

Working with village sign language communities: Deaf fieldwork researchers in professional dialogue

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1. Introduction¹

In this chapter, we report on work in three different communities with a high incidence of hereditary deafness and indigenous sign languages. These are the villages of Alipur in South India and Chican in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, as well as the community of Mardin Sign Language users in Turkey. Alipur and Chican, with 150 deaf people out of 20,000 and 17 deaf people out of 700 respectively, are similar in sociolinguistic set-up to the better-documented "deaf villages" in Bali (Marsaja 2008; de Vos 2012) and Ghana (Nyst 2007). Mardin Sign Language, which originated in the town of Mardin in south-eastern Turkey, is now on the brink of extinction and used by ca. 40 deaf and hearing members of a single extended family, all of whom have moved to the metropolitan areas of Istanbul and Izmir. In all three cases, the sign language has been in existence for several generations. Details about each of these communities can be found in the sociolinguistic sketches in this volume (contributions by Panda, Escobedo Delgado, and Dikyuva).

The intention of this chapter is to add to the emerging discussion in sign language linguistics on issues of ethical practice and community engagement during fieldwork. In particular, the approach is to represent the experiences of deaf fieldwork researchers working with rural and/or small-scale sign language communities in their countries of origin. To this effect, in May 2012 three of the authors (Sibaji Panda (SP) from India, Cesar Ernesto Escobedo Delgado (CEED) from Mexico and Hasan Dikyuva (HD) from Turkey) engaged in academic dialogues about the same set of questions. The dialogues were conducted in International Sign and video recorded. The transcripts were then translated into English. These data, comprising 2.5 hours of video and over 21,000 words in English, are used in the present chapter.

Personal accounts of linguistic fieldwork by researchers are now reasonably common for spoken languages, in particular in the area of language documentation and endangerment. For instance, Wilkins (1992) relates his experiences with work on Aboriginal languages in Central Australia, and Debenport (2010) discusses her work with a Tiwa-speaking Pueblo community in New Mexico. In contrast, similar personal accounts by sign language researchers, such as in Jones & Pullen (1992), are still relatively rare. Although the field of sign language linguistics has always been very concerned with ethics, and ethical issues are now more often discussed explicitly (e.g. Harris, Holmes & Mertens 2009), it is not easy to locate authentic first-hand accounts of fieldwork practice in the sign language literature. In particular, the “voices” of deaf researchers and researchers from developing countries are largely absent from public discourse.² Therefore, our aim is to consider issues of fieldwork practice from the perspective of deaf researchers working in their home countries.

Most of the work that we relate in this chapter is taking place as part of a project on “endangered village sign languages” funded by the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) through the EuroBABEL stream of the European Science Foundation’s EUROCORES scheme.³ This is a large consortium project conducted by partner universities in five countries, and the authors belong to the UK research group, which is the lead partner. In addition, work in Alipur and on Mardin Sign Language has also been supported by grants from the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP). The “applied” community projects we report on include the opening of a school for the deaf in Alipur, the creation of multimedia educational materials on Mardin Sign Language, and the compilation of a dictionary of Chican Sign Language.

In quoting from the academic dialogue data, while we do not always comment on research ethics in explicit, formal, or theoretical terms, it is evident in our work that we are deeply concerned with many issues that are relevant to theoretical discussions and methodological developments in the field. In Sections 2–6, we consider several pertinent issues and scenarios as they play out in each of the three field sites, using lengthy direct quotes from the professional dialogues. Work in each of the three communities constitutes a detailed case study, and Section 7 reflects on the importance of such material and draws conclusions of a general nature.

2. Preparatory phase: Discovering the language and the community

The extracts from the video material in this section describe the initial contact between the deaf EuroBABEL fieldwork researchers and the respective communities. A considerable level of personal interest and increasing involvement is evident from these comments. SP and CEED discuss the first contact with the field site as follows:

SP: I'd like to ask you, about your research location of Chican, what was your first contact with the village, or how did you find it in the first place? How did you contact them?

CEED: I first saw it on the web. There was some information from America about Mexico and Chican Sign Language, calling it Yucatec Mayan Sign Language. I read this and I was confused, like we have our LSM (that is, Lengua de Señas Mexicana, or Mexican Sign Language), but the sign language in that village was supposed to be different, but why and how? That caught my attention and I wanted to have a look and took a flight to go there.⁴ I had a deaf friend from Merida, which is in Yucatan, so he took me there. We entered and there were all the deaf in the village, and it was different. Their culture was different, their clothes were different, their food, houses, everything was different. It was very interesting. I met the people for the first time and signed with them, and I was very interested and really surprised. I was intrigued and wanted to know more about their situation. I found that my own Mexican signs and their signs were different.

SP: In my case, this is how the first contact happened: In 2006 I was working in the Netherlands, and world-famous people came there for a workshop uniquely on village sign languages. We discussed, and I saw the lectures, and I was impressed and interested. I thought that probably India does have several such villages. So I did a lot of searching on the web, and I found a newspaper article. I read it, and yes, there was such a village, with about 200 people with disabilities, blind, deaf, various. This made interesting reading and I kept a copy, though initially, I did not have any funding. I took a flight there on my own initiative, to South India, Bangalore. I didn't know where to go from there, and I searched around for two days. I would go the wrong way, stay for the night, again come back, and nobody knew clearly where it was. After roaming around for a while, I finally found it. I had started out in the morning, and towards the evening, around four o'clock, I was there and had found it, after a long time searching. It was like a shock at first contact, that I had really found the right thing. ... The signs were different, and the place was full of deaf people signing, children, adults, all signing. ... The village has its own particular sign language, and all the criteria from the previous lectures in the Netherlands about village sign languages matched this situation, like testing positively for these criteria.

CEED: So you were searching around and going the wrong way etc for two days. I got there in one day, because luckily, the Mexican deaf association helped me. They gave me instructions how to change buses twice, starting from the main road, and into ever smaller roads, across hills, around bends etc, then the village was there. There are about 700 hearing people, and 18 deaf, but one has died, so now there are 17 deaf people. So the way I contacted and met these people was through the president of the deaf association, who knew an interpreter who was working with the police So we found him and talked to him, the two of us deaf (CEED and the local deaf association president) signing LSM, we were wondering what to do. We said, where are the (local) deaf, and he (the interpreter) took us to their homes. We said hello and took some photos and talked in sign language. We went to all the various houses and in the evening we all gathered together; we freshened up and dressed up well and we gathered and started signing and working together. We established a relationship slowly, not feeling quite sure of ourselves first.

