in Việt Nam, and Deaf social organizers’ actions that seek to re-center government and development aid attention on a sociolinguistic grounding of Deaf experience. This chapter shows how everyday practices reproduce conditions of exclusion for Deaf people who use Hồ Chí Minh Sign Language as well as how Deaf social organizers leverage contemporary language and development aid mobilities to address the detrimental consequences of socio-linguistic ideologies. John Bosco Conama’s chapter takes a critical autoethnographic approach in examining the timeline of developments in the campaign for recognition of Irish Sign Language (ISL) in Ireland between 1981 and 2016. Given the Irish Deaf community’s heterogeneity, possessing fluid boundaries, various language ideologies have come to bear on the question of how ISL recognition was obtained. Christopher A.N. Kurz, Jeanne E. Reis, Jonathan Henner, and Barbara Spiecker’s chapter presents findings from a case study of a multi-stage process of sign coinage that iterates between development, evaluation, maintenance, and sharing of academic terms in ASL. In this chapter, ideologies about ASL are explored, along with motivation for viewing ASL as an academic language in environments where the prevailing perception is that English is superior for academic discourse and domain-specific terminology. Erin Moriarty’s chapter examines sign language standardization projects in terms of language ownership and sign language sovereignty in Cambodia, describing the various forces at work in this setting, such as the import of ASL by a French NGO in 1997 and the concurrent efforts to develop a national sign language. The chapter frames this in-depth example as a case study of how languages are caught up in projects of national belonging and claims to citizenship. The book concludes with an afterword by Joseph Murray.

We want to end this introduction by recognizing what is absent. There is significantly less diversity in the geographical, ethnic/racial, and linguistic backgrounds of our editors and authors than there would be in a world with more equitable distribution of resources. There is also less even attention to the various regions and settings of the world than is ideal, with a higher number of chapters about North America than about any other continent, and with nearly all the chapters focused on urban settings. The relationships between minority and majority sign languages and among racial and regional sign varieties, such as *Lingue des signes québécoise* (LSQ) and ASL in Canada, Black ASL and White ASL in the US, or Mumbai-based and Kerala-based Indian Sign Language in

India, are not analyzed here, nor are the diverse experiences of deaf immigrants around the world.

In our discussions, another important issue surfaced that we have been unable to address here: how to take account of complicated and power-laden local, national, and global connections without disregarding the fact that places outside of the global North do have their own histories that cannot be reduced to the influence of the North. Put another way, we find it important as researchers to both trace circulations of ideologies through deaf travel, education, and organizations like the World Federation of the Deaf, while also recognizing that similar ideologies might appear in multiple locales, each with its own specific sociohistorical context.

We view this book as building on, contributing to, and extending past conversations, and we hope that it will be followed by many more.

References

- Austin, P. K., & Julia Sallabank. 2011. Introduction. In Peter K. Austin & Julia Sallabank (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Endangered Languages*, 1-26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Branson, Jan & Don Miller. 2007. Beyond “language”: Linguistic imperialism, sign languages, and linguistic anthropology. In Sinfree Makoni & Alastair Pennycook (eds.), *Disinventing and reconstituting languages*, 116–134. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Burns, Sarah, Patrick Matthews & Evelyn Nolan-Conroy. 2001. Language attitudes. In Ceil Lucas (ed.), *The sociolinguistics of sign languages*, 181–216. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Erard, Michael. 2019. Studying an emerging sign language won’t kill it – so what are linguists scared of? *Mosaic Newsletter*. Retrieved February 27, 2019 from <https://mosaicscience.com/story/research-emerging-sign-language-linguists-ethics-bsl-asl-deaf/>
- Errington, Joseph. 2000. Indonesian(’s) authority. In Paul V. Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of Language*, 205–228. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.
- Friedner, Michele. 2016. Understanding and not-understanding: What do epistemologies and ontologies do in deaf worlds? *Sign Language Studies*, 16(2). 184–203.
- Goffman, Erving, 1964. The neglected situation. In P. P. Giglioli (ed.), *Language and social context*, 61–66. Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books.
- Goldin-Meadow, Susan & Diane Brentari. 2017. Gesture, sign, and language: The coming of age of sign language and gesture studies. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 40. 1–60.
- Green, Elizabeth Mara. 2014a. *The nature of signs: Nepal’s deaf society, local sign, and the production of communicative sociality*. Berkeley, University of California dissertation.
- Green, Elizabeth Mara. 2014b. Building the tower of Babel: International Sign, linguistic commensuration, and moral orientation. *Language in Society*, 43. 445–465.
- Green, Elizabeth Mara. 2017. Performing gesture: The pragmatic functions of pantomimic and lexical repertoires in a natural sign narrative. *Gesture*, 16(2). 328–362.

- Hanks, William. 1990. *Referential Practice: Language and Lived Space among the Maya*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Haviland, John. 2015. Hey! *Topics in Cognitive Science*, 7. 124–149.
- Hill, Joseph. 2012. *Language attitudes in the American deaf community*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Hill, Jane H. & Bruce Mannheim. 1992. Language and world view. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 21. 381–406
- Hou, Lynn & Annelies Kusters. 2020. Linguistic ethnography of signed languages. In Karin Tusting (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Ethnography*, 340–355. London: Routledge.
- Humphries, Tom. 2001. On deaf-mutes, the strange, and the modern deaf self. In Lois Bragg (ed.), *Deaf world: A historical reader & primary sourcebook*, 99–114. New York: New York University Press
- Irvine, Judith T. & Susan Gal. 2000. Language ideology and linguistic differentiation. In Paul V. Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of Language*, 35–84. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.
- Jourdan, Christine & Johanne Angeli. 2014. Pijin and shifting language ideologies in urban Solomon islands. *Language in Society*, 43(3). 265–285.
- Kendon, Adam. 2008. Some reflections on the relationship between “gesture” and “sign.” *Gesture*, 8(3). 348–366.
- Krausneker, Verena. 2015. Ideologies and attitudes toward sign languages: An approximation. *Sign Language Studies*, 15(4). 411–431.
- Kroskrity, Paul V. (ed.). 2000a. *Regimes of language: Ideologies, politics, and identities*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.
- Kroskrity, Paul V. 2000b. Regimenting languages: Language ideological perspectives. In Paul V. Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of language: Ideologies, politics, and identities*, 1–34. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.
- Kusters, Annelies. 2017. When transport becomes a destination: Deaf spaces and networks on the Mumbai suburban trains. *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 34(2). 170–193.
- Kusters, Annelies & Sujit Sahasrabudhe. 2018. Language ideologies on the difference between gesture and sign. *Language and Communication*, 60. 44–63.
- Ladd, Paddy. 2003. *Understanding Deaf culture: In search of Deafhood*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Le Guen, Oliver, Josefina Safar & Marie Coppola (eds). 2019. *Emerging sign languages of the Americas*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Lippi-Green, Rosina. 1997. *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*. London, UK: Psychology Press.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2001. Feminist theory, embodiment, and the docile agent: Some reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival. *Cultural Anthropology*, 6(2). 202–236.
- McBurney, Susan. 2012. History of sign languages and sign language linguistics. In Roland Pfau, Markus Steinbach & Bencie Woll (eds.), *Sign language: An international handbook*, 909–948. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- McCaskill, Carolyn, Ceil Lucas, Robert Bayley & Joseph Hill. 2011. *The hidden treasure of Black ASL*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Moges, Rezenet T. 2015. Challenging sign language lineages and geographies: The case of Eritrean, Finnish, and Swedish sign languages. In Michele Friedner and Annelies Kusters

- (eds.), *It's a small world: International deaf spaces and encounters*, 83–94. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Moore, Matthew & Levitan, Linda. 1992. *For hearing people only: Answers to some of the most commonly asked questions about the Deaf community, its culture, and the "Deaf reality."* Rochester, NY: Deaf Life Press.
- Moriarty Harrelson, Erin. 2019. Deaf people with “no language”: Mobility and flexible accumulation in languaging practices of deaf people in Cambodia. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 10(1). 55–72.
- Moriarty Harrelson, Erin. 2019. “I never expose them to my sign language!”: Morality in Deaf Tourism. Retrieved February 27, 2019 from <http://mobiledeaf.org.uk/i-never-expose-them-to-my-sign-language-morality-in-deaf-tourism/>.
- Murray, Joseph. 2017. Academic and community interactions in the formation of Deaf Studies in the United States. In Annelies Kusters, Maartje De Meulder & Dai O'Brien (eds.), *Innovations in Deaf Studies: The role of deaf scholars*, 77–100. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nonaka, Angela. 2004. The forgotten endangered languages: Lessons on the importance of remembering from Thailand's Ban Khor Sign Language. *Language in Society*, 33. 737–767.
- Padden, Carol. 1990. Folk explanation in language survival. In L. Bragg (ed.), *Deaf world: A historical reader and primary sourcebook*, 104–115. New York: New York University Press.
- Palfreyman, Nick. 2018. *Variation in Indonesian Sign Language*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Povinelli, Elizabeth A. 1998. The state of shame: Australian multiculturalism and the crisis of indigenous citizenship. *Critical Inquiry*, 24(2). 575–610.
- Reagan, Timothy. 2011. Ideological barriers to American Sign Language: Unpacking linguistic resistance. *Sign Language Studies*, 11(4). 606–636.
- Schieffelin, Bambi, Kathryn Woolard & Paul V. Kroskrity (eds.) 1998. *Language ideologies: Practice and theory*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
- Senghas, Richard J. & Leila Monaghan. 2002. Signs of their times: Deaf communities and the culture of language. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31. 69–97.
- Silverstein, Michael. 1979. Language structure and linguistic ideology. In Paul R. Clyne, William F. Hanks & Carol L. Hofbauer (eds.), *The elements: A parasection on linguistic units and levels*, 193–247. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Silverstein, Michael. 1985. Language and the culture of gender: At the intersection of structure, usage, and ideology. *Semiotic Mediation: Sociocultural and Psychological Perspectives*. 219–259.
- Supalla, Ted, & Patricia Clark. 2015. *Sign language archaeology: Understanding the historical roots of American Sign Language*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Taub, Sarah. 2001. *Language from the body: Iconicity and metaphor in American Sign Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vermeerbergen, Myriam. 2006. Past and current trends in sign language research. *Language and Communication*, 26. 168–192.
- Woolard, Kathryn A. & Bambi Schieffelin. 1994. Language ideology. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23(1). 55–82.

Part I: Sign language ideologies: Setting the scene

Joanne Weber

Interrogating sign language ideologies in the Saskatchewan deaf community: An autoethnography

1 Introduction

This paper provides an autoethnographic account of my late acquisition of American Sign Language (ASL) in the context of diminished access to native ASL signers due to the closure of the RJD Provincial School for the Deaf in 1991. I will focus on selected periods of intense ASL acquisition and language ideological conflicts which propelled me into an translanguaging orientation (Garcia, Otheguy, & Reid, 2015). My adherence to bilingual frameworks for language learning (ASL and English), built upon monolingual language ideologies (Garcia, 2009; Canagarajah, 2013) over a 27 year period, distorted my understanding of my own second-language acquisition.

2 Background

I am a deaf convert to the deaf community (Bechter, 2008). I was educated solely in inclusive education environments and obtained degrees at Canadian universities. As an adult previously acculturated into the hearing world, fully fluent in spoken and print English, my exposure to ASL began upon entering the Saskatchewan deaf community as a young adult. Learning ASL at this stage was also motivated by a search of a new way of life that would afford acceptance, social engagement, and belonging, all of which were not always available in the hearing world (Bechter, 2008; Kusters, 2017). At the same time, in recognition of the oppressive educational practices I had endured during my own schooling, I was committed to empowering deaf students and to becoming a positive role model for deaf students (Kusters, 2017). As a teacher of deaf adolescents, I exercise an intergenerational responsibility toward deaf students which is characterized by a sense of urgency in removing barriers impeding deaf students' learning (Bechter, 2008; Kusters, 2017). I did not want future deaf students to suffer the isolation, alienation, and disengagement I had experienced while immersed in mainstream education environments (Weber, 2013).

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510090-002>

3 Theory

I will present the ways in which my ideological views of sign language acquisition skewed my view of my own practices and the spaces afforded through my work and relationships within the deaf community in Saskatchewan. In doing so, I consider theories of bilingualism to interpret my own evolution of sign language ideologies toward translanguaging practices. Bilingualism in the form of double monolingualism subscribes to the co-existence of two autonomous bounded language systems instead of attending to children's actual bilingual practices (Garcia, 2009). Proponents of minority languages within minoritized communities often serve as gatekeepers, attempting to protect and revitalize their languages and linguistic practices (Garcia, Otheguy, & Reid, 2015). Snoddon (2016) notes a similar linguistic prescriptivism within the deaf community in their attempts to revitalize ASL as used with deaf children and youth. Double monolingualism is a hegemonic construct stemming from language practices in education milieus that hierarchize languages according to their relevance and importance on a global scale (Canagarajah, 2013; Garcia, 2009).

Challenging this construct, Garcia, Otheguy, & Reid (2015) propose a definition of translanguaging which serves to disrupt “socially constructed language hierarchies that are responsible for the suppression of languages of many minoritized peoples” (Garcia, Otheguy, & Reid, 2015, p. 283). This definition of translanguaging enables the “deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (Garcia, Otheguy, & Reid, 2015, p. 283). Instead of referring to social and linguistic constructs as the building blocks of language acquisition, the speaker’s unique, personal mental grammar employed in interaction with other people is used within translanguaging contexts (Garcia, Otheguy, & Reid, 2015). Negotiation of meanings between individuals involves the mixing, switching and combining of diverse semiotic resources such as print, material objects in the environment, gestures and presupposes the desire to achieve clear communication between all parties (Canagarajah, 2013). This paper is a reflection on my own sign language practices and ideologies and how I came to eventually embrace translanguaging in my work with deaf people during three intensive language acquisition periods.

4 Methodology

I present an interpretive autoethnography which seeks to evoke emotions, feelings and perceptions which dominated my efforts to embrace certain sign language ideologies (Denzin, 2014). The validity concerning interpretive autoethnography is contingent upon my credibility as a “writer-performer-observer” who can write stories that are “true, coherent, believable and connects the reader to the writer’s world” (Denzin, 2014, p. 70) Like O’Connell (2017), a deaf scholar who uses autobiographical writing to reflect on his upbringing, I use selections from *The Deaf House* (Weber, 2013) which features my own story growing up as a deaf child in a small rural community, becoming a teacher of the deaf, my life in the Saskatchewan deaf community, and teaching adolescent deaf students (Weber, 2013). *The Deaf House* is a creative non-fiction work which includes autobiographical details gleaned from at least 20 personal journals (dating from 1987), photographs, art works, travel diaries, personal archives and interviews with family members. In this chapter, I apply an ethnographer’s lens to analyze these excerpts from *The Deaf House* along with journal entries I had written over a 27-year period pertaining to sign language practices and ideologies.

Since the examination of language ideologies must be coupled with an examination of language practices (Kusters A. , 2014), I describe three distinct stages of sign language practices which evolved into a translanguaging orientation (Garcia, Otheguy, & Reid, 2015). I use current theorizing on translanguaging to examine the sign language ideologies I adopted throughout these periods and how they have changed over time (Canagarajah, 2013; Garcia, 2009; Garcia, Otheguy, & Reid, 2015).

5 Stage 1: Early monolingual bilingualism: Some autobiographical reflections

Raised in a small town, I developed the ability to speak fluent English with available functional hearing. I always wanted to teach but my parents, who were teachers, discouraged me because I didn’t have enough hearing to manage a classroom of hearing students. The possibility of teaching deaf children opened up when I started to learn sign language.

As a young adult, I became enthralled with American Sign Language (ASL) and did my preservice teaching at the provincial school for the deaf. There, I sat

in a steady stream of signs, catching a phrase here, puzzling over a swoop or a long flight to the right or left, observing how the tongue clicks as the hands travel across the chest. I sit in a shallow riverbed of signs, watching streams of signs form rivulets around my legs and arms. There's no intervention from anyone, no practice, no exaggerated attempts to explain the meaning of signs I have not seen in class.

After a few months, I realize that everything about the Deaf and sign is all about circles. They sit in circles, their hands move from the chest up to the left side of the head, up to the forehead and down to the chin, and then down to the chest again, or the signing is in figure eights, horizontal, vertical, against the chest, away from the head, down to the waist even: a flight of bees and hummingbirds touching down flower to flower.

The meanings begin to slide together like a nearly-completed jigsaw puzzle. The syntax of sign knits itself into my brain, to the point where I can sign without difficulty: "Want coffee you?"

I now understand that the circles are shapes and paths made by classifiers, a series of handshapes that can represent various actions and motions. The Deaf grab the visual space in front of their bodies and make three dimensional models, representations of complex actions with even an index finger. Timidly, I enter into the frenzy of hands slapping, swooping, twisting, sliding, lifting my head in agreement, nodding my understanding, and smiling when a joke is finished. It is as though a sheer curtain lifts before my eyes, the Deaf, who were once shadowy figures behind the curtain, begin to take on colour, shape, and form, (Weber, *The Deaf House*, 2013, pp. 197-198).

Upon completion of the preservice requirement toward obtaining a bachelor's degree in education, I decided to attend Gallaudet University in 1987 to obtain a master's degree in deaf education. Our cohort did not include any native ASL signing teacher candidates. Consequently, I spent most of my time with hearing, hard of hearing and speaking adults who were in Education, Counselling and Linguistics departments. All of us deaf candidates had graduated from mainstreamed schools. We moved amongst the undergraduate students whose flingers were flying in the cafeteria, on the football field, in the Ely Centre, at the Abbey. We did not fit in with those who had attended residential schools for the deaf yet we tried to pick up ASL through limited contact with students. Daily, we congregated, sharing the ASL vocabulary, phrases and metaphors and deaf cultural tidbits. We used our voices while signing at the same time. We were adult deaf converts (Bechter, 2008), monolinguals using English to acquire ASL and feeling our way through a newfound cultural milieu. As we did not have the social and cultural benefits of being acculturated at an early age, we developed a pidgin sign English (PSE), that is, the production of ASL signs in English word order without attending to the grammatical features of ASL.

I was not prepared for the emotional upheaval upon entry to Gallaudet University. Subsequent journal entries indicated a feeling of falling into an abyss

that seemed to exist between the hearing world I had left behind and the deaf world of Gallaudet. In the struggle to accept my own deafness and to grapple with the primacy of English as the superior language (Canagarajah, 2013), I gradually understood that English to me, was the language of the intellect, individual achievement, accolades and awards in recognition of my ability to approximate hearing English speakers. In other words, I had used English to fashion a public persona. Sign language, on the other hand, belonged to my private self in which I could explore my true emotions and ask difficult questions:

Who would give me an award for being deaf? For not being able to speak properly? For not being able to sound normal? For talking too loud? Who is going to applaud me? (Weber, Gallaudet University Journal, October 10, 1987).

Despite my initial contact with the deaf community in Saskatoon and the early euphoria at having discovered a deaf identity, I felt overwhelmed with resentment and exhaustion at having to struggle all over again in the arduous process of learning another language again without sustained access in my classes (this time from Gallaudet University which was supposed to be a linguistic and cultural hotbed of ASL and deaf culture). Moreover, my initial resentment about the academic requirements of my program and at not being acculturated into the deaf community prior to Gallaudet brought on an avalanche of other feelings:

I felt a keen sense of betrayal. I feel betrayed by my body, my parents, and the health and educational system. I felt like I was about to be engulfed or even gobbled up. I felt like I was going to be annihilated over and over again (Weber, Gallaudet University Journal Entry, October 22, 1987).

During my classes in the education program at Gallaudet, there was minimal discussion about bilingual programming or the role of ASL in deaf education despite the excitement surrounding ASL-English bilingualism and ASL linguistics swirling around the rest of the campus. I also encountered hearing graduate students who mocked the voices of deaf people on campus and felt embarrassed for myself and my deaf peers. In my journal, I wrote: “I am ashamed when people laugh at deaf voices, deaf behaviors, deaf words, deaf language” (Weber, Gallaudet University Journal, October 10, 1987). Sign language became a “secret language” to be used with my deaf peers away from the hearing roommates with whom I shared a dormitory suite on campus. ASL enabled me to explore my feelings, inner conflicts and desires. Later that year, I wrote:

I feel like I've been pieced together at last and that the replacement of the missing piece has caused my whole being to wake to life again. That my perceptions of things have

altered radically and for the best. To think I dragged myself through life in this intolerable emptiness ...Now I am made whole again in my deafness... (Weber, Gallaudet University Journal Entry, November 19, 1987).

At that time, Gallaudet deaf community's fierce protection of minority language was supported by burgeoning linguistic research proving that ASL was a real language and had features comparable to spoken languages (Baker & Cokely, 1980; Bellugi & Klima, 1979; Padden, 1988; Stokoe, 1960; Supalla, 1991). Hence ASL was viewed as a bounded language and notations on standard practices of ASL language acquisition were developed (Baker & Cokely, 1980). At the same time, I had to obtain credits in audiology, speech training and Signing Exact English courses toward the fulfillment of a masters in deaf education. Signing Exact English (SEE) is a visual representation of English using ASL signs with attached English morphological markers including English suffixes, prefixes, and verb conjugations. Here, the goal of achieving standard English continued to exert its hegemonic grip on campus.

In 1987, ASL-English bilingual practices at Gallaudet University, indicated a double monolingualism, which Garcia (2009) in reference to bilingual practices in general populations, defines as a situation where two languages compete for recognition, pedagogical practices, and resources through education policies (Garcia, 2009). For instance, while deaf academics and their allies on campus were discussing how to empower the deaf community with the growing linguistic knowledge of ASL (Murray, 2017), the campus remained mired in a double bilingual framework. Murray (2017) summarizes the conflict on the Gallaudet campus at the time, which pitted deaf advocates of ASL and English as two separate languages against other deaf advocates who wanted a combination of both languages therefore not recognizing that ASL is a full language. Therefore, my belief in bounded languages was reinforced by my entry into the bastion of Deaf culture and ASL at Gallaudet University. Moreover, in being forced to take SEE courses (not ASL) toward my degree in deaf education, the training I received at Gallaudet, seemed to suggest, in the back of my mind, that ASL was not really a language. At the same time, I knew that since I was not fluent in ASL, that I could not make a proper judgement about whether it was a true language or not. These conflicting thoughts continued to thrust me into a frozen space where the use of PSE seemed like the only thing I was capable of at the time.

The ideology asserting language as bounded and in competition with each other contributed to a bifurcated sense of self. I felt that I had to choose one or the other in my daily language practices. I was not deaf because I was not fluent in ASL and I was not hearing because I could not fully participate in the hearing

world. I felt caught in a vise because I had absorbed an ideology which equated full mastery of a language with belonging in a community.

I was caught in the crosshairs of this conflict which travelled back with me to Canada in 1988. I then decided not to complete the second year of the master's program at Gallaudet because I felt too conflicted and unsure about ASL and English bilingualism. Upon arrival, my insecurity heightened when I was corrected in my execution of signs or was asked to repeat a concept by deaf adults in Saskatchewan. At the same time, I noted that there were rare communication breakdowns between me and other members of the deaf community. Instead, when misunderstandings occurred, both parties (of which I was one) could expand, negotiate and clarify our meanings. After arriving from Gallaudet when I had spent the year associating with deaf adults who, like me, were not acculturated into the deaf community nor fluent in ASL, I felt that my real ASL acquisition could begin in the safe environment established by the local deaf community. I felt that most individuals in the deaf community in Saskatchewan who had graduated from the residential school for the deaf were quick to repair breakdowns by providing the sign I needed, or clarifying the signs being used in conversations or explaining a classifier which is a handshape devoted to expressing action and spatial relationships. Classifiers allow for greater descriptions of visual spatial relationships as opposed to providing a sign for every English concept or word as in manually coded English such as SEE (Baker & Cokely, 1980). The Saskatchewan deaf community seemed to exercise a moral imperative in ensuring clear communication out of a sense of DEAF SAME that is the shared experience of navigating the hearing world (Friedner & Kusters, 2015; Green, 2014). Witnessing and experiencing this linguistic care for one another made me feel more welcome and safer than the immersion at Gallaudet University. Yet at the same time, listening to the empowerment messages provided by deaf activists concerning the protection of ASL and deaf culture, heightened the confusion with me. I felt policed in terms of sign language usages and cultural behaviours and continued to feel less confident in my ability to grasp the lexical and structural features of ASL. Between these two spaces, however, I was beginning to consider the possibilities of new patterns of interaction and community spaces (Canagarajah, 2013).

In the fall of 1988, I accepted a teaching position at the residential school for the deaf in Saskatchewan. Even though the school's language policy enforced Signed English and ASL was used primarily in the dormitories, recess and at social events, deaf teachers including myself used ASL in the classroom. I soon became embroiled in activities to prevent this school from closing: "I am resolved to defend the school because of the new language and culture that now feeds my bones. Indeed, it's an ironic homecoming from Gallaudet" (Weber, *The Deaf House*, 2013, p. 220). The homecoming was ironic in that despite having partici-

pated in the Deaf President Now movement which promoted ASL English bilingualism and deaf culture, I had returned to a community on the brink of collapse because of actions to close the school for the deaf. During this intense lobbying period, I finally found a way to belong without the advantage of longstanding history of having grown up in the school for the deaf but as a deaf community advocate consumed with the task of fulfilling intergenerational responsibility to deaf students (Kusters, 2017). Within the deaf community, I used my English fluency to read overly abstract documents written by government officials which promoted the 1991 closure of the school for the deaf (Saskatchewan Task Force Committee on Deaf Education, 1989; Saskatchewan Deaf Education Advisory Forum, 1990). At the same time, I acquired more sign language through the process of negotiating meaning and co-constructing knowledge with the deaf lobbyists, deaf educators and leaders in the deaf community. For instance, I often spoke out at deaf community meetings, providing my opinion concerning a strategy employed by education officials in the government at the time to close the school for the deaf. Deaf adults in the audience and my deaf teaching colleagues often corrected my signing in situ or would appear after meetings to clarify what I had just said. After these interventions, I would see nods from individuals in the audience indicating that they had understood what I was trying to convey.

According to the monolingual framework, however, standard English comes with power and status (Canagarajah, 2013). In this case, my English skills along with the PSE that I had acquired at Gallaudet University afforded me rapid entry into the deaf community but not necessarily complete acceptance by the long standing deaf activists in the deaf community (Saskatchewan Deaf Association, 1990). Many deaf leaders questioned my sudden appearance in the deaf community to fight alongside them for the protection of a language and culture in which I was not fully immersed nor fluent. This muted acceptance led me to think about whether I was exploiting the deaf community for my own needs for power, belonging and acceptance. It was an uneasy exchange. The exchange between ASL and English reflected power differentials became lost in the rush to save the school for the deaf.

The Saskatchewan deaf community's efforts to keep the school for the deaf, however, failed. Its closure in 1991 was also prompted by the recommendations of the Saskatchewan government's Task Force on Deaf Education (1989) because of the increasing movement away from a centralized facility serving deaf students to education in home communities provided by local school boards (Saskatchewan Deaf Education Advisory Forum, 1990). Saskatchewan deaf activists maintain that the deaf school in Saskatchewan closed because of a longstanding antipathy of hearing educators, audiologists, and administrators toward sign language and the deaf community (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 2016).

In 1991, the closure of the R.J.D. Williams Provincial School for the Deaf resulted in the exodus of deaf teachers and teaching assistants and the diminishment of a vibrant deaf community. The core group of deaf professionals and teaching assistants had held executive positions in several deaf organizations, promoted the arts and cultural life of the deaf community through the Saskatchewan Cultural Association of the Deaf, and were committed mentors to deaf youth who attended the school for the deaf. I was the sole teacher to remain in Saskatchewan.

After the school closure, my attempt to continue exercising intergenerational responsibility (Kusters, 2017) toward deaf children and youth in the province fell flat:

I now own a consulting business: *Lang Tree*. Initially, I hope to serve the deaf students placed in schools scattered throughout the province. After a few contracts, I quickly see that I can't provide support to anyone in the mainstreamed setting. I'm called by principals desperate for a solution for a deaf student unable to speak intelligibly or comprehend what's happening in class, students are already outfitted with cochlear implants and additional technological equipment, I can't recommend using sign language because there's no one for miles around who can sign, and I can't recommend sending the child to a neighbouring provincial school for the Deaf, because school boards are obligated to provide services to all children with special needs within their home communities. I end up recommending very little other than a gentle admonition: *Keep trying*. (Weber, *The Deaf House*, 2013, p. 253).

Years later, I realized that I was blinded by my belief that the school for the deaf was the only environment for ASL acquisition. I had equated the deaf school with belonging to the deaf community and as the only access to ASL due to the critical mass of deaf students, deaf teachers and deaf support staff available in that milieu. I did not see then, that right underneath my nose, this scorched landscape began to yield new spaces for learning ASL.

6 Stage 2: Emergent deaf spaces for translanguaging

Several ports of entry into the Saskatchewan deaf community provided by the deaf school were closed. These closed ports of entry included graduations, Christmas concerts, teas, cheering for deaf sports teams, close relationships with the students, and several interprovincial competitions, and camps which were coordinated by the staff and students at the school. Access to ASL linguistic role models was now restricted to attendance at deaf community events such as barbecues,

organization meetings, picnics, ball games, and workshops which occurred approximately ten times a year and attendance at sign language classes for hearing students organized by Saskatchewan Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (SDHHS), a non-profit agency dedicated to supporting the independence of their clientele through the provision of sign language interpreting services, community services, and vocational counselling services. At SDHHS, I provided community services including counselling, liaising with other government and non-government agencies, advocacy on the behalf of clients concerning disputes, and workshops. The agency hired mostly hearing people who used PSE in service related positions such as agency administration, vocational rehabilitation and community services.

Despite the higher ratio of hearing people within SDHHS to deaf employees, new deaf spaces began to develop in which I could continue my acquisition of ASL. Deaf spaces are characterized by the presence of deaf authored knowledges, the secretion of memories concerning linguistic and educational oppression, positive memories concerning the deaf school, reference to discourses concerning empowerment of deaf people, and the sharing of information, humour, gossip, and resources by deaf people (Gulliver & Kitzel, 2016). The concept of deaf spaces has arisen out of recent innovations in geography studies which consider the agentic interactions of deaf people with their environments which in turn exert their forces upon deaf people (Gulliver & Kitzel, 2016). The axiom is: “deaf people produce deaf spaces” thereby harnessing a neutral physical world. It is easy to assume that the world is primarily a hearing space and that Deaf spaces appear in it like little Deaf bubbles. Geographers, however, would say that there is nothing inherent in the world that makes it hearing or deaf and that it is the actions of people being in the world that makes a space appear (Gulliver & Kitzel, 2016, p. 2).

While many deaf clients congregated in this deaf space at the SDHHS office to attend meetings, individual sessions and workshops, the deaf space within this agency can be classified as emergent because it was controlled by hearing people who were office managers, secretaries, and upper administrators such as executive directors, executive assistants, and communication coordinators (Gulliver, 2009). The emergent deaf space in this sense was not much different than deaf schools which are often operated by hearing administrators (Gulliver, 2009), the exception being that the deaf space was at the agency which only served deaf adult clientele.

By that time, I had developed a smooth pidgin (Pidgin Sign English) consisting of ASL signs in English word order. My position at SDHHS also entitled me to use sign language interpreters who were CODAs, had obtained certification of interpretation (COIs) and had skillfully mastered the clients' registers in their signing and voicing. I found this period of language acquisition to be the richest and most beneficial as I moved closer into a circle of deaf persons who

were delegated the lowest social status in the deaf community because of their semi-literacy in print English, additional disabilities, lack of employment, and their lack of social and cultural capital required to navigate the social services, justice, and health systems (Bourdieu, 1991). Because I was a newcomer to the deaf community armed with advanced literacy skills and as a professional educator freshly arrived from an oppressive deaf education training program at Gallaudet University, I had quickly allied myself with the deaf professional group who had degrees from Gallaudet University. In doing so, I had acquired a unfortunate snobbery toward these people who often did not have the money, transportation, or community networks to appear at many deaf community events, or the social capital to contribute to deaf organizations. Yet, in retrospect, I realized that these clients, however, provided a rich lingual resource and for the first time, I became acquainted with several different registers, dialects and flexible and creative uses of ASL. I witnessed the increased use of classifiers and gestures, and innovative shifting with their shoulders and eyes to denote conversations between different people they had described. While they described their problems and issues, asked questions, cracked jokes and elaborated upon their family and friend networks, I mentally took notes on their signs. My language learning benefited from their marginalized status within the deaf community, away from the deaf leaders who were protectors of ASL.

I finally could understand classifiers and began to experiment with of non-manual markers such as the raising of eyebrows to formulate questions, shifting my shoulders to indicate characters in a conversation I was relaying, or mouth movements to indicate thickness, size and shape. I became increasingly comfortable in not using my voice and attempted to adopt many of the gestures and non-manual markers my clients used. I was gleaning valuable linguistic knowledge and resources from a marginalized sub population within the deaf community and highly skilled community interpreters.

At the same time, I also served many deaf clients who were introduced to Signed English as upper elementary students or in their teenage years. They had been brought up solely within the hearing world and educated in their home communities. Many of them displayed restricted sign language vocabulary, inaccurately formed signs, signed English phrases, sporadic morphological markers, and mostly eliminated non-manual markers from their repertoires. I found myself having to adjust to their signing and at times, their attempts to speak. At the same time, I could see them groping toward classifiers and the use of visual spatial gestures to augment their signing. In my confusion about what I was experiencing and see, I unfortunately made judgements about what was not ASL. At the same time, despite how restricted their attempts were at communicating their wants, needs and feelings, I began to wonder about the migration of their signing toward

more standard varieties of ASL. This linguistic subgroup of clients seemed trampled by their incomplete mastery of English and their signed English but at the same time, easily picked up the ASL that I was beginning to use more comfortably and fluently. The clients and I patched together meanings often resorting to writing phrases, miming, and role playing. My new knowledge of classifiers and non-manual markers also largely factored into the successful communication with this clientele. In the end, the communication was as clear to us as if I had been communicating with native ASL signers (those who had acquired it in residential school environments). I continued to reflect on the capacity of my mainstreamed deaf clients and I for meaning making despite the continued linguistic prescriptivism concerning ASL in the form of workshops on ASL language instruction of which I partook at that time (Snoddon, 2016).

My inner conflicts concerning ASL and English was now further exacerbated by the continued insistence that ASL was a separate, discrete language which required a tight control of who could teach ASL (Snoddon, 2016) and the conversations I was having with my clientele in my office using a mixture of ASL, PSE, Signed English, writing and reading, and other semiotic resources as such as utility bills, court writs, letters from social workers, drawings and even material objects to develop narratives concerning domestic violence. My office was an emergent deaf space because it quickly evaporated when a hearing administrator entered my office (Gulliver, 2009). Yet within this alternative deaf space, I became directly engaged with our inventive uses of ASL.

7 Stage 3: Translanguaging in a deaf diaspora

In 2003, I accepted the position of a resource room teacher in a small resource program for deaf adolescents in another city in Saskatchewan. There, the deaf community has about ten active members who serve in deaf organizations on local, provincial and national levels. The deaf community in this city had a slightly different flavor as it was group of people united in their usage of sign language (which included the use of Signed English, PSE and ASL, and at times, even spoken English) and the common shared history of being deaf, which did not always include prior attendance at the deaf school located in a city approximately 500 miles away. It is estimated that each province in Canada has around 350 deaf people who use ASL and belong to the deaf community (Canadian Association of the Deaf, 2015). This city has a deaf organization whose thirty odd members are mostly over the age of 65. Approximately five deaf adults volunteer at the elementary and the high school where I teach. The educational interpreters and the

hearing teachers of the deaf use a combination of voice, PSE and Signed English (which does not have as many morphological markers as SEE). The elementary students received mediated instruction in Signed English.

Even at this later stage of my sign language acquisition, I was still inhibited by a deficit lens on sign language and deaf culture due to my professional training as an educator from Gallaudet University and my early formative years as a speaking deaf child. My continued belief in languages as bounded seemed to restrain my thinking about meeting the needs of speaking deaf and hard of hearing who were not interested in learning sign language, the interpreters who were not interested in learning ASL and signing deaf students who were never exposed to ASL. Similar to my work with deaf clients several years earlier, I vacillated between English and ASL trying to respect all communication and language choices. It felt like a juggling act and did not seem to allow for the building of a deaf space where all languages could flourish. I continually felt pulled into a hearing space which contained higher numbers of speaking deaf and hard of hearing deaf students. In the classroom, the average ratio was 4 to one signing deaf person.

My attempt to normalize deaf spaces, as if the physical, linguistic (ASL), and psychological spaces are “normal” in contrast to hearing spaces (Gulliver, 2013) was often thwarted by the hard of hearing and speaking deaf students who were convinced that they were now hearing people because of their dedicated use of hearing aids and cochlear implants. Gulliver (2013) comments that when two spaces coincide in one room, that is, the deaf space, and the hearing space as informed by the auditory industrial complex (Eberwein, 2007), there appears an orientation of intolerance in which inhabitants of one space attempts to annihilate the other. Hard of hearing and speaking deaf students to whom I provided direct instruction, along with their signing deaf peers, often attempted to dominate the deaf space that existed between me and the lone signing deaf student by monopolizing discussions through spoken English. They often eschewed learning sign language. On the other hand, deaf students reasserted the deaf space by requesting one on one instruction.

Intuitively, I knew we needed a deaf space in which all languages could flourish. At first, I agonized over which language to use during instruction. I wrote in *The Deaf House*: “there is a space that is in command now, that decides what I am to see and hear, to know to understand, and how to live, and I live in that space, it is my home” (Weber, 2013, p. 324). Consequently, I began to teach only in ASL. I prefaced my communication choices by telling the students that they could choose to speak or sign and retain their hearing or deaf identities, but I was going to communicate in ASL with the group, leaving the English to be voiced by one of the interpreters.

Within the classroom, the deaf space began to grow, “secrete” structures, encounter other spaces, develop ways of countering other spaces (Gulliver & Kitzel, 2015). For instance, I produced deaf space by incorporating materials on ASL and deaf culture. I deliberately raised questions around hearing loss and encourage the students to share their experiences and perspectives. I invited them to discuss their issues around power and control within their lives.

During this period, I felt my signing to be much looser and freer, more daring and experimental. I began to compose ASL poetry for local theatre performances and created partnerships with artists who wanted to incorporate ASL poetry into their performances. My confidence increased with every playful, imaginative and creative step. I took tentative steps outside of the stranglehold of the double monolingual framework. Like Valente (2011), “[c]laiming my “Deaf” identity has been a long and challenging journey. Claiming my colonized self and unlearning my “deafness” has been and remains even a harder task” (Valente, 2011, p. 22). My steps were tentative because of the deficit lens I still had as an outcome of my professional training despite the years of signing practices that were conducive to translanguaging.

The hard of hearing and speaking deaf students began to show an interest in learning sign language and began to incorporate signing into their individual discussions with me. Sometimes they voiced, and sometimes they did not. At other times, they attempted to communicate in sign language sans voice in front of the whole group. All efforts were welcomed and protected in that I would not allow anyone to criticize any spoken English and or sign language delivery. The students began to converse with each other using a mixture of ASL, spoken English, semiotic resources such as pictures, text, drawings, artwork, the internet on their phones and laptops. The deaf space in my classroom is best classified as “emergent” (Gulliver, 2009) in which deaf students are now maintaining the deaf space and who do not rely on my presence or even my involvement. The presence of hearing people such as hearing administrators and teachers who do not sign and who direct and interact with the students often results, however, in the dismantling of the deaf space.

8 Conclusions

My sign language ideologies were profoundly shaped by my professional training as an educator of the deaf and by my early acculturation into becoming a speaking deaf adult away from deaf spaces. During my professional career, I had not considered the linkages between deaf spaces and sign language ideologies beyond

the simplistic equation of sign language acquisition with assumed primary sites of linguistic acquisition, specifically, the deaf school. Furthermore, I struggled with my own deficit lens on the deaf clients, deaf students, and deaf adults whom I served in a variety of capacities.

Eventually my signing practices trumped my sign language ideologies due to participation in alternative deaf spaces. The double monolingualism that I had tried to support over the years eventually gave way to a translanguaging ideology which was much more open, expansive and inclusive of all signers regardless of their level of proficiency and cultural affiliations. The removal of my own deficit lens influencing sign language ideologies continues to be an ongoing process despite my many years of personal and deep friendships with individuals in the deaf community, my professional affiliations with deaf academics and my own passion for empowering deaf children and youth as they use sign language to negotiate meanings for themselves. In doing so, I have come to embrace and participate in the mission of minoritized communities to preserve and maintain their languages which can be supported by translanguaging. I have learned to honor the linguistic repertoires of signers and to address the power imbalances and inner conflicts resulting from a double monolingualism ideology (Garcia, Otheguy, & Reid, 2015).

References

- Baker, C., & Cokely, D. (1980). *American Sign Language: A Teacher's Resource Text on Grammar and Culture*. Silver Spring, MD: TJ Publishers.
- Bechter, F. (2008). The deaf convert culture and its lessons for deaf theory. In H.-D. Bauman, *Open your eyes: Deaf studies talking* (pp. 60–79). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bellugi, U., & Klima, E. (1979). *The Signs of Language*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Canadian Association of the Deaf. (2015, July 3). *Statistics on Deaf Canadians*. Retrieved from Canadian Association of the Deaf/Association des Sourds du Canada: <http://cad.ca/issues-positions/statistics-on-deaf-canadians/>
- Canagarajah, S. (2013). *Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations*. New York: Routledge.
- Denzin, N. (2014). *Interpretive Autoethnography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Eberwein, D. (2007). *Auditory Industrial Complex*. California State School for the Deaf, Ohlone College. Fremont: Eberwein, D.
- Friedner, M., & Kusters, A. (2015). *It's a Small World: International Deaf Spaces and Encounters*. (M. Friedner, & A. Kusters, Eds.) Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

- Garcia, O. (2009). Education, multilingualism, and translanguaging in the 21st century. In T. Skutnabb-Kangas, R. Phillipson, A. Mohanty, & M. Panda, *Social justice through multilingual education* (pp. 140–158). North York, ON: Multilingual Matters.
- Garcia, O., Otheguy, R., & Reid, W. (2015). Clarifying translanguaging and deconstructing named languages: A perspective from linguistics. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 6(3), 281–307.
- Green, E. (2014). Building the tower of Babel: International Sign, linguistic commensuration, and moral orientation. *Language in Society*, 43, 445–465. doi:10.1017/S0047404514000396
- Gulliver, M. (2009). *DEAF space, a history: The production of DEAF spaces emergent, autonomous, located and disabled in 18th and 19th century France*. University of Bristol, School of Geographical Studies and Centre for Deaf Studies, Bristol.
- Gulliver, M. (2013, August 14). *Building blocks to an understanding of Deaf space*. Retrieved 2017, from mikegulliver.com.
- Gulliver, M., & Kitzel, M. (2016). Deaf Geographies. In G. Gertz, & P. Boudreault, *The SAGE Deaf Studies Encyclopedia* (pp. 451–453). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Kusters, A. (2014). Language ideologies in the shared signing community of Adamorobe. *Language in Society*, 43(2), 139–158.
- Kusters, M. (2017). Intergenerational Responsibility in Deaf Pedagogies. In A. Kusters, M. De Meulder, & D. O'Brien, *Innovations in Deaf Studies: The Role of Deaf Scholars* (Kindle ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Murray, J. (2017). Academic and community interactions in the formation of Deaf studies in the United States. In A. Kusters, M. De Meulder, & D. O'Brien, *Innovations in Deaf Studies: The Role of Deaf Scholars* (Kindle ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Padden, C. (1988). *Interaction of Morphology and Syntax in American Sign Language*. New York, NY: Garland Publishing.
- Saskatchewan Deaf Association. (1990). Archives. *Electronic Correspondence between Regina and Saskatoon Deaf Communities Concerning Resistance Strategies*. Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada: Allard Thomas.
- Saskatchewan Deaf Education Advisory Forum. (1990). *Preliminary Report on Deaf Education to the Honorable Ray Meiklejohn, Minister of Education*. Regina, Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan Ministry of Education.
- Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission. (2016). *Access and equality for Deaf, deaf, and hard of hearing people: A report to stakeholders*. Saskatoon, SK, Canada: Ministry of Justice.
- Saskatchewan Task Force Committee on Deaf Education. (1989). *Report of the Task Force on the Education of the Deaf*. Regina, Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan Ministry of Education.
- Snoddon, K. (2016). Whose ASL Counts? Linguistic prescriptivism and challenges in the context of parent sign language curriculum development. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 1–12.
- Stokoe, W. (1960). Sign Language Structure: An Outline of the Visual Communication Systems of the Deaf. *Linguistics, Occasional Papers 8*.
- Supalla, S. (1991). Manually Coded English: The Modality Question. In P. Siple, & S. Fischer, *Theoretical Issues in Sign Language Research* (pp. 85–110). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Valente, J. (2011). *D/deaf and D/dumb: a portrait of a deaf kid as a young superhero*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Weber, J. (1987, October 10). *Gallaudet University Journal*, October 10.

Weber, J. (1987, October 22). Gallaudet University Journal Entry, October 22.

Weber, J. (1987, November 19). Gallaudet University Journal Entry, November 19.

Weber, J. (2013). *The Deaf House*. Saskatoon: Thistledown Press.

Anne E. Pfister

Bla, Bla, Bla: Understanding inaccessibility through Mexican Sign Language expressions

1 Introduction

A sparsely furnished conference room on the ground floor of a semi-private deaf school served as one of my unofficial office spaces during my 2012-13 fieldwork in Mexico City, Mexico. The room was adjacent to the cement courtyard where students at *Instituto Pedagógico para Problemas del Lenguaje* (IPPLIAP), my primary research site, ate lunch and enjoyed recess. The conference room was not temperature-controlled and was seldom quiet or fully private. The glass-paneled doors freely admitted the boisterous sounds of schoolchildren unabashed by innocent and auditory movement between the countless emotions of primary school social life. The stark porcelain of the shady corners seemed to preserve the crisp morning air, even as dry afternoon sun and haze replaced the city's chilly, high-altitude dawn. This room quickly became warm and intimate when I was accompanied by participants from the IPPLIAP community, including students, parents, teachers, administrators and acquaintances. I conducted interviews around the large, round wooden table to allow visual access for signing and outside sounds and sensations soon faded.

My investigation aims to understand the experience of deafness from the perspectives of deaf people and their (mostly hearing) families in Mexico City, Mexico. Communication was a particularly salient issue facing the majority of families I worked with. Among the participants in this study, language use and modality varied, suggesting a perceived spectrum between pure signing (in *Lengua de Señas Mexicana*, Mexican Sign Language or LSM) and *oralización* (oralization, or the regular use of speech reading and oral Spanish). IPPLIAP created an educational and social climate they referred to as bi-cultural and bilingual (LSM and Spanish). IPPLIAP is a cherished anchor of the Mexico City deaf community and national leader in deaf education. I recruited participants through convenience and snowball sampling radiating from IPPLIAP and my personal networks from over 13 years of collaboration with signers, deaf educators and families in Mexico City.

Deaf participants navigated between predominantly-hearing and more-inclusive signing experiences, each with particular characteristics and language ideologies that impacted their language socialization. The everyday language use and practice among participants reflects and describes their lived experiences within this ideological landscape. This chapter highlights particular LSM expressions –and related

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510090-003>

descriptive concepts— to illustrate the collective understandings they reveal among Mexican deaf people.

2 Oralism & deaf children of hearing parents

Oralism persists worldwide and is an unmistakable aspect of the Mexican landscape. Because oralism “privileges spoken (and written) languages over signed ones, often denying the validity or linguistic nature of signing altogether” (Senghas and Monaghan 2002:83), it is not uncommon for deaf activists to refer to oralism as oppression (Corker 1998) on the grounds that “exclusive oralism denies the need of the deaf body for easily accessible visual communication” (LeMaster 2003:156). Language ideologies affect all aspects of learning and social life, and important ideological choices are made throughout a deaf individual’s life.

Senghas and Monaghan (2002) remind us that “ideas about language affect many social processes, especially education and child socialization” (Senghas and Monaghan 2002:83). For example, language policies can either enable or restrict learning (Branson and Miller, 1997; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008; Tollefson, 2008). The focus here is how participants experienced language ideology and policy at home and within broader Mexican society. Researchers and activists have established that sign language and shared experience are central to the concept of a culturally-deaf identity (Crouch 1997; Nakamura 2006; Phillips 1996; Rosen 2003; Senghas and Monaghan 2002). Indeed, learning LSM was a life-changing event for deaf participants in this study, most of whom were exposed to sign language relatively late in life. In fact, all of the participants featured in this chapter encountered LSM signing environments as adolescents and young adults.

Language socialization theory is based on widely-accepted notions that language acquisition and socialization occur naturally and spontaneously through basic human social interactions (Ochs and Schieffelin 2008; Ochs 1993; Ochs and Schieffelin 1986; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986b). The acceptance of language socialization as a tacit process in which language is a ubiquitous vehicle for “culture” positions language as central to the process of socialization. This implies that human socialization is dependent upon language, an idea I scrutinize using the LSM expressions participants use to describe their socializing experiences.

Deaf children of hearing parents present interesting challenges to language socialization theory. The family is the primary default site for language socialization, however, deaf children “cannot fully participate in the spoken language

socialization environment their parents naturally provide” (Erting and Kuntze 2008:287). Two tenets of this theory are particularly problematic for deaf children living among hearing families. First, language socialization “presents linguistic and sociocultural development as intersecting processes” (Ochs and Schieffelin 2008:5). Again, the assumption here is that language socialization occurs *as* children learn language. I ask: Do these processes intersect differently in households where children cannot access their families’ spoken language(s)? Research presented here suggests they do.

Second, language socialization theory suggests that “local socialization paradigms (together with biological capacities) organize language acquisition” (Ochs and Schieffelin 2008:5). Do local socialization paradigms and language ideologies in Mexico City work with deaf children’s biological capacities to organize language acquisition? Not necessarily. My research suggests discord between individual deaf biologies and local socialization paradigms that insisted children learn about the world through their ears. My research suggests that oralist ideology in Mexico City and medical models that reinforce hearing and speech as the only viable options did not always organize language socialization for deaf participants (see also Pfister 2017).

Consequently, deaf conceptualizations of –and experiences with– language socialization as a culturally and context-specific practice, may differ from the predominantly-hearing notions of language learning and socialization in Mexico City. In other words, language socialization in deaf communities involves competencies, orientations and interests based on knowledge constructed through signing and shared experiences among deaf people. Colloquial LSM expressions –many which did not have a local Spanish equivalent– describe deaf participants’ contrasting experiences in these two environments. This particular language use reflects how deaf people experienced oralism and underscores the importance of inclusive participation in LSM-based language socialization practices.

3 LSM expressions: I’m deaf but I’m not stupid

On a spring afternoon in April, I sat chatting with Alberto, the school-appointed interpreter, as we waited for Hilda, the preschool teacher with whom I had scheduled an interview that day. I am an American anthropologist who has lived, taught and researched in Mexico for many years. I am hearing, fluent in Spanish and a conversationally-proficient (but not fluent) LSM signer. Throughout my ethnographic fieldwork (in 2012-13 and again in 2018), I hired Alberto to interpret

semi-structured interviews with deaf participants like Hilda. Alberto had interpreted at IPPLIAP for many years, had an easy rapport with most of the IPPLIAP teachers and the students adored him. He took a keen interest in my investigation and we often talked through research questions, emergent themes and interview strategies together. As such, he became an important informant as well as a dear friend. As we waited for Hilda to finish her teaching-related duties, Alberto spoke fondly and respectfully about her, telling me that if I *really* wanted to learn LSM, *she* was the expert. Alberto, like others that knew Hilda, described her LSM proficiency and style as beautiful, expressive, genuine and pure.

Some deaf participants in this study, like Hilda, could not oralize and many preferred not to use Spanish. Others used Spanish and LSM proficiently. Marcela, for example, was recognized in the IPPLIAP community as a deaf, signing teacher who was also fluent in Spanish. In other words, she was widely regarded as the faculty member at the opposite end of the bilingual spectrum from Hilda. Within the IPPLIAP community, Hilda's mastery of LSM was a characteristic her acquaintances and colleagues celebrated, while Marcela's competency in Spanish was similarly admired. Though their capacities for using Spanish and LSM differed, all deaf participants in this study lived in predominantly hearing environments and regularly encountered societal expectations to use oral and written Spanish.

Interviews with participants about language and communication were often emotional. My interview with Hilda was intensely evocative. When I asked if her family used LSM when she was growing up, she described her childhood:

No, my family didn't use LSM. It has always been with gestures, with mimicry, we've always tried to understand each other that way: 'come here, go there, this, or that' ... they weren't that involved with me... they always left me for last, there was never good communication between myself and my family. They would just say, 'oh, you're okay, we'll just leave you there'. And, in that way, you continue to grow up without real communication, without signs ...

I didn't really understand well what was happening around me, and that was a problem until I was 21 years old. That's when I finally said, 'Enough! I've had enough! Now, I'm an adult and I'll make my own decisions!' I told them. I got myself an LSM interpreter, and I went to my mother and my father, I said, 'come here, all of you, come here!' I brought all of my family together and had them sitting all together at the table, and they wondered, 'ok, but why?'

And then the interpreter told them for me, 'I'm sorry that I had to bring an interpreter to do this, but I have to speak with you all – are you in agreement?' 'yes, of course' they said. And my family was sitting there and we were all there together at the table. And I told them, 'do you all remember that when I was little, you gave all that attention to everyone, but you never paid attention to me? You let me grow up alone until I was 21 years old. Now, now I'm tired of you all, always *BLA BLA BLA* and I'm just sitting there, bored. I always see that

you're laughing at things that I don't understand. You're talking about things and I don't understand. This has always bothered me and I've never been able to express it.'

My father, he just sat there quietly. He didn't say a thing. My brothers and sisters, everyone was quiet. But, as it turned out, they realized that I wasn't stupid. I'm deaf, but I'm not stupid. I said, 'I'm making you aware of everything that has happened. I want you to know that I've always seen that you were talking when, obviously, I couldn't speak. I cannot hear you. I cannot hear what you're saying. However, I can understand everything you want to say if it's in signs; anything at all that you wish to tell me.' 'Oh yes.' They said. 'We're sorry. The communication has always been difficult with you. We've always tried to speak to you orally'. And I said, 'But, honestly, I simply cannot communicate orally. I've never been able to. I cannot do it.'

Hilda described herself as profoundly deaf, explaining an inability to access oral information in the hearing environment of her childhood home. Hilda's narrative demonstrates several aspects of her experiences with language ideology. She alludes to the subjective value placed on modality and language, explaining that she equated "real communication" with "signs" (sign language) where her family did not. Within the immediate context of her family, different languages were employed, but the language valued by the majority (Spanish) was almost-entirely unavailable to her. Therefore, "good communication", as Hilda conceptualized it, did not exist at home.

Her narrative reveals the consequential isolation and anger resulting from her inability to communicate adequately with her family. Her experiences illustrate how mismatched value hindered social exchanges and access to information. Essentially, the oral environment of her family did not provide a language socialization experience in which Hilda could fully participate. We glimpse the courage it must have taken for her to exercise agency to adopt LSM as her primary language and challenge her family's implicit ideological stance by initiating interpreted communication at home. She recognizes this act is a culminating flash-point when she says, "Enough! I've had enough! Now, I'm an adult and I'll make my own decisions!". She also later apologizes to her family for having to bring an interpreter, which suggests her own internalization of the oralist expectations within her home while also solidifying her departure from those expectations.

Hilda sensed her family thought she was 'stupid' because she could not communicate with them in their preferred modality and language. She therefore addresses the stigmatization related to unreliable access to -and command of- Spanish. Mexican oralist approaches contribute to this stigma by idealizing "model" deaf students -those able to master oralization- like Marcela (mentioned

earlier) and Carolina (discussed later)¹. Hiring an interpreter to communicate her thoughts allowed her to clarify to her family that she was “deaf, but not stupid”. Indeed, throughout my research, I frequently heard deaf participants repeating iterations of the phrase “I’m deaf, but I’m not stupid”. For example, one participant, the hard-of-hearing mother of a deaf IPPLIAP student, recalled frustrating searches for employment and multiple failed attempts to secure a job in predominantly-hearing environments. She explained that she was qualified but never given a chance to prove her worth, which she attributed to hearing people’s pre-conceptions. In our interview, she repeated emphatically, “I’m deaf, but I’m not stupid!”, as she described the humiliation this caused.

Hilda’s narrative reveals an epistemological counter-narrative to oralism. She expresses in no uncertain terms that Spanish language (and oral modalities) were not the only (or best) forms of communication when she explains to her family, “I can understand everything you want to say if it’s in signs”. With this simple statement, Hilda used her experience to 1) explain to her family that sign language is capable of communicating complex thoughts and emotion and 2) state unequivocally that she *needed* sign language. Hilda’s story reveals how oralist ideologies preclude deaf children from participation in important, early language socialization processes and that the consequences of this exclusion can ensue throughout the life course.

4 BLA BLA BLA

In the above narrative, Hilda recalled how her profound deafness presented a barrier to understanding when her family spoke to her — or to one another — in Spanish. To describe the effect of this, she used an LSM expression *BLA BLA BLA*, a colloquialism used frequently among LSM signers in the IPPLIAP community to quickly describe a common experience among deaf people: the inability to capture spoken words around them. The gloss *BLA BLA BLA* (in English, ‘blah blah blah’), or nonsense words, represented the meaninglessness of speech that was inaccessible to the deaf individual. The sign for *BLA BLA BLA* was created with flat, mostly-horizontal fingers (first through fourth fingers together) and a hand movement (top fingers moving toward thumb) to represent a mouth

¹ The author recognizes the many factors associated with deaf individuals’ capacity for learning oral language. Participants in this study held up as oralist “success stories”, like Carolina, were able to reflect on the limitations of this approach and nonetheless preferred signing to oralization. See Pfister 2017 for more discussion.

opening and closing during oral speech. This hand movement, which symbolized a hearing person speaking to (or around) a deaf person, was used in conjunction with a range of facial expressions corresponding to the deaf person's reaction to the speech sounds (confusion, irritation, or boredom, for example). I saw this expression used to describe hearing people's speech in two ways: either as speech intended for the deaf person (with hand movements toward them), or to illustrate deaf people's experiences in hearing environments as hearing people spoke in their proximity (with hand movements in a variety of directions to depict speech that was not necessarily directed at the deaf person).

Hilda and Carolina (below) both used the LSM expression *BLA BLA BLA* to reference and highlight a salient shared experience in oral environments: an inability to access spoken language and the subsequent loss of information. It is important to note that the meaning of the LSM expression *BLA BLA BLA* differs significantly from the meaning of the spoken Spanish and English expressions 'bla bla bla' (and 'blah blah blah' respectively). Hearing interlocutors in both languages typically use 'bla bla bla' to quickly summarize or skim past something predictable, uninteresting, redundant, or otherwise deemed unworthy of explanation or detail. For example, "I saw him yesterday and explained again what we needed to do: review the report, submit it, blah, blah, blah". Figure 1, an image of a sign outside a women's restroom, depicts a woman in traditional dress with a dialogue bubble repeating "Bla, bla, bla...". The men's sign at the same restaurant depicted a male cartoon whose dialogue bubble read "Bla" only once. By using gender stereotypes, these cartoons reiterate hearing people's understandings of the Spanish phrase *Bla Bla Bla* as representative of predictable or redundant speech. The LSM expression *BLA BLA BLA*, however, has a contrasting meaning. It specifically references things that are sensorally inaccessible to deaf individuals. In LSM, it references things beyond the user's grasp, the unfamiliar and the unintelligible.



Figure 1. A painting outside a women’s bathroom in Tepoztlán, Mexico.

In other words, attention to the distinct meanings of these two sayings (in LSM vs. Spanish) reveals two very different realities. The auditory information that is so prevalent and readily accessible to hearing people through spoken language is a restrictive experience for deaf people who do not have access to the dominant oral language. Highlighting and comparing the meanings of the spoken expression “bla bla bla” and the LSM expression interpreted as *BLA BLA BLA*, reveals an imperative consequence of language ideology: *language availability*. The juxtaposing meanings portray hearing people as having virtually unlimited access to information and deaf people as hindered by restricted access to information. The very existence of these expressions lends insight into how language –and specifically the process of language socialization– functions to recognize, circulate and reaffirm shared experience and mutual understanding. The LSM expression *BLA BLA BLA* underscores the ways information is dependent upon modality, and that modalities are valued unequally and disproportionately accessible.

The LSM expression *BLA BLA BLA* also signals the ubiquity of oralist language ideology in Mexican society. It references the dependency of deaf people on visual communicative modes for information while simultaneously exposing oral environments experienced as insensitive to, or dismissive of, specific communicative needs. Carolina, another deaf teacher at IPPLIAP, also used the LSM expression *BLA BLA BLA* when describing her own differing language socialization experiences. In the passage below, she describes how LSM facilitated her

access to information and allowed her to participate more inclusively in social interaction, the crucial foundation of language socialization. Here, she described how she depended upon hearing people for explanations.

With my friends, sometimes talking with hearing people, we could only talk about things in a limited way (*cosas muy pequeñas, muy cortas*), and sometimes hearing people were always too busy to explain things. So, it would seem like everyone in the world was always *BLA BLA BLA*. And when I would ask, ‘Hey, what did he say?’ It was always, ‘Oh, forget it, it wasn’t anything’ or they would only describe it briefly. And I was always losing information. They never told me *exactly* what *they* were seeing and saying.

So later, when I began to see with signs and with an interpreter, then I could finally understand all the information. At times, it’s like there’s a barrier that doesn’t allow you to access the information that is in the voice. Hearing people, they’re always *BLA BLA BLA*. But, on the other hand, in signs, the information abounds and the flow of information is everywhere around you. At last, you can see it.

Hilda and Carolina’s narratives illustrate their observations of how LSM was not valued on par with oral Spanish. They describe alienation from inclusive participation in social networks of friends and family and frustration regarding limited access to information. Carolina conceptualized information in hearing environments as being ‘in the voice’, a medium accessible to her in a very limited way. Keeping in mind that d/Deaf people fall along a spectrum with regard to language capacities and residual hearing, Carolina was more bilingual than Hilda. Like Hilda, she learned LSM late in life (in her early twenties), but graduated from hearing schools and even attended a hearing university for a brief time. In other words, she could navigate hearing contexts using Spanish and oralization (where Hilda stated she could not). Despite Carolina’s relative proficiency in Spanish, she nonetheless describes the inconveniences commonly experienced by deaf participants in oral environments: dependency upon hearing people, incomplete or partial information, and limited ability to participate. Carolina describes repeated experiences with abbreviated, second-hand summaries and an inability to consistently and satisfactorily engage directly with information contained ‘in the voice’. In signing environments, however, she was able to connect to information because it was immediately, visually available. She aptly described this time as when she ‘began to see with signs’.

Carolina also describes how her social position changed between oral and signing environments. Using LSM, Carolina no longer depended on others to relay incomplete information and this freed her from the discontentment associated with missing information ‘in the voice’. Her narrative illustrates an important link between accessibility of information and increased autonomy and agency. In contexts where the ‘information abounds’, she was self-reliant,

independent and could freely participate in the interchange. In other words, signing enabled her to interact differently, thereby changing the circumstances of language socialization.

The narratives of Hilda and Carolina illustrate how they both navigated between two distinct language environments each with a different set of expectations and opportunities for learning and participation. The capacity to interact and reciprocate in the process of language socialization, in turn, impacted their social identities. In fact, the mutual nature of interactions is perhaps the most crucial component of the language socialization process because “socialization is an interactive process” where the individual “is not a passive recipient of sociocultural knowledge but rather an active contributor to the meaning and outcome of interactions with other members of a social group” (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a:165). Language socialization is therefore dependent upon interactivity because “the interactions are the means through which social identities are constructed and socialized” (Ochs 1993:301).

LSM and signing communities granted more autonomous and interactive access to social life and therefore provided a more authentic and inclusive opportunity for language socialization. LSM became the mechanism for social identification along the concept of Wrigley’s (1996) “deaf citizenship” which also emphasizes process, interaction and “social exchange of recognition produced through signing” (Wrigley 1996:104). In contrast to LSM signing communities, the Spanish-speaking environment did not guarantee natural opportunities for deaf participation and therefore did not meet the defining criteria of language socialization described by Schieffelin and Ochs (1986a and 1986b), including ubiquity, interactivity and natural occurrence.

5 **Mente Negra vs. mas claro & cerebro esponjoso vs. mente de piedra**

Fabus² (a pseudonym), another deaf teacher at IPPLIAP, was well-known for her jovial and friendly personality among students and teachers. She was an IPPLIAP alumna, used LSM expressively and oralized Spanish confidently. I interviewed Fabus relatively late in my stay at IPPLIAP, so by the time we sat down for our

² “Fabus” requested I use this pseudonym, but she gave explicit permission to use her image for my research (Figure 2). The other participants in this chapter, and the school, gave explicit consent for me to use their names.

interview, I was familiar with some of the LSM expressions in circulation among the IPPLIAP community and was interested in learning more about them. During our interview, Fabus used many LSM expressions, which prompted me to ask her to explain some in more detail. Fabus learned LSM as an adolescent girl and had an older deaf brother who never learned sign language. As she described her childhood and language experiences, she used the LSM expression, *MENTE DE PIEDRA* (mind of stone, see Figure 2) to talk about life before learning LSM³. I asked her to describe the significance of the expression and she elaborated this way:

MENTE DE PIEDRA (mind of stone), I believe it means that if you throw water on a stone, it doesn't stick. It doesn't do anything, nothing enters. The rock is going to stay the same no matter what. And what does the water represent? The water is like the words and the rock is the brain. They don't stick – they fall onto it, but just keep going. On the other hand, with a *CEREBRO ESPONJOSO* (spongy brain), you can add words like water and they are absorbed. It's like that.



Figure 2. Fabus signing *PIEDRA* (from the expression for *MENTE DE PIEDRA*, or mind of stone)

Fabus's description of these two juxtaposing expressions *MENTE DE PIEDRA* and *CEREBRO ESPONJOSO* depicts the absence and presence of sign language through visual metaphor – ultimately exposing the importance of LSM in the lives of deaf people. She used the sign *MENTE DE PIEDRA* to depict a sub-opti-

³ Specifically, Fabus used the expression *MENTE DE PIEDRA* (mind of stone) to refer to her deaf brother who did not use sign language. She believed this made social interactions, communication and understanding difficult for him.

mal state of mind for learning because information ‘doesn’t stick’ and ‘nothing enters’. *CEREBRO ESPONJOSO*, its metaphorical opposite, references a state when someone is capable of learning and describes the natural acquisition of language and information as absorption. The two states of mind represent differing exposure to language modality (oral vs. signed) and language socialization as the fundamental, default mechanism for learning.

Fabus conceptualized a *MENTE DE PIEDRA* that ‘stay[s] the same no matter what’. Her description alludes to the lack of development and personal freedoms people who do not learn sign language (like her brother) experience. Fabus’s narrative suggests that she associated sign language with mental agility and the opportunity to engage with the world through learning. This description also corresponded with stories from other LSM signers I met who described unparalleled personal growth and social fulfillment upon acquisition of LSM and through sign-based language socialization.

These expressions, and the explanation Fabus provided, were congruent with the lexicon of other deaf participants who often used the sign *ABSORBAR*, or absorb, to describe the naturalized and spontaneous process of LSM-based learning. The sign *ABSORBAR*, in this context, was made with one hand opening and closing above the head to evoke the brain receiving something through contact. Deaf participants often used *ABSORBAR* to describe how quickly they were able to learn LSM, especially when contrasted with the arduous process of oral education and expectations for communication in hearing environments. IPPLIAP teachers and parents also used the sign *ABSORBAR* to describe how students absorbed concepts quickly when they were presented in LSM. Fabus’s description provides rich insight into these visual metaphors and further highlights how participants value LSM in their learning and personal development.

Fabus’s colorful descriptions motivated me to ask her about other LSM expressions, especially those that described pre-LSM life or confusion in predominantly-hearing environments. She then mentioned several other LSM expressions I had seen in circulation among deaf participants, including *MENTE NEGRA* (black mind), *MENTE EN BLANCO* (mind in white), *MENTE VACIA* (empty brain). Each was used to depict oral situations in which information and understanding were restricted.

When I asked Fabus to elaborate on the significance of *MENTE NEGRA* (black mind), she explained it this way:

Let’s see, here’s an example: Out in the universe, everything is dark. If you can, imagine an entire black universe. Like a vacuum. Someplace where there aren’t any stars, there is nothing in that space. Everything is dead. Empty. So, it’s NEGRO (black).

MENTE NEGRA was an LSM expression that very clearly lends insight into the isolation deaf participants experienced without access to a linguistic context to fully understand what was happening around them. I saw deaf participants use this expression to depict feeling bored or left out. Many deaf participants used this expression when recalling their lives prior to learning to LSM. For example, in Pfister et al. (2014), I describe how Leo, an IPPLIAP student, recalled experiencing *MENTE NEGRA* while attending a hearing primary school. He then contrasted this dark time to his arrival at IPPLIAP, where he learned LSM and communicated freely in a signing community, by using the LSM sign for “*MÁS CLARO*” (clearer or lighter). Again, the juxtaposition of adjectives (dark vs. light) describe two very different language socialization experiences: oral environments are described as dark and isolated while LSM presented a clearer, more inclusive and enlightening socialization experience.

6 Conclusions

Language and culture are interdependent and inseparable. My research assumes a position in which language is understood as “practice rather than product” (Hoffmann-Dilloway 2016:12). Through attention to the ways participants understand, use, and reproduce meaning through these LSM expressions, we are reminded that language indexes context and sociality (Ochs 1990) and that language “is both sensitive to and constructive of culture” (Crago 1992). The expressions in this chapter reference the competencies, orientation and social reciprocity that deaf people experience through participation in a signing community and sign-based language socialization. The frequent use of these LSM expressions in Mexico City, and their wide relatability among deaf Mexicans, suggest these linguistic forms have socializing value in and of themselves because they establish, justify and reinforce the importance of LSM and early sign-based language socialization. The insights they reveal demand our attention and should inspire us to elevate the importance of language socialization and the right to accessible language for all.

The LSM expressions presented in this chapter reveal two important aspects of deaf life in Mexico City: 1) they point to deaf people’s implicit awareness of oralist language ideology in Mexico City and describe the impacts of that specific ideology, and 2) they underscore the importance of LSM, signing communities, and sign-based language socialization. Deaf participants were members of a linguistic minority within the broader context of Mexico City, and most spent significant amounts of time in the predominantly-oral environments of their families

and beyond. In these environments, deaf participants were routinely reminded that mainstream Mexican society valued oral Spanish over sign language.

The predominant paradigm in Mexico is a medicalized stance on deafness; parents of deaf children told me about doctors and medical professionals who routinely warned against allowing their children to learn sign language (see Pfister 2017 and Pfister and Vindrola-Padros 2018 for more discussion). Doctors' discouragement of sign language affected how and when deaf young people learned language and how they experienced language socialization. Kathryn Woolard reminds us that "ideologies of language are not about language alone. Rather, they envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality and to epistemology. Through such linkages, they underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very notion of the person and the social group" (1998, 3). By devaluing sign language, the vehicle by which deaf people could most appropriately participate in social life, the status of deaf people in Mexico City was compromised, and families with deaf children experienced stigma in multiple forms.

Ultimately, the LSM expressions discussed in this chapter illustrate how deaf people were unable to experience the reciprocity of language socialization in predominantly-hearing, non-signing environments. The related concepts unveil shared experiences among members of this particular community – including awareness that varying ability to hear and fully understand Spanish affected deaf people's capacity to receive information from hearing family members, peers, teachers, and the community at large. LSM expressions such as *BLA, BLA, BLA*, *MENTE NEGRA*, and *MENTE DE PIEDRA* describe from the emic, or insider, perspective, the frustration and social isolation deaf people experienced when they could not sufficiently rely on oral modalities to communicate and participate. Contrasting LSM expressions such as *CEREBRO ESPONJOSO* and *MÁS CLARO* spoke to the counter-experience: acquiring LSM and finding a signing community of practice providing a natural, participatory and spontaneous space for language socialization to occur.

LSM gives deaf children and adults the means to orient themselves socially. Communication depends upon positioning and status, or the individual's ability to orient themselves "to each other and to their social worlds" (Hanks 1996:229). The fundamental goal of language socialization is "children and other novices develop(ing) their abilities to achieve ... mutuality of orientation with others" (Garrett and Baquedano-Lopez 2000:345). However, most oral environments left deaf participants unable to adequately orient themselves in social contexts. The ability of an individual to position themselves for participation is essential because the objective of language socialization is access to "the knowledge, orientations, and practices that enable (children or other novices) to participate

effectively and appropriately in the social life of a particular community” (Garrett and Baquedano-Lopez 2000:339). LSM expressions remind us of the startling consequences of oralist ideology for deaf children: if they miss out on early language socialization opportunities, they may also miss key knowledge for group participation and potentially for wellbeing and even survival.

The existence of the LSM expressions relayed here, and their vast circulation within this community, suggests that the understandings they reference were common experiences among deaf Mexicans. In other words, these LSM expressions themselves become important indicators of experience. These findings support Kermit’s (2009) ideas noting that “as all languages are living memories reflecting the history of those who speak the language, it is interesting to note that many signs reflect the specific experience of being deaf, both socially and physically” (Kermit 2009:171). This chapter presents concrete linguistic forms and understandings to substantiate the claim that language is a way of sharing “the specific experience of being deaf” (Kermit 2009:171). By drawing our attention to a living language as described by its users, we also access the collective understandings, concerns and priorities of this community.

References

- Branson, Jan, and Don Miller. 1997. National sign languages and language policies. In *Encyclopedia of language and education*, 89–98. New York: Springer Publishing.
- Corker, Mairian. 1998. *Deaf and disabled, or deafness disabled? Towards a human rights perspective*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Crago, Martha B. 1992. Ethnography and language socialization: A cross-cultural perspective. *Topics in Language Disorders* 12(3). 28–39.
- Crouch, Robert A. 1997. Letting the deaf be deaf: Reconsidering the use of cochlear implants in prelingually deaf children. *The Hastings Center Report* 27(4). 14–21.
- Erting, Carol J., and Marlon Kuntze. 2008. Language socialization in deaf communities. In Patricia A. Duff, Nancy H. Hornberger (eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education*. 2nd edn. Vol. 8, 287–300. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer Science + Business Media.
- Garrett, Paul B., and Patricia Baquedano-López. 2002. Language socialization: Reproduction and continuity, transformation and change. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31(1). 339–361.
- Hanks, William F. 1996. *Language & communicative practices*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Hoffmann-Dilloway. 2016. *Signing and belonging in Nepal*. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press.
- Kermit, Patrick. 2009. Deaf or deaf? Questioning alleged antinomies in the bioethical discourses on cochlear implantation and suggesting an alternative approach to d/Deafness. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* 11(2). 159–174.
- LeMaster, Barbara, and Leila Monaghan. 2004. Variation in sign languages. In Alessandro Duranti (ed.), *Companion to linguistic anthropology*, 141–158. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

- Nakamura, Karen. 2006. *Deaf in Japan: Signing and the politics of identity*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Ochs, Elinor. 1993. Constructing social identity: A language socialization perspective. *Research on language and social interaction* 26(3). 287–306.
- Ochs, Elinor. 1990. Indexicality and socialization. In James W. Stigler, Richard A. Schweder, Gilbert Herdt (eds.), *Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative human development*, 287–308. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ochs, Elinor, and Bambi Scheffelin. 2008. Language socialization: An historical overview. In Patricia A. Duff, Nancy H. Hornberger (eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education*. 2nd edn. Vol. 8, 3–15. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer Science + Business Media.
- Pfister, Anne E. 2018. Predicament and Pilgrimage: Hearing families of deaf children in Mexico City. *Medical Anthropology: Cross-Cultural Studies in Health and Illness* 38(3). 195–209.
- Pfister, Anne E. 2017. Forbidden signs: Language socialization and therapeutic approaches to language in Mexico. *Ethos* 45(1). 139–161.
- Pfister, Anne E. and Cecilia Vindrola-Padros. 2018. Fluid and Mobile Identities: Travel, Imaginaries, and Practices of Caregiving among Families of Deaf Children in Mexico City. In Cecilia Vindrola-Padros, Ginger A. Johnson, Anne E. Pfister (eds.), *Healthcare in Motion: Immobilities in Health Service Delivery and Access*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Pfister, Anne, Cecilia Vindrola-Padros, and Ginger A. Johnson. 2014. Together, we can show you: Using participant-generated visual data in collaborative Research. *Collaborative anthropologies* 7(1). 26–49.
- Phillips, Barbara A. 1996. Bringing Culture to the Forefront: Formulating Diagnostic Impressions of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing People at Times of Medical Crisis. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 27(2): 137-144.
- Rosen, R. S. 2003. Jargons for deafness as institutional constructions of the deaf body. *Disability & society* 18(7). 921–934.
- Schieffelin, Bambi B., and Elinor Ochs. 1986a. Language socialization. *Annual review of anthropology* 15(1). 163–191.
- Schieffelin, Bambi B., and Elinor Ochs. 1986b. *Studies in the social and cultural foundations of language, No. 3. Language socialization across cultures*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Senghas, Richard J., and Leila Monaghan. 2002. Signs of their times: Deaf communities and the culture of language. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31: 69–97.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove. 2008. Human rights and language policy in education. *Encyclopedia of language and Education*. 107–20. New York: Springer Publishing.
- Tollefson, James W. 2008. Language planning in education. In *Encyclopedia of language and education*, 1–14. New York: Springer Publishing.
- Woolard, Kathryn A. 1998. Introduction: Language ideology as a field of inquiry. In Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard and Paul V. Kroskrity (eds.), *Language ideologies: Practice and theory*, 3–47. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wrigley, Owen. 1996. *The politics of deafness*. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press.

Gabrielle Hodge



The ideology of communication practices embedded in an Australian deaf/hearing dance collaboration

1 Introduction

What happens when deaf signers of Auslan and hearing non-signing speakers of English and other languages collaborate on a choreographed contemporary dance performance? How do they communicate during the development and rehearsal stages of the project, and what does the final performance look like? A curious observer might speculate that the artists would converse using Auslan and English, perhaps through signed language interpreters; occasionally writing things down, while also making recourse to gesture, movement, and lip-reading when necessary. But does this really happen, and uniformly across individuals? This chapter describes the on-the-ground communication practices that were developed during an Australian deaf/hearing contemporary dance collaboration, with the aim of furthering our understanding of how these practices are performed in everyday life.¹

Deaf people habitually draw upon multilingual, multimodal communication practices in their everyday language use, especially during interactions with non-signing people. Yet our understanding of how individual communicative repertoires manifest within specific interactions and across social networks is still developing. Scholars from disciplines such as education, anthropology and linguistics have analysed a range of everyday social acts (see Kusters, Spotti, Swanwick & Tapio, 2017, for an overview). For example, researchers have investigated sign bilingualism in the classroom (e.g. Bagga-Gupta, 2000), intra-familial interactions in communities with high rates of hereditary deafness and signed language use (e.g. Kisch, 2008; Nyst, 2012),

1 Acknowledgements: This research was supported by funding from the La Trobe University Social Research Assistance Platform and the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AH/N00924X/1). The Delta Project (www.thedeltaproject.com.au) are produced by Arts Access Victoria. All images credited to Pippa Samaya. Many thanks to Arts Access Victoria and the members of The Delta Project: Fiona Cook (Producer), Jo Dunbar and Lina Limosani (Choreographers), Anna Seymour, Elvin Lam, Amanda Lever and Luigi Vescio (Dancers), Rhian Hinkley (Video Designer), Richard Vabre (Lighting Designer and Lighting Operator), and Russell Goldsmith (Composer & Sound Designer). All artists in The Delta Project contributed to this research and were paid above award rates for their time. Thanks also to Brent Phillips, Daniel Hately and David Childs at Auslan Connections for interpreting support, and to Breda Carty, Lindsay Ferrara, Maeve McGreevy and the editors for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this chapter. Any errors are my own.

 Open Access. © 2020 Gabrielle Hodge, published by De Gruyter.  This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 License. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510090-004>

transmodal interpretation and translation practices (e.g. Adam, Carty & Stone, 2011), deaf multilingual and cross-modal practices (e.g. Tapio, 2013; Quinto-Pozos & Adam, 2013), customer/merchant exchanges (e.g. Kusters, 2017), creative collaborations involving deaf and hearing artists (e.g. Fagan Robinson, 2019), and interactions between deaf people without a common signed language (e.g. Byun, De Vos, Bradford, Zeshan & Levinson, 2017). This study takes a tangential approach by investigating the emerging setting of deaf artists collaborating with hearing artists on a creative work performed live to a mixed deaf/hearing (non) signing audience.

Here I use moments from a filmed performance of *Under My Skin*, a two-hour group discussion, one-to-one interviews and email correspondence with the artists to articulate the language ideologies embedded in the final performance. The data demonstrate how human communicative repertoires (and therefore interactions) are shaped by a range of affordances, many of which may be characterised as covertly influencing communication and language use. These include the situated context of deaf signing ecologies within complex mainstream environments, the interpersonal agency of people interacting (e.g. specific embodiments, personal beliefs, habitual communication heuristics, and history of interactions), as well as more intangible aspects of our relationships to each other and immediate physical environs. Our understanding of language ideologies depends as much on these affordances as it does on overt ideas about languages and how they are used, especially in the context of communication practices developed through interactions with members of minority language groups.

2 Communication and language ecologies

The first step in investigating the communication practices that develop between signers and non-signers is to consider the language ecologies in which these practices emerge. Signers and speakers live in richly dynamic language ecologies, in which what we understand as ‘language’ is just one of many resources available for making meaning (Bühler, 1990/1934; Parmentier, 1994; Enfield, 2009; see Moriarty Harrelson, 2017, in relation to deaf signers specifically). Varied resources (a voice, hands, physical artefacts such as paper, sand, mobile phone) and modes of communication (sign, speech, computer icons, an alphabet) may combine in different ways, the details of which are rooted in the interactions occurring in a specific time and place. For example, in Finland, signing deaf children are educated in a highly multilingual school environment, where different signed languages, spoken languages, and formal systems for representing speech on the

hands converge. In the context of learning English via online computer activities, Finnish deaf children often use fingerspelling to mediate their typing of English words. The manner of fingerspelling — such as careful or quick articulation, or negotiated with peers — depends on the specific online learning activity (Tapio, 2013). In the Western desert region of Australia, Ngaanyatjarra children may incorporate alphabetic symbols into their stories drawn in the sand, along with the more traditional iconographic drawings and objects used by adults to index and depict referents (such as humans, monsters and geographical locations) in these stories. This youth-driven contribution to established sand story practices reflects generational literacy differences (Kral & Ellis, 2008; see also J. A. Green, 2014). Even within minority language ecologies, shared resources for making meaning and modes of communication may be used in different ways by different individuals at different times.

In this sense then, a language ecology is not simply the environment in which signers and speakers act; it is the constantly emerging complex shape and history of interactions between language users and their environment (Haugen, 1972; Goodwin, 2000). Encounters between agents in an ecology are developed and maintained over various time frames, with the effect that “future interactions occur in a new and adaptive way” (Pickering, 1997: 192). These small-scale social encounters shape larger scale practices and vice versa (Agha, 2005: 12). Consequently, communicative practices and repertoires differ, both within specific interactions and across social networks (Bourdieu, 1991; Agha, 2007; see also Bernstein, 2003[1971]). As with other minority language ecologies that do not have a loud public presence and codification pathway (via online print, television, radio and institutionalized domains of use), it is the small-scale encounters especially which shape deaf communication practices (including those developed with non-signers), because this is how deaf people most often encounter signed languages (see also Snoddon, 2017). Online blogs and other filmed signed events are becoming more common, and it could be argued that specific signs or ways of signing are becoming codified by internet mediums (e.g. the ILY sign). However, this does not occur to the extent possible for majority languages such as English, the use of which prevails over time in the domains of education, medicine, and the law (see also Eades, 2008, with respect to Indigenous Australian minority languages).