It is evident from both these accounts that the prospect of visiting a “deaf village” has been intriguing and exciting. Although travel to the field sites involved considerable personal effort and expense, there is a palpable sense of emotional involvement and curiosity throughout this process of discovery. CEED is using his existing network across Mexico, as he was president of the National Union of the Deaf at the time, while SP would have found it much easier than a foreign visitor to navigate rural India, as he himself grew up in a village in a different part of India.

Another interesting point is that neither CEED nor SP first entered the village with the aim of conducting research, but rather visited out of a personal curiosity. They comment on how they first started to think of assisting the local community by doing research (SP) and creating sign language resources (CEED), after having spent some time in the village already:

SP: I didn't show them anything about doing research at first. I just met them as a deaf person, in a visual way, through pictures, just like them. I just went and greeted them and met with them, that was all. I didn't really have a firm research plan in the back of my mind at that time, I didn't know.... I felt quite happy, because from the previous lectures in the Netherlands I really was very interested in finding such a situation, and when I arrived there in reality for the first time and it matched, I felt good. It was a new experience. So I started to think how I would do research there later, how to help the locals, and I started planning.

CEED: I wanted to give my support for releasing a dictionary of the local Chican Sign Language. So I was thinking that I did not have any resources myself. I thought I would save up some money for later work, or contact some others for fundraising, then I would fly there again and make something happen. There was no funding at the time, so I dropped it for the time being.

In the case of Mardin Sign Language, a different kind of coincidence led to the discovery of its community, and HD relates the situation as follows:

HD: In 2004, I was working with some students, providing sign language teacher training for them. I had assembled these trainees to teach them about language and linguistics, so they could understand how (to teach). The students all became more aware of their own language, and one of them realised that she had another sign language (in her background), from Mardin. She started telling me that there is this other sign language from the village, and it is important. This person was important, and we met and discussed how something could be done. I met with several other people from the family, and their signs were completely different. The sign language used in (other parts of) southeast Turkey and the Mardin Sign Language were completely different. When I met these people, I realised that this sign language is important.

The discovery of Mardin Sign Language was facilitated by HD's prominent position as the first trainer for teachers of Turkish Sign Language. This case is particularly intriguing in that the users of Mardin Sign Language had been living among the Turkish Sign Language community for decades without anyone becoming aware of the status or existence of their minority sign language. This was only possible through the training programme and the enhanced meta-linguistic skills it provided. Here again, the motivation for research developed gradually over time:

HD: For the EuroBABEL project, I do fieldwork with the (people from) Mardin. This was really not easy, it was difficult, but this student of mine helped me. We went together, as this is her own family. I met several of them, and I could not understand their signing at all. I did not immediately begin with research. That was not my aim. I just met the people, and when I could not understand them, I spent time learning their signs.

A general point emerges from these observations regarding the importance of taking a long-term perspective. The initial familiarisation and engagement with the communities took a long time, and certainly much longer than the official project duration would have allowed. This means that the requirements of a typical scientific project are at odds with the requirements of effective community engagement in terms of the necessary time frame. The initial contact with the communities goes back several years before the beginning of the project, to 2004, 2005 and 2007 respectively, and the subsequent community projects described in Section 4 build on this long-standing contact. It is clear in retrospect that such activities would not have been feasible within the time limit of a typical research project because of insufficient "lead-up time".

In the case of urban sign languages, consistent long-term community engagement is typically much easier to achieve because researchers often

live and work in close proximity to the Deaf community. However, the situation of fieldwork in a less accessible village such as Chican or Alipur is much more difficult and more closely comparable to fieldwork on endangered spoken languages in rural, sometimes remote areas. Moreover, the time lag before starting a formal project and the time spent on follow-up activities after completion are all the more valuable in cases where the target communities have little or no previous experience with linguistic research (see the discussion in Section 3).

Ideally, we would like to think of language documentation as an open-ended collaborative activity rather than a time-limited project. In some cases of research on rural sign languages and their communities, such as in Kisch (this volume) and Nonaka (this volume), contact with a community spans over a decade or more. Working over such long time scales is a significant challenge, given that most funded academic projects only run for two or three years, but mutual respect and trust, the core ingredients of any successful community project, build up very gradually over time.

3. Start-up phase: The beginnings of research activities

From the beginning, the EuroBABEL project was designed to engage with the target communities and to consider substantial local benefit, including the provision of a separate budget for such activities. However, the means of achieving this are far from straightforward, and the observations about the challenges of starting research activities in this section as well as the subsequent decision-making processes (Section 4) are instructive in this regard. This section considers the specific backgrounds of our target communities with respect to people's previous experience with researchers and other professionals (3.1), as well as the impact this has on the notion of informed consent (3.2).

3.1. Considering the “research history” of field sites

In order to understand the challenges in starting research activities, we first need to consider the background situation at the three field sites with respect to previous experiences with research, technology, and language documentation. On the one hand, linguistic research was very much a novelty in these communities, but on the other hand, some of them did have experience with visits by external professionals or researchers from other academic disci-

plines. Such experiences, or the lack thereof, may have influenced their initial reaction to the deaf researchers, as SP and CEED illustrate:

SP: My first contact (with the village) was quite interesting, because I had a friend from Belgium with me and we both went together. We are both deaf, and the people in the village had never met a white deaf person from outside. They had never seen a video camera for filming. They were very interested and flocked towards us readily. So actually for the first contact, I didn't know anything about their homes, about the village, the research. I just arrived and met the deaf for about two hours only, because it was already getting late in the evening and there were no electric lights outside. ... They themselves were also equally intrigued to see a white person coming. That had an impact on them. Later when I kept going there, they always asked me where my white friend was.

CEED: In my case, I was not the first one. There had been people before, Americans, French, Canadian, a number of them. I was the first deaf person though. ... I promised to make a dictionary of their sign language and give it to them, so they were happy.

SP: When I arrived for the first time, this is what people told me: the village had been visited by audiologists, doctors, geneticists, who had taken blood samples for medical research, and this had happened repeatedly. There had not been any linguists or sign language researchers ever visiting there before ... Nobody ever came to collect video data. I was the first one. ... There was no previous standard to evaluate me against. The only thing they especially perceived and remembered about me was that I was deaf, and we felt very compatible.

CEED: Similarly in Chican, there were more doctors, more geneticists, like in your case. People had been distributing hearing aids, cochlear implants, but giving them something about the sign language, education and schooling, that had not been done. There was only concern about hearing aids and such. I saw that this was of no benefit whatsoever, and people were saying, whatever, they gave us these things, so what? People would wear them for the photos, for good PR in the newspapers and some applause for show. I had doubts about that, and I wanted to make an impact for the sign language, to spread and respect their sign language.

Thus both in Alipur and in Chican, we were not the first to visit and to be interested in the situation regarding deafness. Medical doctors, audiologists, geneticists and, in the case of Chican, anthropologists had already visited these villages, and the resulting experiences were not always satisfactory for the locals. This is a pertinent point, as people do tend to draw comparisons with other visitors, which can cause tensions (cf. the chapter on Adamorobe in Ghana by Kusters, this volume). In Alipur, the presence of a white

foreigner, video cameras, language documentation materials, computers and the Internet, and indeed the whole concept of research, was alien to the local deaf people.⁵ In both cases though, the appearance of deaf researchers made a particular impact on the local people. This issue is discussed in more detail in Section 6.

For Mardin Sign Language, the situation was different as we are working with a community effectively in diaspora in Istanbul and Izmir. Therefore, they have ready access to and experience with technology such as video cameras and the Internet. However, as research on Mardin Sign Language had never been conducted, HD also reports that there was a long initial phase during which the Mardin Sign Language users had to become acquainted with language documentation in order to accept the importance of this work for their unique language:

HD: You meet someone, and the person thinks, what is this research, what is the aim. They thought it is not important (to them), and that it should not be important to me either. Then I needed to engage with them (and explain why) it is important. They said that Turkish Sign Language is already used everywhere, and the general attitude and expectation is that Mardin Sign Language is of much lower status. ... For me as a fieldworker, in my view the language of the people in this community is important. However, they had no concept that passing on their language to the next generations was important. Mardin Sign Language was just an okay kind of thing. They did not have the awareness yet. As time passed, I kept giving them information, we had workshops, and they themselves became aware that this is important. They themselves understood that Mardin Sign Language is our own language and is important to us. Initially, they didn't understand that their signs are a linguistic heritage of their own to be carried forward and are important to be preserved. A lot of time was needed for repeated workshops to generate (these ideas).

In Section 4, where decision-making for implementing community projects is discussed, such processes of changing attitudes are discussed in more detail within the particular field settings.

3.2. Informed consent

Considering the previous “research history” in a community is not only vital for helping researchers avoid rushing into something that may have negative connotations for the participants. These considerations also have a more direct, practical impact on the issue of informed consent, that is, the consent that participants capable of autonomous decisions give voluntarily to researchers after comprehensive briefing about aims, procedures,

and possible risks and benefits of their participation. Since informed consent originates from medical research, in principle it should be obtained at the beginning of a project, and certainly before any data collection activities. Informed consent is a central notion in all professional codes of ethics or ethical guidelines, including those of linguists (e.g. LSA 2009).

However, this principle can be a challenge when working with Deaf communities, and certainly in the kinds of communities that our project was operating in. These challenges are not often made explicit, as considering them may force researchers to make uncomfortable decisions. An interesting example is given in Crasborn (2010), who comments on work with users of Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT) for a corpus project involving the open-access publication of video files on the Internet:

Although the statements on the consent form may be explained to them in sign language (...), this does not count as a voluntary and well-informed decision if people are not fully literate and cannot comprehend the impact of a short, written document like a consent form. Second, ... do people understand what publication on the Internet means? ... If one has no experience browsing web pages from all over the world ..., it is hard to decide whether or not video recordings of oneself should be made available to the whole world.

(Crasborn 2010:285–86)

In this case, the research team relied on their personal judgements to decide that genuine informed consent was indeed possible, concluding that “it was the impression of our Deaf assistant that even the older signers in the Corpus NGT were acquainted with the Internet and would be able to comprehend the meaning of “worldwide availability” (ibid: 286).

As should be clear from the comments in Section 3.1, the situation with the signers from Chican, Alipur, and Mardin is far more difficult to tackle. In all cases and particularly for the latter two communities, it is very obvious that given the lack of relevant background knowledge on more than one level, genuine informed consent was an impossible notion at the beginning of research activities. In fact, it is our collective experience that informed consent based on a sufficiently sophisticated understanding of research has been a result rather than a precondition of the research process, and we discuss the implications of this realisation below.

It is interesting that despite working independently of each other, a similar approach was used in all three communities to navigate around this thorny issue. This involved a strategy of slowly feeling their way forward at the beginning of their research, that is, after the initial get-to-know phase was over and they wanted to proceed with actual research.

HD: I tried to explain about research, but people there could not understand. There was something like a disagreement, which was a bit difficult for me. So I just forgot about trying to explain, and just asked them whether I could film them. They agreed readily. They have (family functions) where they come together, like weddings, or for circumcision, which is a Muslim custom. They accepted to be filmed on those occasions. So I did a lot of filming, but people were wondering why I was not filming the party and was filming individual deaf people using sign language instead. ... I tried to explain why filming and collecting the sign language was important, but I felt that they did not get a clear idea at all. I think they had never had any similar experience before where such video recordings were made. I still tried to get a good collection of videos.

HD started filming in a setting where according to the local culture, this was already considered natural, although for quite different purposes. Although at this stage none of the participants had grasped the concept of linguistic research and therefore, obtaining genuine informed consent was impossible, HD's personal judgement was that filming in this setting would be neither intrusive nor harmful. SP's experiences are similar in this respect:

SP: When I arrived for the first time for fieldwork, I did not start filming immediately. I first looked around and shook hands with people, and all should understand first who I was and what I had come for. ... They all had no idea what research meant, and I also didn't rush into explaining it to them. I first met with them and talked about other things, like the importance of studying for them, knowing how to write. They were facing barriers; for example, they were not able to send SMS messages by mobile phone. All the hearing people could do that, but they couldn't. So I explained such things to them, and I organised several workshops within one week What I filmed was nothing in particular, only free communication that was happening anyway, which I filmed by observing in the background.