The tendency for less codification of practices can be partly attributed to the quintessentially face-to-face nature of interactions involving deaf people and signed language, “a fact that may influence, and even constrain, the linguistic [i.e. communicative] system in other ways” (Johnston, 1996: 1). While video technologies such as Skype and WhatsApp facilitate communication between signers in

different geographical locations and time zones, it is not possible to ‘disembody’ signed communication into a singular, unimodal form in the way that looking away from the speaker, speaking down the telephone, or writing a letter does for spoken communication (Johnston, 1996: 7). For deaf people using a signed language, all interactions involve a continuation of visual and/or tactile access to another’s multimodal, situated context: we can see or feel the other person moving in their environment, using all the communicative resources available to them in that moment and physical space. These influences and constraints manifest, for example, in the extensive and habitual integration of three types of signs (in a neo-Peircean sense) in face-to-face discourse: conventionalized signs (e.g. the words included in a dictionary and emblematic manual gestures such as THUMBS-UP), symbolic indexicals (i.e. deictic signs that have both conventional and non-conventional elements, such as pointing actions produced with an index finger), and tokens of non-conventional signs (such as improvised and mimetic bodily enactments of people, animals, or things) (Clark, 1996; Enfield, 2009; see also Ferrara & Hodge, 2018). Compositions of these three types of signs are used to ‘tell, point and show’ during face-to-face interactions, and by extension, creative performances incorporating signed language.

Languages such as Auslan and English may therefore be considered as resources used by signers and speakers in acts of translanguaging, during which they draw on anything that is useful and available to them while engaging in social action (García, 2009; Blackledge & Creese, 2010). The kinds of resources used represent an individual’s communicative repertoire, defined as “the totality of linguistic and communicative possibilities, which are available to speakers [and signers] in specific situational contexts” (Busch, 2012: 169; see also Kusters et al. 2017). However, it is important to note that an individual’s repertoire is as much determined by the resources they do not have, in addition to the resources they do have (Busch, 2015: 14). This factor gains prominence during interactions between deaf signers and hearing non-signers, as they must actively negotiate which bits of each other’s repertoire can be used effectively (or not).

3 Communication and the labor of understanding

Central to this investigation is acknowledging the “labor of understanding” involved in communication, i.e. the work we do “to make understanding happen” (Friedner, 2016: 184). While all human communication seeks to establish common ground and achieve mutual understanding (Clark, 1996), a consequence of deafness is that one cannot take understanding for granted. Speech is often unintel-

ligible to lip-readers, others frequently cannot interpret our varied, flexible, and yet often idiosyncratic means of communicating (or assume that they do, even when they do not)². Language is often “mediated” or “brokered” by other people (Kisch, 2008; Napier & Leeson, 2016). For deaf signers, understanding and being understood may involve comparably more work than is required for *status quo* interactions between hearing speakers of heavily codified languages. This labor is integral to deaf socialities around the world, shaping the communicative practices that emerge in deaf language ecologies, and which are realised in specific interactions (E. M. Green, 2014; Friedner, 2016).

However, the labor of understanding is not simply the effort involved in comprehending individual signs and how they are composed into utterances, as the present study aims to demonstrate. It goes beyond language into the wider realm of committed intersubjectivity: the grounded experience of insightfully noticing and comprehending the myriad behaviors of another person (especially those with communicative intent), acting upon this insight empathetically, and enabling other people to do so in turn. As an ontology, it is also somewhat Janus-faced, its value dependent on both the presence and absence of acts of understanding: “as ungainliness is to grace — each seeing its essences, as absence, in the other” (Kockelman, 1999: 46). Describing the labor of understanding between signers and non-signers — and therefore realizing the value of this work to language ideologies — involves attending to both explicit and implicit ways in which we make ourselves understood, as well as the varying shades of misunderstanding (and even not-understanding) that occur (E. M. Green, 2014).

4 Performing and experiencing a deaf/hearing dance collaboration

Under My Skin is the second production from The Delta Project. It is a multimedia, multi-sensory contemporary dance performance that explores the idea of identity as a shared human experience: what we show and what we hide, and the corre-

² Most deaf signers learn signed language from peers at school or as adults in the deaf community, rather than from their primary caregivers, resulting in signing ecologies that are extremely heterogeneous (Johnston, 2004). Much of the variation we see in deaf signing ecologies can therefore be directly attributed to systemic pressures and structural inequity, especially those resulting from various hegemonic medical and educational policies and technological advancements that have shaped deaf lives throughout the twentieth century.

sponding struggle this brings. Choreographed by Jo Dunbar (deaf) and Lina Limosani (hearing), the narrative arc of the work begins with only glimpses of the four dancers entwined with each other in the darkness (Anna Seymour and Elvin Lam, both deaf, with Amanda Lever and Luigi Vescio, both hearing; see Figure 1). It is impossible to differentiate individuals clearly, and the impression of a single, alive entity comes from moving photographic images of their faces which play subtly over their bodies. Suddenly there is an explosive crack: the iceberg melts, the unity destroyed, each dancer a separate person. During the next forty minutes, the dancers are slowly unveiled: they are revealed, exposed, and ultimately realized as fully dimensional people, but only after a deeply cathartic journey that forces all to probe beneath their skin (especially where it hurts).



Figure 1. Dancers entwined in the darkness (image © Pippa Samaya).

This performance of *Under My Skin* was a profoundly moving experience. It very effectively unpacked and reflected a shared human struggle to the audience, with a distinctly deaf flavor that resonated with both signing and non-signing viewers. As a deaf signer, *Under My Skin* left me with an overwhelming sense of feeling understood. On one level, it seems impossible to grasp what made it this way. On another level, there are more tangible aspects that are open to description, such as the interaction of different semiotic elements throughout the performance, and what these say about the worlds in which signers and speakers live. These include Auslan-based choreographed movement, kinaesthetically-driven sound composition, digital video design, and the interplay of light and shadow. In the following sections, I use moments from one filmed performance of *Under My Skin*, a two-hour group discussion, one-to-one interviews and email correspondence undertaken retrospectively with the artists, to articulate the language ideologies embedded in the final performance.

5 A fertile ground where saltwater and freshwater meet

The Delta Project dance company was initially founded through a collaboration between deaf choreographer Jo Dunbar, deaf dancer Anna Seymour and hearing producer Fiona Cook at Arts Access Victoria in 2012. Together they directed the company into its current name and form. Jo, Anna and Elvin are all deaf from early childhood, belonging to hearing families, but each have different language histories. Their communicative repertoires are shaped by varied ages of signed language acquisition, and for Jo and Elvin, migration from other countries and languages. Anna and Elvin are predominantly signers, whereas Jo uses her voice often, switching between speech and sign depending on her interactions. Their vision for The Delta Project was to bring two worlds (deaf and hearing) together through visuals and sound to create a new dance aesthetic. As Anna explained in the group discussion³:

The name is significant to us: a delta is the fertile ground where saltwater and freshwater meet. We wanted to create a dance performance that merged both deaf and hearing worlds, and was accessible to everyone in the audience. We also wanted to create opportunities for ourselves as professional dancers who are deaf, to raise our game and work with leading artists in the mainstream arts sector.

The hearing artists all learned English as their first language and do not use other languages, except for Luigi and Amanda. As the hearing artists who worked most closely with the deaf dancers, both Luigi and Amanda began to learn Auslan during the development and rehearsal stages of the project. Both can now communicate (to varied extents) with Anna, Elvin and Jo using the Auslan communication practices they developed. Amanda's signing ability is such that she occasionally interpreted for Anna and Elvin during rehearsals when there was no qualified interpreter available, or when there was a last-minute cancellation, as did Jo. All the hearing artists had worked with each other before this project. Overall Jo, Lina, Anna, Elvin, Luigi and Amanda had the most face-to-face contact with each other. The social proximity of Rhian, Richard and Russell,

³ All translations from Auslan into English in this chapter were made by the deaf author (who shares deaf social networks in Melbourne), based on original or interpreted Auslan filmed during the group discussion at Arts Access Victoria on 4 April 2017, or derived from the Auslan-based movement in the performance filmed in May 2016. Some transcriptions of English were provided directly by the hearing artists in our interviews or written correspondence.

as digital video, lighting and sound composition experts, increased only during the rehearsal and performing stages, towards the end of the project.

By inviting these hearing artists to work with them over many months, the deaf artists essentially tasked themselves with birthing a new language ecology. This was one in which the local signed language (Auslan) was explicitly valued along with the ambient spoken language (Australian English), but in which the hearing artists were implicitly tasked with learning to see and do things as deaf people. In other words, everyone was required to expand their communicative repertoires and reorient their habitual communication practices to the translanguaging demands of the collaboration. Present at this birth was a team of five qualified Auslan/English interpreters working with the artists, who were described as integral to the creative process (as Anna explained, “they see and feel the pain too”). Interpreters were usually booked in teams of two: one working with Jo from the choreographer perspective, and the other working with Anna and Elvin from the dancer perspective (each role involving different actions in the theatre space). While the deaf artists are well-versed in tailoring their communicative repertoires to non-signers (by dint of being minority language signers used to doing this kind of work), the hearing artists varied in how they responded to these demands, especially with respect to communicative adaptations.

6 Managing the demands of time and space

The presence of interpreters during the development and rehearsal stages of the project made one challenge immediately apparent: the physical demands of time and space. In mainstream collaborations, the development of dance choreography typically relies on the potential for dancers to simultaneously interpret visual and auditory instructions from the choreographer(s), and respond to these instructions instantly. However, this practice does not work in an environment in which deaf signers, hearing non-signers, and interpreters are communicating in different ways while moving throughout a physical space. As it is not possible for signers to visually attend to two different things at the same time, deaf dancers cannot both watch the interpreter, and simultaneously interpret and react to the choreographer’s bodily instructions. Instead, consecutive communication practices are required during the development and rehearsal stages. Lina, the hearing choreographer, particularly struggled with this constraint on her established technical method:

As a choreographer, I vibrate on quite a fast level: I think fast, I see things quickly, and I react immediately. This pace was not so easy for me to work at during this project. Having to rely on a third party, the interpreters, to pass on information was a new experience for me. This process forced me to be patient, and ‘slow down’, as the speed at which I would speak and demonstrate was difficult for the interpreters to keep up with, and therefore unable to pass on the information to the deaf artists clearly...Some interpreters interpret words differently, so there were moments when directions were not explained as accurately as I had desired. Information would get missed for the deaf artists simply because they are constantly having to draw their focus between the interpreter and myself, especially when I was demonstrating physical instructions or movement.

Implicit in Lina’s comments are two beliefs that had significant impact on the evolution of the project. Firstly, the belief that her role as a mainstream professional choreographer was to mentor the deaf artists ‘up to the level’ of the hearing dancers and hearing ways of doing dance. This belief was shaped by her invited collaboration with Jo, who explicitly sought a mentor in contemporary dance choreography and with whom she worked equitably together outside of the studio. Yet it also contradicts other aims expressed by the deaf artists, which were to draw from both established practices and their own embodied ways of being to develop a new way of doing dance (see §5). Secondly, the belief that there are simply two languages at play, that most instruction would be unidirectional (from English into Auslan), at least during the development of dance choreography, and that the interpreters were mostly responsible for doing this mediation work (even if their interpretation was sometimes not accurate enough). Both beliefs point to a more general confusion about the effects of different bodies — deaf and hearing — on a space. This aspect of interpersonal relations is familiar to many signers, but is typically not known to hearing non-signers until they experience some embodied insight into what it might be like to be deaf and use a signed language (Kolb, 2016).

When Lina was too fast for the interpreters, Anna and Elvin missed out on crucial instructions, resulting in the emergence of their deafness as a barrier during these interactions. Luigi and Amanda tried to pass on information where they could, but the speed of the process made this difficult. Even if an instruction was intended only for themselves, they would feel guilty that this information was not accessible to everyone. Some of these issues were alleviated by pairing each deaf dancer with a hearing dancer as a duet, so that the direction and interpretation of creative development tasks were less likely to be misinterpreted. Luigi and Amanda also developed a practice of taking time to summarise after rehearsals, thus showing a more nuanced understanding of the effects of deaf and hearing bodies in space. However, these acts were essentially compromises to the temporal and spatial demands required for the complicated languaging undertaken

in the studio, rather than the equitable adaptations originally envisioned by the deaf artists. As such, their combined effect is the continued presence of awkward — even painful — memories of existential not-understanding. These memories remain a sore point for the deaf artists.

Interestingly, when interpreters cancelled or rescheduled at short notice, the tension between compromise and adaptation abated. Occasionally Amanda or Jo would interpret for Anna and Elvin, but generally these circumstances forced the non-signing artists to communicate directly with the deaf artists. Suddenly, it was necessary for them to consider how to communicate visually and consecutively (typically via a mix of newly-acquired Auslan signs, English mouthing, pantomime and bodily demonstrations of dance movements) — an action that arguably depends upon noticing more, feeling more, because the comfort of using one's default language is removed. All the artists agreed this improved their overall group bond over time.

Indeed, the deaf dancers observed that while interpreters are vital to facilitating communication, their presence can sometimes create a barrier between signers and non-signers. The presence of interpreters can perpetuate resistance to changing one's communicative repertoire, perhaps by confirming existing beliefs about languages and how they work, while their absence can promote change, resulting in more effective adaptations. This observation suggests that in situations where interpreters are used, it may be useful to actively create opportunities for deaf/hearing interaction both with and without the presence of interpreters. It also points to the value of direct communication for the labor of understanding — at the very least because it facilitates comprehension of the influence of deafness on the spatial and temporal unfolding of interactions, which are markedly different to the customs of those who hear (see also E. M. Green 2015, with respect to interactions between deaf signers). In turn, this increases one's commitment to understanding others' ways of being, and how they are realized in specific interactions.

7 Managing the needs of other people

The physical demands of time and space may be compounded by other factors, such as the varied needs of other people, which often compete with our own. In this case, other professional artists who were expected to contribute to the development of the work. During technical rehearsals, for example, the dancers were required to simply stand on the stage to enable testing of visual effects by Rhian, Richard and Russell. Sometimes this entailed darkness. This was problematic for the deaf artists, who consequently negotiated for there to be some

lighting so they could see their interpreters. In turn, the interpreters used the torch function on their phone to shine light onto each other, or asked another dancer to direct light onto their signing. In cases where total darkness was required, interpreters were excluded from the space entirely. The work of communicating intent then fell to Amanda and Luigi, who could be on stage close to Anna and Elvin, and provide brief updates through physical movement. For this practice to be effective (and not disabling), an enhanced level of trust between individuals is required.

As Jo uses both signed and spoken communication practices, she was often perceived as mediator between the signers and non-signers, despite also needing mediating for herself. For example, she would gather ideas from the hearing artists and take them to the deaf artists, then return with their input. However, some artists observed that the flexibility to either speak or sign can create complications, especially when non-signers forget that being able to speak does not necessarily mean one can hear, or when the physical environment changes quickly. As a choreographer who sometimes observed rehearsals from the stalls, Jo also experienced an additional challenge when seated in the stalls facing the dancers (and therefore the other deaf people) on the stage. This meant she was sometimes facing in the same direction as interpreters, rather than opposite them and in view of their signing. At the same time, she could not visually monitor the faces of the hearing artists seated beside or behind her, because all would be attending to the stage in front of them.

Occasionally a hearing artist would move nearer to Jo to relay information, but mostly Jo depended on previous hours spent with Lina discussing the work, developing the choreography and putting the pieces together. This meant Jo often knew what Lina was working on with the dancers, and therefore did not always require interpretation. Indeed, it was sometimes more beneficial for Jo as a choreographer to instead sit where she could watch the dancers on stage and piece together their movements. Regardless, Jo commented these situations did force a choice about which was more important: watching the movements or seeing the words being spoken or interpreted into Auslan. It was not possible for her to achieve both at the same time in the way the hearing artists were able to do. One consequence was that the hearing artists could take up a stronger position in the theatre space. It is a further question (beyond the scope of this chapter) whether this translated to a stronger position for hearing members of the audience as well. Overall, this situation demonstrates the ways in which our own, important needs can compete with the multi-layered needs of other people interacting within the same space, and the isolation it is possible to experience, even when surrounded by other people like ourselves.

Some artists interpreted pressures such as time constraints as resulting from the technical demands of the production more generally and the presence of strong creative visions — which would be occurring even if all the artists were hearing. In these cases, misunderstandings and moments of not-understanding were attributed to factors other than the use of signing or speaking, i.e. factors unrelated to deafness or deaf communication practices. These included differences in creative vision and personal preferences for how the production should unfold. This demonstrates how communicative intent from one source can be interpreted in different ways by different targets: deaf artists may experience the pressures of time and space as barriers to their communication needs, whereas hearing artists — whose communicative mobility is not as constrained by these pressures — may interpret the same as barriers to their professional desires. Regardless of how these acts are interpreted, both arrive at the same end: with the non-realization of their creative design in the performance, another manifestation of not-understanding.

The communication practices described above emerged in response to the constraints shaped by time, space and people that influence all face-to-face interactions, but which are exacerbated during interactions between signing and non-signing people. With respect to deaf language ecologies, if time is limited for some reason, deaf individuals may feel obliged to sacrifice some or all their access to communication. In this way, time constraints can especially contribute to the exclusion of deaf ecological norms from a space, such as the necessity of attending to one thing at a time. This can result in deaf individuals feeling like they are rushed through an interaction they do not understand. In turn, this can precipitate embodied memories of all the varied disabling interactions that constitute our shared history of deafness. The effects of emotion on the communication practices described here are explored in the next section.

8 The emotional resonance of (not)understanding

Not long after the explosive cracking at the start of the performance, the dancers reappear in filtered light with their faces bound in white tape (Figure 2). Dancing in unison with Luigi and Amanda, Anna moves to the front of the stage, her face and mouth still hidden. Taking short, gasping breaths held in suddenly until she is unable to breathe, Anna produces quick, bodily movements (derived from conventionalized Auslan signs) to tell us she is surrounded by people and cannot breathe. Ripping the tape from her face, she repeats her movements — enabling

clearer identification of individual signs such as PEOPLE⁴, AROUND-ME⁵, CANNOT⁶, BREATHE⁷, HOLD-IN⁸ — once her face is revealed (Figure 3). The tape sticks to her neck. Anna has something to say, but expresses it as if she has not been allowed to. “What the hell am I doing here?”, she signs. “I’m here alone. There are people here I’ve known a while, but do we go deep? No.” She is distressed.



Figure 2. Dancers bound in white (image © Pippa Samaya).



Figure 3. Anna talks to us (image © Pippa Samaya).

The role of affect and emotion in communication is often avoided in the scholarly literature, yet they are integral to the “powerful engines of social life” (Enfield & Levinson, 2006), particularly regarding the symbolic expression of lived experience (Du Bois & Kärkkäinen, 2012; see also Busch, 2015). As finely choreographed dance, the Auslan-based movements are too stylized and abstracted from everyday Auslan to be understood as regular conversation, yet several signing and non-signing viewers later observed (in the foyer of the theatre, after the show) that they somehow understood the intent of this expression, and indeed, identified with it. By creating the Auslan-based movement, then removing her mask to show her face, then repeating the movement, Anna effectively expresses an emotional intent that is not contingent on comprehending the signing as Auslan utterance — although the perception of Auslan signs does create a sense of self-identification for signers who are watching. Instead, it is the sequential unfolding and unified semiotic composition of these acts which enables a global understanding of her embodied expression, with the less language-like elements providing the

4 <http://www.auslan.org.au/dictionary/words/people-1.html>

5 <http://www.auslan.org.au/dictionary/words/environment-2.html>

6 <http://www.auslan.org.au/dictionary/words/cannot-1.html>

7 <http://www.auslan.org.au/dictionary/words/breathe-1.html>

8 <http://www.auslan.org.au/dictionary/words/hold-1.html>

emotional power. It is one thing to say you cannot breathe; it is another thing altogether to show someone what this looks like.

The organisation of the micro-moments within this dance sequence can be understood in the wider context of communicative moves, or turns, which are the “single, complete pushing forward of an interactional sequence by means of making some relevant social action recognizable” (Enfield, 2009: 11). We are watching Anna, therefore we are interacting with her, as she finds ways for us to recognise her communicative intent using the range of means at her disposal. This instance involves a combination of Auslan-derived dance with the white tape masking her face in a certain way, all produced in the specific setting of the darkened stage with other dancers in physical proximity. However, it could easily be some other semiotic composition, depending on one’s creative vision, the semiotic resources available, and the spatiotemporal context in which the moves are done. In everyday Auslan use, for example, this composition typically involves integration of multilingual and highly conventionalized signs (including Auslan signs, English fingerspelling and mouthings) with tokens of symbolic indexicals and non-conventional signs, which are more heavily dependent on the context for interpretation (Clark, 1996; Enfield, 2009; see also Ferrara & Hodge, 2018, and §2).

Essentially, the basis for the shared understanding that emerges between audience and dancers during Anna’s performance is the same basis we use for communicating face-to-face using signed or spoken languages: the mutual orientation, recognition, and interpretation of social acts. It is the interaction of the elements within the composition that drives the creation of a “precise and vivid understanding” (Kendon, 2004: 174) not the use of language *per se* (see also Armstrong, Stokoe & Wilcox, 1995). The preciseness and vividness of an understanding, however, might be clarified by using more overt and conventional semiotic strategies such as conventionalized words or signs. This is acknowledged by one of the dancers, Luigi. When asked how he best expresses himself, he replied:

Dancing is good for therapy, but writing is easier to share with someone because you can be more explicit — it can be difficult to be clear with dance, and to communicate in detail. Dancers need to be very good if they want to make the audience feel something.

This observation on the differences between dancing and writing (just two of many possible modes for expressing communicative intent) points to a tacit awareness that face-to-face communication — whether spoken, signed, or danced — emerges through disambiguating the physical and meaningful context of an interaction via the pluralistic expression of communicative intent (LaPolla, 2003). This requires interpreting both implicit and explicit information. In every-

day communication, disambiguation is effected by combining ostensive acts (such as conventionalized signs and words, and the use of other bodily actions such as eye gaze and/or finger pointing to index people, things and ideas to the real or imagined space of the interaction) with the interpretations that others infer from these acts (LaPolla, 2003). Interactants can constrain each other's context to varying degrees of explicitness in different ways depending on the semiotic resources used.

For example, compare the following face-to-face spoken utterances made in response to an offer of a drink: (a) [points at soup], (b) "I have soup", (c) "No, because I have soup", and (d) "No, I don't want anything to drink. Since I have soup, I don't need anything else to drink right now" (LaPolla, 2003: 116). Each response deploys bodily actions or spoken words in different ways, each effecting a different kind of inferential effort from the person offering a drink. In the context of a contemporary dance performance, interpreting a dance movement may involve arguably more inferential effort than everyday conversation. For example, a choreographer may intentionally leave a great deal of interpretation up to the audience, perhaps to some artistic ends. Conversely, a deaf signer likely may not want the possibility of understanding to be so open, or potentially vague, in their everyday communication⁹. Depending on how explicit one wants to be, it is typically a dancer or signer's skill level and the more conventional resources used (such as Auslan signs, or the physical movements derived from Auslan signs) that enable the degree of precision needed to clearly disambiguate some aesthetic quality or emotional resonance.

In both dance and everyday communication, however, this entails some recognition of what is/is not available in the communicative repertoire of other people, and how other's repertoires may/may not overlap with our own. The effort required for disambiguation is therefore magnified during interactions between signers and non-signers, for whom there are fewer conventionalized resources available. It is also present (more prosaically) during interactions between speakers or signers using a common language. Indeed, this unfolding closely resembles an earlier observation about Auslan (Johnston, 1996: 32):

There are grounds for believing, though detailed contextual analysis is needed to confirm this, that an Auslan text often unfolds in a spiral manner with a central event or proposition being stated and restated several times from different perspectives and in different ways with increasing embellishment and detail. In this way, the event or proposition is gradually 'brought into focus' and clarified.

⁹ I thank professional dancer and choreographer M. McGreevy for this comparison.

This process of semiosis and gradual clarification — essentially the moment-by-moment laboring toward shared understanding — is also demonstrated by the interplay of the dancers with their shadows and images on the far wall of the stage. During the first half of the performance, Anna and Elvin rise and sign directly to each other, their shadows enlarging their actions on the white wall (Figure 4). However, while the movements produced by Anna and Elvin might be recognised by a signer as based on Auslan, it is only when one looks to their shadows on the wall that an understanding of the signing is possible. Here we can distinguish the handshapes and aesthetic quality of movement more clearly: what initially appears to be two people engaged in arm-heavy physical movement is framed in greater detail as a signed conversation in which neither is listening to the other. By itself, the Auslan-based movement is not enough to constrain our perception of what is happening on the stage. It is the use of light and shadow which illuminates the relevance of the communicative moves organized by the dancers, and therefore the emotional resonance of their refusing to do the work of understanding (see also Figure 5). These communicative acts are primordially driven by emotion, and this is evident in the result.



Figure 4. Anna and Elvin sign to each other (image © Pippa Samaya).



Figure 5. Elvin confronts himself (image © Pippa Samaya).

9 Valuing the labor of (not)understanding

The stage contracts with darkness again, and the dancers emerge cocooned in a breathing slip of rubber skin. They crawl out and transform the skin into a barrier separating them all: two dancers manipulate the tensile material while another struggles through the barrier (Figure 6). Leaning, stretching, rebounding from the rubber, they come together eventually, raw and exhausted. Slowly the dancers release the barrier and look for each other (Figure 7). They face towards each other, considering each other directly, regulating their breath.

The light becomes gentle and soft, a reflection of the connection they are creating, as if each is saying, “Look at us — I am here; we are here together”. It is not common to see people sustain eye contact for long periods of time. When this does happen, it is often the result of a struggle and a realization: something difficult had to happen before this moment in which we connect, making it more profound. This moment demonstrates how the acts of misunderstanding occurring in interactions between signers and non-signers (or between people with mismatched repertoires more generally) might be necessary for increasing the value of the understanding that does occur, and therefore the emotional resonance of the interaction.



Figure 6. The barrier (image © Pippa Samaya).



Figure 7. Looking for each other (image © Pippa Samaya).

Reflecting on the performance, Luigi explicitly acknowledged the value of attending to faces, and the use of eye gaze to initiate and co-regulate social actions with his deaf colleagues. This is evidence of how a non-signer might effectively adapt their communicative repertoire for deaf languaging. The origin of this awareness lies in the need for dance cues to be visual: if they could not be visual, the responsibility of translating a specific auditory cue into a visual one fell to him. Luigi

discovered he therefore used eye contact with the other dancers on stage to a far greater extent than would typically occur with non-deaf dancers. This behavior resulted in a much more connected unit, compared to other performances in which he had only relied upon auditory cues. In these cases, dancers do not look at each other directly, but rather out into the audience or down into themselves, resulting in a performance that is consequently less connected for both dancers and audience. The fact that Luigi acted on this awareness demonstrates his understanding of important differences between deaf and hearing bodies, and even how deaf ways of being might enrich his own experience and dance practice. He is determined to develop more eye contact with other dancers in the future.

The act of looking directly at someone is intense for both those doing the gazing, and the people who observe them. This intimacy carried through to the end of the performance, when the dancers reappear with their moving image projected onto the wall (Figure 8). Here their movements change. They slow down. No longer touching, but still synchronized, they are each a distinct entity. The theatre fades to black and the stalls shudder with the stamping feet of the audience. We take deep breaths and feel shocked. Moving images and silhouettes of the dancers appear standing at the back of the stage. The shape of their bodies visible, but lacking detail of who they are as people. Slowly they walk forward while being dimly lit from the side, making them more, but not fully, visible (Figure 9). They reach the front edge of the stage and are bathed in full light. Finally, they are fully realised, detailed people — indivisible and whole. They show us that when we are brave enough and tired enough to reveal and expose what is under our skin, both to ourselves and to others, we build a stronger shared understanding — one in which we may gradually be seen.



Figure 8. Moving images
(image © Pippa Samaya).



Figure 9. Walking forward
(image © Pippa Samaya).

10 The geography of (not)understanding

By coordinating the multi-sensory resources of movement, sound, video and light within the bounded space of the theatre, the artists in The Delta Project essentially mobilized a kind of idealized place in which deaf and hearing worlds are brought together. They achieved this by integrating Auslan-based choreographed movement, kinaesthetically-driven sound composition, digital video design, light and shadow into their performance. Analysis of one filmed performance and discussions with the artists reveals the communication practices that evolved during the development of the work are integral to this struggle. When deaf and hearing artists with varied language histories and pre-existing relationships collaborate on a creative work together, they naturally draw heavily upon their specific embodiments, personal beliefs, individual communication heuristics and shared communication practices. However, they also challenge each other to develop new ones, resulting in a complex language ecology in which subsequent interactions occur in new and adaptive ways. The result is a living geography of (not)understanding: one that is grounded in their experience of various intersubjective relations in which interactants notice/do not notice, comprehend/do not comprehend, and do/do not respond in turn.

The ideology of communication practices embedded in the final performance is one in which interactants actively realize that communication does not always work, even in the presence of professional interpreters hired to overtly mediate cross-modal interactions between different language users. Other, subtle affordances may instead assert more power in how these interactions unfold, such as different embodiments and the reality of different communicative repertoires colliding in a physical space. The nature of deafness means that some aspects of communication necessarily occur in different ways to spoken or written language interactions between people who can hear, particularly when it comes to managing the demands of time and physical space. It is also an ideology in which the individuals communicating do not always understand each other, but for reasons that are not simply attributable to the fact that others do or do not share the same communicative repertoire. These reasons may have more to do with conflicting personal beliefs, some of which may be linked to explicit ideas about language. It is entirely possible, for example, for individuals to simultaneously admire deaf signed language practices and resist the norms involved in using these practices effectively.

Yet the ideology embedded in *Under My Skin* is also one in which communicative intent can be realized pluralistically and with deep feeling. The data from the final performance and discussions with the artists described here demonstrate how it is not enough to simply learn the vocabulary and grammar of a

signed language. Using a signed language, or learning to interact using a signed language because you are working with people who do, means adapting to the differences presented by deaf bodies — it means growing yourself into the collective ‘skin’ of deaf people who sign. Indeed, close interpersonal affinities between signers and non-signers can develop if each is attuned to the varied ways others labor towards understanding beyond their designated languages, such as by drawing on the full range of semiotic resources available during interactions. This involves developing one’s sensitivity to the visual and kinaesthetic dynamics of an interaction (sign, dance, light, shadow), such as through attentive ‘listening’ (including meaningful use of eye gaze), and expanding one’s communicative repertoire and awareness of different semiotic processes. These qualities may be revealed to non-signers in different ways, across different time depths. The nature of these revelations depends as much on an individual’s personal beliefs and their commitment to understanding other people, as it does to the varied language histories of individuals, their personal agency and the dynamics of interacting personalities.

Regardless of how acts of communication manifest, both signers and non-signers organize their expression via sequentially unfolding communicative moves, in which various semiotic resources (including what we call ‘language’) combine. We also share the same drive to disambiguate the context of interpretation for others, such as by manipulating the preciseness and vividness of an understanding through the varied means available. However, this also entails becoming habituated to those ugly moments of not-understanding that contribute to what E. M. Green (2014: 142) aptly describes as “the sedimentation of failures and frustrations” familiar to deaf lives, such as when knowledge and understanding are sacrificed to the demands of time and space, or when others do not make allowances for the sequential contingency that deaf languaging requires. In addition to explicit ideas about language and analysis of the semiotic resources available during specific interactions, our understanding of language ideologies also depends on the more covert, subterranean affordances evidenced in this study, especially in the context of communication practices developed through interactions with members of minority language groups.

Despite the reality of how their varied communication practices evolved, all members of The Delta Project emerged from the collaboration with a better understanding of the role of communication in producing a creative work. As Amanda and Luigi had the most one-on-one contact with the two signing deaf dancers, their participation in this emerging language ecology is arguably the most sensitive of all the hearing artists. However, all the hearing artists felt their understanding of deaf ontologies and signed language has expanded through this collaboration. While it is unclear if the deaf artists experienced comparable benefits in gaining the main-

stream experience they so badly wanted, they certainly progressed in their professional skill. Everyone wishes they could do the work again: another iteration, more of it, and in different places. There is power in it, so much more to explore.

During the group discussion, Richard commented that he was overwhelmed by the fact that several deaf people told him they felt like the performance was “made for them”. In response, I asked if he had ever seen a performance that made him feel that way. He replied that he had seen a lot of art that resonated with him, but nothing he felt was specifically made for him. This was surprising to me. However, perhaps this feeling is an effect of living with the extremes of (not) understanding: a space, a performance, a moment being “made for you” when you do not usually feel that way can be transformative¹⁰. In this way (among the many other contributions to the realized and potential aesthetic value of the performance left unsaid here), *Under My Skin* is an artefact of the labor of understanding undertaken between the deaf and hearing artists involved in the collaboration. It is a testament to the willingness of deaf and hearing people to do this work.

References

- Adam, Robert, Breda Carty & Christopher Stone. 2011. Ghostwriting: Deaf translators within the Deaf community. *Babel* 57(4). 375–393. doi 10.1075/babel.57.4.01ada
- Agha, Asif. 2005. Voice, footing, enregisterment. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 15(1). 38–59. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.2005.15.1.38>
- Agha, Asif. 2007. Language and social relations. (Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language no. 24). Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Armstrong, David F., William C. Stokoe & Sherman Wilcox. 1995. *Gesture and the nature of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bagga-Gupta, Sangeeta. 2000. Visual language environments: Exploring everyday life and literacies in Swedish deaf bilingual schools. *Visual Anthropology Review*, 15: 95–120. doi 10.1525/var.2000.15.2.95
- Bernstein, Basil. 2003[1971]. *Class, Codes and Controle*. London: Routledge.
- Blackledge, Adrian, & Angela Creese. 2010. *Multilingualism: A Critical Perspective*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Bühler, Karl. 1990[1934]. *Theory of Language: The representational function of language*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Press.
- Busch, Brigitta. 2012. The linguistic repertoire revisited. *Applied Linguistics*, 33(5). 503–23. doi.org/10.1093/applin/ams056

¹⁰ I thank E. M. Green for this point.

- Busch, Brigitta. 2015. Expanding the Notion of the Linguistic Repertoire: On the Concept of Spracherleben—The Lived Experience of Language. *Applied Linguistics*, 38(3). 340–358. doi.org/10.1093/applin/amv030
- Byun, Kang-Suk, Connie de Vos, Anastasia Bradford, Ulrike Zeshan & Stephen C. Levinson. 2017. First Encounters: Repair Sequences in Cross-Signing. *Top Cogn Sci*. doi:10.1111/tops.12303
- Clark, Herbert. H. 1996. *Using Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Du Bois, John W. & Elise Kärrkäinen. 2012. Taking a stance on emotion: affect, sequence, and intersubjectivity in dialogic interaction. *Text & Talk*, 32(4). 433–451. doi.org/10.1515/text-2012-0021
- Eades, Diana. 2008. Language and Disadvantage before the law. In T. M. Turell & J. Gibbons (eds.). *Dimensions of Forensic Linguistics*. (pp. 179-195). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Enfield, Nicholas J. & Stephen C. Levinson (eds.). 2006. *Roots of human sociality: Culture, cognition and interaction*. Oxford: Berg.
- Enfield, Nicholas J. 2009. *The Anatomy of Meaning: Speech, Gesture, and Composite Utterances*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fagan Robinson, Kelly. 2019. Conscious artistic translanguaging onstage. *Applied Linguistics Review* 2019; 10(1): 73–92. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2017-0079
- Ferrara, Lindsay & Gabrielle Hodge. 2018. Language as description, indication, and depiction. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9:716. doi 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00716
- Friedner, Michele. 2016. Understanding and not-understanding: What do epistemologies and ontologies do in deaf worlds? *Sign Language Studies*, 16(2). 184–203. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26191026
- García, Ofelia. 2009. Education, multilingualism and translanguaging in the 21st Century. In Ajit K. Mohanty, Minati Panda, Robert Phillipson & Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (eds.). *Multilingual Education for Social Justice: Globalising the Local*, 140–58. Orient BlackSwan.
- Goodwin, Charles. 2000. Action and embodiment within situated human interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32. 1489–1522. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(99)00096-X
- Green, E. Mara. 2015. One language, or maybe two: direct communication, understanding, and informal interpreting in international deaf encounters. In Michele Friedner & Annelies Kusters (eds). *It's a Small World: International Deaf Spaces and Encounters*, 70–82. Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Green, E. Mara. 2014. *The nature of signs: Nepal's deaf society, local sign, and the production of communicative sociality*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of California, Berkeley.
- Green, Jennifer. 2014. *Drawn from the Ground: Sound, Sign and Inscription in Central Australian Sand Stories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haugen, Einar. 1972. The ecology of language. In Anwar S. Dil (ed.). *The ecology of language: Essays by Einar Haugen*, 325–39. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Johnston, Trevor. 1996. Function and medium in the forms of linguistic expression found in a sign language. In William H. Edmondson & Ronnie B. Wilbur (eds.). *International Review of Sign Linguistics*, 57–94. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Johnston, Trevor. 2004. Whither the deaf community? Population, genetics, and the future of Australian sign language. *Am. Ann. Deaf*, 148(5). 358–75. doi 10.1353/aad.2004.0004
- Kendon, Adam. 2004. *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Kisch, Shifra. 2008. Deaf discourse: The social construction of deafness in a Bedouin community in the Negev. *Medical Anthropology* 27(3). 283–313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01459740802222807>
- Kockelman, Paul. 1999. Poetic function and logical form: ideal languages and forms of life. *Chicago Anthropology Exchange*, 29. 34–50.
- Kolb, Rachel. 2016. The deaf body in public space. *The New York Times*, 28 September. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/28/opinion/the-deaf-body-in-public-space.html>
- Kral, Inge & Elizabeth M. Ellis. 2008. Children, language and literacy in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. In Jane Simpson & Gillian Wigglesworth (eds.). *Children’s language and multilingualism: Indigenous language use at home and school*, 154–172. London and New York: Continuum.
- Kusters, Annelies. 2017. Gesture-based deaf-hearing customer interactions: Mumbaikars’ multimodal and metrolingual strategies. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 14(3). 283–302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2017.1315811>
- Kusters, Annelies, Massimiliano Spotti, Ruth Swanwick & Elina Tapio. 2017. Beyond languages, beyond modalities: transforming the study of semiotic repertoires. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 14(3). 219–232. doi:10.1080/14790718.2017.1321651
- LaPolla, Randy J. 2003. Why languages differ: variation in the conventionalization of constraints on inference. In David Bradley, Randy J. LaPolla, Boyd Michailovsky & Graham Thurgood (eds.). *Language variation: papers on variation and change in the Sinosphere and in the Indosphere in honour of James A. Matisoff*, 113–144. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.
- Moriarty Harrelson, Erin. 2017. Deaf people with “no language”: Mobility and flexible accumulation in languaging practices of deaf people in Cambodia. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 10(1). 55–72. doi:10.1515/applirev-2017-0081
- Napier, Jemina & Lorraine Leeson. 2016. *Sign language in action*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Next Wave. 2016. *Under My Skin, The Delta Project*. Retrieved 15 October 2016: <http://2016.nextwave.org.au/#event=214>
- Nyst, Victoria. 2012. Shared Sign Languages. In Roland Pfau, Markus Steinbach & Bencie Woll. (eds.) *Sign language*, 552–574. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Parmientier, Richard J. 1994. *Sign in Society: Studies in Semiotic Anthropology*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Pickering, John. 1997. Beyond Cognitivism: Mutualism and Postmodern Psychology. In Paavo Pyllkkänen, Pauli Plykkö & Airi Hautamäki (eds.). *Brain, Mind and Physics*. Amsterdam: IOS Press.
- Quinto-Pozos, David & Robert Adam. 2013. Sign language contact. In Robert Bayley, Richard Cameron, & Ceil Lucas (eds.). *The Oxford handbook of sociolinguistics*, 379–400. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Snoddon, Kristin. 2017. Uncovering translingual practices in teaching parents classical ASL varieties. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 14(3): 303–316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2017.1315812>
- Tapio, Elina. 2013. *A nexus analysis of English in the everyday life of FinSL signers: A multimodal view on interaction*. Published doctoral dissertation, University of Oulu, Finland. Jyväskylä: Jyväskylä University Printing House.

Theresia Hofer

“Goat-Sheep-Mixed-Sign” in Lhasa – Deaf Tibetans’ language ideologies and unimodal codeswitching in Tibetan and Chinese sign languages, Tibet Autonomous Region, China

1 Introduction

Among Tibetan signers in Lhasa, there is a growing tendency to mix Tibetan Sign Language (TSL) and Chinese Sign Language (CSL). I have been learning TSL from deaf TSL teachers and other deaf, signing Tibetan friends since 2007, but in more recent conversations with them I have been more and more exposed to CSL. In such contexts, signing includes not only loan signs, loan blends or loan translations from CSL that have been used in TSL since its emergence, such as signs for new technical inventions or scientific terms. It also includes codeswitching to CSL lexical items related to core social acts, kinship terms or daily necessities, for which TSL has its own signs, such as for concepts including “to marry”, “mother”, “father”, “teacher”, “house”, “at home”, “real”, “fake”, “wait”, “why”, “thank you” and so on.¹

Some Tibetan signers refer to the resulting mixed sign language as “neither-goat-nor-sheep sign” (in Tibetan *ra-ma-luk lak-da*). This phrase is partly derived from the standard Lhasa Tibetan expression of something or somebody being “neither-goat-nor-sheep” (in Tibetan *ra-ma-luk*), an expression widely used in the context of codeswitching between Lhasa Tibetan and Putunghua (i.e. standard Chinese) and the resulting “neither-goat-nor-sheep language” (in Tibetan

1 Although the acronym TSL is also used for Taiwan Sign Language and Thai Sign Language, I use it here, because it is used in the English designations of many TSL-related publications written in the Tibetan language, co-authored by deaf Tibetans. “Tibetan Sign Language,” or TSL, to be sure, is an outsider’s term (none of the deaf Tibetans in Lhasa speak, read or write English). It is used in these publications to render the Tibetan terms *onkug lakda* (TDPF & HI 2002) or *bökyi lakda* (TDA 2011), the first literally meaning ‘deaf and mute hand signs’, the second, ‘Tibetan hand signs’. These Tibetan terms do not incorporate the regular Tibetan word for language (*ké*), which in its narrow meaning only refers to spoken languages due to its root denoting vocal sounds and utterance. In TSL, *bökyi lakda*, is signed with the TSL signs BÖ/BÖPA (*TIBET/TIBETAN*) followed by LAK-DA (*SIGN*) (which is identical to the one used in International Sign). When this chapter refers to TSL, it only refers to its Lhasa variety.

ké ra-ma-luk, Yeshe 2008). Recently, signers have come up with new signs for their own mixing practices, such as “goat-sheep-mixed-sign”, “mixed sign” and “Chinese-Tibetan-mixed sign”.² The various terms used to name this mixing phenomenon suggest different attitudes toward TSL, CSL, and the practice of mixing.

Based on participant observation, linguistic autobiography interviews (Pavlenko 2007) and many video recorded conversations with and of 25 deaf Tibetan signers over four months of fieldwork in Lhasa during 2016 and 2017 (see Figure 1), this chapter describes several ways that signers learn and mix TSL and CSL and it analyses how Tibetan signers of both TSL and CSL think about this sort of language co-existence. It also relates these sign language practices and ideologies to spoken language practices and ideologies in Lhasa today.³

2 There is no widespread written form for sign languages in general, or TSL in particular. When I paraphrase my interlocutors’ signing into written text based on notes I took during fieldwork, I use italics within quotation marks. When I translate their signing from video or drawings of, or very detailed notes on, particular signs, either directly into English or into Standard Tibetan and then English, I use quotation marks but no italics. When referring to standard TSL signs, I capitalise the closest Tibetan rendering of that sign, e.g. BÖ, which is followed by an English translation in italics and in square brackets [*TIBET*]. Except for the titles of books in the references (where I use the full Wylie transcription), I otherwise use phonetically-based spelling for Tibetan terms following the Tibetan and Himalayan Library, 2010 Online Tool (<http://www.thlib.org/reference/transliteration/phconverter.php>), and italicise these. For Chinese, I use pinyin transliteration and indicate Chinese terms with the use of C. in front of them. For CSL I follow the same methods as for paraphrasing and translating my interlocutors who use TSL, as outlined above, and do the same in those instances when these languages are mixed.

3 This chapter is part of a research project (funded by the Wellcome Trust, Grant 104523), about the lives and signing practices of deaf Tibetans in contemporary Lhasa, capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). I refer to the research participants as signers, given that sign language is their preferred communication mode. In line with recent trends (e.g. Kusters and Friedner 2015), I use *deaf* with a lowercase “d” as a more encompassing category than “Deaf” or “d/Deaf”, which in earlier work in Deaf Studies was used to highlight socio-cultural identity and/or the mixed nature of audiological and socio-cultural conditions.



Figure 1. Map of the Tibet Autonomous Region and Lhasa within the People's Republic of China.

In this chapter I use Kroskrity’s broad definition of language ideology, as a “ubiquitous set of diverse beliefs, however implicit or explicit they may be, used by speakers of all types as models for constructing linguistic evaluations and engaging in communicative activity” (2004: 497). To this need to be added also beliefs and attitudes towards different linguistic modalities and the specific possibilities they may offer its users. While language ideologies have been explored with regard to distinct signed languages (Kusters 2014, Reagan 2010), attitudes towards and practices of mixing and co-usage of sign languages are the focus of a newly emerging field of research (Adam 2015, Plaza-Pust and Morales-López 2008, Quinto-Pozos 2000, Zeshan and Panda 2015).⁴ This article contributes to the documentation and analysis of how people codeswitch⁵ between two sign languages, and analyses attitudes about such mixing. It also points out a phenomenon which TSL signers call “spontaneous sign.”

⁴ Noteworthy here is the five-year research project on sign multilingualism that was carried out at the University of Central Lancashire, UK. http://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/explore/projects/multilingual_behaviours_sign_language_users.php

⁵ I follow Crystal’s definition of codeswitching, as “The use by a speaker of more than one language, dialect or variety during a conversation. Which form is used depends on factors such as the nature of the audience, the subject matter, and the situation in which the conversations take place.” (1992: 69-70), and Myers-Scotton’s distinction between loans and codeswitching as being one mainly of frequency and predictability: while the use of loan words is to some extent predictable, codeswitching is not (1997: 191-207).

The chapter starts by offering some background information on the recent emergence of TSL, its users and their social and political context in Lhasa; the development of the Lhasa Special School since its foundation in 2000 and the role of Chinese Sign Language; the phenomenon of TSL-CSL codeswitching and that of “spontaneous sign”. The core of the chapter presents my findings from Lhasa and an analysis in terms of three broad ideologies about unimodal codeswitching: language purism and language-related pragmatism among the TSL-dominant signers, and linguistic hierarchies among CSL-dominant Tibetan signers. I discuss each of these three language ideologies in relation to local categories used by the signers: The “neither-goat-nor-sheep sign language” I relate to ideologies of language purism they have expressed, with considerable hesitation about code-switching implied. The concept of the “goat-and-sheep-sign” or as one informant put it “a bird with two sign heads” on the other hand values an “and-and” perspective and I relate this to other expressions of a pragmatic ideology about language mixing. Last, CSL-dominant signers have two new signs for the phenomenon of mixing that of RA-LUK-LAK-DRÉ (GOAT-SHEEP-SIGN-MIXED) and of GYA-BÖ-LAK-DRÉ (CHINESE-TIBETAN-SIGN-MIXED). These I relate to ideas that were have expressed about linguistic hierarchies between the national (CSL) and the local (TSL) sign language.

2 The recent emergence of Tibetan Sign Language, its users and the social and political context

While a range of communication practices surely existed among deaf people and between deaf and hearing people before 2000, from that year onwards significantly new communication opportunities developed among deaf Tibetans in Lhasa. That year the International NGO Handicap International (HI) started working with deaf Tibetans and established a project to formalize and support what they called “Tibetan Sign Language” (or for short TSL) through the production of sign language dictionaries and Deaf Club activities (Hofer 2017; Hofer and Sagli 2017; TDA 2011; TDPF & HI 2002, 2005). The project also created a new and at first two-handed TSL manual alphabet that later become one-handed (TDPF & HI 2002: 16, TDA 2005: 106). In 2004 the Tibet Deaf Association (TDA) was formed with logistical and financial support from HI, backed and supervised by the Tibet Disabled People’s Federation (TDPF), the TAR branch of the China-wide, governmental China Disabled People’s Federation (CDPF). The various activities by and

for deaf Tibetans (partly organized and partly funded by HI), were a Sunday Deaf Club; meetings to collect, document and standardize signs; and TSL courses in Lhasa and in selected nearby county towns. In 2014 Handicap International had to stop working in Tibet as their cooperation contract was not renewed by the government. The TDA’s work has since been under direct TDPF management, effectively becoming a government organization, with no input from a non-governmental organization. Many of its prior activities came to a halt or are being carried out with greater difficulty. While deaf activists in China proper⁶ are able to defend regional sign varieties and dialects of CSL, and sometimes also TSL, deaf Tibetans and the TDA find in Lhasa and the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) it is increasingly difficult to carry on TSL-related activities. In their politically highly charged environment they often fear repercussions if officials and TDPF superiors interpret activities as “politically sensitive,” that is, if they are construed as contested aspects of the Tibetan identity and language nexus. As a result, there have only been sporadic TSL courses between 2014 and 2017, and as of July 2017 the production of further TSL language materials had come to an apparent halt, which the TDA lamented.

TSL initially emerged among those adult deaf Tibetans who were involved with the TSL project and the Sunday Deaf Club, beginning in the early 2000s. Most of them had not been formally educated, though some who became deaf as teenagers, had attended regular schools until then. Among this group long-term friendships and romantic relationships developed and TSL was the main language, eventually spreading to a group that I estimated in 2017 to number about 200 to 300. This took place in a context of infrastructure-led, large scale urban growth of Lhasa with accompanying labor migration from rural to urban areas. A majority of people joining the TDA activities were therefore initially not from Lhasa, but hailed from different places across the TAR. Following anthropologist Friedner, it would be apt to say that several of those who joined the TDA meetings took “deaf turns”, becoming increasingly oriented towards other deaf instead of hearing people, creating deaf selves and deaf sociality (2015: 2).

⁶ When Tibetans speak about the non-Tibetan areas of China, they tend to use the term *Gya* or *Gyanak* (Tibetan for “China”). However, when speaking or writing Chinese, the term *neidi* (Ch. “interior”) is commonly used among Tibetans, in many publications translated as “mainland China”. I use “China proper” or the “interior” as translation for *neidi*, but “China” for the Tibetan *Gyanak* so as to preserve the strong sense of many Tibetans that “Tibet” is a categorically different place from “China”, even though they have been politically absorbed into the People’s Republic of China.

3 The arrival of Chinese Sign Language and the Lhasa Special School

In 2000, the first government “Special School” — effectively a deaf boarding school but later also housing a small number of children who are blind or with physical or mental disabilities — was established not far from the city center of Lhasa, a city at that time on the brink of large-scale urban transformation. There were initially six Tibetan teachers and one Chinese teacher (all hearing), speaking a combination of Putunghua and Tibetan as well as using what might be called rudimentary “special education-variety CSL” with their students. These teachers had learned that form of CSL in a module on special education, during a one-year paid training stint at the Beijing Municipality Teachers Training School (*Bei jing shi fan xue xiao*). They had no other exposure to signed communication or to deaf Chinese people.

The first director of the Special School was a Han Chinese man, who had been working in Lhasa as a teacher and who was married to a Tibetan woman. After his son became deaf in early childhood and having considered the very limited educational opportunities that he would encounter in Lhasa, he petitioned the local authorities to establish the first local Special School and succeeded.

For the first batch of students in 2000, the Lhasa Special School management could only recruit seven deaf Tibetan children via Lhasa neighborhood committees. Over the years, as word spread and the school grew, more and more students came to attend, also from other parts of the TAR. In 2017 the school was home to over 160 deaf students aged between 7 and 21 and four more Special Schools had in the meantime been established in other locations in the TAR.

The Lhasa Special School offers the 9 years of obligatory education, divided into 6 years of primary school and 3 years of lower middle school. In 2017, plans were made to start in the near future also a high school (i.e. upper middle school) within the Lhasa Special School. The school also runs a two year vocational training programme in, for example, *thanka* painting, carpet making, tailoring and decorative drawing.

While all classes, except Tibetan language, are taught in either oral Chinese and/or CSL-supported oral Chinese, students amongst themselves mainly sign a mixed form of various CSL dialects and use only a few, or no TSL loans. Only some have had exposure to TSL as an extracurricular subject, when between 2001 and 2012 TDA volunteers offered classes at the school. This had not been the case in the Lhasa Special School since it moved to the outskirts of Lhasa, to the new and so-called “education district” in the summer of 2016. In the other 4 Special Schools established in other parts of the TAR, there is typically

less signed and more oral instruction than at the Lhasa Special School, and the teachers of Tibetan language as a subject have even less TSL skills and resources.

In 2016/2017 students in the Tibetan language classes at the Lhasa Special School benefitted from the TSL manual alphabet that had initially been introduced by the TDA volunteers. It had quickly become used by the first government Tibetan language teacher, a dedicated Tibetan woman. As member of the pioneering group of teachers who started the Lhasa Special school and in charge of Tibetan language teaching, she also created a set of 100 new grammar signs in about 2001/2002, in order to represent specific spoken and written Tibetan grammatical terms and concept that she had to teach the students, as the school followed the regular Tibetan language programme and textbooks for all Lhasa schools. She used these with her students in the classroom and then created resources and shared them with other Tibetan language teachers, as the school began to grow and she was no longer the only Tibetan language teacher.⁷ The TSL manual alphabet and the Tibetan grammar signs were the only two, aspects of TSL used by the hearing Tibetan language teachers in the classes I attended in 2016 and 2017. With exception of the pioneering teacher who had also learned other TSL signs and used “spontaneous sign” to great effect, most of them used spoken Tibetan as a means of instruction, interspersed with the TSL manual alphabet and some grammar signs. The fluency in TSL finger spelling and grammar signs varied greatly between the most experienced teacher and others who had started teaching Tibetan language to deaf students more recently.

Overall 150 deaf students have graduated from the Lhasa Special School, of whom about 40 have gone on to a specialized high school (i.e. upper middle school), set up for teaching deaf students in China proper. Out of these, just over ten had succeeded in entering colleges that are open to include deaf students as well as offering some CSL interpretation and/or captioning services.

The overall group of about 40 deaf Tibetans who had travelled and studied in China proper, have been profoundly exposed to the “special education-variety of CSL” (used mainly by teachers) as well as native CSL varieties — depending on where they went and the extent of their social networks. Nanjing and Shanghai sign varieties (Yang 2015) were most dominant among these Tibetan deaf students and graduates. Five graduates from these Chinese colleges have now been

⁷ Only 15 out of the 100 grammar signs are documented in the Standard Tibetan Sign Language Dictionary (TDA 2011: 481-485). They have all not been video recorded and as of 2017 most of them had fallen out of use.

employed as teachers in the Lhasa Special School, using and spreading these varieties at the Lhasa Special School.

* * *

In Lhasa, there was initially little impact of the Special School students' primary use of CSL varieties on the TSL-dominant signers outside of the boarding school, as there was little to no contact (except during the extracurricular Tibetan and TSL classes). From about 2012 on, however, when the first deaf graduates from the local Special School who had gone on to high school and/or college in China proper returned to Lhasa again and started looking for work, they began to meet other deaf Tibetans. For instance in the TDA office, local tea and coffee houses, Lhasa tailoring shops, and an all-deaf incense workshop, and the sporadically organized TSL courses and Sunday Deaf Club meetings. It is most likely at this point that the phenomenon of mixing Chinese and Tibetan sign languages began to occur.

4 „Spontaneous sign“ as a third phenomenon in the mix

Deaf Tibetans often explained to me that they share a pool of body language, gestures and signs, which they refer to as “*rang-jung lak-da*”, or “spontaneous sign language”. They hold that some of this repertoire is shared with what linguists refer to as co-speech gestures of hearing Tibetans, such as the Tibetan language teacher at the Lhasa Special School mentioned earlier. In several interviews people estimated that “spontaneous sign” makes up approximately 30% (some even said 80%) of the sign lexicon of what eventually became TSL. I observed how “spontaneous sign” was also drawn on in interactions between predominantly TSL and CSL Tibetan signers (Hofer 2019). A phenomenon similar to “spontaneous sign” has also been reported from Nepal, locally referred to as “natural sign” as analysed by Green (2014), and from Port Morsby, Papua New Guinea, locally referred to as “culture sign” and researched by Reed (forthcoming).

Many sign linguists hold that the number of shared signs between signers of different sign languages is larger as compared to that of words between two different spoken languages due to the higher iconicity of many sign languages (e.g. Guerra Currie et al. 2002). This has also been contested however (Taub 2004).

Be that as it may, in Lhasa and the specific socio-linguistic context of deaf TSL signers and their deaf and hearing networks, “spontaneous sign” mattered.

This is a context of an only recently formalized local sign language, as explained above, that still features great variation. There has been a historical lack of formal schooling for deaf children and sign language interpreters do not exist. The use of TSL is also restricted to informal domains (for example, there is no TSL on TV and no TSL-interpreted public events) and the number of TSL signers is overall small. The time span has also been shorter and the spaces where the language has been used few, when compared with the vast breath of application and long-standing history of national European sign languages, such as French sign language (LSF), which is documented as early as the mid-18th century.

The existence of “spontaneous sign” in Lhasa means that unimodal codeswitching does not only take place in the local varieties of Tibetan and Chinese sign language, but that deaf Tibetans also draw on a pool of signs, gestures and bodily communication that is shared by *all* Lhasa Tibetans regardless of their dominant language modality. Spontaneous sign should therefore be considered a phenomenon of a third type and its existence has implications for communication across often too rigidly conceived deaf-hearing, Tibetan-Chinese and TSL-CSL social and linguistic boundaries.

5 „Neither-goat-nor-sheep-sign“: Ideals of language purism and practices of sign mixing

During a video-call TSL signers Drolma, Tashi, and myself were sitting in a Western-style café,⁸ talking with Wangchen, a competent TSL signer and acquaintance. After some time, Drolma signed to Wangchen, “*Have you forgotten your Tibetan signs? Now you sign ‘thanks’ in CSL.*” Tashi signed, “*That’s right, you do*”, himself also using a common CSL sign meaning “correct/right”, instead of the TSL equivalent, which maps onto the affirmative “*dug/red*” (“you do/you have”) in spoken Tibetan. Wangchen was caught a little by surprise, laughed and then commented, “*Our signing is now a mix of Tibetan and Chinese signing, right?*”

This conversation reveals that Tashi and Wangchen do shift to and borrow CSL signs in an otherwise TSL-based conversation, even when Drolma and Tashi told me that they prefer to use Tibetan sign. And indeed, based on my notes and

⁸ All personal names used in this article are pseudonyms. Location names have also in some cases been changed to protect the anonymity of the research participants.

a preliminary transcription of video-recorded conversations in which they chat with other TSL-dominant signers, there are few occurrences of code-switching to CSL. For example, they frequently use the CSL sign “to marry” and Drolma used to mouth or voice the Chinese term *laoshe* (“teacher”) even when signing TSL for “teacher”, thus creating a new code-blend involving a Tibetan sign and a spoken Chinese term. They did however not use CSL for the days of the week, which was otherwise common among TSL signers, or CSL numerals, which was also common. Their relatively “pure” TSL (at least as far as imports from CSL were concerned) might be explained by their limited contact with graduates from the Lhasa Special School thus far and their signing and mingling mainly with others who had been involved in the TSL project and of a similar age group. All of the Tibetan interlocutors in our video call, had known each other from the Sunday Deaf Club activities and other TDA-HI collaborative projects, in which Drolma had been involved since 2000, Wangchen since soon after and Tashi, who is also a bit younger, since 2009. At first encounter with TSL, Drolma and Wangchen were in their early and late 20s respectively, had minimal schooling and both were already too old to attend and study at the newly set-up Lhasa Special School. Tashi had grown up in a small village outside of Lhasa.

Among Drolma’s close friends is Yangzom. After a few years of a joint informal play group at a local Lhasa hospital, they were reunited during the TSL project in the early 2000s, where they also gained some basic literacy in Chinese and Tibetan. They see each other for celebrations, such as Tibetan New Year, and get together in their spare time. Discussing the topic of mixing Tibetan and Chinese sign, Yangzom says she prefers and signs better in TSL. She added that it now surprised her that communication even with her long-standing friend Dekyi gets a little stuck sometimes, due to Dekyi’s pervasive use of CSL signs. These remarks were made before Yangzom started a new job in an all-deaf sewing workshop, where a majority of her colleagues are CSL-dominant signers and she has gotten used to it since.

Dekyi’s increased use of CSL signs is, despite her having been instrumental in completing the *Standard Tibetan Sign Language Dictionary* (Henceforth, for short, *The Standard Dictionary*) and serving as one of the functionaries of the TDA. Dekyi loves the Tibetan language and is one of relatively few deaf Tibetans who can read, write and also speak Tibetan well; she is also proficient in correctly fingerspelling Tibetan words using the TSL manual alphabet. Prior to losing most of her hearing as a teenager, she gained a solid Tibetan and Chinese language education at a regular school. After she was no longer allowed by the teachers to attend this school, she stayed at her family home before eventually moving to Lhasa and joining the TDA. She considers herself (and is considered by others) a deaf person (*mi on-pa*). Actively involved in developing TSL, Dekyi has praised

Tibetan Sign Language, in a project funding application in written Tibetan, as a “butter lamp that shines a light in the darkness for those who lost their hearing or cannot speak”, the butter lamp a salient metaphor for not only shining a light in the dark, but also accruing religious merit.

Dekyi was the first to mention the term *ra-ma-luk lak-da*, the “neither-goat-nor-sheep sign language” to me, back in January 2016, when we were discussing trends in sign language use among deaf people in Lhasa. At that point there was no sign for mixing Tibetan and Chinese sign, but the practice was already common. While dedicated to the value and the promotion of TSL, Dekyi often mocked herself and other Tibetans as becoming “neither-goat-nor-sheep” in their signing, herself using the spoken Tibetan word and thus participating in the same discourse pertaining to Chinese codeswitching in Lhasa Tibetan that is widespread among hearing Tibetans (cf. Tournadre 2003, Yeshe 2008).

Although from our conversations I knew that Dekyi had a personal preference for a purer TSL (in her terms, “only TSL”), as a functionary of the TDA I observed that she had to communicate with everybody, no matter which sign language or form of communication was required. The TDA is meant to represent “all” deaf Tibetans.⁹ For getting the work of the organization done the TDA had to hire graduates from the Special School, preferably those who had come back from China proper with college education. Working with these CSL-dominant signers, Dekyi has acquired a robust CSL repertoire and she now uses many CSL signs as part of her communication, even with those she used to sign mainly in TSL before.

While the two friends Drolma and Yangzom’s longing and preferences for a purer TSL matter to them personally and have also seemingly influenced their choices of close friends and how they sign with them, Dekyi’s opinions are more than a matter of personal choice and interest. Given her role in the TDA, she is required to balance working for deaf Tibetans’ well-being and “development” all over the TAR (including Tibetans for whom TSL may not be the main sign language), yet also is responsible for the transmission of TSL into the future, a key mission of her organization. To pursue the latter has become difficult, however, especially since summer 2016 when the PRC government’s *State Plan for Sign Language and Braille Standardization Movement (2015-2020)* (from now on, for short, the *State Plan*, CDPF et al. 2015) came to the knowledge of the TDA in Lhasa.

⁹ Note that this in fact only includes deaf Tibetans in the TAR and not Tibetans in other parts of China. To my knowledge there have not been any Han Chinese attendees to TDA activities. In terms of actual membership the numbers I have been given were vague. Perhaps the best indicator of a possible number of TDA members, was the 200 group members in 2016 of a Weixin (WeChat) group that the TDA had created to inform deaf Tibetans of its activities.

The *State Plan* is to “promote the standardization (*C. gui fan hua*) of sign language” and “speeding up the research and creation of the state’s common (*C. tong yong*) sign language and Braille” (CDPF et al. 2015: 4). Although this policy paper should technically not affect Tibetan Sign Language, its status, use and future development (since it is a linguistically different sign language from the national CSL addressed in the document), the *State Plan* and the policy of unification, have been used by TDPF officials in a way that implies that TSL is a part of the “national sign language” that the *State Plan* sets out to regulate and standardize. In line with this (mis)interpretation (likely to be related to a lack of commitment and imagination, and/or the political sensitivities attributed by the authorities to the Tibetan language and culture nexus), the TDPF had in 2017 ceased to fund TSL-related activities, including TSL language courses and materials. Instead, it promoted Tibetans’ learning of CSL and gives permission to deaf Tibetans to contribute to research projects in China proper, which dedicate themselves to the creation or expansion of CSL corpora, for example, by documenting TSL lexical items or contributing Tibetan signs to otherwise CSL-research based outputs. The exact practices and projects that have begun in relation to this the state “common sign language” and its aims and objectives are currently not well documented.

* * *

Many of the TSL signers who had been actively involved with the TDA activities see the codeswitching of TSL and CSL in the form of what Dekyi calls a “neither-goat-nor-sheep sign language” as something negative that ideally should be avoided. This ideology resonates with wider discourses and concerns over the influence of Chinese on the Tibetan languages and the region more broadly (Robin 2014) and with regard to Chinese codeswitching in modern Lhasa Tibetan (Yeshe 2008).

Yet, the group of people discussed in this section still engage in the practice, especially due to their expanding engagements with the CSL-dominant graduates from the Special School through work and friendships. Pragmatism and the necessities of communicating in daily life, as well as the lack of support for TSL within and outside of the Special School, make many people’s idealistic positions untenable in practice in certain contexts. We can see clearly the tensions between many Tibetans’ stated preferences, i.e. their language ideologies, and their linguistic behavior. These tensions also remind us as researchers that we should not make the assumption that people’s attitudes result in corresponding linguistic behaviors.

This point resonates with Zeshan and Panda’s study of bilingual signers, who found that the four study participants’ language attitudes towards mixing two sign languages (two felt keeping the sign languages separate was prefera-

ble, while the others supported the idea of mixing sign languages in the same stretch of discourse), had no bearing on their actual codeswitching practices as recorded on video (2015). There are also numerous studies on local sign language users’ attitudes towards imports and influences from a globalizing American Sign Language (ASL) and national sign languages and to what extent these attitudes translate into their own linguistic behaviors and use of ASL (Cooper 2016, Moges 2016, Moriarty Harrelson, 2017, Nonaka 2014, Schmalting 2003).

In summary, the signers’ attitudes discussed so far vary, all operate within a model that Dekyi termed the “neither-goat-nor-sheep” model of mixing languages — a model that implies the traditionally negative connotations of something or someone being “neither-nor”. The term she used — both in speech and sign — were still Tibetan terms and metaphors, close in meaning to hearing Lhasa Tibetans using the term. This was however not the only way to perceive and interpret the mixing of TSL and CSL.

6 “A-bird-with-two-heads”: Pragmatism and translanguaging

Wangchen a TSL teacher and involved in various TSL project activities, holds different opinions on the mixing of TSL and CSL from those analyzed in the previous section and expressed by his peers. At home Wangchen signs with his deaf wife in TSL with the usual CSL loans and occasional switches to CSL signs, even when there is a TSL equivalent. While I observed that his wife tends to speak Tibetan with their hearing son, Wangchen signed a more basic form of TSL with him.¹⁰ Outside of the home, he has built many friendships and working relations with deaf people associated with the TDA and the TSL project, as well as with those who have graduated from the Special School. Based on a preliminary review of my video recordings and from what I observed during fieldwork, he uses a larger number of CSL signs with CSL-signing Tibetans, than with his wife and son or TSL-dominant friends. Regardless, most signers perceive him as one of the most expert and fluent signers in TSL.

¹⁰ He also lately has made more effort to voice Tibetan expressions alongside his signing (which he was not used to and also found very difficult), as his son’s teachers expressed concerns to them about their son’s slow speech development. For the time being, they had decided to prioritize speech over sign.

We also discussed the topic of mixing Tibetan and Chinese signs. In such a context I once explained to him the Tibetan term *ra-ma-luk lak-da*, “neither-goat-nor-sheep sign,” after Dekyi had first mentioned it to me to capture the TSL-CSL mixing. I explained how *ra-ma-luk* was commonly used for things and people that are neither/nor and that the term is now commonly used for the mixing of spoken Tibetan and Chinese. He didn’t know that expression and it took me some time to explain it accurately in TSL, as there was not yet a sign to denote such a practice. Once I had finished my explanation, Wangchen responded that this concept did not quite fit the case of Tibetan signers’ mixing of Tibetan and Chinese signs. They are more like “*a bird with two heads*”, one, he said, was a Chinese “*sign head*” and the other a Tibetan one. Depending on the situation, one would use one and/or the other, often in quick succession.

For Wangchen the increasing mixing of TSL and CSL was a natural development and it was most important to him to be able to communicate — no matter how. He gave some examples: “Say you want to sign knife but you don’t know the Tibetan sign for it, you use the Chinese one. Or for pizza, the same.” I asked, “Do you mind this mixing?” He replied, “No, it doesn’t matter — it’s like this: we meet someone and we sign. And when I do not have a sign to explain something, or the other person doesn’t understand a sign I use, I pick another sign for it and then that person understands — so it is very useful.” Although in reality Wangchen signs many CSL signs for which he has TSL signs and for which others would understand the TSL sign, the underlying ideology he expresses seems to be that the primary goal of communication is understanding each other. For him this means that communication happens in sign, as he is deaf, has little speech and like all of his peers, uses no hearing aids or implants. Given how relatively few Tibetan signers there are in Lhasa altogether, he thinks people should be able to communicate within that wider group of deaf people, irrespective of their preferred sign languages or educational background.

While thinking less than Dekyi about the implications of mixing TSL and CSL for the future of TSL, Wangchen shares with her the outlook and responsibility to communicate with a wide net of deaf Tibetans due to their TDA work and as TSL teachers. They also share a sense that it is urgent to bring deaf Tibetans together as much as possible, whatever form of communication this takes, so that deaf people can support each other and improve their livelihoods. This concern found expression in adding a CSL component towards the end of the most recent TSL course taught in Lhasa in November 2016, after a suggestion by the TDA leadership.¹¹

¹¹ The CSL module was taught by a graduate of the Lhasa Special School.

During a more formal autobiographical interview in February 2016, I asked Wangchen about his thoughts on the future of TSL. “Tibetan sign is very useful. [They] should go together. We should not just develop and use one [i.e. CSL] and leave Tibetan sign aside. Chinese sign can be a real headache, with the finger-spelling of Pinyin terms and all. Many [Tibetans] find them very hard to understand. It’s very different from our sign language, which has strong and many spontaneous expressions and which can be understood by all and easily. It makes [people] happy, they like [using] it.” I asked, “And what do you think would need to be done to strengthen Tibetan sign?” He said “We need to collect and create many more signs - in fact we need to have signs for everything. Now we have only about 1200, but we need many more in the future. We need signs for all the Tibetan words. That’s what I think would be important. And then we need to teach this full repertoire more widely.”

In this last statement he seems to suggest, as some examples in the literature on ideologies of users of other young sign languages do (e.g. Hoffmann-Dilloway 2008, 2016), that a signed language should have signed equivalents of all the words of the surrounding spoken language of the area or ethnic group. And, furthermore, that “signs” should be recorded in written language documents and formally taught, rather than understood as used and simply spread through use in an adult signing population.

* * *

Wangchen’s use of the metaphor of a “*bird-with-two-sign-heads*” suggests that he does not support a neither-nor or either-or, but rather an and-and perspective on the mixing of TSL and CSL. He also expresses a love for “spontaneous sign”, which he says is easily understandable by deaf Tibetans, at times even by hearing people. When asked directly, Wangchen expressed his concerns about the future of TSL. His ideas for developing Tibetan signs suggest a way to strengthen the bird’s Tibetan “sign head,” as if this were a prerequisite for this bird’s head to be used as much as its Chinese “sign head”. His comments suggest that there needs to be a better balance to the current much greater official support for all kinds of Chinese language in the TAR, through more support for Tibetan languages, whether signed, spoken or written. Put simply, in many settings, especially education and other government-related domains, Tibetans have no longer a choice as to which language(s) to use, with a growing tendency to Chinese in all public spaces in Lhasa (except monasteries, nunneries and some teahouses) and Tibetan relegated to Tibetan homes and 8 hours of obligatory Tibetan language classes a week for students in primary school. Therefore, only time will tell what the results of Wangchen’s fluent adaptation to contexts and communication partners will be

like. It also remains open what the development of further Tibetan Sign Language materials that he envisions, will look like and to what extent these might actually impact linguistic behavior of deaf Tibetans and their codeswitching to CSL. There seems to be some overlap of his opinions with other signers discussed below, whose new sign of the “goat-and-sheep language” (rather than “neither-goat-nor-sheep sign”) seems to be closer to his perspective, than to the spoken and written Tibetan expression “neither-goat-nor-sheep sign”.

7 GOAT-SHEEP-SIGN-MIXED: Language hierarchies, national orientations and code-blending

A large group of adult Tibetan signers in Lhasa sign almost exclusively in the local variant of CSL, due to their exposure to and adoption of CSL at the Lhasa Special School. Here Chinese and CSL dominate and little spoken/written Tibetan or TSL are taught, known or used by the students. Some of these signers, as mentioned earlier, were further exposed to CSL and its variants during their studies at high school and College in China proper. I only include in the discussion here those who have already graduated from that school and now live in Lhasa or surroundings. Those currently attending the Lhasa Special School have had almost no opportunity to come in contact with TSL signers, apart from learning and using the TSL manual alphabet and the grammar signs during formal Tibetan language classes, as well as using aspects of “spontaneous sign.”

Among the graduates from the Special School, the majority are not aware of, or discuss their non-use of TSL. Those whom I asked, do not seem concerned about only relying on CSL. Rather, they see use of CSL as an expression of their cosmopolitan and national outlook, welcoming what they see as CSL’s greater lexical repertoire as well as the more advanced educational opportunities that can be accessed via CSL by deaf people in China proper. They also hope to embrace professional openings (such as teacher posts) within the TAR’s now five Special Schools, which require CSL and Chinese (TSL is no requirement at all, even for Tibetan language instructors). Many among this group are also simply more familiar and comfortable with CSL and have taken “deaf turns” (Friedner 2015) earlier in their lives than many in the TSL-dominant group.

Three of the so-far five deaf Tibetan teachers employed by the TAR’s Special Schools fall into this category. To them, CSL opened up unprecedented educational opportunities, such as attending technical colleges (*xué yuán*) in Beijing, Nanjing, Tianjin, Xian and Shanghai, and they have gained great competence

in (several varieties of) CSL.¹² Despite the pervasive use of CSL in this group of signers, the deaf Special School teachers and several others claim that they use Tibetan “spontaneous sign” and TSL for Tibetan concepts that “do not exist in CSL”: Tibetan clothes and food items, for example, such as a *chuba* (Tibetan robe) or butter tea. However, my own observations and video recordings do not bear this out. Rather, I have seen them describe such items in CSL (for example for *chuba* they sign “Tibetan dress”) and they have their own local variety of CSL sign for butter tea (literally signing “oil drink”). Even for place names in Tibet, for “Tibet” and “Tibetans”, and for “China” and “Chinese” they tend to use CSL signs, which tend to incorporate a Pinyin fingerspelling component related to the romanization of Chinese characters (Hofer, forthcoming). This is significant as these signs thus might become removed from cultural and political sensibilities shared by many Tibetans, especially with regard to signs for Tibetan places and the Tibetan people (cf. Hofer 2016).

Some among the Lhasa Special School graduates view their lack of TSL more critically, and with regret even. Among them are Tenzin and Gendun, who over a joint lunch in the Barkor area of central Lhasa commented on their conundrum. At the school they had been exposed to the extra-curricular TSL classes on Saturdays (cf. Hofer and Sagli 2017), which Tenzin in particular enjoyed. But she said that whenever they attempted to use their newly-learned TSL in the regular classes, their hearing teachers (at that time there were no deaf teachers) would correct them and instruct them to use CSL instead. Tenzin’s fingerspelling of Tibetan was still good, and perhaps due to her apprenticing as a *thanka* (Buddhist scroll) painter she also knew many TSL signs for the various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon, the main icons of Tibetan *thanka* paintings. Gendun expressed similar feelings. While both said they would love to use more TSL, they found little space to use and practice it. Neither of them were involved or even aware of the then-ongoing TSL classes and occasional Sunday Deaf Club activities organized by the TDA. At the time of writing, Tenzin had stopped painting *thanka* and Gendun was hired as an assistant teacher to the Lhasa Special School. Given the school’s language policy and him being reunited with other CSL-signing deaf and hearing teachers, he does not feel in a position to expand his use of TSL.

The opinions and ideologies of some other CSL-signing Tibetans were not clear cut and oscillated between an appreciation for the cosmopolitan potential

¹² The use of a national sign language or even a foreign sign language such as American Sign Language in national deaf education is common in many other places too and often thought by teachers to open up educational opportunities (Kusters 2014; Schmalig 2003).

of, as well as familiarity with CSL, and also a sense of regret for lacking TSL. Two women stood out among this group. Both had graduated from the Special School. Lhamo had obtained a College degree from a university in China proper in 2015 and almost immediately landed a job at one of the newly established Special School outside of Lhasa. Khandro meanwhile completed a vocational training and subsequently married, shortly afterwards having a child. Then she began to work at the TDA. Both of them were close friends of Dekyi, the aforementioned TDA functionary. While Khandro's CSL and that of another work colleague had definitely instigated TSL-dominant signers at the TDA to pick up more CSL, as already discussed, both Khandro and Lhamo wanted to learn more TSL from others to expand their repertoire.

That said, when I asked Lhamo what she thought the future of communication among deaf Tibetans, she gave a pragmatic answer. As if I didn't know, she said with slight surprise: "TSL alone is not enough, there are not enough signs. We need Chinese sign, as they have a sign for everything." We discussed this for a while, myself being well aware that these arguments had been also made in favor of Chinese language instruction in mainstream, Lhasa schools, and against the use of Tibetan in education. Lhamo continued: "Look, Tibetans use so much Chinese nowadays, even for technical things where we have Tibetan terms. The same in sign language, why not use the Chinese signs for terms we don't have?" She thought a blend of the two sign languages would be the best, using the spoken term "neither-goat-nor-sheep sign language" in a self-conscious and not inherently negative way. At the end of that conversation, she confirmed her opinion: "Yes, to mix and blend the two is best, use Chinese and Tibetan sign, mixed together."

Lhamo's argument, and also Wangchen's comments above, that there were insufficient Tibetan signs overlaps with the sign language ideologies held by several hearing teachers and the leadership of the Lhasa Special School, who in this way explained and defended the use of CSL as a medium of instruction next to Chinese to me. They were, however, often uninformed about not only recorded but also the actual extent of the TSL lexicon. For example, one long-established teacher wrongly thought there were only 400 TSL signs¹³. They also did not know about the interest expressed by the TDA in producing more volumes of *The Standard Dictionary* to further document the TSL repertoire. The ideology that more

13 *The Standard Dictionary* has overall 1,437 sign entries. A Nanjing-based research project with four fluent TSL signers from Lhasa in 2012 and in 2014 found and collected a combined TSL lexicon of 6300 non-CSL TSL signs (personal communication, November 2016). What counted as "one" sign here is not known to me.

documented words and signs are better, resonates with ideologies in many other places about the status of the respective languages and their users.

Given the wider Chinese-medium instruction in Lhasa schools, it would have been exceptional for the Lhasa Special School to use TSL as a medium of instruction, not least because this would have had to involve a collaboration with the TDA. As discussed above the TDA was affiliated until 2014 with Handicap International, and working with an INGO had become particularly sensitive and problematic for Tibetans after a new series of protests began in 2008.

* * *

Several CSL-dominant Tibetans seem to advocate a form of translanguaging, which has been defined as “the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (Otheguy, Garcia and Reid 2015:283). Dekyi earlier on called this by the spoken Tibetan term “neither-goat-nor-sheep sign”, a term also used in spoken form by Khandro in the past. They both did not sign the term, as both became deaf in their teens and they speaks fluent Tibetan. And yet, at the very end of a stint of fieldwork, in late June 2017, Khandro and Dekyi were experimenting with and showed me new signs for this linguistic practice¹⁴: they signed RA-LUK-LAK-DA (“goat-sheep sign”) and RA-LUK-LAK-DRÉ (“goat-sheep-sign-mixed”). Rather than the neither-nor model and its claims to purity of *either* the goat *or* the sheep language, these signs, like Wangchen’s two-headed bird, confidently refer to the blending and co-use of Tibetan and Chinese sign. What is more, the latter sign mixes TSL and CSL: “goat” is signed the same way in TSL and CSL, so it’s hard to know which, but, “sheep” is different in the two languages and they used the CSL sign. “Sign” and “mixed” were both TSL signs. This compound sign subsequently has been used among several signers of this group when discussing the mixing of the two sign languages with me (see Figure 2) and “Chinese-Tibetan-mixed sign” has also come into use (Figure 3).

¹⁴ This was the first time I saw a Tibetan person sign this term.



Figure 2. RA-LUK-LAK-DRÉ (GOAT-SHEEP-SIGN-MIXED).



Figure 3. GYA-BÖ-LAK-DRÉ (CHINESE-TIBETAN-SIGN-MIXED).

Overall, the sign “goat-and-sheep-sign-mixed” and indeed most of the discussion of mixed signing, focuses on the lexicon, not syntax or other aspects of grammar, with the exception of a CSL-dominant signer who pointed also to aspects of mixing of TSL and CSL grammar. The origin and implications of my research participants’ ideological focus on the level of words/signs needs to be further researched. It might well have to do with the legacy of the TSL project, as almost all of the TDA’s efforts so far focused on lexicon and dictionaries as a means to standardize, formalize and promote Tibetan Sign Language. Erika Hoffman-Dilloway’s work in Nepal discusses a similar focus in the process of standardizing Nepali Sign Language (2008). Also relevant may be the initial mode of transmission of CSL to the students of the Lhasa Special School via hearing Tibetan teachers who encountered and studied CSL mainly through a standard two-volume CSL dictionary, rather than through everyday communication with deaf Chinese people.

8 Conclusion

Chinese and CSL are promoted top-down as the nominal “national languages” of the deaf in China through the country-wide Special School system. New policies proposed through the *State Plan* (CDPF 2015) and related documents further support this. This is even though CSL is not officially recognized as one of the minority languages of the PRC (Huang and Gu 2014, Yang 2015). The promotion of Chinese and CSL takes place regardless of the location of a Special School or the group of deaf people it may cater to in an ethnic minority areas (such as the TAR), where other spoken minority languages are used and are official languages. Central government and official language ideologies claim to thus offer better educational opportunities for all deaf people in China. Yet, as this chapter has discussed, these ideologies collide with the aspirations, ideologies and, at times, linguistic behaviors of some deaf Tibetans — in particular those who had actively worked in the TDA in support of TSL and had considered it the local equivalent of the “father tongue” (i.e. the native language) of all deaf Tibetans. Yet, the official ideologies in support of CSL do not collide with other deaf Tibetans, like those who are CSL-dominant, thus offering a complex socio-linguistic picture.