It is evident here that SP primarily considers it important to engage with the situation of deaf signers in Alipur, including their status as a disadvantaged group, whereas obtaining video data is happening in the background, almost in a casual manner. Similarly, CEED describes the initial process of building a rapport with deaf signers in Chican, while also commenting on his own difficulties.

CEED: I was quite nervous and shaky and felt uncertain, because I was doing this for the first time. I didn't really have experience in this job, in research, collecting video data and all. I had never done that. It was the first time for me. But I got some training, and UZ had the experience, and I was really up for it and interested. So I arrived back in Mexico by plane. I hired a car and paid for the petrol and the car hire, and the driver left, and I was there. I

was introduced to people, and I slowly started signing with them. There was tentative eye contact, and I did not start filming yet, I held back. So slowly we were signing, eating together the food I provided, and they started to be open and share things. It was a bit of work to loosen them up, and we started to gel with each other. They were intrigued that I was also deaf like them, and signing and gesturing with them. I started filming their signs, like the numbers 100, 200, and stories. I would encourage them and they expressed themselves and I collected the signing. ... I showed them that I was using LSM with my other deaf friend, and they were surprised to see how different it was. Equally, we saw that their signs were different; I already knew that. There was interpreting and translation going on between the two versions of signing, and we looked at each other's signs and were intrigued. I respected their signs, and they respected mine, and understood that they had their own sign language. I kept teaching them that the urban areas and Mexico City are different, and the village here has its own sign language.⁶ So that opened their minds, and slowly over time, we started to match well with each other.

In the professional dialogue, the notion of respect is discussed frequently by CEED, and clearly, this is considered more important than a formal requirement such as obtaining a consent form. Moreover, it is evident in all three accounts that the initial steps taken are very small, while the responses from participants are constantly being evaluated. This is to try to get a sense of the participants' priorities, and to ascertain what level of understanding the participants may be developing about research on their languages.

This way of talking about first steps at the beginning of research activities is quite similar to what Kubanyiova (2008) discusses in terms of conflicts between "macroethics" and "microethics". Discussing a project in Applied Linguistics, she maintains that "when research becomes highly situated, it is as if suddenly a can of ethical worms is opened, and what seemed straightforward and logical at the macro-level suddenly becomes ambiguous and problematic in the actual research practice, rendering existing ethical guidelines inadequate" (Kubanyiova 2008:515). The macro-level consists of general principles laid down, for example, in professional codes of ethics, while the level of microethics is concerned with the particular requirements of a very specific situation, which may be in conflict with macroethical principles. In our case of informed consent from users of village sign languages prior to data collection, it would certainly have been possible to give explanations through the local sign language and obtain their agreement in some formal way – after all, no objections to video filming were raised in any of the three communities.⁷ However, unless one is satisfied with a rubber-stamping exercise, such consent is largely meaningless if the participants have no background knowledge of linguistic research, and realistically, they

can only acquire this understanding during the course of research itself. This concerns not only informed consent but also a whole range of other issues such as anonymity, data protection, confidentiality, and acknowledgements, and publication media.

Faced with this conundrum, we used our personal judgement to slowly feel our way forward, in the ways described above. This level of personal responsibility, and indeed personal risk, is increasingly being recognised as researchers now frequently work in multi- and cross- cultural contexts. This requires quite a different set of skills based on the concept of research ethics as a continuous process rather than a set of pre-conditions to research. Jones & Pullen (1992:196) refer to the long-term “moral career” of researchers in their discussion of tensions between “Deaf and hearing worlds”. This is similar to the notion of “virtue ethics”, which “does not place emphasis on following principles but rather on the development of the moral character of the researcher, his/her ability and willingness to discern situations with potential ethical ramifications as they arise in the research practice, and his/her ability to make decisions”, so that formal ethics requirements are balanced with situationally adequate behaviour (Kubanyiova 2008:507). Although no such theoretical notions are mentioned in the professional dialogues, this is effectively our approach. The following quotes describe how consent was eventually obtained at times and in ways judged appropriate by the research team. In Chican, people were already familiar with researchers, so the main issue was the way in which information was being communicated:

CEED: There was an existing consent form from the university in Preston. I had the form translated into sign language by an interpreter and filmed that, because people there are illiterate and don't read Spanish. I first translated the form from English into Spanish, and when I showed it to them, they didn't understand, so I called an interpreter, who translated it into Chican Sign Language, like, did they agree for their sign language data to be made public? This was explained in sign language and filmed, and when it was clear, they signed on the forms. It was good. The only problem was that there was one child, 12 years old, so I asked the father to come. I gave explanations to him, and asked if there wouldn't be any problem, that I wouldn't be blamed afterwards. But that was not the case, and eventually, everything was signed and it was fine.

By contrast, SP followed a very different approach, which was motivated by the particular hierarchical organisation in the administration of Alipur:

SP: For me, it was different. I first proceeded slowly with some filming, and I didn't get any signatures initially. That village has a particular system of management. The people don't have the right or authority to decide themselves. There is one head of the village, a hearing person who can sign very

well, smoothly. The village head can decide matters for everyone in the village. For example, he decides about cleaning public places, electricity, water supply, all kinds of problems he is responsible for. People are not allowed to watch TV; it is edited heavily first, and there are only a few channels that are provided. This is related to their Muslim culture, where they are very strict about many things. It was this head of the village who I was working with. So I asked him, should all these people sign for their consent? But he said, no, there is no need, you can go ahead and film. Only the village head himself gave his signature; that was okay. So we negotiated and agreed that he would be the only one. Also, I film many children, and their families themselves did not understand the meaning of signatures. They didn't have a concept of research, didn't know what the Internet is. They had never seen a computer. So they couldn't understand about data being shared over the Internet, or about publishing books. So we didn't sign any forms. ... However, later they developed more awareness. So now, they can give more of their own input when they are being filmed.