The diverse sign language ideologies that I have discussed here have emerged and changed over the past years in relation to earlier (now defunct) collaboration of a group of locals with the INGO Handicap International, the founding and activities of the TDA, the increasing interactions among deaf signers in an urban environment, the founding of the TAR Special Schools, and domestic mobility of some deaf Tibetans enabling them to go to China proper. These ideologies are found among, but do not map onto neatly, two groups of deaf Tibetan signers in Lhasa, whom I have referred to as TSL-dominant and CSL-dominant. Even these classifications may be inadequate, however. In the written words of one interlocutor, even the “father tongue of deaf Tibetans is now neither-goat-nor-sheep” (*rang-ki pha-ké lak-da de yang ra-ma-luk*). Deaf Tibetans have been referring to the resulting language practices with the spoken and written Tibetan terms “neither-goat-nor-sheep-sign” and “mixed-sign-language”, as well as by new signs that render this practice as “goat-sheep-mixed-sign”, or “Chinese-Tibetan-mixed sign” (Figure 2 and 3). Mixing CSL lexical items into the communication of TSL-dominant signers has become particularly common, while comparatively fewer CSL-dominant Tibetan signers codeswitch to or import loans from TSL into CSL. This imbalance is partly due to local social dynamics, the influence of powerful state institutions and state-led sign language ideologies that aim to tune down regional or ethno-linguistic differences within the PRC to instead promote national (political) unity and exert cultural and linguistic control homogeneity.

The broader tensions and political sensitivities over Tibetan language, culture and political self-representation are additional important contextual influences.

Crystal (2000) and Myers-Scotton (2007: 78-79) have suggested a three stage linguistic process leading to the loss of spoken minority languages world-wide: the primary use of the minority language being followed by an emerging bilingualism, which then quickly declines and leads – usually through the younger generation’s use and preference for the new language – to fewer and fewer people using their “old” minority language (see also Thomason 2015: 12). Most sign languages, however, are not used in the families into which deaf people were born and the linguistic developments among deaf signers, at least in Lhasa, seem to follow a different path. The “new language” here (i.e. CSL) is actually the “old” and “native” language of the Tibetan Special School students, while those who first encountered TSL as their “father sign language” (*pha-ké lak-da*) do not actually use TSL wholesale, but incorporate large numbers of CSL lexical items into TSL grammatical structure through either loans or codeswitching. What will come after this current stage, only time, and the ongoing documentation of deaf Tibetans’ communication and their social, professional and individual lives, will be able to tell.

In Lhasa, different attitudes towards the mixing of Tibetan and Chinese sign, as well as towards “spontaneous sign” shared between all deaf Tibetans (and to some extent their hearing teachers, family members and others), are unevenly distributed and they do not necessarily influence the respective linguistic behaviors of the very same people who hold them. Furthermore, both language ideologies as well as linguistic practices are changing in response to ongoing wider societal changes in Lhasa, in Tibet and in the PRC, specifically with regard to a changing legal environment for TSL and CSL, language shift towards Chinese, and changing educational and professional opportunities encountered by deaf people.

The signs and the practices related to the mixing of TSL and CSL challenges assumptions about the bounded nature of local (sign) languages, as well as the social boundaries of those who use them. In addition to the actual linguistic behaviors, it might after all be the language attitudes and ideologies, and the contexts and social relations within which these are embedded, that establish significant social differentiation.

References

- Adam, Robert. 2017. Unimodal bilingualism in the Deaf community: Language contact between two sign languages in Australia and the United Kingdom. London: University College London PhD dissertation.

- China Disabled People's Federation (CDPF); Education Bureau; State Language Commission and the State News, Publishing and Broadcasting Administration. 2015. State plan for sign language and Braille standardization movement (2015–2020). http://www.cdpf.org.cn/yw/201512/t20151229_537798.shtml (accessed 13 August 2019)
- Cooper, Audrey C. and Nguyen Tran Thuy Tien. 2016. Signed language community-researcher collaboration in Viet Nam: Challenging language Ideologies, creating social change. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 25(2): 105–128.
- Crystal, David. 1992. *An encyclopedic dictionary of language and languages*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Crystal, David. 2000. *Language death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Friedner, Michele. 2015. *Valuing Deaf worlds in urban India*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Green, Elizabeth Mara. 2014. *The Nature of Signs: Nepal's Deaf Society, Local Sign and the Production of Communicative Sociality*. Berkeley: University of California PhD dissertation.
- Guerra Currie, Anne-Marie, Richard P. Meier and Keith Walters. 2002. A cross-linguistic examination of the lexicons of four sign languages. In Richard P. Meier, Kearsy A. Cormier & David G. Quinto-Pozos (eds.), *Modality and structure in signed and spoken languages*, 224–236. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hofer, Theresia. 2016. “Indexicality and Tibetanness through sign: Places and belonging” Paper presented at the Language, Indexicality and Belonging Linguistic Anthropology Conference at Somerville College, University of Oxford, 7–8 April.
- Hofer, Theresia. 2017. Is Lhasa Tibetan sign language emerging, endangered, or both? *International Journal for the Sociology of Language* 245 (May): 113–145.
- Hofer, Theresia. Forthcoming. Logics of Iconics: Place names in Tibetan Sign Language (TSL) and their Use among Signers in Lhasa. *Minpaku Sign Language Studies*, Vol 3, 2020, Japan, Minpaku.
- Hofer, Theresia and Gry Sagli. 2017. ‘Civilising’ Deaf people in Tibet and Inner Mongolia: Governing linguistic, ethnic and bodily difference in China. *Disability & Society* 32(4): 443–466.
- Hoffmann-Dilloway, Erika. 2008. Metasemiotic regimentation in the standardization of Nepali Sign Language. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 18(2): 192–213.
- Huang Wei, and Gu Dingqian. 2014. Status quo of sign language. In Yuming Li and Wei Li (eds.) *Language situation in China* (Language policies and practices in China, Vol. 2). Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 43–50.
- Kusters, Annelies. 2014. Language ideologies in the shared signing community of Adamorobe. *Language in Society*, Vol 43: 139–158.
- Kusters, Annelies and Michelle Friedner. 2016. Introduction — DEAF-SAME and Difference in international Deaf spaces and encounters. In Michele Friedner and Annelies Kusters (eds.) *It's a small world: International Deaf spaces and encounters*. Washington DC: University of Gallaudet Press, p. ix–xxix.
- Kroskirty, Paul. 2005. Language ideologies. In Alessandro Duranti (ed.) *A Companion to linguistic anthropology*. 496–517. http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/book.html?id=g9781405144308_9781405144308 (accessed 8 May 2017).
- Moges, Rezenet Tsegay. 2016. Challenging sign language lineages and geographies: The Case of Eritrean, Finnish, and Swedish sign languages. In Michele Friedner and Annelies Kusters (eds.) *It's a small world: International deaf spaces and encounters*. Washington DC: University of Gallaudet Press, 83–94.

- Moriarty Harrelson, Erin. 2017. *Regimes of mobilities: Deaf development, NGOs and Deaf tourism in Cambodia*. Washington DC: American University PhD dissertation.
- Myers-Scotton, Carol. 1997. *Dueling languages: Grammatical structure in codeswitching*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Nonaka, Angela M. 2014. (Almost) Everyone here spoke Ban Khor sign language — until they started using TSL: Language shift and endangerment of a Thai village sign language." *Language & Communication* 38:54–72.
- Otheguy, Ricardo, Ofelia García, and Wallis Reid. 2015. Clarifying translanguaging and deconstructing named languages: A perspective from linguistics. *Applied Linguistics Review* 6(3):281–307.
- Pavlenko, Aneta. 2007. Autobiographic narratives as data in applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics* 28(2):163–188.
- Plaza-Pust, Carolina and Esperanza Morales-López (eds.). 2008. *Sign bilingualism: Language development, interaction, and maintenance in sign language contact situations*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Quinto-Pozos, David. 2000. *Contact between Mexican sign language and American sign language*. Austin: University of Texas PhD dissertation.
- Reagan, Timothy G. 2010. *Language policy and planning for sign languages*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Reed, Lauren W. Forthcoming. „Culture sign is my favourite“: Bilingualism and identity in the Port Moresby deaf community, Papua New Guinea. For special issue of *Asia-Pacific Language Variation Journal*.
- Robin, Françoise. 2014. Streets, Slogans and Screens: New paradigms for the Defense of the Tibetan Language. In: Trine Brox & Ildikó Bellér-Hann (eds.) *On the fringes of the harmonious society — Tibetans and Uyghurs in socialist China*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 209–234.
- Schmaling, Constanze. 2003. A for apple: The impact of western education and ASL on the Deaf community in Kano state, northern Nigeria. In: Leila Monaghan, Constanze Schmaling, Karen Nakamura, & Graham H. Turner (eds.) *Many ways to be Deaf: International variation in Deaf communities*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 302–310.
- Taub, Sarah F. 2004. *Language from the Body: Iconicity and metaphor in American sign language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- TDA (Tibet Deaf Association). 2011. *Bod kyi rgyun spyod lag brda'i tshig mdzod* [Dictionary of everyday Tibetan sign language] (Chinese titlepage title: *Longya shouyu zangyu cidian* [Deaf Tibetan sign language dictionary], English title on title page: *Standard Tibetan sign dictionary*). Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi rigs dpe skrun khang [Tibet Minority Press].
- TDPF (Tibet Disabled People's Federation) & HI (Handicap International). 2002. *'On lkugs kyi lag brda'i bod yig tshig mdzod deb dang po* [Alphabetical dictionary of Tibetan deaf-dumb sign language — Volume 1], (English title on title page: Tibetan sign language dictionary — Volume I). Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang [Tibet People's Press].
- TDPF (Tibet Disabled People's Federation) & HI (Handicap International). 2005. *Bod kyi lag brda'i slob deb — dang po* [Tibetan sign language book — Volume 1]. Lhasa: Privately published.
- Thomason, Sarah. 2015. *Endangered languages: An introduction*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Tournadre, Nicolas. 2003. The dynamics of Tibetan-Chinese bilingualism. *China Perspectives* 45 (January-February): 1–9.

- Yang, Junhui. 2015. Chinese sign language. In Julie Bakken Jespen et al. *Sign Languages of the World: A Comparative Handbook*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 177–194.
- Yeshe, Kelsang. 2008. *Chinese codeswitching in modern Lhasa Tibetan: A motive-driven linguistic behavior of Lhasa Tibetans*. Oxford: University of Oxford DPhil dissertation.
- Zeshan, Ulrike and Sibaji Panda. 2015. Two languages at hand: Code-switching in bilingual deaf signers. *Sign Language & Linguistics* 18(1): 90–131.

Part II: Sign language ideologies in teaching

Cindee Calton

The impact of student and teacher ASL ideologies on the use of English in the ASL classroom

1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the decisions American Sign Language (ASL) teachers make about the use of English and the role that language ideologies about ASL play in these decisions. For a discussion of the efficacy of teaching ASL in the target language versus the source language, see Rosen et al. (2014). Rosen et al. found that “voice-off” classrooms were more effective at teaching vocabulary in most cases. My research, questions asked: 1) with what sign language ideologies do students enter the ASL classroom; 2) what sign language ideologies do the ASL teachers possess; and 3) how do interactions between ASL teachers’ and students’ language ideologies influence teachers’ decisions about how much and what modality of English to use in the classroom?

This chapter examines a question that all second-language teachers face: whether or not to use students’ first language in their classrooms. Although some students in classes I studied undoubtedly were native speakers of languages other than English, the teachers I discuss in this chapter had to choose whether or not to use English or not for clarifying purposes while teaching the target language since the majority of students in their classes spoke English as their first language.

Although their policies were by no means unanimous, most of the spoken language I interviewed for this study indicated that they think English should be avoided. However, ASL teachers expressed far more concern over spoken English in the classroom and the political implications of its use than their spoken language teacher counterparts. In this chapter, I argue that ASL teachers’ choices about the use of English are strongly motivated by an assumption that their students hold the ideology that ASL is not a language and the teacher’s desire for students to recognize ASL as a full and complete language.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510090-006>

2 Theoretical framework: Language ideologies

By “language ideology” I mean ideas or beliefs that speakers hold about language(s). I use the concept of “language ideology,” articulated by Irvine as “the cultural (or subcultural) system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (1989:255). Like all ideologies, speakers are generally unaware of their language ideologies because they accept them as “common sense” (Fairclough 1989; Gramsci and Forgas 1988). Language ideologies are cast as “universally true,” yet they reflect the “experience or interest of a particular social position” (Woolard 1998:6). Language ideologies are thus not peripheral to understanding language, but “are the very heart of the matter” (Gee 1992:xix). Language is not simply the means by which cultural and ideological elements are expressed, but a cultural and ideological phenomenon itself. Language use, and therefore language instruction, is thus inherently political. Speakers, however, tend not to recognize language’s political nature.

The very act of educating is also inherently political (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, McLaren 1997, Schieffelin 2000, Brice Heath 2001, Schiro 2012). The second-language classroom is a place where languages are constantly in contact. As such, ideologies about particular languages are relevant to instruction and learning in the classroom. As Irvine and Gal demonstrated, language ideologies are not rooted in the language itself, but represent a transference of ideologies about the users of a particular language onto the language through processes they label “iconization” (2000). Language ideologies can thus serve to reinforce prevalent ideologies about social groups. Students enter language classes with ideologies about the language they are there to learn. Similarly, teachers teach language classes with ideologies about the language(s) they teach.

Iconization and another semiotic process that linguistic anthropologists call “second-order indexicality” are implicated in ideologies about language contact, and I found these to be prevalent in the second-language classrooms I studied. Silverstein (2003) described second-order indexicality as “the process by which signs¹ take on novel indexical meanings in new contexts that were only latent in earlier ones” (Graham 2002:190). Particular languages and elements of languages have social meaning, and thus ideological entailments, through iconic and indexical processes.

As formulated by Peirce in his typology of ASL signs, iconic signs take on meanings by virtue of some physical resemblance to what they represent (1894).

¹ Peirce is referring to signs generally, not specifically signs from a sign language.

Indexical signs, or indexes, get their meaning by virtue of some spatial or temporal co-occurrence with their object or meaning. Languages both entail indexes and are themselves indexical. Language features that are specific to particular groups of people are, by virtue of co-occurrence, what Silverstein (2003) called first-order indexes. An American English speaker who hears the word “y’all” and understands it to be an index of “Southern speech” by virtue of its iconicity with the speech of people from the United States South who say “y’all,” makes this interpretation on the basis of a first-order relationship. The second-order index takes this association further, “bring[ing] ideology to bear on the relationship noticed” (Woolard 2008:437). As a second-order index, the linguistic marker is infused with political or moral associations. The person who hears the word “y’all” makes moral and political inferences about the speaker based on the listener’s associations. These political or moral associations in turn “naturalize and ideologize the sociolinguistic associations that they have registered in the first order” (Woolard 2008:438).

Ideologies of sign languages, like the ideologies of spoken languages, reinforce power relations (Senghas and Monaghan 2002). Persons expressing dominant Western ideologies of sign language often use these, perhaps unwittingly, to reinforce hierarchies of power that tend to place sign languages below spoken languages (Monaghan 1996; Senghas and Monaghan 2002) and deaf² people below the hearing (Kannapell 1993). For example, historical ideologies of sign languages make comparisons between those languages and the communication systems of animals (Baynton 1996). Educators also historically compared sign languages to “primitive” languages, with the assumption being that more “primitive” people required visual gestures because their spoken languages were not capable of expressing every type of idea (Baynton 1996; Farnell 1995). Ideologies of sign language are thus closely connected with ideologies of disability and deafness, such as the ideology that people with disabilities or deaf people are broken or defective.

² Baynton, (1996) a hearing scholar of deaf and disability history, argues that the distinction between “deaf” and “Deaf” is inherently difficult to make as it is difficult to determine “at what precise point do deaf people become “Deaf”. This is further complicated by recent critiques of the uncritical use of the concept of a “Deaf Culture” that seems to encompass all deaf people worldwide as “usurp[ing] the specific realities of everyday deaf lives.” (Friedner and Kusters 2014). Following Baynton’s example, I am choosing not to make the distinction in this chapter. However, it should be noted that all of the deaf people I interviewed and observed consider themselves to be culturally deaf.

3 Ideologies of disability and deafness

Because ASL is used by people who are deaf, through the process of iconization, the politics of ASL classes are connected to the politics of disability and deafness. The ideas and beliefs that nondisabled people have about the lives of people with disabilities are ideologies that the public accepts as “common sense.” Nondisabled people tend to imagine life as a person with a disability as much more problematic than many people with disabilities feel it actually is. Disability Studies scholars argue that the obstacles that people with disabilities face are rooted in society’s treatment of them as defective, rather than in their bodily difference (Longmore 2003). The pathological “pity” model of disability focuses on enforcing normalcy at the expense of people with disabilities’ quality of life.

Deaf Studies scholars similarly challenge the medical model of disability. They contest the proposition that disability, specifically deafness, is a “condition” to be pitied and cured. The field of Disability Studies is based on the premise that disability is socially constructed and that the challenges disabled people with disabilities face are social in nature. Many of the foundational works in Deaf Studies make a similar case, but argue that deaf people are not “disabled.” Early scholars and activists in Deaf Studies posit that deaf people constitute a unique cultural group. Recent work in the field has criticized this position as coming from a largely Northern-centric position (see for example Friedner and Kusters 2014). Nevertheless, the positions espoused in these foundational works were evident in the deaf and hearing³ ASL instructors I interviewed and observed.

The ASL teachers I interviewed argue that deaf people have more in common with minority groups than with disability groups. The views they express indicate ideologies that are similar to those expressed by Deaf Studies scholars. Padden and Humphries (1988) argue that the label disability, which they define as an apt description for people who are blind or physically disabled, does not fit deaf people. They claim that the term disability “suggests political self-representations and goals unfamiliar to [deaf people]”(44).

This layer of disability ideologies, in addition to language ideologies, influences ASL teachers’ pedagogical choices. ASL teachers expect their students to hold pathological views of deafness; they believe that this ideology shapes students’ belief that ASL is an incomplete language. Consequently, ASL teachers aim

3 It should be noted that the issue of who should teach ASL (hearing or deaf people) is itself highly political and contentious. Most of the deaf instructors I interviewed felt that ASL should be taught by deaf people. Hearing teachers had more mixed opinions. For further discussion, see Calton (2013).

to teach their students respect for ASL as a natural language, and for deaf people. In fact, this is one of their primary teaching objectives.

4 Methodology and field sites

To gain a deeper understanding of the ways various ideologies interact in ASL classrooms, I selected five universities for in-depth research. I chose a multi-sited approach in an attempt to capture varying types of programs across a broad geographic area. A multi-sited ethnography allows for the examination of the movement of narratives over a larger system (Marcus 1995). In this case, the narratives in question are ideas that hearing students in the United States in ASL classes have about the deaf designation and about ASL.

Costs related to research also influenced how I selected programs for this study. In several cases, I selected programs where I was able to secure free housing; this enabled me to visit more institutions, stay longer, and engage in more in-depth study. To protect the privacy of participants in the study, I have assigned pseudonyms to the universities and interviewees. I gathered four types of data: interviews, participant observation in classrooms, textbooks and course materials, and student work. I interviewed 53 language instructors: 29 ASL instructors and 24 instructors of other spoken languages.

As a hearing person proficient in ASL, I interviewed hearing teachers in English and deaf instructors in ASL, and transcribed and translated all interviews myself. I then conducted primary analysis of the interviews, highlighting expressions of ideologies for further analysis. I examined the textbooks used in each of the classes I observed for the use of English and any directions the textbooks gave about using English in the classroom. Finally, one teacher permitted me (with the permission of students as well) to copy student responses to readings on deaf culture. I analyzed these for evidence of ideologies students expressed about ASL and/or deafness.

5 Student ideologies

Student ideologies about ASL emerged most prominently in the student papers I was permitted to collect. Students wrote reactions to assigned chapters from *For Hearing People Only* (Moore and Levitan 2003). Their papers did not just discuss the text. In many cases, students grappled with confusion over what they were learning about ASL in class. Since they came into the classroom with little knowl-

edge of ASL, students' ideologies are informed by folk ideas of the nature of sign languages. Specifically, many students conflated ASL with gesture, expected ASL to be based upon English, and assumed that ASL is less complex than spoken languages. In many cases these ideologies affect how the students interpret the words and grammatical concepts that teachers and textbooks present about ASL.

For example, Blake conflated ASL with gesture: "I know it can be hard because where I work we have quite a few Mexicans that don't speak not a word of English [sic]. Although there are a few that do speak good English and will help out if there is a problem, but if they are not around we use sign language to talk without even really knowing it." Here Blake talks about gesturing with speakers of a different language as if it is analogous to using a sign language. His statement makes it clear, however, that he sees gesturing and sign language as one and the same, even after he learned some ASL.

The idea that ASL is similar to, or the same as, gestures is an example of iconization. In a more extreme example, Laura wrote, "In class [it] helps me remember [when] sign[ing] to think kind of [like] caveman talk, putting the object first, then the subject, then finally the verb." Laura's "caveman talk" comparison references a common narrative of the speech of "cavemen" as broken and sub-human. This statement exemplifies the ideologies that the ASL teachers seek to combat.

James keyed in on signs that bear some resemblance to concepts they represent. James wrote, "... from what I have learned of sign language so far, [it seems that it] almost tries to duplicate the look of something. Some examples would be elevators, stairs, rooms, hallways." Here James expresses the idea that ASL signs are iconic in nature; that they bear a physical resemblance to what they signify. Many ASL signs do have some iconic properties. However, many ASL signs are not at all iconic, including many of the signs James had learned at the point he wrote this statement. The fact that iconicity is present in sign language has historically been a source of skepticism for linguists⁴, but recently many linguists of sign languages have challenged this assumption (see for example Wilcox 2004). In the case of the particular signs that James cites, although they are iconic, that does not mean their meaning is transparent to a non-signer or that they are by any means universal signs. Students' focus on ASL signs' iconic properties reflects their assumption that sign language is somehow more natural and less arbitrary than spoken language.

Closely related to the ideas of gesture and iconicity is the idea that ASL is somehow universal. Barbara and Travis came to the class with the idea that sign

⁴ This is possibly due to the historical significance of Saussure's (1966) work in the field of linguistics and his emphasis on the importance of arbitrariness in language.

language is universal across the globe. Barbara expressed surprise at learning that this is not the case: “I learned in this chapter that every national sign language is different.” Some students were also surprised to learn that within any given sign language, there is geographic variation. In one exercise, Travis wrote, “This is shocking to me that signers have accents.” In fact, that sign languages should vary by country and within the language should be no more shocking than the idea that spoken languages vary geographically: both are collections of arbitrary symbols that must be learned. The assumption that sign languages do not vary from place to place or from group to group reflects a conception that sign language is in fact not learned but somehow innate, natural, and universal, like the gestures that Blake tells us that he uses to communicate with his non-English-speaking coworkers.

Laura expressed the idea that ASL is or should be somehow based on English. While ASL and English are in intense contact with one another and influence each other, ASL has a separate lexicon and grammar that is distinct from English. The lexicon and grammar are very different due to the typological features of the different modes. Laura exemplified the idea that ASL is English-based when she wrote, “with ASL it is hard to remember that when signing it you leave out certain words.” Laura’s statement suggests that she thinks of ASL as a simplified version English that is achieved by “leaving out” words that ASL does not have. She is most likely noting that ASL does not have equivalent lexical items for some English words. In fact, ASL does not have definite and indefinite articles, such as “the” or “a,” or the verb “to be.” These are not simply words that are “left out” from signed sentences. Rather, they are grammatical elements that do exist in ASL but are expressed differently; the functions they serve in English are accomplished in different ways than in ASL.

The fact that ASL has a lexicon that differs from English also surprised and confused Jane. She notes, “I found out that there is not a sign for every single word. This surprised me because I thought it would just take too long to fingerspell the words that didn’t have a sign.” Jane’s juxtaposition of “sign” with “word” here implies that she doesn’t quite think of ASL signs as the words of ASL, but something different. Her statement that every word must be fingerspelled also reflects the idea that ASL is based upon English and every English word should have an ASL counterpart. At the time, Jane had learned that many ASL words have no good English counterpart, however she does not seem to have noted those instances.

Alice expressed surprise that ASL word order is not the same as English word order. Alice fails to understand that ASL has distinct syntax. She wrote, “I don’t understand the purpose of *rearranging* the sentence” (emphasis added). Alice’s statement reveals that she conceives of ASL in terms of English; she thinks of it as

“rearranged” English rather than as an entirely distinct language with a different grammar structure.

Beyond expecting ASL to have the same word order as English, Leslie expressed the sentiment that ASL *should have* the same word order as English. Leslie wrote, “The fact that ASL is so much different from English amazes me. I would have thought that you would want to have developed it as closely as possible.” Leslie clearly thinks of ASL as something that has been consciously “developed,” rather than as a natural language that has grown organically. From her point of view, its development and grammar should have been more influenced by English.

As Baynton has pointed out, the ideas that ASL is based on English and that sign language is natural and universal are paradoxical: it is not possible that these can be simultaneously true (1998). However, from students’ papers we can see that both of these ideas exist in many students’ thinking. I argue that these two contradicting-yet-coexisting ideologies demonstrate that students’ understanding of ASL is largely based on misinformation, due to their previous lack of exposure to ASL and lack of a stake in its place in U.S. society. This contrasts with the ASL teachers I met. These individuals, many of whom are deaf or deaf-allies, do have deeply vested interests in the status of ASL. Their more-clearly formed and articulated ideologies reflect this distinction.

Teachers also had and freely expressed opinions about the ideologies possessed by students who entered their classrooms. Both Spanish and ASL teachers complained that students taking their courses perceived these languages to be easier than other languages. They differed markedly in their reactions to this perception. The Spanish teachers I interviewed reasoned that, once students entered their classrooms, they would no longer have this misunderstanding. ASL teachers, on the other hand, were concerned that, even after completing their courses, students would still think ASL was easier than other languages. They considered this attitude toward ASL to be extremely problematic. As discussed earlier, language ideologies are also ideologies about the users of that language, and so an attitude that ASL is easier than other languages might imply that ASL users are somehow less competent than other language users.

6 Instructor ideologies and goals

While 13 out of 24 spoken-language instructors identified the basics of language mechanics as most important, all ASL instructors indicated that they care more about correcting misunderstandings students might have about ASL and deaf

people. Although 22 of 24 spoken-language instructors I interviewed indicated that they want their students will leave class with more open minds about other cultures in general, all ASL teachers indicated goals that were specific to the deaf community in the US and Canada. ASL instructors' top priority for their students was not recall of the language itself but rather respect for deaf people, their culture, and their language. This is true for both deaf and hearing ASL instructors.

When spoken language teachers discussed open-mindedness, their underlying ideology was that multiculturalism and multilingualism are good. For example, Ravi, a Hindi instructor hoped to foster his students becoming "good human beings." According to Ravi, a person is "good" if that person knows that "his [or her] version of truth is not the only version of the truth." Lisa and Kaylee, both Spanish teachers, hoped that the struggle of language acquisition itself would foster students' empathy for nonnative English speakers in the future. Implicit in all of these spoken language teachers' ideologies are assumptions about their students' ideologies. Generally, spoken language teachers assumed their students view multiculturalism and multilingualism negatively. And many specifically implied they expect their students to have pro-English-only attitudes.

For ASL teachers, the ideologies were more specific to ASL and deaf people. Some ASL teachers expressed a general desire that students respect deaf people. This was the case for both hearing and deaf teachers. This is not so different from the spoken-language teachers who indicate that they want their students to be more open-minded toward other cultures and languages. However, whereas spoken-language teachers tended to express a desire for general open-mindedness, ASL instructors were quite specific in their desire for students to learn to have respect for deaf people in particular. For example, when I asked Roxanne, a deaf ASL instructor, what she wants her students will remember years from now, she said, "It's important they remember to respect deaf people. That's the goal." Similarly, Frank, another deaf ASL instructor, told me, "If I emphasize one thing, I'd say it's deaf culture and respect for it." Theresa, a deaf ASL tutor employed by one of the departments I visited, said, "If they forget the language, that's fine. I forgot my French, ... but respect for deaf people, yes."

Some ASL teachers also expressed a desire for students to respect ASL itself and be aware that it is a language on a par with spoken languages. ASL teachers expressed concern that their students might enter the class believing that ASL is not a language, is not as complex as spoken languages, or is a visual form of English. For example, Danielle, a deaf ASL teacher, explained that she wants her students to remember, "that the language is the same as any other. It's a legitimate language equal to English." Similarly, Sean, a deaf ASL teacher, told me, "I think it is important that they remember that sign language is equal to spoken language. That's really important." Along the same lines, Gloria, a hearing ASL

teacher told me, “I hope that they remember that ASL and English are not the same thing.” Gloria’s comment demonstrates the belief that a distinct language is central to the legitimacy of a cultural group. These teachers clearly think that students enter their classrooms with misconceptions about ASL, and they want to correct these misconceptions. Among the spoken-language teachers I interviewed, no one reported wanting or needing to convince their students that they were learning a legitimate language, reflecting the better understanding students have of the nature of other spoken languages.

The textbooks used by the instructors I interviewed mirror the teachers’ goals. Clearing up misconceptions about ASL is clearly a goal of a textbook used by all five programs: *Signing Naturally* (Smith, et. al. 2008a). The introduction contains a section titled “Debunking Some Myths about ASL,” which says that “the most important myth to debunk” is the idea that ASL is a visual form of English. The book also explains that ASL is not pantomime and it is not a universal language. In contrast, I examined the Spanish, French, and German textbooks used at the universities I visited, and I found no introductory content explaining to the student that what they are learning is a full and complete language (Ariew and Dupuy 2011; Castells et al. 2010; Lovik, Guy, and Chavez 2011; Mitschke and Tano 2010; Tschirner, Nikolai, and Terrell 2012).

7 Case studies: Use of English in three ASL classrooms

Like spoken language teachers, ASL teachers expressed a variety of goals for their students; however, unlike spoken-language teachers, these goals focused specifically on fostering respect for deaf people. ASL teachers work to teach their students to respect ASL and deaf culture. The following three case studies examine methods used by different teachers that attempt to accomplish this goal, and also the role that English played in each class.

Before discussing the case studies, it is necessary to acknowledge that there are practical matters to be considered when it comes making decisions about the use of English in the ASL classroom. First and foremost is the fact that many ASL instructors are themselves deaf, and thus speaking English is not feasible in their classrooms. Beyond that, hearing teachers such as Gloria expressed that they wanted all classrooms within their ASL departments to be the same with regard to the use of English.

Another consideration is that, unlike their spoken-language counterparts, most ASL teachers I encountered did not have formal training in the teaching of

ASL. Whereas the spoken language teachers I interviewed had or were working on graduate degrees in their target languages, the ASL teachers I interviewed described a variety of degrees ranging from interpreting and deaf education to completely unrelated fields such as theater.

7.1 Case Study 1: Danielle's ASL I Class

Danielle is an ASL instructor and the Program Coordinator at Central State University. She is deaf and teaches all four levels of ASL using the *Signing Naturally* curriculum. I observed Danielle's ASL I class for six weeks. Danielle is fiercely proud of her deaf identity and deaf culture. Danielle often engaged me in conversation after her class about multiple issues surrounding deafness, such as her own frustrations with the hearing world, cochlear implants, and the issue of whether or not deafness is a disability.

The *Signing Naturally* (Smith et. al. 2008a), curriculum that Danielle used avoids the use of written English as well as spoken. Cultural material and grammar explanations are, as in the other language books I examined, in English. However, unlike the other books, vocabulary words are associated with pictures of the concept the signs represent, not with English words. For example, the sign for walking is accompanied by a picture of a person walking with a walking stick. There is no place in the text or index to look up signs based on English words, and it is clear that the authors made efforts to avoid associating pictures of signs with English glosses.

ASL teachers at four of the five programs I studied told me that they discourage students from requesting sign glosses for English fingerspelled words. *Signing Naturally* devotes an entire lesson to encouraging students not to ask for vocabulary by fingerspelling English words. Danielle used this lesson in her ASL I class. She put a PowerPoint on the screen one day with the following text:

Signer A: Use one of these strategies

- point to object
- draw picture
- list of things in the category
- use opposites
- describe/act out

Signer B: Responds

- give sign
- tell you don't know
- tell you forgot

- say you think you know and show it
- ask for clarification

So, instead of asking for a sign by fingerspelling an English gloss, which may be easier or faster, Danielle wants students to point, draw, or act out what they want to say, or use their existing vocabulary to make inquiries. Danielle proceeded to tell her students that, from then on, she would not accept requests for the sign for an English word and that students must use one of the strategies she showed them in the PowerPoint. When students asked for signs and started fingerspelling a word, she asked them to come up to the front of the room and use these strategies to ask for the sign. This explicit desire to avoid glosses, even when formulated in grammatically correct ASL sentences, contrasts with strategies employed by teachers of spoken-languages who told me that they would be delighted if students used the target language to ask for the equivalent of an English word.

7.2 Case Study 2: Rick's ASL I Class

Rick is an ASL instructor at Desert Plains University. Like Danielle, he is proud of his deaf identity. Rick and I often rode the same bus to campus and he often talked to me about his opinions on educating deaf children. Rick strongly believes that deaf children should attend deaf schools and be taught in ASL. He based this on his experiences attending both mainstream programs and a state school for deaf students.

Teachers at Desert Plains University have a no-voice policy, but do not think it is problematic to use written English glosses to teach ASL. Rick used glosses in combination with symbols used by the *Signing Naturally* teacher's manual (Smith et. al. 2008b) that stand for grammatical markers. The text below is from one of his PowerPoint slides.

S: You marry, you (q)

T: #No, me not marry, me (neg)

S: You have boy+friend (or girl+friend), you (q)

T: Yes (nod), me have boy/girl+friend

Or: #No (neg) me still look-for ++

Or: Detest [boy/girl+friend]

Or: Me favorite me-alone⁵

⁵ Translation:

S: Are you married?

T: No, I'm not married

In the prompt above, the sentences are glossed with English words in ASL word order, as in “you marry you” for “are you married?” Other symbols are added to represent ASL grammar. For example, the # symbol is conventionally used to mark a fingerspelled loan sign. The symbol (q) tells the student that their eyebrows should be up to mark the statement as a yes or no question. The character + is used to show compound signs, as well as sign repetition in the case of ++. These characters are commonly used in glosses of ASL in textbooks, and they are used in the teacher’s manual (though not the student book) of *Signing Naturally*.

Sean, a teacher at the same program, explained to me that he was opposed to *Signing Naturally*’s philosophy of avoiding writing out glosses. He thinks that glosses are the best way to show word order and grammatical markers. Rather than leaving it to the students to interpret the meaning of the different lexicon and word order they were encountering, these symbols make the grammar explicit from an English speaker’s perspective.

7.3 Case study 3: Dana’s introduction to sign language class

Dana is an ASL instructor at Mountain University. She is hearing and is a certified interpreter who mainly teaches an introductory ASL course. Dana is a graduate of Mountain University’s interpreting program. Like other teachers I observed and interviewed, Dana expressed a desire for her students to respect deaf people.

Unlike the other programs I observed, at Mountain University, the introductory ASL class is taught using a mixture of ASL, spoken and written English, and Signed English. Although later courses in the program use the textbook *Signing Naturally*, this course uses the textbook *A Basic Course in American Sign Language* (Humphries et al. 2004). The signs in this book are taught in alphabetical order based on their English glosses, a radically different approach from *Signing Naturally*. The introductory class incorporates ASL and Signed English. During their lessons, teachers draw a continuum on the board (see Figure 1) Then they physically position themselves in relation to distinct zones and move along the spectrum as they change their signing relative to their positioning.

S: Do you have a boyfriend (or girlfriend)?

T: Yes I have a boyfriend/girlfriend

Or: No, I’m still looking

Or: No, I hate dating

Or: No, I prefer to be single

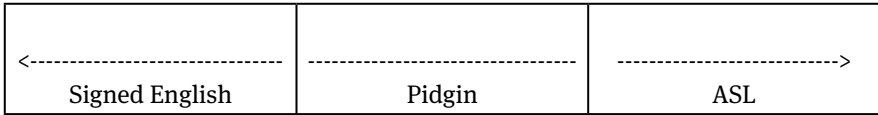


Figure 1. The signing spectrum as drawn on the board in the introductory ASL class at Mountain State University.

Dana introduced this spectrum on the first day. On the second day, she showed her students several example sentences, while moving along the spectrum. Her utterances are glossed in Table 1.

Table 1. Glosses of Dana’s utterances demonstrating different styles of signing.

HOW ARE YOU ACTIVITY+I-N-G	HOW YOU	WHATS-UP
PLEASE you-GIVE-me THAT YELLOW BOOK	PLEASE you-GIVE-me POINT YELLOW BOOK	BOOK YELLOW you-GIVE-me PLEASE
THE RED CAR HIT THE BLUE CAR IN FRONT OF IT	(No Pidgin example for this one was given.)	BLUE CAR CL-3 → RED CAR CL-3 → “car rear ends other car”

Dana’s Signed English examples use English components such as a morpheme for “-ing,” the word “are” and the word “the,” as well as English word order. Her “pidgin” examples maintain English word order but do not use English morphemes. Her last example, about a car accident, is the one with the greatest differences across the spectrum. Her ASL example uses a classifier (CL-3 in the gloss). The handshape “3” can be used in ASL to show the movement and orientation of a vehicle. As modeled in Figure 2 below, when a signer’s hand is in the “vehicle” handshape, the front of the car is the tip of the middle finger and the back of the car is the outer part of the wrist. So, as in Dana’s example, in this picture one of the cars is about to rear-end the other.



Figure 2. Re-creation of the car crash demonstration.

By introducing both ASL and Signed English, the program contrasts ASL with English in the same modality. One of the upper-level interpreting students told me that the director of the program is fond of saying, “In order to learn what ASL is, you must first learn what it is not.” As discussed earlier, ASL students often enter ASL courses believing that ASL is English, and this is a point of concern for many of the teachers I interviewed. In the introductory class at Mountain University, Dana’s examples on various parts of the spectrum show students that the way to sign something in ASL is not the same way one would sign something in English.

While the teaching methods of each of the three teachers reveal commonalities, such as a desire for respect for deaf people and ASL, they also reveal subtly different ideologies. Dana’s use of a spectrum of sign language varieties is in line with an expressed desire by the faculty of that program that students, especially future interpreters, not leave the program with the belief that some deaf people are better than others because of where they fall on the language spectrum, including the use of more English-like signing. This contrasts starkly with Rick and Danielle, who both favored the use of a less English-like ASL. Danielle even commented to me after my interview with her that in retrospect, she had adapted her signing in the interview to be more English-like for my benefit, and expressed regret at doing so as she saw me as a student in many ways. Dana is hearing and Rick and Danielle are both deaf. Their life experiences probably play a role in their ideologies and decisions. For Dana, her experience is having to adapt her interpreting to a variety of signers. For Rick and Danielle, their experience is a lifetime of linguistic oppression.

8 Conclusion

The second language classroom is a site of language contact, and is thus a site of where contrasting language ideologies meet. My research shows that students enter the ASL classroom with a variety of ideologies: that sign languages are or should be universal, that they are based on gesture, and that ASL is or should be based on English. ASL teachers, fully aware of these ideologies, have ideologies of their own that they wish to impress upon their students: that ASL is a full and distinct language worthy of their respect. Both spoken language and ASL teachers understand students to be misinformed and as having prejudicial language ideologies of which they need to be divested. Therefore, both groups of teachers saw their main job as providing information and divesting students of misconceptions. However, ASL teachers focused specifically on deafness and ASL. My research shows that students enter the ASL classroom with a variety of ideologies: that sign languages are or should be universal, that they are based on gesture, and that ASL is or should be based on English. ASL teachers, fully aware of these ideologies, have ideologies of their own that they wish to impress upon their students: that ASL is a full and distinct language worthy of their respect. The emotional investment that ASL teachers have in this outcome is considerable, and this is not surprising given metadiscourses around the idea that language is central to the legitimacy of a cultural group. It is also not surprising given the oppression deaf people experience on a daily basis, particularly around their use of ASL. Many deaf instructors I interviewed described experiences in their childhood where use of sign language was forbidden or discouraged. Conscious of the fact that many of their students were future educators, ASL teachers may also have an emotional investment in preventing future deaf children from suffering through the same oppression they did.

References

- Ariew, Robert & Beatrice Dupuy. 2011. *Français-monde: Connectez-vous à la francophonie*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Baynton, Douglas. 1996. *Forbidden signs: American culture and the campaign against sign language*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Baynton, Douglas. 1998. Out of sight: The suppression of American Sign Language. In Werner Sollors (ed.), *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, ethnicity, and the languages of American literature*, 367–379. New York: New York University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre & Jean-Claude Passeron. 1977. *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. Richard Nice, trans. London: Sage Publications.
- Brice Heath, Shirley. 2001. What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school. In Alessandro Duranti (ed.), *Linguistic anthropology: A reader*, 318–342. Boston: Blackwell Publishers.
- Calton, Cindee. 2013. *Teaching respect: Language, identity and ideology in American Sign Language classes in the United States*. Iowa City: University of Iowa PhD thesis.
- Castells, Matilde Olivella, Elizabeth E. Guzmán, Paloma E. Lapuerta & Judith E. Liskin-Gasparro. 2010. *Mosaicos: Spanish as a world language*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1989. *Language and power*. London: Longman Group.
- Farnell, Brenda. 1995. *Do you see what I mean? Plains Indian sign talk and the embodiment of action*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Friedner, Michele & Annelies Kusters. 2014. On the possibilities and limits of “DEAF DEAF SAME”: Tourism and empowerment camps in Adamorobe (Ghana), Bangalore, and Mumbai (India). *Disability Studies Quarterly* 34(3).
- Gee, James Paul. 1992. *The social mind: Language, ideology, and social practice*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.
- Graham, Laura R. 2002. How should an Indian speak?: Amazonian Indians and the symbolic politics of language in the global public sphere. In Kay B. Warren & Jean E. Jackson (eds.), *Indigenous movements, self-representation and the state in Latin America*, 181–228. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Gramsci, Antonio & David Forgacs. 1988. *A Gramsci reader: Selected writings, 1916–1935*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Humphries, Tom, Carol Padden & Terrence O’Rourke. 1994. *A basic course in American Sign Language*. Dallas, TX: T.J. Publishers.
- Irvine, Judith T. 1989. When talk isn’t cheap: Language and political economy. *American Ethnologist* 16(2). 248–267.
- Kannappell, Barbara M. 1993. The power structure in the deaf community. *Deaf studies III: Bridging cultures in the 21st century: Conference proceedings*. 163–169. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University College for Continuing Education.
- Lane, Harlan. 1989. *When the mind hears: A history of the deaf*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Longmore, Paul K. 2003. *Why I burned my book and other essays on disability*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lovik, Thomas A., J. Douglas Guy & Monika Chavez. 2011. *Vorsprung: A communicative introduction to German language and culture*. Boston: Cengage Heinle.
- Marcus, George E. 1995. Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of the multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24. 95–117.

- McLaren, Peter. 1997. *Revolutionary multiculturalism: Pedagogies of dissent for the new millennium*. New York City: Westview Press.
- Mitschke, Cherie & Cheryl Tano. 2010. *Promenades: à travers le monde francophone*. Boston: Vista Higher Learning.
- Moore, Matthew S. & Linda Levitan. 2004. *For hearing people only*. Rochester, NY: MSM Productions.
- Padden, Carol & Tom Humphries. 1988. *Deaf in America: Voices from a culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Peirce, C. S. 1894. *What is a sign?* Indiana University: Purdue University Indianapolis. <http://www.iupui.edu/~peirce/ep/ep2/ep2book/ch02/ep2ch2.htm> (accessed 24 October 2 2013).
- Rosen, Russel S., Mary-Kate DeLouise, Amanda T. Boyle & Kerry Daley. 2014. Native language, target language, and the teaching of American Sign Language vocabulary. In David McKee, Russel S. Rosen & Rachel McKee (eds.), *Teaching and learning signed languages*, 145–174. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. 1966. *Course in general linguistics*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Schieffelin, Bambi. 2000. Introducing Kaluli literacy: A chronology of influences. In P. Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of language: Ideologies, politics, and identities*, 293–327. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Schiro, Michael. 2012. *Curriculum theory: Conflicting visions and enduring concerns*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Senghas, Richard J. & Leila Monaghan. 2002. Signs of their times: Deaf communities and the culture of language. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31. 69–97.
- Silverstein, Michael. 2003. Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life. *Language & Communication* 23(3–4). 193–229.
- Smith, Cheri, Ella Mae Lentz & Ken Mikos. 2008a. *Signing naturally student workbook, units 1–6*. San Diego: DawnSignPress.
- Smith, Cheri, Ella Mae Lentz & Ken Mikos. 2008b. *Signing naturally teacher's curriculum guide, units 1–6*. San Diego: DawnSignPress.
- Tschirner, Erwin, Brigitte Nikolai & Tracy Terrell. 2012. *Kontakte: A communicative approach*. New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Wilcox, Sherman. 2004. Cognitive iconicity: Conceptual spaces, meaning, and gesture in signed languages. *Cognitive Linguistics* 15(2).
- Woolard, Kathryn A. 1998. Introduction: Language ideology as a field of inquiry. In Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard & Paul V. Kroskrity (eds.), *Language ideologies: Practice and theory*, 3–47. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Woolard, Kathryn A. 2008. Why dat now? Linguistic-anthropological contributions to the explanation of sociolinguistic icons and change. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12(4). 432–452.

Aron S. Marie

Finding interpreters who can “OPEN-THEIR-MIND”: How Deaf teachers select sign language interpreters in Hà Nội, Việt Nam

1 Introduction

On a Thursday evening, thirteen hearing students gathered in a rented classroom for their first Hà Nội Sign Language¹ (HNSL) class at the Center for Teaching Sign Language² (CTSL). An, the CTSL director and prominent Deaf³ community leader, gave an introductory lesson on Deaf culture, while two HNSL interpreters, Thuần and Ngoc, alternated between interpreting and contributing to the lesson. An explained that Vietnamese Deaf people have their own culture⁴, which centers on using Vietnamese Sign Languages (VSLs). Then he wrote two terms on the board: *Điếc* (lit: Deaf) and *khiếm thính* (lit: hearing impaired) and said, “You may have heard ‘*khiếm thính*’ is a polite word for Deaf people, but it isn’t. *Khiếm thính* and *Điếc* are different. *Khiếm thính* is for people who are born hearing and later in life... lose their hearing, or people who have partial (lit: half) hearing and grow up reading lips. *Điếc* is for people who grow up signing, who grow up with signing culture. I am *Điếc*, I am not *khiếm thính*.” One student asked, “One of my friends says *khiếm thính* is more polite...what do I tell them?” She argued that even if Deaf people preferred *Điếc*, she should use *khiếm thính*, because other hearing people thought it was polite. An, Ngoc, and Thuần spent

1 Woodward argues there are multiple sign languages in Việt Nam including Hà Nội Sign Language, Ho Chi Minh City Sign Language and Hai Phong Sign Language (2000). My informants recognize regional differences in signing, but do not use a consistent nomenclature, referring to their way of signing as VIETNAMESE SIGN, HANOI SIGN or simply SIGN. For this chapter, I use Woodward’s nomenclature.

2 Pseudonyms are used for the CTSL, Interpreters Association of Hà Nội (IAHN), Hà Nội Deaf Cultural Group (HDCG), and all individuals in this chapter.

3 My informants prefer *Điếc*/Deaf capitalized to emphasize that Deaf people are a cultural group, but do not use the *d*/Deaf distinction to distinguish audiological vs. socio-linguistic constructions of Deafness.

4 Recently scholars have pointed out that “Deaf culture” can be overly universal and essentialist (see Friedner and Kusters 2015). Yet, Deaf leaders in Hà Nội regularly use DEAF CULTURE and DEAF COMMUNITY to describe a sense of sameness between Deaf signing people, and to draw parallels to other Vietnamese minority groups. I use these terms to respect my interlocutors’ claims, and to consider how such terms can be mobilized in Deaf peoples’ advocacy work.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510090-007>

nearly 20 minutes explaining why she should use *Điéc*, yet she maintained that *khiêm thính* was more polite.

I was conducting research at the CTSL because it is the primary place where HNSL interpreters are selected and trained. Currently, there is no government-recognized training or certification for HNSL interpreters, so the CTSL staff has taken it upon itself to use HNSL classes to identify potential interpreters. When the staff identified a promising student, typically after the eight-week introductory course⁵, An would mentor the student individually; initially working alongside them as a Deaf interpreter (Stone 2012), translating between signs they knew and fluent HNSL⁶. Four of six hearing interpreters in the Hà Nội Sign Language Interpreting Team (HSLIT) were trained in this manner (the others started interpreting before the center was founded).

The Center is Deaf-run; thus, Deaf people play a prominent role in selecting and training HNSL interpreters. The CTSL teachers are all Deaf, and are assisted by two hearing interpreters and a hearing proctor. The CTSL staff and Deaf leaders in Hanoi take it for granted that Deaf people should be responsible for evaluating sign language interpreters. Ngoc and Thuần, the CTSL's interpreting assistants, while enjoying mentoring new interpreters, also insisted Deaf people should have the final say in selecting interpreters.

During my interviews with CTSL staff about interpreter selection, they rarely specified that a student should not become an interpreter, and the student who insisted on using '*khiêm thính*' was one of them. What made this particular student ineligible to interpret was not simply that she used the wrong lexical terminology -- the assumption was students would use the wrong terminology initially -- but rather, her refusal to change even after the lesson. As Thuần explained, this student was unwilling to OPEN-[her]-MIND to Deaf culture: "You can explain and open people's minds. But there are a few people who are very closed minded and will only open their minds a tiny amount. It's their attitude (personality)." Being "open minded" was one of the primary qualities the CTSL staff looked for in an interpreter⁷.

In this chapter, I examine how Deaf people evaluate potential interpreters, and the beliefs and values animating such evaluations. While a handful of studies

⁵ Classes met twice weekly 1.5 hours/session. After the introductory course, students could attend the advanced class as long as they liked.

⁶ HNSL interpreters reported getting interpreting assistance from An for 6-12 months.

⁷ Students' interpreting potential was not typically evaluated during their first lesson. This student was a unique case in that she refused to change her perspective after considerable explanation, and demonstrates the value placed on open-mindedness in HNSL interpreters.

have examined Deaf consumers’ evaluation of sign language interpreters (Kurz and Langer 2004; Napier et al. 2007; Napier and Barker 2004) here I focus on the process of selecting of interpreters, and the prominent role of language ideologies in this process. For this paper I draw on Kroskrity’s definition of language ideologies as “ubiquitous sets of diverse beliefs, however implicit or explicit they may be, used by speakers of all types as models for constructing linguistic evaluations and engaging in communicative activity” (2004, 497). Language ideologies are often multiple and competing, as they represent the interests of specific social or cultural groups. In this case, I focus on competing language ideologies around the use of Vietnamese Sign Languages (VSLs) that structure how the CTSL staff select sign language interpreters.

While we might expect evaluations of interpreters to focus on their linguistic abilities, the CTSL staff looked for interpreters who could OPEN-[their]-MINDS to Deaf culture. I argue this focus on “open-mindedness” means that HNSL interpreters are largely evaluated by whether they can disassociate themselves from negative ideologies about sign language, and take on ideologies widely held by Deaf people. In Việt Nam, hearing people often believe speech is required for social inclusion, that sign language is “backwards,” and that sign language is an ineffective medium for cognitive development. In contrast, Deaf people often refer to themselves as having a distinct language and culture and envisioned a world where sign language could be a valid medium for participating in society. As the majority of HNSL students had little to no prior contact with Deaf people⁸, many students entered the CTSL holding common hearing ideologies about sign language and Deaf people. Therefore, Deaf community leaders focused on finding interpreters who could OPEN-[their]-MINDS, dis-orienting from hearing-centered ideologies and re-orienting toward Deaf cultural norms. This reorientation is similar to the way Deaf people in other countries reorient towards Deaf sociality⁹ (Bechter 2008; Friedner 2015), although here reorientation is a prerequisite for becoming an interpreter.

Finally, I would like to suggest that the evaluation of re-orientation was itself guided by language ideologies. The CTSL staff looked for specific behaviors believed to correspond with students’ orientation towards Deaf people and sign language. In particular, they viewed the terminology students used to refer

⁸ While a handful of students had Deaf family members, other students reported wanting to learn sign language for reasons ranging from majoring in special education, to simply “liking” sign language.

⁹ Following Friedner’ coining, Kusters defines Deaf sociality the practice and valuing of “deaf people interacting with and having social relationships with each other” (Kusters 2014, 467)

to Deaf people, whether they asked Deaf people questions, and whether they adopted Deaf norms of embodiment, as indexing students' ideological stance. In other words, Deaf people used their own beliefs about language to evaluate hearing people's stances towards Deaf people and sign language.

This chapter is based on two months of field work at the CTSL (2015) as well as a longer history of involvement with Deaf people in Hà Nội as a study abroad student (Fall 2010) and researcher (2013–2014). During these previous trips, I studied HNSL at the CTSL, volunteered with the Hà Nội Deaf Cultural Group (HDCG), and immersed myself in Deaf signing spaces as much as possible. This previous experience, and the dedication of my Deaf interlocutors allowed me to become highly proficient in HNSL, although my spoken and written Vietnamese are still intermediate.

At the CTSL, I conducted participant observation, at times participating in activities with the students, and at other times attending formal and impromptu staff meetings. I paid particular attention to student-staff interaction, lesson content, and when CTSL staff discussed students' potential as interpreters. Observations were supplemented with semi-structured interviews with the CTSL director, the teacher of the advanced hearing class, and the two interpreting assistants. All interviews were conducted in HNSL, video recorded, and translated into English, with occasional assistance from an HNSL interpreter fluent in English.

Shaping this research are the long term relationships I had with CTSL staff as a student, volunteer, researcher and friend. Yet many aspects of my identity marked me as different; I am a white, hearing, American researcher, and not an interpreter. The question of how these identities translate into ethnographic practice deserves further exploration, especially given recent calls in Deaf studies to examine researcher positionality (Kusters, O'Brien, and Meulder 2017). I believe part of doing so entails examining local frameworks through which Deaf people evaluate and understand hearing people's actions. What does it mean to be a "good" or "respectful" hearing person according to Vietnamese Deaf people? What ethical obligations and expectations do these frameworks set up for hearing researchers? While I continue to grapple with these questions, I hope that my analysis of how Deaf people value open-mindedness begins to illustrate these local frameworks and understanding of hearingness.

2 Ideologies around signing in Việt Nam

One of the factors that shaped the way interpreters were selected were the negative ideologies toward sign language and Deaf people in Việt Nam. One location

where Deaf people encounter these ideologies is in the educational system. While Vietnam’s first Deaf school (Trường Âm-Điếc Lái Thiêu, est. 1886) used manual methods, in 1989, a Dutch group called Komitee Twee introduced oral education, which uses speech and lip-reading, to Vietnam. Since then oralism has been used in all Vietnamese Deaf elementary schools¹⁰ (Woodward, Nguyen, and Nguyen 2004, 253). Cooper (2014) found that in Ho Chi Minh City oral schools, Ho Chi Minh City Sign Language (HCMC SL) was prohibited and resulted in disciplining, while speech was actively rewarded (323). School principals referred to HCMC SL as *ngược* (opposite/backwards) because its word order doesn’t correspond to Vietnamese, and to Deaf students as “người điếc ngược (lit. person + Deaf + opposite/backwards) (Cooper 2014, 323). Moreover, poor student achievement in Vietnamese oral schools generally has been attributed to perceived cognitive deficits rather than limited linguistic access (Woodward, Nguyen, and Nguyen 2004). Taken together these practices imply that speech is necessary for social and economic inclusion, and question the value of VSLs as languages.

While these ideologies resemble oralist ideologies in other countries (Hill 2013), they have unique salience in Việt Nam given colonial legacies. After decades of linguistic suppression under the French, anti-colonial intellectuals utilized Vietnamese and the romanized script Quốc ngữ, as vehicles for unification (Cooper 2011, 99–110; Minh-Hằng and O’Harrow 2007). However, this rested on the erasure of linguistic diversity, including regional variation, linguistic minorities, and VSLs (Irvine and Gal 2009). Moreover, VSLs were positioned as French because the Lái Thiêu school was run by French priests (Woodward et al. 2015, 337). Deaf education textbooks framed manual methods as an unfortunate colonial legacy which contributed to “underperforming national development agendas” (Cooper 2014, 317). However, the ideology that sign language is a colonial legacy depends on the erasure of both Deaf Vietnamese people’s contributions to VSLs and the role of foreign entities in introducing oralism to Việt Nam.

Deaf people also encounter ideologies outside of the schooling system. Deaf people reported that hearing people thought that HNSL was a code for Vietnamese rather than a distinct language and that sign languages could not express the full range of thoughts and emotions. Despite their interest in learning sign language, many of the hearing students entering the CTSL held such beliefs. Thuần, one of the interpreting assistants at the CTSL, explained, “Previously, I thought Deaf people were stupid—they could not learn well. That in sign language the

10 Two secondary education programs, the Đồng Nai and Hà Nội Deaf Education Projects use VSLs.

conversations were just average, not advanced. Those were my beliefs. Later, through work and collaboration, my mind was opened and I changed my beliefs.”

In contrast to the ideologies hearing people hold about VSLs, Deaf leaders argue Deaf people are a cultural minority group. To make this claim, Deaf people rely on an ideology that linguistic differences (VSLs vs. Vietnamese) constitute cultural differences (See Gal and Woolard 2001 for a discussion of how linguistic differences come to define publics). Yet while Deaf people in Vietnamese’s oral schools can covertly learn sign from peers, many Deaf people in rural areas do not have the opportunity to attend Deaf schools, so VSL fluency varies significantly. Thus, Deaf people have created other spaces, like Deaf clubs, where Deaf people can improve their signing and engage in Deaf sociality. The Hà Nội Deaf Cultural Group (HDCG) has over 500 members, 50-100 of whom crowd into a rented elementary school classroom every Sunday for meetings. HNSL is foregrounded in these meetings, with numerous language games, riddles, history, science and Vietnamese lessons conducted in HNSL, emphasizing sign language as central to Deaf culture.

Moreover, Deaf leaders contest the ideology that participation in the public sphere should be grounded in spoken Vietnamese. Deaf community leaders across Việt Nam have striven to create a society where sign language is a valid basis for “social inclusion” (Cooper 2014, 327). The CTSL staff imagined a world where Deaf people would be able to go to any public venue — courts, hospitals, coffee shops — and participate as signing individuals, whether through an interpreter or directly with hearing people who know sign language. Yet as Cooper notes, social inclusion is more of an imagined future than a current reality (2014, 327).

3 Using interpreters to change language ideologies

To make this future a reality, Deaf community leaders use interpreters to meet with oralist school teachers, government officials, and disability rights groups to advocate for the use of sign language in schools, workplaces and other settings. In fact, HNSL interpreting did not grow out of Deaf people trying to access public services (doctors, courts etc.), but rather to support HDCG’s advocacy. The first account I have of formal HNSL interpreting was during negotiations to

establish Disabled People of Hà Nội (DPHN)¹¹ in 2006, and the CTSL was created in 2007 when disabled leaders asked Deaf leaders for sign language classes, to better communicate with them. In contrast, to access public services, Deaf people frequently have hearing family members, most of whom do not know HNSL, navigate the interaction for them. These family members do not act as formal interpreters. Rather, Deaf people explain the situation to their family before the interaction (through gesture or writing), then rely on their family to communicate for them. This pattern of prioritizing interpreters for advocacy scenarios contrasts with other countries where the earliest records of sign language interpreters are in courts (Stone 2012, 983–84).

Thus, from their very inception, HNSL interpreters have been considered a key part of creating social inclusion. As An put it, “Interpreters are about lobbying the government... [The CTSL] is about entering society;” only with interpreters would Deaf people be able to successfully lobby the government and be included in society. Hearing interpreters also understood themselves as part of Deaf peoples’ political project. While HSLIT’s¹² mission statement lists providing communication access, their first goal is to ensure “that hearing society can become aware of sign language and Deaf culture, and respect the Deaf community.”

Such work requires interpreters mediate the very situations where competing language ideologies are invoked, contested, and (re)constructed. For example, Cooper and Nguyễn analyze how Deaf people utilize interpreters during VSLs linguistics workshops to change hearing people’s minds about VLSs (2015). Hearing participants came to recognize that VSLs were not “backwards” forms of Vietnamese and began treating Deaf people as authorities, asking them questions directly, rather than directing question towards hearing people (ibid: 107). To change hearing people’s minds, Deaf presenters depended on interpreters to match the formality of their signing, to convey their authority. Similarly, they required interpreters to maintain the ideological valance of their statements. For example, Deaf people relied on interpreters to translate the sign *Điếc* (Deaf) into Vietnamese without using the *bị* marker, which, when present, frames Deafness as an unfortunate medical condition (2015, 120; this volume).

¹¹ The umbrella group HDCG is under.

¹² HSLIT (est. 2015) is a voluntary organization of HNSL interpreters committed to promoting their profession, comprised of 6 hearing interpreter, and one Deaf interpreter.

4 Finding interpreters who can OPEN-[their]-MIND

Within this landscape of competing language ideologies and interpreters' critical role in contesting and reconstructing them, how are interpreters at the CTSL selected? As shown above, one of the most important qualities was a student's ability to OPEN-[their]-MIND; the student in the opening vignette was considered unsuitable to interpret because she could not OPEN-[her]-MIND enough to use the word *Điếc*. Conversely, every student identified as a potential interpreter was described as open minded. The interpreting assistants at the Center even used the rhetoric of open-mindedness to describe their own re-orientation towards the Deaf community. For example, Ngoc described how she had originally used terms like "khiếm thính" but over time opened her mind about the importance of using *Điếc*. In other words, one of the key ways that students could demonstrate open-mindedness was to change from using words like "khiếm thính" to words like "*Điếc*."¹³

I argue that the choice of lexical terminology carried such weight because Deaf people believed it indexed students' language ideologies. Cooper and Nguyễn have analyzed how *khiếm thính* is seen as indexing ideologies that Deafness is a stigmatized medical condition that needed to be referred to via euphemism, while *Điếc* indexes ideologies that Deaf people are part of a community with a shared language and culture (Cooper 2014, 313; Cooper and Nguyễn 2015, 112–13). As discussed in the introduction, by maintaining the term *khiếm thính*, the student in the opening vignette showed she remained oriented to hearing ideologies and refused to reorient to Deaf peoples' ideologies.



Figure 1. OPEN-MIND in Hà Nội Sign Language.

¹³ Other word choices such as *bình thường* (normal) vs. *người nghe* (hearing person), worked similarly.

The relationship between lexical terminology and attitude can be understood as a type of iconization, which Irving and Gal define as “a transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic features (or varieties) and the social images with which they are linked” (38). Iconization works “by picking out qualities supposedly shared by the social image and the linguistic image” (ibid.; 38). In the case of open-mindedness, the icon is drawn not between shared qualities of discrete linguistic features and social images, but rather between different types of change. Changes in lexical terminology are seen as indexing changes in language ideologies and attitudes towards Deaf people. This iconic logic is paired with a logic of trajectory, as small shifts in attitude are taken as evidence that a student will continue re-orienting themselves toward the Deaf community. Crucially, because being open minded is indexed by change, and not by discrete linguistic features, it was a highly portable logic, with other changes (such as asking Deaf people more questions or adopting Deaf norms of facial expression, discussed below) mapping to open-mindedness as well.

The claim that hearing students should open their minds to Deaf culture resembles the way Deaf people in other countries have striven to ‘convert’ others to Deaf sociality. Bechter argues that Deaf culture in the United States can be understood as a convert culture (2008, 61), in which Deaf people re-orient themselves from their hearing families, and towards the Deaf culture that they become a part of. Friedner has argued that Deaf people in India re-orient themselves in a similar manner, and hope hearing people will do the same (2015, 158). Indeed, the rhetoric of OPENING-[YOUR]-MIND was applied to Deaf people as well; Deaf Hanoians discussed bringing Deaf people who did not know HNSL to Deaf events so they could have their minds opened. However, precisely what opening your mind entailed for Deaf Hanoians deserves further research.

Yet what is unique about the rhetoric of OPENING-[your]-MIND in this context is that re-orienting to Deaf culture became a central criterion for selecting interpreters. Open-mindedness was seen as necessary for successfully working with Deaf people. As Ngoc explained, closed-minded interpreters would not believe Deaf people when they corrected their signing or behavior;

If Deaf people tell [the interpreter] how they want [the interpreter] to respect their culture, how they want to be treated equally, how they want respect, then [the interpreter] won't believe it. [The interpreter] won't believe what Deaf people tell them because they are closed-minded to [Deaf] culture.

In the following sections, I discuss other characteristics and behaviors that, like shifting from the use of words such as *khiem thính* to *Điếc*, were seen as constituting open-mindedness and demonstrated re-orienting to positive ideologies.

5 Open-mindedness as recognizing deaf people's authority

Another way students demonstrated reorientation was by asking Deaf people questions about sign language and Deaf culture. Whenever the CTSL staff evaluated students, they considered whether the student asked Deaf teachers questions. One student who stood out in this regard was Mai. Although Mai's signing was described as "average," what distinguished her from her peers was that she peppered Deaf teachers with questions about sign language and Deaf culture. An even excitedly reported seeing Mai hanging out with Deaf students at the CTSL (who were late signers) and asking them questions.

Asking questions demonstrated motivation and commitment to learning HNSL. Yet asking questions of Deaf people was also a sign that hearing students could open their minds, as it required dis-orienting from ideologies that discounted the authority of signing people. Students had to disorient from the idea that HNSL was backwards and that speech is the default medium for conveying authority (Cooper and Nguyễn 2015, 107) and reorient to the idea that Deaf signing people could be authority figures, and in fact were the primary authorities on their language and culture.

When hearing students entered the CTSL, they generally treated hearing interpreting assistants as default authorities and directed questions to them. As Ngoc explained, she had developed techniques to convince students to ask questions directly to Deaf teacher;

If [a student] didn't understand a sign, and they ask me, I will repeat the question to the Deaf teacher with them watching me, so that they know [they can do that too]. If they ask me again, I tell them they should fingerspell the word to the teacher, just like I do ... They are wrong to think of me, they should think of the Deaf teacher, so I redirect the questions.

Similarly, the staff encouraged students to treat Deaf teachers as the default authorities by decreasing the visibility of the interpreting assistants. In a staff meeting, they decided to relocate interpreters from the front of the classroom, where they might be mistaken as a teacher, to the back of the classroom, where they would not "distract" students. Whenever Ngoc or Thuần participated directly in a lesson, they would first ask the Deaf staff's permission, then sign their contribution as the other interpreter voiced. This ratified the authority of the Deaf staff, and prioritized direct access in HNSL, even when their comments were directed to hearing students. These strategies draw on a larger set of techniques Deaf people have developed to ratify the authority of Deaf signing people (Cooper and Nguyễn

2015). It was against this backdrop that Mai’s constant questions marked her as open-minded.

6 Embodying open-mindedness through facial expression

Finally, students could demonstrate open-mindedness by adopting Deaf norms of embodied communication, particularly around facial expression. While the majority of hearing students were described as “blank faced,” potential interpreters were described as having facial expression “like a Deaf person’s.”

For example, one evening students were practicing interpreting written Vietnamese dialogues into HNSL. One student, Quyen, skillfully translated the Vietnamese phrase “không muốn” (don’t want) by combining the manual sign MUỐN (want) with the mouthing “không muốn.” Simultaneously, she screwed her face into a look of disgust, and flung her chin over her shoulder, conveying a sassy tone. An, who had been watching for the back of the room, turned to me, unprompted, and signed: “Quyen has excellent facial expression. The rest of the students are mediocre, but she is great. I’d pick her to interpret.”

Partially, facial expression was valued as a necessary skill for interpreting. In sign languages, facial expressions can convey a wide range of syntactic and affective information similar to speakers’ vocal tone (Herrmann and Steinbach 2013). The CTSL staff argued that interpreters needed a firm command of facial expression to ensure Deaf people’s comprehension, translate emotive information conveyed in a speaker’s tone of voice, and intuit the meaning of signed words and phrases they had not previously encountered.

But facial expression was also valued as a distinctly Deaf norm of embodiment, and thus as an index of students’ open-mindedness and reorientation. Nam (the teacher of the advanced hearing class) explained: “[Sign language] grammar, facial expression, role shifting¹⁴; those are all Deaf things [lit: DEAF-THEIRS].” Many CTSL activities emphasized the connection between facial expression and Deaf culture. For example, in a CTSL talent show, hearing students performed a skit about a family getting ready in the morning¹⁵. The play was mostly dialogue, with occasional pantomiming (brushing teeth, slurping phở/noodle soup). After-

¹⁴ In some sign languages, including HNSL, role shifting (shift in body orientation) is one way signers quote other signers.

¹⁵ I played the father in the hearing rendition of the play.

ward, An thanked the performers and asked a Deaf teacher and Deaf students¹⁶ to re-perform the play. They repeated the play with the same plot but different affect, drawing heavily on facial expression. The Deaf teacher did a hilarious impression of a mother, smiling as she bustled about cooking breakfast, and scowling at her family's ineptitude. The audience gave hearty applause. An asked what distinguished the two renditions, and students commented that the facial expressions made it funnier. An agreed, reminding the students that facial expression is part of Deaf culture, and encouraging them to practice facial expression. In an interview, An described his strategy:

With the hearing play... I saw they didn't have facial expression, they didn't show anything... So, I asked Deaf people to copy the play and they used lots of facial expression. And hearing people woke-up to Deaf [culture] for the first time. The lesson stuck that facial expression is important. That shows that Deaf people have their own culture. And [the hearing students] got it; it belongs to the Deaf¹⁷. Hearing people need to open their minds about that.

The assumption was if students recognized Deaf people used facial expression in distinctive ways, they would in turn recognize Deaf people as a cultural minority. In other words, facial expression was seen as a boundary marker between Deaf and hearing cultures.

Facial expression may have been recruited as a boundary marker rather than HNSL itself, because many Deaf people in Việt Nam, especially those who grew up in rural areas without access to Deaf education, were not fluent in VSLs. While many Deaf groups have embraced socio-linguistic definitions over medical models of deafness (Monaghan 2003), this poses problems for including Deaf people who don't have access to sign language (Hoffmann-Dilloway 2011). Using facial expression as a boundary of Deaf culture had the benefit of allowing late signers to perform as skilled members of Deaf culture. In the same talent show, late Deaf signers also performed skits, and An emphasized how they too used facial expression successfully¹⁸. In fact, facial expression was viewed as especially important for late signers' (as opposed to fluent signers) comprehension of HNSL. For example, when a hearing student asked An about variation amongst Deaf signers, An explained that some Deaf people did not attend Deaf schools and had to come up with their own way to sign, and he stressed that it is espe-

16 The CTSL offers a class for Deaf people to study HNSL and written Vietnamese.

17 Lit DEAF THEIRS

18 Other factors such as GESTURE or ROLE-SHIFTING may have contributed to the 'success' of their performance, but were not commented on by An in this scenario.

cially important to use gesture and facial expression when communicating with late signers.

Despite encouragement, few hearing students adopted Deaf norms of facial expression. Nam often asked students if they understood a lesson only to be greeted with blank faces, prompting him to admonish students. One student protested, “I already told you! I don’t have facial expression!” Ironically, this statement was accompanied by both grammatical (raised eyebrows) and emotive (exasperation) facial expression. Nam responded, “See, when you are angry you have facial expression-you look mad!” Here, Nam collapsed the usually carefully maintained distinction between Deaf and hearing facial expressions, exposing the messy work of using facial expression as a boundary marker between Deaf and hearing cultures. While hearing people do use facial expression, CTSL teachers frequently downplayed or ignored hearing peoples’ facial expression to claim that Deaf culture is distinct. This *erasure*, which Irving and Gal define as the “process in which ideology, in simplifying the linguistic field renders some persons or activities... invisible,” reified the boundary between the cultures (2009, 404). Yet at other times hearing facial expression was foregrounded to persuade students to cross this boundary and adopt Deaf norms of embodied communication.

Given many students’ resistance to adopting Deaf norms of facial expression, facial expression became an embodied icon of opening your mind and re-orienting to Deaf community norms. It was for these reasons that the CTSL staff considered facial expression such an important selection criterion for interpreters.

7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how Deaf people’s selection criteria for interpreters are deeply rooted in the local socio-political context. In a world where Deaf people were actively trying to change hearing people’s language ideologies, Deaf community leaders selected interpreters who could disorient from ideologies that frame hearing Deaf people and sign language negatively, and embrace Deaf cultural norms. While we might expect evaluations of interpreters to focus primarily on linguistic skills, the staff of the CTSL focused on finding interpreters with a positive, respectful, perhaps even deferent ideological stance toward Deaf people and sign language.

Moreover, their evaluation of interpreters’ ideological stances were in turn rooted in language ideologies. Deaf teachers believed that students use of lexical terminology, asking questions, and use of facial expression indexed a student’s

ideological stance. These features were connected to open-mindedness through classical ideological processes of ionization and erasure (Irvine and Gal 2009). In other words, Deaf teachers saw specific ways hearing people used sign language as reflecting their level of respect or deference to Deaf people.

Yet recognizing the role language ideologies play in these evaluative schemes is not to dismiss their real ability to capture what makes a good interpreter. As language ideologies are evaluative constructs (Kroskrity 2004), any evaluation of interpreters' suitability inherently relies on language ideologies, whether interpreters are evaluated for producing "verbatim" translations (Haviland 2003), or for embracing Deaf community norms. The relevant question is not whether or not our evaluative schemes rely on language ideologies, but what work our evaluative schemes do. In Hà Nội, Deaf people wanted interpreters who could re-orient themselves toward the Deaf community and who were doing linguistic, cultural, and ideological work to align with Deaf people. In other words, Deaf leaders sought interpreting students who could transform themselves, and would continue transforming themselves, changing their relationship to the Deaf community and sign language as they grew and developed in their interpreting practice.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the University of Chicago Center for Southeast Asian Studies and Fulbright IIE for research funding; my interlocutors for their continued support; and to Michele Friedner, Ray M. Marie and the volume editors for their thoughtful commentary.

References

- Bechter, Frank. 2008. The Deaf convert culture and its lessons for Deaf theory. In H-Dirksen L. Bauman (ed.), *Open your eyes: Deaf studies talking*, 60–82. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cooper, Audrey C. 2011. Overcoming the 'backward' body: How state institutions, language, and embodiment shape Deaf education in contemporary southern Viet Nam. *American University*.
- Cooper, Audrey C. 2014. Signed languages and sociopolitical formation: The case of 'contributing to society' through Hồ Chí Minh City Sign Language. *Language in Society* 43(3). 311–32.
- Cooper, Audrey C. & Trần Thủy Tiên Nguyễn. 2015. Signed language community-researcher collaboration in Việt Nam: Challenging language ideologies, creating social change. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 25(2). 105–27.
- Friedner, Michele Ilana. 2015. *Valuing Deaf worlds in urban India*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

- Friedner, Michele Ilana & Annelies Kusters. 2015. Introduction. In *It's a small world: International Deaf spaces and encounters*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Gal, Susan & Kathryn Woolard. 2001. Constructing languages and publics. In *Languages and publics: The making of authority*, 1–12. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Haviland, John B. 2003. Ideologies of language: Some reflections on language and US law. *American Anthropologist* 105(4). 764–774.
- Herrmann, Annika. & Markus Steinbach (eds.). 2013. *Nonmanuals in Sign Language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Hill, Joseph. 2013. Language ideologies, policies, and attitudes toward signed languages. In Robert Bailey, Richard Cameron & Ceil Lucas (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hoffmann-Dilloway, Erika. 2011. Lending a hand: Competence through cooperation in Nepal's Deaf associations. *Language in Society* 40(03). 285–306.
- Irvine, Judith T. & Susan Gal. 2009. Language ideology and linguistic differentiation. In Alessandro Duranti (ed.), *Linguistic anthropology: A reader*, 2nd edn, 402–434. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kroskrity, Paul V. 2004. Language ideologies. In Alessandro Duranti (ed.), *A companion to linguistic anthropology*, 496–517. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Kurz, Kim Brown & Elisabeth Caldwell Langer. 2004. Student perspectives on educational interpreting: Twenty Deaf and hard of hearing students offer insights and suggestions. In *Educational interpreting: How it can succeed*, 9–47.
- Kusters, Annelies. 2014. Deaf sociality and the Deaf Lutheran church in Adamorobe, Ghana. *Sign Language Studies* 14(4). 466–487. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sls.2014.0016>.
- Kusters, Annelies, Dai O'Brien & Maartje De Meulder. 2017. Chapter 1: Innovations in Deaf studies: Critically mapping the field. In *Innovations in Deaf studies: The role of Deaf scholars*. Perspectives on Deafness. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Minh-Hàng, Lê & Stephen O'Harrow. 2007. Vietnam. In Andrew Simpson (ed.), *Language and national identity in Asia*, 415–442. Oxford Linguistics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Monaghan, Leila. 2003. A world's eye view: Deaf cultures in global perspective. In *Many ways to be Deaf: International variation in Deaf communities*, 1–24. Washington, D.C: Gallaudet University Press.
- Napier, Jemina & Roz Barker. 2004. Accessing university education: Perceptions, preferences, and expectations for interpreting by Deaf students. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 9(2). 228–238.
- Napier, Jemina, Meg J. Rohan, Melanie Metzger & Earl Fleetwood. 2007. An invitation to dance: Deaf consumers' perceptions of signed language interpreters and interpreting. In *Translation, sociolinguistic, and consumer issues in interpreting*, 159–203. Washington, D.C: Gallaudet University Press.
- Stone, Christopher. 2012. Interpreting. In Roland Pfau, Markuis Steinbach & Bencie Woll (eds.), *Sign language: An international handbook*, 980–998. Handbooks of Linguistics and Communication Science. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Woodward, James. 2000. Sign languages and sign language families in Thailand and Viet Nam. In Karen Emmorey, Harlan L. Lane, Ursula Bellugi & Edward S. Klima (eds.), *The signs of language revisited: An anthology to honor Ursula Bellugi and Edward Klima*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Woodward, James, Thi Hoa Nguyen, Hoang Lam Nguyen, Tuan Linh Nguyen, Minh Nhut Nguyen & Tran Thuy Tien Nguyen. 2015. Ha Noi Sign Language. In Julie Bakken Jepsen (ed.), *Sign languages of the world: A comparative handbook*, 335–350. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Woodward, James, Thi Hoa Nguyen & Tran Thuy Tien Nguyen. 2004. Providing higher educational opportunities to Deaf adults in Viet Nam through Vietnamese Sign Languages: 2000–2003. *Deaf Worlds* 20(3). 232–263.

Kristin Snoddon

Teaching sign language to parents of deaf children in the name of the CEFR: Exploring tensions between plurilingual ideologies and ASL pedagogical ideologies

1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the shortcomings and utility of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) for deaf sign language teachers in light of its function as an elite policy document with attachments to prestige spoken language varieties. More specifically, this chapter discusses some ideological and practical impacts of introducing the CEFR into the domain of sign language teaching to hearing parents of deaf children. I present findings from my ongoing ethnographic action research studies as a deaf researcher working with Canadian teachers of American Sign Language (ASL) to develop CEFR-aligned ASL courses for parents. In this context, despite a lack of a formal curriculum for parents, parents' and deaf children's sign language learning has often been viewed as deficient. The prevalence and impact of this ideology became apparent in an earlier study of teaching parents how to read children's books through ASL (Snoddon, 2014). In this study, a parent participant characterized both their own ASL production and their children's reception of bilingual input as "broken" (Snoddon, 2014, p. 185).

In response, a CEFR-aligned parent ASL curriculum was conceived in order to promote a plurilingual framework that endorses parents' and children's emergent linguistic and cultural competences, and addresses an identified mismatch between existing ASL curricula focused on interpreter training and the learning needs of parents of deaf children (Snoddon, 2015). However, this dynamic view of language learning and use is in contrast to the monolingual view of language competences that is argued to be inherent to the CEFR proficiency descriptors (Barni, 2015). Just as there are contradictions between the CEFR's championing of plurilingualism and its promotion of (potentially misapplied) language proficiency descriptors, there are tensions inherent to the concept of plurilingualism itself, which can be used to mask inequalities (Kubota, 2014). Additionally, a main challenge has been rendering the CEFR and its proficiency descriptors accessible to Canadian deaf sign language teachers; similar concerns regarding the complexity and readability of the CEFR have been raised elsewhere (Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007). Although the CEFR claims universal

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510090-008>

applicability across languages and contexts (Martyniuk, 2012), questions have been raised regarding the suitability of the CEFR to minority-language teaching (Lotti, 2007). In this regard, this chapter illuminates Blommaert's (2007) axiom that "social events and processes move and develop on a continuum of layered scales, with the strictly local (micro) and the global (macro) as extremes, and with several intermediary scales (e.g., the level of the State) in between" (p. 1). In other words, this chapter shows how ideologies surrounding sign language teaching and learning play out on macro- and micro-scales, with intended and unanticipated effects.

The next sections of this paper describe ideologies surrounding teaching sign language to parents of deaf children and provide background information regarding the CEFR, its applications and its ideological underpinnings. Following this, the study goals, methodology, and participants are introduced and findings discussed related to ASL instructor ideologies and the ideological impact of attempting to incorporate the CEFR in parent ASL classes.

2 Teaching ASL to parents of deaf children

Internationally, few research initiatives have focused on teaching sign language to parents of deaf children (Snoddon, 2015). Most programs of this nature have followed a comparatively informal home visiting format where sign language teachers meet with individual families (Napier, Leigh, & Nann, 2007; Watkins, Pittman & Walden, 1998). Under the Ontario Infant Hearing Program, home visits by so-called ASL consultants are provided to a maximum of 48 hours a year if parents elect to receive ASL services; the ASL service option is not available to parents who choose spoken-language services (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2018; Snoddon, 2014). Previous research revealed limitations in this model in terms of meeting the communication needs of families with deaf children and supporting parents' development of ASL proficiency (Snoddon, 2014). In this earlier study, parent participants reported ongoing frustration and communication difficulties within the constraints of available services. Comments made during interviews with different parents included "My ASL vocabulary isn't the best" and "We don't sign enough, we don't have enough vocabulary, we just don't have enough" (Snoddon, 2014, p. 188-190).

I argue that in early intervention contexts for deaf children, modernist ideologies of named languages as bounded systems and of bilingualism as requiring native-like competence in standard languages have inhibited support for parents' sign language learning in both ideological and practical terms. These inhibitions

exist on both lower and higher scales, at the micro-level of local ideologies taken up into practice and at the macro-level of international academic discourse (Blommaert, 2007). The inhibiting effects of these practical, micro-scale ideologies are seen above in parent participants' reported communication difficulties and frustrations within the context of the Ontario IHP's limited provision of ASL services to families. As an instance that reflects macro-scale ideologies in the academic discourse of deaf education, Mayer & Leigh (2010) claim that significant language delays are "a hallmark of L1 (sign language) learning by all deaf children whose hearing parents have no prior experience of deafness" (p. 179). Similarly, Knoors and Marschark (2012) describe the "unavailability (impossibility?) of fluent language models from an early age for deaf children with hearing parents" (p. 294). A deficit view of parents' and children's nascent bilingualism has worked in tandem with oralist ideologies so that cochlear implants and spoken language training are presented as the only option for parents and deaf children across both local and global scales, at least in the Global North (Mauldin, 2016). As Kubota (2014) notes, "The denial of multilingualism for marginalized populations indicates how power produces and justifies social violence, a problem to be scrutinized" (p. 478).