This approach is more contentious because it is not clear that local customs should be able to override a general requirement for individual consent in one way or another. It is likely that we will still seek more explicit consent at an individual level later on, as deaf signers have now become more aware of our work. Until then, pictures, videos, names and other personal information are not being published.

For Mardin Sign Language, issues around video data, publications, and other forms of dissemination were discussed in the first project workshop, after a substantial amount of video data had already been collected. Participants signed consent forms translated into Turkish and, in one instance, with an additional Turkish Sign Language translation, which was filmed on video. Unlike the communities in Chican and Alipur, the Mardin Sign Language users were explicitly keen on wide dissemination of their language materials:

HD: I have discussed and agreed (with the community) on the dictionary, publications, and materials. We have not implemented this yet, but we will later on. I have been making video recordings, and I have collected signatures (for consent) from the participants. The aim is to disseminate these materials widely. The participants are very happy that the existing Mardin Sign Language will be preserved.

Of course, delaying the formal act of obtaining consent does not imply ignoring a duty of care towards research participants. On the contrary, proceeding in this way makes it all the more necessary to develop a sensitive radar as an informal way of trying to gauge the level of agreement with the research process in the community. Nevertheless, this still involves a significant element of risk on the part of the research team. For the indi-

vidual fieldwork researcher, there is a risk that someone higher up in the “project hierarchy” may reject the use of data collected in this way, or may enforce compliance with “macroethical” procedures which are unsuitable in the field. Moreover, there is a collective risk for the research team because initially, there is no guarantee that informed consent will indeed be given as the project progresses, and despite the researchers being deaf and from the same country, they all came across cultural difficulties, conflicts, and barriers. These challenges are discussed in Section 5.

3.3. Working with gatekeepers and mediators

The quote from SP in the preceding section points to the importance of gatekeepers and mediators in the Alipur community, and working with such people is a well-known issue for fieldwork researchers (cf. Kusters, this volume). Being able to work with a research assistant who is a member of the target language community can be invaluable (cf. de Vos, this volume), and this is confirmed by HD’s experiences, particularly at the beginning when he was not yet sufficiently fluent in Mardin Sign Language.

HD: I have grown up using Turkish Sign Language, but as far as reception is concerned, it’s not at all easy for me to understand (Mardin Sign Language). For example, there are a huge number of facial expressions. I thought this would be limited system, but it is absolutely huge. ... When I have difficulty with the research, the solution is that I need to have an assistant. I can sit with the assistant and look at things (on video) and clarify them. My assistant knows Mardin Sign Language, but she likes to get in touch with other members of her family, to show them things and ask them, like, what does this mean, what is that, to draw out the answers from them.

Of course this has not only been helpful in terms of data analysis, but also in order to engage more effectively with the other family members in any practical matters or in cases of conflict.

It is interesting that in both Alipur and Chican, communication sometimes took place through hearing interpreters. Being deaf and from the same country did not provide a sufficient basis of communication when it was important to provide exact, specific information beyond casual conversation. There is no doubt that HD, SP and CEED learned the respective minority sign language very quickly, and this direct contact through the local sign language has proved very important for establishing a rapport with the local deaf participants as well as for the quality of research outcomes. However, SP and CEED chose to use the services of interpreters for specific purposes:

SP: I wanted to explain to them what I was aiming for, why I was doing this work, and what would be the benefit to them, trying to sign to them (with their signs), because their signs were different. So I had to adopt and learn their signs to an extent. However, there was a hearing person who came, and I used speech to the hearing person, who then signed it to all the deaf (in local signs). So the communication was through an interpreter.

This situation happened only in one particular instance, when there was a critical moment in communication during a workshop where more complex information needed to be conveyed. Otherwise, informal communication was through sign language.

CEED: I first started by questioning them, asking them what they want the most. ... So I explained this to them through an interpreter, giving the options: did they want a deaf school, or something more practical connected to material life like their local businesses and surroundings, or what did they want?

In addition, CEED chose to involve a hearing interpreter alongside deaf signers for certain linguistic tasks that required specific meta-linguistic skills:

CEED: I would show them a word and ask what the sign is, but they often responded with long sentences in their sign language. I was aiming only to get a single word and I said, no, no, tell me just in short, but they gave me long sentences. So I brought in an interpreter, because the interpreter could pinpoint and give me just the signs in short. Then eventually, the deaf understood it too, and we communicated as a group.

Gatekeepers, mediators and interpreters are perhaps more likely than other research participants to play a role during times of conflict. Section 5 deals with cultural adjustment and conflict resolution.

4. Implementing community activities

In this section, we discuss the various community-based activities carried out in the three communities during the project. Decision-making processes are described in Section 4.1; we discuss how these decisions have come about and who was involved. Section 4.2 goes into more detail as to the possible benefits that these minority language communities may derive from the practical aspects of this research.

4.1. Decision-making processes

Deciding about community projects is not easy when the researcher and the community have completely different life experiences, background knowl-

edge, and available resources. As pointed out in previous sections, here again a lot of time is needed to arrive at a sensible and actionable decision. In Alipur, SP was involved in the re-opening of a school for the deaf. The fact-finding and decision-making process involved several stages and various groups of people in the village.

SP: I noticed something about the village: in terms of education, for hearing people there was a lot of education. They were well-educated, and there were many schools all around which were really good. But what about the deaf? The hearing population is about 20,000 people, and that is a lot. There are many good schools everywhere, but for the 150 deaf, there is nothing, zero, not a single deaf school. A few people told me that previously a deaf school had opened, but after a short time, only one year, it was closed. I asked, why was it closed? They said, the teacher was teaching us in the oral way, and was speaking, so we couldn't understand anything. So people stopped coming to the school. It was also a cultural thing, as deaf people had never pursued education. They were only working as manual labourers, and there was no emphasis on schooling. So many of them skipped school, and it closed. Ok, so I thought hard about that. I knew that they all had the potential to study. I saw that there was no fingerspelling used at all, and they were completely illiterate. They could not send SMS messages on mobiles. I made a lot of such observations, and I thought, the school that had closed before, maybe it can be opened again, but how?

Here the initial phase is based on the SP's observations in the field, supplemented by additional specific information elicited from deaf people in the village. The fact that SP is already familiar with life in rural India, albeit from a different region, is particularly valuable, as this background knowledge makes it much easier to assess what level of action is likely to be successful and what local resources may be available to draw on. In addition, SP is active in the area of deaf education in urban areas of India, and has experience in establishing bilingual deaf educational programmes.

After the initial idea for the deaf school had developed, SP pursued the topic in a more systematic way, involving first a larger number of deaf people and then the village administration.

SP: I arranged a workshop where all the deaf came together. I could already sign a little in their sign language, so I started to communicate and debate with them. And they all said, yes, we can have a school and we want to have it. Both adults and children wanted the school. They understood the situation, like, all the hearing people can read and write and develop themselves well, but what about us deaf people, we have nothing, and we are stuck. Ok, so I decided about the school, but what could I do? It would be a big undertaking, needing lots of work, and funding to help set it up, so I couldn't do that.

I thought about how to let the idea take hold. I met the leaders of the village and had a lot of negotiations with them. Finally, they agreed to provide a building, they provided carpeting, and salary payments to the teachers. In addition, there was the funding that I had obtained for the project before, and which I had paid to the village head, so it was really his. He is a very religious and honest man, so he redistributed that money as salary payments for the teachers. So that's how it developed, and now the school is running well and is well-established.

As Alipur is a relatively well-off community by local standards, it was beneficial to draw on local resources. The project resources acted as seed funding, but the continuity of a project such as this new school, which is still up and running, depends on the local administration taking over, and lobbying for this was part of SP's approach. If a project is fully resourced through external support, the risk is very high that it will disband immediately when the outside involvement comes to an end.

In the local context and for this particular purpose, this consultation process at multiple layers was feasible for the more tangible outcomes that were already familiar to the local population. Everybody was already aware of the value of education. However, for the more abstract aims of protecting a language from endangerment, a different decision-making approach was needed, as the concepts behind language endangerment and its consequences are unfamiliar in Alipur. This is evident in the decision to create bilingual multimedia materials, which included various semantic categories of Alipur Sign Language signs with translations in the local spoken language, Urdu:

SP: I had asked them whether everyone (in the village) can sign, and they said no. In a number of households, nobody could sign. Only those outside with regular contact with the deaf were able to sign, but not within all the households. In addition, the women usually stay at home, so they have much less access to signing. So I asked if everyone could access television, and they confirmed and were happy with the idea. How this would work in terms of technology they didn't know. So I made a DVD (with signs) and handed it over. They were unable to imagine what language documentation is and how the future would be for the language. I only discussed this with the village head, and we agreed about the various actions. I checked with him if everything was right, and he was happy with these things.

Again, we see how the village head acts as gatekeeper and takes decisions on behalf of the community, as is common practice in Alipur. For other field sites, without such a hierarchical structure, the situation is different. For Mardin Sign Language, a more directly participatory approach was possible, as the small group of signers can contribute more directly to decisions and their implementation.

HD: The group of Mardin Sign Language users want to document the various (aspects of) their language. Looking at their situation, it was important that we in the (research) team first discussed amongst ourselves (...) that these people have their own Mardin Sign Language, and how to provide them with an approach to documentation, how we can film them, etc. Once we agreed this in the research team and it was clear, I approached the Mardin Sign Language family members, and they were very happy. I gave them only a very small idea, just dropping in a thought and then stepping back. I didn't bombard them with many ideas from my side. I explained language documentation to them, about filming and assembling materials.

This interaction is quite typical in that HD carefully introduced an idea and then waited for the reaction from the participants. This can speed up the decision-making process and also helps the participants to clarify options and opportunities, particularly at the beginning when they may not have enough background knowledge to be aware of the range of feasible possibilities. The decision-making process then becomes increasingly concrete:

HD: In May 2011 we had a meeting with the Mardin Sign Language group in Ankara. People came together for a workshop, and this created a tremendous set of materials. We wanted to assemble various categories of signs to put into a dictionary; that was the first thing that we (researchers) and the participants agreed. Secondly, we wanted to preserve their memories. After discussion, (we decided that) we wanted something about the local area (of Mardin), and have sign language (texts) about all the various places there. Thirdly, (stories from) our elderly participants, (about the time) when they were children, how they used to play and interact. All those memories came back to them, and we filmed a collection of their stories on video. All this we want to include in a DVD and disseminate. So we agreed these things. ...They said that they really wanted a glossary with various categories of signs, so I said yes, good idea. I accepted the ideas on what to document that they contributed, and I took a back seat. Eventually, we combined the ideas that the family members had and the ideas that our research team had and brought them together.

It is evident here that both parties, research team and language community, feed into the process. HD as the lead researcher has to keep a balance between the input from the sign language users and the background knowledge that is available within the research team, and find a compromise that works for everyone. In Section 6, HD discusses a similar complementary approach in terms of involving both deaf and hearing researchers. In this case, it has been beneficial that one member of the research team is also a member of the MarSL-using family group, so that she was able to be a mediator.

For the village of Chican in Mexico, a dictionary of signs was one of the intended outputs, as for the communities of Alipur and Mardin, but the technological infrastructure is very different in Chican, and the researchers had to take this into account. As in the other two cases, the decision-making process was not straightforward in Chican.

CEED: I first started by questioning them, asking them what they want the most. Just to film everything and then leave ... I didn't want to do that. ... So I explained this to them through an interpreter, giving the options: did they want a deaf school, or something more practical connected to material life like their local businesses and surroundings, or what did they want? They were thinking a lot and not coming up with anything at first. I suggested they might like a book of signs, as there were none available, and they really liked this idea of the sign language dictionary. I showed them some samples, the book from Bali, and showed them the CD,⁸ so they could understand, and they wanted something similar. ... It was important to give them something, and also to have publicity for them internationally, so that people outside would understand and respect them. I asked them about making a DVD, but they said no, that wouldn't have any benefit. That is because in the village no technology is available, there is no electricity because it is a small, remote village. There is no mobile phone network coverage and no Internet. They might get it set up in the future, but as a rule, a population of 700 people is not enough (in order to get the service). If there are more people (in an area), for example 5,000, or over 2,000, then network coverage is set up. But for only 700 people, that is too small. So it was better to have material on paper as a hardcopy book. This can be kept on shelf, and can also be distributed, so it is beneficial. People can physically skim through the book and look up the signs for words, in Spanish, English, and Mayan. And there will be the Chican Sign Language signs.