3 Plurilingualism

These systemic limitations and ideologies were my original impetus for seeking a plurilingual framework for parents' ASL learning following pioneering work by deaf teachers who developed parent Sign Language of the Netherlands courses that are aligned with the CEFR (Oyserman & de Geus, 2013). In Canada, my rationale for seeking to develop a similarly CEFR-aligned parent ASL curriculum was based in the framework's advancement of plurilingual and pluricultural competence, which is summarized as follows by Coste, Moore, and Zarate (2009, p. v-vi):

- It developed a wholistic and multiple, rather than segmented vision, of language skills and of language, identity and culture;
- It insisted on disequilibrium and partial competence, rather than on balance of skills;
- It insisted on potential linkages, rather than on separateness of its various components;
- It developed a dynamic vision of competence, situated, contextualized, and changing over time and circumstances;
- It included circulations, mediations and passages *between languages and between cultures*;

- It considered competence as highly individualized, and dependent on life paths and personal biographies, and as such, subject to evolution and change, whether in or out of school.

In these terms, the CEFR promises freedom from both macro- and micro-scale ideologies of languages and cultures as bounded systems requiring native-speaker competence for participation. In previous research about an ASL book sharing program for parents and young children, combined with systemic limitations in ASL services for parents and children, these ideologies have been shown to work at the local level against the goal of supporting elaborated parent-child communication in ASL (Snoddon, 2014). The macro-scale discourse of plurilingualism offers a more expansive vision of communication practices across lifespans, named languages, and cultures. Becoming a parent of a deaf child often means “[re]locating the centre of one’s life” (Busch, 2015, p. 340) and entering a space where parents’ linguistic repertoires need reconfiguring and expanding. Plurilingualism endorses “truncated multilingualism” and the creative language practices of speakers or signers who achieve communicative goals in particular situations without necessarily “knowing” a named language in the sense of having “full competence” (Blommaert, Collins, & Slembrouck, 2005, p. 199).

However, the concept of plurilingualism itself can be used to mask inequalities due to its connection to “individual subject positions” (Kubota, 2014, p. 484) rather than to collective language minority groups who seek continuity and reproduction through mother-tongue education (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002). Plurilingualism has been defined by the Council of Europe (2001) as multilingualism at the level of the individual, and this framework has also been linked to proficiency in standard national languages. Plurilingualism may privilege the heteroglossic language practices of dominant group members who may have more access to standard national language proficiencies (Kubota, 2014, p. 484). Canagarajah (2013) argues that plurilingualism has “hitherto been defined largely in cognitive terms” and thus risks being viewed “as a solitary mental activity” (p. 10). Moreover, plurilingualism has been linked to “a covert neoliberal agenda” (Flores, 2013, p. 500) of individual responsibility and adaptation to a free-market economy in terms of language learning. As Kubota (2014) argues, “In bolstering neoliberal discourses, the multi/plural approaches lose a transformative edge that seeks significant changes in the sociopolitical and economic conditions of people who are using, learning, and teaching language” (p. 475).

There is a concern that in seeking to distance language ideologies from modernist concepts of boundedness and place, researchers move away from the epistemologies and needs of language minorities who value rootedness, belonging, and solidarity (Kubota, 2014). These authenticating definitions of collective lan-

guage minority identity are “founded upon the modernist definitions of language and language rights” (Kubota, 2014, p. 483). However, these modernist language rights discourses, with their essentialist leanings, can ultimately be as limiting to minority groups’ cultural and linguistic interests as discourses of plurilingualism because they can both serve to alienate less privileged and nonstandard minority language speakers. It may be that these essentializing (modernist) and hybridizing (plurilingual) ideologies occur in tandem in the discourses of and about language minorities, including sign language speakers. For example, signers can simultaneously invoke a collective identity and advocate for official sign language recognition and bilingual education for deaf children while asserting the integrity of plurilingual repertoires of new signers, such as parents, and of bimodal bilingual deaf children with cochlear implants.

4 The CEFR in context and practice

4.1 Background

The CEFR was developed as a reference tool in teaching, learning, and assessing second or additional languages (Council of Europe, 2001; Little & Taylor, 2013). In the Canadian context, work has taken place to advance the adaptation of the CEFR (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010), including the utilization of the CEFR in Ontario French immersion programs from kindergarten to grade twelve (Little & Taylor, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Canadian initiatives and research involving the CEFR have mainly focused on teaching and learning French and English, the two official languages of this country (Little & Taylor, 2013). Thus, the Eurocentrism that is argued to be inherent to the CEFR’s privileging of standard national languages (Barni, 2015) can also be said to emerge in the Canadian context. A national policy of official bilingualism in English and French neglects so-called allophone (or immigrant) and Indigenous language speakers, while sign language speakers are often erased altogether from discourses in Canadian modern language education (Churchill, 2003).

The CEFR4SL was initiated in 2011 for adapting the CEFR to sign language teaching in Europe (Haug & Keller, 2011). In adapting the CEFR to the modalities of signed rather than spoken/written languages, this initiative has focused on supporting university sign language interpreter training programs (Sadlier, van den Bogaerde, & Oyserman, 2012). Similarly, the European Centre for Modern Languages’ project titled Sign Language for Professional Purposes, or ProSign, has worked to specify proficiency levels for sign languages that correspond to

CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe, 2017). These European initiatives for adapting the CEFR to sign language teaching that are focused on interpreter training illustrate how sign languages are often viewed and constructed in the neoliberal economy. That is to say, in the macro-scale context of national and provincial accessibility legislation and inclusive education policies, sign languages become disability accommodations to be provided in the person of interpreters as the only provision of sign language in education for deaf learners that is broadly supported through policy and funding mechanisms in the Global North (Russell & Winston, 2014). In this context, sign language education and curriculum development have focused on ASL classes for adult second language learners and the training of hearing service providers in the form of interpreters rather than on K-12 or preschool teacher education or the development of immersion programs for deaf children. For instance, in Snoddon (2016) I reported that 1,138 students were enrolled in second language ASL courses at my university in contrast to the total enrolment of less than 300 students at the four provincial schools for deaf students in Ontario that provide a bilingual education in ASL and English or Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) and French. In contexts outside of Canada, McKee (2017) and de Meulder (2017) report similarly dramatic discrepancies in the ratios of hearing to deaf learners of sign languages. In this way, the linguistic human rights of deaf children and adults are seemingly reduced to consumerism of information and services via interpreters.

4.2 Implementation and assessment

The CEFR proclaims an action-oriented and learner-centered approach to communicative language teaching and learning (Little & Taylor, 2013) that is broadly applicable across languages and contexts (Council of Europe, 2001). In its descriptions of partial competences in named languages as forming parts of a learner's whole repertoire, as outlined above, the CEFR has championed the concept of plurilingualism, or multilingualism at the level of the individual (Council of Europe, 2001). However, criticisms have arisen of the CEFR's proficiency descriptors for assessing learners' receptive, productive, interactive, and mediation skills (Barni, 2015; Council of Europe, 2001). These skills are assessed according to the scales A1-C2, which involve six levels that describe learners' language proficiency from basic user (A1-A2) to independent user (B1-B2) to proficient user (C1-C2) (Council of Europe, 2001). Blommaert, Leppänen, and Spotti (2012) term the CEFR "an amazingly modernist instrument" (p. 3) that is underpinned by a monolingual ideology for measuring language proficiency despite its proclaimed orientation to plurilingualism.

Moreover, as Barni (2015) reports, the CEFR proficiency descriptors or “I can” statements have been used for measuring immigrants’ competence in standard European languages with a view to granting or denying citizenship, a purpose for which they were not designed since they are not a precise measurement of an objectified language proficiency outside of context (Coste, 2007). As Fleming (2009) argues, the descriptors are not intended to serve solely for assessment purposes (or supply high-stakes testing for government agencies that impacts immigrants’ life chances) but also to support teaching and learning in a plurilingual context, such as formulating lesson plans and curricula that support enrichment education for disadvantaged learners. These points illustrate “the layered and polycentric nature of sociolinguistic phenomena [which] should be seen as tied to differences between ‘scales,’” (Blommaert, 2007, p. 3), as when the CEFR as a supranational comparison tool for supporting language teaching and learning in particular contexts is taken up by the state for the purposes of border policing. The stated ideologies of the CEFR and how the framework is taken up into practice and ideologies at a local level may be seen as an instance of “jumping scales” (Blommaert, 2007), where higher-scale or macro phenomena take on new meanings and interpretations in lower-scale or micro contexts.

However, it has elsewhere been argued that the CEFR has been misappropriated as an exclusive, top-down standard for language assessment when its original purpose was to serve as a reference tool that must be adapted in a bottom-up manner to the language teaching and learning context at hand (Coste, 2007; Martyniuk, 2012). As Coste (2007) writes, the CEFR was conceived by the Council of Europe to address the comparability of language certificates in Europe and not serve as a prescription for defining proficiency in standard languages (p. 3). Coste adds that the CEFR has been underutilized as a teaching and learning tool to support curriculum development at the local level, “even admitting that it is complex, sometimes proliferous and not entirely consistent” (p. 12), and that its support for plurilingualism must be foregrounded and extended to include learners’ first languages. In her investigation of the use of the CEFR for minority languages, “which often occupy a position between a second language and a mother tongue,” Lotti (2007, p. 7) argues that a plurilingual framework is vital. As she notes, applying the CEFR in minority-language contexts lends prestige to undervalued languages because they are placed on a level with standard European languages (p. 16). Lotti (2007) also identifies issues with making the CEFR available in European minority languages—a point that may be less relevant now as the numbers of translations increase, but that remains true for many sign languages.

Moreover, as she writes, an issue that has been neglected in a minority-language context is that “a considerable amount of curriculum developers, textbook

writers, teachers, and not in the last place, time is needed” (Lotti, 2007, p. 17) to implement the CEFR in language education. In the case of Indigenous, immigrant, or signed languages, these resources are often lacking (Snoddon, 2016). However, for this type of investment, “the profits to be gained from it are significant: comparable reference points on learning and teaching objectives, the possibility to differentiate between proficiency levels and language activities, and an increased awareness of what the language learning process is about” (Lotti, 2007, p. 18) in a micro-scale context of teaching a minority language where resources and training are more scarce than they are for teaching standard national languages (Ó Ciardúbháin and Nic Giolla Mhichíl, 2014). These benefits are in addition to the increased language vitality and community empowerment that can be brought about through rigorous teaching of minority languages. To this point, the NGT instructors in Snoddon’s (2015) study reported that the CEFR is attractive to parents of deaf children because it treats the learning of sign language with the same gravitas as the learning of spoken languages such as Spanish or French. Moreover, it was found that the CEFR proficiency descriptors provide parents with clear assessments of their sign language learning progress and motivate them to continue.

This point illustrates how, as with the discourses of linguistic minorities and plurilingualism described above, language assessments such as those based on the CEFR descriptors can have a dual effect of reinforcing or resisting monolingual hegemony. The use of CEFR proficiency scales to assess parents’ sign language learning enables researchers to show that, contrary to dominant ideologies and discourses in early intervention, parents can achieve communicative competence in sign language (Oyserman & de Geus, 2013, 2015). In this context, language assessment can have emancipatory purposes, particularly in relation to the CEFR’s communicative focus and “I can” descriptors (Little & Taylor, 2013). In the case of teaching sign language to parents of deaf children, the value of the CEFR and its proficiency levels lies in the perceived rigor that the scales bring to the task of teaching and learning of sign languages (Snoddon, 2015). This aspect is important in the case of undervalued languages (Lotti, 2007) and is in line with the CEFR’s mandate to protect linguistic diversity (Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, 2007; Leeson & Grehan, 2010). Further, the CEFR can offer a more explicit description of what parents need to learn to become effective communicators in ASL with their children and other ASL speakers whom parents may encounter, since it focuses on domains, or “spheres of action or areas of concern” for explicating learner goals (Council of Europe 2001, p. 45). The personal, public, occupational, and educational domains each consider the locations, institutions, persons, objects, events, operations, and texts in the context of language use (Council of Europe, 2001), and lesson plans can be formulated accordingly. This

consideration of the context for language use is important given the identified mismatch between existing ASL curricula focused on interpreter training, which promotes language learning related to communication with deaf adults in mainly a public domain, and the communication needs of parents of deaf children in a family context or personal domain (Snoddon, 2015). As Blommaert et al. (2005) observe, “the particular environment organizes a particular regime of language,” which centers on “the connection between individual communicative potential and requirements produced by the environment” (p. 198).

The next section of this paper introduces the study goals, participants, and methodology.

5 The study

The ongoing, multi-year, multi-phase study of developing a parent ASL curriculum has encompassed teacher workshop and parent class locations in Toronto and Ottawa and received funding from several sources, including a University of Alberta Killam Operating Grant (2013-2014), a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Insight Development Grant (2014-2016), and a Carleton University Development Grant (2016-2017). The study’s original objectives were to investigate the development of a parent ASL curriculum framework in collaboration with Canadian ASL instructors and two Dutch practitioners who developed a CEFR-aligned Sign Language of the Netherlands curriculum for parents. Additionally, the study goals were to track the field-testing of this CEFR-based parent ASL curriculum with participating parents and instructors and develop a long-term, research-based model for supporting parents in their ASL learning.

In workshop and classroom sites in Toronto, participants included four deaf Canadian ASL instructors and seventeen hearing parents of deaf children aged between 0 and 8 years. In Ottawa, two deaf ASL instructors participated along with five hearing parents of deaf children aged between 19 months and 6 years. In both cities, parent participants’ previous and concurrent experiences with learning ASL ranged from minimal to incorporating home visiting ASL services and other early years ASL programs provided to parents and children via local service agencies. In Toronto, during August 2014 and May 2015 two one-week instructor orientation and training workshops were held in collaboration with the Dutch facilitators, and two fourteen-week parent ASL courses took place from fall 2014-winter 2015 and fall 2015-winter 2016. These courses were respectively aligned with level A1 and A2 proficiency descriptors. In Ottawa, where funding constraints precluded my hosting another workshop with the Dutch practitioners,

I led a half-day instructor orientation workshop during the summer of 2016 that was followed by a fourteen-week parent course taking place from fall 2016-winter 2017. This course was aligned with level A1 proficiency descriptors and had the goal of further refining and finalizing the teaching materials developed through the Toronto workshops and classes. These materials included teacher and student guides, short ASL videos, and Power Point presentations.

An ethnographic action research design was adopted to qualitatively and collaboratively document steps leading up to the development and field-testing of the pilot parent ASL curriculum, and assess the impact of this curriculum on parents' ASL learning following the CEFR. Field notes and videotaping were utilized for data collection during the parent classes where I was a participant observer, and data were analyzed thematically. A central and recurring theme for this project was the ideological and practical impacts of attempting to utilize the CEFR for developing parent ASL classes. These attempts also revealed various ideologies surrounding ASL teaching and the limitations and utility of the CEFR in this context, thereby illustrating "effects of scaling" related to power and inequality, and differential access to "discursive resources" (Blommaert, 2007, p. 7) such as language education frameworks. The next section reports and discusses these findings related to instructor perspectives.

6 Instructor ideologies

Previous research involving the Toronto-based component of this project revealed challenges faced by ASL instructors in terms of developing a new framework for ASL teaching (Snoddon, 2016). These challenges appeared to be linked to a relatively short time frame and gaps in resources (compared to European researchers who have been involved with adapting the CEFR to sign languages for a longer period of time, with support from the Council of Europe) for supporting instructors' learning about the CEFR for teaching parents and developing curriculum materials. Owing to their teaching experience and community-based training, instructors in the Toronto context appeared to be influenced by other, U.S.-based ASL curricula, principally the *Signing Naturally* series (Smith, Lentz, & Mikos, 2008) that focuses on supporting communication with adult deaf signers in a public domain and thus serves as a conduit to interpreter training. In addition, prescriptivist instructor ideologies regarding ASL and its teaching emerged in messages of disapprobation regarding initialized signs that were produced by some parent participants (Snoddon, 2016, 2017). Initialized signs, which incorporate fingerspelled handshapes corresponding with the first letter of a sign's

English gloss, were ideologically linked by the instructors to English-based sign systems introduced in deaf education in the 1970s after decades of oralism (Padden & Ramsey, 1998; Supalla & Clark, 2015). In place of initialized signs, the Toronto instructors privileged teaching of vocabulary items derived from classical ASL varieties (Snoddon, 2016, 2017). In this way, the Toronto parent classes invoked historical ASL discourses and varieties that were related to the instructors' identities and backgrounds as former students at an Ontario deaf residential school during the 1960s and 1970s.

The Ottawa instructor training workshop and parent classes likewise revealed challenges in adapting the CEFR, influences from instructors' other teaching and training experiences, and instructors' ideologies regarding ASL and ASL teaching. However, these factors manifested in different ways from the Toronto component of the project and revealed some generational differences between instructors. As compared with the Toronto workshops, there was an even more limited space of time and resources for supporting instructor orientation to the CEFR. This took the form of an approximately 3-hour workshop that I led, incorporating information from the Dutch facilitators' training workshops plus my own research. I also provided the Ottawa instructors with assorted CEFR information materials in print and electronic format via a Dropbox folder. In addition, in an effort to render the CEFR more accessible, the Ottawa instructors made a video ASL translation of level A1 proficiency descriptors for sign languages. This video was also intended to support future training of other ASL instructors for the parent ASL curriculum. However, unlike the Toronto instructors, the Ottawa instructors did not need to develop new curriculum materials; they were able to follow the template created by the Toronto instructors in the form of teacher and student guidebooks and videos. A main goal for this phase of the project was to further refine and finalize the teaching materials for the first parent ASL course.

7 Resistance to the CEFR

In previous research related to the Toronto component of the project, it was reported that instructor participants followed a hybrid format that incorporated the CEFR along with *Signing Naturally*-derived teaching approaches (Snoddon, 2016). This hybrid format was argued to be due more to a relatively compressed space of time and resources for learning about the CEFR and influence from previous instructor training and professional experience, rather than resistance to the CEFR itself. In contrast, in the course of teaching the Ottawa parent ASL classes, the instructors sometimes appeared to express overt resistance. This came up in

comments from instructors about the framework being “restrictive” or “limiting” that arose during exit interviews following the last parent class. These complaints about the CEFR also surfaced in conversations following my feedback during and after the first four parent classes, which I gave when instructors appeared to deviate from the teacher guidebook.

For example, during the second class that had the CEFR descriptive categories-derived theme of Family and domain of Institutions (related to family trees and networks), the instructors began teaching several country name signs in response to conversations with parent participants about where parents and instructors had lived in the past. This teaching included signs for Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, along with name signs for cities, provinces, and U.S. states (Ottawa, Winnipeg, Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal, Newfoundland, Minnesota). At this time, I felt the city, province, state, and country name signs might better fit with a Locations domain (instead of Institutions). During the third class, which had the theme of Living Routines (Time) and domain of Operations, the instructors taught several relatively low-frequency ASL vocabulary items that were also not in the teacher guidebook lesson plan for this class. These included the signs TWO-DAYS-AGO, THREE-DAYS-AGO, TWO-DAYS-FROM-NOW, THREE-DAYS-FROM-NOW, and so forth. While these items related to the class theme and domain, I felt they may have been less commonly used by deaf signers and therefore not suitable for an A1-level beginner course. Thus, the instructors’ previous training may not have promoted awareness of the value for learners of high-versus low-frequency vocabulary items.

Following the first four classes, I emailed feedback comments to the instructors that included a list of vocabulary items taught during class that were not in the teacher guidebook. (After subsequent classes, I stopped doing this due to my concern that I was taking a too directive role in the study.) At this time, I stated that there was nothing wrong in adding or deleting vocabulary items from the teacher guidebook, but that doing so needed to be justified from a pedagogical perspective. These comments were based on what I had previously observed during the Dutch facilitators’ workshop and the guidance they gave me in subsequent communications. I also tried making the same comments to the instructors in ASL after the classes in question. However, as one instructor stated during the exit interview, she wanted to be free to teach whatever came up during class and not be bound to follow the guidebook.

There are several possible interpretations to be deduced from the Ottawa instructors’ perceived resistance to the CEFR and related teaching materials. For one, the instructors may have been influenced by their experience of teaching ASL classes in what was then our university that do not follow a formal curriculum or textbook. This disavowal of published ASL teaching materials and lesson

plans is based in my former university department's apparent rejection of the *Signing Naturally* curriculum (Doré, 2014). Also, the instructors were younger and both individually and collectively possessed less ASL teacher training and experience than the instructors in the Toronto classes. As such, from my observations they may have experienced more difficulty with following a new, formal curriculum- and theory-based framework than did their peers in Toronto. I wondered at various times during the Ottawa parent course whether the instructors may have preferred to develop their own teacher guidebook that better fit their teaching goals and identities instead of following one written by other instructors in a different context, but time and resource constraints prevented this from being feasible. In addition, doing so would have necessitated a more in-depth understanding of the CEFR, which I had originally hoped would be gained in part by the instructors' working through the framework and lesson plans set out in the teacher guidebook and other pilot curriculum materials developed for the Toronto courses.

8 ASL teaching ideologies

In both contexts and phases of the project, instructor ideologies regarding how to teach ASL emerged and influenced pedagogical approaches to teaching parents. In Toronto, this took the form of incorporating generic *Signing Naturally*-derived materials and activities, such as the same picture card activities that were used in the instructors' other ASL courses, instead of teaching materials and activities geared directly toward parents. There was also a focus on vocabulary teaching that sometimes appeared to take precedence over other activities (Snoddon, 2016). This may have been precipitated by the vocabulary lists of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in the teacher guidebook lesson plans that were developed by the Toronto teachers. In Ottawa, however, instructors' anti-curriculum and -textbook ideologies emerged in the form of activities that emphasized parent participants' production of gestural communication along with standard vocabulary and grammar teaching. These activities often took the form of asking parents to describe various images depicted in a Power Point presentation, using gestures and signs that parents already knew.

For example, during the ninth class, which had the theme Illnesses and category Events, parents were asked to try describing various images of children with minor injuries and illnesses. The six Power Point images respectively depicted a child who had apparently fallen off a bicycle, a child clutching their stomach as if to indicate a sore stomach, a child holding up an index finger that wore a

Band-Aid, a child blowing their nose into a tissue, a child with their hands at their throat as if to indicate a sore throat, and a child lying in bed with a thermometer in their mouth. The three parents present for this class were asked to practice signing about the images. The following excerpt is based on a written transcription of video data that includes the convention of identifying English glosses of ASL words with capital letters, with pseudonyms for participant names.

After modeling for the parent participants how to sign injury-related vocabulary (BAND-AID, BANDAGE) to describe the first image in the Power Point of a child who has apparently fallen off their bike, the first instructor addresses the class: WE WANT YOU TRY CREATIVE, PRACTICE. (“We want you to try and practice being creative.”) The first instructor points to the remaining five images in the Power Point slide. HOW DESCRIBE? (“How would you describe these images?”) She points to the slide. GESTURE. HOW? CREATIVE. TRY. (“Use gesture. Try being creative.”) The first instructor points to the three parents seated in a semi-circle and nods, then turns on the classroom lights. The parents face each other, look at the images, and laugh. One parent, Ada, mimes that she has a hurt index finger. With a childlike expression, Ada signs HURT. The second instructor prompts the parents, pointing to the image of a child clutching their stomach, but Ada places her hands around her neck, her attention turned to the other two parents. Ada grimaces, and the other parents copy her expression and gesture. The second instructor moves closer to the parents and copies Ada’s gesture and expression: CHOKING? he asks. Ada repeats her gesture, pointing to the image of the child with hands at their throat. The second instructor shakes his head, indicating that an extended C handshape is the wrong handshape for signing about a sore throat. He demonstrates signing a G handshape running down his trachea: SORE THROAT. Ada again points to the Power Point image of the child with hands at their throat and indicates that an extended C handshape is used by the child in the image. The second instructor points to the image and responds, HEARING! (“They’re hearing!”)

As the above episode demonstrates, the Ottawa instructors emphasized parent participants’ creative production of gestural communication, although the second instructor did correct a parent participant’s handshape production. Similar activities involving asking parents to try gesturing and signing about Power Point images took place during the sixth, seventh, tenth, eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth classes. This emphasis on gestural communication resulted in an apparently relaxed and playful classroom atmosphere where parent participants felt free to experiment with mimicry and role play. Indeed, at several times throughout the course and during the last class, the five parent participants reported their enjoyment of the classes and desire for future courses.

However, to some extent an emphasis on gestural production may also have limited parent learners’ development of a fuller communicative repertoire that encompassed ASL receptive and interactive skills. This became apparent during the last parent class that was intended to focus on assessment of parents’ learning following selected CEFR proficiency descriptors for reception, production, and

interaction. The instructors had selected these descriptors from various lesson plans in the teacher guidebook. While I communicated with the instructors several times in advance of this class and shared further information regarding CEFR-aligned assessments from the Toronto instructors and Dutch practitioners, the assessment that took place in Ottawa appeared to emphasize production over other aspects of language ability. This was glimpsed in the reception portion of the assessment, which involved asking parents to retell segments of a video ASL story, and in the interaction portion which involved asking parents to retell what they had done the previous day. In other words, the parts of the assessment that were intended to focus on reception and interaction were also weighted toward production. This may reflect gaps in sign language teacher preparation in terms of construct validity and test design.

In addition, although the Ottawa phase of this project involved the translation of CEFR A1 proficiency descriptors into ASL by the instructors, they appeared to have difficulty with subsequently incorporating the descriptors into lesson plans and assessment activities. This was so even though from the fifth class onward, in response to a suggestion that I conveyed from the Dutch practitioners that instructors explain the CEFR “I can” statements to parents, the instructors included the receptive, productive, and interactive proficiency descriptors from each lesson plan into the class Power Point. However, the instructors did not discuss these “I can” statements with parents or outline how these were to be covered in the class. These teaching, assessment, and curricular planning issues point to an ongoing need for advanced ASL instructor training and professional development initiatives involving the CEFR and possibly other frameworks, such as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines which have been adapted for ASL (American Sign Language Teachers Association, 2014). As evidenced by my study findings, such training and professional development should address gaps in sign language teacher preparation, including assessment principles and curriculum and task design.

9 Discussion and implications

I have argued elsewhere that ASL teaching has been and in Canada, largely remains a community-based vocation, even in the few university settings where for-credit ASL courses are provided (Snoddon, 2016). As such, the teaching and learning of ASL in Canada should benefit the Canadian deaf community and reflect deaf community epistemologies and values. On an ideological level, a plurilingual framework for teaching ASL to hearing parents and deaf children

may be better supported by a minority-language teaching approach aimed at language revitalization and reversing a decline in minority speakers rather than an approach used for teaching standard national languages, such as French and English. This point needs further exploration in terms of investigating how CEFR proficiency descriptors can enhance sign language teacher education and development of curriculum and support parents' learning, instead of being used mainly for top-down, professional assessment purposes (see Fleming, 2009). In turn, an enhanced understanding of CEFR descriptors may result in more rigorous and holistic assessment on instructors' part. Moreover, a minority-language and/or mother-tongue-based teaching approach that focuses on the value of the CEFR for lesson planning and curriculum development to meet the needs of parents and deaf children may help to further distinguish the ideological underpinnings of teaching parents ASL from the goals of sign language training for professional purposes, which is more broadly available and supported. If ASL revitalization and multilingual education are main goals for deaf communities, it will be unfortunate if interpreter training continues to take precedence over planning for children's and parents' acquisition of ASL.

The issues raised by my ongoing study related to the ideological impact of attempting to introduce the CEFR into the domain of Canadian ASL teaching, challenges in implementing a CEFR framework, and instructor ideologies suggest that further research is needed in order to make the CEFR more accessible and useful to Canadian deaf sign language teachers. However, in general the Canadian context does not afford broad resources or support for teaching and learning Indigenous or minority languages, especially by and for Indigenous or minority populations (Everett-Green, 2016; Taylor, 2009). Adapting the CEFR for parent ASL teaching may indeed appear to lend prestige to an undervalued language in addition to the more immediate objectives of supporting enhanced parent-child communication and child development, but the former was not a main rationale for the project. Rather, I sought a plurilingual approach that endorsed hearing parents' emergent ASL communicative competences and that was initiated by Dutch deaf teachers with hands-on familiarity with the CEFR and parent teaching. Therefore, from an ideological perspective the intended and observed impacts of utilizing the CEFR in parent ASL teaching may be substantially different.

10 Conclusion

This paper has sought to provide an overview of the ideological impact of a CEFR-aligned curriculum for teaching ASL to hearing parents of deaf children. In this

setting, CEFR-related ideologies, including competing discourses of plurilingualism and standard language proficiency, are encountered by both monolingual ideologies surrounding teaching parents ASL and by instructor's ideologies regarding ASL pedagogy, influenced by gaps in the training available to Canadian sign language teachers. In turn, the profession of sign language teaching faces competing ideologies regarding its main objectives of language training for professional purposes and language revitalization for deaf communities, and how these may ultimately conflict or align with deaf community interests as well as with a plurilingual framework. These points illustrate how language ideologies work across macro-level scales and micro-level scales in local contexts, and how unanticipated outcomes in sign language action research may result from difficulties with “scale-jumping” (Blommaert, 2007).

References

- American Sign Language Teachers Association. (2014). *Standards for learning American Sign Language*. https://asltta.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/National_ASLS_Standards.pdf (accessed 22 February 2017).
- Barni, Monica. (2015). In the name of the CEFR: Individuals and standards. In Bernard Spolsky, Ofra Inbar-Lourie, and Michal Tannenbaum (eds.), *Challenges for language education and policy: Making space for people* (40–51). New York: Routledge.
- Blommaert, Jan. (2007). Sociolinguistic scales. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 4(1), 1–19.
- Blommaert, Jan, James Collins, & Stef Slembrouck. (2005). Spaces of multilingualism. *Language & Communication*, 25, 197–216.
- Busch, Brigitta. (2017). Expanding the notion of the linguistic repertoire: On the concept of *Spracherleben*—the lived experience of language. *Applied Linguistics*, 38(3), 340–358.
- Churchill, Stacy. (2003). *Language education, Canadian civic identity, and the identities of Canadians*. Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe Language Policy Division.
- Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (2007). *Recommendation 222: Language education in regional or minority languages*. <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&id=1144741&direct=true> (accessed 10 February 2017).
- Coste, Daniel. (2007). *Contextualizing uses of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/contextualising-uses-of-the-common-european-framework-of-reference-for/16805ab765> (accessed 9 August 2019).
- Coste, Daniel, Danièle Moore, & Geneviève Zarate. (2009). *Plurilingual and pluricultural competence: Studies towards a Common European Framework of Reference for language learning and teaching*. Strasbourg: Language Policy Division.
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Strasbourg: Language Policy Unit. http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework_en.pdf (accessed 6 November 2013).
- Council of Europe. (2017). *Sign languages and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Descriptors and approaches to assessment*. <http://www.ecml.at/>

- ECML-Programme/Programme2012-2015/ProSign/tabid/1752/Default.aspx (accessed 31 January 2017).
- Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. (2010). *Working with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in the Canadian context: Guide for policy-makers and curriculum designers*. <http://www.cmec.ca/docs/assessment/CEFRcanadian-context.pdf> (accessed 29 October 2013).
- De Meulder, Maartje. (2018). "So, why do you sign?" Deaf and hearing new signers, their motivation, and revitalisation policies for sign languages. *Applied Linguistics Review*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2017-0100>
- Doré, Christina. (2014). *Exploring teacher perceptions of a textbook-free ASL program at a Canadian university: A qualitative mixed methods study*. Ottawa: Carleton University MA thesis.
- European Centre for Modern Languages. (2013). *Signed languages for professional purposes*. <http://www.ecml.at/F5/Links/tabid/867/Default.aspx> (accessed 18 August 2014).
- Everett-Green, Robert. (2016, December 28). Trudeau promises aboriginal language bill, but activists say whole system needs overhaul. *The Globe and Mail*. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/trudeau-promises-aboriginal-language-bill-but-the-whole-system-needs-an-overhaul/article33444970/> (accessed 22 February 2017).
- Fleming, Michael. (2009). *Languages of schooling and the right to plurilingual and intercultural education*. Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe Language Policy Division. http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Schoollang_EN.asp (accessed 21 February 2017).
- Flores, Nelson. (2013). The unexamined relationship between neoliberalism and plurilingualism: A cautionary tale. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47(3), 500–520.
- Haug, Tobias. & Jörg Keller. (2011). *Development of theoretical and practical guidelines for the adaptation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to sign languages*. Zurich, Switzerland: European Science Foundation. http://www.hfh.ch/fileadmin/files/documents/Dokumente_FE/D.21_Haug_Keller_2012_10_112_Report.pdf (accessed 17 April 2014).
- Knors, Harry & Marc Marschark. (2012). Language planning for the 21st century: Revisiting bilingual language policy for deaf children. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 17(3), 291–305.
- Kubota, Ryuko. (2014). The multi/plural turn, postcolonial theory, and neoliberal multiculturalism: Complicities and implications for applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 37(4), 474–494.
- Leeson, Lorraine & Carmel Grehan. A Common European Framework for sign language curricula? D-Sign(ing) a curriculum aligned to the Common European Framework of reference. In Maria Mertzani (ed.), *Sign language teaching and learning: Papers from the 1st Symposium in Applied Sign Linguistics* (21–33). Bristol, UK: Centre for Deaf Studies, University of Bristol.
- Little, David & Shelley K. Taylor. (2013). Introduction. Implementing the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* and the European Language Portfolio: Lessons for future research. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 69(4), i–xvi.
- Lotti, Barbara. (2007). Investigation into the use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in regional and minority language education. Mercator: European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning. http://www.mercator-research.eu/fileadmin/mercator/publications_pdf/CEFR%20in%20regional%20and%20minority%20language%20education.pdf (accessed 9 August 2016).
- Martyniuk, Waldemar. (2012). The use and (potential) misuse of frameworks: The CEFR case. Presentation at ACTFL-CEFR Symposium 2012, European Centre for Modern Languages,

- Graz, Austria. <http://www.uni-leipzig.de/actflcefr/material/Use%20CEFR%20Martyniuk.pdf> (accessed 9 August 2016).
- Martyniuk, Waldemar & José Noijons. (2007). Executive summary of results on a survey on the use of the CEFR at national level in the Council of Europe Member States. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Language Policy Division. https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Survey_CEFR_2007_EN.doc (accessed 9 August 2016).
- Mauldin, Laura. (2016). *Made to Hear: Cochlear Implants and Raising Deaf Children*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mayer, Connie & Greg Leigh. (2010). The changing context for sign bilingual education programs: Issues in language and the development of literacy. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 13(2), 175–186.
- McKee, Rachel. (2017). Assessing the vitality of New Zealand Sign Language. *Sign Language Studies*, 17(3), 322–362.
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services. (2018). *Language development services guidelines: Ontario Infant Hearing Program. Version 2018.2*. Toronto, ON: Ministry of Children and Youth Services.
- Ministry of Education of Ontario. (2013). *A framework for French as a second language in Ontario schools Kindergarten to Grade 12: Core French, extended French, French immersion*. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/frameworkFLS.pdf> (accessed 27 January 2017).
- Napier, Jemima, Greg Leigh, & Sharon Nann. (2007). Teaching sign language to hearing parents of deaf children: An action research process. *Deafness and Education International*, 9(2), 83–100.
- Ó Ciardúbháin, Colm, & Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl. (2014). Creating tasks in a less-commonly taught language for an open educational resource: Why the CEFR is important for Irish. In Sake Jager, Linda Bradley, Estelle J. Meima, & Sylvie Thouéсны (eds), *CALL Design: Principles and Practice; Proceedings of the 2014 EUROCALL Conference, Groningen, The Netherlands* (261–266). Dublin: Research-publishing.net.
- Oyserman, Joni & Mathilde de Geus. (2015, July 1–3). Teaching sign language to parents of deaf children: Impact of CEFR-PSL methodology. Poster presented at ICSLA: 2nd International Conference on Sign Language Acquisition, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
- Oyserman, Joni & Mathilde de Geus. (2013, July 10). *Hearing parents and the fluency in sign language communication*. Poster presented at the Theoretical Issues in Sign Language Research Conference 11, London, UK.
- Padden, Carol & Claire Ramsey. (1998). Reading ability in signing deaf children. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 18(4), 30–47.
- Russell, Debra & Betsy Winston. (2014). Tapping into the interpreting process: Using participant reports to inform the interpreting process in educational settings. *Translation & Interpreting*, 6(1), 102–127.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove. (2002). Review or emotional reaction? A rejoinder. *Applied Linguistics*, 23(4), 536–541.
- Smith, Cheri, Ella Mae Lentz, & Ken Mikos. (2008). *Signing Naturally Units 1–6 Teacher's Curriculum*. San Diego, CA: Dawn Sign Press.
- Snoddon, Kristin. (2017). Uncovering translingual practices in teaching parents classical ASL varieties. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 14(3), 303–316.

- Snoddon, Kristin. (2016). Whose ASL counts? Linguistic prescriptivism and challenges in the context of parent sign language curriculum development. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 21(8), 1004–1015.
- Snoddon, Kristin. (2015). Using the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* to teach sign language to parents of deaf children. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 71(3), 270–287.
- Snoddon, Kristin. (2014). Hearing parents as plurilingual learners of ASL. In David McKee, Russell Rosen, & Rachel McKee (Eds.), *Teaching and learning of signed languages: International perspectives and practices* (175–196). Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Supalla, Ted, & Patricia Clark. (2015). *Sign language archaeology: Understanding the historical roots of American Sign Language*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Taylor, Shelley. (2009). The caste system approach to multilingualism in Canada: Linguistic and cultural minority children in French immersion. In Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Robert Phillipson, Ajit K. Mohanty, & Minati Panda (eds.), *Social justice through multilingual education* (177–198). Buffalo, NY; Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Watkins, Susan, Paula Pittman, & Beth Walden. (1998). The deaf mentor experimental project for young children who are deaf and their families. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 143(1), 29–35.

Part III: Sign language and literacy ideologies

Ruth Anna Spooner

Permissive vs. prohibitive: Deaf and hard-of-hearing students' perceptions of ASL and English

1 Introduction

“I hate English! It’s too strict!” and “I prefer just ASL. It’s way better.” As a former teacher and then as a researcher, I have heard many such utterances — as have many other teachers—from numerous deaf¹ students, especially from those who struggle with print literacy. What is it that leads so many deaf students to bemoan English for being too strict and having too many grammar rules? Why do a number of these students identify ASL as being “better,” and what do they mean by “better”? Certainly, it is a complicated process to learn a language to which one has limited access, as deaf students do with English in its spoken modality. And for deaf students who use ASL, it is a visual language that they often find easier to access and use. These factors could be partly why many deaf students express negative attitudes towards English: they find it hard to learn.

However, as I will show in the analysis below, it is far more complicated than this. Deaf students, like any other language users, carry ideologies about language—that is, they have powerful, interrelated beliefs, values, and attitudes concerning language and its speakers — all of which influence the ways they view English in its spoken and print modalities, as well as ASL, reading, and writing. In this article, through a careful examination of what the students say about print English *and* about ASL, I will show that they do not necessarily dislike English solely because they view it as being hard, but rather because they, not having a solid grammatical understanding of how either ASL or English works, have constructed a number of conceptions that powerfully shape their views and attitudes towards both languages. These findings underscore the importance for us to work towards a better understanding of the complicated and often-conflicting language ideologies that deaf students carry and how these ideologies might be influencing their learning in the English classroom.

¹ To avoid cluttersome acronyms such as D/d/HOH or D/HOH in this article, I will simply use the term *deaf* to refer to all individuals who identify as Deaf, deaf, and hard-of-hearing when discussing the deaf population as a whole or the group of student-participants in this study. If relevant when discussing a specific participant, I will label them with the descriptor that they use to describe themselves: Deaf, deaf, or hard-of-hearing.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510090-009>

2 A brief review of literature

The majority of previous studies have focused on language *attitudes* of deaf students, not on language ideologies (a larger umbrella which includes, but is not limited to, attitudes). For instance, Anderson (1993) studied college deaf students' attitudes towards writing, and found that many felt English to be cumbersome and "full of small words and grammar," a belief that seems to also underlie the writing behaviors that Mayer (2010) found in her textual analysis of deaf students' writing. She discovered that deaf students made "liberal and indiscriminate use" of derivational morphemes, prepositions, and other small words such as *the, a, for, but, will, to*, and so forth, more to signal that 'this is English' rather than to carry any grammatical or semantical information in their sentences (p. 148). This belief also recurs among the students in this study who complain that English has too many complicated features.

More recently, Toscano, et al (2006), Nickerson (2003), and Wood (2004) also explore deaf students' experiences with the English language, documenting their various struggles with learning print English. Even though these studies provide fascinating insight into how deaf students feel about reading and writing, they were designed to explore the students' *experiences* with English literacy, not their language ideologies, which encompass not only the students' experiences but also their resultant attitudes, values, and beliefs about *language* in general. One study, Tomkins (2001) comes very close to revealing language ideologies about English and ASL when the fluently bilingual student-participants discuss specific situations when they would switch between English and ASL, depending on the language mode and capacity of the other speaker, a sophisticated code-switching behavior which also appears among some students in my study. However, Tomkins' (2001) study focuses on documenting the participants' experiences with code-switching; it was not designed to probe the language ideologies underlying the conscious and/or unconscious code-switching decisions made by the students.

Hill's (2012) studies on the language attitudes of the deaf community provides keen insight into how deaf people perceive ASL and what they believe counts as ASL. Of particular importance to my discussion is how Hill's participants expressed conflicting views on the organization of words in ASL, with some asserting that ASL has no word order (in spite of reams of ASL linguistic research that proves otherwise). This belief is also widespread among the participants in my study, as will be discussed shortly.

Aside from Hill's (2012) work and the above-mentioned studies, most research on deaf students and language have focused almost exclusively on the types of

errors in deaf students' reading comprehension and writing.² Such data is indeed useful for teaching purposes, but it does not give us the whole picture, for we still do not know much about the language ideologies that underlie these perceived errors, nor do we know how said ideologies (about *both* English and ASL) might be motivating or alienating students towards the written modality of English.

This paucity of research is concerning because linguists have consistently found that people's language ideologies can powerfully color their perceptions of language, how it ought to look, and those who use it (Irvine and Gal 2000; Silverstein 1998; Kroskrity 2000). Ideologies are more than merely ideas about language: they are sets of deeply ingrained and seemingly commonsense beliefs, attitudes, morals, and values that language users construct, hold, and pass on about language and about what "correct" language ought to be. We rarely notice them in ourselves, but they can profoundly affect how people think, act, and justify these thoughts and actions towards both the spoken and written modalities of their language (Irvine and Gal 2000).

For example, in the spoken modality of English within the United States, speakers who use *ain't* instead of *isn't*, pronounce *ax* instead of *ask*, or use double negatives in their sentences may be viewed as backwards, uneducated, and/or less intelligent because their speech or grammar do not align with the Standard American Spoken English dialect, which many Americans believe to be the most correct and therefore superior form of spoken English (Lippi-Green 1997, Swofford 2015). Even though many of these grammatical features like double negatives are in fact not "errors" but rather linguistic and rule-abiding features of other English varieties—such as African American English (AAE) or Southern English — many everyday speakers still hold negative views towards these varieties of English (Flores and Rosa 2015; Hill 2012; Labov 1972)

In written English, some people feel irritated when they see *your* and *you're* being misused, or *their*, *there*, and *they're*, whereas for other people, these minor perceived grammatical errors and/or misspellings are unimportant. Non-standard varieties in word order and/or verb modalities are more noticeable for many people and can elicit negative, even visceral reactions towards the writer (Johnson and VanBrackle 2012). Such reactions stem from the ideologies that each person carries: our beliefs about what good English ought to look like and the differing degrees of value that we attach to it. As Kroskrity (2000) points out, most of us are not even aware of how powerfully our language ideologies shape our behaviors and views of other people.

2 See, for example, Easterbrooks (2013), Mayer (2010), and Paul (1998).

Unfortunately, we do not know much about how deaf students' language ideologies — about spoken English, about written English, and about ASL — might be affecting their attitudes towards the acquisition of English literacy. This study, therefore, is a preliminary foray into exploring deaf students' language ideologies and how they may be factoring into the ways students take up (or resist taking up) print literacy practices in English.

3 Study design

3.1 Participants

The data presented here comes from a larger qualitative study at a school for the deaf located in the western part of the United States. This school does not follow a bilingual-bicultural approach, but ASL is the primary method of communication in the school's academic and residential spheres. Fifteen student-participants were recruited randomly from the high school grades. A high percentage of the participants were from Latino backgrounds (especially Mexico and Puerto Rico, with a few of the participants coming from families where Spanish is the primary spoken language, which may or may not have been accessible to the student in the home), and the rest were of mixed and/or Caucasian descent.

The participants also come from a variety of linguistic backgrounds and proficiency levels in English and ASL: some have used ASL their whole lives and some are less proficient, having just begun learning ASL in the past 3–5 years, and some use spoken English well. The students all could converse informally in sign language at age-appropriate levels; however, at the time of the study, two of the students had not yet achieved academic fluency in ASL, meaning that even though they could converse well in ASL, they were not as familiar with the signs for advanced words and concepts that are used in the classroom, and thus sometimes needed their teachers to repeat information presented in ASL during class.

As for English, these students had a wide range of reading fluency levels, from being at grade-level to being 6–8 years behind their grade level. However, this school does not formally assess the ASL skills of its students, so for the purposes of this study, a Sign Language Proficiency Inventory (SLPI) assessor was brought in to do a brief assessment of their ASL skills, which found most students to have moderate to advanced fluency in ASL (scores of 3.5 and 4.5, out of 5 on the SLPI, respectively), with two students scoring in the intermediate-fluency (3.0) range. All of the students have taken English (reading and writing) courses every

year, and even though all of their classroom instruction is given in ASL, only a couple of participants report ever having any formal instruction *about* ASL.

3.2 Data collection

Interview and classroom data was collected in this qualitative study in which I, as a Deaf bilingual researcher who uses ASL, observed students working with their English teacher in the classroom and interviewed the students individually at specified intervals throughout the span of the study. This article will focus on the interview data that explicitly relates to the language ideologies that surfaced during two separate 45–60 minute semi-structured interviews about the students' linguistic experiences. I conducted all of the interviews in ASL, and later transcribed the videotaped interviews into written English for analysis.

4 Findings: Student ideologies about ASL — comparing (and subordinating) it to English

“English has *everrrrrything* in it,” complains Jayson³ when talking about what he perceives to be the excessively complicated nature of English grammar. “That’s why it’s hard.” He is not alone in his complaint: many of his peers also criticize print English. On the one hand, they uphold it as being the language that they need to learn well in order to lead successful, productive lives in an English-using society, but at the same time, they disparage it for being *too* advanced, *too* complicated, and *too* hard.

More than half of the students strongly identify with ASL as their preferred language for daily communication, but all of them also believe ASL to be a “simpler,” “easier,” and “less complex” language than the written modality of English. Their comments reveal that many of them seem to be using print English as a standard for assessing the linguistic adequacy of ASL. Or put another way, they judge ASL by how it measures up to English. Chris is a typical example of this ideological stance, as we see in the following excerpt when he talks about his Deaf girlfriend “writing ASL” and “cutting words out” in her sentences. I asked what he meant by that, and the conversation proceeded as follows:

³ Jayson is a pseudonym chosen by the student-participant, as are all of the students' names in this article.

Q: What kinds of words?

Chris: The unimportant words.

Q: Like, for example...?

Chris: Um...[pauses] um, like, “the” and “of.”

Q: So these are cut out?

Chris: Yeah.

Q: And that makes it “writing ASL”?

Chris: [nods]

Q: Do you sign that way, too?

Chris: Oh, yeah.

Q: Cutting stuff out like that?

Chris: Yeah, most people do that when they sign. That’s ASL.

His choice of verb speaks volumes: words are *cut out* in ASL, as does the choice of the adjective “unimportant”. Assuredly, he means words typically seen in English, which indicates that he is comparing ASL to English, and this becomes starkly clear moments later:

Chris: [The ASL] is not always in full. You always lose stuff, like, words are missing from it.

Q: So you feel that it isn’t enough, or what?

Chris: It’s not the full English. ASL is not complete English.

Q: How is it different?

Chris: ASL is shorter. ASL flips words around.

Several other students also draw comparisons between ASL and English and conclude that ASL is either broken English or a weaker language. “ASL is, uh — [sighs] — it has words all backwards in order,” Bella fumbles as she tries to explain. “Uhh...I mean, like, you know what [the subject of the sentence] doing...uh, but you don’t really know why or who or what.” In Bella’s eyes, ASL has fewer words than English and all of the words are ordered “backwards,” by which she means that ASL syntax often follows a topic-comment or SOV structure, as opposed to the SVO syntax that is common in English (Liddel 2003). Because ASL syntax does not match the structure she sees and has studied extensively in English, and also perhaps because of her recent experiences as a new signer with not fully understanding what is being said in ASL conversations, Bella assumes that important information must be missing from the ASL sentences. In her confusion about ASL

grammar — which she does use when she signs but has never studied formally — Bella claims that details like the “who,” “what,” and “why” of sentences are missing from ASL utterances.

When asked to compare between ASL and English, most students also describe ASL using phrases like “missing” and “skips words.” Hendrix struggles to explain his reason for using these phrases, and his startling conclusion starkly illustrates how much some of these students do subordinate ASL:

Hendrix: Well, it's more different actually. Signing is different because it doesn't really have conjunctions. It can be hard to understand at first, like, huh, what? Words like *for*, *and*, *so*. At first, I didn't really understand it, but now, it's okay.

Q: Why doesn't ASL have conjunctions and those kinds of words? Do you know why?

Hendrix: [short pause, shrugs] Maybe it's a third—third-world language. I don't know.

It is important to note that ASL *does* have conjunctions like *for*, *and*, and *so*, albeit perhaps expressed in a typologically different way from English. For example, ASL does have explicit signs for *for* and *and*, but frequently, the signer might signal *and* by a shift of the shoulders and eye gaze instead of using the physical sign for *and*.

However, to Hendrix, it seems like these words are missing, even though he uses them in his own signing. This student, who is a grade-level reader with speaking fluency in three languages (English, Spanish, and ASL), can name specific parts of speech; but as to why some of them seem to be “missing” in ASL, he can only hazard a guess. The best explanation he could think of was “third-world language,” a phrase that has strong connotations with poverty, racial inequality, and less developed countries.

In his eyes, English, with all of the parts of speech, is clearly a first-world language, whereas ASL is not. It is worth noting that Hendrix identifies strongly with ASL and prioritizes it as his preferred language for everyday conversation, so the fact that he uses “third-world” to describe ASL raises a host of troubling questions about how he (and several other students, as well) might be feeling tension between the language that has become a core part of his identity and the unsettling notion that his preferred language might be of a lower status in comparison to English.

Snooki also refers to the parts of speech in her attempt to describe ASL, but her explanation reveals that she does not fully understand the grammatical terms

she mentions, nor does she understand how the grammar of her own first language (ASL) works:

It's different. ASL is like, um, like, not, 'HOW ARE YOU.' The 'ARE' is not ASL. That's English. ASL just goes, 'HOW YOU?'. But when you write your sentences, it's *how are you* because it's in English. It's different [...] ASL has no verbs, nouns, adjectives, or anything like that. It's just straight-up talking, um, just normal talking, you know. But English *must* have nouns, verbs, adjectives. You just have to have them.

Even though Snooki has enough linguistic awareness — and pride in ASL — to insist that ASL is its own language (which she did earlier in her interview), she still claims that it has *no* nouns, verbs, adjectives, or any parts of speech. In her mind, those things belong to English; in her follow-up interview, Snooki reiterated those ideas again, saying that “those [things] are missing in ASL. That's the ASL way.”

In other words, Snooki is okay with ASL skipping things because that's just “the ASL way,” and it feels clearer, more personal, and more entertaining to her. However, Snooki's word choice — *missing* — implies the subordination of ASL to English, which possesses all of the rules and all of the grammar. This statement shows that even though Snooki knows that there are such things as nouns and verbs—and that they are necessary for English — she has failed to develop a metalinguistic understanding of *what* nouns, verbs, and adjectives are, and that they are also grammatical features in other languages — such as ASL, for instance. Having never received any ASL grammar instruction, Snooki assumes that *grammar* is something that belongs to written English only, which becomes clear when she later insists that ASL is flexible to the point of having “no sentences and no rules.” ASL does have complex and complete grammar (Hill 2012, Liddell 2003), but she is unaware of it and believes that ASL “can be signed any way you want.”

In short, these students look at print English and see all of the parts of speech and all of the grammatical features that, based on their schooling, they think a language should have. Then using the “yardstick” of English, they measure ASL and think that it comes up short in comparison because things are “missing” and “switched around.” In fact, the students in this study identified only two rules for ASL:

- (1) It must be signed clearly enough for the recipient to understand.
- (2) It has to have good facial expressions.

According to the students, as long as these two criteria are met, it's “good ASL.” Interestingly, they do not recognize that “good facial expressions” are, in fact, an

integral part of ASL morphology, including word formation, question formation, prosody, intonation, adjectives, and adverbs (Liddel 2003; Sandler & Lillo-Martin 2006).

Roy uses the word “fluid” to describe ASL grammar and claims that “you can move words all over the place” as long as the message is clear. He then gives several examples of how one might sign the same ASL sentence in different word orders, asserting that they are all equally ASL and concluding with, “it can’t be wrong.” In his view, anything goes in ASL — including more English-based signs such as Signed Exact English — as long as it is clear to the intended audience. Several other students also use the word “fluid” and “flexible” to describe ASL, using these exact words independently of one another, with a few of them insisting that word order in ASL doesn’t matter at all.

It is important to note that most of the students appear to have never been taught ASL explicitly, so they do not realize that even though SVO, SOV, and topic-comment structures are all used in ASL, there are, in fact, rules governing ASL syntax and sign production. They have apparently never been told what the linguistic features of ASL are, nor have they been taught how these features work.⁴ These students don’t have the metalinguistic knowledge that there are rules to be followed in ASL; what they think they see is that everyone seems to sign the way they prefer (i.e. following any random sentence structure, or using different variations of one sign), and in the midst of all that variety, the only consistent value is that people can understand one another — hence the students’ criteria of “clarity and understandability.”

Interestingly, apart from three students who mentioned in their interview that they identify more closely with spoken English, all of the students in the study praise ASL for its rich expressiveness and the ease of communication it provides. For them, the perceived *a*grammaticality of ASL is precisely what provides them with flexibility and freedom of expression, and they appreciate and cherish ASL all the more for it. This is a fascinating point of tension in these students as they — unnoticed to themselves — steadily assert their belief that ASL is a less competent language while at the same time also upholding it as the language most important to their identity.

⁴ The majority of schools for the deaf and mainstream programs in the United States do not provide formal ASL instruction for their deaf students whose first language is ASL, nor do they provide a curriculum of ASL classes for deaf students in parallel to the number of English classes they are required to take.

5 Student ideologies about English: excessively strict, rigid, and hard

When it comes to print English, the students are very well aware that there is such a common expectation of “correctness”; in fact, they describe English as being “strict” and “tough” because it has grammar and many rules that they need to follow. Terminology like “parts of speech,” “verb tenses,” “prepositions,” “nouns, verbs, and adjectives,” “word order,” and “grammar” pepper their comments about English, which reflects the many years of written English instruction they have received.

Even King, a fifteen-year-old whose print literacy skills in English are nine years below his grade level, can talk in a vague way about English grammar. “[My sentences] just are not right,” he says. “Um, like, my words are out of order. Like, I write, ‘I want,’ but I put that at the end instead of the beginning of the sentence.” Like King, many students can describe what they see in the language, and even name some rules, but when it comes to enacting these rules in their own writing, they struggle.

Several students fault written English for these struggles, blaming it for being too complicated. Snooki explains: “English *must* have nouns, verbs, adjectives. You just have to have them. I’m like, okay, sure. It doesn’t make sense to me.” Quite a few students, in spite of being able to bandy around grammatical terms like *past tense*, *adjective and parts of speech*, still felt deeply confused about how to use these things in their writing. King perceives that most of his sentences have at least one error in them, and on fixing them, he says:

I change it because they tell me to change it. Sometimes, it is not a big deal, but often — I mean, the rules are very strict in English. When I finish writing something, there are lots of mistakes in my sentences, so they tell me I need to change it. If there are only one or two mistakes, they might leave it, but if there are lots, I have to change them.

King tends to fix his sentence upon being asked to, but the fact that he is simply changing whatever they tell him to change shows that he really does not understand what he is doing or why. Nor does Auggins, who describes a sort of haphazard hunt for the correct way to express himself in English when trying to write back and forth with hearing people in various everyday situations when an interpreter is not available:

But sometimes, it happens that they don’t understand, and I don’t know [the word I want], so it’s like, oh, great, we’re stuck [...] I’ll try to find another word, another way to write it. If they still don’t get it, I tell them to wait a second while I think of another word instead.

Until we both go *aha!* and they finally understand. I mean, I keep trying word after word until they understand.

Basically, Auggins tries one word or one way to write the sentence, and if it doesn't work, he tries again and again, inserting random guesses (at words that he is not sure precisely what they mean, by his own admission) until he succeeds—or until the hearing person gives up and walks away, which has happened. For Auggins and the students who struggle the most with English, there seems to not be much rhyme or reason to how the language works, and its “strictness” alienates many of them.

To them, English grammar appears not to be a way of describing, understanding, and using the language; rather, it appears to be a long list of rules that feel rigid and prescriptive, with only one correct way to write a sentence. Most of the students do not seem to be aware that within the constructs of standard English, there *is* room for some flexibility in syntax. Further, nowhere in their comments do we see the kinds of words they use to talk about ASL (e.g. *flexible, fluid, free*). Instead, the verbs *fix* and *memorize* came up frequently along with *need* and *must* in the context of English words and sentences. Xina liberally uses phrases like “problem-solving” and “analyzing” when describing her experiences with print literacy. For many of these students, English is a long, confusing march of learning vocabulary, rules, and syntax—a process that they find extraordinarily difficult and baffling.

Consequently, when these students put English and ASL side-by-side, the (apparent) flexibility of ASL makes the (apparent) rigidity of English seem even *more* rigid. Many of these students have limited to no access to spoken English in their daily lives, and even though the written mode of the language is more (sensorially) accessible to them because they can see it and process it more fully, they still struggle with it. Learning the written modality of a language without having full access to said language's spoken modality makes it very challenging for these students to engage with written English in the same way that hearing children do. A small number of deaf students *do* successfully acquire print literacy and ownership in English; however, for many deaf students, like the ones in this study, owing to the lack of well-designed bilingual education programming in ASL and English, print English is, in many ways, still not fully accessible. For them, ASL feels closer and more important, whereas English, with its strictures and restrictions, seems distant and rigid. Hence the many comments like “I hate English” and “English is way too strict!” along with words like *frustration, struggle, lost*, and even *forget the English*.

Five out of the fifteen participants, however, do not have as negative an attitude towards English even though they also subscribe to the belief that ASL

grammar is vastly more permissive. They have near-grade level or grade-level reading and writing skills, and they seem to regard the complexity of English as a challenge — a sometimes-exasperating challenge, but nowhere as excruciating as it is for some of their peers. Hendrix and Reg, for example, find reading fun and don't mind writing, but they also acknowledge that it can be hard to remember all of the English rules, but they shrug it off as a part of the learning process, as do the other three students. For them, English seems to be slightly hard at times, but not at a level that is too far above their ability to successfully navigate. It is important to note that the students who have this attitude — whether they are D/deaf or hard-of-hearing — are also the ones who possess strong reading and writing skills. All of the students with weaker reading and writing skills in this study expressed strong aversion towards print English.

6 “Why do I have to fix this?!”

The students' beliefs about ASL's perceived agrammaticality leads to many of them carrying a set of ideological values related to language correctness that differ from those of native English speakers (which I will explain, momentarily), and such values do not always align with the ones that hearing people often carry about written English.⁵ In the students' eyes, the only “errors” possible in ASL are those that occur when a signer uses the wrong phonological parameter that conveys the wrong meaning (such as inadvertently signing *sorry* instead of *please*, or *Tuesday* instead of *bathroom*, signs that are similar because they differ only by one ASL parameter — for example, “SORRY” and “PLEASE” share the same location, movement, and palm orientation, but have a different handshape.)

What these students do identify as “errors,” however, are related to the phonology of a sign, not to its morphology or syntax. Such errors impact meaning, so the students are quick to correct them. However, none of them identify any other types of errors, steadily asserting that “ASL doesn't have grammar” and that everyone is free to sign words in any order they like, as long as the message is clear. (Interestingly, the students do not realize that if the message was, indeed, clear, then the utterance must have been at least partially grammatically correct.) They do not see mistakes in ASL syntax, or the mixing of Signed

5 For more on the types of ideological judgments that various speakers make based on variations in language use and perceived linguistic errors, see Lippi-Green (1997) and Kroskrity (2000).

Exact English signs into an ASL utterance, as errors but rather as each person's "way of signing," as one student puts it, which is something that they believe should be accepted without judgment.

The permissiveness that these students show (and value) in ASL directly conflicts with the widespread and institutionalized language ideology that many people hold about written English, where correctness in grammar is valued and in which a standard written variant exists and is oftentimes strictly enforced in school. Even though English speakers are more permissive towards variation and rule-bending in spoken English, many still believe that the standard variant is what English ought to look like in its print modality, and are thus much less forgiving towards perceived "errors" in written texts, particularly in academic and professional contexts (Kroskrity 2000; Flores and Rosa 2015; Lippi-Green 1997).

The students perceive that English needs to have many words in it — and usually in a certain order — before it is considered "correct." However, their attitude towards achieving this correctness is somewhat lackluster. Snooki, upon being asked about fixing her sentences, scoffs disdainfully:

Then they're like, change it to English. And I'm like, are you serious? I gotta do this? The rules are so strict for English. And I'm like, really? [...] But no, it has to be changed to English. Because it's a different language. When I learned that, I was like, ugh, you've gotta be kidding me.

She fixes her sentences because she is told to, not because she sees any value in it, as do King and Auggins, both of whom declare that their goal in writing is not correctness but rather getting their message "clear enough" or "good enough". Roy gripes about the necessity of fixing his grammar because it runs counter to his desire to communicate:

Roy: Sometimes, some of my [hearing] friends will point [a mistake] out and explain to me why it's wrong, show me how to fix it. I'll be like, oh, thanks. But at the same time, I'd be a little annoyed, like, don't you do that again, so...[laughs, scoffs].

Q: Annoyed? Why?

Roy: Because I don't like my grammar being corrected. Forget that. That's not important. The important thing is to communicate, to write with each other.

A few minutes later, Roy later wonders why he should bother fixing his sentences if the hearing person had already understood him in the first place, errors and all, a sentiment that Dani echoes.

Roy and Dani — along with several other students—do not seem to distinguish between informal writing to communicate with hearing people and the

more formal types of writing required for their schoolwork. To them, writing is writing and English is English: no matter where they use it, they are often told to, as King puts it, “change, change, change” everything. Such changes often seem trifling, even meaningless to the students, especially to those who do not appear to understand the rules behind the corrections.

Even though these deaf students all know that incorrect grammar and poor literacy skills are undesirable in the real world, many of them are not aware of how their character and their intellectual abilities might be judged negatively not only based on their deafness, ethnicity, gender, and so forth but also based on the quality of their writing in standard English. In spite of the fact that one’s ability to adhere to standard English grammar is most definitely not an indicator of intelligence or ability (or the lack thereof), many native English speakers in the United States *do* judge non-standard English usage negatively—especially in academic and professional writing contexts (Johnson and VanBrackle 2012; Lippi-Green 1997; Irvine and Gal 2000). Three students in this study acknowledged that hearing people might think deaf people are “dumb” for not being able to use English “correctly,” but the rest of the students insisted that hearing people outside of school “don’t mind grammar errors.”

The phrase “deaf person’s way” came up frequently, and for some students, the “deaf way of writing” seems to be closely associated with who they are as a person. Roy, Dani, and Bella assert that hearing people should be tolerant of deaf people’s attempts to write in English: for them, it all comes down to respect. If the hearing person has any respect for the deaf person—or for deaf people in general — then the perceived grammatical errors should not elicit any judgment. Roy believes that his friends don’t notice or care about his grammar errors, and he seems to generalize this to all hearing people, assuming that they understand and respect deaf people the same way that his own friends do, not realizing that his friends, through their acquaintance with him, know that English is not his first language, which is not usually the case for hearing strangers. Dani, similarly, assumes that all hearing people understand that deaf people have limited access to spoken English, so she doesn’t see why they would be critical about grammar errors.

Only Hendrix, Bella, and Megan — all of whom are able to hear spoken English fairly well, in addition to having grade-level literacy skills in English — show any real awareness of what hearing people think when they see someone (deaf or not) using non-standard English grammar. Citing negative comments and judgmental attitudes they’ve seen in the past, these students know how negatively hearing English speakers often react towards grammar errors. They worry that their deaf friends will be judged for grammatical mistakes that they can’t help making.

7 Conclusion

Coming from the perceived more linguistically flexible and permissive culture of ASL that they have encountered, many of the students expect hearing English speakers to be equally permissive, even to the point where they believe that these speakers won't judge them based on their non-conformity to standard written English. Thus, when their teachers require them to correct their English sentences or to read paragraphs closely to tease out precise meanings, the students feel put off by the apparent pointlessness of the exercise. In their eyes, ASL allows them many different ways to be correct, whereas in English with its seemingly more prohibitive nature, there are countless ways to be wrong. This frustrates them because if the message was clear enough in the first place, then why should they expend extra energy and effort to perfect their writing, especially with a language that they already find excessively hard?

Clearly, most of these deaf students *do* find English hard, but its difficulty is not the only reason that they resist and struggle with learning it. Their comments show that these students' conceptualizations of language lack metalinguistic knowledge of ASL (and often English) grammar structure, which, put together with their deeply-seated attitudes, leads to a complicated web of language subordination and misconceptions, all which are perpetuated by their ideologies about how each language works.

This, combined with the more rigid, complicated, and difficult nature they perceive in print English, leads to them disliking English even more, in spite of their acute awareness of the consequences associated with weak English literacy skills. This is deeply concerning for researchers and educators because even though these students know they need to learn English well, they still resist it, due to their deep-seated language ideologies. This resistant attitude is not the only cause for deaf students' struggles with learning English, of course, but it is an avenue worth exploring further, as literacy research has consistently found that student attitude is a powerful factor in the improvement or failure of struggling readers and writers (Wilhelm 2007, Beach et al. 2006)

For decades, teachers have tirelessly instructed deaf students in English literacy using monolingual teaching methods (as evidenced by the ways that the students in this study could tick off "English-y" terms even if they did not quite understand what they meant), but perhaps we have failed to provide these students with adequate vocabulary and instruction to understand the grammar of the language that is the more comprehensible and accessible one for many of them (i.e. ASL). Delpit (2006) makes a crucial argument that linguistic minority students are more likely to learn standard English if they feel that their home linguistic practices are affirmed and taught (p. 48), a point that Flores and Rosa

(2015) also emphasize when they discuss the importance of teaching students' home language in schools — and not just as an add-on to help their English improve but as a full, legitimate language on equal terms with English (p. 164–166). Their arguments center on African American and Latino students; however, their point is very much worth considering with linguistically and culturally diverse deaf students, many of whom identify ASL as their linguistic “home” and struggle with English literacy practices.

This study is a first step towards a more comprehensive understanding of deaf students' language ideologies and how said ideologies might influence the ways they engage with learning to read and write in English. Previous studies' findings have given us valuable insight into the students' attitudes towards reading and/or towards writing, or about their perceptions of ASL and/or English. This study builds on these findings by further exploring not only the students' attitudes and experiences but also the *values*, *beliefs*, and *conceptualizations* related to both ASL and print English that are intermingled within these attitudes and experiences—that is, the ideologies these students have constructed through the myriad influences of their family, educational upbringing, cultural and social experiences, and so forth.

Given that ASL and print English are not only different languages but also occupy different modalities (one is kinesthetic and the other lies flat on the page), it is especially fascinating to see how the students' ideological stances towards each language seem to be partly influenced by the fact that ASL is signed and English is written, as well as the fact that English is actively taught in the classroom and ASL is not. The students' insightful comments reveal how powerful and important linguistic “homes” are for them — and for all of us — in the way they insistently uphold and value ASL as the language closest to their identity *in spite of* their beliefs that ASL is “less” and “lacking” in comparison to English.

This ought to challenge us to rethink our approach to language instruction for deaf students, which has long emphasized print English compared to formal ASL instruction. Using ASL as the language of *communication* in the classroom is not the same thing as providing formal instruction in ASL art and literature, linguistic structure, and grammar; most of the students in this study have been receiving English instruction for years in a classroom where the teacher uses ASL. This is not enough, for as long as language instruction in the classroom means primarily *English* language instruction, we continue to implicitly send the message to deaf students that their linguistic “home” is lesser, lacking, and insufficient in comparison to English. As many of the students in this study show, it is a message that they have received all too well. And it is one that does not appear to compel most of them to engage with reading and writing.

References

- Anderson, Jacqueline. 1993. *Deaf students mis-writing, teacher mis-reading: English education and the deaf college student*. Burtonsville, MD: Linstok Press.
- Delpit, Lisa. 2006. *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.
- Easterbrooks, Susan.R., and Jennifer Beal-Alvarez 2013. *Literacy instruction for students who are deaf and hard-of-hearing*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Flores, Nelson and Jonathan Rose. 2015. "Undoing appropriateness: raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in education." *Harvard Educational Review* 85(2).
- Hill, Joseph Christopher. 2012. *Language attitudes in the American Deaf community*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Irvine, Judith T., and Susan Gal. 2000. "Language ideology and linguistic differentiation." In *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, edited by Paul.V. Kroskrity, 35–84. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
- Johnson, David, and Lewis VanBrackle. 2012. "Linguistic Discrimination in Writing Assessment: How Raters React to African American 'Errors,' ESL Errors, and Standard English Errors on a 153 State-Mandated Writing Exam." *Assessing Writing* 17.1: 35–54. Web.
- Kroskrity, Paul.V. 2000. "Regimenting languages: language ideology perspectives." *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, edited by Paul.V. Kroskrity, 1–34. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Labov, William. 1972. *Sociolinguistic patterns*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Google Scholar. Web. 25 Mar. 2015. 4.
- Liddel, Scott K. 2003. *Grammar, gesture, and meaning in American Sign Language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lippi-Green, Rosina. 1997. *English with an accent: language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*. London: Routledge Press.
- Mayer, Connie. 2010. "The demands of writing and the deaf writer." In *The Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language, and Education*, edited by Marc Marschark and Patricia Elizabeth Spencer, 144–55. Vol. 2. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Paul, Paul.V. 1998. *Literacy and Deafness: The development of reading, writing, and literate thought*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Sandler, W. & Lillo-Martin, D. 2006. *Sign language and linguistic universals*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Silverstein, Michael. 1998. "The uses and utility of ideology: A commentary." In *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, edited by Kathryn A. Woolard and Paul Kroskrity, 123–148. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Swofford, Sarah Catherine. *Linguistic and Rhetorical Ideologies in the Transition to College Writing: A Case Study of Southern Students*. Unpublished Ph.D dissertation. University of Michigan.
- Tomkins, Lillian Buffalo. 2004. "Cultural and linguistic voice in the Deaf bilingual experience." In *Literacy and deaf people: Cultural and contextual perspectives*, edited by Brenda Jo Bruggemann, 139–156. Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Toscano, Rose Marie, Barbara McKee, and Dominique Lepoutre. March 2002. "Success with academic English: Reflections of deaf college students." *American Annals of the Deaf* 147(1): 5–23.

Julia Gillen, Noah Ahereza and Marco Nyarko

An exploration of language ideologies across English literacy and sign languages in multiple modes in Uganda and Ghana

1 Introduction

This chapter is the outcome of research into deaf people's everyday experiences with literacies, using the English language, in Uganda and Ghana. Relatively little attention has been paid to the everyday literacies of deaf people, taking a perspective beyond the classroom. As we will explain further below, the research conducted here was part of a larger project undertaken mostly in India where we piloted a "Peer to peer deaf literacy" educational program (Gillen et al. 2016). In Ghana and Uganda our research purposes were twofold: to come to a better understanding of deaf people's existing practices with English literacy and to investigate the potential for developing a future peer to peer deaf literacy initiative. In this chapter we report and discuss our findings in respect of the first aim. Two of us, Ahereza and Nyarko, embedded in deaf communities, recruited deaf participants to focus group workshops. We explored the everyday life experiences of deaf sign language users in multiple modalities, with a particular focus on their experiences with English literacy.

We sought to investigate participants' language ideologies: how their ideas about languages and attitudes are "productively used in the creation and representation of various social and cultural identities" (Kroskrity 2004: 509). We drew on Literacy Studies and Linguistic Ethnography (Tusting 2013). We explain these terms and relate our understandings to related but different conceptions of literacies appertaining to deaf studies. Then, we give an overview of the language ecologies and education policies in Uganda and Ghana especially as affecting deaf people learning English literacy.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510090-010>

2 Literacy studies and linguistic ethnography

By Literacy Studies, frequently referred to as New Literacy Studies, we refer to an understanding of literacy as social practice which chiefly emanated from empirical research studies, each conducted over a considerable length of time and with shared sociocultural theoretical backgrounds, in the early 1980s. One of the most significant pioneering studies was conducted in Liberia and Sierra Leone by the North American scholars Scribner and Cole (1981). They studied literacy practices of Vai people, where it was possible to disentangle the effects of schooling from engaging in literacy related activities, since many learnt to use the Vai script for letter writing and reading informally, and some learnt Arabic through religious practices. Scribner and Cole (1981) were able to demonstrate that consequent development in skills and capabilities were linked with the specific literacy practices that people had been involved in; whereas experience with schooling led to other but also specific gains in school-related literacy processes. This new understanding, foundational to Literacy Studies, broadens models of literacy beyond a set of decontextualized skills located in the individual, measured by standardized assessment tests, deemed by Street (1983) the “autonomous” model of literacy. He argued that “illiteracy” is an ideologically motivated binary term which obscures the multiple modes and strategies people use in their environments. Literacy Studies values literacy practices to the extent they may be authentically important to people as social beings, in all their different domains of life, and recognizes that literacy may be learnt in various contexts, including from peers and through leisure activities (Papen 2012).

Linguistic Ethnography is a term for theoretically driven methodology, combining linguistics and ethnography, holding that “language and the social world are mutually shaping, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity” (Rampton et al. 2004: 2). In this chapter we also make use of Chang’s (2008) approach to autoethnography recognizing the opportunity provided by the experience of two of us, Ahereza and Nyarko, as deaf SL (sign language) users in the communities studied. Linguistic ethnography has a great deal in common with the North American centred (sub) discipline of Linguistic Anthropology; and the original position paper of Linguistic Ethnography acknowledged strong points of comparison and inspiration from common sources such as the work of Dell Hymes. However, while suggesting that a point of differentiation from Linguistic Anthropology could be held in what the Linguistic Ethnographers called “ethnic generalisation” — assumptions of cultural homogeneity, — (Rampton et al. 2004: 13–14) it seems to us that at least

as important is a decoupling of the study of language from a perspective necessarily or primarily founded on language-as-speech (Hernández-Campoy and Conde-Silvestre 2015, cf Duranti 1997). Challenges to this stemmed partly from a firm footing in Literacy Studies and the recognition that we live in a textually-mediated social world (Barton 2007).

It is important to add that in Deaf Studies a rejection of the autonomous view of literacy has led to a lens through which literacies can be conceptualized as occurring through practices with sign languages. Snoddon (2010) rejects assumptions that it is print literacies alone that can be associated with higher-order thinking skills, arguing, in common with the New London Group (1996), that this masks relations of power that reproduce and maintain systematic inequities. She argues that practices in American Sign Language (ASL) for example can instantiate the criticality, design and transformational praxis of the multiliteracies perspective using modes of communication practiced by sign language users. We do not substantively oppose this argument, analogous indeed to the resistance of assumptions that print literacy alone is associated with higher-order skills put forward with evidence relating to complex cultural practices using oral modes and artefacts in Nigeria by Akinnaso (1982; 1992). However in this project we used terms and concepts from Literacy Studies to distinguish between L1 modes of communication, whether oral or sign, and literacies associated with writing and reading print and online texts. In practice, this was also a convenient stance for this study, where participants could readily differentiate between their practices with literacies in the English language, and uses of sign language modes of communication.

One of the key insights by Street and fellow scholars in Literacy Studies (e.g. Gebre, Rogers, Street, & Openjuru 2009), has been that for many people in relatively marginalized sectors of society, even those occasionally deemed as possessing little literacy or as being “illiterate” — a very considerable span of authentic or “real” literacies are operationalized by them in the course of their everyday lives. Corbett (2015) groups together a number of factors involved in distancing people’s practices from those valorized in standard assessment tests emanating from seats of power in the metropolis under the term “rural literacies”. He stresses the distinctiveness of such practices in highly varied instances of space and time. As Quinto-Pozos and Adam (2013: 379) point out, “Deaf people are typically multilingual. They use signed, written and, in some cases, spoken languages for daily communication...” Typically, however, distinctive constellations of such practices will be both distanced from, and undervalued by the standards of formal education and deaf people may be particularly vulnerable in this respect. In this chapter we investigate everyday literacies and sign language ideologies among deaf people in Uganda and Ghana. However, to presage

a finding, people's attitudes towards their everyday informal literacy practices as well as their opinions as to their skillsets and values, are very much informed by their educational experiences. Therefore it would be artificial and unhelpful to separate off, or ignore, their experiences of schooling and other formal institutions within the full prism of their communicative practices.

3 An overview of language ecologies and language education policies in Uganda and Ghana, especially as pertaining to deaf people

It must first be emphasized that “education and language issues are very complex in Africa because of the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual situation” (Ouadaogo 2000 cited by Owu-Ewie 2006: 76). In both Uganda and Ghana, there is a complex language ecology with many languages; yet with a distinctive place for English owing to its original imposition in a colonial past and current status as a world language. The tension between these factors is instantiated through swings in language education policies. In sub-Saharan Africa, at different times, resistance to the legacy of the colonial past has been the chief political influence behind emphasis on education in local languages; at other times, such as the immediate post-independence period, English-only policies have been tried with arguments that this is ultimately more beneficial for participation in a global world economy (Osseo-Asare 2017).

Uganda is recorded by Ethnologue.com as having 43 living languages, with the principal languages as English and Swahili. English as an official national language is used in all formal contexts deaf people encounter such as social and medical services. Ugandan Sign Language is legally recognized in the constitution of Uganda; deaf people learn through sign languages and English at school. There are over 40 primary schools for deaf people and two prominent secondary schools all employing sign bilingualism as a medium of classroom instruction. The national language policy introduced in 2007 champions the use of local mother tongue in schools and this includes Ugandan Sign Language.

In Ghana, a highly multilingual country with 79 indigenous spoken languages, English is an official language, but owing to the great wealth of languages is not universally spoken by hearing people (Kerswill 2017). It has become highly significant through its use as a medium of education although since Independence in 1957 there have been several policy swings on the use of English in schooling (Osseo-Asare 2017). Most literacy is in English owing to its status in official

domains as well as education; use of English is estimated at about 77% among young people and growing (Kerswill 2017). So all Ghanaians, hearing and deaf, are living in a country with a complex mixture of languages, where English has the status of an official language and lingua franca for literacy purposes, but is not an L1 nor by any means universally shared. Sign language is used by deaf people and as a medium of instruction in schools for deaf people in Ghana even though a majority of hearing teachers are not proficient with the language. This has a negative effect on the quality of teaching and learning.

Nyst (2013) explains that there is a very rich ecology of sign languages in Africa, with structural features unique to the continent although there is a dearth of adequate typological studies. She reveals that sign languages emerge in very different ways, such as emergence within a single family; a rural or urban micro community; around a deaf school which either builds on local practices or explicitly brings in a sign language from elsewhere, often but not only ASL. Sometimes even schools for the deaf discourage the use of sign languages, but this does not necessarily lead to the stifling of them. Overall, she claims, the most frequent condition for the generation of sign language is spontaneous, and outside deaf education (Nyst 2013: 77). Therefore, whatever the policy of deaf schools to sign languages in the classroom, which can vary, they are undoubtedly very important places for the development of sign language use.

4 The Peer to peer deaf literacy project

This chapter draws from the project, “Literacy development with deaf communities using sign language, peer tuition and learner-generated online content: sustainable education innovation” funded by the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council and the Department for International Development, which ran from June 2015 to July 2016. As we have briefly mentioned above, the project’s main intervention concerned the implementation of a “Peer to peer deaf literacy” program in India. Ahereza and Nyarko were initially brought to India for training in the project’s aims and research methods. They then returned to Uganda and Ghana respectively in order to conduct research into literacy and language practices in Uganda and Ghana and, in work that is not in focus in this chapter, to research the feasibility of introducing a peer to peer deaf literacy program into those countries if future funding was accessed in the future (Zeshan et al. 2016).

In Uganda, Ahereza had already been working with the Ugandan National Association of the Deaf, which had already used some peer to peer deaf literacy work in its pedagogical endeavors, especially in primary and secondary schools

where deaf university students are deployed to do their internships and vacations to engage in tutoring. In Ghana, Nyarko was working essentially as a lone researcher with Lancaster University, Ghana. However, as a member of the Ghana National Association of the Deaf, his daily interaction and frequent participation in various training activities, not restricted to literacy development, made him aware of the literacy needs of the Deaf.

Our project approach springs not from a deficit-based standpoint but rather from a valuing of participants' "real literacies", inspired by Street's (2012) "Learning for empowerment through training in ethnographic-style research" (LETTER). That project had stemmed originally from work in India dedicated to the empowerment of rural Dalit women through education. It had been realized that these women had distinctive literacy and numeracy practices that educators working with them generally disparaged. Active research into their practices was founded on realization of the importance of previous experience and often tacit knowledge in informal adult learning (Gebre et al. 2009). It is vital to bring this out, through participatory methods of research that improve all parties' understandings. This enables future pedagogic work "to start where they [the adult learners] are" (Rogers' 2002; 2004; cited by Street 2012). However, more significantly as far as this chapter is concerned are the other benefits gained: to the participants who reflexively enhance their own understandings of the complexities and richness of their existing practices, including through discussions with others; and to the researchers/trainers who gain knowledge of local literacy practices and language ideologies, and benefit from the capacity and understanding that they can learn from the learners themselves. As Gebre et al., (2009: 16) argue, "Ethnography then is turning my world upside down to try to take the point of view of another person."

5 Methods

Initial data were gained through a focus group discussion in India after the first two weeks' initial training between Ahereza and Nyarko, with the project's P.I. Ulrike Zeshan and Co-I. Sibaji Panda, located in India. Perhaps the most important point to emerge here was a developing understanding of ethnography, and an understanding that research entails exploration of practices among a community, including when one feels part of that community. Thus we make use of Chang's (2008: 26) conception of the self in autoethnography as "an extension of a community rather than.... an independent, self-sufficient being." Therefore when we include data from ourselves gained in interviews, we place these in inverted commas as any other interview data.

Ahereza and Nyarko then worked to recruit focus group participants, in order to run two focus group workshops in each location. Ahereza, a project Research Assistant and a Sign Language Coordinator for the Ugandan National Association for the Deaf (UNAD) recruited through Deaf-led events including a workshop on political awareness organized by a Deaf Member of Parliament and a regional Deaf football challenge cup. The 19 participants were all young Deaf adults between the ages of 18 and 33: 2 teachers of Deaf children, 1 IT teacher of young Deaf people, 5 sign language instructors, 3 university students, 1 college student, 2 high school students from a secondary school for the Deaf, 1 community worker, 1 business professional and 3 UNAD staff members. There were 14 males and 5 females. Nyarko, a project Research Assistant was based at Lancaster University Ghana for the duration of the project. He used his networks in the Eastern region of Ghana to recruit 12 participants: 3 Deaf teachers at Demonstration School for the Deaf Mampong-Akuapem, 4 students at Senior High Technical School for the Deaf, Mampong-Akuapem and 5 members of the Ghana National Association of the Deaf, Eastern Region. The age range of the participants was between 16 to 36 years, and there were 7 males and 5 females.

At each focus group, the project was first discussed and consent to participate obtained and recorded. All events were filmed in Ugandan SL or GhSL. Participants had access to some written questions and topic notes in English but discussions were held in Ugandan SL or GhSL and later transcribed into English.

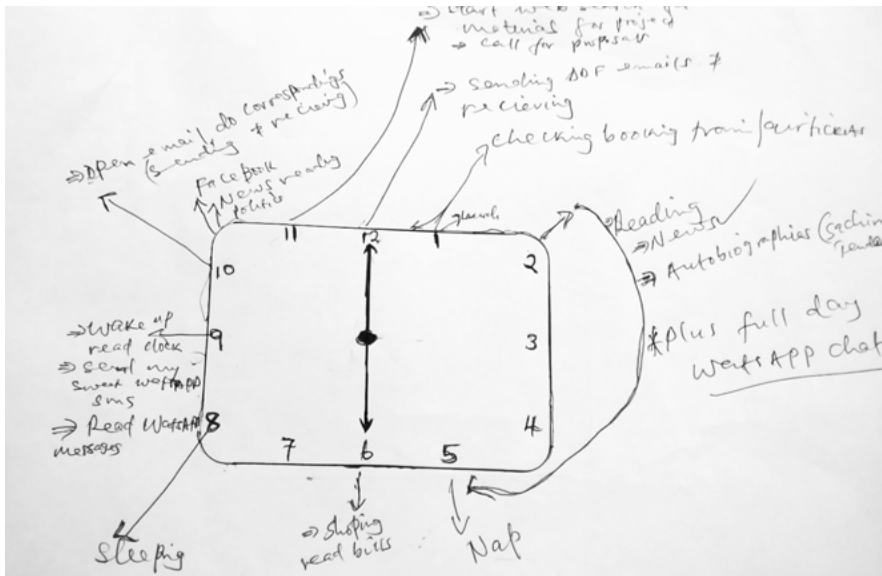


Figure 1. example of a clock face activity.

Initial activities made use of Satchwell's (2005) "clock face" activity to explore interactions with English literacy within a typical day. The participants first wrote notes on a clock face on a poster and then expanded on their written entries. Successive discussions unpicked experiences writing and reading English in physical encounters, situating them within a language ecology involving sign language use as L1. Personal histories elucidated how literacy was learnt, most often with the help of informal networks. In Ghana for example the majority had formal education up to university level but nevertheless expressed that they could not coordinate written English words to make meaningful sentences, ascribing the difficulty to the strong differences between grammars of English and sign languages. The second workshop in each location was very much concerned with sharing views on the P2PDL approaches, as were made visible to participants in an online virtual learning environment, Sign Language to English for the Deaf (SLEND) that had been developed with Indian participants. Finally we engaged in dissemination events.

6 Findings and discussion

6.1 English in everyday life

In focus groups with deaf participants, the clock face activity took some time to explain and practice with. It became a powerful elicitation technique to explore the diverse practices with English literacy and ways in which it could be used to access local language practices other than those of dyadic and group sign language communications. Here for example is an abridged list of English literacy practices by one person in Ghana. Having filled in a clock face poster briefly, they expanded on this, communicating in sign language as follows:

6:00am: I usually watch religious sermons on television with subtitles. I had the opportunity to read the subtitle messages to enhance my understanding.

7:00am: Checking messages on my phone for example Facebook messenger.

8:00am:[travelling], I take the opportunity to read inscriptions on signposts, billboards, posters and signboards.

9:00am: I mostly read novels. One of my favorite is 'Maame Water' ["Mermaid", a novel].

10:00am: I had the opportunity to check messages on WhatsApp on my phone and also reply to them.

11:00am: I made a transaction at the bank. This included filling in the deposit forms and reading the information on the forms. I also read handouts and other information at the bank.

12:00pm: I go to a restaurant, read the menu and order food.

3:00pm: I got to the library, I read books, journals and newspapers.

Other Ghanaian participants distinguished between private events when they used English literacy to read for themselves, such as TV subtitles, the Bible, novels and environmental texts, and those where they use English in transactional communications. The clock face activity revealed to deaf participants how often they used English in their daily lives and also encouraged them to identify their strengths and weaknesses with the language.

For many deaf participants, online environments are vital domains where their lack of hearing need not have any negative impact on their access to information, nor their capacity to participate in communicative interactions, if their English proficiency is felt to be sufficient for their needs. So they are enabled to pursue social interests through social media such as WhatsApp and Facebook, to obtain and share information on the internet, and have dyadic dialogues through SMS texting or messaging through other applications. Ugandan participants do like to post videos and watch sign language videos when possible, but this is not accessible to the majority most of the time owing to the cost of accessing broadband. Therefore the use of written English remains dominant. Ghanaian participants stated they often used video chat, Facebook video chat, and Glide and Skype video calls, so that they could communicate easily with other sign language users. They found it more difficult to express themselves with non-sign language users through writing.

This exercise is an element of developing consciousness of the broad range of purposes in which English literacy is employed in everyday life, that otherwise may be overlooked.

6.2 Interfaces between languages

In line with the aims of our project, the interface between written English and sign languages was a significant topic of discussion, as Deaf participants expressed that they often need to use written English to communicate with hearing people who do not know sign language. This can happen in many domains from the home and shopping to sites where the stakes for effective communication are very high, such as in health care settings and any formal meetings where sign

language interpreters are not available or too expensive. Although Uganda supports the training of interpreters at diploma level, for example as provided in one public university, their use is not necessarily funded even at meetings with the Ministry of Education. However, between deaf people there are still often choices to make in terms of what language to use. One participant in Uganda explained that communications are designed according to a range of factors including the channel of communication and the other interlocutor's abilities. In dialogues where both participants are bilingual, e.g. they know English and a local/mother tongue or sign language, the choice over whether to use the shared sign language or English may well depend on the channel, with SL preferred face to face and English online. However, this choice may itself be modified: "It depends on the person I'm talking [to]. Sometimes some deaf people are not fully fluent in English so I have to apply simple English that is in form of sign language for them to understand what I mean. But others who know English I apply English grammar. That is how we move." (This quotation, as most of our data, was originally uttered in Ugandan sign language, videoed and later transcribed.) We understand the participant to be talking about processes of improvisation in order to assist those who are not fluent in English to comprehend a message. As Quinto-Pozos and Adam (2013: 379) point out "Language contact...surfaces in the daily interactions between ...users [of signed languages]."

Furthermore, other languages may be involved; especially in Uganda, Luganda, Lunyankole, and Iteso were mentioned. These are particularly significant in families, including where children have become deaf after acquiring a local language as L1. A participant in Uganda explains that s/he can communicate effectively enough through speech in the local language with people s/he is close to, such as family and neighbors, but that this is useless in the local hospital where English is used. Another key issue identified was "...lack of confidence among deaf people. You will find them communicating freely among themselvesbut when it comes to communicating with hearing people such as police they will not try but rather call someone else to help them, arguing that they don't want people to notice their "broken" English. This deprives them of opportunity to practice and develop their English." This participant refers to bringing in help most probably from a member of the family with whom they converse perfectly effectively. This indicates a desire to avoid any misunderstandings but also indeed a degree of shyness, the wish to avoid any potential personal embarrassment.

Some deaf people do strongly promote signed communication strategies that make as strong a reliance as possible on English. In Uganda some deaf people who became deaf after their initial education prefer communicating using "signed exact English" or inventing signs that are influenced by English. An emerging cohort of deaf university graduates, who were deafened later in life, have the con-

confidence and preference to coin new signs taking influence from English words. For example, a word like ‘COCKTAIL’ will be signed as ‘COCK/HEN’ and ‘TAIL’. Or they will sign what they term “exact English”; that is, insisting on signing every word in an English sentence. Their argument is that sign language should be the same as English and therefore should not be signed in its own grammar which they refer to as “broken English.” Of course signed exact English is used in some schools as a pedagogical tool especially when teaching English. It is true that this form of signing (signed exact English) works for a section of deaf people who prefer it, but it often brings those users in conflict with those deaf people who prefer using sign language grammar thereby creating a gap between those two. In an argument that may be regarded as misguided by members of the academic community of sign language linguists, those who use signed exact English and are very influenced by English, argue that the use of sign language grammar may impede learning of English literacy. Indeed some take an extreme position, blaming poor English literacy among deaf students on sign language grammar. However those who take an opposing position sometimes accuse them of diluting Uganda sign language and not possessing a strong deaf identity.

This often creates conflicts between those people and profoundly deaf people or native signers who prefer using sign language grammar with a core emphasis on iconicity. This strong difference of opinion creates a gap between these two groups of deaf people. The focus group participants echoed Ahereza’s own experiences of finding a dichotomy in practice between those L1 signers who prefer interacting among themselves with full sign language grammar and those who orient much more towards newly coined “invented” signs based on English.

6.3 Education issues for deaf people

Deaf people are often denied education in their L1; Branson & Miller (1998: 17) argued that integrating deaf children in mainstream schools should be blamed for “inhibiting the development of a sense of community among young Deaf people, and cutting them off from the only language to which they have complete and uninhibited access.”

In both countries it is recognized that the practice of putting deaf children in hearing schools is a barrier to their learning. In Uganda the benefits of deaf adults working with deaf children was appreciated, so that if parents, whether deaf or hearing, urban or rural, could afford it, they would hire such people to work with their children in the evenings to catch up with what they had been taught in the day. Even in deaf schools (more than 99% of which are residential), deaf adults are called up by hearing teachers of the deaf in the evenings or during

breaks to help make full clarification of what was taught. This is because deaf students understand their fellow deaf adults/tutors better than hearing teachers, even those who know sign language. Although such teachers are good, they tend to be more readily understood by adults than children. This is because although teachers are often graduates from teacher training colleges, they often face challenges in trying to give elaborated explanations to deaf children. This is owing to their “hearing accent” and the influence of English on their grammar, so that they tend to prefer signing word by word and sentence by sentence than giving a summary presentation or explanation of meaning through applying classifier constructions. Deaf adults give more assistance through reversioning or elaborated explanations, expanding through role plays, etc.

However in Ghana, the picture is different, according to our data. There is relative resistance to the idea that deaf people could really make a substantial positive addition to teaching provided by hearing teachers competent in sign language. Hearing teachers would be unlikely to believe that deaf people might have English language skills and knowledge. Hence literacy development is the sole responsibilities of trained teachers of the deaf, whether they are proficient in Ghanaian Sign Language or not.

For our Deaf participants, English is seen as inextricably linked to educational success, for many reasons. In one of the project’s autoethnographic interviews, Nyarko stated, “English is the key if deaf students are to succeed in other subjects. Take example of math where one has to comprehend math rules yet those rules are written in English. Another example is that of social studies where students are required to express themselves in written English. This therefore, calls for English language competency among the deaf.” He argued that deaf people do not lack ambition, to progress to university for example, but that “their main challenge is lack of English skills.” Ahereza also argued that proficiency in English literacy is conflated with overall learning and even personal motivation to learn: “My peers are often saying that I’m lucky to know English, arguing that it is English competency that is motivating me to continue learning. I’m therefore of a view that once these people get to a level of my English competency, they are likely to be motivated to advance in other forms of learning.”

6.4 Language ideologies and identity

Varied attitudes to English literacy were expressed across our data. We did find evidence of some dichotomous conceptualizations of the “worlds” of hearing and deaf people, with a minority of the Ugandan participants preferring to stress their identities within the deaf community and their use of SL as an L1. As has long

been recognized, stress on the identification of deaf people as a distinct cultural group is key to resisting deficit-based notions of deafness (Senghas & Monaghan 2002). We recognize that fine-grained investigations of practice, such as through the clock face method or eliciting detailed accounts in discussion, did tend to undermine a strong sense of duality or separation between two “worlds.” Thus we were able to explore how one person who stressed his sense of belonging to a deaf community of SL users nevertheless, as a university student, made constant use of English in practice.

It is acknowledged by some that it takes confidence to ask for help. A Ugandan stated: “I have seen that deaf people in Uganda do not have confidence to ask for guidance whenever they fail to understand something compared to international deaf with whom I have interacted.” Similarly, in Ghana, the culture of the majority of deaf people, in the opinion of our participants, is to disparage their own capabilities with written English. They expressed themselves as finding it difficult to communicate with the police and doctors or at the bank in the absence of sign language interpreters, although sometimes further discussions often uncovered the use of successful strategies to cope. One participant recalled that he was not introduced to correct English patterns using bilingual methods during his school days and so adopted adaptations influenced by sign language. This, he feels, has negative consequences as regards his interactions with hearing people who have no sign language background. This is a tendency we sometimes found to associate the deficit with the deaf person.

7 Conclusions

Language ideologies are frequently complex and may contain some contradictory elements. In this project in both Uganda and Ghana we have found, as may be expected, understandings of important linguistic and cultural centrality of sign languages to deaf people. We have found that English literacy is significant in all our participants’ lives. This is strongly linked with its official, state-sponsored position in education and links with future employability. Yet we also see some additional, or combined strands of thinking including a desire by some to adapt sign languages, for reasons that might be strongly instrumental depending on the context, but which might be more strongly motivated through the possibility of making these closer to English, through lexical and grammatical constructions. This is analogous in some aspects to controversies around the use of ASL described by (Hill 2013).

The tendency of some deaf people to stress their difficulties with English literacy displays their internationalization of the autonomous model of literacy, so dependent on formal assessments that are unsuitable for many deaf people. On the other hand, some preferred to stress their sense of being a member of the deaf community, (also preferring to capitalize Deaf) so finding this a means of claiming a strong sense of social identity and empowerment.

A significant finding of the project is that increasingly important to participants is English online, where practices of reading and writing do not usually directly involve sign language use and where in literacy practices deafness may potentially be unmarked. This contributes to others' findings that "communication technologies should be further explored as a potential avenue that may support deaf individuals' English language and literacy development" (Garberoglio et al. 2015: 118). Material barriers to accessibility where experienced are therefore extremely important.

Through this chapter, we have offered a contribution from Literacy Studies and Linguistic Ethnography to "understanding how people's uses of literacy derive meaning and power through their embeddedness within social practice" (Rampton et al. 2004: 9). Finally, we argue that recognition of other modes of language as having the potential to be equally worthy of study as speech, or indeed even more so depending on the circumstances, can be understood as a challenge to mainstream linguistics and as empowering the study of other modes such as sign language linguistics and indeed digital literacies (Gillen 2014). It is worth underlining that from the perspective of the center ground of linguistics this is a potentially radical challenge. For example, a recent endeavor at providing a comprehensive collection of *Research Methods in Linguistics* (Podesva & Sharma 2013), while possessing many virtues, assumes that the only reason study of language in a mode other than speech might occur would be owing to the limiting factor that the written word may be the only evidence for historical contexts. It is important to stress that many who identify themselves as sociolinguists fully embrace the study of sign languages and their users; see for example a recent significant handbook edited by Bayley, Cameron, and Lucas (2015). Thus, potentially in common with other chapters in this book, we propose that attention to sign language ideologies and literacies can be used to challenge the hegemony of speech-centered language ideologies in the discipline of linguistics itself.

References

- Akinnaso, F.Nyi. 1982. On the differences between spoken and written language. *Language and Speech* 25(2). 97–125.

- Akinnaso, F.Nyi. 1992. Schooling, language, and knowledge in literate and nonliterate societies. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34(1). 68–109.
- Barton, David. 2007. *Literacy: an introduction to the ecology of written language*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bayley, Robert, Richard Cameron & Ceil Lucas (eds.). 2015. *The Oxford Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Branson, Jan & Don Miller. 1998. Nationalism and the linguistic rights of Deaf communities: linguistic imperialism and the recognition and development of sign languages. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 2(1). 3–34.
- Chang, Heewon V. 2008. *Autoethnography as method*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Corbett, Michael. 2015. Rural literacies: text and context beyond the metropolis. In Jennifer Rowsell & Kate Pahl (eds.), *The Routledge handbook of literacy studies*, 124–139. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Duranti, Alessandro. 1997. *Linguistic anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Garberoglio, Carrie Lou, Duncan Dickson, Stephanie Cawthon & Mark Bond. 2015. Bridging the Communication Divide: CMC and deaf individuals' literacy skills. *Language Learning & Technology* 19(192). 118–133. <http://llt.msu.edu/issues/june2015/garberoglioetal.pdf> (26 June, 2017).
- Gebre, Alemayehu Hailu, Alan Rogers, Brian V. Street & George Openjuru. 2009. *Everyday literacies in Africa: ethnographic studies of literacy and numeracy practices in Ethiopia*. Kampala: Foundation Publishers. <http://balid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Ethiopia-whole-book-knj.pdf>.
- Gillen, Julia. 2014. *Digital literacies*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Gillen, Julia, Sibaji Panda, Uta Papen & Ulrike Zeshan. 2016. Peer to peer deaf literacy: working with young deaf people and peer tutors in India. *Language and Language Teaching* 5(2). 1–7. <http://azimpremiuniversity.edu.in/SitePages/pdf/Language-and-Language-Teaching-July-2016.pdf>.
- Hernández-Campoy, Juan Manuel & Juan Camilo Conde-Silvestre. 2015. Assessing variability and change in early English letters. In Anita Auer, Daniel Schreier & Richard J Watts (eds.), *Letter writing and language change*, 14–34. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hill, Joseph. 2013. Language ideologies, policies, and attitudes toward signed languages. In Robert Bayley, Richard Cameron & Ceil Lucas (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of sociolinguistics*, 680–697. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kerswill, Paul. 2017. The contested role of English in West Africa: Ghana. Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6t8N9-oljSE&feature=youtu.be>.
- Kroskrity, Paul V. 2004. Language ideologies. *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, 496–517. Malden: Blackwell.
- New London Group. 1996. A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review* 66. 60–92.
- Nyst, Victoria. 2013. The significance of African sign languages for African linguistics and sign language studies. In Olanike Ora Orié & Karen W. Sanders (eds.), *Selected proceedings of the 43rd annual conference on African linguistics*, 77–81. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- Osseo-Asare, Philomena. 2017. Postcolonial Theory and Early Literacy Development for 4–8 year-olds: A Life History Study of Ghanaian Teachers. PhD dissertation, University of Sheffield.

- Owu-Ewie, Charles. 2006. The language policy of education in Ghana: a critical look at the English-only language policy of education. In J Mugane, J Hutchison & A Dee (eds.), *Selected proceedings of the 35th annual conference on African linguistics*, 76–85. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. <http://www.lingref.com/cpp/acal/35/paper1298.pdf>.
- Papen, Uta. 2012. *Literacy and globalization: reading and writing in times of social change*. London: Routledge.
- Podesva, Robert J & Devyani Sharma (eds.). 2013. *Research methods in linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Quinto-Pozos, David & Robert Adam. 2013. Sign language contact. In Robert Bayley, Richard Cameron & Ceil Lucas (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of sociolinguistics*, 378–400. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rampton, Ben, Karin Tusting, Janet Maybin, Robert Barwell, Angela Creese & Vally Lytra. 2004. *UK Linguistic ethnography: a discussion paper*. <http://uklef.ioe.ac.uk/documents/papers/ramptonetal2004.pdf>.
- Satchwell, Candice. 2005. Literacy around the clock: an examination of the clock activity. *Proceedings of 3rd International Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning*. Glasgow: Scribner, Sylvia & Michael Cole. 1981. *The psychology of literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Senghas, Richard J & Leila Monaghan. 2002. Signs of their times: deaf communities and the culture of language. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31. 69–97.
- Snoddon, Kristin. 2010. Technology as a learning tool for ASL literacy. *Sign Language Studies* 10(2). 197–213.
- Street, Brian V. 1983. *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Street, Brian V. 2012. LETTER: Learning for empowerment through training in ethnographic-style research. In M Grenfell, David Bloome, C Hardy, Kate Pahl, Jennifer Rowsell & Brian V. Street (eds.), *Language, ethnography and education*, 73–89. New York: Routledge.
- Tusting, Karin. 2013. *Literacy studies as linguistic ethnography*. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/education/research/lcd/publications/workingpapers/the-papers/WP105-Tusting-2013-Literacy-studies-as-linguistic-ethnography.pdf>.
- Zeshan, Ulrike, H.R. Fan, Julia Gillen, Sibaji Panda, Uta Papen, Karin Tusting, Daniel Waller & Jenny Webster. 2016. *Summary Report on “Literacy development with deaf communities using sign language, peer tuition, and learner-generated online content: sustainable educational innovation.”* Preston. <https://islandscentre.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/summary-report-p2pd1.pdf>.

Erika Hoffmann-Dilloway

Feeling what we write, writing what we feel: Written sign language literacy and intersomaticity in a German classroom

1 Introduction

In 2012, in an experimental classroom in a German school, a young boy named Theo¹ sat down at the computer. He had been tasked with translating a German Sign Language (Deutsche Gebärdensprache, or DGS) sentence, which might be glossed as HE GOOD WRITE CAN, into written German.² The computer screen projected onto a large display, classmates watched as Theo typed his translation, “Er kann gut schreiben” (in English, “He can write well”). His classmates conferred, deemed his translation correct, and their teacher, Mr. Wöhrmann, concurred. Theo grinned and returned to his seat, as his classmate Omer rose to take his turn translating at the computer.

As in many bilingual-bimodal approaches to deaf education, in this primarily DGS-medium classroom, sign language use was understood to facilitate rather than detract from students’ abilities to expand their communicative repertoires to include spoken and written languages (it should also be noted that signing was not seen simply as a means to such an end, but was understood as irreplaceably valuable in itself). However, in most such classrooms, spoken languages may be enacted across the modalities of speech and writing while sign languages are understood to be un-writable or only writable when mediated through spoken language glosses (e.g., see the classroom practices described in Bagga-Gupta 2000). Here, on the other hand, DGS as well as German appeared in written form. Indeed, Theo’s DGS prompt for this particular translation assignment had appeared in writing on the worksheet on which he was to type his German sentence (see Figure 1).

¹ All student names have been changed to pseudonyms.

² I use terms like German and DGS (and later in the text, English and Nepali Sign Language) less as my own analytical frames than as recognition of these named languages as ideological constructs salient (in varying ways) to classroom participants, and with important consequences for how linguistic practices may be (or fail to be) recognized and ratified.

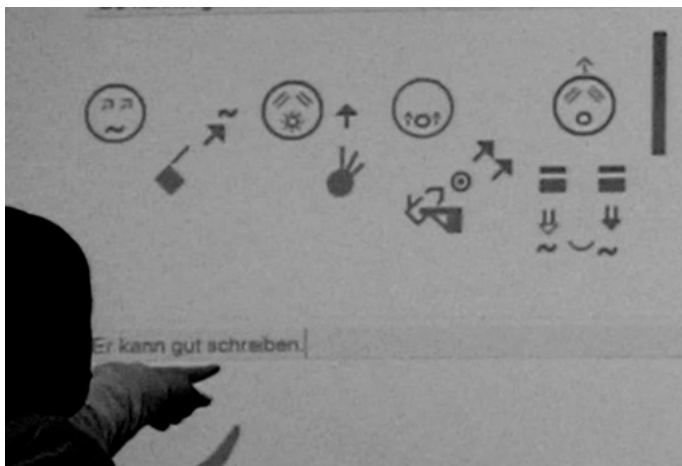


Figure 1. A video-still of Theo's translation exercise projected for the class.

In this classroom, DGS texts are produced using a writing system called SignWriting (SW), a feature-based system that iconically represents hand shapes, locations, orientations, and movements, as well as facial expressions, postural shifts, mouth movements, and other aspects of a bodily communicative ecology (including, but not limited to, those movements that have been analyzed as contributing to sign language phonology). When originally developed in the 1970s, SW represented these bodily features from what users term the “receptive” viewpoint, the perspective of someone observing another person signing. However, since the 1980s it has become standard to write from what users call the “expressive” viewpoint, the embodied perspective of a signer (Sutton 2014:13). As I have discussed elsewhere (Hoffmann-Dilloway 2018), this shift has accompanied a linguistic ideological reframing of SW from a writing system that focuses on the receptive visual modality of signing to one that stresses the felt movements involved in producing linguistic forms.

Linguistic ideologies, in this chapter, are understood to be the, “cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (Irvine 1989:255). Current iterations of the concept have productively widened the scope of this concept to encompass semiotic ideologies, beliefs about “what signs are and how they function in the world” (Keane 2003:419) and media ideologies: “how people understand both the communicative possibilities and the material limitations of a specific channel, and how they conceive of channels in general” (Gershon 2010:283). Such ideologies are not distinct from one another; as Gershon (2010:284) notes, semiotic,

linguistic, and media ideologies may be mutually constitutive, aligning to “generate or support locally persuasive perspectives.” Further, perceived boundaries between the linguistic, the semiotic more broadly, and the modalities, media, and channels through which such signification occurs are not given but are ethnographically variable and themselves ideologically mediated.

In this chapter, I explore how the linguistic and media ideological framing of expressive SW as entextualizing felt experience reflects and affects broader local semiotic ideologies of how intersubjective relations are mediated through public signs. (Intersubjective alignment, or the “existential organization, recognition, and constitution of relations between subjects” (Desjarlais and Throop 2011: 87), is understood here as a product as much as a precondition of social interaction (Hanks 2013).) Specifically, drawing on ethnographic research conducted in this classroom during the summers of 2010 and 2012, I analyze SW-based pedagogical strategies that treat this writing system as a tool to draw attention to the experience of producing and perceiving language. Crucially, these activities frame such experience not as a matter of individual subjectivity but as an object of intersubjective alignment. Ultimately, I argue that use of expressive SW in this ideological context provides a resource through which students cultivate a sense of intersubjective relationality achieved not only through shared languaging practices, but also, to an intersomatic (i.e., sense of shared bodily sensations (Csordas 2008)) orientation to the “feelings of doing” language (Harkness 2015:574).

2 Translanguaging and intersubjective relationality

In making this argument, I draw on and seek to contribute to the literature on transmodal-translanguaging, or communicative practices in which participants work to align their diverse multimodal linguistic repertoires in the context of situated interactions (e.g., Williams 1996; García 2009; Blackledge and Creese 2010; Canagarajah 2011; Reynolds 2014). Though conceptualized in different ways over the course of its development, use of the term typically signals a theoretical commitment to eschewing understandings of languages as discrete systems and rather to viewing linguistic repertoires as plurisemiotic ensembles (e.g., Garcia and Wei 2014) which, when taken as analytical starting points, facilitate the “dis-invention” (Makoni and Pennycook 2007) of languages as monolithic. Many of those adopting the term highlight the political dimensions of how translanguaging practices are framed in particular contexts, often with an explicit focus on

strategies for intervening in pedagogical settings to make them more receptive to translanguaging practices.

While this literature theoretically accommodates analysis of the transmodal dimensions of translanguaging practices, as Kusters (2017) points out, very little of this work has provided sustained attention to a wide range of embodied semiotic practices, such as gesture, instead focusing primarily on the speech stream and on written literacy practices (likely due in part to how scholars' own language and media/modality ideologies affect where they direct their analytical attention). An ethnographic context such as the one explored here, in which classroom participants draw on a movement writing system to cultivate shared attention to embodied experience, does not accommodate a narrow focus on particular modalities, however. Instead, it directs attention to how people work to create (partially) shared worlds by means of multimodal embodied experience, including experiences of translanguaging practices.

Additionally, while the literature concerning translanguaging has productively drawn on the concept of language ideologies, most of this work focuses on how translanguaging practices explicitly challenge dominant ideologies that frame languages as discrete monoliths. In the case at hand, indeed, pedagogical practices disrupt a range of locally entrenched, explicitly articulated, linguistic and media ideologies (e.g., that speech and auditory skill training to the exclusion of sign languages is the best means for deaf students to acquire spoken language skills; that sign languages cannot be written; etc.). Analysis of such ideological clashes and their impact on the development and broader reception of innovative pedagogical practices is important in imagining new approaches to education that can disrupt rather than reproduce existing social hierarchies.

However, attention to the mediating effects of more implicit linguistic and semiotic ideologies on translanguaging interactions also yields valuable insights. In this classroom context, even as pedagogical practices radically challenge some educational norms, locally dominant ideologies about the relationship between communicative practices and intersubjectivity are not contested and, in being taken for granted, perhaps naturalized and universalized. Contrary to such an (implicit) stance, however, ethnographic research has shown that even if we assume that intersubjectivity universally entails awareness of, along with coordination and co-engagement with, others (Duranti 2010; Hanks 2013), there can be radical differences in how such alignment is understood to be achieved and signaled.

In many Euro-American contexts public signs are ideologically framed as primarily a resource for assessing the intentions, feelings, and knowledge of others (Searle 1969; Grice 1975). While interpretations of speech acts are mediated by conventional pragmatic norms in such settings, these norms often center

on divining the intention of the speaker. However, in many other contexts, for example in the Pacific and in Central America, ethnographers describe variations of what has come to be called a “Doctrine of the Opacity of Other Minds”; ethno-theories through which people frame others’ internal states as unknowable (e.g., Rosaldo 1982; Robbins and Rumsey 2008; Duranti 2010; Danzinger 2013). Speculation about another’s intentions, feelings, or knowledge may be seen as an inappropriate means of interpreting public signs in general, or in specific domains. In such contexts stress is often placed on interpreting speech with reference to established pragmatic norms that do not hinge on inferring speakers’ intentions. As Danzinger (2013:3) notes, ethnographic work reveals that, “constant reading of others’ minds is not actually necessary to the conduct of much everyday interaction.”

Such a claim runs counter to assumptions built into widespread accounts of human development, such as the presumed universality and centrality of particular ways of displaying Theory of Mind (TOM) (e.g., Baron-Cohen et al., 2000). Within a frame that takes culturally contingent displays of “mind-reading” as a fundamental cornerstone of human relationality, failure to display such an orientation can be understood as failure to be a full person. Autistic self-advocates (e.g., Savarese 2017; Yergeau 2013) describe experiencing devastating effects from such naturalization of culturally specific modes of achieving and recognizing intersubjectivity (e.g., Baron-Cohen 1997). Both authors also stress how Euro-American ethno-theories of intersubjectivity treat co-engagement as a “primarily mentalist process” (e.g., all about somehow disembodied “minds”) while downplaying embodiment and “visceral intersomatic connections between subjects” (i.e., physical, somatic, contextual components of co-engagement) (Groark 2013:285; Savarese 2017; Yergeau 2013). They suggest that attention to the specificity of embodied experience can help resist abstracted and ungrounded universalizing theories.

In raising their critiques of the TOM concept in this chapter, I by no means seek to conflate autism and deafness, but rather to draw attention to the potential “interpretive dangers of taking one culturally-particular form of intersubjectivity...as the standard against which all other forms of social knowing are to be measured” (Groark 2013:280). In the ethnographic context to which I now turn, implicit personalist language ideologies inform evaluations of students’ linguistic and social practices and the pedagogical strategies designed to socialize them to locally legible ways of performing relationality. As the same time, however, I suggest that use of expressive SW also may disrupt a mentalist framing of personalism, by both reflecting and perpetuating attention to the intersomatic relations that underpin intersubjective alignment.

3 The Osnabrück classroom and SignWriting

Though the European Union of the Deaf continues to promote the recognition of sign language as a fundamental right for deaf Europeans, many deaf children in Germany (as in many contexts globally) continue to experience primarily oralism-based language socialization in home and school contexts, through which they are engaged in efforts to teach lipreading, speech, and written German, and are not given the opportunity to acquire DGS (Günther et al. 2009). Despite intensive surgical (e.g., cochlear implantation), technological (e.g., hearing aids), and pedagogical interventions, however, such an approach can fail to provide deaf children sufficient access to interactive language use (e.g., Spencer 2004).

At the time of my research, The National Training Center for the Hearing Impaired (*Landesbildungszentrum für Hörgeschädigte*), in Osnabrück (located in the Lower Saxony region), primarily provided an oralism-centered education. However, the school offered one DGS medium classroom, led by a hearing, but DGS fluent, teacher named Stefan Wöhrmann. Students were not assigned to this class until their teachers and parents decided that they were not acquiring appropriate linguistic skills through a strictly oralist approach. Most of the students were aged seven or older by the time the “last resort” of DGS was decided upon; thus, most entered the classroom with truncated linguistic repertoires (relative to their age peers), many showing effects of extended linguistic (and often, consequently, social) deprivation. These effects were a consequence of the often “either/or” framing of oralist approaches vs. signing (Humphries et al. 2012).

When discussing these effects in interviews, Wöhrmann expressed particular concern over his sense that many of his incoming students seemed to fail to take into account their peers’ perspectives and knowledge. In so doing, Wöhrmann made clear his understanding that such perceived deficits did not arise from deafness, but rather from the socially contingent isolation from interactive language use created by educational and home environments that favored spoken over signed language. To stress this point, he cited his experience with Selma, the only deaf member of the class born to deaf signing parents, who entered his classroom with linguistic and pragmatic skills that he characterized as unquestionably on par with her hearing age peers (but which were simply enacted via DGS rather than German).

Indeed, a large body of literature points out that deaf children of deaf signers, who have sustained access to sign language from birth, do not suffer the social, linguistic, and cognitive delays that can affect deaf peers born to hearing parents and not exposed to an accessible language from birth (e.g., Humphries et al. 2012; Lederberg et al. 2013). This distinction has also been shown specifically in terms of performance on tasks designed to assess TOM, wherein studies have demon-

strated that deaf children not provided with sustained access to sign language early in life performed less well on TOM tasks, while deaf children acquiring sign language from birth showed no delays or deficits in TOM tasks compared with hearing peers (e.g., de Villiers 2005; Schick et al 2007). Such work makes clear the role of language socialization in understanding and displaying TOM in culturally legible ways. As I will discuss in the next section, written literacy instruction via expressive SignWriting, in addition to helping expand students' linguistic repertoires to include new modalities, codes, and genres, was also framed as socializing students to such perspective taking.

SignWriting is only one of a range of written sign language literacy and/or notation systems created over the years, including but not limited to Stokoe Notation, Hamnosys, Si5s, and ASLWrite (see Czubek 2006; Kato 2008; Snoddon 2010; and van der Hulst and Channon 2010 for discussions and comparisons of such systems, as well as for discussions of sign language literacies not dependent on writing). In interviews, *Wöhrmann recounted discovering SW in particular in 1999, when he contacted Valerie Sutton, the system's inventor. She provided instructional materials and put Wöhrmann in touch with a transnational network of deaf and hearing SignWriters who communicated regularly by means of an email list-serv. This group of experienced users helped Wöhrmann in his study of the writing system and provided a forum in which he could discuss the adaptation of the system for his students' particular pedagogical needs. Becoming a part of this network of users was crucial, as Wöhrmann was largely isolated in his efforts to introduce written sign language literacy via SW in Germany (indeed, as he notes, most local schools were skeptical about using sign language at all, let alone written sign language literacy). Such isolation was and continues to be a fairly common experience for SignWriters; although deaf and hearing signers in over 30 countries use SW to produce texts in a wide range of genres, it is typical that groups of users in any given locale are small.*³

³ For example, in addition to transnational networks of SignWriters mediated by the Internet, its use among local networks is growing rapidly in some contexts. In particular, Brazil contains fast growing centers for local SW use. Although I am unable to find a reliable current estimate of the number of users in the country, the very active Facebook group "SignWriting Brasil" has 1,743 members at the time of writing. Germany's networks of users has also grown since the 1990s, for example, through Wöhrmann's collaboration with the German IT company CI WPS GmbH and the University of Hamburg to create educational resources such as the Delegs (Deutsch lernen mit GebärdenSchrift or Learn German with SignWriting) software program, used at the time of my 2012 research trip in deaf adult educational projects designed as a bridge to employment or additional education programs in Hamburg.

Worldwide, signers have adapted SW to represent different sign languages because of the system's flexibility. SW is phonographic, i.e., made up of graphic symbols that represent signs phonologically at the featural, or sub-segmental, level (though the term "phonology" implies a focus on sound, signed languages also have phonology, as the concept centers on duality of patterning, rather than on the modality of the units that can be so combined (Stokoe 1960; Sandler 1989)). Originally derived from a dance notation system (Sutton 1973), SW did not emerge from a phonemic analysis of a particular sign language. Consequentially, its symbols are not mapped onto any one language's phonology.⁴ Rather, it can be used to notate signing at a phonetic level, akin to the International Phonetic Alphabet (a notation system developed by linguists in an attempt to accurately represent the sounds used across all spoken languages).

SW does not formally distinguish between what linguists often frame as linguistic and paralinguistic phenomena (likewise this boundary is challenged by a translanguaging perspective). SignWriters, drawing on the representational resources provided by the system, choose how much and what type of detail to represent in a given text, depending on their analysis of what aspects of a signing ecology are significant for a text of a particular genre. As I have argued elsewhere (Hoffmann-Dilloway 2011), the need to make such choices, rather than having many of them encoded into a script, helps SignWriters explicitly articulate and challenge dominant, and often tacit, ideologies about the nature of language and writing. Furthermore, the wide range of variation in how SW is employed by different writers, and the comparison between texts afforded by forums like the SW focused listserv, also reveal and affect users' ideological perspectives on language, writing, and social formations.

One of the representational choices afforded by the SW system is the perspective from which texts are written. Because of its iconically motivated representations of bodily articulators and its diagrammatic representations of the spatial relationships between them, SW can encode signing practice from different visual vantage points. Texts can be written from what users term the "receptive" viewpoint, the embodied perspective of someone observing another person signing (see Figure 2) or from what they term the "expressive" viewpoint, the embodied perspective of a signer (see Figure 3).

⁴ In some contexts of use, however, SW orthographies have been proposed that focus on the phonological forms specific to particular languages, such as American Sign Language (Frost and Sutton 2013) or Maltese Sign Language (Galea 2014).

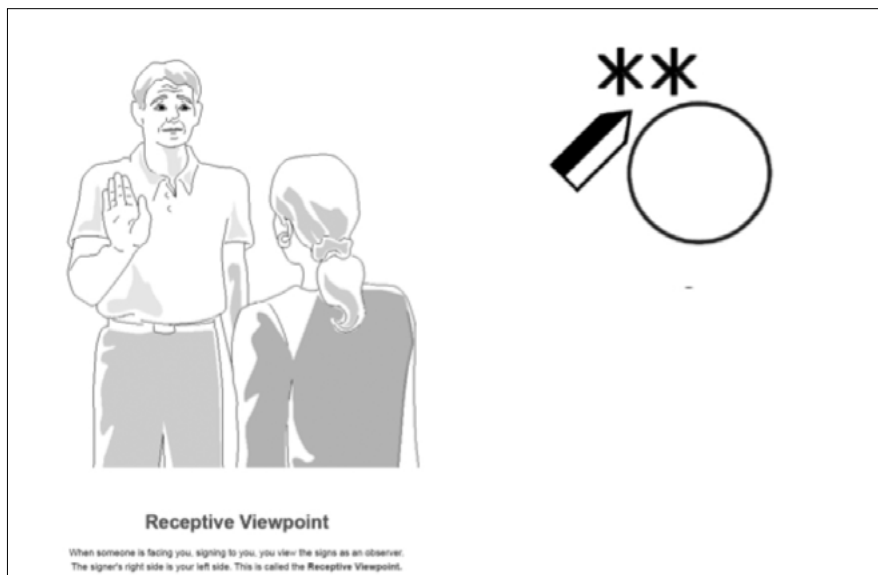


Figure 2. The illustration on the left, from a SW instruction manual, establishes that “receptive” SW is written from the embodied perspective of someone observing a signer. The text on the right shows an American Sign Language sign, TO-KNOW, written receptively (Sutton 2014).

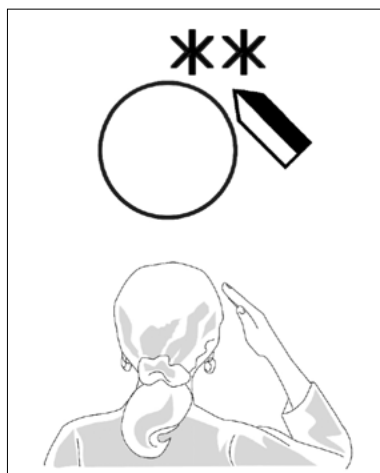


Figure 3. Also from a SW instruction manual, the figure below shows the American Sign Language, TO-KNOW, written from the expressive viewpoint (or that of the signer) (Sutton 2014).

When it was originally adapted from dance notation, SW was primarily written from the receptive perspective. However, in 1984, two early deaf adopters, Lucinda O’Grady and Meriam Ina Schroeder, encouraged SignWriters to write from the expressive perspective (Deaf Perspectives on SignWriting Video Series: How SignWriting Has Changed 1995; Sutton 2014). As Sutton explained to me in a 2010 interview, as a hearing person she was committed to allowing deaf users to drive the development of SW. And yet she initially objected to the switch to expressive writing, noting that some of the articulators encoded through SW (such as facial expressions) are not visible from the embodied perspective of the signer. However, O’Grady and Schroeder pointed out that they could *feel* all of their articulators,⁵ even if they could not see them, an argument that persuaded other early deaf users (and Sutton). Today SignWriters around the world primarily take the expressive viewpoint as the default perspective from which to read and write SW texts and are taught to “write what they feel” (see Figure 4). Thus, in addition to framing signers as subjects, this shift ultimately came to ideologically highlight signers’ subjective, multimodal experience of language use.

Of course, visual reception of actions and the felt experience of producing actions are interrelated processes. Indeed, skill in calibrating the proprioceptive (stimuli that track the positions and movements of the body) and interoceptive (stimuli that signal the status of the body’s inner workings) sensations of producing signing with the visual targets provided by other signers is a vital part of learning to sign (at least for sighted signers). These processes are mutually reinforcing in that mastering the motions that characterize the production of particular signs can make them easier to parse visually when observing others producing them: “what our bodies know how to do is also what they are able to see” (Streck 2015:422). Nevertheless, O’Grady and Schroeder, in advocating for a shift from receptive to expressive SignWriting, did not see this distinction as trivial. Rather, they argued that expressive writing signaled an ideological commitment to prioritizing the subjective experience of the signer, particularly in contrast to typically receptive recording and transcription techniques, which they felt objectified signers.

The framing of SW as a writing system that encodes a signer’s felt experience has had additional consequences for how the act of reading someone else’s expressively written text may be understood. When expressive SW is seen as ideally allowing the inner experience of a signer to be externalized, transduced into written text, and re-internalized by a reader, reading or writing from another person’s perspec-

⁵ Note, however, that proprioceptive and interoceptive sensations are not necessarily available in the same way in everyone’s sensory repertoires (e.g., some autistic people may orient to proprioceptive or interoceptive sensation differently than do neurotypical people).

tive can be ideologized as facilitating (if not guaranteeing) intersubjective experiential alignment and sympathy with that person. My concern in this chapter is not to demonstrate that expressive SW necessarily has this effect, but rather to explore how the framing of expressive SW as entextualizing and transmitting felt experience was taken up in pedagogical uses of SW in the Osnabrück classroom.

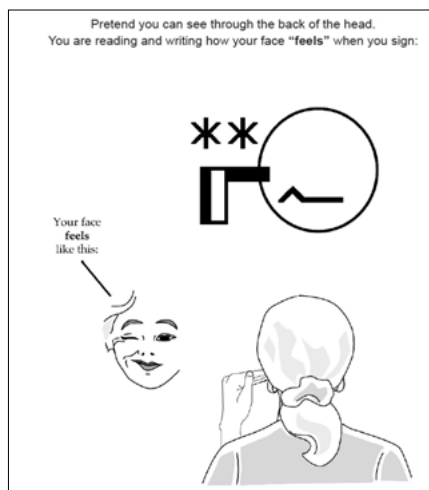


Figure 4. A page from a SW instructional manual (Sutton 2014)

4 SW literacy practices and intersomatic alignment in the classroom

The following examples of classroom interactions are drawn from my 2010 and 2012 fieldwork observing, participating in, and video-taping class sessions. Myself a hearing person, the languages in which I have the most comprehensive communicative competency (Blommaert and Backus 2011) are English and Nepali Sign Language. While I have less structural and pragmatic control of German and DGS, I had been intensively studying both leading up to and during my research and was able to follow and participate in lessons, particularly those aimed at the youngest students, whose control of these codes was also emerging. Moments in which I needed help to orient myself to the classroom activities, and my efforts to check my interpretations of video-recorded data with more fluent speakers and

signers, were useful as they often elicited explicit reflection on classroom interactions from participants.

But before turning to specific interactions, below I briefly situate readers with regard to the basic pedagogical strategies in this bilingual-bimodal classroom. As the introductory vignette suggests, classroom interactions involved a great deal of what is often termed “chaining” — “complex layering and mixing of communicative resources, including modalities” to create “bridges of links between the different language varieties and the different cultural meaning systems” at play in a given setting (Bagga-Gupta 2014:113; Humphries & MacDougall 1999). This process hinges on students’ abilities to engage in resemiotization (processes yielding what is interpreted as “the same” or comparable signification across different semiotic systems or codes) and remodalization (processes realizing what is interpreted as “the same” or comparable signification across modalities) (e.g., Iedema 2003; Tapio 2014). (Again, I note that the boundaries between such systems and modalities are not given but are ideologically mediated.)

Thus, a frequent exercise involved providing students with a prompt in one code-mode configuration, and then asking them to translate/transpose it across other code or mode manifestations. For example, Wöhrmann might use DGS to prompt a student to use Signed German (*Lautsprachbegleitende Gebärden*), an invented code that mapped German lexical items and grammatical structures onto sign forms, to ask another student a question, with the student so addressed requested to answer back in spoken German. The shift from DGS to LBG was framed as a resemiotization (a change in codes) without a remodalization (a change in modes). The subsequent shift from LBG to spoken German was then framed as a remodalization without a resemiotization.

Such chaining practices also included writing, as in the opening example. Students might be given a SignWritten prompt in DGS and then asked to write down a referentially equivalent sentence in LGB using SW (changing code but not modality encoded or writing system), then write down a referentially equivalent sentence in German using SW (changing, from the original prompt, code and modality encoded, but not writing system), and finally in German using German orthography (changing, from the original prompt, code, modality encoded, and writing system).

The third step (writing spoken German using SW) was made possible by the ideological shift to framing SW as encoding expressive experience of language production rather than visual reception of signing. Indeed, in this classroom, SW is used to write not only DGS and LGB but also the movements of the lips, tongue, and palate involved in speaking German, not all of which are externally visible but all of which can be felt by the students. Incoming students typically first developed written literacy in SignWritten DGS, then in signed and spoken

German via SW (as its encoding of moments was understood to be more initially accessible than a German orthography based on sound contrasts). They built on these competencies, through chaining practices, to acquire written German literacies in German orthography. In past work (Hoffmann-Dilloway 2013), I argued that, in addition to facilitating the expansion of students' communicative repertoires, such SW-based literacy practices help students strategically blur or regiment perceptions of boundaries between the multiple codes they employ and the modalities through which they express them. In this chapter, however, I focus on how use of expressive SW in such practices was framed as a resource for highlighting common ground among the students' various sensory, as well as linguistic, repertoires.

As my first example shows, these goals are interrelated. In a 2012 lesson for students aged 12-15, Wöhrmann projected onto a large screen some photos of a Turkish city, in order to encourage Hazan, a student from a Turkish family, to sign a narrative about her memories of the city to the rest of the class. The class became sidetracked, however, when another student, Emil, signed in DGS a comment about the projector (see Figure 5). Wöhrmann, who often embedded requests that students translate across codes and modes into naturally occurring classroom conversations, asked Emil to spell the term for projector (in German "Beamer") using fingerspelling, a series of manual signs representing the letters of German orthography). Emil did so successfully.

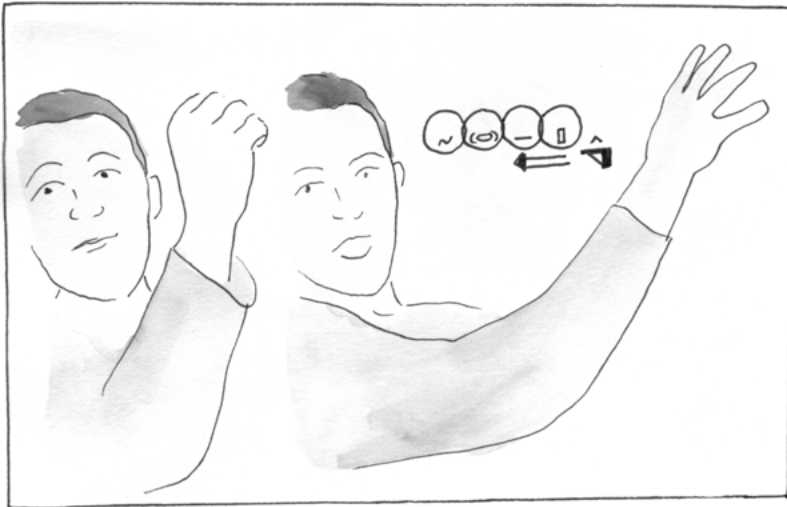


Figure 5. Emil signs BEAMER. I made this sketch from my viewpoint as a participant in the classroom. The sketch also includes a SW representation of Emil's sign, written from his embodied perspective. (I have been experimenting with graphic methods, incorporating sketches into both my fieldnotes and my practices for transcribing video-recorded data.)

However, Zeynep then indicated confusion at Emil's spelling. She performed the sign, which, like many DGS signs, included mouthings, lip movements that can be understood to resemble the act of pronouncing an associated German word (Baker and van den Bogaerde 2009) and in this case resembled the movements involved in pronouncing "Beamer". She then fingerspelled b-i-m-a, a German orthographic representation that she claimed mapped more clearly onto the performance of the mouth movements she associated with both the DGS sign and the German word (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Zeynep fingerspells b-i-m-a. This sketch was made from my viewpoint as a participant in the class, but includes SW representation of her fingerspelling written from her embodied origo.

In the midst of the subsequent discussion over the appropriate German orthographic spelling, Wöhrmann stepped over to the chalkboard and, using SW, wrote the mouth movements associated with saying, or signing, beamer or BEAMER. The students discussed his representation and agreed that the SW spelling represented the mouth movements they all felt when either signing or pronouncing the word. Only once this had been established did the class begin to discuss Emil's and Zeynep's divergent fingerspellings — ultimately determining that Emil was correct about the German orthographic spelling, but agreeing

that Zeynep's phonetic spelling was a reasonable German textualization of the mouth movements.

The fact that all three of the named codes (DGS, LBG, and German) at play in the classroom could be written with SW (and thus approached formally in terms of felt movement) meant that processes of remodalization did not complicate and were not conflated with processes of resemiotization. Thus, in this, as in many other classroom moments that I observed, the students treated expressive SW as the most likely means of objectifying and confirming a sensory and linguistic common ground from which to engage their different perceptions.

While this first example involved a classroom interaction that focused on aligning students' perceptions and experiences of language with the aim of achieving formal and referential specificity, another 2012 lesson, geared toward newer students aged 7–10, highlights the affective dimensions of co-engagement in languaging mediated by expressive SW. Wöhrmann, using SW, had written a DGS narrative on the board. In so doing, he wrote a sign as it was modified by context in the performance of the story, rather than in its citational form (i.e., phonologically realized as one-handed rather than two). The students were initially confused by this representation of the sign. However, because they had learned to read SW they were able to "feel it out" (decode how to perform it) despite not being sure about its referential meaning.

Before Wöhrmann provided clarification about the forms' phonological realization and reference, he stopped and waited, seeing that the students, having felt out the form, were repeating the sign over and over while giggling. As the students continued to laugh and play with the form independently of its meaning, they also watched one another perform the form, calibrating one another's affect laden performance of the SW text with their own experiencing of performing the movements. Wöhrmann allowed them to carry on in this way for some time, continuing the lesson only after they seemed to have had their fill (see Figure 7).

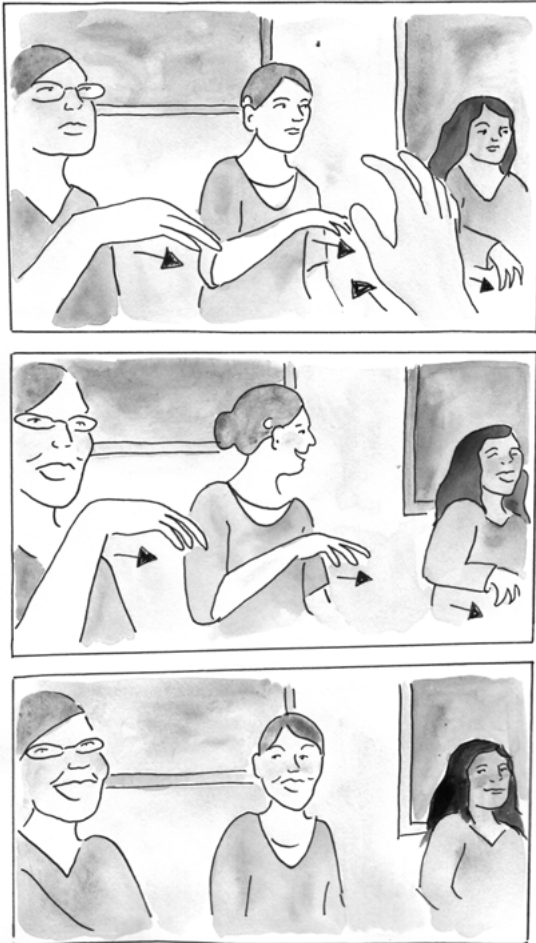


Figure 7. These sketches are drawn from my viewpoint as a participant in the class (my hand is visible in the first panel). First, the three students “feel out” a sign written on the blackboard. The second panel shows the students laughing and observing one another while playing with the sign’s form. In the third panel they have stopped repeating the sign and their giggling is winding down.

I frequently saw classroom time devoted to allowing students to experiment with the “phenomenological potential” in such poetic play “to immerse interlocutors in an affective zone” of intimacy (Ochs 2012:151). Such classroom practices afforded a mutual orientation to the “feelings of doing” language (Harkness 2015:574), not just in terms of cultivating an ability to objectify the physical sensations of producing forms, but also the social dimensions of alignment to and through them.

In offering an example in which referential meaning is (briefly) set aside as a matter of focus, I do not downplay the importance of ensuring referential understanding among deaf students (who were not able to take such understanding for granted in oralist classrooms) (see Friedner (2016) for more on the importance of understanding in deaf epistemologies and ontologies). However, I suggest that a sense of the shared-ness of the experience of producing and perceiving language was also something that could not be taken for granted in the students' previous oralist classrooms and thus appeared to be relished and valued in this classroom.

5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to follow the example of scholars (e.g., Friedner 2015:4), who have encouraged researchers not to assume normative and uniform sensoriums among their research participants, but to attend to how the “social processes of trying to understand and make collective understanding happen” yield different kinds of “sensory culture.” I have explored some strategies through which, in a particular classroom, participants recruit expressive SignWriting as a tool to generate and confirm a sense of intersubjective and intersomatic experience among students.

In addition to providing information about this particular ethnographic context, this chapter seeks to highlight the ways in which people must be socialized to culturally specific ways of conceiving of and performing intersubjectivity. Thus, it was necessary to attend to the broader explicit and implicit linguistic, media, and semiotic ideologies about the relationships between intersubjectivity, public-social signals, and phenomenological experience that underpinned both the belief that engagement with expressive SW texts facilitates the externalization and re-internalization of felt experience and the specific practices through which these ideologies were enacted. As Hanks (2013:266) notes, ethnographic understandings of intersubjectivity require “careful description of the corporeal, cognitive and affective dimensions of co-engagement.” Research, such as the burgeoning literature on transmodal-translanguaging, which hopes to yield more just pedagogical practices, must take into account the ethnography of different dimensions of co-engagement in order to attend to the ways in which interactants' repertoires may be diverse not only in the kinds of semiotic resources they employ, but also in terms of their ways of understanding and performing communicatively mediated alignment between persons.

Acknowledgements

I thank Stefan Wöhrmann, Christoph Plickert, the students from the Landesbildungszentrum für Hörgeschädigte in Osnabrück, Valerie Sutton, Adam Frost, and all participants on the SignWriting listserv. I thank Oberlin College for funding this research through two Powers Travel grants and Elana Jacobs-Pontecorvo for research assistance. I thank the editors of this volume and an anonymous reviewer for their insightful suggestions. I am grateful for comments on earlier drafts of this article and an associated conference paper provided by the participants in the University of Michigan's Department of Anthropology's Ling Lab, Audrey Cooper, Barbra Meek, Sarah Hillewaert, Judith Irvine, Michele Koven, Annelies Kusters, Jennifer Reynolds, and Chantal Tetreault. All errors are my own.

References

- Bagga-Gupta, Sangeeta. 2000. Visual language environments: Exploring everyday life and literacies in Swedish deaf bilingual schools. *Visual Anthropology Review* 15 (2): 95–120.
- Bagga-Gupta, Sangeeta. 2014. Linguaging: Ways of being-with-words across disciplinary boundaries and empirical sites. In, Paulasto, Heli, Meriläinen, Leo, Riionheimo, Helka and Kok, Maria (eds.), *Language contacts at the Crossroads of Disciplines*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 113; pp. 89–130.
- Baker, Anne, and Beppie van den Bogaerde. 2009. Code mixing in signs and words in input to and output from children." In Carolina Plaza-Pust and Esperanza Morales-López, (eds.), *Sign Bilingualism: Language Development, Interaction, and Maintenance in Sign Language Contact Situations*, 1–27. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Baron-Cohen, Simon. 1997. *Mindblindness: An essay on autism and Theory of Mind*. Boston: MIT.
- Baron-Cohen, Simon, Helen Tager-Flusberg, and Donald Cohen (eds.). 2000. *Understanding other minds: Perspectives from developmental cognitive neuroscience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blackledge, Adrian, and Angela Creese, A. 2010. *Multilingualism: A critical perspective*. London, UK/New York, NY: Continuum International.
- Blommaert, Jan, and Ad Backus. 2011. Repertoires revisited: Knowing language in superdiversity. *Working Papers in Urban Language and Literacies*, no. 67, Kings College, London.
- Boyes-Braem, Penny. 2002. *David und Goliath*. Zurich: GS-Media.
- Canagarajah, Suresh. 2011. Codemeshing in academic writing: Identifying teachable strategies of translanguaging. *Modern Language Journal* 95(3), 401–417.
- Csordas, Thomas. 2008. Intersubjectivity and intercorporeality. *Subjectivity* 22 (1): 110–121.
- Czubek, Todd. 2006. Blue Listerine, Parochialism, and ASL Literacy. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 11(3): 373–381.
- Danzinger, Eve. 2013. Conventional wisdom: Imagination, obedience and intersubjectivity. *Language and Communication* 33:251–262.

- Deaf Perspectives on SignWriting: *How SignWriting has Changed*. Produced by the Deaf Action Committee for SignWriting. VHS Tape. La Jolla: California. 1995.
- Desjarlais, Robert and Jason Throop. 2011. Phenomenological approaches in Anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40: 87–102
- de Villiers, Peter. 2005. The role of language in theory of mind development: What deaf children tell us. In Astington, Janet and Baird, Jodie (eds.), *Why language matters for theory of mind*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, pp. 266–297.
- Duranti, Alessandro. 2010. Husserl, intersubjectivity, and Anthropology. *Anthropological Theory* 10(1) 1–20.
- Friedner, Michele. 2015. Understanding sign language bibles through affective audits in South India. *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 81(5):1–22.
- Friedner, Michele. 2016. Understanding and not-understanding: What do epistemologies and ontologies do in deaf worlds? *Sign Language Studies* 16 (2): 184–203.
- Frost, Adam and Valerie Sutton. 2013. *American Sign Language hand symbols in SignWriting*. La Jolla (CA): SignWriting Press.
- Galea, Maria, 2014. *SignWriting (SW) of Maltese Sign Language (LSM) and its development into an orthography: Linguistic considerations*. The University of Malta, Doctoral thesis.
- García, Ofelia. 2009. *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Garcia, Ofelia and Li Wei. 2014. *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism, and education*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Gershon, Ilana. 2010. Media ideologies: An introduction. *The Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20(2): 283–293.
- Grice, H. Paul. 1975. Logic and conversation. In: Cole, P., Morgan, J. (eds.), *Syntax and semantics: Speech acts*, vol. 3. Academic Press, New York, pp. 41–58.
- Groark, Kevin. 2013. Toward a cultural phenomenology of intersubjectivity: The extended relational field of the Tzotzil Maya of highland Chiapas, Mexico. *Language and Communication* 33:278–291.
- Günther, Klauss, Johannes Hennies, and Manfred Hintermair, 2009. Trends and developments in deaf education in Germany. In Moores, Donald, Miller, Margery (eds.), *Deaf people around the world: Educational, developmental, and social perspectives*. Gallaudet University Press, Washington D.C., pp.178–193
- Hanks, William. 2013. Counterparts: Co-presence and ritual intersubjectivity. *Language and Communication* 33:263–277
- Harkness, Nicholas. 2015. The pragmatics of qualia in practice. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 44: 573–589.
- Hoffmann-Dilloway, Erika. 2011. Writing the smile: Language ideologies in and through sign language scripts. *Language and Communication* 31(4): 435–55.
- Hoffmann-Dilloway, Erika. 2013. (Don't) write my lips: Interpretations of the relationship between German Sign Language and German across scales of SignWriting practice. *Signs and Society* 1(2): 243–272.
- Hoffmann-Dilloway, Erika. 2018. Feeling your own (or someone else's) face: Writing signs from the expressive viewpoint. *Language and Communication* 61:88–101.
- Humphries, Tom, and Francine MacDougall. 2000. "Chaining" and other links: Making connections between American Sign Language and English in two types of school settings. *Visual Anthropology Review* 15 .2.: 85–94.

- Humphries, Tom, Poorna Kushalnagar, Gaurav Mathur, Donna Jo Napoli, Carol Padden, Christian Rathmann, and Scott R Smith. 2012. Language acquisition for deaf children: Reducing the harms of zero tolerance to the use of alternative approaches. *Harm Reduction Journal* 9(16).
- Iedema, Rick. 2003. Multimodality, resemiotization: Extending the analysis of discourse as multi-semiotic practice. *Visual Communication*, 2(1), 29–57.
- Irvine, Judith T. 1989. When talk isn't cheap: Language and political economy. *American Ethnologist* 16: 248–267.
- Kato, Mihoko. 2008. A study of notation and sign writing systems for the deaf. *Intercultural Communication Studies* 17(4): 97–114.
- Keane, Webb. 2003. Semiotics and the social analysis of material things. *Language and Communication* 23: 409–425.
- Kroskrity, Paul. 2004. Language ideologies. In Alessandro Duranti (ed.), *A companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, 496–517. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Kusters, Annelies. 2017. Gesture-based deaf-hearing customer interactions: Mumbaikars' multimodal and metrolingual strategies. *International Journal of Multilingualism* 14(3).
- Lederberg, Amy, Brenda Schick, and Patricia Spencer. 2013. Language and literacy development of deaf and hard-of-hearing children: successes and challenges. *Developmental Psychology* 49(1): 15–30.
- Makoni, Sinfree and Alastair Pennycook. 2007. *Disinventing and reconstituting languages*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Reynolds, Jennifer. 2014. Translanguaging within enactments of quotidian interpreter mediated interactions. *The Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 24 (3): 315–338.
- Robbins, Joel and Alan Rumsey. 2008. Introduction: Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology and the opacity of other minds. *Anthropological Quarterly* 81 (2), 407–420.
- Rosaldo, Michelle Z. 1982. The things we do with words: Ilongot speech acts and Speech Act Theory in Philosophy. *Language in Society* 11, 203–237.
- Ochs, Elinor. 2012. Experiencing language. *Anthropological Theory* 12 (2), 142–160.
- Sandler, Wendy. 1989. *Phonological representation of the sign: Linearity and nonlinearity in American Sign Language*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Savarese, David. 2017. *Wayfaring: Explorations of ethnography and language*. Oberlin College, B.A. honors thesis.
- Searle, John R. 1969. *Speech Acts: An essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Schick, Brenda, Peter de Villiers, Jill de Villiers, Robert Hoffmeister. 2007. Language and theory of Mind: A study of deaf children. *Child Development* 78(2): 376–396.
- Snoddon, Kristin. 2010. Technology as a learning tool for ASL literacy. *Sign Language Studies*, 10(2), 197–213.
- Spencer, Patricia. 2004. Individual differences in language performance after cochlear implantation at one to three years of age: Child, family, and linguistic factors. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 9 (4): 395–412.
- Stokoe, William. 1960. *Sign language structure*. Silver Spring, MD: Linstok.
- Sutton, Valerie. 1973. *Sutton Movement Shorthand book one: The classical ballet key*. La Jolla (CA): Sutton Movement Writing Press.
- Sutton, Valerie. 2014. *Lessons in SignWriting textbook*. La Jolla (CA): SignWriting Press.
- Streeck, Jürgen. 2015. Embodiment in human interaction. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 44, 419–438.

- Tapio, Elina. 2014. The marginalisation of finely tuned semiotic practices and misunderstandings in relation to (signed) languages and deafness. *Multimodal Communication* 3 (2):131–142.
- van der Hulst, Harry and Rachel Channon. 2010. Notation systems. In Brentari (Ed.), *Sign Languages*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 151–172.
- Williams, C., 1996. Secondary education: teaching in the bilingual situation. In: Williams, C., Lewis, G., Baker, C. (eds.), *The language policy: Taking stock*, 12, 2, pp. 193–211CAI, Llangefni.
- Yergeau, Melanie. 2013. Clinically significant disturbance: On theorists who theorize theory of mind. *Disability Studies Quarterly* 33(4).

Annelies Kusters

Interplays of pragmatism and language ideologies: Deaf and deafblind people's literacy practices in gesture-based interactions

1 Introduction

In thinking of signed communication broadly, we must consider how signing is embedded within wider communicative ecologies. In many of these ecologies, signing deaf people are not able to use an established sign language with most hearing people, and communicate in the manual medium with these hearing people by using gestures. The context of this chapter is that of customer interactions and service encounters between deaf Indian Sign Language (ISL) users and hearing non-signers in Mumbai, who frequently combine this practice of gesturing with writing. I focus on this use of writing and how it is combined with gesturing, and on people's reflections regarding these literacy practices.

The range of contexts covered in this study included interactions between deaf and deafblind customers and hearing sellers at street markets, indoor markets and indoor shops; deaf and deafblind customers purchasing food and drinks at street stalls or in restaurants; deaf and deafblind people taking various forms of public and private transport (train, bus, taxi, auto-rickshaw, ferry); deaf shopkeepers selling accessories to hearing customers; a mobile deaf retail businessman selling boxes of pens to small stationery shops owned by hearing sellers; and a deaf manager running a branch of Café Coffee Day (an upmarket coffee chain) with deaf staff.

The data analysed in this chapter is specific to the context of Mumbai where the use of (co-speech) gesture is frequent and widespread (Kusters 2017a), people are typically multilingual, and more than one written language is widely used. Extensive gesturing is part of the linguistic ecology of Mumbai: (co-speech) gesturing is not merely a linguistic strategy used with/by deaf people but common to customer interactions in general. For example, people gesture prices, amounts, sizes and shapes of things, and engage in enactments (such as enacting how a particular thing is used). Certain emblematic gestures are widely understood by hearing people, such as PRICE, WATER, TRAIN and TOILET.

The distinction between signing (ISL) and gesturing is ideological — actually most deaf people in India often refer to both ISL and gesturing with a sign that can be translated as “signing” — an overarching category which includes gesturing with hearing people who don't know ISL, as well as signing with deaf people who do know

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510090-012>

ISL (Kusters and Sahasrabudhe 2018). However, in the context of this chapter and the wider research study, I adopt a sociolinguistic ideological tradition of distinguishing gesturing from signing because I specifically look at deaf-hearing communication in which the hearing interlocutor has not learned ISL. Thus, “gesturing” is the term I use for manual communication between deaf signers and hearing non-signers (whether or not combined with speech/mouthing/writing in one or more languages). In contrast, when I write “signing”, I mean ISL. Deaf people expressed that in ISL, they can sign more quickly, use a larger lexicon, have complicated discussions with greater ease, and that more different registers are used (Kusters and Sahasrabudhe 2018).

Importantly, when reflecting on differences between gesturing and signing, deaf and deafblind persons pointed out that the limitations of gesture-based communication decrease or dissolve when people are acquainted or when they gesture slowly and patiently and take the time to communicate and to try different ways of expressing the same idea. People may repeat or rephrase their utterance, employing different modalities such as mouthing in different languages, writing things down, and using handling objects. Participants expressed that ISL can be used in itself while gesture is often used in combination with other modalities (eg. mouthing and writing). Indeed, gesture-based interactions, as observed in Mumbai, can be described as a translingual practice (Canagarajah 2013) in which people make use of their full linguistic repertoire to make themselves understood, bridging different language backgrounds. This translingual practice forms the wider context of this chapter’s focus on the combination of gesturing with writing (combining gesturing with mouthing/speech and the use of objects has been covered in Kusters 2017a and Kusters 2017b). During the studied customer interactions and service encounters, people engaged with text quite frequently: they read menus, price lists, price tags, shopping lists, the screen of a ticket machine or a smartphone. Gesture-based interactions often involved pointing to these pre-produced texts. Yet people also *produced* written texts within these interactions, typically in economic ways.

There was variation as to *what* people wrote (characters, numbers, words and occasionally sentences); people’s recruitment of *media and writing surface*, which were often alternated within one and the same interaction (including finger-writing in the air, on the counter, on a hand palm or under-arm; writing with a pen on paper or the hand; and typing on a calculator, mobile phone, braille pad or computer); and their selection of *language and script* (eg. English, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati languages; Roman, Devanagari, Gujarati and Braille scripts). These often strategic choices were related to the material surroundings in which interactions happen, and to interlocutors’ skills and willingness to communicate.

Deaf people usually took the initiative themselves to write (they were not asked by a hearing person to do so), while hearing people either wrote on their own initiative or they were asked to do so.

Practices of gesturing and writing are intertwined in the interactions that I study, and *ideologies* on the affordances and constraints of particular languages (such as Indian Sign Language, Hindi or English) and particular modalities (ie gesturing vs writing) cannot be analysed separately from these practices or separately from each other. When people make the choice to write or not (or to accept engaging with another's writing or not), they make decisions on which modality and language to foreground. These decisions are impacted by expectations and assumptions (typically based on previous experiences), for example on whether gesturing (whether or not in combination with speech/mouthing) suffices for their aims in that particular situation or not. Studying these explanations lays bare language ideologies, but also shows that these ideologies are situated and embedded in a complex interplay of factors.

The data collected in this study includes 300 video-recorded gesture-based interactions featuring five deaf participants and one deafblind key participant (two female and four male); 50 short interviews with the same six deaf and deafblind people and 80 with hearing people after such interactions; six 1–2 hour discussions in three different deaf clubs with 50–100 participants; and semi-structured in-depth interviews with the six key participants. An 80-min documentary film called *Ishaare: Gestures and Signs in Mumbai*, featuring these six key participants, was created within the frame of the project (see <https://vimeo.com/142245339>). The research team consisted of myself (a female deaf researcher from Belgium), an Indian deaf male research assistant (Sujit), an Indian hearing male research assistant cum interpreter, as well as three Indian deaf cameramen who took turns.

Going forward, I offer a short literature review on the study of writing in everyday interactions, followed by a description of the linguistic ecology of Mumbai from a deaf viewpoint. I then analyse specific examples of contexts in which writing is used and to what ends, and how people explain their choice to write or not write. This is followed by a consideration of what happens when people's textual literacies do not overlap, discussing problem solving strategies, including the involvement of ad hoc literacy mediators. I illustrate how gesturing and writing are positioned in dynamic context-dependent constellations and hierarchies, in which language ideologies, pragmatism, material environments, timing, and interlocutors' skills and willingness all are important aspects. By studying how language ideologies on gesturing and writing are embedded in these complex dynamic wholes, I contribute to a deeper understanding of sign language ideologies in practice.

2 The study of writing in interaction

The field of New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Gee 1996) posits that literacy is not just a set of functional skills, but a set of social practices associated with people's social positions and with the (cultural and social) contexts in which *literacy events* happen (Street 2000). Literacy events are “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants' interactions and their interpretative processes” (Heath 1982:93). The contexts of literacy events studied within the tradition of NLS include classrooms, homes, bureaucratic encounters, work places, religious contexts, and community spaces.

As Mondada and Svinhufvud state (2016:34), *writing in interaction* is “implemented by the writer, but also anticipated, co-achieved and monitored by the co-participants”. What gets written can be oriented to during the writing or afterwards (or both) (Mondada and Svinhufvud 2016). Writing in interaction does not exist in a semiotic vacuum but instead is often linked to other modes such as pointing, gesturing, speech and drawing (Goodwin 2013, Street, Pahl and Rowsell 2014).

The study of what is written during literacy events (and how this is done) is just one small aspect of the study of literacy practices. *Literacy practices* include literacy events as well as the “broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts” (Street 2000:22). The concept of “literacy practices” thus includes emic perspectives and beliefs about what texts are for and how they are situated, and it also includes affects and inclinations such as willingness to write, or resistance against the use of writing. This dynamic whole forms the focus of this chapter.

Wilkinson, Bloch and Clarke (2011) investigated how people who are perceived as disabled by normative communicative standards, use linguistic resources in different ways than the majority of people. They studied writing in interaction involving (hearing) people who had difficulty expressing themselves through speech only, for example because they had aphasia. One participant finger-wrote words and names on a table top, during an otherwise spoken interaction. In a similar fashion, in the study described in this article, deaf and deafblind people use linguistic resources that are actually common to many people (eg. gesturing, and writing in English or Marathi) but they and their interlocutors use them in different ways, to different extents, or at different moments than hearing sighted people generally do in customer interactions.

It happens that deaf and deafblind people encounter barriers when trying to communicate in customer interactions, including not being understood, getting shooed away or ignored, or having an impatient or angry interlocutor. Therefore, willingness of the interlocutor to communicate flexibly is an important element in the analysis of the interactions. Canagarajah (2013) uses the

term “cooperative dispositions” to talk about this ethical dimension. They are dispositions that people may bring to contact zone interactions, making them potentially “open to negotiating diversity and the co-construction of meaning” (Canagarajah 2013:179), for example treating language norms as open to negotiation, treating language as a constellation of multimodal resources that they can mix and mesh, and having a strong ethic of collaboration. Not everyone develops these dispositions to the same extent (not even if they are multilinguals): personal experience and personal investment are involved too. Some people are more agentive than others.

In an example of lack of this cooperative disposition, Spooner (this volume) discusses experiences of literacy of deaf young people in the USA. Several of her participants struggled with writing in interaction with hearing people, and tried to complement writing with gestures but hit a wall when trying to do so. The participants felt hearing people's inability to understand gesture necessitated that they express themselves solely through writing while they wanted to *combine* writing with gesturing. Such willingness and adeptness to use and combine linguistic resources is embedded in specific cultural and linguistic ecologies.

3 Literacy repertoires and deaf education

The lack of high quality instruction in deaf education impacts the use of written language in deaf-hearing interactions in India. There are about 25 deaf schools in Mumbai and most of these schools support an oralist teaching philosophy. Even when teachers gesture or sign, the education most deaf people in Mumbai receive is sub-standard. In the case of deaf people who do speak, their families and teachers are often familiar with and understand their speech, but they may find that others do not. Indeed such experiences may serve as an impetus for them to use default modes other than speech when interacting with hearing people outside of their homes. For example, Supriya, a deaf woman in her late thirties who went to a staunchly oralist deaf school and communicates through speech with her family, explained how she started work in Worli after her schooling and travelled there from Bandra daily by bus (both are suburbs in Mumbai). After a month of commuting she found out that she paid too much for her bus ticket: “Everyday I spent 8 rupees for commuting. I however doubted that the conductor understood because of my speech, so one day I wrote ‘Bandra’ on a paper and showed it to the bus conductor. He gave me a ticket for 7 rupees. I cursed myself. I was showing off that I can speak. (...) Now I tend to show a piece of paper.” Most examples of misunderstood speech concerned place names, such as receiving a ticket for the

wrong location or ending up in the wrong destination. Oralist ideologies in deaf education can thus shape deaf people's adult communicative practices in a way that is unhelpful, and writing can be the outcome and is presented as such, as an option less prone to misunderstanding.

In Mumbai (and in India generally), many deaf people from the generation aged between 20 and 45 have attended one or more of the many peer education programmes for English literacy taught to and by deaf adults through Indian Sign Language (see e.g. Zeshan et al. 2016). One recent programme outlined by Gillen et al. (2016, this volume) focuses on real everyday literacies such as those in customer interactions and accessing the linguistic landscape (eg. sign boards with information, leaflets). These peer literacy programmes starkly contrast with the education deaf people receive at school by hearing non-signing teachers, usually with instruction given through (mostly) speech, with literacy teaching typically focused on one written language, often a local/regional one such as Marathi.

As a result of these peer literacy programmes, many deaf people in the deaf clubs where we organized discussions consider English as their stronger written language and associate English with self-confidence, pride and independence. Many of them regard English as a very valuable resource, a language associated with status and with having enjoyed a good education. Their English literacy is usually on a functional level and many deaf people find building long sentences difficult. Yet in the context of navigating the city and communicating with others through SMS, deaf people were not so concerned with high level English and/or standard grammar. Indeed by writing and reading mostly characters, numbers and words (see below) they partially got around the need for these variants of English (and I got the impression that in customer interactions in Mumbai in general, "perfect grammar" is not expected nor something people are concerned about).

However, in Mumbai, not only English, but also Marathi and Hindi are frequently used in customer interactions and service encounters. While written English is the language of many offices and of higher education, and is widely present in the linguistic landscape of Mumbai, it is not always of use on the streets and in small shops, at ticket windows, at the police station and so on. Indeed, hearing people who can speak (variants of) English might not be textually literate in English, either being nonliterate or textually literate in other languages such as Hindi or Marathi which use the Devanagari script and not the Roman (Latin) script which is used to write English. This means that deaf people who prefer to write in English often have to search for a person who is English-literate who can mediate (see below for examples). And the contexts of higher education, banks and other highly literate places where written English (in the form of fluent sentences rather than words) is ubiquitous, were in general not easily accessed by deaf people.

4 Combining gestures and writing

In this section I describe a number of contexts in which writing is used. Firstly, people often communicated about prices by writing numbers down (see Figure 1), often with the aim to *reduce the number of possible interpretations of number gestures*. Number gestures could easily be misunderstood due to differences in perception and production of number gestures by deaf and deafblind signers and hearing nonsigners, and due to the need of interpreting them in context. For example a gestured “5” could be understood as 5, 50, 500 pieces/rupees/grams (see Kusters 2017a). Moreover, people often gestured round prices such as 10 or 20, but often wrote down non-round ones such as 18 and 13.



Figure 1. Sujit's hand with the text “Bhiwandi” and “200/-“

People also wrote when they *wanted to narrow down or name their gestures*, largely in parallel with the role of mouthing (Kusters 2017a), such as communicating names of locations. For example, when communicating with the driver of an autorickshaw, people would write the destination on their own hand (see Figure 1 for an example), a piece of paper or a mobile phone (either before or during the interaction), often accompanied with a point in the direction of the place and/or a statement in gesture that they would give directions. Similarly, when communicating with hearing ticket officers, a deaf person could write down the place name (for example “Vile Parle” or “VP”) and then gesture the number of tickets and if they wanted to buy a one-way or round-trip, for example, “two return” [two return tickets]. When booking an autorickshaw (a cheap and popular form

of private transport), deaf people would often be understood when they gesture to signify a landmark in the vicinity such as BOAT (ferry), TRAIN (a nearby train station), SHOE (referring to a statue of a shoe in Kamala Nehru park, to denote the park itself), BEACH (a nearby beach), often in combination with pointing in the direction of the place. Far-away destinations were more frequently written down than near ones, which can sometimes be gestured.

Deaf and hearing sighted people thus use writing to complement gestures. I want to emphasize though, that many gesture-based interactions happened without any writing (see *Ishaare* or Kusters 2017a for examples). Similarly, interactions between Pradip, who is deafblind, and hearing sighted people, frequently happened without writing. These interlocutors used visual gestures and tactile gestures, produced by touching the other's gesturing hand, tracing shapes on someone's hand or using the other's hand to co-formulate gestures (Kusters 2017b). However, overall, it seems writing was used more by Pradip and his interlocutors than between deaf and hearing sighted interactants. Indeed, sighted deaf people could point at items visible on a distance (such as products on shelves behind a counter), they could lipread others and often produced mouthings themselves; these are channels which are less available for Pradip to access and use.

An example: Pradip arrived at a shop with the counter facing the street. When it was his turn, the seller offered him a pen and turned away to look for paper, not having seen that Pradip shook his hand holding the pen (ie gesturing “no”), put down the pen and tried to call the shopkeeper. The latter returned with a piece of paper (probably based on expectations following an earlier interaction with Pradip), but Pradip took the man's hand, removed the paper from it, and then finger-wrote V-I-M (writing each character over the former one), which is the brand name of a block of dishwashing soap he wanted to buy (see *Ishaare* 00:30:14). The seller, who had his eye gaze trained on his own hand (where Pradip was writing), nodded and turned around to get the block of soap. In a short impromptu interview immediately after this interaction, Pradip explains why he refused the paper: “I don't want to write on paper, but on his hand. Paper creates distance. Our hands must be connected”.

Blommaert (2012:5) argues that “writing can only proceed when one has access to the material infrastructure for writing”, by which he means pen, paper, computer, mobile phone and so on. Here, however, we have people writing without material infrastructure other than the body itself, and Pradip actually *prefers* it this way. Finger-writing on the hand makes the Roman script accessible for Pradip and his interlocutors through its use of the body as a writing surface, and is fleeting and evanescent (much like speech or signs, and like finger-writing on a table or in the air) and does not leave a permanent mark. One has to read in real-time: his sighted

interlocutors watch their hand when Pradip finger-writes, and when people write in Pradip's hand, he feels it in real-time (see for example Figure 2). After having felt what the other wrote, Pradip often double-checks by writing in return.



Figure 2. Hearing sighted shop assistant (in the middle) finger-writing the price of a packet of milk in the hand of Pradip, a deafblind man.

Fingerwriting is done by Pradip and his interlocutors to communicate prices, symbols, words and abbreviations. Symbols include the symbols for “correct” (a checkmark) and “wrong” (an X). Abbreviations include well-known acronyms of train stations (such as D for Dadar); or in restaurants: C for coffee and D for *dosa*. Again, writing typically happens in interactions that are primarily gestured. For example, in a restaurant Pradip gestured “*dosa*”, using a gesture based on the spreading of dough in a pan. His interlocutor finger-wrote “*uttapam*” (which is a thicker *dosa*). Pradip gestured “no”, and wrote “D”, which the man understood.