To a greater or lesser extent, the approaches discussed here have elements in common with participatory research and co-inquiry in the humanities and with deaf people (see, for instance, Carleton 2007; Yorks 2007; Barnett et al. 2011). It is often pointed out that decisions about research and its applications should involve community members from the very beginning. Discussing such approaches in relation to working with the Deaf community, Harris, Holmes & Mertens (2009) point out that "[i]nstead of having a hierarchical research team with a primary investigator at the top, assistants in the middle, and participants at the bottom, the research project should be a horizontal dialogue between research teams and participants."⁹

However, in practice this is not easy when limited time is available for fieldwork, and our project often needed to use a variety of strategies, compromises, and sometimes short-cuts towards decision-making. The engagement

processes with the communities took a long time. People are not able to come up with requests to researchers at the drop of a hat; they often need time and intensive engagement in order to gauge the effects and benefits that linguistic research may have for them. A “pure” theoretical notion of bottom-up participatory processes does not reflect the realities of our fieldwork.

4.2. Benefits for minority sign language communities

So what have been the benefits for the communities of Alipur, Chican and Mardin from this research so far, or what further benefits can be expected? Throughout the project, we have been considering and re-considering this issue, which is evident in the data from the professional dialogues.

CEED: (We need) something for teaching in the school.¹⁰ The teachers who are in the school should be given some material, so they can use it themselves to teach. I can’t teach myself because I have no time. So it is better to bring some material and for them to use it there locally. ... If we can print the dictionary, then afterwards they can do things themselves with the help of these materials. We can develop more ideas, and eventually set up a building, and that would be beneficial.

SP: With my work, it is similar in terms of giving something to the community. When I applied for the project,¹¹ I added to the budget that I would make something like a dictionary. ... Actually, as I see it now, it is not a dictionary, but rather a word list. It has groups of signs, such as food, vegetables, and various word groups. I had consulted with the community before, and what they all wanted was that all the hearing people in the community must be able to sign well. At the moment, if there are deaf family members in the home, then (hearing) people living with them can sign well. But other people outside may only use some gesture and a rather low level of signing skill. So we feel it is better to disseminate the sign language widely. So okay, we collected signs, edited video clips and put them on a disk. I have made a DVD and handed it over. It is lucky that the village has its own TV channel. So we only needed a single DVD, and it can be broadcast into all homes in the village. Everyone can see it because they all have this technology. So the DVD worked out well. Secondly, the deaf school was set up. We established the school because it is very important (for the deaf) to have literacy, to be able to send SMS messages on their mobiles Thirdly, all the deaf, in particular the adults, are illiterate. Now the school has started to teach the children, but there is nothing for the adults. So I thought that in the evenings twice a week the adults can get together as a group and get a little bit of instruction. This was only aiming at sending SMS messages for communication, like “come”,

“go”, “time”, so that they could send this by mobile text. Secondly, many of them are very busy, working, having regular transactions with money, but they never write anything down or make lists. Everything only exists as signing by hand and in their memory, that’s all. Information about who has borrowed money from whom, how much, etc., all this they memorise and talk about in signs only. So it is better if it can be written down, and they all want to be able to write this down. But it is difficult for them to write down everyone’s names. Everybody has sign names, including all the hearing people, they have all been given sign names, but (the deaf) don’t know the written names. So they face a barrier with respect to writing, and the adults need to be taught about that. ... In addition, I have been documenting the village’s own sign language. I have collected many hours of videos, about 20 to 25 hours. This big collection is being kept in a big computer server in an organised way. In the future, if the language becomes endangered and is about to die and disappear – we don’t know - there will be a record of the language kept safe, and they can all remember it.

CEED: Yes, that is right, I agree. If the language dies, we must be able to retrieve something from files. Later on, ... if the language has died, there will be a substantial file collection. This is important because of the background and history of the village, and there may be other similar villages around the world, so if we have substantial records, we will be able to know how many such sign languages have existed.

The Alipur and Chican sign language users may not be concerned or even aware at present that their language might become endangered, and what consequences this could have. It is the researchers who are anticipating such a situation. It is also evident that SP and CEED are using a lot of local background knowledge both in terms of the general environment and in terms of the specific situation of the deaf people in Chican and Alipur.

In addition to these various uses of language resources and considerations about literacy and education, another important impact that linguistic research can have is a change in language attitudes. This is very evident in the community of Mardin Sign Language users. As explained in Section 3, the Dilsiz family members were quite hesitant to consider the value of their language at the beginning of this research. However, this attitude gradually changed.

HD: Our participants really want to preserve their own family stories. When I asked whether this material needed to be disseminated, they said, yes, they wanted to disseminate it, so that’s what we will do. ... We now have materials for MarSL, and there are a few people (among the family members) who want to teach the language to children. They would like to teach the sign language to hearing children. This is their own idea, and I support that.

Of course teaching MarSL to children may or may not work out in practice, but regardless of the actual result, the change in attitude is evident from such statements. Much of this change was due to intensive interaction with groups of people, particularly during project workshops, and HD points out the importance of such in-depth involvement between researchers and language users as a group.

HD: There is a big difference now (with respect to the community), and they have benefited (from our research). In particular, I think that we should have more workshops. We have organised two workshops, but that was hardly enough. In order to give the participants more information and feedback, I would like to have further events, but we have only had a budget for two small workshops, that's all. I think there has been a huge benefit for the community. We have a very warm relationship with the family (of MarSL users). It is not enough to keep meeting the same one person over and over for research. Working with a group of people carries more benefit for the community.