Sometimes, when finger-writing did not work, Pradip typed on a Braille pad connected to his mobile phone and showed the mobile phone to his interlocutor (see *Ishaare* 01:14:06). This is a tactilely accessible product that Pradip can re-read; ie it is not evanescent like the fingerwriting. Yet it is also slightly more cumbersome, and in 44 recorded interactions, Pradip made use of his mobile phone only twice (though I have to note that his Braille device was broken for some of the time).

While gesture is foregrounded in the interactions described in this chapter, writing is used to narrow down meanings or to communicate place/brand names. People's expressions through gestures can be underspecified, so com-

binning gesturing with writing is a pragmatic solution to negotiate potential or initial problems with understanding. Here, however, I do not imply that underspecification is inherent to the modality of gesturing: it is often possible to communicate numbers and place names through gesturing, and in many situations, participants would initially try to gesture these. In earlier work (Kusters 2017a, Kusters 2017b), I have shown that when people can gesture, they will often choose to gesture, even when initially misunderstanding or not understanding each other.

Writing was also used by people who were reluctant to gesture much and/or were uncertain how to communicate through gesture, specifically new customers. With new customers, writing (and to a certain extent, pointing) was regarded as an interim solution: Durga (deaf manager of Café Coffee Day) and Komal (deaf shopkeeper of an accessories shop) narrated how when hearing customers became acquainted, they would gesture and sign more, and write less, especially for regular orders. This is also the case for deaf customers and hearing shopkeepers: writing was an intermediary to using gesture more extensively. Over time, the unacquainted hearing person would learn to communicate through gesturing with no writing or very limited writing, especially as the hearing shopkeeper came to anticipate a deaf regular customer's needs such as a phone refill or a medicine they had bought repeatedly in the past.

5 Understanding, space and temporality

In the previous section I explained that people combine gesturing and writing in order to get their message across in an efficient way: they do not necessarily use gesture to remedy misunderstandings, but rather to prevent them. However, people also wrote when gestures (with or without mouthing/speech) were *not understood or only partially understood*, by either the deaf or the hearing interlocutor. Mostly, the primary strategy was repeating or paraphrasing the gestures, often adding mouthings (sometimes in different languages) (see Kusters 2017a). This confirms that people actually prefer and foreground gesturing. In other situations, or as a secondary strategy, people wrote. For example, Reena (one of the six key participants) went to an indoors grocery shop and ordered a pot of honey by pointing at a pot she saw on the counter — she thought it was honey but actually it was pickles. When the shop assistant gave her a pot of pickles, Reena gestured that she wanted honey but then ceased her attempt to explain it through gesture and quickly asked for a pen to write it down. She wrote it down in Marathi (see Figure 3), and then the seller (who read the paper)

asked his assistant to fetch the item. A few minutes later the seller addressed Reena, pointed at one of his customers and said “my sister, sister” (in English), repeating it several times (ceasing to voice, only mouthing his repetitions)—then he wrote it down (“sister”, see Figure 3). Reena understood and provided a widespread sign/gesture for sister which the seller then copied (see *Ishaare* 00:34:00).¹ Here we see how, in a span of a few minutes, both the deaf and the hearing interlocutor write something, where they feel that signing/gesturing and/or speaking/mouthing does not immediately work.

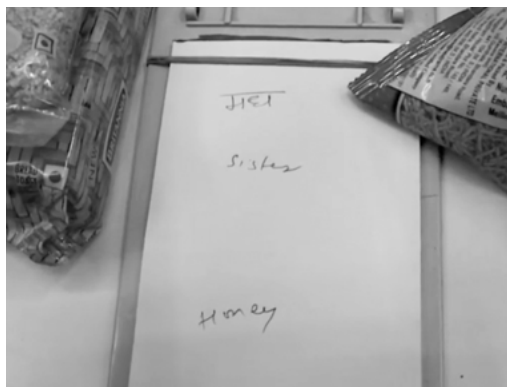


Figure 3. Paper on writing board with “मध” [honey, in the Marathi language], “sister”, and “honey”.

In interviews, Reena explained that she is a strong supporter of using gesture with sellers at markets because gesturing/signing is the natural way for deaf people to communicate. She said that deaf people should gesture in the first place and not write, and should repeat the gesture when they were not immediately understood. Indeed, in the street markets, writing was used significantly less frequently than in indoor shops: hearing market vendors mostly gestured (also for numbers) and only in a limited number of cases they wrote with a pen or finger in their hand or showed a calculator. In contrast, Reena explained, in a busy and crowded shop environment with counters and items behind glass, in contrast to vegetable stalls where it is easy to take things yourself or to point from close by, writing (or showing a shopping list) is often an important strategy.

¹ Under “sister”, Figure 3 shows one more instance of “honey”, this time in English. Reviewing the video, it seems that the seller started to write down the items Reena had ordered, but wrote down the other items Reena bought on a different piece of paper. He then used this list to calculate the total price.

When she arrived in this busy shop, she had already struggled to get and keep the shopkeeper's attention, impacting her quick decision to write down "honey" rather than to gesture it again. Reena comments: "I tend to write words only. It is urgent [because of the crowd] and easy to understand for them. They quickly take the item I want, and our time is saved."

Here we see that Reena is responding to the social and spatial environment and temporality, in ideological ways (deaf people "should gesture") and in pragmatic ways (sometimes writing is more efficient). Here, time is an important element in choosing to write or not: sometimes writing will save time, while in other situations it's quickest to point at the product or in a menu, for example. Thus, sometimes people choose the more pragmatic (here, most quickly and easily understood) means over their preferred or more generally valued means of communication. Choosing to write does not necessarily mean that people think it is impossible to communicate the same message through gesturing, rather they are taking into account the larger context in which the interaction happens.²

In my outline of how writing is used to remedy misunderstandings and to do it *quickly*, it is clear that writing is an interagentive and intersubjective action. I have earlier mentioned an instance where Pradip was offered paper; I observed this on several more occasions, and Pradip refused in most instances, given his preference for gesture and finger-writing over writing on paper. However, in another case, when ordering sugar in a grocery shop where he was familiar with the seller, Pradip asked for pen and paper himself, by locating the seller and then gesturing the request. The seller took a notebook, put it down for Pradip, brushing Pradip's hand when he did so. Pradip reached for the seller and pointed at various locations on the paper to ask where he should write. The seller responded by pointing at the place Pradip touched last, between Pradip's hands (thus Pradip felt the approximate spot where the seller pointed, see Figure 4a) (*Ishaare* 00:32:02). Pradip then wrote "sugar" (Figure 4b), and turned the paper around for the seller to read it. The seller responded by gesturing "how much?" while Pradip touched his hand. Pradip nodded and then, still holding the seller's right hand, gestured "half" (for "half a kilo").

² Another example where the larger context matters is when things considered "private" by the interlocutors were bought/ordered at medical shops, such as condoms, pregnancy tests, and menstrual pads. A deaf interlocutor explained that in these contexts, they would write down what they wanted.

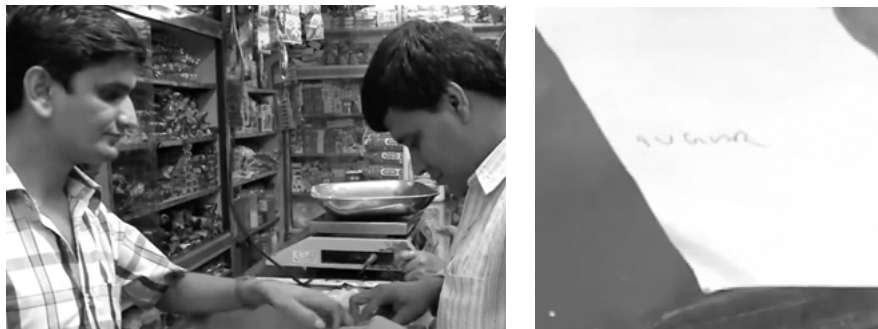


Figure 4 a and b. Writing “sugar”.

Pradip explained afterwards that this seller cannot read finger-writing in the hand, and that he found it difficult to explain “sugar” to this man in gestures. He said other sellers were more apt in understanding gestures for “sugar”. Earlier we saw that Pradip prefers and values finger-writing; but here he chooses to get his point across by using a different writing surface. He is being pragmatic, based on previous experience with this seller.

6 When literacy repertoires do not overlap

In the interactions studied in this project, there often were situations where deaf people’s and hearing people’s literacy repertoires did not overlap. For example, many rickshaw drivers were not literate in English (though they often were in Hindi and/or Marathi). People had strategies to mediate such differences in languages and literacies. For example, a deaf young woman explained:

I called a rickshaw. I spoke that I wanted to go to Bandra but he didn’t understand my voice and asked me again and again. (...) I wrote it in English on a paper but he didn’t know English. I got an idea and took my train pass out and showed this to the driver [train passes in Mumbai are trilingual in English, Hindi and Marathi]. He then understood and asked me in gesture if I wanted to go to the train station and I confirmed, so he asked me to get in.

Another example: Komal (the deaf shopkeeper) knew only very little English: she had learned some Gujarati at school and hadn’t attended an English peer literacy programme, and she said she understands written Gujarati better than written English. She told me about some customers who wrote in English to indicate the color of an item they wished to purchase:

I know a few color words in English but I don't know names like "sky blue". (...). I told them that I didn't know the words they wrote. They asked for a hearing person. I said no, we [Komal and her husband] are deaf. (...) Then they got the idea to point at something with the same color.

So in these situations, the deaf and hearing customers found another way to communicate their wish. Writing is not treated as the *end point* of the interactions but as one of several possible strategies. Here we see the importance of the cooperative disposition outlined by Canagarajah (2013): people use different modalities and objects to get their message across: in the first case by using a pre-printed object, in the second case by pointing at an object in the vicinity.

Pradip created and uses a "spices booklet" to mediate between different literacies, particularly situations where a seller does know Marathi but not English. This booklet contains names of about 20 spices that are commonly used in India (such as turmeric, asafoetida and cumin) written in two languages in three different scripts: English (Braille and Roman script) and Marathi (Devanagari script), with one spice name per page. For example, Pradip reads English in the Braille script on the pages in the booklet until he finds what he needs (Figure 5), points at this page in his booklet while holding the booklet in a position that the seller could read the Marathi translation on the same page, adding gestures to specify how many packets he wanted, or the weight of the items (see *Ishaare* 00:31:42 for an example). Pradip narrates about the earlier mentioned seller in the shop he frequents:

Before I had this booklet, I wrote with a pen in the paper, but he didn't understand. He gave me the wrong things again and again. Our time was wasted and we were tired. So I got the idea to make this booklet. The seller told me that he can't read English, Marathi only. (...) This booklet makes things easier for us. I can quickly buy things I want. If I write on paper, I will be slow. The seller prefers this booklet over writing. Before he was often angry but now he is happy.

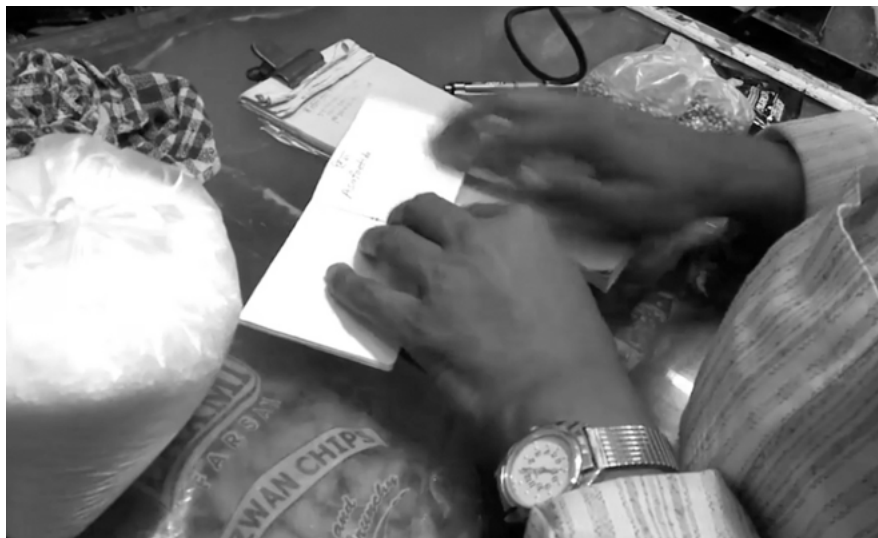


Figure 5. Spices booklet.

Pradip explained that for vegetables, grains and pulses the booklet was not necessary as he could touch and select them himself, but spices are often sold in closed packages behind counters. “Sugar” is not included in the booklet, hence his earlier choice for writing it down, and he said he wanted to create a second booklet to fill in such gaps. Like Reena, he also explained that time is an important factor:

Shopkeepers often don't want to use writing because they are rushed because of the crowds in the shop. They would get angry so I avoid this situation to make them calm and patient with me. I show it and order items quickly.

The fact that Pradip refers to emotional states (angriness and happiness, feeling calm, feeling rushed) is important — people are busy making a living and want communication to go smoothly. So, in short, the booklet is used to 1. Navigate a space where items are not accessible by touch/smell 2. Mediate different literacies and 3. Save everyone's time and energy. Like finger-writing in the hand and in contrast to writing on paper, the spice booklet is a kind of writing accessed by both interlocutors, but in the form of a pre-created object (like the trilingual train ticket) that is useful in the process of navigating and mediating between different languages, scripts and environments.

7 Involvement of literacy mediators

Above, I have given examples of situations where interlocutors solve for themselves the problems that arise when literacies do not overlap. In addition, people often make use of literacy mediators: people who make their literacy skills available to others (Baynham 1995). This often happened when hearing people couldn't read English: a third person, literate in English, became involved. For example, Sujit and I wanted to go to Tilak Nagar, a neighborhood in the suburb of Chembur, by auto rickshaw. I had written down "Chembur Tilak Nagar" on a piece of paper and showed the driver. He shook his head to indicate that he could not read it. Sujit mouthed "Chembur", which the man immediately understood. He asked (in speaking): "Chembur?" which Sujit lipread, and Sujit nodded to confirm. The driver nodded that we could get in. At that moment, a passerby in office clothes, who had been observing us, approached us. I showed the paper to the man, who spoke to the driver. Now the driver had an extra confirmation, and a more specific location, i.e., Tilak Nagar. Later, when I asked him to sign a receipt, the driver did it in the Devanagari script. When we wanted to return from Chembur to Mulund by another auto rickshaw, Sujit mouthed "Mulund" to the driver and pointed into the direction of its location. The driver did not understand. I took a pen and gave it to Sujit who wrote "Mulund" on the palm on his hand, and showed it to the woman who was just getting out of the same rickshaw. In gestures, the woman asked him for a more specific location in Mulund, Sujit mouthed "east" and did an eastward movement with his hand. The woman communicated it to the driver, who asked an even more exact location. The woman relayed to Sujit by speaking and gesturing. Sujit, expecting this question, gestured that he would give directions.

In both cases, the third person (a passersby and a previous passenger) spotted the situation and involved themselves, but there were also situations where either the driver or the deaf customer tried to spot a person (typically in smart clothes) who they supposed could read English. It even happened when vehicles such as taxis and auto rickshaws were in motion: the paper or hand (with text) was shown to the driver or a passenger in the vehicle riding next to it.

In this way, literacy becomes accessible to individuals through other people: literacy is treated as a distributed resource. Where literacy repertoires do not immediately match or not sufficiently overlap, a third person can mediate.

8 Conclusion

In gesture-based interactions, deaf and hearing people wrote in combination with gesture to express things they found hard to gesture and/or to prevent misunderstanding, or started writing when speech or gestures were not correctly or sufficiently understood. People also were generally more inclined to write when the hearing person was not adept at gesturing or comfortable gesturing and when communicating in crowded and rushed contexts. Wilkinson, Bloch and Clarke (2011) observe that writing in interaction is subordinated to co-occurring talk and I observe the same with regard to gesture here: writing is mostly treated as subordinated to pre-occurring or co-occurring gesture.

For deaf people who are literate in a print or written language, there are many circumstances in which the affordances of writing offer a means to make themselves understood and to understand others. At the same time there are limitations experienced with regard to this because of their own literacy repertoires (being comfortable only with particular genres and formats of English and/or other languages) or those of their hearing interlocutors (mostly limitations in terms of English print literacy). When interlocutors' literacy repertoires overlap, writing can be more accessible and unambiguous than mouthing, speaking or gesturing. In terms of choosing whether or not to write, people make *pragmatic decisions* (often in the spur of the moment) based on the material environment (street, indoors, crowded/quiet, items behind glass or available through touch), the willingness and acquaintedness of the interlocutors and their literacies, the preferred products (very specific or not, private or not, regular order or not) and the infrastructure available for writing (counter, pen, paper,...), which create different contexts of use.

Yet people in these situations are not only being pragmatic. Street, Pahl and Rowsell (2014:234) argue that: "By seeing affordance as culturally shaped, the ideological nature of multimodality comes to the fore". Indeed, here, ideologies on affordances and constraints of writing come to the fore through multimodal language practices. By using writing in limited ways and using more gestures than writing, people reflect an (often implicit) ideology on the way they want writing and gesturing to be balanced. Reena expressed something that many participants in the study said: deaf people are primary users of a particular modality, signing and gesturing, and should present themselves as such. Furthermore, while writing is ideologically valued as clear, unambiguous, and quick; it is not seen as a fail-safe strategy. Too much writing, and writing that happens without gesturing, limits understanding; because of limited overlap in literacy repertoires, or because of limited (textual) literacy. The resource of writing is thus very much valued, yet it is used for very specific purposes and in specific ways and

locations in Mumbai, and within the context of the “cooperative dispositions” of many Mumbaikars.

In summary, the focus on literacy practices of deaf people in customer interactions in Mumbai lays bare implicit and explicit ideologies on the affordances and constraints of writing in these contexts, in connection with affect/feeling (comfort/discomfort, patience/impatience, anger) and pragmatic reasonings. Because specific instances of writing can be made visually and tactilely accessible, deaf and deafblind people ideologically connected writing with independence and the ability to circumvent the need to speak, enabling them to communicate in the manual modality by combining gesturing with writing. Their literacy practices, including their language ideologies, are thus co-shaped by their being deaf or deafblind, their being fluent, proud and confident users of the manual modality (gesturing/signing), their comfort with particular genres/types of written languages, their discomfort with other types/genres of written languages, their interlocutor’s ability, willingness and/or reluctance to write, and their comfort with making use of literacy mediators. Pragmatism, preference and language ideologies co-shape literacy events in gesture-based interactions.

References

- Baynham, Mike. 1995. *Literacy practices: Investigating literacy in social contexts*. London and New York: Longman.
- Blommaert, Jan. 2012. Writing as a sociolinguistic object. *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies*, 97.
- Canagarajah, Suresh. 2013. *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*. London: Routledge.
- Gee, James Paul. 1996. *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. London: Routledge.
- Gillen, Julia, Panda, Sibaji, Papen, Uta, & Zeshan, Ulrike. 2016. Peer to peer deaf literacy: Working with young deaf people and peer tutors in India. *Language and Language Teaching*, 2(10). 1–7.
- Goodwin, Charles. 2013. The co-operative, transformative organization of human action and knowledge. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 46(1). 8–23.
- Green, E. Mara. 2014. *The nature of signs: Nepal’s deaf society, local sign and the production of communicative sociality*. Berkeley, University of California dissertation.
- Heath, Shirley Brice. 1982. Protean shapes in literacy events: Ever-shifting oral and literate traditions. In Deborah Tannen (ed.), *Spoken and written language: Exploring orality and literacy*, 91–117. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Kusters, Annelies. 2017a. “Our hands must be connected”: Tactile gestures, visual gestures and writing in interactions featuring a deaf blind customer in Mumbai. *Social Semiotics* 27(4). 394–410.

- Kusters, Annelies. 2017b. Gesture-based deaf-hearing customer interactions: Mumbaikars' multimodal and metrolingual strategies. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 14(3). 283–302.
- Kusters, Annelies & Sujit Sahasrabudhe. 2018. Language ideologies on the difference between gesture and sign. *Language & Communication*, 60. 44–63.
- Mondada, Lorenza & Kimmo Svinhufvud. 2016. Writing-in-interaction: Studying writing as a multimodal phenomenon in social interaction. *Language and Dialogue*, 6(1). 1–53.
- Street, Brian, Pahl, Kate, & Rowsell, Jennifer. 2014. Multimodality and New Literacy Studies. In Carey Jewitt (ed.), *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis (Second Edition)*, 227–237. London: Routledge.
- Street, Brian. 2000. Literacy events and literacy practices: Theory and practice in the New Literacy Studies. In: Marilyn Martin-Jones & Kathryn Jones (eds.), *Multilingual literacies: Reading and writing different worlds*, 17–29. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Wilkinson, Ray, Steven Bloch & Michael Clarke. 2011. On the use of graphic resources in interaction by people with communication disorders. In Jürgen Streeck, Charles Goodwin & Curtis LeBaron (eds.), *Embodied interaction: Language and body in the material world*, 152–168. Cambridge University Press.
- Zeshan, Ulrike, Rita Huhua Fan, Julia Gillen, Sibaji Panda, Uta Papen, Karin Tusting, Daniel Waller & Jennifer Webster. 2016. Summary report on “literacy development with deaf communities using sign language, peer tuition, and learner-generated online content: sustainable educational innovation”. Retrieved from <http://www.deafliteracy.net/?q=node/7>

Part IV: Sign language ideologies in language planning and policy

Audrey C. Cooper

Bị and being: Spoken language dominant disability-oriented development and Vietnamese deaf self-determination

1 Sign language ideologies and social change: An introduction

This chapter examines the historical emergence of ideological constructions about Hồ Chí Minh Sign Language (HCMSL) and Vietnamese Deaf people,¹ how particular ideologies have impacted Vietnamese Deaf people in southern Việt Nam living in and around Hồ Chí Minh City, and how awareness of such ideologies shapes Vietnamese Deaf social organizers' social action. The analysis developed in this chapter takes two inspirations as its point of departure. The first inspiration emerged while conducting ethnographic work with Vietnamese Deaf people who described the ways that educational personnel, journalists, and HCMSL-Vietnamese interpreters tended to characterize HCMSL. The circumstances they described indicated the presence of contemporary ideological contestation over the use of HCMSL and Deaf people's innate capacities, as well as providing evidence for social classificatory regimes associated with the Vietnamese language and with HCMSL. The second inspiration involves ethnographic observation of Vietnamese Deaf people's social organizing work and their strategic attention to social classification, inclusion and exclusion, particularly with respect to national citizenship. Over the last decade, such social organizing work has created a national network of Deaf organizations, direct partnerships with international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and governmental partners, and has also drawn the attention of the 'Deaf global circuit' (Moriarty Harrelson 2015). These sought after social changes notwithstanding, Vietnamese Deaf social organizers'

1 Note: My use of Hồ Chí Minh Sign Language (HCMSL) is a departure from earlier publications (cf. Cooper 2014, Cooper and Nguyễn 2015). This change reflects ongoing work with Vietnamese Deaf co-researchers who preferentially use the English translation *Hồ Chí Minh Sign Language* (and the abbreviation *HCMSL*) as this resembles the original Vietnamese *Ngôn ngữ ký hiệu Tp. HCM* (and *NNKH Tp. HCM*). My use of the capitalized form of *Deaf* also reflects Vietnamese Deaf research participants' preferential use of the capitalized form to reflect their conceptualization of Deaf communities in Việt Nam as an ethnocultural group (corresponding to Việt Nam's 54 other ethnocultural groups). I also use lower-case *deaf* in accordance with researcher and case-specific usage.

encounters with sign language ideologies continue to index them as deficient — particularly with respect to intellectual capacity and the ability to contribute to national development and modernization.

Sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological study of language and social change (Erickson 2004, Ahearn 2001, Duranti 1994, Mendoza-Denton 2007, Spitulnik 1998) illuminate pressures exerted by dominant languages and normative participation structures in the production and maintenance of particular sociolinguistic orders, whereby social actors and actions undergo everyday forms of stratification. Such stratification is facilitated—and arguably also reworked by—indexicality: the ways that linguistic signs index, or point to, contextually related objects. Blommaert argues that the “‘function’ of language — what we usually call the production of meaning — cannot be separated from value attribution” (2005: 393); moreover, “orders of indexicality” associated with specific social actors systematically effectuate “imposing the ‘doxa’ of a particular group” onto other groups (Ibid. 394). The analysis I develop in this chapter contributes to a growing set of work dedicated to examining relationships between (sign) language ideologies and sociolinguistic orders that also centrally involve idealized (and often nationalistic) notions of worthy and unworthy, productive and unproductive, ‘citizen bodies’ (Beasley and Bacchi 2000; see also Foucault 1977, and Tremain 2015). Dominant ideologies and dominant languages are formally structured into state institutions, with schools being the paradigmatic ideological apparatus. However, dominant ideologies and dominant languages also circulate in everyday sites and interactions — such as public spaces (cafes, restaurants, hotel lobbies, and shopping areas).

Drawing insights from interaction-based and gesture studies, Kusters’ (2017) research on ‘multimodal and metrolingual’ practices contributes to understanding relationships between sign language linguistic repertoires, gestural repertoires, and ideological experiences/perceptions of affiliation (e.g., connection and differentiation). Kusters describes interactions between deaf and hearing Mumbaikars in urban markets, showing the ways that deaf and hearing people exchange goods and money, as well as positive regard, in the presence of differing sensorial affordances or “sensorial asymmetries” (Ibid., 3). For these circumstances, it is not inconsequential (for deaf or hearing Mumbaikars) that deaf Mumbaikars return to sites wherein they repeat and build upon linguistic and gestural repertoires. Such interactions facilitate social and economic relationships between interactants; for instance, businesses’ ability to form a strong consumer base via repeat customers, and preferred vendors and spaces for deaf consumers. Such interactions are also shown to facilitate the formation of shared language and gestural practices.

Moriarty Harrelson's (2017) research with Cambodian deaf people and NGOs further demonstrates the significance of perilinguistic practices (e.g., drawing, gesture)² to Cambodian deaf people's acquisition of "new linguistic resources" following migration to urban centers (Ibid., 3). Moriarty Harrelson argues that, as Cambodian deaf people acquire new linguistic resources, they "also acquire attendant ideologies about what language is, who possesses language, and what constitutes communication" — notions which, for her data-set, are shown to be strongly influenced by interaction with NGO workers and NGO-knowledge production (Ibid.). Such ideological forces are also found to be active in the Vietnamese case: both cases provide evidence for the ways that expert and/or official forms of knowledge production index sign language inferiority. In the Vietnamese case, NGOs have not been the primary drivers of sign language ideologies; rather, official rhetoric contained within Ministry of Education and Training policies and programming preceded and also promoted INGO activities that generate sign language ideological materials that powerfully circulate in "special" schools and vocational training centers. Outside of these locations, sign language ideologies also circulate throughout the linguistic landscape of Hồ Chí Minh City and surrounding areas via the media and HCMSL-Vietnamese interpreters.

As the above discussion suggests, quotidian interactions involving signed and spoken language linguistic and perilinguistic repertoires often reveal ideologies related to language and to sign language users, specifically, as a kind of subject group for whom physical attributes are conceptualized as related to and limiting of human capacity. That physical attributes are prominent in sign language ideological processes is understandable, especially when we consider the role of corporeal schema — or assemblages of body experiences, social meaning, and attitudes/values (Fanon 1988: 111; Ahmed 2007 and 2012)—in individual and intersubjective understandings of the self and of others. Whereas corporeal schema cannot be observed directly, attention to the ways that Deaf and hearing people interact in physical space, or the ways they represent features of signed languages and Deaf bodies in text, can illuminate the ways that hegemonic (spoken language) sociolinguistic orders are reproduced via language ideological connection and differentiation (Irvine and Gal 2000). I refer to such composites of embodied, cultural and linguistic action and related social orders as *biosociolinguistic orders* (cf. Maffi, Luisa. 2001. *On biocultural diversity: Linking language knowledge and the environment*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian).

² Viaggio describes perilinguistic practices as those which have been "added on to" linguistic utterances, such as "kinetics and illustrations" (2005: 84).

Structural inequalities connected to interactions between deaf and hearing people in most societies indicate the ways that sign language ideological regimes can shape the social opportunities of Deaf people to limit the “way the world is available as a space for action” among those engaged in signed language practices (Ahmed 2007: 153). In Việt Nam, language ideological regimes privilege hearing public service professionals’ knowledges and skills in modes that contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities between Deaf and hearing people. Hearing public service personnel accrue social and economic benefits by virtue of public perception of their supposed special knowledge (about Deaf people), supposed special language skills (language fluency in a signed language), and supposed mastery of special methods for engaging Deaf people (special education pedagogy). Accordingly, Vietnamese Deaf people’s claims to expert knowledge in the educational domain (relative to credentialed special school teachers), and language-oriented social organizing work, both constitute sociopolitical forces with which the contemporary Vietnamese state must (increasingly) contend.

2 Methodology and analytic considerations

Over the last decade I have concentrated my research on Vietnamese Deaf people’s signed languages, social change activities, state-society engagements, and interactions between Deaf and hearing co-participants in national and international development activities. This chapter draws on original ethnographic research conducted in three focal research periods: doctoral dissertation fieldwork (2008 to 2010), postdoctoral research (2012 to 2014), and preliminary meetings with co-researchers in July 2017. Primary research sites include: five speech-based Deaf education “special schools,” one bilingual adult Deaf education program (with instruction in HCMSL and written Vietnamese), and one Deaf Club operated by and for Vietnamese social organizers (who conduct activities in HCMSL and written Vietnamese). Additional sites include community-based organizations, university settings, and café and hotel spaces wherein Deaf social organizers hosted leadership activities.

My selection of data for this chapter expands upon insights developed in individual publications (Cooper 2014, 2015, 2017) and collaborative publications (Cooper and Nguyễn 2015 and 2017), all of which address sign language ideologies and ideologies some way. My interest in this area of analysis was sparked while socializing with Deaf research participants in public places, therein also witnessing their routine confrontations with hearing people. Such confrontations

involved negative affective displays, direct and indirect commentaries, and occasionally also verbal and physical attacks.

Deaf people's negative confrontations with hearing people also routinely occurred during international development programming activities which I participated in from 2012 to 2014. As a consultant and co-trainer for the *Intergenerational Deaf Education Outreach Project – Vietnam* (a project of the World Bank), Deaf co-trainers and I often conducted meetings in public spaces during which our signing often attracted curious glances, as well as malicious commentaries and behavioral displays (grimaces, sideways stares, mimicry). Whereas the routine nature of these confrontations made them somewhat predictable and expected, they nevertheless required social negotiation in order to continue our work with a minimum of interruption and the avoidance of an incident. For example, in hotel lobbies associated with some of the larger hotels within which trainings occurred, hotel guests sometimes stood very close by – even directly over our shoulders – and made comments about our signing and other aspects of our appearance. On several occasions, hotel staff pressured us to leave hotel lobbies.

In contrast to confrontations with random onlookers, negative commentaries by public service professionals – such as “special school” principals, teachers, and signed-spoken language interpreters—proved more ubiquitous, and more troubling. This is because public service professionals hold leadership positions within public institutions that are charged with providing education, training, and other services to Deaf people in Việt Nam. Such positional authority facilitates public perception: i. that public service professionals are experts on Deaf ontologies and signed languages, and ii. that Deaf citizens are recipients of, and reliant upon, expert assistance.

I am a non-Deaf, public and linguistic anthropologist from the United States, whose first and second languages are English and American Sign Language, followed by HCMSL and Vietnamese. Experiences within and across the latter language ecologies – as well as over two decades of professional practice as an ASL-English interpreter – continue to stoke my interest in understanding relationships between sign language usage, body experience and human biodiversity, common sense notions of “social problems,” and everyday and official forms of power. As a researcher who is also engaged in international development training and learning, I am also keenly aware of my own participation in sign language ideological production. Given Deaf people's worldwide confrontations with linguistic exclusion from education, employment, and civic participation – anthropological and sign language linguistic researchers are often called upon to lend expert authority to language advocacy campaigns. How I/we engage in these activities, with Deaf communities and about them, is of great methodological and

theoretical interest to me, and human concern — which I address throughout the chapter and in the conclusion.

3 Background on Deaf-related international development in Việt Nam: Intervention into „vulnerable populations“ and „population quality“

International nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) have been a primary driver of development in Việt Nam for over 30 years. In 1986 — the point at which the Vietnamese state initiated political economic reform known as *Đổi mới* (commonly translated as “renewal” or “renovation”) — the development “industry” was just getting established (Ferguson 1994). Today, there are thousands of smaller and larger INGOs, and hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars in development aid channeled into investment in Việt Nam. In 2013, the last year for which figures were fully reported (at the time of this writing), the U.S. Agency on International Development invested \$131,476,659 US dollars in Việt Nam alone (USAID 2017).

The early influx of INGOs to Việt Nam first focused development agendas on what they termed “vulnerable populations” (USAID 2004: 7). In the mid-1980s, the Vietnamese state selected the Dutch organization Komitee Twee as an early partner for their speech-based education approach because government officials reasoned that speech-based education would best prepare Deaf citizens to contribute to the country’s economic development and modernization. By 2003 Việt Nam had established more than fifty speech-based Deaf education special schools. Notably, no special schools used the national curriculum in the manner implemented by “regular” schools; rather, special schools were allowed to modify the curriculum as Deaf students were not believed capable of mastering educational subjects. Despite the widespread practice of extending a single curricular year across two or more academic years, this approach nevertheless resulted in educational failure.

In 2000, one INGO-funded program implemented the first HCMSL-based education program. Since that time, there has been a modest rise in Vietnamese-language sources on special school education and signed languages in Việt Nam, produced almost exclusively by special school teacher-trainers, and others with backgrounds in traditional linguistics (i.e., not sign language linguists) (Woodward et al., 2004; Woodward and Nguyễn 2012). Given the dearth of Vietnamese-language scholarly literature from relevant scholars — and, thus far, no

Vietnamese-language publications by Vietnamese Deaf scholars — information by special school teacher-trainers and other expert knowledge producers (medical professionals, early intervention specialists) circulate in educational and governmental domains largely without critique or debate. Expert and popular folk theories about Vietnamese signed languages and Deaf people's sociolinguistic practices thus hold privileged statuses in the scholarly record, as well as in and across national and international development circles.

It is in the context of education and healthcare demands that economic development — the primary driver of state policy (Phạm M. H. 2007) — is increasingly linked to the “development” of the domestic population. In 2000 the Vietnamese state responded to the “poor quality” of the population by initiating a national population strategy with the goal of “develop[ing] a human resource of high quality in order to meet the requirements of industrialization and modernization.”³ Bureaucratic attention to biological reproduction demonstrates state-level strategies for engineering national populations according to standard measures and in idealized forms (Kohrman 2005; see also Gammeltoft 2014). In Việt Nam, the ways that *special schools* and *inclusive education* schools are structured could be understood as an extension of population management, which requires parents, their children, and other family members to navigate ideologically saturated decisions involving biotechnological interventions — such as diagnoses and treatment for *khuyết tật về khả năng nghe* (lit. ‘disability in hearing ability,’ or ‘hearing disability’) (GSO 2018, 42; GSO 2006, section 2, part 4.25).

In 2010 the Vietnamese National Assembly passed the comprehensive Law on Persons with Disability which included, for the first time, mention of students' rights to use “ngôn ngữ ký hiệu” (sign language) in school; however, the Vietnamese state did not — and still has not — made provision to train existing teachers in ngôn ngữ ký hiệu (hereon NNKH) or NNKH-based instructional methods (NCCD 2010). As of this writing, Việt Nam possesses more than 70 Deaf education special schools that remain largely speech-based by default. Deaf students also increasingly attend “inclusive education” schools (trường hoà nhập), which are growing in number throughout the country. Inclusive education schools are speech-based by definition. Whereas only a fraction of Deaf school-age children attends any school (NCCD 2010), those that do are not likely to attend a school with teachers proficient in a Vietnamese Sign Language. Furthermore, while Vietnamese Deaf social organizers advocate for state recognition of NNKH, they do so in context of state pressure to “unify” the varieties of NNKH associated with southern, central,

3 See Việt Nam Population Strategy Decision No. 147/2000/QĐ-TTg.

and northern Việt Nam. These are among the sign language ideological structures and forces constraining HCMSL — centered social organizing in the contemporary moment.⁴

4 Hồ Chí Minh Sign Language ideological traces: Evaluations of Deaf being

In the Vietnamese context, Deaf people are overwhelmingly, though not exclusively, referred to in terms of deficit and disability. The circumstances of this variability, and the mechanisms underpinning negative sign language ideologies in Việt Nam, needs to be clarified for practical and theoretical purposes. The observation that initially prompted this inquiry emerged while conducting research on print journalism articles that discussed Deaf people; examining available journalistic accounts, I noticed that the marker *bị* frequently collocated with *điếc* (deaf) and *khiếm thính* (hearing impaired). In February 2009, I discussed this observation with focal Deaf research participants and showed them examples, to which many expressed surprise and dismay. To be clear—these research participants were not unaware of the ways that journalistic accounts tended to characterize them; in fact, a substantial subset of research participants had been featured in print journalism centered on education or societal issues. However, they had not observed *bị* indexicality as a pattern that seemed to consistently represent Deaf people and sign language in negative terms — and also, implicitly, hearing people and Vietnamese in positive terms (“order of indexicality”). Moreover, this pattern apparently cut across diverse journalistic platforms (print, online, broadcast) and genres. Another consideration that is salient to analyzing research participant responses to collocations of *bị* and *điếc* is this focal group’s: i. relatively recent access to secondary and higher education, and thereby limited opportunities to study Vietnamese language and literature in depth, and, ii. limited access to education via HCMSL as the instructional language that would support critical classroom engagement with nuanced aspects of Vietnamese language usage, such as the *bị* marker.

⁴ In 2006 the Prime Minister signed Decree No. 01/2006/CT-TTg, *On Accelerating the Implementation of New Policies to Assist Disabled People’s Economic and Social Development* directing the Ministry of Education and Training to establish a “uniform use of sign language for the disabled/handicapped throughout the country.”

Use of the *bị* marker is ubiquitous in spoken Vietnamese. Simpson and Ho explain that *bị* is used to indicate that the “event depicted by the main verb is understood as affecting the subject in some generally negative way” (2008: 831). *Bị* often collocates with descriptions of physical conditions such as in the following examples in Simpson and Ho: *Nga bị bệnh* (Nga is sick) and *Nam bị tàn tật* (Nam is crippled) (2008: 833). Cooper and Nguyễn also note that *bị* can take a “social pragmatic function as *bị* indicates speaker moral perspective on the immediate topic and an expectation for shared perspective with the listener” (2015: 113). Therefore, *bị* cues listeners (specifically) to a speaker’s satisfaction of social norms (e.g., politeness, information sharing), and can also cue listeners to normative stances on a topic — particularly in situations involving listeners unfamiliar with the topic.

Collocations of *bị + deaf* and *bị + hearing impaired* — among other constructions, such as *bị + disabled* (khuyết tật), and the more negatively construed *bị + tàn tật* (handicapped) — are widely attested in print, online, and broadcast media, as well as policy documents and everyday conversation. Use of the *bị* marker is apparently so conventionalized that when I asked hearing research participants (teachers, principals, HCMSL-Vietnamese interpreters) about their use of *bị* when referring to deaf people, the most common explanation offered was: “Chỉ là cách chúng tôi nói” (That’s just how we say it”). An excerpt from an interview with a HCMSL-Vietnamese interpreter indicates the biosociolinguistic pressure exerted in everyday interactions to engage in normative sign language ideological production and normative (negative) body ideological marking of Deaf bodies:

Mỹ: We have to say *bị*. If we do not say *bị* then others will think we are not showing the right attitude to the situation of [Deaf person] and his/her family.

Cooper: What if that person has no experience with Deaf people and you use *bị*?

Mỹ: Then they will know how to behave the proper way.

This explanatory framework suggests a moral universe in which interactants discussing third party referents take *stances* on body features and conditions. Du Bois (2007: 143) argues that evaluation is “the most salient and widely recognized form of stancetaking,” by which the “stancetaker (1) evaluates an object, (2) positions a subject (usually the self), and (3) aligns with other subjects” (Ibid. 163). The *bị* marker is obligatory for spoken Vietnamese, and indexes care and concern for the well-being of others, especially those perceived to be less fortunate. Omitting *bị* when referring to body features or circumstances that are conventionally

perceived to be negative or unfortunate may sound strange, or ungrammatical, as such omission performs an explicit disalignment with the wider moral and social order. While use of the *bị* marker is not obligatory per se — as research participants described it to me — such omission nevertheless requires social negotiation or the ability to disregard sociolinguistic expectations. These circumstances indicate the ways that language, cultural and body ideologies — or biosociolinguistic *regimes* — shape interactional possibilities for Deaf and hearing people in everyday situations in Việt Nam.

It is through print and online media sources, however, that most people in Việt Nam encounter authoritative accounts of signed language and Deaf cultures. Public access to sources on the latter subjects is extremely limited. Popular bookstores do not carry sources on Vietnamese signed languages and Deaf cultures. Special education teacher-training materials tend to be written from medical perspectives and are only available to matriculated students. Workbooks and dictionaries on “Hồ Chí Minh City Sign Language” are only available to students taking classes at the *Trung tâm Nghiên Cứu và Thúc đẩy Văn hóa Điếc — Trường Đại học Đồng Nai* (Center for Research and Promotion of Deaf Culture — Đồng Nai University; formerly, Đồng Nai Deaf Education Project). Moreover, use of the single public library in Hồ Chí Minh City is contingent upon possession of a library card.

By contrast, free Wifi is plentiful and online sources offer relatively unencumbered access to national news and information. In the aforementioned research on print journalism essays — which included 21 essays published between 2004 and 2010 — I identified 121 uses of *khiếm thính* (hearing impaired) and only 15 references to *điếc* (deaf; all instances took the lower-case form) (Cooper 2011: 401). Moreover, journalists tended to use either or both terms without reference to *người* (person/people), and most instances were preceded by the *bị* marker. Interviews with Deaf research participants reached consensus that journalists typically used the term *khiếm thính* (hearing impaired), and not research participants’ preferred term *Điếc* (Deaf; with upper case ‘D’).

Given the circumstances just described, Vietnamese-language print and online journalism accounts of sign language and Deaf people are powerfully positioned to influence both public perception and state-society decision-making. By contrast, Deaf people’s circulation of HCMSL ideological production to hearing populations is extremely constrained: limited to contexts in which social interactants already know HCMSL or situations that involve HCMSL-Vietnamese interpreters. Whereas there are few places to study HCMSL and HCMSL-Vietnamese interpreter training workshops have emerged as recently as 2012 in southern Việt Nam (hosted by a single organization and on an ad hoc basis), there are few situations involving HCMSL-Vietnamese interpretation.

Below I provide three examples of texts of sign language ideological production to discuss the ways that the latter intersect with ideologies involving physical attributes and capacities. *Sample Text 1* and *Sample Text 2* are excerpted from expert and journalistic texts, respectively, and both include the *bị* marker. *Sample Text 3* is excerpted from a public presentation given by Deaf social organizers, with interpretation in Vietnamese and English for hearing participants, and demonstrates the absence of the *bị* marker.

Sample Text 1: excerpted from Bùi (2010), a research publication titled *Phát triển Ngôn ngữ cho Trẻ Khiếm Thính trong Tổ chức Trò chơi Ở lớp Mẫu giáo Hòa nhập* (Hearing-Impaired Children’s Language Development in Play-Based Early Inclusive Education):

Ngôn ngữ là lĩnh vực phát triển quan trọng ở trẻ em và cũng là lĩnh vực **bị ảnh hưởng** nghiêm trọng nhất từ tật điếc.

Language is an important developmental area in children and is also the most [negative marker] severely affected by the handicap deafness.

Sample Text 2: excerpted from Thùy Linh’s (2013) public interest report for the online news outlet *VN Express* titled *Hệ Thống Dịch Ngôn Ngữ Ký Hiệu* (Sign Language Translation System) describes a signed-to-written language interpretation computer program in the experimental design phase in China:

Dandan Yin, một cô gái trẻ **bị khiếm thính**, tham gia thử nghiệm hệ thống dịch ngôn ngữ ký hiệu, cho biết hệ thống này đã hoàn thành giấc mơ thời thơ ấu của cô đó là có một chiếc máy tính dành cho những người khiếm thính.

Dandan Yin, herself a young [negative marker] hearing-impaired child, participating in the sign language interpretation system experiment, said that the system fulfilled her childhood dream of having a computer for hearing-impaired people.⁵

⁵ Another example of negative reference to Deaf people comes toward the end of the essay when the journalist explicitly states that such research development provides the hope of “mở ra một thế giới mới hoàn toàn mới cho những người không may mắn như Dandan Yin” (“opening up a whole new world for unlucky people like Dandan Yin”).

In the context of prevailing conventionalized reference to *deafness* and *hearing impairment* as unfortunate conditions, signers' affirmative epistemic stances on Deaf identities and HCMSL are nevertheless asserted and co-referentially taken up: such stances highlight the presence of a biosociolinguistic regime for which *Deaf being* cannot be reconciled with notions of abject statuses or identities. In Figure 1 below — drawn from a *Giao lưu* (cultural exchange event) hosted by Deaf community members in July 2012 for purposes of introducing hearing college students to HCMSL linguistic and Deaf cultural information—Deaf presenters discussed the difference between the two terms “*khiếm thính*” and “*Điếc*” (hearing impaired and Deaf). Approximately forty people attended the *Giao lưu* event: ten “Deaf community” members (Cộng đồng người Điếc); fifteen college student members of the Đoàn thanh niên Trường Đại học Kinh tế Tp. HCM (Youth Group of the Hồ Chí Minh City University of Economics); ten members of three INGO organizations working with Deaf people; one HCMSL-Vietnamese interpreter; two hearing Deaf education professionals; and one anthropology researcher/presenter (the author). Individually and combined, Deaf community member presentations centered on language and identity to put HCMSL linguistic structure and Deaf sociolinguistic practices in context of other human language communities. One of the ways that Deaf leaders did this was to show comparative sentences in HCMSL and Vietnamese, as well as to describe their educational experiences and the difficulties they experienced in speech-based schools.

As the image of their PowerPoint slide demonstrates (Sample Text 3), there is no use of the *bị* marker. Presentation details — which lasted for more than an hour—addressed presenters' reasons for explicitly rejecting the identificatory label *khiếm thính* (hearing impairment) and encouraged participants to use “*người Điếc*” (Deaf person/people). An intriguing question here is whether the presenters addressed the *bị* issue, and if not, why not?⁶ The presenters did not address the *bị* issue. They also did not address other indexical devices available for negative attribution — such as derogatory or offensive commentaries. The circumstances connected to such choices warrant more detailed examination. For present purposes, the purpose and spirit of the *Giao lưu* as a friendly exchange may be at least partially explanatory for the avoidance of topics that might be construed as negative or indicative of culpability. Moreover, *Giao lưu*, as I understand them, seek to promote mutual understanding across differing perspectives. They are not meant to be didactic or academic; therefore, not addressing the *bị* issue is one way that Deaf presenters established a socially normative *genre* or a

6 I wish to express my gratitude to this volume's editors who raised this question with me, thereby extending my analysis of orders of indexicality, among other ideological considerations.

“way of acting and interacting linguistically” that was also suitable to the occasion (Fairclough 2003: 17).



Figure 1. Sample Text 3. PowerPoint Presentation presented by Cộng Đồng Người Điếc (Deaf Community of Hồ Chí Minh) in July 2012: Sự Khác Nhau Giữa KHIẾM THÍNH và ĐIỆC (The Difference Between Hearing Impaired and Deaf). Photo credit: chapter author.

Vietnamese Deaf signers preferentially use the sign DEAF to refer to individual Deaf people and groups. HEARING IMPAIRED is not attested amongst southern Deaf signers, nor among Deaf people from northern or central regions of the country with whom I interacted (within IDEO, for example). Markers such as **bị** are also not attested and – more relevantly – are not felicitous with HCMSL structure. Whereas there are a number of signs that may be used to indicate negative attitudes towards or perceptions of topics of concern, one of the linguistic affordances of HCMSL is a robust non-manual system for symbolizing negative affective and epistemic properties. To represent **bị** – as would be necessary, for example, in a university Vietnamese literature course – Deaf instructors, students, and HCMSL-Vietnamese interpreters would employ fingerspelling. The same is true for the term *khiếm thính* (hearing impaired), as there is no conventionalized symbolization of this term in HCMSL (Cooper and Nguyễn 2015).⁷ With

⁷ HCMSL users do, however, employ *nonce* signs (i.e., a sign established for a particular pur-

respect to the collocation of negative affect with the signs for Deaf or hearing impaired, in Vietnamese Deaf discourses, the sign for *Điếc* (Deaf) does not tend to collocate with negative affect. Deaf social organizers do reference the term *khiếm thính* (hearing impaired); however, they tend to do so in the context of information sharing or training — much as in Figure 1.

Sample Texts 1-3 provide evidence for a social order that legitimizes practices of speaking/hearing and delegitimizes practices of seeing/signing. The presence of the *bị* marker in Vietnamese texts, and absence in HCMSL texts, also demonstrates that the biosociolinguistic context in which the *bị* marker operates as a meaningful mode is irreconcilable with Vietnamese Deaf subjective descriptions (“being”). One significant way that the three Sample Texts overlap is the way that value attributions attach to language and to Deaf bodies.

Within the immediate interaction of the *Giao lưu* as it was facilitated by Deaf Community members, hearing audience participants appeared enthusiastic about the content, asked questions and even practiced trying out what was, for them, new ways of referring to Deaf people (having been accustomed to “hearing impaired”). In discussing the event over lunch, the Deaf presenters discussed the latter observations as positive outcomes of the *Giao lưu*; however, they stated a shared concern that the social reach of the event was limited. They discussed the need for much larger scale action, and broader social platforms for creating partnerships amongst hearing society leaders — particularly amongst business entrepreneurs and government entities favorably disposed toward Deaf people and Deaf social engagement. Vietnamese Deaf people’s social actions to advance their own sociolinguistic knowledge and preferential terms is therefore salient to considerations of Deaf people’s confrontation with sign language ideologies.

Notwithstanding the ideologically-laden nature of Vietnamese hearing people’s negative evaluations of Deaf people, applying Kusters’ (2017) analytic framework of “sensorial asymmetries” to *hearing ontologies* enables us to argue the following: in situations where (signing) Deaf people outnumber hearing people, the designation “people with sensorial asymmetries” could apply to such hearing people and their “unequal access to semiotic resources” (Kusters 2017: 18). However, such analyses would not necessarily lead to denigration of hearing persons as such. Therefore, we can observe that normalization and naturalization of hearing/speaking practices (uses of and attitudes towards the body) plays a significant role in the ways that hearing people perceive and

pose, and not conventionalized among the general population of HCMSL users). For example, a presenter might establish a temporary sign for a concept that is typically fingerspelled in a situation where the concept will be mentioned multiple times.

elevate their own biosociolinguistic regimes over those of Deaf people in Việt Nam. Bio/body ideologies are thus constituent elements of ideological devaluation of signed languages.

5 Trajectories of ideological emergence: Education and disability-oriented development

Elsewhere I discuss the emergence of sign language ideologies in Việt Nam as coalescing across three key epochs (Cooper 2014 and 2017): French colonial occupation and anti-colonial resistance, post-American War geopolitical agendas, and Đổi mới era market-socialist development and modernization. Educational planning figured largely in each of these epochs. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, initiation of Đổi mới political and economic reforms spurred the expansion of the development industry in Việt Nam, and education was one of the first domains for which the Vietnamese state sought development assistance. Seeing national development and modernization as a natural outgrowth of educational achievement, the reform agenda promoted mass education in spoken and written Vietnamese as the primary vehicle for potentiating national progress (Phạm, 2007: 282–283). Development dollars also enabled the expansion of education to students with disabilities.

In order to boost national development and modernization, educational leaders have engaged in a series of ongoing educational reforms. One of the earliest reforms involved establishing a national curriculum for all schools throughout the country. They also established a national system of speech-based Deaf education “special schools” so that Deaf students would be prepared to “contribute to society” (*đóng góp cho xã hội*) like other Vietnamese citizens (Cooper 2014). Within a few years, the speech-based approach proved extremely ineffective, yet educational leaders reasoned that Deaf students’ intellectual ineptitude was to blame and not speech-based pedagogy.⁸

⁸ In several publications I examine the ways that national geopolitical agendas, language ideological and body ideologies are tightly coupled within the education sphere, and how these influence everyday interactions in Deaf education settings. For example, examining special school administration and teacher perspectives on Deaf students in five special school settings in the 2008 to 2010 period, I found common reference to student language use as “ngược” (backward), and common reference to *students themselves* as ‘người điếc ngược’ lit. person + deaf + ‘opposite or backwards’ Cooper 2014 and 2017).

In 2010, passage of the Law on Persons with Disability (No. 51/2010/QH12) gave students the right to use “sign language” (ngôn ngữ ký hiệu) in school, thereby officially ending the formal era of state-mandated speech-based Deaf education.⁹ However, whereas special education teacher training does not include formal training in, or proficiency requirements for, signed language based-instruction, teacher interaction with Deaf students remains limited. It is in context of educational language deprivation that Deaf students are believed to possess intellectual deficits, providing an administrative and state-official explanation for educational underachievement, and a rationale for constituting Deaf students as figures of dependency.

Cooper and Nguyễn (2015) describe a number of ways that expert educational and medical discourses explicitly refer to Deaf people in Việt Nam: commonly through the use of euphemisms such as “hearing impaired” (khiếm thính), *khuyết tật về khả năng nghe* (hearing disability), *không âm thanh* (no sound), and *không nói chuyện* (no talking). Such categorical descriptors mark the absence of sensorial or physical features to index perceived deficits in human capacities broadly. They also ignore language and ethnocultural affiliation, and other features of shared experience. Accordingly, the supposed domestic ‘vulnerability’ of the Vietnamese Deaf population mark Deaf people as subjects of development concern (educational, employment, health, poverty), and disability is treated as amenable to national and internationalist solutions—and presumably also progress. Whereas the *bị* marker ladens collocated states-of-being or subject referents (sick, deaf) with negative social meaning, such indexing (stances) ideologically deny the changeability of the circumstances they aim to improve.

In contrast to the above negative referential terms, ethnographic research with southern Vietnamese Deaf research participants identifies a strong preferential use of the term *Điếc* (Deaf) (across all data sets from 2007 to 2017); moreover, *Điếc* is found to indicate use of what research participants described as a “fluent” form of signing (indexed by a strong positive evaluation) which they contrasted with signing in Vietnamese word-order (indexed by a strong negative evaluation). Accordingly, two of the sign language ideological constituent elements that Deaf research participants associated with HCMSL include: i. that HCMSL is comprised of a standard, knowable structure that does not resemble Vietnamese, and ii. that

⁹ The 2010 Disability Law contains only one mention of “sign language,” appearing in Paragraph 4 of article 27 in the section on education of persons with disability: “*người khuyết tật nghe nói được học bằng ngôn ngữ ký hiệu* [persons with hearing and speech disabilities can study using sign language].”

people who identify as ‘người khiếm thính’ (hearing impaired person/people) will not be fluent in HCMSL.

Notwithstanding evidence of Deaf social leaders’ own affirmative sign language ideological production, the data examined in this chapter indicate that Deaf people living in and around Hồ Chí Minh City are strongly disadvantaged with respect to representational power. Official-type reports, academic research, and public interest journalism proliferate ideas about sign languages and deafness; however, presently, there are very few outlets for Deaf people to circulate Vietnamese Deaf biosociolinguistic orders (values) related to Deaf experiences, cultural viewpoints, and languages to the wider public.

6 Conclusion: Vietnamese Deaf self-determination and social being

Deaf and hearing *cultures*, *worlds*, and *epistemologies*, are widely covered in the Deaf Studies literature as, typically, dichotomously conceived; the circumstances of sign language ideological production in Việt Nam demonstrates that both hearing and Deaf people engage in ideological production. However, given the historical and contemporary circumstances of i. Vietnamese language dominance, and related obligatory demonstration of hearing/speaking practices in state institutions (education), and ii. Deaf people’s widespread social marginalization—Vietnamese Deaf people remain, as an aggregate, disadvantaged with respect to circulation of signed language-centered perspectives and practices.

In the context of Vietnamese Deaf people’s educational and socioeconomic marginalization, we can observe the ways that biosociolinguistic regimes privilege spoken Vietnamese and (idealized notions of) hearing/speaking. We can also observe that the delegitimization of HCMSL, and subordination of seeing/signing practices, have significant social consequences — especially for Deaf lives and livelihoods. Circumstances of HCMSL delegitimization prevail despite Việt Nam’s 2012 ascension to low-middle income status, an expanding array of national and international development — including a marked rise in disability-oriented development — and also the emergence of “sign language” affirmative social policies. Whereas Deaf social organizers are poised to take leading roles in national and international development efforts, sign language ideological forces perpetuate substantial barriers to such action.

The importance of Deaf-led social action in training and guiding hearing public service professionals (school principals, teachers, and interpreters) is especially critical given the prominence of biobureaucratic structures that con-

tinue to stratify social relations and opportunities that advantage hearing people as “experts” and disadvantage Deaf people as “recipients” or “beneficiaries” of expert interventions. Were Vietnamese Deaf people’s lives characterized by “epistemological equity” (De Clerck 2011: 1425), then nation-state and expert-type ideological production (about HCMSL and Deaf people) could be regarded as simply one set of opinion among many. This is not the case, however, as public service professionals interact with and implement the policies of government ministries, international nongovernmental organizational agendas, and — in the case of signed-spoken language interpreters — literally shape the messages that government and public service personnel receive from Deaf leaders via their interpretation services.

For more than three decades, national laws and disability-oriented international development have contributed to and complicated Deaf self-determination efforts in Việt Nam. To the extent that national and international guidelines establish nomenclature related to disability and circulate “disability-inclusion” frameworks that exclude or inaccurately characterize Vietnamese sign languages — not only in policy and programming, but in official-type and journalistic reporting — Deaf social organizers can expect to confront sign language ideological regimes far into the future — along with indeterminate effects for social participation, health, and livelihood opportunities. From another perspective, the emergence of government-level attention to Vietnamese sign languages and Deaf education in laws and international conventions gives Deaf social organizers opportunities to innovate new social organizing strategies, including invention of their own sign language ideological materials.

Dedication

This chapter is dedicated to Ted Purves whose fierce commitment to the social promise of embodied ideas and shared art-forms nourished curiosity and love in us all.

References

- Ahearn, Laura. 2001. *Invitation to love: Literacy, love letters, and social change in Nepal*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2012. *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2007. A phenomenology of whiteness. *Feminist Theory* 8: 149–168.
- Beasley, Chris & Bacchi, Carol. 2000. Citizen bodies: Embodying citizens, a feminist analysis. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 2(3): 337–358.

- Blommaert, Jan. 2005. Situating language rights: English and Swahili in Tanzania revisited. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 9(3): 390–417.
- Bùi Thị Lâm. 2010. Phát triển ngôn ngữ cho trẻ khiếm thính trong tổ chức trò chơi ở lớp mẫu giáo hoà nhập [Hearing-impaired children's language development in play-based early inclusive education]. *Ngôn Ngữ & Đời Sống Số* 9(179): 13–16.
- Cooper, Audrey C. 2017. *Deaf to the marrow: Deaf social organizing and active citizenship in Việt Nam*. Washington, DC Gallaudet University Press.
- Cooper, Audrey C. 2015. Signed language sovereignties in Việt Nam: Deaf community responses to ASL-based tourism. In Michele Friedner and Annelies Kusters (eds.), *It's a small world: International deaf spaces and encounters*, 95–111. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Cooper, Audrey C. 2014. Signed languages and sociopolitical formation: The case of Hồ Chí Minh city sign language. *Language in Society* 43(3):311–332.
- Cooper, Audrey C. 2011. *Overcoming the “backward” body: How state institutions, language and embodiment shape deaf education in contemporary southern Việt Nam*. Washington, DC: American University dissertation.
- Cooper, Audrey C. & Nguyễn Trần Thủy Tiên. 2017. Composing with signed and written languages: Our process. *Composition Studies* 45(1): 13–18.
- Cooper, Audrey C. 2015. Signed language community-researcher collaboration in Việt Nam: Challenging language ideologies, creating social change. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 25(2): 105–28.
- De Clerck, Goedele A. M. 2011. Fostering deaf people's empowerment: The Cameroonian deaf community and epistemological equity. *Third World Quarterly* 32(8): 1419–1435.
- Duranti, Alessandro. 1994. *From grammar to politics: Linguistic anthropology in a western Samoan village*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Erickson, Frederick. 2004. *Talk and social theory*. New York: Polity.
- Fairclough, Norman. 2003. *Analyzing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. London: Routledge.
- Fanon, Frantz. 1988. *Black skin, white masks*. London: Pluto Press.
- Ferguson, James. 1994. *The anti-politics machine: Development, depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage.
- Gammeltoft, Tine M. 2014. *Haunting images: A cultural account of selective reproduction in Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- GSO. 2018. *National survey of people with disabilities 2016*. Hà Nội: General Statistics Office.
- GSO. 2006. *Household living standards survey*. Hà Nội: General Statistics Office.
- Harrelson, Erin Moriarty. 2017. Deaf people with “no language”: Mobility and flexible accumulation in languaging practices of deaf people in Cambodia. *Applied Linguistics Review* 10(1): 55–72.
- Harrelson, Erin Moriarty. 2015. Same-same, but different: Tourism and the deaf global circuit in Cambodia. In Michele Friedner and Annelies Kusters (eds.), *It's a small world: International deaf spaces and encounters*, 199–211. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Kohrman, Matthew. 2005. *Bodies of difference: Experiences of disability and institutional advocacy in the making of modern China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Kusters, Annelies, Spotti, Massimiliano, Swanwick, Ruth, & Tapio, Elina. 2017. Gesture-based customer interactions: Deaf and hearing Mumbaikars' multimodal and metrolingual practices. *International Journal of Multilingualism* 14(3): 219–232.
- Kusters, Annelies. 2014. Language ideologies in the signing community of Adamarobe. *Language in Society*, 43: 139–158.
- Mendoza-Denton, Norma. 2008. *Homegirls: language and cultural practice among Latina youth gangs*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.
- NCCD. 2010. *Annual report on the status of people with disabilities*. Hà Nội: National Coordinating Council on Disability.
- Nguyễn Đình-Hoa. 1979. Standardization and purification: A look at language planning in Vietnam. In Nguyễn Dang Liem (ed.), *South-East Asian Linguistic Studies* (Vol. 4), 179–204. Pacific Linguistics: Australian National University.
- Nguyễn Kim Hà. 2001. *Lessons learned from a decade of experience: A strategic analysis of NGO methods and activities in Vietnam 1990–1999*. Hà Nội: VUFO-NGO Resource Centre.
- Nguyễn Quang Kinh. 1994. The eradication of illiteracy (EOI) and universalization of primary education (UPE) in Vietnam. In Phạm Minh Hạc (ed.), *Education in Vietnam 1945–1991*. Hà Nội: Ministry of Education and Training.
- Nguyễn-võ Thu-hương. 2008. *The ironies of freedom: Sex, culture, and neoliberal governance in Vietnam*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Phạm Kim. 1984. Vấn đề phục hồi chức năng cho người điếc [Rehabilitation issues for the Deaf]. Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Y Học [Medical Publishing House].
- Phạm Minh Hạc. 2007. Twenty years of the renewal of education and training: Achievements and challenges. In (anonymous eds.), *Việt Nam: Twenty Years of Renewal*, 277–90. Hà Nội: Xuất Bản Thế Giới [World Publishers].
- Scollon, Ronald & Scollon, Suzanne B.K. 2003. *Discourses in place: Language in the material world*. London: Routledge.
- Simpson, Andrew & Hao Tam Ho. 2008. The comparative syntax of passive structures in Chinese and Vietnamese. In Marjorie K. M. Chan and Hana Kang (eds.), *Proceedings of the 20th North American Conference on Chinese Linguistics (NACCL-20)* (Vol. 2), 825–41. Columbus: Ohio State University.
- Spitulnik (Vidali), Debra. 1998. Mediating unity and diversity: The production of language ideologies in Zambian broadcasting. In Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard, & Paul V. Kroskrity (eds.), *Language ideologies: Practice and theory*, 163–188. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Thùy Linh. 2013. Hệ Thống Dịch Ngôn Ngữ Ký Hiệu [Sign Language Translation System]. *VN Express*: November 4. Last accessed September 1, 2019: <https://vnexpress.net/khoa-hoc/he-thong-dich-ngon-ngu-ky-hieu-2905010.html>
- Tremain, Shelley (ed.). 2015. *Foucault and the government of disability*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Viaggio, Sergio. 2005. *A general theory of interlingual mediation*. Berlin: Frank & Timme.
- Woodward, James C., Nguyễn Thị Hoa, & Nguyễn Thị Thủy Tiên. 2004. Providing higher educational opportunities to deaf adults in Việt Nam through Vietnamese sign languages: 2000–2003. *Deaf Worlds* 20(3): 232–63.
- Woodward, James C. and Nguyễn Thị Hoa. 2012. Where sign language studies has led us in forty years: Opening high school and university education for deaf people in Viet Nam through sign language analysis, teaching, and interpretation. *Sign Language Studies* 13(1): 19–36.

John Bosco Conama

35 years and counting! An ethnographic analysis of sign language ideologies within the Irish Sign Language recognition campaign

1 Introduction

This chapter examines the sign language ideologies behind the campaign for recognition of Irish Sign Language (ISL) in Ireland between 1981 and 2016, with occasional references to events prior to 1981. This had been a campaign under the direction of a Deaf¹-led organization, the Irish Deaf Society.

While state recognition of ISL currently was given through the Irish Sign Language Act 2017², there have been many stages of lobbying/discussion within the campaign towards achievement of ISL recognition. For example, during the 1980s there were debates over gendered variants within ISL, and whether they should be refined into a standardized list of ISL vocabulary. In the early 1990s, efforts initially focused on an insistence that ISL was an authentic language, with an initial public awareness campaign being carried out not only amongst society at large, but also within the Irish Deaf community. Over the years, lobbying has evolved into the current campaign — focusing on persuading the Irish parliament to enact a parliamentary Bill to formally recognize ISL, thus granting ISL users various linguistic rights. Meanwhile, the campaign has also pursued several strands: the insistence that Deaf children have a right to be educated in ISL and drawing on international conventions to highlight shortcomings on the part of the Irish government. However, for the sake of brevity, these latter strands are not mentioned here.

1 While I accept and agree that the definition of d/Deaf are anthropologically and politically contested, I prefer to follow the resolution by Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf (CCSD) with the aim to “*indicate that ASL and Deaf culture are the birthright of every Deaf individual by virtue of their having been born Deaf or become Deaf in childhood, whether or not they have been exposed to it*” and not to use this term to identify or adjudge individuals based on their audiological or educational backgrounds. (<https://www.deafculturecentre.ca/Public/Default.aspx?I=299&n=The+Lower+Case+%22d%22+or+Upper+Case+%22D%22> (accessed August 2017))

2 For the full version one can access this link: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2016/78/>

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510090-014>

I have been heavily immersed in this campaign for twenty years. Given this, a critical auto-ethnographical approach is adopted for this chapter, and thus it is important that my positionality be outlined here (see Madison 2005). My first language is ISL, although I was born into a hearing family, who were advised by educational and medical professionals to avoid usage of ISL at all times (Conama 2010). Additionally, I received my formal education within a very specific gendered, religious, historical and political climate. For more than 20 years prior to this chapter's publication, I was, and still am, actively involved in the campaign for ISL recognition. I have experienced and observed social and linguistic injustices meted out to many Deaf users of ISL. Given this position, I adopt the third role of Fine's typology of qualitative research – the activism stance (Fine 1992: 221-225). This chapter is largely based on documentary evidence and a number of sources from personal communication.

2 Application of Kroskrity's language ideologies and organization

In sum, language ideologies are beliefs, or feelings, about languages as used in their social worlds (Kroskrity 2004: 498)

Kroskrity's model of language ideologies, and their levels of organization, is fitting for our purposes. He suggests there are five levels of organization of language ideologies, and cautions that these levels have "*partially overlapping but analytically distinguishable layers of significance*" (ibid 501). Firstly, a specific social or cultural group can influence one language ideology to benefit, legitimate and distinguish their political, social and economic interests from other interests. Hence its members often perceive their position as one of being the authority on language ideologies. The second level is the existence of a multiplicity of language ideologies within a single group. These divergent views on language ideologies can allow for a situation where one ideology profits relative to the others, with this now dominant perspective within a group able to standardize or champion their ideology over others.

In relation to the existence of multiplicity of views on language, a third level has members of a group displaying varying levels of awareness of how language ideologies are shaped. Within a language using group, some users have sophisticated abilities in articulating, verbally and/or in print, how their specific ideologies came to be, in a social, cultural, political, economic and historical context;

other users may be conditioned by their own doctrines. Kroskrity urges us to be aware of this situation when researching the effects of language ideologies.

The fourth level relates to how members mediate their ideologies and ‘form of talk’. Kroskrity uses the analysis of Irvine and Gal (cited in *ibid* 507–508) to identify three issues within language ideologies: *iconization*, *erasure* and *fractural recursivity*. Iconization refers to the users’ own perspectives on the attribution and connection between language usage and particular social groups. Erasure is akin to sanitising any difference in using a language. Fractural recursivity refers to ‘*othering*’ any sub-group within a group. For example, in Dublin, people with accents associated with the northside of Dublin (iconization) are often the subjects of jokes concerning criminality and class antagonism (fractural recursivity)³. Not many of their slang terms are tolerated or celebrated outside northside Dublin (erasure).

The fifth and final level centers on the role of language ideology in identity-formation processes among many groups. This refers to any group basing their identity centrally on their use of language and using it to set boundaries to distinguish themselves from outsiders.

Kroskrity suggests that language ideologies can be examined through a number of different interests within a group, awareness of how ideologies are being shaped and influenced and, amongst language users, identity formation. Kroskrity thus provides a convenient typology that can be applied in a study of the ISL recognition campaign, and how it can be examined in terms of language ideologies, as expressed by a number of groups within the campaign.

3 Timeline of ISL recognition campaign

While it is hard to pinpoint a specific timeframe within which to describe the ISL recognition campaign, the establishment of the Irish Deaf Society (IDS)⁴ in 1981 is an ideal starting point. In 1985, the IDS were eventually accepted as an

³ See these examples in this link: <http://www.dublinscape.com/dublin-northsiders-vs-dublin-southsiders.html>.

⁴ There was no Deaf-led Irish national political organization before the establishment of the Irish Deaf Society; before independence from Britain in 1922, the country was deemed to be represented by the British Deaf and Dumb Association. The reasons for the absence of such a body between 1922 and 1981 remain largely unknown, although Conama (2002) speculates on a number of factors behind this absence, including the influence of anti-intellectualism and powerful clerical control in Irish society.

Ordinary Member (OM), with voting powers, of both the European Union of the Deaf and the World Federation of the Deaf (Irish Deaf Society 2006). While the Society prioritized the use of sign language from the beginning, state recognition of ISL was not an initial goal (Irish Deaf Society 2006). For the sake of brevity and convenience, this section will be dividing the campaign timeline into the following periods: a) 1980-1990s, b) 2000s and c) 2010s. While this periodization is imperfect in terms of how discrete these phases actually were, it does capture key moments and how they have impacted on language ideologies.

Before outlining the background to the ISL recognition campaign, it is important to deal with the effects of Deaf education. The educational ideologies that have historically dominated this field have left a massive legacy and impacted upon ISL, not only leaving it with heavily gendered variation, but also shaping societal and, more specifically, the Deaf community's attitudes towards ISL, both negative and positive.

It is generally accepted that the significant educational provisions for Deaf children in Ireland were established in 1816 with the Claremont Institution in Dublin (Pollard 2006) though there is strong evidence that educational provisions were available prior to Claremont, albeit on an individualized or private tutoring basis. However, the position of Claremont⁵ as the national center for Deaf education in the 19th century was gradually undermined by several factors including accusations by Catholic organizations of proselyting acts⁶. These acts led to the establishment of separate Catholic schools in Cabra in Dublin in the 1840s and 1850s. In addition, the establishment of a large school in Belfast in 1836 took in many children in its vicinity, children who would otherwise have gone to Claremont (Matthews 1996; Pollard 2006).

The implementation of oralism in Catholic schools in the 1940s and the 1950s complicated the situation further. For example, within these gendered schools, there were systems of internal, strictly enforced segregation created on the basis of pupils' ability to hear (Grehan 2004; Leeson and Saeed 2012). These systems were implemented in order to safeguard the oralist philosophy (Crean 1997; Grehan 2004). They created an internalized belief among generations of Deaf children that the ability to hear and speak well was the apex of their education;

⁵ Claremont (founded in 1816) was often seen as the school championing the Protestant ethos although it was neither owned nor managed by the churches until it came under the management of the Church of Ireland (Anglican) in 1869 (Pollard 2006).

⁶ There was no record of actual proselytizing actions in Deaf education but accusations of proselyting acts were rampant in 19th century Ireland (Coolohan 1981, 9).

and failure to reach this achievement was seen as an unfortunate and negative stigma on individuals (Conama 2010).

3.1 1980s/1990s

A significant move was made in 1988 after a training workshop in Cork delivered by Clark Denmark, an academic from Durham University⁷ that many IDS directors attended (Irish Deaf Society 2006). According to Lynch (1988), Denmark's workshop was a revelation to her and many others. Two attendees, Teresa Lynch and Helena Saunders, took the step of naming the Irish Deaf community's "natural sign language", at an IDS congress in 1988; the initiative was taken to name it Irish Sign Language (ISL)⁸ (Lynch: personal communication 2017). However, this initiative was not universally accepted. The slow and gradual acceptance will be explained later in the chapter⁹. After the 1988 congress, ISL became a contentious issue for the Deaf community and educators of Deaf people.

Nevertheless, a trend towards acceptance of ISL as a language in its own right gained gradual momentum from the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. It was not without tension. For example, an argument broke out over the appropriate sign for *abortion* (see Figure 1 for the liberal sign and Figure 2 for the conservative sign) on a national television news program during the bitter constitutional referendum on abortion¹⁰ (Burns, Matthews and Nolan 1998; Irish Times 1992). The argument had its parallels with the battle between conservative and liberal views on abortion. The argument centered on the appropriateness of signing, with one sign signifying 'a stab in the stomach' as if it were a murderous gesture, while

⁷ Durham University in the UK set up the Deaf Studies Research Unit back in the 1980s.

⁸ It has been suggested that the first serious linguistic research into ISL was carried in 1991, though there are a number of dissertations on ISL dating back to 1975 (for example: O'Murchu 1975 and Maguire 1982)

⁹ However, the term "ISL" did not originate with this congress, with many sources pointing to ISL already having been named as such before 1988. The term was first traced back to 1972 and was used at sporadic events where "Irish Sign Language" was referred to since then. This finding is based on the Google ngram facility, which is not fully authenticated, but at least it provides an insight. For example, Terrence O'Rourke made references to "Irish Sign Language" in his publication in 1972 (O'Rourke 1972).

¹⁰ In 1992 the government decided to hold a referendum on abortion to clarify the constitutional clauses in relation to the lives of mothers. Both sides bitterly and emotionally contested the referendum.

another sign signified ‘removal’ with a fist on the stomach followed by a forward movement as if to indicate disposal.



Figure 1. Liberal Sign.



Figure 2. Conservative Sign.

3.2 2000s

Since then, momentum has gained slowly in the 21st century. The first decade of this century has witnessed the establishment of the Centre for Deaf Studies in Trinity College, University of Dublin, state funding being made available for translation into ISL for several public information campaigns, and frequent appearances of interpreters at public places (Leeson and Lynch 2009).

While confidence was building regarding the status of ISL, the Irish Deaf Society still decided to seek official recognition in order that ISL could be prop-

erly supported. A formal submission to have ISL recognized in the Irish Constitution was sent to then Taoiseach¹¹, Bertie Ahern, in 2003, but recognition was not forthcoming. The effects of historical educational policies on Irish Sign Language are clearly reflected in Ahern's response to the Irish parliament, Dáil Éireann:

While I know Irish sign language is a vital part of communication and is used by probably a larger number than we imagine, I am not sure a constitutional provision would need to be made for it.... If I remember rightly from a visit to the Irish Deaf Society, *several different forms of sign language are used* (Dáil Debates, 11 February 2003). [my emphasis]

While it is not immediately clear what is meant by “several different forms”, an informed speculation may be that this refers to gendered ISL variations, or differences between manually coded language and natural sign language. Regardless of the exact meaning, the Taoiseach, a non-ISL user, chose to such a statement at the same time as he chose to deny ISL recognition, seeming to fall with the first level of language ideology as outlined by Kroskrity, with a specific social group using one language ideology to benefit, legitimate and distinguish their political, social and economic interests from the interests of ISL users. The response did not generate further interest among Deaf people; there was disappointment at the response, with the hopes for ISL recognition becoming somewhat subdued, and a feeling that the attempt had been a waste of time.

A significant development came when the IDS gained a legal right to nominate candidates to contest the Senate elections. In 2007, Mark Daly¹² became the first candidate to win a seat in the Irish Senate (Seanad Éireann)¹³ with the help of an IDS nomination. As result of his involvement in the Senate, the IDS through Senator Daly were able to table a Bill in 2009 to recognize ISL. This first attempt was not successful, and therefore the following year the IDS decided to set up a cross-community group, to which national Deaf organizations¹⁴ were asked to

11 Irish word for ‘the Chief’ – equivalent of Prime Minister.

12 Senator Mark Daly is a member of the Irish nationalist and centrist political party known as Fianna Fáil. He had no prior relations with the Deaf community, and was one of many candidates who came to the IDS seeking Seanad nominations. The IDS were satisfied that he would indeed work towards ISL recognition.

13 The Seanad Éireann (or Senate) is the upper chamber in the bicameral Irish parliamentary system.

14 This group includes National Deaf Women of Ireland, the Irish Deaf Youth Association, Deaf Sports Ireland, the Council of Irish Sign Language Interpreters, two interpreting agencies: Bridge Interpreting, Sign Language Interpreting Service, and service providers DeafHear and the Catholic Institute for Deaf People.

send representatives. The group has met on several occasions. In order to assist the group, legal advice was sought; and on foot of this advice, it became clear to the cross-community group that a political campaign, rather than pursuit of legal redress, was absolutely necessary. The legal advice centered on current legislation and they would not provide sufficient grounds for legal redress.

3.3 Recent and current situation

In 2011, there were two significant developments for the campaign: the national Irish Census and a general election. The national Census contained a question about language usage at home, other than use of the two official state languages, Irish and English. The IDS decided to ask its members and non-members alike, to put down ‘Irish Sign Language’ for this particular Census question. However, the outcome was unexpected. The number of people counted in the census who mentioned using ISL was put at just 3,502 — with a slight majority of users who were in fact *not* deaf or “*having a serious hearing impairment*” (Census 2013). The reaction by the Deaf community to this was a general kind of disappointment. A number of reasons were put forward for this low figure, such as the ambiguity of the Census question wording, or respondents’ belief that the question was irrelevant. There was a consensus among the ISL campaign group that the numbers using ISL were severely underreported in the Census (Conama 2016a; Deaf-Hear 2016). Incidentally, the most recent Census (Central Statistics Office 2017) reported a total of 4,944 ISL users, increasing by 30% from the last Census and demonstrating clearly that the reliability of this kind of data can be questionable.

In the same year, 2011, a general election was called, and all political parties were lobbied by the IDS for their views on the recognition of ISL. Only two out of the seven main Irish political parties referred to recognition of ISL in their manifestos (Conama 2016b). The cross-community group began a campaign which involved a number of measures, including the aim of raising the level of the Deaf community’s consciousness about the importance of ISL being recognized (Irish Deaf Society 2012).

This plan of action has witnessed many positive developments, such as expanding the scope of the annual ISL Awareness Week, establishing social media outlets to inform the public of the campaign, and an extension of the campaign to focus on local government authorities (county / city / town councils). The latter aspect has had an enormous effect on local Deaf communities due to two factors. Firstly, the involvement, mostly of Deaf people, in attending meetings of local authorities discussing motions calling on central government to recognize ISL; for these Deaf attendees, it was a unique experience because

they recognized some faces at these council meetings and this was the first time they were linking in to local political networks and realized that how they were disfranchised at a local level. Secondly, these meeting were usually reported in the local media, resulting in the ISL campaign gaining a lot of coverage and momentum on this front.

As a result, there was a consultative meeting called by Minister Kathleen Lynch in November 2013. The Minister invited the senior civil servants in relevant government departments, such as health, education and justice. In light of the ever-growing profile of ISL recognition campaign, the government side asked the meeting attendees to name the five most pressing priorities in relation to ISL recognition. The five priorities were a) a congregated settings and residential homes for elderly and vulnerable people policy – changes in this policy militated against Deaf residents who wanted to stay together for linguistic and cultural reasons; b) government information translated into ISL and staff given awareness training; c) an Interpreting Hours Voucher Allocation System, including Access to Work¹⁵ (i.e. costs of interpreting to be met by the exchequer, in order to reduce the costs to businesses of employing Deaf people and improving Deaf employee retention); d) quality monitoring and accreditation of sign language interpreters; e) Irish Sign Language access for Deaf children in school. At this meeting, the government still insisted that these priorities could be worked on within the National Disability Inclusion Strategy¹⁶ (Department of Justice and Equality 2014). However, to date, none of these priority areas have been granted or implemented.

In January 2014, there was a two-hour debate in Seanad Éireann on the ISL Bill; the government, by a margin of three votes, rejected it. The government minister, Kathleen Lynch justified this rejection by stating:

...We do not want to see scarce resources, particularly at this time of extremely scarce resources, used without the service being put in place. We need to put the service in place before we put the legislation in place. That is what we have done in other areas and that is what we would like to do in this regard. (Seanad Éireann Debate, 22nd January 2014 – Houses of the Oireachtas 2014).

15 Access to Work is UK based scheme, fully financed by the state, where employees with a disability can avail of financial resources to ensure as full integration at work as possible (more information: see this link: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview>).

16 This Strategy is a non-legislative governmental approach to address disability-related issues in society with a principal aim of improving the quality of life for people with disabilities (see: <http://www.justice.ie/en/jelt/pages/pb13000321>).

Whether this was a feasible approach or not, this episode left a huge impact on the Deaf community, who felt very let down by this rejection. The media reported on this negative impact:

...the rejection of the ISL Bill by the Seanad in January 2014 left a negative impact on many deaf people and a feeling that “their State doesn’t attach the importance to their language, moreover their right to express it” (McCormack 2015).

However, an unexpected benefit came from this rejection. This negative feeling sparked more interest in the campaign among the Deaf community, with most Deaf people mentioning how personal the rejection was for them¹⁷. This was compounded by another incident around the same time: Deaforward, the popular Deaf advocacy service, became a victim of austerity policies adopted by the government. The IDS mobilized support from all groups within the Deaf community to reverse the cuts, in what was a productive campaign (thejournal.ie 2014). Such a successful mobilization and the eventual reversal of the cutbacks inspired further confidence in the ISL campaign, reflected in increasing participation of different groups within the ISL Awareness Week programs in subsequent years.

4 Discussion of issues raised here through the lens of Kroskrity’s framework

While recognizing that Kroskrity’s five levels of language ideologies may overlap, this section attempts to identify each level with particular events. While a dominant ideology hasn’t taken hold amongst Deaf people, the state has managed to maintain their dominant control of the description of the language. Regardless of the exact meaning, the Taoiseach, a non-ISL user, chose to such a statement at the same time as he chose to deny ISL recognition, seeming to fall with the first level of language ideology as outlined by Kroskrity, with a specific social group using one language ideology to benefit, legitimate and distinguish their political, social and economic interests from the interests of ISL users people. While a dominant ideology has not taken hold amongst Deaf people, the state have managed to maintain their dominant control of the description of the language there has been no overarching dominant group within the community to

¹⁷ The reaction can be gauged by the comments to the Facebook page of the ISL recognition campaign.

impose their version of language ideology, though there were a few attempts by certain groups. Certain attitudes towards gender variations and the question of standardizing ISL were examples, but these never gained enough of a foothold where these attitudes could impose beliefs on the rest of the community. Furthermore, there was, and still is, a strong societal belief that ISL is just a compensatory tool rather than a language with its own right (Rose and Conama 2017). For example, dealing with politicians and senior civil servants during the campaign reveals that their understanding of ISL is wide of the mark of the campaign's own definition of ISL. Queries relating to the existence of universal sign language and technological advances, such as the expansion of video relay services, in order to reduce the anticipated costs of interpreters have been oft mooted. Referring back to the response of the then Taoiseach, the then Minister's rejection of the ISL Bill in 2014, it could be possibly regarded as progression from one level to another.

With regard to the second level of Kroskrity's framework, there were attempts to standardize ISL by the committee as will be further described below. Circumstances such as the introduction of oralism to Catholic schools, the belief in perpetuating a manually coded form of English and the increasing concern over the quality of literacy among younger Deaf people created a context that supported a call for standardizing ISL. This was an intense concern among Deaf community leaders during the 1980s but the support waned as time went on. Those who had been exposed to the effects of oralism were gradually replacing the leadership.

Since this paper relies on documentary evidence and personal communications, it is important to point out that with regard to Kroskrity's third level focusing on the levels of awareness, the Deaf community did not have the benefit of accessing international academic studies into linguistics and their understanding was informed by their own experiences and conditioned by their societal context. Back in the 1980s, the community leadership's concern over a reduction in the use and popularity of signed English were genuine, as they believed such a disregard could worsen the literacy among younger Deaf people. They had actually seen the 'disregard' for proper grammatical rules in English, especially the use of 'informal sign language' (as described in LeMaster and Foran 1996).

The committee set up to standardize ISL (as will be further described below) during the early 1980s and their attempts to mediate their language ideologies and 'form of talk', as described in the fourth level by Kroskrity, can be exemplified by their disproportionate preference for 'male' signs over 'female' sign and their insistence that signed English should be a standard language. However, over time, both issues became gradually insignificant and irrelevant. Especially, in the next (fifth) level, where the growing prevalence of Deaf children in main-

stream education with a much reduced access to Deaf signing adults, as well as the increased number of children being cochlear implanted, means that boundaries are no longer as clear cut and visible.

5 Impacts of sign language ideologies from diverse groups on ISL recognition

Given the Irish Deaf community's heterogeneity, possessing boundaries that are in many ways highly fluid, various language ideologies have come to bear on the question of how ISL recognition can be obtained. Factors such as gender and age-related beliefs of different groups, and historical influences are the main issues at play, which I expand on below.

Having summarized the timeline of the ISL recognition campaign, peppered with several notable events along the way, the following is an attempt to categorize the impacts of such factors listed above on language ideologies, and their influences on the campaign for ISL recognition for the benefit of understanding. While we are clear about the purpose of such categorization, we should nonetheless retain a realistic understanding that the world we live in is kaleidoscopic, and such category boundaries are highly fluid.

5.1 Gender and its consequences

Ireland has a long tradition of gendered approaches to social issues due to many factors, including the Catholic Church's dominance within educational and social services (Inglis 1998). Because of this, it was inevitable for Deaf Catholic children to be schooled in this way. Consequentially, gendered variations of ISL exist due to decades of gender segregation in the separate and influential Catholic schools for Deaf children.¹⁸

There are a number of explanations for the existence of gendered variations in ISL. Leeson and Grehan (2004) report that the original signs developed by

18 Since the 1850s, Catholic educational provision has been based on gender divisions, with Catholicism the dominant religion in Ireland (except the north-eastern part of Ireland). Hence the Catholic Church owned most schools and its influence on society's social norms was inevitably dominant.

St. Mary's School¹⁹ for Deaf Girls were regarded by Christian Brothers as too effeminate for boys. Therefore the Christian Brothers developed separate signs, which were judged to be masculine enough for their male pupils (Crean 1997). LeMaster (1997) adopts a different view, and suggests a number of other explanations; while the schools were geographically close by, nonetheless they operated as independent entities with very little interaction between them, resulting in distinctive signed vocabularies. She even reported that it was the nuns who actually "feminized" the signs for the girls, and not the other way around (ibid 67). This observation was not accompanied with explanations as to why such an attitude occurred.

Complications arose from the schools, especially after the implementation of oralism in the Catholic schools, with the emergence of 'different' and 'incomprehensible' sets of signs, leading to calls to standardize ISL to ensure that it was comprehensible for everyone (LeMaster and Foran 1986). LeMaster and Foran (1986) reported that there was a committee²⁰ established with the aim of identifying and selecting which gendered sign would suit each English word. They reported that it was mostly 'male' gendered signs that were chosen over female signs, but did not explain why the disproportionate number of male signs were chosen. They also reported that the committee ended up inventing signs if there were no already existing signs for a particular English word.

Stanislaus Foran, a prominent member of the Irish Deaf community insisted that ISL was a sign system based on English grammatical rules (LeMaster and Foran 1986). Foran was behind a drive to standardize ISL in the 1980s and 1990s (Irish Deaf Society 2010). Foran and LeMaster claimed there were three distinct types of Irish sign languages: the new, the old and the informal. They suggested that most Deaf people and hearing educators acknowledged the first two as legitimate because they were based on the grammatical system of English, while the informal was known as "Deaf Sign Language", only used by Deaf people in informal settings (LeMaster and Foran 1986: 83). The 'old' and 'informal' types had gender-specific vocabularies, and it was claimed that their users would struggle to understand each other. Additionally, the arrival of oralism in Catholic schools in the 1940s led to the banishment of 'old' signs from these schools (ibid). The

19 As St. Mary's was being established, two nuns and two girls were sent to Caen, in northern France where they learned signs and pedagogy and they imported these signs. However, over time, these signs were altered from French ones – possibly due to English vocabulary. The Christian Brothers were given a responsibility of setting up a separate boy's school and came to view the signs from St Mary's as too feminine, hence seeking American advice. This is speculation that many commentators are inclined to agree with. Crean (1997) mentioned the American dimension.

20 This committee was formed on basis of invitation only and consisted of both Deaf and hearing users of ISL.

‘new’ type was organized by the ‘Unified Sign Language Committee’ which had four specific objectives for standardizing ISL: a) produce a dictionary, b) invent new signs where possible if there was no apparent sign for each grammatical unit of English, c) create gender-neutral vocabulary (even most signs identified for inclusion in the dictionary were ‘male’), d) a need to record grammatical signing in written English – this need was based on concern among ‘deaf people’ that some people were ‘forgetting’ English grammar rules in their signing (LeMaster and Foran 1986: 83-84)

There are plenty of reasons as to why ISL should be derived from, or should be grammatically influenced by the English language²¹. The origins of this can be traced back to the 1700s, where the first public school for Deaf children was opened in Paris. Its founders were led to conclude by their own observations – mistakenly – that the local Parisian sign language had no grammatical structure, and thus they felt they had to impose French grammatical rules upon it. This belief found its way to Ireland (Foran 1994)²². Subsequently, this myth of sign languages being ungrammatical in nature has continued into the 20th century (Fischer 2015). The Catholic Deaf schools established in Cabra in Dublin, in the middle of the 19th century, soon became dominant in shaping signs, because of their strength in numbers²³, creating the belief that ISL emerged from the establishment of the Catholic schools. Despite findings to the contrary in linguistic research by many academics, this belief persists in the literature, as well as among Deaf people. By the 1940s, these Catholic schools switched their educational policies to embrace oralism which required the removal of signing from the schools and applied harsh measures to those who were ‘caught’ using ISL.

O’Connell (2013, 2014 with Deegan) suggests that oppression and stigmatization of ISL possessed hallmarks of internal colonialism by Catholic-led teaching

21 English is widely spoken in this country though Irish (Gaeilge) is also spoken, albeit with a lesser frequency. Both are constitutionally recognized though Irish is regarded as the first language in terms of legal meaning and translation. English became a majority language during the 19th century and remains so due to its’ economic, social and political factors (John 1983, 117). Irish was, and still is, regarded as not ideal for Deaf children to study and there are official channels where parents or schools can apply for an exemption so that Deaf children can learn other subjects while the rest of the class studies Irish (Leeson 2005, Department of Education Circular 12/96 1996).

22 Please see footnote no. 18 above. Additionally, St. Mary’s brought a copy of instructions on how to teach Deaf children back from France and they procured Fr. Burke, fluent in French, to translate the book into English. In this manual, there were instructions to teach signs on basis of spoken language’s grammatical rules (Foran 1994)

23 Over decades, the Cabra schools had thousands of pupils on their roll books while other schools struggled to reach those numbers, hence their “strength in numbers”.

tradition, leaving its users feeling inferior and believing English to be the superior language. This suggestion is corroborated by studies into gendered variations of ISL (e.g. Leeson and Grehan 2004) and linguistic imperialism (Rose and Conama 2017). Saunders and McDonnell (1993) reported strategies utilized by Deaf school authorities beyond the confines of the schools in curbing the use of ISL by Deaf people in the workplace; Deaf school leavers were given placements in employment²⁴ leading to permanent positions, but their employers were advised to keep Deaf employees separated wherever possible, and forbidding signing or teaching colleagues how to sign (*ibid*). Given such an atmosphere, it is no surprise why a belief among Deaf people evolved that English was the superior language.

5.2 Age-related beliefs

LeMaster (2003) makes a good point in relation to the period before the implementation of oralism in the Catholic-run schools²⁵. She noted from her research in the 1980s on older Deaf signers that respondents remembered their school days as being fully accessible, as hearing people working in these schools were duty-bound to sign at all times²⁶. In such an environment, the concept of disability was quietly de-emphasized because older Deaf people grew up in more accessible environments and were less inclined to be activists. Therefore, older people educated at this time did not adopt an active involvement in ISL recognition, or seek major civil rights outside education. In fairness to this generation, letters have been found in newspaper and school archives expressing concerns about the shortcomings of the oralist system but nothing resembling a campaign (Irish Deaf Heritage Archives). Having stated that, there was some civil and political activism on their part, but not on issues directly related to ISL recognition. For instance, there was a street protest in Dublin, in 1971, against the killing of a Deaf man by British troops in Northern Ireland (Sunday Independent 1971) and also a campaign seeking to have the television license fee for Deaf people reduced on the grounds of inaccessibility (Sunday Independent 1977).

24 Information of how such placements were arranged are sketchy at best. However, the schools were actively involved in placements, an objective of which was that these people were strictly forbidden from signing (Wendy Murray Snr, personal communication 2017).

25 Protestant-run schools in Ireland implemented oralism as early as 1882 (Leeson and Grehan 2004:69).

26 LeMaster did not specify which code or language those hearing staff members were obliged to use.

Additionally, documentary evidence exists that older Deaf people were highly employable and highly regarded by society in terms of their specific employment skills. In one case, three Deaf men in the 1940s were regarded as the ‘elite’ in the harness-making industry (Bunbury n/d). Despite their experiences of accessing a limited curriculum chiefly emphasizing trades such as shoemaking, tailoring and harness-making during their schooldays, they were able to set up businesses independently and raised families.

After the implementation of oralism in the late 1940s²⁷, this generation of Deaf people were preoccupied by a perception that younger Deaf people did not acquire the ‘correct’ version of ISL; therefore, Deaf activists like Stan Foran took a keen interest in standardizing ISL. Apart from the odd letter to newspapers and schools magazines as mentioned above, they did not problematize the presence of oralist philosophy in their language outlook. The presence of oralism in the schools removed access for Deaf children to signing adult role models, and a hybrid version of ISL emerged, featuring for example, frequent use of mouth-patterns complementing signs among younger people (Mohr 2014)²⁸. As for the ISL recognition campaign, it is noticeable that the campaign is led by Deaf people who have experienced the impact of oralism in their formative educational years (LeMaster 2003).

5.3 Professionals working with the Deaf community

It must be recognized that those working within the Deaf community as professionals, but regarded as outsiders by the Deaf community, constitutes a diverse group. It is beyond this chapter to analyze this group in-depth, but the subject deserves brief commentary. As we know from recent work on Irish Deaf history, professionals (mostly the laity) in this country have been trained — perhaps indoctrinated — to devalue ISL from the outset (Crean 1997, Conama 2010) which has left a massive legacy of ISL being unappreciated and unvalued within the Deaf community. Apart from oralism in education, government publications have reported the abuse which occurred within institutions financially supported by

²⁷ It has to be emphasized that oralism had a presence in the Irish schools since the 19th century, but was largely confined to smaller, non-Catholic schools for Deaf children. The presence of oralism also did not remove access to ISL completely.

²⁸ For example, the word ‘September’ was often fingerspelled in full, or partially as S.E.P.T., but after the influence of oralism, ‘September’ was signed using an ‘S’ handshape with a mouth pattern signifying ‘September’.

the state (Ryan 2009). In these reports, there are dedicated chapters on residential schools for Deaf children; the investigators identified lapses in ‘communication access’ as key in the failure to stop abuse against Deaf children. Terms such as ‘ISL’ were not used in these reports, even though from anecdotal evidence, we know that survivors raised this topic, and specifically named ISL in their dealings with the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse and the Residential Institutions Redress Board²⁹ (RIRB). Interestingly, the Commission recognized the inability of many of the professionals to identify and stop abuse on grounds of communication (Ryan 2009); put simply the professionals did not understand the ISL the children were using to tell of their abuse.

Since the advent of university-accredited courses in interpreting and other fields relevant to the Deaf community in the 1990s, there are a growing number of such professionals, and these professionals look to ISL recognition with hopes that the Bill would steady their employment prospects. Given the precarious circumstances³⁰, most interpreters are unable to find avenues to steady their career and enable them to achieve a reasonable quality of life (Leonard 2016). As a result, their representative organization, the Council of Irish Sign Language Interpreters has been very supportive of the ISL recognition campaign³¹.

It has been known for many years that interpreters coming out of university to work in the Deaf community have to learn to cope with different styles of ISL used by various diverse groups within the Deaf community (Leeson and Lynch 2009). For example, certain groups, especially those who were heavily exposed to oralism, retain a habit of signing and using their voice simultaneously; other groups who left the schools before the advent of oralism retain a fondness for manually coded language: signed English. Leeson and Lynch (2009) state that due to the increased frequency of ISL users attending courses in higher education in various domains ‘new’ to ISL, it is inevitable that jargon used within these fields would lead to the development of new signs. It is known anecdotally that certain groups, especially older members within the community resent these new signs, and do not want previously unknown vocabulary spilling into the wider Deaf community. In this context, these new signs are seen as intruding into ISL.

29 The Board was set up in 2002 (see more information: <http://www.rirb.ie>)

30 The nature of work is highly seasonal with very limited access to government benefits (Leonard 2016)

31 To be fair, this is not the only reason that CISLI supports the campaign, as it seeks a say in the three following points: stronger representation in a registration body, having a say in any assessment of interpreters, and wanting to influence how interpreting tasks are organized and financed (more information – see <https://cisli.ie/2017/01/>).

This illustrates a lack of awareness that languages evolve over time, depending on contexts and circumstances, as Kroskrity points out.

6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined two main sections: a summarized timeline of the ISL campaign, and the impact of language ideologies on ISL recognition. We can see clear patterns of change on a decade by decade basis. In the early days of the campaign, focus was firmly on demonstrating the authenticity of ISL, with a spectrum of views expressed. These ranged from those who saw ISL as a natural human language, to those who considered it a sign system based on English grammatical rules. Subsequent decades saw the debate regarding linguistic status play out and involve more diverse groups, such as newly trained ISL/English interpreters. The general conclusion is that the Irish government's rejection of the 2014 ISL Bill actually garnered more support and active involvement from the Deaf community for the Bill. de Meulder (2015) and Murray (2015) discuss the possibility that unrealistic expectations are held with regard to the delivery of these additional resources on the back of recognition. We will have to wait and see what happens in the Irish context with regard to this, especially in light of Minister Lynch's statement in the Seanad that the Government did not wish to see recognition without services, yet over 3 years after this statement, none of the five key priorities of the community have been delivered upon.

Applying Krostrity's five levels of language ideologies organisation proves useful and each of these are easily identifiable in the data we considered here. We saw that multiple language ideologies are held and apart from the state's own narration on signed languages, there is an one dominant ideology in place within the Deaf community: the Cabra male variety of ISL. However, just because this ideology dominates now is no indicator of future persistence. We note that there are strong correlations between language ideologies and an individual's cultural beliefs, identity-formation and economic necessities. Thus, language ideologies are an ever changing dynamic, and it will be interesting to see how these ideologies will impact on the understanding of all key players of the long sought-after state recognition of Irish Sign Language.

References

- Balkany, T., Hodges, A.V. and Goodman, K.W. 1996. Ethics of cochlear implantation in young children. *Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery*, 114(6), pp.748–755.
- Blunden, Andy. 2017. *Honneth’s ‘Struggle for Recognition’ by Andy Blunden*. [online] Available at: <http://home.mira.net/~andy/works/honneth.htm> (accessed 8 May 2017).
- Bunbury, Turtle. n.d.. *Turtle Bunbury — Award-winning travel writer, historian and author based in Ireland*. [online] [Turtlebunbury.com](http://www.turtlebunbury.com/). Available at: http://www.turtlebunbury.com/interviews/interviews_ireland/vanishing_3/interviews_ireland_jj_hackett.html [Accessed 11 May 2017].
- Burns, Sarah, Patrick Matthews, and Evelyn Nolan-Conroy. 2001. Language attitudes. *The sociolinguistics of sign languages*. In Cecil Lucas, ed., 2001. The sociolinguistics of sign languages. 181–216. Cambridge University Press.
- Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf. 2017. [online] Available at: <https://www.deafculturecentre.ca/Public/Default.aspx?l=299&n=The+Lower+Case+%22D%22+or+Upper+Case+%22D%22> [accessed 5 Sep. 2017].
- Census 2011 Profile 8 Our Bill of Health — Health, Disability and Carers in Ireland. 2013. Dublin: Central Statistics Office.
- Conama, John Bosco. 2002. *“Tourists in their own land” — a social policy analysis of the Irish deaf community’s participation in society*. Trinity College, University of Dublin M.Litt thesis.
- Conama, John Bosco. 2016a. Census 2016. [Vlog] *Facebook page*. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/jbconama/posts/10153421100141160> (accessed 8 May 2017).
- Conama, John Bosco. 2016b. ISL analysis manifestos. [Vlog] *Irish Sign Language (ISL) vlog and films by all*. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10153269607086160&id=669976159 (accessed 8 May 2017)].
- Conama, John Bosco. 2010. *Finnish and Irish sign languages: An egalitarian analysis of language policies and their effects*. University College Dublin PhD thesis.
- Conroy, Pauline. 2006. *Signing in & Signing Out: The Education and Employment Experiences of Deaf Adults in Ireland: a Study of Inequality and Deaf People in Ireland*. Irish Deaf Society.
- Coolahan, John. 1981. *Irish education: Its history and structure*. Institute of public administration. Dublin
- Cooley, Denis R. 2007. Deaf by design: a business argument against engineering disabled offspring. *Journal of business ethics*, 71(2), 209–227.
- Crean, Edward J. 1997. *Breaking the silence: The education of the Deaf in Ireland 1816–1996*. Irish Deaf Society Publications. Dublin.
- De Meulder, Maartje. 2015. The legal recognition of sign languages. *Sign Language Studies*, 15(4), pp.498–506.
- Deafhear.ie. 2016. *DeafHear*. [online] Available at: <https://www.deafhear.ie/DeafHear/newsFeature.html?who=1149> (accessed 8 May 2017).
- Department of Justice and Equality 2014. Facilitator’s Report. The Communication Clinic Limited. (accessed 9 May 2017).
- Department of Taoiseach. 2011. *Programme for Government 2011*. [online] Available at: http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Work_Of_The_Department/Programme_for_Government/Programme_for_Government_2011-2016.pdf (accessed 8 May 2017).

- Duggan, Nora. 2015. *The Relationship between the Irish Sign Language Campaign and the Irish Deaf Community*. National University of Ireland. Maynooth MA thesis.
- Education Act. 1998.: Stationery Office. Dublin.
- Fine, Michelle., 1992. *Disruptive voices: The possibilities of feminist research*. University of Michigan Press.
- Fischer, Susan D. 2015. Sign languages in their Historical Context. *The Routledge Handbook of Historical Linguistics*, pp.443–65.
- Foran, Christy. .1994. *Transcript of the 1847 manuscript Irish Sign Language*. Dublin, Deaf Association (deposited in Deaf Heritage Centre, Dublin).
- Houses of the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament). 2014. *Recognition of Irish Sign Language for the Deaf Community Bill 2013: Second Stage*. [online] Available at: <http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/debateswebpack.nsf/takes/seanad2014012200001?opendocument> (accessed 9 May 2017).
- Inglis, Tom. 1998. *Moral monopoly: The rise and fall of the Catholic Church in modern Ireland*. University College Dublin Press. Dublin.
- Ireland –Department of Education 1972 Committee on the Education of the Deaf *The education of children who are handicapped by impaired hearing: report of a committee appointed by the Minister for Education*.: Stationery Office. Dublin.
- Irish Deaf Society. 2010. Obituary of Stanislaus Foran. 2010. *Irish Deaf News*, (21). Dublin.
- Irish Deaf Society. 2006. *IDS History Book, 1981–2006 Silver Jubilee Anniversary*. IDS publication. Dublin.
- Irish Deaf Society. 2012. *Annual General Report*. Dublin: Irish Deaf Society. Dublin.
- Irish Deaf Society. 2016. *Irish Deaf Society 2016 General Election Manifesto*. Dublin.
- Irish Independent. 2015. Mary Hanafin defends decision to vote against council motion on marriage equality.
- Irish Times. 1992. A stab at definition. p.A12.
- Irish Times. 2005. Deaf people want Irish sign language to be recognised. p.4.
- Irishexaminer.com. 2014. *Eamon McDevitt play aims to give voice to deaf community*. [online] Available at: <http://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/features/eamon-mcdevitt-play-aims-to-give-voice-to-deaf-community-287436.html> (accessed 11 May 2017).
- Irvine, J. 2017. *Language Ideology — Anthropology — Oxford Bibliographies — obo*. [online] Oxfordbibliographies.com. Available at: <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0012.xml> (accessed 8 May 2017).
- John, Ranelagh O’Beirne. 1983. *A Short History of Ireland*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Kroskrity, Paul.V., 2004. Language ideologies. *A companion to linguistic anthropology*, pp.496–517. Suffolk, England.
- Leeson, Lorraine, and Carmel Grehan. 2004. To the Lexicon and Beyond: The Effect of Gender. In Mieke Van Herreweghe and Myriam Vermeerbergen. *To the lexicon and beyond: Sociolinguistics in European deaf communities*. Gallaudet University Press. Washington DC.
- Leeson, Lorraine, and Teresa Lynch. 2009. Three Leaps of Faith and Four Giant Steps: Developing Interpreter Training in Ireland. *Signed Language Interpreter Education and Training: A World Survey*, pp.35–56.
- Leeson, Lorraine, and John I.Saeed. 2012. *Irish Sign Language: A cognitive linguistic account*. Edinburgh University Press. Edinburgh.

- LeMaster, Barbara. 2003. "School Language and Shifts in Irish Deaf Identity." In Leila Monaghan, Constance Schmaling, Karen Nakamura, and Graham Turner (Eds.), *Many Ways to be Deaf: International Variation in Deaf Communities*. 153–172. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press.
- LeMaster, Barbara. 1997. Sex differences in Irish sign language. In Jane H Hill, P. J. Mistry, and Lyle Campbell, eds. *The life of language: Papers in linguistics in honor of William Bright*. Vol. 108..67-85. Walter de Gruyter
- LeMaster, Barbara. 2003. School language and shifts in Irish deaf identity. In Leila Frances Monaghan, , Karen Nakamura, Constanze Schmaling, and Graham H. Turner, eds. *Many ways to be deaf: International variation in deaf communities*. 153–172. Gallaudet University Press. Washington DC.
- LeMatser, Barbara. and Stan Foran. 1986. "The Irish Sign Language." *The Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness*, McGraw-Hill:NY [online] Available at: <http://web.csulb.edu/~lemaster/Publications%20%28PDFs%29/1986.Irish%20Sign%20Language.Gallaudet%20Encyclopedia.pdf> (accessed 8 May 2017).
- Leonard, Cormac. 2015. *Interpreters and Deaf People in Irish Courts, 1815 – 1924*. [online] Available at: http://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/39031473/Interpreters_and_Deaf_People_in_Irish_Courts_-_TCD_Postgrad_Seminar.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1494522495&Signature=N-7rczsAgPX74EJ1aH5PCybNnRro%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DInterpreters_and_Deaf_People_in_Irish_Co.pdf (accessed 11 May 2017).
- Lynch, Teresa. 1988. What is ISL? Unpublished conference paper presented at: St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, 18 October 1988.
- Maguire, Frank. 1982. *A user's guide for Irish sign language research*.. Trinity College, University of Dublin. Masters Thesis.
- Mathews, Elizabeth. S. 2011. *Mainstreaming of Deaf Education in the Republic of Ireland: Language, Power, Resistance* .National University of Ireland, Maynooth. Doctoral dissertation
- Matthews, Patrick.A. 1996. *The Irish Deaf Community*. Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann. Dublin.
- McCormack, C. 2015. Deaf community roar for recognition of sign language. *Sunday Independent*.
- McDonnell, Patrick & Saunders, Helena 1993. Sit on Your Hands. In Renate Fischer *Looking back: A reader on the history of deaf communities and their sign languages* 255–260. Hamburg.
- Mohr, P.E., Feldman, J.J., Dunbar, J.L., McConkey-Robbins, A., Niparko, J.K., Rittenhouse, R.K. and Skinner, M.W. 2000. The societal costs of severe to profound hearing loss in the United States. *International journal of technology assessment in health care*, 16(04), 1120–1135.
- Mohr, Susanne., 2014. *Mouth actions in sign languages: An empirical study of Irish Sign Language* (Vol. 3). Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG.
- Murray, J.J. 2015. Linguistic human rights discourse in deaf community activism. *Sign Language Studies*, 15(4). 379–410.
- National Association For the Deaf (Ireland) 1972
- National Disability Strategy Implementation Group. 2013. [online] Available at: http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/NDS_ImplementationPlan_FINAL.Pdf/Files/NDS_ImplementationPlan_FINAL.Pdf (accessed 8 May 2017).

- O'Connell, Noel.P. and Jim Deegan. 2014. 'Behind the teacher's back': an ethnographic study of deaf people's schooling experiences in the Republic of Ireland. *Irish Educational Studies*, 33(3) .229–247.
- O'Connell, Noel.P., 2013. *A critical (auto) ethnographic study of deaf people's experience of education and culture in Ireland*. Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick Ireland. Doctoral Thesis.
- O'Murchu, Cormac. 1975. *A dictionary of Irish sign language..* Trinity College, University of Dublin. Masters Thesis.
- O'Rourke, Terrence.J. ed. 1972. *Psycholinguistics and total communication: The state of the art.*: American Annals of the Deaf. Washington DC
- Oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie. 2013. *Dáil Éireann — 11/Dec/2013 Written Answers Nos. 122–126*. [online] Available at: <http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/debateswebpack.nsf/takes/dail2013121100082> (accessed 8 May 2017).
- Pollard, Rachel. 2006), *The Avenue: A History of the Claremont Institution*: Denzil Press. Dublin
- Rose, Heath. and Conama, John Bosco. 2017. Linguistic imperialism: still a valid construct in relation to language policy for Irish Sign Language. *Language Policy*. 1–20.
- Ryan, Sean. 2009. Commission to inquire into child abuse. *The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse*. Dublin
- Sunday Independent. 1971. [Photograph] Unknown, Sunday, 29 August 1971.
- thejournal.ie. 2014. *Advocacy service for deaf people closes after funding cut, leaves '5,000 at risk'*. [online] Available at: [http://Advocacy service for deaf people closes after funding cut, leaves '5,000 at risk'](http://Advocacy%20service%20for%20deaf%20people%20closes%20after%20funding%20cut%20leaves%205%2C000%20at%20risk) (accessed 11 May 2017).
- Walshe, John. 1999. *A new partnership in education: from consultation to legislation in the nineties*. Institute of Public Administration. Dublin.

Christopher A.N. Kurz, Jeanne E. Reis and Barbara Spiecker

Ideologies and attitudes toward American Sign Language: Processes of academic language and academic cocabulary coinage

1 Introduction

This chapter unveils the changing viewpoints and experiences of a group of Deaf¹ subject matter experts with respect to American Sign Language (ASL) as they participated in a multi-year process of developing ASL educational materials for an online application, the ASL Concept Learning Resource (ASL Clear). The project is primarily funded by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. It was conducted at Boston University and The Center for Research and Training at The Learning Center for the Deaf. The project's primary aim is to develop high quality ASL instructional resources in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) content. In the planning and filming phases, Deaf subject matter experts were asked to agree on appropriate ASL discourse structures for academic content, and identify or coin ASL vocabulary for STEM-related processes and concepts discussed in the micro-lectures. Micro-lectures were crafted to align with the grammatical and discourse principles of ASL, and contained only existing and newly coined ASL vocabulary. To accomplish this, the team agreed not to include fingerspelled loanwords or Anglicized signs, e.g., signs using the initial letter of an English word and signs that represent English words for English syntactic purposes.²

After participating in the ASL Clear project for some time, seven individuals were asked about their initial and changing perspectives on the role of American Sign Language in classroom settings. They discussed how engaging in the process of applying their content expertise to the development of educational materials and coining vocabulary affected their beliefs about ASL as a language of academic settings. Finally, they were asked to share the challenges and discoveries that arose while developing ASL materials in collaboration with other content area experts. In this

¹ "Deaf" is used throughout this chapter to encompass the broad range of individuals with cultural and linguistic characteristics. Our choice to use "Deaf" is intended to include, rather than exclude, those Deaf individuals who do not refer to themselves with this designation.

² Anglicized signs are signs that incorporate English forms or characteristics (e.g., initialized signs –FAMILY, CLASS, TEAM, etc.; and signs that are intended to represent English words – AM, THEN, TO, AT).

chapter, we explore how engaging in this process with other native ASL speaking content experts shifted the language ideologies of the Deaf individuals involved and helped them better understand their role in, and capacities for, constructing quality educational resources and identifying specialized vocabulary for academic settings.

Rumsey defined language ideologies as “shared bodies of common sense notions about the nature of language in the world” (1990: 356). Members of linguistic communities hold conscious and unconscious ideologies about languages, both their own and others. Speakers of different languages come into contact more or less frequently depending on a number of factors, such as educational placements, geographic region, neighborhood diversity, and tourism (Rumsey 1990). The amount and quality of these interactions are likely to contribute to underlying language attitudes and beliefs. In turn, language attitudes and beliefs have political, societal and educational ramifications for countries, communities, and individuals (Rumsey 1990).

Most Deaf people are not provided with immediate access to a signed language, and access to the signed language may be limited throughout the lifespan (Humphries, et al. 2017). Deaf individuals primarily live in continuous contact with a community that is not fluent in their signed language (Krausneker 2015; Rayman, 2009), while individuals who can hear are highly likely to speak the same language as at least some of their neighbors. While Deaf individuals and their hearing, sighted neighbors share similar visual language experiences, such as print in the environment (e.g., billboards, signs, and newspapers), their experiences and patterns of conversational engagement are quite different. Even when higher number of sign language speakers are concentrated in a given region, the community is spread across a larger geographic area. This phenomenon often occurs near educational institutions that serve Deaf students (e.g., Gallaudet University, National Technical Institute for the Deaf). In addition, sign language speakers come together in large numbers in conference settings (e.g., World Federation of the Deaf, American Sign Language Teachers Association, National Association of the Deaf, National Deaf Education Conference, National Black Deaf Advocates conferences), and at sporting events (e.g., Summer and Winter Deaflympics).

In some cases, a *shared signing community* develops among significant numbers of Deaf and hearing people, most often in rural settings and villages. These are rare situations that increase the level of engagement between Deaf and hearing members of the community, and allow them to interact in a sign language. In some cases, this impacts the language beliefs of both groups, with more dramatic shifts often noted among hearing community members (Groce 1998). Kusters (2014) examined sign language ideologies in southern Ghana and

found that Deaf and hearing people in a shared signing community believed that the signed language held the community together. A similar situation emerged in Martha's Vineyard between the 18th and mid 20th century where "everyone spoke sign language" (Groce 1998; Lane, Pillard and Hedberg 2011). The hearing people Groce interviewed for her book did not see Martha's Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL) as belonging only to the Deaf islanders, rather they perceived it to be a shared community language among Deaf and hearing inhabitants.

This chapter presents a case study of Deaf ASL speakers who are subject matter experts, engaged in a multi-stage process of ASL word coinage that iterates between creating, evaluating, maintaining and sharing over several years. This chapter discusses shifting sign language ideologies in educational institutions where Deaf people convene and interact for the purpose of learning academic and vocational content knowledge and skills.

2 Academic language and educational policy on communication

Hill (2013) describes how social factors and educational policies may affect Deaf people's beliefs about their languages. For example, in American academic settings, educational policies emphasizing English as the language of instruction tends to reinforce negative attitudes about signed languages both inside and outside of the classroom. This may result in Deaf people perceiving English as a superior language. Anecdotes shared by Deaf people in the United States showed that many held beliefs that ASL was not a true language, and that signed language was inferior to English (Baynton, Gannon, and Bergey 2007). Hill (2013) describes the impact of language attitudes on identity and educational policy, noting that language attitudes about the majority culture (i.e., English) being superior lead to increased attention on English-like communication policies for instruction and assessment, thus delaying Deaf identity development among deaf students.

In the early 19th century, Deaf children began to attend newly established schools, most notably, the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, CT, and New York School for the Deaf. They brought along their highly variable ways of communicating with hearing family and community members — a patchwork of home-signs and gestures. Upon arrival to school, the students were taught in modified French Sign Language (LSF) and English (Barnard 1835). This shift in the level of engagement among Deaf people, from geographic isolation to increased contact with one another, also contributed to the development of a signing community, with resulting language changes. Signing became the primary means of commu-

nication and language (Van Cleve and Crouch 1989), and was often referred to as “the language of signs” or “natural sign” (see Gallaudet 1848, for example). For the first seventy years of deaf education in the US, instruction was provided in the ‘manual method,’ meaning that teachers and Deaf students used signs to communicate with each other. Despite agreement among educators about the need for ‘manual’ language, they split into differing ideologies regarding the structure of signed utterances and vocabulary in classroom settings, and debated their views in various forums well into the mid-19th century (Edwards 2012).

It is important to note that the American landscape of oscillating language philosophies for Deaf students has not abated to the present day. When oral English-only policies prevail in the educational domain, a pattern of school practices follow: Deaf people are not allowed to sign in the classrooms; deaf teachers lose positions, leaving students with few or no Deaf professionals as heritage sign language models; the grammatically robust signed language of the regional Deaf Community is minimized, disparaged, or hidden entirely. Such practices have had longstanding impacts on perceptions about the value of signed languages as community and school languages. Generations of Deaf people in the U.S. have perceived their signing as either *not a language*, or as *a language only appropriate for non-academic or vocational settings*.

ASL was not recognized as a language until a century and half after the first US school opened its doors. In 1960, Stokoe, Casterline and Croneberg made the claim that ASL is rule-governed, structured, and has stable linguistic principles shared by the world’s languages --since then, researchers have identified many other signed languages around the world. The beliefs of Deaf people have begun to shift as well, increasingly aligning with scholarly acceptance of ASL and other signed languages. This shift has fostered more widespread discussion of the role of ASL in bilingual schools and programs in the US, and begun to evolve into increasing receptivity for ASL as language of academic discourse among some educators and other members of the Deaf Community. This shift may have been facilitated by questions raised about the effectiveness of attempts to incorporate Anglicized signs and sentence structures for instructional purposes by using sign systems, such as Simultaneous Communication, Signed Exact English, Seeing Essential English, Signed English, Linguistics of Visual English, and Conceptually Accurate Signed English, all of which were developed during the 1960s through 1980s (Kowalsky & Meier 2013, Wang, et. al 2017). During the 1980s until the present, some schools for the deaf in the US have adopted bilingual (ASL-English) language policies, and begun to design instruction to foster Deaf students’ mastery of both languages. These practices are supported by literature demonstrating how the processing of English print is facilitated by knowledge funds of ASL, and in ASL (Scott and Hoffmeister 2016, Novogrodsky, et al. 2014). However,

it continues to be challenging to apply and implement ASL for the full range of educational activities, because classroom resources, instructional practices, and communication policies continue to be oriented toward the use and development of English (Rudser 1988). Despite insufficient resources or curricula for ASL language learning and content instruction, bilingual schools for the deaf are working to define and apply ASL as an academic language.

Academic language is defined by Nagy and Townsend (2012: 92) as “the specialized language...of academic settings that facilitates communication and thinking about disciplinary content”. In academic settings, even words are seen as tools, with the most powerful vocabulary being capable of encapsulating complex concept-worlds, and shared by a broader language community. Research shows that the challenges Deaf students face in learning advanced academic concepts are often tied to difficulties *accessing* appropriate vocabulary for those concepts in ASL as well as *accessing* world knowledge inside and outside the classroom. Lang et al. (2006) argue that the best solution to current vocabulary challenges is to create and document academic signs, and provide avenues to access these signs. Acquiring the specialized vocabulary of a language offers specific affordances; one benefit of these affordances is the capacity to use language in creative ways (Conteh and Meier 2014). Discussion of dictionary organization and language standardization is beyond the scope of this chapter, but other studies have examined the topic (e.g., Eichmann 2009; Van Herreweghe, De Meulder and Vermeerbergen 2015).

3 ASL STEM Concept Learning Resource

In collaboration between Boston University and the Learning Center for the Deaf, Framingham, MA, the *ASL Clear* is being created to offer a collection of complete Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) instructional units in ASL. Each unit contains a micro-lecture associated with a set of STEM terms, definitions and examples. The goal of *ASL Clear* is to promote academic discourse in the STEM classroom by moving from a vocabulary-centered focus to an emphasis on instructional texts developed in topical units. Deaf subject matter experts present all academic content in ASL.

4 Methodology

Because all of the authors are heritage ASL speakers³, two of whom are Deaf and work in content-area environments (academic settings, science fieldwork and laboratories, and computing and engineering sites), and one a CODA working in school settings with training in education and linguistics, we used an emic approach of study by collecting qualitative data from Deaf ASL speakers related to their perspectives on ASL as an academic language.

The case study involves ethnographic data collected from seven Deaf individuals; two female and five male adult participants between twenty-four and sixty-five years old. Four were current or former teachers of the deaf, three were in STEM-related doctoral programs, and one works in science lab and field settings. All participants hold college degrees in the STEM fields. Some had opportunities to study ASL linguistics or language arts. They were recruited purposively based on a combination of their content knowledge, heritage language experience, and ASL fluency. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was given random a pseudonym.

In this case study, we used multiple data points from content expert group discussions, focus groups, semi-structured interviews and reflections to capture and describe participants' beliefs and biases about ASL in academic contexts. Their changing perspectives on the power of ASL for academic discourse and learning was also explored. The seven participants shared their responses in ASL or English, in person or via an online Focus Group program.

5 Findings

The four themes that emerged in this case study revolved around (1) language attitudes and biases toward ASL, and its role as an academic language, (2) the affordances of ASL to facilitate and promote comprehension of academic content, (3) the role of fingerspelling in instructional texts, and (4) persons who hold authority in language-related decisions.

³ Heritage ASL speakers, when they were younger, acquired ASL as their home language, community language or school language from Deaf ASL speakers (Supalla and Clark 2015; Compton 2014). Hearing people can be heritage ASL speakers if their home language was ASL.

6 Deaf participants' views on academic languages: Attitudes and biases

Biases that influenced the group's beliefs about ASL were explored, as well as motivation for contributing to academic materials and vocabulary in ASL given the prevailing perception in educational environments that English is superior for academic discourse and domain specific products. In this portion of the study, we inquired about two different time periods: before ASL Clear project participation and after ASL Clear project participation.

In focus group sessions, participants shared reflections about their language perspectives prior to participation in the ASL Clear project. Some participant comments are highlighted below:

I used to think ASL in an academic context relied heavily on fingerspelling, had a reduced affect, and was English-oriented. I thought ASL was a tool to express English sans the auditory aspect. I never really realized, incorporated and felt that ASL was a language that was independent of English. (Emilio)

I felt that English was the better avenue than ASL in conveying abstract or technical topics. I felt that ASL was limiting with its lack of signs for technical terms. I also thought that by signing English, it gave me an elevated status as an academic. I saw interpreters signing English, I saw Deaf people signing English, and I was surrounded by hearing teachers, peers, and the oppressive ideology that ASL was not on an equal footing as English. So, naturally, I adopted and developed a similar ideology and approach to conveying information in academic settings without questioning the process. (Brock)

It was not easy to use new signs that were not established in the community without fingerspelling or making the connection to an English word. When someone used a sign unfamiliar to me, I would ask what it means (and what I was really asking was 'what's the English word?'), and the person would [automatically respond by] spelling the English word to me. (Joy)

In college (as a math tutor) and during my first few years of teaching, I would often emphasize English vocabulary and require reading English information WHILE introducing new concepts. Looking back, this can be overwhelming to those who acquire information better in ASL than in English. (Ricky)

I grew up in a deaf school from K – 8th grade, but I was always mainstreamed at another school for math, English, and science classes. During high school, I was mainstreamed full time. So I had both the luxury of having teachers who sign for themselves (usually sim-com and signing in English word order, unless I had a deaf teacher) and access to interpreters who were able to sign --at the time I thought well. Because I was always placed in two different linguistic academic environments, I tended to think that learning in "just ASL" wasn't good enough. I thought that it was better to make sure everything was signed and fingerspelled exactly the way it was said by my teachers, so I knew what English words were used. (Saul)

I was fickle with interpreters. I asked an interpreter, who signed everything in ASL during my human growth and development class, to sign in English. He would... sign in English then somehow always slide back to ASL. After a few times, I asked him to switch with another interpreter. Looking back, I don't think I was ever confident that I could be a scholarly person with ASL... nor confident that a person who uses full ASL could be scholarly. (Maria)

Before participants began collaborating with the project, they perceived ASL to be primarily a language for social engagement, although they had experienced and used ASL in classroom learning, instruction and interpretation. They believed ASL had limitations in capturing complex ideas or specialized vocabulary. The participants consistently reported that they believed English terms and materials should be showcased first, via print or fingerspelling, before presenting the same information in ASL. The participants admitted they preferred that academic content be influenced by English (via Anglicized vocabulary and English-like sentence structures), because they felt English was the language of academic content, and greater fluency in speaking/writing in English was an indication of greater intelligence. They also noted that the signed utterances of Deaf individuals perceived as 'more intelligent' often closely reflected the grammatical structure of English and more frequently contained fingerspelled English words. Participants initial beliefs highlighted the role of English as THE language of academic instruction, with ASL serving mainly as a medium for the delivery. In this view, ASL is in a second-tier supporting role, only functioning to ensure that the English [real] terms and content are conveyed. This suggested that deaf students might feel like they have been taught effectively only if they have been given the English.

When participants wanted to discuss academic content for which there were no established ASL signs, they chose to either fingerspell or invent signs in handshape of the first letter of an English word. They did not reflect on or wonder about these habitual practices, rather they assumed their choices facilitated ease of communication.

During my HS and college years, I often fingerspelled for any unknown sign and many math signs were initialized (i.e. handshape F in fraction). (Brock)

I made up some signs that seemed appropriate to me. Sometimes these invented signs used the initial of the word, such as E for electron. (Emilio)

The comments of the participants align with Hill's finding: language attitudes are often influenced by educational policies that emphasize English as the language of academia. This indicates that ASL is the minority language within the majority culture.

After the participants began working with the ASL Clear project, they realized ASL can and should be the language of academia. They saw that there were many advantages to capitalizing on the full range of existing vocabulary and grammatical features of ASL to discuss complex ideas and domain specific content (i.e., STEM), and became more aware of the limitations of defaulting to fingerspelling or Anglicized signs for the same purpose. They began to see the cognitive and learning benefits of analyzing and producing ASL discourse, and began to realize that these benefits were not well understood by educators and interpreters. They were experiencing firsthand what studies with bilingual students show, namely that learning content in the stronger language supports the learning of the same content in a second language (Scott and Hoffmeister 2016, Wilbur 2000). The participants of this study also began to see that various applications of this approach to instruction would benefit Deaf student learning, in both ASL and English. They also began to see that English is not the sole language of academic content, even at the highest levels of abstraction and complexity. Rather, domain specific discourse is inherently possible in any language, including ASL.

When minority languages experience translation struggles with academic content, they either develop new vocabulary in their language or borrow from another language (Akmajian et. al 2017; Giacon and Lowe 2016). Words that originate in one language, if learned by speakers of another language, are at times ‘borrowed’ into the second language. This phenomenon has been well-documented in spoken languages, and it is facilitated by contact between speakers of various languages. As noted earlier in this chapter, Deaf people, whether or not they share the same signed language, tend to be geographically widespread, creating very different patterns of contact than for those who use spoken languages. As a result, signed languages have grown and developed differently. There have also been frequent attempts to borrow from spoken languages used by the surrounding community; these are often seen as more important to learn and more prestigious, with mastery of the majority language seen as a mark of intelligence, as noted by our participants.

The shift in ideologies experienced in this case study coincides with the advent of readily available consumer-oriented video technology. This does not appear to be two separate phenomena co-occurring in time, rather the arising of technology seems to be intertwined with new perspectives and more vibrant discussions on signed languages. When one’s language is more easily captured, shared and organized, it becomes possible to learn, analyze and borrow from other signed languages. It’s also possible to widely share content and words within a single signed language, such as academic terms coined by ASL speakers who have a need to discuss given material because they are working in the professions, studying for degrees, and teaching the content. The ease with which visual

languages can be shared provides a unique opportunity for the geographically widespread Deaf Community to learn and weigh in on new terms.

This experience empowered me to start instructing interpreters how to sign some new words appropriately and it helped me process new concepts more easily. Like protein--the new, more appropriate sign helped me to visualize and connect it to new ideas much more easily. (Saul)

My perspective on using ASL in academic context changed big time, because now every time I encounter a term with unknown sign... instead of resigning myself to fingerspelling it, I will stop and think about developing a good sign. It has become a fun process that I often discuss with my students as I teach. (Emilio)

I strongly believe that using ASL in academic contexts will allow natural learning to take place. It is natural and intuitive and it will allow Deaf people to learn with ease and to really understand the concepts without a “Swiss cheese” of information. ASL is more useful, expedient, and capable of conveying technical topics. I feel that by using only ASL in academic settings will ease the cognitive processing of ASL-users in a way that minimize their constant two-way translations between ASL and English. There will be less time spent on thinking what is the ASL sign for the English word or the English word for the ASL sign and more on absorbing the content and understanding the meaning behind it. I feel that by using ASL only, it allows me to retain the information better because I was less focused on the translations and the constant switch between two languages while absorbing and processing the information in real time. (Joy)

Now I recognize the importance of introducing and delivering new concepts FIRST through the language in which students best acquire information, which is ASL. Instead of relying on English to support me, I would just discuss concepts with students in ASL. Then later I would introduce the English vocabulary/concepts and make the connection to the concepts that were already presented in ASL. (Maria)

I struggled with minimizing my impulsiveness to fingerspell and coming up with new signs to describe a concept and replace fingerspelling. Over time, the English [indiscriminate-ness] of my mind and heart slowly lost its grip. I began to develop an appropriate mental state and an ability to separate English and ASL. From that point and on, my ability to develop ASL signs in lieu of fingerspelling flourished and I began to see the true power of ASL and the possibilities it has in conveying technical topics (and better than English in so many ways). And, of course, I was now convinced that ASL, not fingerspelling or English, is the answer to discussing technical topics. (Joy)

The participants became ‘language scientists’ (Czubek, personal communication) while engaged in this multi-step linguistic experiment. The subject of their experiment was ASL, their first language, and they were called on to use their linguistic intuitions and awareness to explore and capitalize on associations and relationships in phonological and morphological patterns. They began by

analyzing a specific STEM concept, and evaluating current ASL discourse and vocabulary for that concept. Then they moved into a development and production phase, crafting a short presentation and coining terms as needed, based on the visual linguistic principles they believed to be inherent to ASL. Following that, the material was 'field tested' within and outside of the ASL Clear team, then modified as needed. With permission to creatively coin ASL vocabulary and build on the affordances of ASL, the participants became enthusiastic about ASL as an academic language and brought their learning and new applications to their respective occupations. This process elevated the potentiality of ASL in their minds and others, and they began to hold the language and their use of it to a higher standard. The participants came to believe that the clear relationship between signed words and concepts would support bilingual learning in ASL and eventually English. The process of vocabulary development also showcased the affordances of ASL, which is discussed next.

7 Deaf participants' views on languages of academia: The affordances of ASL to facilitate and promote comprehension of academic content

The participants saw that ASL not only had the ability to effectively describe and enliven academic material, but also the potential of ASL after they were asked to come up with ASL vocabulary to describe STEM concepts. They began to notice specific linguistic features, especially the natural ASL handshapes, that allow them to develop categories of signs with similar characteristics. For example, the signs for proton, neutron and electron share one common characteristic: the "1" handshape active hand. Similarly, the signs for fraction, improper fraction, proper fraction, mixed number, place value, exponent, and variable share one common characteristic: the bent "L" handshape active hand as it represents a number (Kurz, Kurz, and Harris 2018). Kurz, Kurz, and Harris (2018) emphasize the use of classifiers in academic concept delivery as it brings more depth, adding more information in words than a signed representation of an English word may carry, one of the academic language features. Such linguistic feature patterns aid in recall and retrieval. One participant observed this when one of her students, who was transferred to her school with minimal ASL fluency and used an accompanying voice interpreter, recalled a shared linguistic feature group of specific ASL science vocabulary without any aid from his interpreter one day after the participant introduced the new signs to class.

I used to think it's important to fingerspell lots of terms used in science class to emphasize the terms that used in the concept. But when I participated this entire project and that made me realize that it's really important to develop signs and ideas in ASL and then that will improve motivations in the students to learn STEM. Stronger use of ASL in science class will help ASL users to visualize and understand the concepts. The terms will be learned easier when reading the textbook at home as homework assignments. (Emilio)

During Gallaudet, I noticed science lectures were better and clearer when they were taught by Deaf scientists. I remember being astonished at Dr. Raymond Merritt's ASL — how he explained the processes of DNA, RNA and proteins. It was so visual and clear... and I think that's when I started to look at his brilliancy in science being related to the complexity and sophistication in his ASL, despite the many signs being made up to be able to provide instruction. He used a lot of classifiers when he taught to make up for the terms that don't have actual signs, which led me to start using classifiers in academic discussions and learning. (Maria)

I made a lot of changes in many signs in my classroom! It has become a fun process with my students when I ask them what they think the sign should be, and whether they like/dislike the new sign that I presented to them. It is very beneficial, because I can see them thinking about it, and some students are starting to use these new signs on their own. Examples: exponent, parallelogram, equation. (Ricky)

ASL has unlimited resources that we have overlooked for a long, long time. I realized we have long forgot the power of ASL as an academic language. Now I see how powerful ASL can be for us to shoot for higher standards of language use in the classroom: Deliver academic subjects clearly to Deaf students and allow them to express their knowledge and ideas in ASL clearly. (Joy)

The participants believed Deaf students should be given ample opportunities to play with ASL, unlocking its power and enhancing its status as an academic language, thus using it to support their English language learning as Emilio mentioned in his quote above. Incorporating ASL linguistic features in signed academic vocabulary aids in conceptual understanding, patterns and relationships, student motivation, metalinguistic awareness, and sign appreciation. One participant shared his observation when the sign for function (made with two “1” handshape hands with their palm orientations facing and touching each other in repeated movements — similar to the ASL word for “translation” — see Figure 1) was modeled in the mathematics classroom. The students immediately adopted the ASL word and dropped the old ASL word (the “F” or “S” handshape active hand moving in arc repeatedly on the back of the passive hand). The students shared with the participant that the new ASL word enhanced their understanding of the mathematical concept of a function, as it represents a one-to-one relation between a set of input and a set of output and it also represents a computational engine for an input to produce an output.



Figure 1. ASL for function.

A participant discussed the process of ASL vocabulary development:

When I develop signs, I use the concept-based approach. Coming from the top-down: (1) Choose a concept, (2) Define it and consider all aspects of it, (3) Come up with a potential sign, (4) Ask myself these following questions. Does it follow ASL linguistic rules? Is it conceptually accurate? Is it easy to use in the context? Can the sign be modified to fit different contexts? Does it feel natural and intuitive? Will others feel the sign aid or enhance their understanding of the concept? (4) If the answer is yes to all of these questions, check with the ASL Clear team and other deaf professionals. (5) Use it and modify when needed. (Joy)

In a similar vein, Michelangelo once remarked on sculpturing that the figurine was already there in the block of marble and he just used a hammer and chisel to uncover it. The participants believe that ASL vocabulary for academic contents are already there, and like that hammer and chisel, their ASL knowledge and linguistic playfulness are tools for uncovering the true potential in ASL for academic delivery. The question is, who is or should be in control of the sculpture, or in this case, the development of specialized ASL vocabulary? Should it be community-based, expert-based, or combined? See next comment for an example:

I did an activity at a school for the Deaf where I showed the students some marine animals (sea urchin, chiton, sea anemone, mussel, and sea star) and had them create a sign for each animal. They came up with great signs. And the interesting thing is that, for sea star, four

different groups came up with the exact same sign. It shows that ASL-speaking deaf people do share a fundamental understanding and intuitiveness of the language. It is also great for them to start thinking about their own language, its rules, how the signs can be modified, and in what context. It will give them a sense of ownership and pride in their own language without adopting and accepting (without questions) the signs given by hearing people. (Joy)

The next comment shows the participant's belief that the responsibility for ASL vocabulary coinage and maintenance should fall on Deaf academics who are heritage sign language speakers. Further, they are also responsible for disseminating proper ASL words to the community of professionals who work with Deaf students.

I use and share the signs with everyone with great caution. More so with my interpreters and colleagues. However, I realize and understand the serious responsibility of coming up with signs and disseminating them. If we want ASL to flourish as a language and to allow it to evolve naturally on a right path, we need to take a serious consideration in developing signs (making sure the signs follow linguistic rules and are conceptually accurate) and disseminating them (checking with fellow deaf academics, linguists and educators, and get their consensus). Because there are few Deaf academics and a multitude of interpreters and hearing professionals, we wield a great power in deciding what and how signs are used and disseminated. One deaf person can influence a hundred of hearing people and they, then, use the signs and influence other hearing people and/or deaf people. So, we need to set a right example in the very beginning by developing and thinking the signs thoroughly and checking it with fellow members of the community.

People who develop new vocabulary in their language have a feeling of ownership and responsibility for the language.

8 Deaf participants' views on languages of academics: ASL-English fingerspelling

There are numerous ASL hand configurations that occur naturally. The ASL-English fingerspelling alphabet includes 21 consonants and 5 vowels, which follows the English alphabet. It is different from the natural ASL hand configurations, although they share some same configurations.

ASL-English fingerspelling is employed at surprising levels in any content-specific classroom, especially in higher grades. Literature on educational practice with Deaf students often emphasize the need to fingerspell academic terms repeatedly (Padden 2005). Literature also shows that teachers of Deaf students and educational interpreters use fingerspelling with the idea that doing so will reinforce English vocabulary development (Wolfe, et al. 2015). Harris (2016,

2011) notices the increased dependence on fingerspelling among interpreters and Deaf education teachers in advanced academic courses. Such dependence skews the structure of instructional discourse toward English-like vocabulary and syntax.

During the ASL Clear project, the STEM experts were asked to develop micro-lectures without ASL-English fingerspelling to promote academic contents using ASL linguistic features and their patterns/rhythms (e.g., classifiers, movement, location, etc.).

The participants described their views about ASL-English fingerspelling before engaging in the project:

I used to think it's important to fingerspell lots of terms used in science class to emphasize the terms that used in the concept. (Saul)

I thought that it was absolutely important and critical. It was a MUST to have my interpreters fingerspell all these terms to me. I have always been in a scientific academic environment. My classes were always science related. In the beginning of my college studies, I took classes to become a midwife, then neonatal nursing. We all know there aren't signs for so many words. If my interpreters weren't fingerspelling enough, I would lack confidence in their abilities to facilitate information to me. (Maria)

I felt that fingerspelling was an absolute requirement. I felt that I could not possibly discuss academic topics without using fingerspelling to create a bridge to a specific English term. I felt that I could not learn and understand technical concepts and succeed as an academic without knowing English terms to describe the concepts. English was the gateway to becoming a member of an elite group of academics and fingerspelling was the physical key that Deaf people need to use to open the gate in order to become academics. (Joy)

Views on inserting English words via fingerspelling shifted fairly dramatically as they engaged with colleagues to script complex content into micro-lectures. The participants created micro-lectures to align with the grammatical and discourse principles of ASL, and contained only existing and newly coined ASL vocabulary. To accomplish this, the team agreed to include natural ASL hand configurations in their micro-lectures.

Fingerspelling is unnatural. It is not intuitive. ... Many signers, both hearing and deaf, struggle with reading fingerspelling and are often forced to ask the person to repeat. If many people struggle with fingerspelling, does it say something about its usefulness? (Emilio)

Fingerspelling is a language control trap for Deaf students. (Brandon)

The first comment above indicates an ideology one holds that fingerspelling is not intuitive, because some ASL-English fingerspelling alphabet handshapes are

unique to the fingerspelled alphabet and not otherwise present in ASL discourse (e.g., “J” and “Z”). One participant described an increasingly nuanced view, shifting from complete dependence on loanwords in order to engage in academic discussion, to awareness of the times and places when fingerspelled loanwords allowed him to add information about terms in the second language of his students:

I still believe that fingerspelling is an important strategy used in instruction, especially to make the connection between ASL signs and English words. I use it often while introducing new English vocabulary and using strategies (sandwiching, chaining) to create this connection. Once this is established and understood by the students, I do not require fingerspelling anymore for this already-taught concept/term. (Ricky)

One study among 3-5 year olds showed that after multiple viewings of an educational video in ASL, they exhibited much greater preferential repetition behavior for ASL vocabulary (271 times) and character dialogue (669 times) over fingerspelled terms (54 times) (Golos 2015). Higgins, et al. (2016) conducted research focusing on cognitive considerations of K-12 Deaf students in mathematics assessment. The results showed that overall, students did better with the delivery mode in ASL, or signed and fingerspelled, as opposed to just fingerspelling for mathematics words exclusively. The fingerspelling-only modality was examined at the high school level and none of the 15 participating students favored this approach. These findings provide evidence of some of the challenges Deaf students face when test items contain only fingerspelling of key terms. The findings also demonstrate that comprehension is increased when the delivery mode is in ASL rather than only fingerspelling, which is usually the mode educational professionals choose when translating standardized tests.

One participant compared fingerspelling to smoking as a bad but addictive habit as we want other people to know specific English words, rather than the context of information delivery (Brandon). In a personal communication, John Lee Clark (August 29, 2016), a well-respected DeafBlind writer/poet, explained that some members of the Deaf and DeafBlind community prefer to avoid fingerspelling as much as possible, because fingerspelling represents a switch from ASL to English “on the hand,” which can be jarring, almost akin to switching from ASL to Cyrillic and back.

One participant conducted an informal study comparing ASL vocabulary with fingerspelled loanwords, and shared her experience:

One time, I decided to do a quick activity during my presentation at a school of the Deaf with four different groups of 10-12 students. I showed five photos of different science concepts (upwelling, trait, sublimation, endoplasmic reticulum, and anthropogenic). In the first part

of the activity, I fingerspelled the term for each photo and had them copy me a couple of times. Then, I re-showed the photos in a different order and asked them the term for the photo. All but one [student] were not able to come up with the terms. Most of them were either incorrect or were only able to come up with the first letter of the term. Then, I repeated the activity and showed them the signs we came up with and had them copy me. Then, I re-showed the photos and asked them to tell me the term. All of them told me the correct sign in less than 5 seconds. The activity told me a lot about the relationship between ASL signs or fingerspelling and the students' ability to learn and retain the vocabulary. Although it is preliminary, it is clear to me that properly-developed signs have positive benefits. (Joy)

The participant believed that new linguistically and conceptually-accurate signs in place of ASL-English fingerspelling will have more impacts on student conceptual understanding. More research is needed to evaluate how language and content learning is impacted by excessively or exclusively ASL-English fingerspelling 'academic terms,' as well as the effect of academic terms, grammar and discourse structures in ASL in classroom settings.

Instead of resorting to ASL-English fingerspelling exclusively when there is no known ASL word, teachers could use language discourse strategies that enrich student understanding. These strategies include contextualizing academic contexts in the life experiences of students, using familiar language to introduce novel information and terms, and pointing to printed words on a board or in a book. These approaches are shown to assist with conceptual development, deepening understanding, and expanding vocabulary. Such skills are likely to eventually lead to language transfer, in this case from ASL to English, with support of sandwiching and chaining. One participant (Ricky) commented: "I would discuss academic concepts that have no signs by telling the story or using examples of how it works." This requires a shift in delivery paradigm for teachers and Deaf students who are accustomed to ASL-English fingerspelling in the classrooms to reinforce English language development and to convey concepts via their English translation.

9 Deaf participants' views on languages of academia: Persons of authority

Upon reflection on new signed vocabulary development when they were in school as students, some participants admitted they often defer sign creation decision-making to hearing professionals, mainly because they are perceived as persons of authority. Some of their comments are:

No, I did not usually develop new signs for science words because I always let interpreters do that for me. (Emilio)

My teachers tended to use initialized signs for most math and science vocabulary, sometimes they invented the signs as we learned new units. I did not say anything although it did not make sense. Mostly, I laughed at them – only in my mind or with my classmates. (Joy)

When my hearing teachers introduced new words, most of them would show the signs for the words. We just adopted them. Most of the signs that they showed were initialized signs. For example, the sign for atom is A around the fist. the same goes for P for proton, N for neutron and E for electron. (Brock)

The process of creating a sign was always spontaneous, on the spot, and on the fly without thinking thoroughly what the signs meant and the implications of creating and spreading the signs. Most of the time, the interpreters would create the signs and I adopted them. Sometimes, I would create the signs and they adopted them. I created signs for oceanographic processes (upwelling, tides), genetics (genes, enzyme, transcription). (Maria)

The percentage of teachers of the deaf who were educated heritage ASL speakers is very small, thus maintaining the status of ASL as a minority language within a majority culture. The participants in this case study did not realize they could create linguistically-accurate signs for any academic contents. Before they started working with the project, they felt their hearing teachers and interpreters were persons of authority for development of ASL vocabulary, regardless of their backgrounds. They realized many online ASL lexical signs are linguistically-inaccurate. The participants strongly advocated for a community of heritage ASL speakers who are content experts to create linguistically accurate ASL vocabulary.

10 Discussion and implications

Our findings reveal a set of issues and solutions in language ideologies, the development of the ASL word coinage process to ensure close replication of the natural processes by which other languages grow with new specialized vocabulary, as well as new understandings throughout the process, especially with natural linguistic features of ASL. The participants recognized the power of ASL during and after they participated in the ASL Clear project. They realized ASL can and should be the language of academics. The findings show the significance of language attitude and bias toward ASL as a language of academic in school settings among Deaf people in the United States. The participants' formative educational experiences at schools for the deaf and mainstream schools where the English language was more valued largely influenced their language attitudes and beliefs about

ASL as an academic language. Such educational policy, such as English language learning policy where all student are English language learners, may help mold Deaf students' perceptions about English as the academic language and ASL as the social language. Furthermore, limited exposure or lack of ASL and educated Deaf heritage ASL speakers in school may help solidify their adverse beliefs about ASL as an academic language. Furthermore, ASL literacy instruction does not hold the same status as English literacy instruction.

It is difficult for a Deaf child to acquire ASL from hearing teachers and interpreters as most of these professionals learn ASL later in life. The increasing number of Deaf children being placed in inclusive educational settings has reduced their potential exposure to a peer group of sign language speakers. Teachers and school administrators who understand and are fluent in the linguistic features of ASL and English will be able to provide a more authentic, coherent, and successful literacy experience for their Deaf students. Otherwise, they may have a negative impact on Deaf students' literacy development. Hearing educational professionals need to recognize this and follow data-driven techniques which include consulting with Deaf heritage speakers who are content area experts and working with Certified Deaf Interpreters in education settings in order to achieve optimal academic ASL delivery (Baker and Scott 2016). And Deaf children still need a peer group of language users to learn, play, and create words or concepts.

Deaf people, especially Deaf children, are language scientists who should explore ASL patterns/rhythms in specialized vocabulary and discourse (Kurz, Kurz, and Harris, 2018). Such patterns/rhythms aid in recall and retrieval and enable students to build content knowledge relationships. Educational professionals can support this by discussing linguistic features of ASL, including phonological patterns and semantically/conceptually accurate signs, and enrichment by providing additional information. Most importantly, professionals should consult with heritage ASL speakers on improving content delivery in ASL. Advocacy for language equity helps ensure accurate information delivery. Deaf people are encouraged to establish community-based dialogue about the ideologies, beliefs, ownership, and participation in the ASL academic vocabulary development process that were raised in this study in relation to language status, language accessibility, and community accountability. People who develop new vocabulary in their language have a feeling of ownership and responsibility for the language. Deaf children ideally acquire academic ASL from Deaf heritage ASL speakers who are content experts. The development of academic language development requires students to acquire and produce it, and scaffolding children's language and literacy growth heavily depends on teacher-student interaction where language play and interaction is natural and spontaneous.

There are various ideologies related to ASL-English fingerspelling. Deaf consumers often ask for clarifications through fingerspelling, especially when they want to know the specific English term. It is clear that we depend on fingerspelling to get some messages (specific word choices) across. However, many people within the Deaf community grow up with the ideology that English is superior to ASL. If more teachers and interpreters are trained in academic ASL and have strong knowledge of specialized vocabulary, more Deaf people would quite possibly lean toward academic ASL for their learning needs.

There were some limitations in this study. No persons of color were part of the group. They are quite likely to bring new perspectives on ASL as an academic language and the ASL vocabulary development process. Also, no non-heritage ASL speakers were included in this study. It is possible that their language attitudes and beliefs could change if given opportunities to interact, compose, and create in ASL within academic contexts.

References

- Akmajian, Adrian, Ann K. Farmer, Lee Bickmore, Richard A. Demers, and Robert M. Harnish. *Linguistics: An introduction to language and communication*. MIT press, 2017.
- Baker, Sharon, and Jessica Scott. "Sociocultural and Academic Considerations for School-Age d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing Multilingual Learners: A Case Study of a Deaf Latina." *American Annals for the Deaf* 161 (2016): 43–55.
- Baynton, Douglas, Jack R. Gannon, and Jean L. Bergey. *Through Deaf Eyes: A Photographic History of an American Community*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2007.
- Compton, Sarah. "American Sign Language as a Heritage Language" *Handbook of Heritage, Community, and Native American Languages in the United States*. 2014. Available at: <http://works.bepress.com/compton/5/>
- Conteh, J., and G. Meier. "The multilingual turn in languages education: Benefits for individuals and societies." *Bristol: Multilingual Matters* (2014).
- Edwards, Rebecca, A.R. *Words Made Flesh: The Nineteenth-Century Deaf Education and the Growth of Deaf Culture*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012.
- Eichmann, Hanna. "Planning Sign Languages: Promoting Hearing Hegmony? Conceptualizing Sign Language Standardization." *Current Issues in Language Planning* 10 (2009): 293–307.
- Gallaudet, Thomas H. "On the Natural Language of Signs; and Its Value and Uses in the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb." *American Annals of the Deaf* 1.3 (1848): 79–93.
- Giacon, John, and Kevin Lowe. "Key factors in the renewal of Aboriginal languages in New South Wales." *Language, Land and Song: Studies in Honour of Luise Hercus*. London: EL Publishing (2016): 523–538.
- Golos, Debbie B. "Deaf children's engagement in an educational video in American Sign Language." *American Annals of the Deaf* 155.3 (2010): 360–368.
- Groce, Nora Ellen. *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Marth's Vineyard*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Harris, Raychelle. "Sign Language as Academic Language." In *Deaf Studies Encyclopedia*, edited by Genie Gertz and Patrick Boudreault (Eds.), (pp. 829–832). Thousand Oaks, CA: The Sage Publication, 2016.
- Harris, Raychelle. "A Case Study of Extended Discourse in an ASL/English Bilingual Preschool Classroom." PhD diss., Gallaudet University, 2011.
- Hill, Joseph. "Language Ideologies, Policies, and Attitudes toward Signed Languages." In *The Oxford Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, edited by Robert Bayley, Richard Cameron, and Ceil Lucas (Eds.), (pp. 680–697). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Higgins, Jennifer A., Lisa Famularo, Stephanie W. Cawthon, Christopher A. Kurz, Jeanne E. Reis, & Lori M. Moers. "Development of American Sign Language guidelines for K-12 academic assessments." *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*. (2016): doi: 10.1093/deafed/enw051
- Humphries, Tom, Poorna Kushalnagar, Gaurav Mathur, Donna Jo Napoli, Carol Padden, Christian Rathmann, and Scott Smith. "Discourses of Prejudice in the Professions: The Case of Sign Languages." *Journal of Medical Ethics* 43 (2017): 648–652.
- Kowalsky, Jilly, and Richard P. Meier, "The Sign INSTITUTE and Its Derivatives: A Family of Culturally Important ASL Signs." *Sign Language Studies* 13.3 (2013): 291–315.
- Krausneker, Verena. "Ideologies and Attitudes Toward Sign Languages: An Approximation." *Sign Language Studies* 15 (2015): 411–431.
- Kurz, Christopher A.N., Kim Kurz, and Raychelle Harris. "Effectively interpreting the content areas utilizing academic language strategies." In *Deaf Eyes on Interpreting*, edited by Thomas Holcomb and David Smith (Eds.), (pp. 253–268). Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2018.
- Kusters, Annelies. "Language Ideologies in the Shared Signing Community of Adamorobe." *Language in Society* 43 (2014): 139–158.
- Lane, Harlan, Richard C. Pillard, and Ulf Hedberg. *The People of the Eye: Deaf Ethnicity and Ancestry*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Lang, Harry G., Mary LaPorta Hupper, Denise A. Monte, Scott W. Brown, Ivar Babb, and Pete M. Scheifele. "A study of technical signs in science: Implications for lexical database development." *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 12.1 (2006): 65–79.
- Nagy, William, and Dianna Townsend. "Words as tools: Learning academic vocabulary as language acquisition." *Reading Research Quarterly* 47.1 (2012): 91–108.
- Novogrodsky, Rama, et al. "The Development of Antonym Knowledge in American Sign Language (ASL) and Its Relationship to Reading Comprehension in English." *Language Learning* 64 (2014): 749-770.
- Padden, Carol. "Learning to fingerspell twice: Young signing children's acquisition of fingerspelling." *Advances in the sign language development of deaf children* (2006): 189–201.
- Rayman, Jennifer. "Why Doesn't Everyone Here Speak Sign Language? Questions of Language Policy, Ideologies and Economics." *Current Issues in Language Planning* 10 (2009): 342–354.
- Rudser, Steven F. "Sign Language Instruction and Its Implications for the Deaf" in Michael Strong (ed.), *Language Learning and Deafness*. pp. 99–112. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Rumsey, Alan. "Wording, Meaning, and Linguistic Ideology." *American Anthropologist* 92 (1990): 346–361.

- Scott, Jessica A., and Robert J. Hoffmeister. "American Sign Language and academic English: factors influencing the reading of bilingual secondary school deaf and hard of hearing students." *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* (2016): 1–13.
- Supalla, Ted, and Patricia Clark. *Sign Language Archaeology: Understanding the Historical Roots of American Sign Language*. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2015.
- Van Cleve, John V., and Barry A. Crouch. *A Place of Their Own: Creating the Deaf Community in America*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1989.
- Van Herreweghe, Mieke, Maartje De Meulder, and Myriam Vermeerbergen. "From Erasure to Recognition (and Back Again?): The Case of Flemish Sign Language." In *The Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies in Language*, edited by Marc Marschark and Patricia Spencer, 45–61. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Wang, Ye, Maria C. Hartman, Laudan B. Jahromi, and Barbara Tversky. "Better Story Recall by Deaf Children with Unimodal Communication." *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities* 29.5 (2017): 699–720.
- Wilbur, Ronnie B. "The use of ASL to support the development of English and literacy." *Journal of deaf studies and deaf education* 5, no. 1 (2000): 81–104.
- Wolfe, Rosalee, John McDonald, Jorge Toro, Souad Baowidan, Robyn Moncrief, and Jerry Schnepf. "Promoting Better Deaf/hearing Communication Through an Improved Interaction Design for Fingerspelling Practice." *Universal Access in Human-Computer Interaction: Access to Today's Technologies* 9175 (2015): 495–505.

Erin Moriarty

Exploring sign language histories and documentation projects in post-conflict areas

1 Introduction

Cambodia is often portrayed as a ruin, perpetually recovering from an unmitigated humanitarian disaster after decades of war, compounded by genocide in which 2 to 3 million people were killed between 1975 and 1979 (see Behan 2017; Knowsley 2017; Mitchell 2017 for examples of articles on tourism that mention the Khmer Rouge genocide in the first three paragraphs, over 40 years after the fact). Following that, Cambodia is depicted as a place without a history of a deaf community or a national sign language in scholarly, NGO, and media narratives (see Kenning 2013; McMorran and Mom 2013; Woodward 2016).

In NGO and media discourses about Cambodia, having a national signed language is sometimes linked to notions of development and modernity (Moriarty Harrelson 2017a). The dominant narrative in the media, such as *The Cambodia Daily*, *USA Today*, and *The Phnom Penh Post*, contends that there was nothing in Cambodia for deaf people (e.g., no national Cambodian Sign Language, nor local sign languages, nor any form of deaf education) until foreign NGOs arrived in post-conflict Cambodia in the 1990s (see Kenning 2013 for an example of this narrative). Media narratives often portray deaf education, deaf persons and sign languages as if they were recent developments and/or through a deficit lens. Additionally, in the cases of post-conflict areas, narratives that portray sign languages and their users as recent developments are more easily circulated because of the literal destruction of people, histories, institutions, and in some cases, the sign languages in use. In these cases, such narratives ignore or erase the (sometimes-nearly-lost) histories of deaf people in lower-income, postcolonial countries and naturalize the narrative of newness by ignoring the role of war in the destruction of the lived experiences and undocumented histories of certain groups of deaf people.

These ideologies in circulation regarding the history of deaf people and sign language(s) in Cambodia involve the erasure of historical records and of the lived experiences of deaf people in Cambodia before the NGOs arrived. These claims circulate widely because often, the history of sign language and deaf people are lost as a result of armed conflict or civil war, as in the case of Nicaragua and Cambodia before the late 1970s and 1980s. Media narratives often represent deaf communities and signed

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510090-016>

languages in certain places, such as in low-income countries¹, as relatively recent developments. As such, deaf education and the documentation of a national signed language are tied to notions of modernity and development (Branson and Miller 1998). Similar claims have been made about Nicaragua, where researchers have claimed the flourishing of a new sign language among children attending school for the first time after a civil war. Efforts to cultivate a national signed language or to augment it with the coining of new signs — framed as language creation, development, or standardization (Adam 2015; Mori 2011; Nakamura 2011) — are often key sites of intervention in these spaces that are imagined as lacking.

In this chapter, I sketch the historical circumstances of sign language documentation and standardization projects in Cambodia, describing the various forces at work in this setting, including the import of American Sign Language (ASL) by Krousar Thmey, a French NGO that established schools for deaf and blind students in Cambodia in 1997, amid concurrent efforts to develop a national signed language. I examine NGO projects concerning sign language in Cambodia to address larger questions about sign languages as natural and bounded entities as well as ideologies that drive signed language documentation and standardization projects in low-income countries. Sign language work, or the basic sign language research and documentation and the publication of this research in a dictionary or in the form of other teaching materials, is considered to be an important part of the development of a national, politicalized deaf community in the global South (WFD 2015). I discuss the development of Cambodian Sign Language in response to Makoni and Pennycook's (2007) call to interrogate the "invention" of languages. I examine efforts to document and classify signed languages as a project driven by these specific ideologies, focusing on the late 1990s through the present.

In many parts of the world in both the global North and South, sign languages do not necessarily come into being as a result of gradual change of a prior language over a long period of time, as is the case for most spoken languages. Sign languages can emerge very quickly, within one or two generations, such as in the case of the sign language that emerged in Ban Khor, estimated to be 60 to 70 years old (Nonoka 2009) and Israeli Sign Language, said to be 75 years old (Meir & Sandler 2008); the flip side of this is that they can be particularly vulnerable to destruction during war and genocide because of their particular sociolinguistic profiles (i.e., often very localized and/or linked to specific institutions like deaf schools). This chapter is not an attempt to present a narrative in which

1 I use the term "low-income" to refer to countries where the Gross National Income (GNI) threshold is <\$1,025.

it is claimed that Cambodia had a national signed language before foreign intervention in the 1990s; the evidence does, however, suggest that deaf people were signing with each other before the arrival of NGOs in the 1990s. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to show the complexity of tracing the histories and geographies of signed languages throughout the world, particularly in post-conflict areas. This chapter is an engagement with dominant ideologies that portray such areas as blank slates that require intervention.

2 Documentation of “natural” sign languages and linguistic prescriptivism

Linguistic descriptions of Cambodian Sign Language designate it as the “natural” sign language of deaf people in Cambodia (Woodward et al. 2015). The form of Cambodian Sign Language used at Deaf Development Programme (DDP) is ideologically positioned by linguists and NGO workers as “natural” in opposition to the sign language used by students and teachers at Krousar Thmey, an NGO which imported ASL in the 1990s for use in its schools. Some of the deaf Cambodians affiliated with DDP have said that the signing used by the teachers, interpreters and students (as well as former students) is incomprehensible and not Cambodian Sign Language. They also often say that they do not understand the sign language interpreter provided by Krousar Thmey on television news broadcasts because it is not Cambodian Sign Language, but they do not seem to use the concept of “natural” to describe their perceptions of the differences between what I am calling Krousar Thmey signing and DDP signing for the purposes of this chapter.

Recurring patterns across individual discourses signal the presence of ideology (Jourdan and Angeli 2014). Dominant ideologies have naturalized particular interventions, such as the modification of sign languages by educators to conform to aspects of spoken language grammar, specifically syntax and morphology; the wholesale import of a foreign sign language, such as ASL in the case of Cambodia; or the coining of new signs because of a perception that the sign language used on an everyday basis by deaf people is not sophisticated enough for education. What is not often analyzed is the “common-sense” idea that “natural” sign languages exist in opposition to artificial signing systems. In the Cambodian context, it seems that the term “natural” regarding signed languages, sometimes denotes “not foreign” or indigenous, but in other cases, it refers to the “natural” development of a sign language among deaf people and/or a sign system that is not based on spoken language grammar.

As such, this chapter examines the persistent patterns of various discourses about sign language in Cambodia that circulate among the media, NGOs, and international development workers working with deaf people. In this chapter, language ideologies are defined as attitudes about the nature of language, their origins, and their future (Kroskrity 2000:5). These persistent discourses among deaf Cambodians and the people who work with them (hearing Cambodians and/or foreigners, whether deaf or hearing), are concerned with questions of what should be defined as the *national* sign language, and not necessarily sign language(s) as used in everyday practice by deaf people themselves.

Linguistic prescriptions and technologies for teaching the national spoken language via the signed modality (such as in the example of Sign Supported English, SSE, which borrows signs from British Sign Language and attempts to follow English grammatical structure) have had a long, contested history in deaf education. One of the main controversies that characterizes deaf education and sign languages is the invention and use of sign systems by educators as a pedagogical tool for teaching. According to Pettito (1994:2), these systems are “‘hybrids,’ amalgams of parts of spoken language structure and parts of signed language structure that do not possess the full grammar of either of the two languages from which they were drawn.” These planned systems were often developed as a means of encoding spoken languages using aspects of signed languages in order to teach spoken and written languages to deaf students (Petitto 1994; Hochgesang 2016).

This controversy is based on ideologies about the natural development of a signed language, as opposed to the invented sign-based codes that are often used in classrooms with deaf students as a teaching tool or the import of foreign sign languages for use in deaf education settings in low-income regions of the world (Branson and Miller 1998, 2004). For the purpose of this chapter, “natural” signed languages are defined as sign languages that emerged “naturally” from communities of deaf people (Petitto 1994). The emergence of natural language occurs as a result of daily interaction and efforts to communicate on a systematic basis (Hochgesang 2016). On the other hand, planned sign communication systems are sometimes developed through formal committee meetings during which members decide which manual signs best represent certain concepts, rather than through everyday communicative practices (Hochgesang 2016).

According to Blommaert (2008), languages are “born” as a result of textual procedures based on the assumption of languages as structures that are replicable in textual objects, specifically, their own description, such as in a dictionary. A language’s existence is a matter of its existence as a recorded, researchable structure (Blommaert 2008). As a language becomes textual in the form of documentation, it is seen as stable and worthy of respect (Blommaert 2008). Blom-

maert writes, “The point is languages came into being because...of the particular textual-generic requirements that were imposed on ‘the record’, and they came on record in terms of these generic requirements” (2008:306). A sign language that does not have a traceable history is rendered invisible and denied the status of “real” language until it is recognized through processes of documentation. Through processes of development and documentation, Cambodian Sign Language came to be a recognized language by deaf Cambodians, deaf educators, and development workers, as well as by the government.

The term “natural” is often used in conjunction with signed languages; however, Betcher (2008) noted that the concept of what is “natural” is a problematic construct that is often used in deaf political discourse. He goes on to say, “Calling sign language ‘language’ is not the same as theorizing it as such from top to bottom — a task that can only require the theorization of language itself” (Betcher 2008:82). Many scholars in Deaf Studies have commented on the central role of sign languages in the formation of national deaf communities (e.g., Padden and Humphries 1988; Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan 1996; Monaghan, Schmaling, Nakamura and Turner 2003; Mathur and Napoli 2011). Deaf people who do not already share a standardized language but regularly interact with other people will develop ways to communicate, such as multimodal translanguaging (Moriarty Harrelson 2017b) or homesign (Goldin Meadow 2013). As such, the Cambodian case compels us to interrogate the ideologies at work in circumstances where social upheaval such as war or mass displacement of people have created a vacuum for the advancement of certain ideologies connected to humanitarianism, deaf development, and sign language work.

3 Historical circumstances of sign language projects in Cambodia

Much of the English-language media coverage of deaf people in Cambodia, including coverage by local newspapers such as *The Phnom Penh Post* and *Cambodia Daily*, and foreign newspapers such as *USA Today*, ideologically position Cambodia as a hot, dirty, and corrupt place. In many cases, deaf people in Cambodia are described as being treated as less than human by their families and other Cambodians (see Robertson and Ouch 2014). In media interviews, foreign development workers who began working with deaf people in the 1990s claim there was no evidence of deaf education or signed language in Cambodia prior to the workers’ arrival. For example, a *Cambodia Daily* article from 2014 claimed that “It was not until 1997, when a Finnish aid worker gathered a group of deaf

Cambodians together and encouraged them to communicate with each other, that Khmer sign language first began to take shape. Under the guidance of a Catholic priest who arrived in Phnom Penh 14 years ago to work at DDP, hundreds of young people like Ms. Chonreasmey have freed themselves from living only inside their own minds” (Robertson and Ouch 2014; see Moriarty Harrelson 2017a for further examples).

These narratives do not only appear in the media. During fieldwork, several people testified that learning sign language at DDP had a transformative effect on their lives, showing that these narratives appear among deaf people and the hearing people who work with them. This is a complex, nuanced set of overlapping narratives that cannot be collapsed into an equation where outsiders, such as development workers from Australia, Finland, and the United States “wrongly” describe deaf people in Cambodia as lacking language, and where deaf Cambodians are experiencing false consciousness in subscribing to this ideology by repeating this narrative themselves. There are indeed some deaf people who have experienced communicative deprivation and find it difficult to acquire certain elements of a communicative repertoire. It is indeed a transformative experience for deaf Cambodians to meet other deaf people and learn a shared sign language either at DDP or Krousar Thmey, or via interaction with deaf people in community settings). In this context, these narratives co-exist, overlap, oppose, compete, or reinforce each other, as ideologies do.

However, certain ideologies have become dominant through media and/or academic hegemony, as well as a distinctly global North tendency to treat undocumented experiences as non-existent. Since the late 1990s, a succession of consultants has visited Phnom Penh to assist the project of “developing” CSL, based on the belief that there was no signed language in Cambodia prior to the arrival of the NGOs. Yet, the narrative that there was no deaf education or sign language in Cambodia was contradicted by evidence I found in the National Archives of Cambodia, as well as data from interviews during the 2014-15 phase of my fieldwork.

There is a paucity of detailed information about the origins of Cambodian Sign Language. In the following paragraphs, I attempt to piece together an account of NGO efforts to develop a national signed language in Cambodia with documents I found in a thick, dusty binder on a neglected bookshelf. This bookshelf was located in the office of the Cambodian Sign Language teaching and interpreting projects on the second floor of the administrative building at DDP. In this binder, I found a trove of reports, handwritten notes, and diagrams from the earliest days of the Sign Language Research and Development Committee. I asked the Deputy Director of DDP (at the time) for permission to look through these documents, and they turned out to be a rich resource for the history of deaf development in Cambodia through signed language projects. Using these documents, I will present an

account of the work of the Cambodian Sign Language project over two decades, with the purpose of providing contextual understanding of the emergence of a variety of communicative practices now known as Cambodian Sign Language, as well as the ideologies that drove efforts to develop and document Cambodian Sign Language as a national language in Cambodia.

Several sources attribute the earliest efforts to develop Cambodian Sign language, which was at the time referred to as Khmer Sign Language, to a deaf development worker from Finland who came to Cambodia in 1996. However, the documents I found in Phnom Penh attributed the efforts to develop a national signed language to both Cambodian-run and foreign NGOs in Cambodia working with people with disabilities and deaf people (e.g., the Cambodian Disabled People's Organization, or CDPO, and DDP) during a period of national reconstruction immediately after the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) period in the 1990s. A few of these documents referred to Navy Kiev, a hearing Cambodian who worked in Site Two, a refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodian border, as a "sign language teacher," but it is not clear from these documents what her background or training was.² Navy Kiev first worked with deaf people in the camps and then started working with deaf people in Phnom Penh when the camps closed and she was repatriated to Cambodia, as were many deaf people and their families.

Site Two was located in Thailand, 70 kilometers northeast of Aranyaprathet, near Ta Phraya, approximately 4 kilometers from the Cambodian border. With nearly 200,000 residents, Site Two was the largest of six camps for displaced Cambodians. One of the NGOs active in Site Two was the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which operated a Special Education program for deaf and blind students. In its 1985 country report, the IRC stated that it had provided education for over 300 students with disabilities since 1982, but it is not clear where this education was provided because the Site Two refugee camp opened in 1985, and, the IRC stated that as of 1985, it had 100 students with disabilities in its program.

According to one report, "Refugee instructors train refugee teachers in Braille and sign language. These two communication programs were developed...under the guidance of the IRC coordinator. Parents and family members of the deaf were simultaneously trained in order to communicate with their child or sibling" (see Rowat 2014). These sources do not specify which sign language was used or who provided the training in deaf education pedagogies, but there is evidence of the

² This is one of the rare instances where I use an individual's real name in the interests of historical documentation and because this information is already available publicly.

invention of a fingerspelling system representing the Khmer script and based on the sounds in spoken Khmer (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 is an image of the the “Khmer Sign Alphabet”, a document that seems to have been disseminated by the IRC in the camp, according to a website created and managed by a Canadian who had worked in the camps for seven years (see Rowat 2014).

According to Joanne Scott’s collection of oral histories, Him Mao, a school-teacher from Phnom Penh who became a refugee in the camps on the Thai-Cambodian border, testified that he was assigned to the “special school” in the camps. Him Mao explained that he worked with a Thai assistant who “went back and forth to Bangkok for me, going to the special school there. We were working on developing a sign language for Khmer people because at that time in Cambodia, there was no sign language” (Scott 1989:126). Him Mao explains, “We used the Thai and English system as a model. We had to compare them and get out the sounds to form into Khmer. We compared all the sounds. There were so many — consonants, vowels, punctuations, independent vowels. For the numbers, we used the international signs — the same as Thai and English.”

Figure 1 illustrates the fingerspelled alphabet from ASL being used to represent the sound of each character in Khmer. The first character in the Khmer alphabet is a “K” sound and the second character is a “KH” sound; the handshapes representing these characters are the handshapes for “K” and then “K” and “H” in ASL, meaning that someone with knowledge of ASL or Thai Sign Language fingerspelling may have invented this Khmer fingerspelling alphabet. The IRC system is not in use in contemporary Cambodia. There is now a completely different system of handshapes used for fingerspelling the Khmer alphabet (see Figure 2). There is a similarity in the sense that the handshapes in both alphabets are visual representations of sounds in spoken Khmer. As of this writing, information about how the Cambodian Sign Language fingerspelling system came to replace the system used by IRC is not available, nor is it possible to decipher the ideologies behind this change.

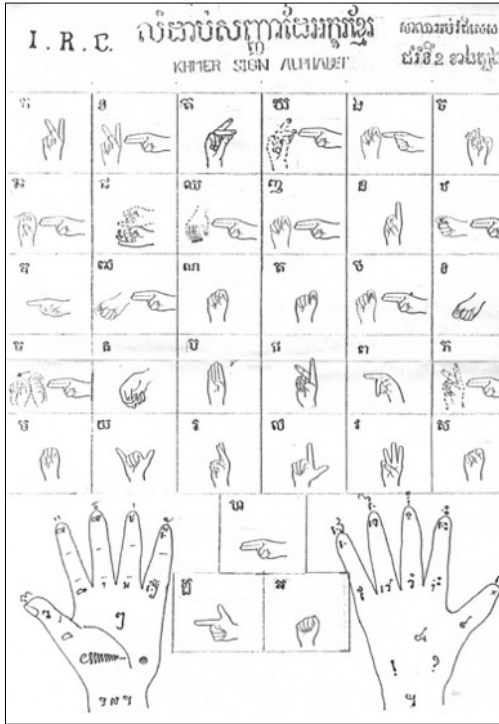


Figure 1. Drawing of the “Khmer Sign Alphabet” disseminated by IRC.



Figure 2. “Cambodia Sign Language” fingerspelling chart disseminated by DDP and Krousar Thmey.

Often, information about activities with deaf people in the camps was not part of any media or NGO narratives emerging from Phnom Penh. The historical record of activities within the disability sector picks up again in the 1990s after the camps on the Thai-Cambodian border were closed. In July 1995, the CDPO and Disabled People International (DPI) held a meeting for stakeholders interested in working with deaf people in Cambodia. In September 1995, the first meeting for deaf adults was held at the CDPO/DPI office. Yim, a hearing Cambodian, had begun a project to look into the situation of deaf people in Cambodia, most likely at the behest of Maryknoll, an organization that later assumed administrative responsibility for DDP after it separated from CDPO. Maryknoll is an organization of Catholic missionaries from the United States who live and work overseas, and it continued to work with deaf people in Cambodia under an agreement with DPI.

In January 1996, Navy Kiev, who had worked with deaf people in the Site Two refugee camp, joined Yim as project staff, and they gathered together about 50 deaf people in the Phnom Penh area. For the next six months, they worked with these deaf people on a needs assessment. In March 1996, a deaf woman from Finland came to Cambodia with funding from the Finnish Disabled People's International Development Association (since renamed as Disability Partnership Finland), and in a 2005 report to the Woodford Foundation on a survey of deaf services in Cambodia and Laos she is credited with establishing DDP (Clark 2005). According to Clark (2005), this deaf woman stayed in Cambodia from March to May 1996, conducting a three-month research project and collaborating on the needs assessment. During this time, the deaf development worker from Finland, Navy Kiev, and Yim met with over 90 deaf adults and children in order to promote what they termed "socialization" and the "natural" development of sign language.

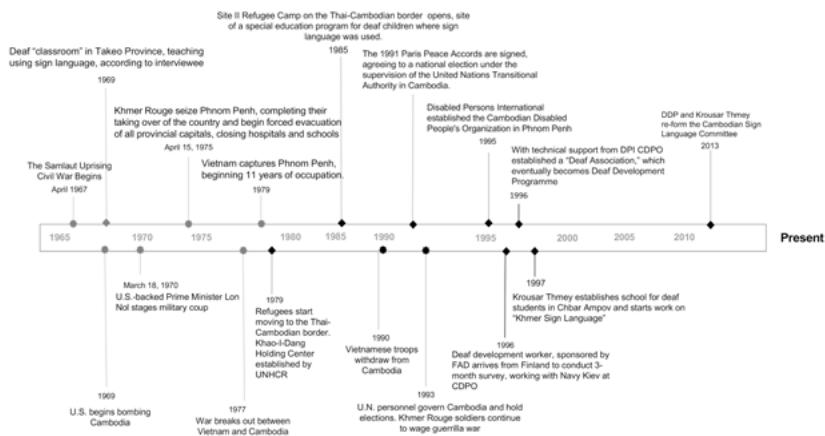


Figure 3. Timeline of the historical record of events.

According to an English-language document titled “Background History of the Sign Language Technical Group Sub-Committee” that was published by CDPO on their website, the deaf advisor from Finland and Navy Kiev, who was a program assistant with CDPO at the time, worked under the auspices of CDPO to bring deaf people together in order to “develop” a national signed language. This document also explains that CDPO established a “Deaf Association” in early 1996 with technical support from DPI, in order to “develop a National Sign Language for deaf people under the supervision and advised by a deaf woman from Finland. The Finnish government provides the funds to support the project up to 2003.” The circumstances in which Cambodian Sign Language came into being seem to have been experimental in nature. The NGOs had the aim of creating a national signed language by bringing deaf people together to create a Deaf community as an incubator of a “natural” signed language.

Samath Heang was one of the first deaf people recruited to work with the CDPO as an illustrator for the Cambodian Sign Language project. He drew the signs in the sign language workbooks developed by DDP. He explained to me that his parents had heard about CDPO on the radio and brought him to the center in 1997. Samath said, “A person from Finland came to Cambodian Disabled People’s Organization. I was surprised to see other deaf people.” Miming a stiff stance with wide eyes and arms crossed @ in front of his chest, he explained that he at first felt paralyzed when confronted by a room full of deaf people.

According to Samath, when he first arrived at CDPO the staff gathered together deaf people in front of a blackboard. They would go around the room asking deaf people how they variously signed a word, such as “cat,” then ask the group which sign they liked the best. The group then decided on the sign to be adopted, and that became a part of the lexicon of “natural” Cambodian Sign Language.

In December 2014, I sat in the bleachers at a football game with Samath and Sam, an older deaf man who works as a security guard and handyman in Phnom Penh. I watched them recall “the old days” when they first met as members of the first cohort of deaf people recruited by CDPO in the early 1990s to develop Cambodian Sign Language and a Deaf community, before the “Deaf Project” split off to become DDP. After I asked them if that was the first time they had ever seen sign language, Sam said that he “had sign language” in 1969. Taken aback and thinking that I had misunderstood, I asked him to please repeat what he had just signed. He repeated himself, and I realized that my understanding of his signing had been correct. I asked him to please retell his story, and after getting his permission I filmed this on video. Sam claimed that in 1969, he had attended school with 150 to 200 other deaf people. He later clarified that this was a classroom at a school in a province south of Phnom Penh, where he is from originally. I asked

him what sign language he had been using and if he could demonstrate for me, but he claimed that he did not remember any of it.

In follow-up interviews, Sam explained that in 1969, there were teachers working with the deaf students who were from Thailand, Japan, and the United States. He could not remember their names or any other identifying information, so I was unable to follow up with further archival research. I asked him what happened to the school, and he explained that it closed because of bombings and war. He told me that all of the other deaf people had died during the “Khmer Rouge times” and that he was the only one left alive from the “deaf classroom.” In addition to documents I found in the National Archives, Sam’s story about being in a signing environment in 1969 contradicts dominant NGO narratives about there being “nothing” in Cambodia before they arrived in 1997.

4 “Khmerization” of ASL

Attached to the minutes of a meeting facilitated by Disability Action Council in 2000 between Krousar Thmey and CDPO is a document titled “Background History of the Sign Language Technical Group Sub-Committee.” In this document, there is a statement that ASL was imported into Cambodia because the “slow processing of sign language development does not match the need of the school. The new approach lead Krousar Thmey to the collaboration with Cambodian Disabled People’s Organization on the agreement of adapting American Sign Language.” CDPO was involved because it still oversaw the “Deaf Project,” which had not yet separated from CDPO to become DDP.

Benoit Duchâteau-Arminjon, a hearing man from France who established Krousar Thmey in the refugee camps, made the decision to import ASL with the intent to “Khmerize” it over time. He was a strong proponent of the “Khmerization” of ASL with the assistance of a committee, meaning they would invent signs for concepts and objects specific to what he termed “Cambodian culture,” which most likely referred to specific cultural traditions such as the Apsara dance and Khmer instruments such as *roneat* and *skor*, which are a part of Krousar Thmey’s programming. From its earliest days, Krousar Thmey has trained its blind students to play instruments and its deaf students to perform “traditional” Khmer dances, often performed for top government officials, including the Prime Minister of Cambodia, Hun Sen and his wife.

“The Background History of the Sign Language Technical Group Sub-Committee” document also contains a bullet point claiming “The staff from KT and Cambodian Disabled People’s Organization had two days meeting with deaf adult

group to explain the need and constrain mentions (sic) above. At the end of the second day, the deaf adult group agreed to adopt ASL and provides (sic) their signatures as evidence.” The organizers of this meeting thus felt they needed “evidence” of agreement from the “deaf adult group” to accept ASL as the community’s language. This shows that at this point in time, people involved with deaf education in the global South were at least aware of the potentially problematic nature of importing ASL for use in the schools. This document also mentions that the committee suspended its work from mid-1999 to 2000 “due to the lack of communication, misunderstanding, human resources and the disagreement from the deaf Advisor when she return (sic) in mid 1999 on the adaption of ASL.”

According to interview data, there was a wholesale import of ASL signs, but this does not necessarily mean ASL as a language was imported. From interview data and my observations of the leadership at Krousar Thmey’s approach to sign language development, it seems that they viewed sign language as a pedagogical tool for teaching deaf children and not necessarily as a cultural property of deaf people. Below, a graduate of Krousar Thmey explains his recollection of when ASL was first brought into the school.³

S: It was 1997.

S: It was from America

S: They gave us a book of signs.

S: Before 1997, I used “mother” and “father” (Uses CSL signs)

S: then starting in 1998, with American Sign Language. (nods)

S: Yes, that is right, it was in ninety-eight.

E: Really? In 1998?

S: Yes. Really. I remember clearly.

S: I knew “mother” and “father” (demonstrates CSL signs)

S: I knew [those signs].

S: I asked the teacher, why did it change?

S: The teacher, the big boss, said it has been changed. We now use “Mother” and “Father” (demonstrates the ASL signs for “Mother” and “Father.”)

3 This interview was conducted in Cambodian Sign Language, then transcribed into written English. Often, sign languaging practices are glossed as individual words for signs or transcribed/translated into complete written sentences; however, these methods are both problematic. For the purpose of this analysis, I translated the signing into written English.

- S: We use (started with CSL sign for “Use” then switched to ASL, signing “use” with an initialized “u”) [those signs now].
- S: America is important (uses the ASL sign for “important”)

As shown in Figure 4 and in the Krousar Thmey textbooks and signage around the schools, elements of ASL and English are clearly present. Specifically, handshapes from the ASL fingerspelled alphabet are present, as are signs that incorporate handshapes denoting the first letter of an English word.⁴ It is important to note that a mixture of signs is shown on the front covers of two versions of the “Khmer Sign Dictionary” (see Figure 4). The figure pictured on the cover of the dictionary on the left depicts ASL signs for “dictionary,” and “sign.” The ASL sign for “dictionary” is often an initialized sign using the “D” handshape. On the right, the figure in the top row is signing ASL for “language,” and Cambodian Sign Language for “deaf” and “Cambodia.” Also, the sign for Krousar Thmey as depicted on the cover of the book on the left is “family new” in ASL with the initialized “F” hand shape.

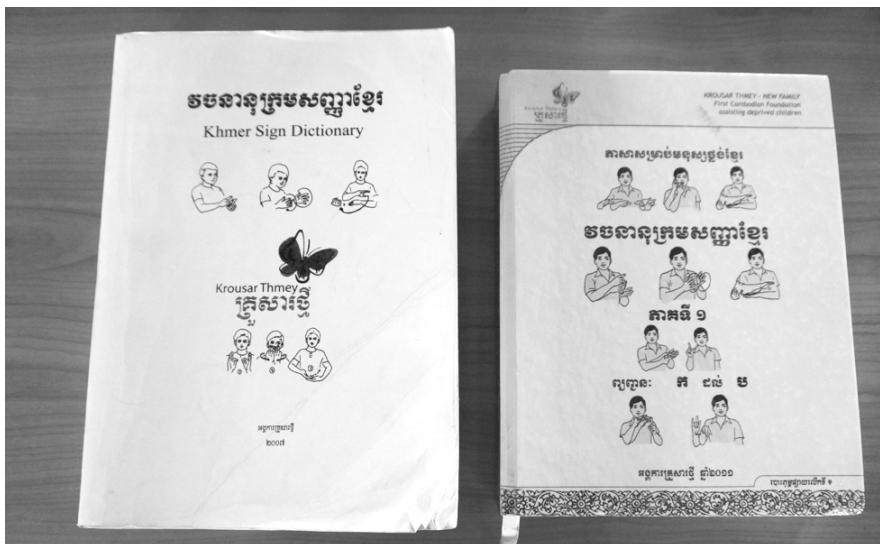


Figure 4. Covers of two books produced by Krousar Thmey during the “Khmer Sign Dictionary” project.

⁴ Incidentally, this sign is still used by some people in the United States but more recently there has been a trend to excise elements of English from ASL, for example, in the sign for “language” by replacing the “L” handshape with the “F” handshape. However, the concept of signed language purification by excising elements of the spoken language was not present in Cambodia at the time of my fieldwork

The books in Figure 4 show influence from the import into Cambodia of ASL, which was contested by the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD). Liisa Kauppinen, who was president of the WFD from 1995-2003, wrote in a document that seems to have been produced in response to the import of ASL into Cambodia, “The school cannot decide on its own what sign language is used in instruction...The attempt to import ASL into Cambodia is linguistic colonialism, perhaps even imperialism” (L. Kauppinen, personal communication, n.d.) James Woodward, a hearing linguist from the United States based in Vietnam who had briefly worked on the Cambodian Sign Language development project, wrote, “The Ministry should follow the World Federation of the Deaf’s recommendations . . . since it is recognized by the United Nations as the legal representative of Deaf people worldwide” (J. Woodward, personal communication, November 8, 2002). Ultimately, Krousar Thmey moved forward with its decision to implement ASL in its schools.

While ASL was being used in the Krousar Thmey schools, a committee comprised of deaf and hearing people affiliated with DDP and Krousar Thmey continued their joint efforts to develop “Khmer Sign Language” (now known as Cambodian Sign Language) by meeting regularly to invent signs for Khmer words. This activity is an example of an ideology that signed languages must “match” the dominant spoken language of the area. As a guide, the group worked with the official textbooks mandated by the national educational curriculum. Going grade-by-grade and chapter-by-chapter, they invented signs for each word in the textbooks; but this work was suspended according to data collected during interviews and emails from that period, the committee eventually dissolved because of tensions between DDP and Krousar Thmey.

For about ten years, until 2013, there were two separate committees based at each NGO working to develop sign language in Cambodia. Krousar Thmey produced textbooks following the government-issued Cambodian national curriculum, but with individual signs mostly from ASL for some words, similar to what is seen in Figure 4. At the same time, DDP worked to produce their own textbooks for the teaching of Cambodian Sign Language. The DDP committee was comprised primarily of deaf Cambodians who had received training in sign language research in Finland and Australia, as well as in-country with linguists from the United States. There were also hearing Cambodians involved with the committee, as well as deaf advisors supported by the Finnish Association of the Deaf who provided “supervision”. There is a dictionary of signs collected by DDP, which was not widely disseminated. In fact, there seem to be very few copies of this dictionary, one of which is in the library at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. In Cambodia, I found copies of the Cambodian Sign Language textbooks from when the project first started in the 2000s, but not the DDP dictionary that I found in the Gallaudet library.

The covers of the textbooks produced by the DDP Cambodian Sign Language committee are very similar to the covers of other books I have seen from projects in other Southeast Asian countries. What struck me about this collection is that many of the dictionaries were produced under the tutelage of the same linguist from the United States, James Woodward, with almost identical narratives about the importance of allowing “natural” sign languages to emerge from “Deaf communities.” These sign language dictionaries are from different countries, but they all have the same cover design, the same organizational framework based on handshapes, and similar narratives about the importance of “natural” sign languages. This shows patterns in the circulation of ideologies about sign language documentation and dictionary-making.

The Cambodian Sign Language textbooks had the same basic introduction as the other dictionaries produced with Woodward, with similar wording explaining that “national sign languages are natural languages, distinct from the national spoken language”. The wording in the introduction is also very similar to the introduction in the sign language dictionaries produced in the 1990s by the National Association of the Deaf in Thailand, a project supported by a different consultant from the United States, Charles Reilly, who was encouraged by William Stokoe to engage in this work (C. Reilly, personal communication February 24, 2010). These books essentially have the same introduction emphasizing the importance of using “natural” sign languages rather than “invented systems,” an implication that the ideological stance established in sign language work taking place in Southeast Asia was a possible reaction to trends in the United States towards deaf education pedagogies based on Signed Exact English and a desire to prevent this in Southeast Asia.

During my visit to the DDP office in 2013, I asked if I could purchase a copy of the official Cambodian Sign Language dictionary. The deputy director at DDP told that it had not been published yet. I explained to him that I had seen a copy at the Gallaudet library entitled “CSL Dictionary: Hong Kong Version.” At first, he looked puzzled, but after a pause he told me it had probably been a single copy produced for the Nippon Foundation who funded this project and that to his knowledge, there are no copies in Cambodia.

5 Sign language ideologies in practice: “DDP sign” and “Krousar Thmey sign”

Ideologically, deaf people cleaved along NGO lines until 2013, when the Cambodian Sign Language Committee was revived as a joint project between DDP and Krousar Thmey. Until this time, deaf people socialized primarily with others from

the same NGO, using what they believe to be different sign languages. In conversations, deaf people from both NGOs often referred to the signs used by the other group as either a “DDP sign” or a “Krousar Thmey sign.” It emerged from interviews with deaf Cambodians and NGO administrators that for the previous decade, deaf people who had become a part of the urban deaf network in Cambodia used different signs and/or believed there were differences between the sign languages they used that were seemingly based on the NGO with which they most identified. The two groups of signers told me that they could not understand each other. In interviews, deaf people from DDP often told me they could not understand the Cambodian Sign Language interpreters on TV. These interpreters are provided by Krousar Thmey and are former teachers or currently work as interpreters in the schools; however, during my fieldwork in 2014–2015, I observed people from Krousar Thmey and DDP socializing together to a greater extent than I had in 2012 and 2013. These groups of people seem to be able to understand each other well, and many of the signs used are similar, if not the same.

This ideological distinction continues through the contemporary incarnation of the Cambodian Sign Language development committee. Currently, a group of ten comprised of five people from each NGO work through textbooks from the national curriculum of Cambodia, with the primary task of deciding if there is a “Krousar Thmey” or “DDP sign” for a given Khmer word in the textbook. If there are indeed two signs from each respective NGO, the group then votes on which sign should be documented as an “official” CSL sign. This is an activity that I observed many times during fieldwork.

In another example of ideologies specific to “DDP signs” and “Krousar Thmey signs,” some of the signs used at *both* DDP and Krousar Thmey were viewed as “foreign.” in 2014, during one of the Cambodian Sign Language committee meetings I attended at Krousar Thmey, I noticed there were binders labelled “Deaf Culture” and “Khmer Sign Language” in enclosed glass cabinets in the back of the room. During a break, I walked over to the shelves to peruse the binders. I asked the Krousar Thmey staff if I could look at the binders. In doing so, I walked over to their desk and initiated a conversation, explaining that I was interested in learning more about Cambodian Sign Language and the history of sign language “development” in Cambodia.

The teacher/interpreter had been coaching one of the older students on a speech she was to give the next day at the other Krousar Thmey Phnom Penh location, which was a newer campus with deaf and blind students recently built on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. The student who was being coached on her signing went outside for a break, and the teacher/interpreter told me that DDP used “Australian” signs and that they were not really Cambodian Sign Language. She said, “Their signing is Australian. DDP uses Australian signs.”

This is intriguing, especially in light of the statements I had seen from people at DDP that Krousar Thmey used “American” signs. It should be noted that Australian Sign Language, or Auslan, is very different from ASL, especially in its fingerspelling, so it seems difficult to confuse the two if one were familiar with either sign language. Auslan uses a two-handed fingerspelled alphabet similar to what is used in British Sign Language and New Zealand Sign Language, whereas ASL uses a one-handed fingerspelled alphabet. Many signers in Cambodia affiliated with DDP use the ASL fingerspelling handshapes and/or the fingerspelling handshapes for Cambodian Sign Language, which are very different from ASL or Auslan fingerspelling.

It is possible the “Australian signs” claims emerged from the presence of several Auslan signers at DDP over the years. One of the linguists who consulted with the Cambodian Sign Language development committee was Colin Allen, a deaf Australian who as of this writing is the president of the WFD and who in the 2000s worked as an aid consultant on behalf of the Finnish Association of the Deaf. More recently, AusAID, the Australian version of the US Peace Corps, has been sending deaf and hearing volunteers from Australia to work at DDP. The long-time Deputy Director at DDP, a man who is the seventh generation of a deaf family from the United Kingdom, is a native British Sign Language user, so this may have had an influence on certain signs but for the most part, based on my observations the signs used at DDP were not ASL, Auslan or BSL.

Another example of ideologies about sign languages is visible in how sign languages are named. Many signed languages are named according to certain conventions established in field sign language linguistics, such as the use in the name of the nation or the location where the signed language was identified. These conventions seem to apply to named signed languages throughout the world, such as Irish Sign Language, Kenyan Sign Language, Taiwanese Sign Language, Ugandan Sign Language, etc. Many of these named signed languages are abbreviated in English as ISL, KSL, TSL, etc. In some cases, the signed languages are abbreviated in accordance to the grammar of the country in question’s spoken language, as in LSF (*Languge des signes française*), LSE (*Lengua de Signos Española*), NGT (*Nederlandse Gebarentaal*), *Deutsche Gebärdensprache* (DGS), and so forth. In still other cases, a specific sign language is known by one name in the spoken/written language of the nation or region and by another in English. In the case of Cambodian Sign Language, I once asked the deputy director of DDP why the national signed language in Cambodia was called Cambodian Sign Language and not Khmer Sign Language, as the national spoken language is called Khmer. He told me, “There are many ethnic groups in Cambodia. Not everyone is Khmer and they are also signers, so we use Cambodian Sign Language.”

To date, there have been very few scholarly publications featuring linguistic analyses of Cambodian Sign Language. One such analysis recently appeared in a mammoth handbook titled *Sign Languages of the World* (Woodward et al. 2015). According to the authors, Cambodian Sign Language is also known as CSL; CBSL or CamBodian Sign Language, to distinguish it from Chinese Sign Language and other signed languages with similar acronyms; and Khmer Sign Language or KSL. The authors wrote, “It is best to avoid using the term Khmer Sign Language, since the term Khmer refers to the [dominant] language used by hearing people in Cambodia and Cambodian Sign Language is a different language from spoken/written Khmer” (Woodward et al. 2015:157). This is an interesting example of an ideological stance adopted by linguists to position Cambodian Sign Language as completely separate from spoken Khmer.

As far as my research shows, there is no documentation of a discussion among deaf people in Cambodia about what the national signed language should be called. Deaf Cambodians themselves use signs that translate literally into English as “Sign Language Cambodia.” This is another instance that reinforces that there are inherent ideologies in naming conventions of sign languages, as Green (2014) found in Nepal. The naming of Cambodian Sign Language as “Cambodian,” rather than “Khmer,” is in itself an ideological construct with the aim of distinguishing it from the dominant spoken language in Cambodia and/or an imported foreign sign language, such as ASL. Interestingly, the few linguistic analyses of Cambodian Sign Language have never commented on how many of the signs use the Cambodian Sign Language fingerspelling handshape corresponding to how the word sounds in Khmer. The effort to prove that sign languages are true languages on a par with spoken languages has resulted in the drawing of stark ideological lines, not only between signed and spoken languages, but also between the construct of “natural” sign languages as used by deaf people and what are viewed as sign systems based on spoken languages.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the complexity of the linguistic situations in a specific post-conflict context where the histories of sign language and deaf people have either been lost or obscured by dominant narratives. As well, any signed languages in Cambodia that could possibly have existed prior to this conflict were destroyed because people were killed and communities of shared signed language users dispersed, especially as the Khmer Rouge evacuated the cities in 1975. The destruction of both people and historical records left a vacuum

for certain narratives to fill and created spaces for ideologically-driven international development projects to “develop” a Deaf community and a national sign language. The project to incubate a Deaf community in Cambodia, as well as develop a national sign language, involved certain ideologies about sign languages as natural and bounded entities and what a national Deaf community should look like.

In the Cambodian case, ideologies advanced by development workers and sign language linguists from the global North about the importance of engaging in Deaf community development became the driving force behind the implementation of these projects, which may not have been the best design for the Cambodian context. Sign language work in different countries with different historical contexts seem to emerge from the exact same blueprint, as is typical of international development projects in general.

The sign language linguists working in Cambodia took specific ideologically-driven stances in an effort to solidify Cambodian Sign Language’s position as a language in its own right, possibly to prevent the entrenchment of a contrived form of signing as a deaf education pedagogy, such as signs for words in spoken Khmer derived from ASL in a manner, similar to Signed Exact English.

This chapter examines the consequences of sign language ideologies and boundary making for the lives of deaf people in Cambodia. With this chapter, I hope to complicate our understanding of international development projects to create Deaf communities and sign language “development” work by examining how ideologies and historical practices weave in and out of each other, with ideologies pushing practices and practices becoming ideologically typified. The development of what is known as contemporary Cambodian Sign Language was clearly not “natural” as understood by sign language linguists. The development and documentation of Cambodian Sign Language was idealized as key to deaf development in Cambodia, partly because of the unique circumstances of post-conflict Cambodia. The destruction of the country’s infrastructure, including government and schools, formed a vacuum that the NGOs tried to supplement to the best of their abilities, and they have indeed made a difference in the lives of many deaf people.

References

- Adam, Robert. 2015. Standardization of Sign Languages. *Sign Language Studies* 15(4). 432–445.
- Behan, Rosemary. Return to Cambodia. *The National*. September 28, 2017. <https://www.thenational.ae/lifestyle/travel/return-to-cambodia-1.662519>. (accessed February 14, 2018).
- Blommaert, Jan. 2008. Artefactual Ideologies and the Textual Production of African Languages. *Language & Communication* 28(4). 291–307.
- Clark, Rodney. 2005. *Services for Deaf children in Cambodia and Laos*. Woodford Foundation.
- Disability Action Council. 2003. The development of Cambodian (Khmer) Sign Language: History on the development of Cambodian (Khmer) Sign Language. Electronic resource, <http://www.dac.org.kh/highlighted-activities/kslc.htm> (accessed September 18, 2009).
- Gal, Susan. 1993. Diversity and Contestation in Linguistic Ideologies: German Speakers in Hungary. *Language in Society* 22(3). 337–359.
- Hochgesang, Julie. 2016. Languages, Natural. In Genie Gertz and Patrick Bouderault, (eds.) *The SAGE Deaf Studies Encyclopedia*, 560–567. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Reference.
- Jourdan, Christine, and Johanne Angeli. 2014. Pijin and Shifting Language Ideologies in Urban Solomon Islands. *Language in Society* 43(3). 265–85.
- Kenning, Chris. Priest helps create sign language for Cambodian deaf. *USA Today*, August 28, 2013. <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/08/28/priest-teaches-sign-language-cambodia/2714033/> (accessed March 26, 2019).
- Knowsley, Jo. Cambodia's charm offensive: How a new frontier has opened in this bewitching country – and it's blissful. *The Daily Mail*, September 9, 2017. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-4867682/Cambodia-s-charm-offensive-country-s-new-frontier.html#ixzz574Rjg0kK>. (Accessed February 14, 2018).
- Kroskrity, Paul V. (ed.). 2006. *Regimes of language: Ideologies, politics, and identities*. Oxford: James Currey Publishers.
- Lane, Harlan, Robert Hoffmeister, and Benjamin J. Bahan. 1996. *A Journey into the Deaf World*. San Diego, CA: Dawn Sign Press.
- Makoni, Sinfree, and Alastair Pennycook (eds.). 2007. Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages. In *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages*, 1–41. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Mathur, Gaurav, and Donna Jo Napoli (eds.). 2011. *Deaf Around the World: The Impact of Language*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Meir, Irit, and Wendy Sandler. 2008. *A language in space: The story of Israeli Sign Language*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Meir, Irit, Wendy Sandler, Carol Padden, and Mark Arono. 2010. Emerging Sign Languages. In Mark Marschark and Patricia E. Spencer (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language, and Education*, 267–280. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mitchell, Celeste. 2017. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, is Asia's hot new stopover city. *News.com.au*. <http://www.news.com.au/travel/world-travel/asia/phnom-penh-cambodia-is-asias-hot-new-stopover-city/news-story/b41e6cb20cbfa931e8ef01669428571f>. (accessed February 14, 2018).

- Moriarty Harrelson, Erin. 2017a. *Regimes of mobilities: Deaf development, NGOs and deaf tourism in Cambodia*. Washington, DC: American University dissertation.
- Moriarty Harrelson, Erin. 2017b. Deaf people with “no language”: Mobility and flexible accumulation in languaging practices of deaf people in Cambodia. *Applied Linguistics Review* 10(1). 55–72.
- Monaghan, Leila, Constanze Schmalig, Karen Nakamura, and Graham H. Turner (eds.). 2003. *Many Ways to Be Deaf: International Variation in Deaf Communities*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Mori, Sori. 2011. Pluralization: An alternative to the existing hegemony in JSL. In Garauv Mathur and Donna Jo Napoli (eds.), *Deaf around the World: The Impact of Language*, 333–38. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nakamura, Karen. 2011. The language politics of Japanese Sign Language (Nihon Shuwa). In Garauv Mathur and Donna Jo Napoli (eds.), *Deaf around the World: The Impact of Language*, 316–32. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nonaka, Angela M. 2009. Estimating size, scope, and membership of the speech/sign communities of undocumented indigenous/village sign languages: The Ban Khor case study. *Language and communication* 29. 210–229.
- Padden, Carol A., and Tom L. Humphries. 1988. *Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Petitto, Laura. 1994. Are signed languages ‘real’ languages? Evidence from American Sign Language and Langue des signes québécoise. *Signpost* 7(3). 1–10
- Robertson, Holly, and Sony Ouch. 2014. Creating a Common Language for Nation’s Deaf. *The Cambodia Daily*. September 6. <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/creating-a-common-language-for-nations-deaf-67639/> (accessed September 18, 2016).
- Rowat, Richard. 2014. Thai / Cambodia Border Refugee Camps 1975-1999 Information and Documentation Website. <http://www.websitesrcg.com/border/NGO/IRC-Special-Education.html> (accessed February 5, 2017).
- Scott, Joanne C. 1989. *Indochina’s refugees: Oral histories from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Co.
- Woodward, James, Anastasia Bradford, Sokchea Chea, and Samath Heang. 2015. Cambodian Sign Language. In Julie Bakken Jepsen, Goedele De Clerck, Sam Lutalo-Kiingi, et al. (eds.), *Sign Languages of the World. A Comparative Handbook*, 159–76. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

**Part V: Conclusion – Ideology, authority,
and power**

Joseph J. Murray

Ideology, authority, and power

1 Introduction

I would like to ground my observations on this volume by first relating a set of experiences that took place in Bolivia in the late 1990s, when a friend and I interacted with deaf and hearing Bolivians in our work for a sign language documentation project. Our project, funded by the Center for Sign Language Research in Switzerland, was to film sign names for geographical locations in selected South American deaf communities, both signs for locations in each of the target countries and their signs for other countries and areas of the world. The aim was to create a corpus of place name signs among selected deaf communities in the continent. This project took place alongside a more prosaic goal, one aligned with our ages (late twenties) and cultural status (Western backpackers): to travel around the world for a year. Both of us are deaf native signers, my companion's native sign language being Danish Sign Language and mine being American Sign Language. We were also conversant in other sign languages, including Norwegian Sign Language and International Sign, and had travelled together around Europe and North Africa before setting off on our trip to South America. The episode recounted below came approximately a third of the way into our planned year, and after we had already filmed deaf people in Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru.

It is important to note this recounting of my experience in Bolivia comes from an imperfect source: my memories and those of my travel companion, filtered through several retellings over the years to different audiences in university classrooms and in informal settings. At the time, I was not seeking data outside of videotaped signs and as such I made no notes of the interactions described below (and my travel companion made only partial notes in a private journal). The following paragraphs should thus be read as an imperfectly sourced reminiscence, corroborated in part with conversations with my travel companion during the writing of this chapter.

In this pre-social media and nascent internet age, our first challenge was going to be finding deaf people to film. Before we left for South America we took a trip to Gallaudet University and its (then) Center for Global Education, and through the print resources there, found addresses of schools, clubs, and other locations related to deaf people. These photocopied pages would prove to be remarkably good starting points for our entrance into different deaf communities in the region. An important contact in Bolivia was a young deaf man from La Paz who had studied in the United States. He introduced us to a government official, a hearing man who was working on

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510090-017>

a sign language dictionary project with the national deaf association. They recommended we travel on to Cochabamba, where the national association's president lived, and they made arrangements for us to be met there by the president, who also invited us to stay at his home. In Cochabamba, we would be directed to informants whom we could videotape for our project. The government official would meet us again there, since he had a meeting there with the national president regarding the sign language dictionary project. We congratulated ourselves on our good luck at yet again plugging into another deaf network and set off for Cochabamba on an early morning flight.

We were met by Ramon¹, the president of the national association, at the Cochabamba airport. Chatting over breakfast at Ramon's home, we quickly established a good rapport with him and he agreed to help us find informants from his network and gave us permission to use his kitchen as a makeshift studio. At the time, I was in my third year as vice president of the World Federation of the Deaf Youth Section, a section of the WFD which had only been established at the time of my election, and was still finding its way forward, both within the WFD and as an international authority on deaf youth.² Ramon was thrilled to meet a "representative" of the WFD and my status quickly brought up a new realm of sociopolitical discussion between us, with him sharing the national association's work and, as the conversation went on, confiding in his struggles with the local deaf club, particularly the local president, who was not supportive of his work on the national level.

Tired from our early morning flight, my travel companion and I took a nap. We woke to find the government official and a committee consisting of deaf and hearing people at Ramon's kitchen table, which was now covered with papers and a Spanish dictionary. Ramon gestured us over and explained the sign language dictionary project they were currently working on. He showed us a list of words in Spanish and explained they were going through this alphabetical list, creating signs for each word. The list he showed us revealed they were still on the letter A. Ramon explained the committee saw our presence as a boon, since we could also contribute signs to their dictionary for words that were closely related to English.

My travel companion and I looked at each other, immediately uneasy about 1) the "dictionary" project, which was in reality a sign creation project, and 2) the idea of inserting our signs, be they American or Danish or International Sign, in the dictionary. We held the view that sign languages should spring naturally from

1 All names used in this account are pseudonyms.

2 The WFDYS has expanded considerably since then. www.wfdys.org

a community of users and knew “made up” signs caused considerable frisson in other communities. We were also rather averse to the idea of being known by future generations as the imperialists who brought our signs to another country, our actions immortalized in a dictionary. Our objections were not well received by Ramon, who saw the project as a means of “improving” Bolivian Sign Language, explicitly referencing the educational sphere as a setting in which “more” signs were needed, with the young government official pitching in to corroborate there was indeed such a “need” for a larger lexicon. Ramon framed the project as one in which we could contribute to the betterment of deaf Bolivians in enhancing the lexicon of Bolivian Sign Language and was at first perplexed, then increasingly angry that we would not contribute.

As we continued to express our reluctance, he pulled out his trump card. “I’m going to help you with your project and you won’t help me with mine?”

This comment was deeply embedded in what I understood as deaf community values of reciprocity (Philip 1997). Taking on the favor of staying at his home and asking him for assistance in our sign documentation project created upon us an obligation to assist him in other ways. We went back and forth and ultimately agreed we would contribute back what we had received: name signs for geographical locations, mostly country signs. I rationalized that this was more acceptable, since in the United States and Western European communities in which I had interacted in up to that point, there was a general consensus that it was a good idea to adopt other countries’ names for their own country. This was especially desirable in cases where the local sign for a country was founded on assumptions of ethnic difference, such as signs located around the eyes for Asian countries. This desire to adopt “original” sign names was not unanimous in the United States; there was also a view that some older national signs should be preserved and not replaced with outside signs. But in general, the consensus at this time was that the adoption of outside signs was a progressive move. So we contributed the “original” signs for different countries Ramon and his committee found on their list, including the Finnish sign for Finland, which was a crooked index finger tapping twice on the lower middle part of one’s chin, which I will gloss as SUOMI, the Finnish Sign Language gloss for this sign.³ This sign was fairly widely known among those who have been in contact with the WFD, since with periodic exceptions the WFD’s office has been based in Finland since 1987.

That evening Ramon brought us over to the local deaf club, located a short walk from his home. The club shared a building with a privately funded school for deaf children run by a hard of hearing non-signing Spaniard. The Spaniard

3 “SUOMI” is Finnish for Finland. <https://signbank.csc.fi/>

showed us a Spanish Sign Language dictionary and explained he was planning to use the signs in this dictionary for classroom instruction since Bolivian Sign Language was too impoverished for educational purposes (the Spaniard's connection to the dictionary project was unclear). Ramon introduced us to the local president, Miguel, and pushed him to allow us to say a few words to the local community. Having grown up in the deaf community, I expected this and was well aware of what was called upon me as a visitor to a local deaf community. I had long witnessed visitors to my local deaf club and to my family home bring stories of other places and other peoples, stories containing lessons on ways of being deaf to our local community. So this cultural expectation was ingrained within me when I stepped out in the front of the audience.

After an introduction emphasizing our remoteness, our long travel, our research project, and my authority, as a representative of the WFD, based in Finland, Ramon then used our presence to legitimize his sign language dictionary project and (by extension) his own legitimacy as a national president to his local community. "They've helped out with our project. For example, they showed us the right sign for Finland. The older sign shouldn't be used anymore, it should be this sign they've shown us." Miguel immediately stepped up and objected, saying the SUOMI sign was fine for "them" (ie, us), pointing first towards us then pushing out at us with the palm of his hand, to signal rejection of the space which we occupied, then contrasting this space by pointing downwards "here," designating his space as a geographical space where the SUOMI sign should not be used. Ramon immediately leapt back in and said the whole world was using this sign, and they should not be yoked to older signs and older times. He then looked to me, standing aghast between the two presidents, and asked me if the SUOMI sign was used by the WFD. Reluctantly, I explained the SUOMI sign was indeed used by the WFD, but there were also national variations, such as the older ASL sign FINLAND, with an F handshape circling the middle of the forehead.

"But what does ASL use now?" Ramon asked. I confirmed the spread of the SUOMI sign, but added that there was no reason the Bolivian sign and the SUOMI sign couldn't co-exist, as the ASL and SUOMI signs were also doing at the moment. Miguel nodded in agreement, saying they could use theirs and I could use the SUOMI sign, again figuratively "pushing" against me with the palm of his hand when signing "they." The national president disagreed, again invoking the authority of the metropole, defined as unnamed international deaf communities (implicitly northern by our presence) and the institutional authority of the WFD.

The argument over the sign for Finland was obviously part of an ongoing power struggle between the two men. Ramon had earlier complained of the local club not being supportive of his work, and he positioned the conflict as one between "backward locals" and his vision for working with state authorities to

improve education for deaf people. Miguel was arguing on behalf of Bolivian Sign Language and the argument put him in the role of a defender of an indigenous sign language rooted in the language used by the community, a position for which I had much sympathy. As a young backpacker in a role with extremely limited authority to speak on behalf of the WFD I was ill positioned to resolve this conflict.⁴

Our experience in Cochabamba was not unique. In fact, the very ordinariness of our experience in Bolivia can be seen in the chapters throughout this volume, showing the pervasiveness of certain ideologies about sign languages across different times and places. These include sign language teaching or standardization efforts, often externally funded by a governmental, quasi-governmental or non-governmental authority (Moriarty, Conama, Hofer, this volume) due to a perception of the sign language as having an impoverished lexicon and being correspondingly ill-equipped to be used in educational settings (Hofer, Spooner, Moriarty, Gillen et al, Kurz et al, this volume). Another ideology is the misconception that sign languages are not languages but artificial systems and thus can be modified by self-styled experts, leading mostly in the direction of taking them closer to higher status, often spoken, languages (Hofer, Moriarty, Seegers, this volume). The positivist ideologies of such projects should be noted here, since they are essentially attempting a daunting, almost ridiculous task: creating a new language. That nonetheless such a task is seen as possible, across multiple countries and regions (Adam 2015), shows the pervasiveness of certain tropes about sign languages and, implicitly, deaf people.

These tropes about sign language allow certain claims to authority over sign languages to advance, claims that are manifested in consistent ways across different contexts. Before going into the specific claims seen in this volume, it is worth stopping to remark how these claims carry a presumption of authority over sign language and deaf people, authority asserted from different subject positions. In Bolivia, I asserted mine from that of a Western deaf native signer with some knowledge of contemporary academic understandings of sign language, Ramon from his authority as a political leader and representative of a quasi-official language planning committee, and Miguel as a representative of a local language community. Each claim to authority can bring up its own alliances between different parties. To take one example, the struggle over how to understand ASL at Gallaudet University in the 1990s (briefly recounted in Murray 2017) was not

⁴ At the time the WFD did not have an official policy on language standardization, but see Moriarty (this volume) for an example of the WFD's negative view of the importation of foreign signs into other national settings in the 1990s and early 2000s.

between deaf and hearing people but between people trained in linguistics or adhering to a particular take on ASL in accordance with linguistic research, and those who saw the new take on ASL threatening their use of a variety of signing which incorporated English in different ways and to different degrees. Although each claim to authority brings together unique constellations of ideas playing out in highly context-specific settings, there nonetheless exists a fairly consistent set of claims to authority (power-knowledge) over deaf people and sign languages replicated throughout the chapters in this volume.

In this chapter I discuss three claims to authority prominent in the chapters in this volume: claims grounded in official authority, claims which evoke cultural authority, and claims which refer to sensory experiences, particularly the sensory experience of being a signing deaf person. At first glance, these claims can be positioned as competing claims between deaf and hearing people, but, as will be seen, this latter construction is mostly related to the claim that deaf people have unique embodied experiences/sensory orientations from which they claim a position of authority, presenting their claims as “insights”. Other claims to authority can see deaf and hearing people aligned in promoting their ideological perspectives on sign languages over others. Ramon’s alliance with the government official is an example of official authority, with the aim of using an “improved” sign language to promote educational outcomes. The alliance between deaf sign language teachers and hearing interpreters at the Center for Teaching Sign Language (Marie, this volume) advances a claim to authority by both deaf and hearing people, one that seeks to counter public impressions in Vietnamese society of deaf people as needing assistance, a perception embedded in the Vietnamese language through the use of the word-term-adjective “*bị*” (Cooper, this volume). Claims to authority over sign language can come about through shifting alliances between different parties at different times and places, towards goals both local and transformative.

These contested claims to authority play out through common contentions about sign languages and about deaf people, contentions seen repeatedly across multiple settings in this book. One common contention lies in the (non)existence of language for deaf people. Another is the claim for the existence of a *specific* language, including the authority to control the parameters of this language. This is frequently manifested as control over the lexicon but can also encompass domains for language use, contentions over who should use the language, and more. These two claims are also covered by the editors in their Introduction, as “key sites for the manifestation and investigation of sign language ideologies.” My reflections here should be read as alongside theirs as a parallel set of reflections. These common contentions about sign languages are enabled by a wide constellation of ideological perspectives on language, bodily difference and the govern-

mentality of such difference by various actors and as such will vary according to particular sociocultural and temporal settings. Below I describe how different claims to authority about sign languages play out across multiple chapters in this volume, touching on other literature on sign language ideologies as appropriate. At times, I borrow the editors' thoughts in the Introduction (this volume) on how the terms *ideology* and *insight* can offer contrasting and interweaving perspectives on claims to authority over sign language. In the next section, I look at the first claim to authority: official and quasi-official (via NGOs) claims to authority over sign languages, as manifested in control over the existence and composition of sign languages.

2 “MENTE DE PIEDRA”: Insights and ideologies on languagelessness

The term MENTE DE PIEDRA is a *Lengua de Señas Mexicana* (Mexican Sign Language, or LSM) expression used by deaf people to describe the effects of language deprivation on deaf people not exposed to a sign language (Pfister, this volume). Pfister's informant relates the truism that water thrown at a stone won't be absorbed into it. Likewise, for deaf people without access to language, the informant explains, their brain “stay[s] the same no matter what” (Pfister, this volume). The expression MENTE DE PIEDRA encapsulates a longstanding orientation in deaf communities to sign languages as being fundamental for the development of a deaf person's cognitive abilities. This longstanding claim can be seen in historical accounts of deaf political leaders who claimed a similarly impoverished status for the “uneducated deaf” (Söderfeldt 2013, Murray 2007), a claim repeated in numerous human rights and development projects around the world involving deaf people.

The portrayal of deaf people as being potentially without language opens a space for various actors to mobilize within. These actors, using frames as varied as that of benevolence, linguistic human rights, and national uplift, seek to fill this space with their language acquisition projects. The power of the concept of languagelessness in mobilizing the resources of governmental and non-governmental entities — and thus a claim to official authority — can be seen in several chapters in this volume (Weber, Pfister, Hofer, Cooper, Moriarty). Moriarty chapter shows how two NGOs worked to create different versions of Cambodian Sign Language over several decades. During her fieldwork in Cambodia, Moriarty then does something two decades of aid workers apparently did not: she asked deaf Cambodians if they ever went to school. And the answer was yes. This simple

question upended the rationale behind two decades of NGOs' framing Cambodia as a space which never had an indigenous sign language.

Moriarty relates the debate between two NGOs with their separate sign language development projects. The Krousar Thmey faction subscribed to the language importation school and sought the Khmerization of ASL. That they knew this was problematic can be seen in a document Moriarty unearths showing the consent of deaf participants in the training program was given with their thumbprints attached to a document attesting to their acquiescence to the adoption of K-ASL. Here we see how the ideology of languagelessness collapses under its own contradictions. Affixing their personal markers to a document is an action undertaken in many cultures (and common in Cambodia) to show a binding commitment and understanding of an agreement. But if deaf Cambodians did not have a language and needed one to be brought in from the outside then how did they then have enough linguistic capacity to be able to sign a document attesting to their linguistic impoverishment?

But we cannot dismiss the fear of MENTE DE PIEDRA as a simple NGO fundraising device. Weber (this volume) relates the struggles of deaf people she meets with delayed access to sign language, including "restricted sign language vocabulary, inaccurately formed signs, signed English phrases, sporadic morphological markers, and mostly eliminated non-manual markers" (Weber p. 35). Hoffmann-Dilloway also studies a group of deaf youth with "truncated linguistic repertoires" due to an oral-only approach in their educational and home settings (Hoffmann-Dilloway p. 206).

Research shows there are very real effects to lack of sign language exposure for deaf children. Hall et al. (2017) propose the term "language deprivation syndrome" as a mental health diagnosis, occurring in situations when deaf children have limited access to natural language exposure through sign languages. Noting the limitations of cochlear implants in allowing unhindered access to spoken language, the authors describe a range of language disorders that have emerged from the literature. These range from language dysfluency to knowledge deficits arising due to continued lack of access to information from one's environment, settings not uncommon for deaf people without access to visual language.

Sign languages emerge within communities of users and such communities may be fragile in times of social upheaval, with the corresponding dispersal of such communities and the language transmission opportunities they could have given to new generations of deaf people. In Cambodia, the reported 150-200 deaf students attending the school Moriarty's research rediscovered were most likely dispersed due to bombings and wartime conditions, and the pupils were reported as killed during the Khmer Rouge massacres. Moriarty correctly points out the fragility of sign language spaces in periods of extreme social upheaval and urges

us to take this into account when looking at the claims of the (non)existence of sign languages in post-conflict settings (Moriarty this volume).

Heeding the editors' warning to avoid teleological narratives of development, we should not see the dangers of languagelessness as a phenomenon existing on a scale from underdeveloped to developed countries. Indeed, we may be entering a new age of partial language acquisition in Western countries. In many western European countries, sign language educational settings dating back to the nineteenth century are being dismantled to comply with an ideological model of "inclusive education" which seeks to put deaf children in local public schools, with the consequence that they are isolated from access to deaf peers. Deaf children enter young adulthood or adulthood with limited to no access to sign language, with correspondingly detrimental effects on their linguistic and cognitive development (Hall et al 2017).

Deaf children's reduced access to sign language is also pushed along by neo-oralist orientations to signed and spoken languages which position spoken languages as the primary vehicle of language acquisition. These anti-signing perspectives parallel deaf community narratives of *MENTE DE PIEDRA* in that they also position deaf children as *potentially* languageless. The neo-oralist solutions include measures such as surgery to implant auditory stimulation devices, intensive periods of speech therapy, and the reorientation of family life around the promotion of the spoken language skills of the deaf family member (Mauldin 2016). Putting these neo-oralist campaigns alongside contemporary campaigns by deaf-led organizations to highlight language deprivation due to lack of access to sign language we can see how interests from widely divergent ideological perspectives on sign languages both make use of the concept of languagelessness. New generations of deaf people are continually and discursively framed as always already being potentially languageless, by both opponents and proponents of sign languages.

3 Naming and controlling languages

If deaf people are seen as languageless, it then follows that they are vessels awaiting new languages or new signs to be given to them. Here I turn to the next claim to authority: the claim to the existence of specific languages. This has manifested most commonly in the affixing of national modifiers to sign languages, the ideological consequences of which the editors have outlined in the Introduction, chief among them "territorialization" of the languages, both tying languages to specific geographical locations and people within those locations and obscuring

language variation within the same geographical area. That the earliest attempts to affix national modifiers to sign languages in Western countries came about as a result of an emancipatory process which raised the status of sign languages and deaf people (Murray 2017) should not obscure the power dynamics behind such namings, both in these settings and elsewhere.

Moriarty Harrelson (2017a) describes a moment of tension between deaf and hearing people working on the Cambodian sign language dictionaries. Here it is interesting to see the arguments participants draw upon to justify their positions. When a deaf person complains about the intricacy of a project to choose standardized signs, his hearing co-workers directly allude to their status as hearing people, reminding the deaf person that they are doing this out of benevolence, and possibly implying an expression of gratitude from deaf participants would be more appropriate than arguments over the validity of the signs. This example is from Cambodia, but it is an expression peculiarly familiar in other settings: the colonialist administrator surprised at the “natives” resistance, the insistence of area studies scholars on medical technology as a “positive aspect” of colonialism, the paternalistic hearing researcher of sign languages who never considers adding deaf research assistants as co-authors for publications. In Vietnam this benevolence is embedded in the Vietnamese language, as Cooper (this volume) elegantly describes, through the use of the “intransitive-passive verb” *bị* whenever hearing people speak of deaf people. To be described with a *bị* is to be the object of benevolence. Whatever the name and expression given in particular settings, the logic of benevolence remains consistent in degrading deaf people’s claim to authority over their lives and languages.

An assumption of authority over language is most commonly manifested in control over the language’s lexicon. In this volume several authors look at the justifications given for the adoption of lexical items from another country’s sign language. As Moriarty has pointed out, the importation of new lexical items has spurred a counter reaction attaching value judgments to lexical change. My reluctance to contribute “foreign” signs to the Bolivian dictionary project and my acquiescence to sharing country name signs was grounded in my experiences of Western deaf communities adopting country signs as a cosmopolitan and progressive measures, in that some imported country signs replaced existing ones based on visual perceptions of ethnic difference represented in demeaning ways. Here I was enacting a slightly amended version of what Moriarty (this volume) points out is a value orientation that attaches positive value to “natural” versus “artificial” language development. Moriarty shows the former is understood as “developed by deaf people within that geographical location” with “artificial” being brought from “outside parties or locations.” With outside “locations”, we see echoes of the Spanish teacher’s use of a Spanish Sign Language dictionary

and with outside “parties” we see the imposition of new lexical items in the entire dictionary project, a project echoed in other chapters. Moriarty (this volume) notes observers in Cambodia put both foreign sign systems and artificial sign systems in the same category of languages, seen in opposition to “natural” language development. While the distinction being made accurately reflects the ideologies of observers in Cambodia, this may reflect their experience with a particular Western savior mindset (Moriarty Harrelson 2017b) that seeks to import sign languages into what are perceived as “less developed” countries. These debates are still prevalent today, with a 2018 case of a social media video posting on a popular site, *Seek the World*, claiming the proper name signs for “Germany” was the DGS (Deutsche Gebärdensprache) version and not the ASL sign for Germany. The post elicited over 200 comments, with participants in the debate asserting authority based on geographical and ascribed identities, such as being a traveller or social media personality or a German or a native user of one or another sign language (*Seek the World* 2018).⁵ Not only is the specific debate of country sign names still alive and well, it has spread to new online spaces, spaces Deaf Studies scholars are just beginning to study.

This volume shows several cases of the active assistance of an existing community of signers in promoting language change, belying easy distinctions between insider/outsider influenced efforts. In Bolivia, the dictionary project was an effort shared by deaf and hearing people, a combination echoed in other chapters. Conama’s chapter (this volume) shows lexical change in Ireland within deaf schools and deaf communities motivated by different factors, such as the development of “masculine” signs by hearing priests for use at the boys’ school to replace signs used at the girls’ school (Crean 1997). Conama describes the work of a “Unified Sign Language Committee,” an Irish language standardization project consisting of deaf and hearing members which sought to invent new signs and draw a more direct connection between signing and English grammar. Conama explains that this effort was partially driven by concerns among older deaf people that younger deaf people were signing “ungrammatically.” Proper signing could mean signing in English word order, a signing style also debated during the “cultural turn” at Gallaudet in the 1990s (Murray 2017).

In the examples above claims to authority on sign languages grapple with ideologies positioning the majority (spoken) language as having greater value. Gillen et al. (this volume) describe the language practices of late-deafened university graduates who explicitly set out to modify both lexical items and grammat-

⁵ Thanks to Annelies Kusters for pointing out that this debate brings my observations forward to the present day.

ical constructions in their Ugandan Sign Language use to make both individual signs and sentence structure conform to English words and grammar. As related by Kurz et al. (this volume) in a study of seven U.S. deaf people in STEM fields, many first created new ASL signs for academic concepts in their fields which were heavily influenced by English language settings in which the concepts were learned. As one informant noted, “It was not easy to use new signs that were not established in the community without fingerspelling or making the connection to an English word” (Kurz et al. this volume).

Users perceive power disparities between different languages in different domains. English is perceived as having a place in the educational domain, a contention made by informants in Spooner’s study of group of ASL-using high school students at a school for deaf learners in the U.S. These students draw contrasts between what they perceive to be a rule-bound English taught at school and a perceived “flexible” ASL used by the children without formal instruction. This perception is inaccurate but it takes place in a contact zone (Pratt 1992) where the languages at play are spoken and signed. In Lhasa in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in China, Theresa Hofer (this volume) shows how a complex interplay of spoken and sign language ideologies, influenced by the Chinese government’s nation-building project in the region, lead to greater status being given to Chinese Sign Language (CSL) over Tibet Sign Language by her informants. CSL is imported into the region through special schools, which also use Chinese, and then further among deaf residents of Lhasa, via school graduates. Ideological considerations of language status do not necessarily split between modalities; there are high status and low status sign languages. Hofer’s chapter is an important addition to studies of sign language status, which are more commonly made between signed and spoken languages, and this study points to the need for more research on perceptions of status between different sign languages.

The examples above remind us that we need to follow the mechanisms as well as the message. The importation of lexical items from other sign languages or signs developed by a committee can spring from an institutional pathway that the state traditionally uses to promote one language variety over another: education. A more recent development is the use of sign language materials, whether in print or digital formats, as training materials for teachers and instructional materials for deaf students in local education settings without the presence of other signers. Moriarty Harrelson outlines the resistance of two deaf people to invented Cambodian Sign Language signs for Zodiac symbols (Moriarty Harrelson 2017). One person concludes the argument with a resigned sigh, saying the invented signs are for hearing people, explicitly referring to the goal of hearing teachers fostering “inclusive” environments for deaf children in the provinces. These efforts reduce sign language to material objects used by hearing people

as accessibility devices in service of inclusive education, without learning sign language from a community of users.

In the next sections, I describe two further claims to authority advanced by deaf people over sign languages: authority based on claims to culture and authority based on claims to a unique sensory orientation.

4 Claims to cultural authority

I use the term “cultural authority” as a way of describing identity-based claims to authority over language, whether these identities are based on geography, the concept of “deaf culture”, or other ascribed or avowed identities such as gender, ethnic belonging, and sexual orientation. For example, Miguel, the local deaf club president, claimed cultural authority as a Bolivian and a Bolivian Sign Language user in his rejection of the sign for SUOMI, countering Ramon’s (the national president) reach to the external quasi-official authority of the WFD.

This current historical moment, with the emergence of previously suppressed perspectives from marginalized populations, has led to new claims to identity-based authority and thus to new areas of insight into how sign language ideologies can be understood with reference to intersectional identities. Work on Black ASL (McCaskill et. al 2011) is one example of the necessary complexities which emerge when scholars embark on explorations of language ideologies linked to multiple identities.

These claims to legitimacy rooted in identity can come through conversations and everyday skirmishes over language, as well as in more formal setting such as conferences, public institutions, and schools. In this volume, the domain of sign language instruction, and the space of the language instruction classroom, emerges as a particularly fertile area for culture-based claims to authority by deaf people. Deaf Vietnamese sign language teachers serve as gatekeepers to the sign language interpreting profession and, as related in Marie’s chapter, they exercise this authority to remove students who do not fit their desired vision of a good interpreter. Marie relates the story of how deaf teachers decided one hearing student shouldn’t be allowed to matriculate because she didn’t “open her mind” to the proper term for deaf (*Điếc*) instead of hearing impaired (*khiếm thính*). This and other examples point to the strategic choices made by deaf teachers to ensure they would be growing hearing allies who could “embrace Deaf cultural norms” in their work (Marie, p. 141). Marie details several strategies used by the deaf staff at the center to evaluate potential interpreters. These include monitoring interpreting students to see who asked questions to deaf staff (and not just to hearing

staff), thus showing receptiveness to deaf people as authority figures. This orientation was promoted by staff by positioning interpreters in the back of the classroom, the better to show students that deaf people were in charge of the class.

The ASL instructors studied in Calton's chapter see it as part of their job to shape ASL students' language ideologies, in ways rooted in the socio-political context of public perceptions of ASL as not being a "legitimate" language. To a greater degree than the spoken language teachers Calton also interviews, the ASL instructors in Calton's study sought to shape students' perceptions in the classroom. Whereas spoken language instructors wanted their students to leave with a respect for different cultures, the ASL instructors specifically wanted their students to see ASL as having equal value as that of other languages. With this in mind, instructors enacted pedagogical practices to show ASL as a language distinct from English.

5 Embodied practices, sensory authority

Deafblind writer John Lee Clark has written of "metatactile knowledge," a sensory orientation to the world based on touch, and ties this to languaging practices among deafblind people, specifically with the use of Tactile ASL, in which touch is an essential element (Clark 2015). This claim to language practices rooted in sensory orientations is the subject of the third and final claim to authority I want to discuss in this chapter. Benjamin Bahan (2014), drawing from Edward Hall, asks us to view deaf people as people who have a different sensory orientation to the world, one built on living as visual and tactile beings. Bahan has developed, through a series of papers, (Bahan 2014, 2008) "insights" (to borrow the editors' use of this term) on how deaf people utilize visual, kinesthetic, and tactile strategies to shape their interactions with other humans and the cultural and physical contexts in which they operate. This section looks at claims to authority grounded in the embodied experiences of being a signing deaf person. Below, I discuss how deaf people present perspectives on language ("ideologies") as being "insights" drawn from their embodied sensory experiences.

That bodily orientation has ideological dimensions can be seen in the fascinating example of sign writing related in this volume and in more detail elsewhere (Hoffmann-Dilloway 2018). Hoffman-Dilloway shows how SignWriting began as a written system that codified signs based on how they were received by the viewer, but as deaf people took use of the system, they demanded a shift to an expressive notation form, one based on the embodied experience of signing. With this shift, the physical act of signing is rendered into a printed script as opposed to the perspective of the "reader" of the sign. This literal flipped script illustrates

the ways in which deaf people claim authority over sign language based on their sensory experiences as signing deaf people.

The materiality of signing is an important part of this sensory claim to authority. Some claims draw on the physical act of signing. Other claims refer to the visual-spatial properties of sign languages as conferring advantages to signers that are not possible with spoken/written languages. These claims are often produced in a framework where sign languages are explicitly juxtaposed against spoken or written languages and the acceptance of the primacy of sign languages is presented as a moral orientation towards a deaf way of being (Green 2014).

This link between being deaf as necessitating a moral orientation towards promoting the status of sign language can be seen in Joanne Weber's contribution to this volume. Weber writes an autoethnographic account of her entrance into the deaf community and acquisition of ASL over the course of her adult life, a project she explicitly attributes to her desire to find "a new way of life" distinct from her previous experience of conforming to a normative hearing way of life (Weber, p. 25). Weber relates her increasing realization of how surrounding ideologies which accorded a higher status to English than ASL influenced her use of sign language, pushing her to a more English-like signing style. Her discovery of the strengths of ASL emerged more fully when she interacted with deaf people "delegated [to] the lowest social status in the deaf community because of their semi-literacy in print English." These people became a resource for her language development, bringing her in contact with core visual principles of sign languages involving classifiers, visual description via gesture and the use of body movement to denote role-shifting in signed stories (Weber, this volume).

This turning away from English towards a preference to harnessing the visual properties of sign languages can also be seen with the informants in Kurz, Reis, and Spiecker's account of deaf people who create new lexical items for STEM concepts. Their chapter emphasizes the need to create spaces in which deaf people can step back from English and find room to explore the possibilities inherent in signed languages. English-dominant signs emerge due to ideologies, found even among working academics who are heritage ASL signers, which denigrate ASL in favor of English as an academic language. Many informants felt interpreters and signing hearing professionals were better suited to creating new signs based on English concepts than they were.

The dominant presence of English receded only when space was consciously created for the creation of ASL-based lexical items. A shift in ideologies began to emerge after their informants participated in a project aimed at developing visually oriented ASL sign vocabulary for different concepts in STEM fields. When faced with the need to create new signs, their informants start with signs drawing upon the English terms for the concept. Only with prompting do they then move

on to create signs that harness the visual-spatial characteristics of sign languages to describe — rather than transcribe — STEM concepts new to people who use ASL.

Kurz et al. clearly consider these signs created in a conscious effort to utilize the visual-spatial properties of ASL, as being better than those relying on English, praising “the use of classifiers in academic concept delivery as it brings more depth, adding more information in words than a signed representation of an English word may carry” (Kurz et al this volume, p. 297). Kurz et al further criticize the use of loan words via fingerspelling, passing on an anecdote from an informant that such borrowings are more difficult to remember than signs based on classifiers. They note such visually based lexical items include “linguistic feature patterns [which] aid in recall and retrieval” of concepts (Kurz et al. p. 297). Here ASL use is positioned as being the best lexical creation strategy from the perspective of cognitive functioning.

A claim to authority based on the embodied experience of signing also can be seen in Moriarty Harrelson’s recounting of deaf Cambodians’ resistance to hearing people’s invented lexical items in sign language for Zodiac signs. Among the variety of arguments made for the rejection of the invented signs, one key argument was grounded in the expert knowledge of the signers as producers of a material language produced by the body. Moriarty Harrelson (2017a) relates:

[The deaf person] finished with a flourish by demonstrating the “impossibility” of the sign for the year of the tiger because the sign for “tiger” requires both hands. He asked the hearing teachers with an aggravated look on his face, “How are you going to combine the signs for tiger and year? It looks wrong! You need both hands to sign “tiger,” so you cannot do this.”

The deaf person’s resistance to hearing people’s invention of signs is rooted in a literal bodily rejection of the proposed signs as being physically impossible to produce. In this case, the deaf person’s argument against the signs evokes his knowledge as a person who has embodied knowledge of what it means to use a sign language properly. His progression of signs for the Zodiac move from one-handed to two-handed, and in the process, the physical impossibility of signing the way the hearing people want the sign to be produced is demonstrated. The deaf man uses a physical and materially tangible tangle of hands to signify linguistic confusion, using the material world to offer what is in actuality a quite sophisticated structural analysis of the problems of inventing visual-spatial lexical items based on spoken language principles. Here, this man is adopting what James Scott (1985) calls the weapons of the weak: he is not directly challenging the activity of inventing signs, but is using what little power he has as a fluent signer- to point out weaknesses in the spatial-manual properties of the invented sign. That this then calls into question the authority of the hearing

inventors, and thus the legitimacy of the other invented signs, can be inferred. In reality, extant power imbalances between deaf and hearing people in the project were too great to prevent new invented signs from continuing to be created and disseminated. This resistance to linguistic prescriptivism draws upon deaf knowledge of the grammatical rules of sign language — proper grammar use being a traditional field of contentious language practices across many languages — but adds a sign language twist in justifying this critique by evoking the three-dimensional grammatical space in which the visual-spatial properties of sign languages are brought into play.

This orientation towards deaf ways of being also comes through in Snoddon's discussion (this volume) of the resistance of sign language teachers in Ottawa to a standard CEFR parent instruction curriculum. Snoddon explains several contributing factors that may have led to this resistance, including lack of experience in ASL teaching and lack of time to train the instructors in the CEFR framework. However also of interest is that the specific form of resistance taken by instructors consisted of encouraging parents to use visual-spatial qualities of sign languages, privileging this skill alongside traditional vocabulary-based teaching practices. The instructors elicited communication from parents forcing them to use gestures alongside their emerging ASL vocabulary to convey the meaning embedded in a series of print images. This seems to me to be not unlike the communicative competencies engaged in by deaf people in non-signing contexts, in the piecing together of different parts of one's linguistic and semiotic repertoires in order to convey meaning, as discussed in Kusters' chapter in this volume. This pedagogical strategy is echoed by Danielle, the ASL instructor in Calton's chapter, who encourages students to "point, draw, or act out what they want to say" in lieu of resorting to English to ask for new lexical items in ASL (Calton, p. 122). In Ottawa, the instructors seem to be training the parents in ways of communicating as deaf people, teaching parents both lexical items and gestural elements as they teach ASL.

This could arguably be said to be passing on a deaf way of experiencing language to parents (and indirectly to deaf children), in a way that reinforces a turn to deaf ways of experiencing the world. That the Ottawa parents have a positive response to this pedagogical technique points to them realizing they are able to harness new, previously overlooked, communicative competencies. Research on sign language instruction shows positive benefits to visual working memory, mental image generation and visual rotation skills among hearing people who learn and use a sign language (Hauser and Kartheiser 2014).

The examples above are all presented as "insights" by the informants. The ideological dimensions of these insights are clear enough, as seen via the explicit elucidation of a moral orientation towards deaf ways of being present in the

examples above. However, one can also interpret sensory orientations in ways which do not necessarily privilege sign languages. In other words, ideologically clear-cut language insights can also be formulated from an opposite ideological perspective, one in which the purported limitations of sign languages are highlighted. Hodge (this volume) shows how the physical dimensions of language use taking place in spaces where deaf and hearing dancers interact — signing in darkness, the rapid-fire use of speech shutting down signed communication- feed into ideologies surrounding the languages: the inconvenience of sign languages, the practicality of the majority spoken language. Common sense “insights” of language use in particular spaces can be reversed in different settings. We could tell Hodge’s informants of the practicality of sign languages across distance and the relative awkwardness of spoken languages in describing objects in space. Ultimately, we are simply engaging in ideological practices on the “affordances and constraints of particular languages” (Kusters, p. 240). Kusters notes “pragmatism, preference and language ideologies co-shape” written and gestural communicative practices among deaf, deafblind, and hearing people in Mumbai. How we think about language is conditioned by the realities of bodies navigating in both physical and ideological spaces.

6 Conclusion

Throughout the studies presented in this volume, we see how the ideological nature of our insights into sign languages are often tied to beliefs about the status of deaf people and the value of deaf lives. In several chapters, sign language use is intimately tied to self-identity as a deaf person and membership in a community. Implicit in my negotiations with Ramon on borrowed signs was a shared sense that we were discussing something of critical importance- not a given in societies which actively denigrate deaf people and sign languages or disempower deaf people from asserting authority over the sign languages they use. The variegated arenas where ideologies play out in this book- classrooms, projects, NGO offices, public spaces — show this struggle time and again. For deaf people, sign languages are of critical importance for their self-identity, their self-worth, and their ability to navigate society in their preferred ways.

Ideological perspectives on sign languages are tied to perceptions of deaf peoples’ worth, something noted by deaf people throughout this volume. Deaf Mexicans repeatedly assert, “I am deaf but I am not stupid.” Deaf Vietnamese teachers screen hearing sign language students to ensure they can properly represent deaf people to larger society. ASL teachers share a similar hope for the

long-term outcomes of their pedagogical endeavors: that their students will “remember to respect deaf people. That’s the goal” (Calton, p. 119). This book shows sign language ideologies can be seen as attempts to present certain forms of knowledge about deaf people. Knowing this, deaf people actively seek to shape and present this knowledge in ways that better their lives.

References

- Adam, Robert. 2015. “Standardization of Sign Languages.” *Sign Language Studies* 15 (4): 432–445.
- Bahan, Benjamin. 2014. “Senses and culture: Exploring sensory orientations.” In H-Dirksen L. Bauman & Joseph J. Murray (eds.), *Deaf Gain: Raising the stakes for human diversity*, 233–254. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bahan, Benjamin. 2008. Upon the formation of a visual variety of the human race. In H-Dirksen L. Bauman (ed.), *Open your eyes: Deaf Studies talking*, 83–99. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Batterbury, Sarah, Paddy Anderson & Mike Gulliver. 2007. “Sign Language Peoples as indigenous minorities: implications for research and policy.” *Environment and Planning*, 39, 2899–2915.
- Clark, James Lee. 2015. “Metatactile Knowledge” Blog entry posted October 15, 2015 at <https://johnleeclark.tumblr.com/post/130321809778/metatactile-knowledge>
- Crean, Edward J., 1997. *Breaking the silence: The education of the Deaf in Ireland 1816–1996*. Dublin: Irish Deaf Society Publications.
- Green, E. Mara. 2014. Building the tower of Babel: International Sign, linguistic commensuration, and moral orientation. *Language in Society*, 43. 445–465. doi: 10.1017/S0047404514000396
- Hall, Wyatte C, Leonard Levin & Melissa Anderson, “Language deprivation syndrome: a possible neurodevelopmental disorder with sociocultural origins.” *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 52 (2017): 761–776.
- Hauser, Peter & Geo Kartheiser. 2014. “Advantages of Learning a Sign Language” In H-Dirksen L. Bauman & Joseph J. Murray (eds.), *Deaf Gain: Raising the stakes for human diversity*, 133–145. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hoffmann-Dilloway, Erika. 2018. “Feeling your own (or someone else’s) face: Writing signs from the expressive viewpoint.” *Language & Communication*. 61: 88–101. DOI: 10.1016/j.langcom.2016.12.011
- Mauldin, Laura. 2016. *Made to hear: Cochlear implants and raising deaf children*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- McCaskill, Carolyn, Ceil Lucas, Robert Bayley, & Joseph C. Hill. 2011. *The hidden treasure of Black ASL: its history and structure*. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press.
- Moriarty Harrelson, Erin. 2017a. “Regimes of Motilities: Deaf Development, NGOS, and Deaf Tourism in Cambodia. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. American University.
- Moriarty Harrelson, E. 2017b. “Authenticating Ownership: Claims to Deaf Ontologies in the Global South,” In Annelies Kusters, Maartje De Meulder, & Dai O’Brien (eds.), *Innovations in Deaf Studies: The role of deaf scholars*, 361–383. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Murray, Joseph J. Deaf Studies: Scholarship and Community Interaction in the Making of Deaf Identities in Annelies Kusters, Maartje De Meulder, & Dai O'Brien (eds.), *Innovations in Deaf Studies: The role of deafscholars*, 77–100. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Philip, Marie (1997). "Deaf Culture and Interpreter Training Curriculae" Unpublished manuscript.
- Pratt, Mary Louise 1992. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.
- Scott, James C.. 1985. *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Seek the World. 2018, May 4. "How to Sign Germany Country Properly" Video file posted on Facebook. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/seektheworld2015/videos/1704962619619151/>
- Söderfeldt, Ylva. 2013. *From pathology to public sphere: the German deaf movement, 1848–1914*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

Language Index

- American Sign Language 6, 10–11, 14, 25–39, 81, 95, 99, 111–126, 145–161, 167–182, 189, 197, 208–209, 287–306, 310–311, 316, 320–323, 326–328, 336–338, 340, 343–349
- Auslan / Australian Sign Language 59–79, 325–326
- Bolivian Sign Language 333–337, 342–343, 345
- Cambodian Sign Language 309–328, 339, 342, 344
- Chinese Sign Language 7, 10, 17, 83–103, 327, 344
- English 7, 11, 15, 21–39, 59–79, 111–126, 149–150, 155, 158, 160, 167–182, 185–198, 223–240, 275, 277–279, 281–282, 287–306, 312, 322, 324, 326–328, 334, 338, 340, 343–344, 346–349
- German Sign Language 201–217, 343
- Ghanaian Sign Language 185–198
- Indian Sign Language 19, 223–240
- Irish Sign Language 265–282
- Khmer 309–328, 340
- Lengua De Señas Mexicana / Mexican Sign Language 43–57, 106, 339
- Marathi 223–240
- Signed (Exact) English 15, 30–31, 35–37, 123–125, 175, 194–195, 275, 281, 290, 312, 328, 334, 340
- Tibetan Sign Language 3–104, 326
- Ugandan Sign Language 185–198, 326, 344
- Vietnamese Sign Languages 129–142, 245–262

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510090-018>

Subject Index

- access 25, 29, 33, 43–57, 62, 65, 67, 70,
133–140, 150, 155, 160, 167, 177, 180,
191–193, 206–207, 213, 230–231,
237–240, 252, 254, 273, 275–276,
279–281, 288, 291, 293, 339–341
- affect 71, 139–140, 215–217, 226, 240, 249,
253, 255, 257–258, 287, 293
- attitude towards deaf people 130, 137, 253, 257
- bilingual-bimodal 25–32, 43, 46, 51, 79,
94, 145–150, 168–182, 201–218, 248,
290–291, 295, 297
- classroom communication 25–39, 45–46, 52,
55, 88–100, 111–126, 129–142, 145–161,
167–182, 191, 196–197, 201–217,
259–260, 278, 287–306, 315, 321, 325,
343, 345–346
- code-switching 86, 92, 168
- coinage or invention (of signs) 97, 195,
278, 287–306, 310–311, 320, 323, 343,
347–348
- communicative repertoires 14, 26–39,
62–79, 90–104, 145–161, 203–204,
212–217, 223–240, 247, 258, 314
- dance 60–79, 208, 210, 320, 350
- deaf associations 10, 32–33, 36, 86,
189–191, 267, 271, 288, 309–328, 334
- deafblind 223–240, 302, 346
- deaf children 27, 33, 37, 44–45, 148,
157–158, 255, 281, 305, 315
- deaf club 86–87, 92, 99, 134, 248, 333–336,
345
- deaf education 6, 14, 17–18, 25–39, 43–57,
60–61, 63, 81, 83–104, 122, 133–134,
140, 145–161, 67–182, 185–198,
201–217, 227–228, 245–262, 265–282,
273, 275, 287–306, 309–328, 335,
339–341, 344–345
- fingerspelling 11, 61, 97, 99, 117, 121,
122–123, 138, 154, 213–214, 257–258,
280, 287–306, 316–317, 326–327, 348
- grammar 7–9, 13, 15, 26, 28, 77, 89, 98,
102, 104, 116–118, 121–123, 141, 157,
167–182, 194–197, 212, 228, 256–257,
260, 275, 277–278, 288, 290, 294–295,
301, 303, 311–312, 326, 343–344, 349,
351
- hearing non-signers 13, 38, 59–79, 145–161,
223–240
- interpreter education 111–126, 129–142, 145,
149–150, 153–154, 160, 345–346
- interpreters - working with / services 15,
34–37, 45–48, 51, 59, 65–73, 77–78,
89, 91, 176, 194, 197, 245, 247, 249,
253–257, 262, 270, 273, 287–306, 311,
325, 338
- intersubjectivity 63, 80, 204–205, 217–219
- language contact 90, 98, 112, 117, 126, 194,
227, 295, 344
- language ownership 300, 305
- language policy 9, 31, 44, 94, 99, 103, 111,
122, 145, 149, 185, 188–189, 261–271,
273, 278, 289, 291, 294
- language prestige 6, 145, 151, 160, 295
- language socialization 43–57
- language vitality 152
- mouthings 35, 48, 68, 72, 92, 139, 202,
214–215, 223–240, 280
- multimodality 3–4, 59, 62, 203–204, 210,
227, 239, 246, 313
- NGOs 10, 86–87, 236–262, 309–328, 337,
339–340, 350
- oralism 6, 43–57, 133–135, 147, 155, 187,
206, 217, 227–228, 268, 240, 275–281,
341
- parents of deaf children 13, 27, 29, 43–45,
56, 145–161, 195, 206, 315, 349
- sign language documentation 10, 83–104,
291, 309–328, 333–335
- sign language history 309–328
- signwriting 201–217, 346
- theory of mind 205–207
- World Federation of the Deaf 20, 268, 288,
323, 334–337, 345

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510090-019>