Furthermore, initial work through the EuroBABEL project enabled the MarSL users to understand what is involved in such research and therefore to participate in decisions. A process which involves members of the language community as early as at the bid preparation stage is ideal, but would have been impossible at the very beginning when the MarSL users were not even aware that their "old signing" could be of relevance to anyone. HD reflects on this change in the capacity of MarSL users to engage in negotiations about the next research project bid:

HD: Initially ... I just met and engaged with the community, did some video filming, and some research and documentation, and that was it. There was a give-and-take with the participants, and they wanted to do more, so we took this on board and applied for a different project through ELDP at SOAS.¹² This was a fairly big project, not a huge one, but sizeable. Before putting in this new bid, I met with one of the deaf members of the family, Hasret Dilsiz, and through her, with her parents. We discussed the bid and I was feeding them information, so we could negotiate the various aspects of the bid. We then agreed (to go ahead). We agreed what would be their job and what would be my job, and how we would combine our efforts. Subsequently, our bid was successful, and I contacted them again to start working. We have been pursuing this project over the last 14 months. I keep meeting the community a lot; I always go there frequently and meet them.

In summary, benefits from this research include user-friendly language resources, educational opportunities, and changes in language attitudes. However positive the outcomes described in this section, we have also experienced a range of problematic situations in this particularly challenging type of fieldwork situation. Some of these are exemplified in the next section.

5. Cultural adjustment and conflict management

This section illustrates clearly that any naive notion of deaf people's sign language research in their home countries being an easy, unproblematic exercise is misplaced. To start with, cultural adjustment to a greater or lesser degree was necessary in all three communities. This was least marked in the case of Mardin Sign Language, as the physical environment in Turkish cities was nothing new for HD, and he was already familiar with some of the deaf Dilsiz family members, who also belong to the Turkish Sign Language using community. By contrast, SP, though familiar with rural India in general, experienced a considerable cultural shift in the Muslim village of Alipur.

SP: When I arrived there (in Alipur) for the first time and started looking around, there were many obstacles in the process. ... When I first went there and returned back home, I did some Internet research and read about the local community situation, and I became very nervous. This was because they are a very strict Muslim group, and they have many strict religious rules. For example, women are behind closed doors at home, and must wear face veils. They cannot meet and talk to any man at all. And really in the village, that's accurate; I did not see any women roaming about at all. All were at home behind closed doors. So it made me extremely nervous when I searched the Internet about this community; I was really apprehensive. ... I was always worried and nervous that maybe I might break some of the rules, like the religious rules. I was not sure if I could go to particular places or not, I didn't know the culture. In addition, I could not understand the signing of the deaf people there, I kept missing it. There were one or two or deaf people with good communication skills. For example, they were good at doing gestures and creating a mix of international signs. Still, through this communication I could not get the full information, could not get information about the culture. I was stuck, and there were a lot of obstacles for the first year and a half. After that, the doors opened, and from then until now, everything is very good. Before I was searching around on the Internet and getting nervous, but when I got there, after a while I understood that actually all the people were very nice. Really there was no bother about the religion, and no worry about the rules mentioned on the Internet, that was the wrong information. They are really all very nice people, they support the deaf, donate money, they have set up a school and given the building for it, and it is all very positive.

CEED: Were your obstacles due to the culture there, or the food, the clothes, or what?

SP: A little, but in particular, my worry was about the religion, or their rules. This is because I am a Hindu, and they are Muslims. I thought maybe I won't match with them; maybe I make a mistake and they will throw me out, or

they will be a fight. I was nervous, how would I learn (to manage)? Then over time I learned things, because actually when I met the village Head later, he was very open. He led me around and things were open. When I asked him things, he gave me explanations. That hearing person explained to me that I didn't need to be nervous. I only needed to step back and withdraw whenever a woman passed by. I had to stand and wait and let her pass. He explained these things to me well, and I was very grateful and very relieved. Later on it was smooth.

For SP, the challenge of adjustment was purely in cultural terms and not in terms of the physical environment, as he was familiar with factors such as unavailability of hotels, frequent power cuts, and the like. CEED, who is from an urban, predominantly Spanish-speaking area of Mexico, found it a challenge to adjust both to the local culture and language, and to the way of life in a Mayan village.

CEED: In Chican, ... everything is different. They sleep in hammocks, and I did too. I learned a lot about their culture. There are a lot of mosquitoes and one issue is that it is very hot, and you need a lot of (mosquito) spray. I was always feeling hot, and always waving a hand fan for air, but it was okay. It was a strain, but I learned their culture and respected it. Once they served some food, and I didn't really want it, but they insisted that all share the same (food), so I had to respect that. I was happy with that and didn't say anything. When you sit down at the table, it is not at the usual height, it is low down and you have to squat around it. This is their culture and I learned that; it is natural there and I am happy with that.

As mentioned before, CEED would sometimes use a local interpreter to help with communication in Chican Sign Language, including when negotiating payments for the sign language consultants. For instance, it was important to find out what level of payment would be appropriate in the local context, so as to neither over- nor underpay the consultants.

CEED: We discussed what they wanted for giving me data, like food or drink. Firstly, I paid money to all of them for their work when providing data; secondly, I provided food. If there was no food, they would get tired of signing, so I provided it. So they were happy with getting paid, and felt positive themselves. I also asked the hearing interpreter what would be right, how much money should be paid. I didn't decide myself. We discussed how much should be paid, and at the end, I paid everyone the same money. I put it in individual envelopes and handed them out, and people gave signatures. People gave signatures for consent, that there was no problem with publishing their data, that their signing could be shown in public, and they said okay to that. Like, is it okay to film? Yes, okay. All were in the loop and were happy with that, and I said thank you to all. I said, don't worry, I will make a dictionary of the signs, and they will distribute the dictionary to you. This will

be beneficial for lobbying. Because I am deaf like them, I felt a good rapport intuitively. It was good and I remunerated the deaf in a professional way.

Money also played a role in a conflict experienced by SP in Alipur. In this instance, an unfounded rumour had spread about SP's alleged misuse of video data for commercial purposes. Resolving this misunderstanding is described by SP as follows:

SP: One of the deaf adults ... said, "it is very wrong of you to take all these films, because you collect the films, and then you fly abroad and sell them". I was shell-shocked. What, me selling these sign language videos for profit?? That was the rumour that had spread, so the deaf all took that very negatively. I tried to think how I could solve this problem. I went to meet the hearing head of the village, who I had been associated with. I told him about this problem, the communication issue with people, and everything. He said, no, no, just leave it, and he called a meeting with all the deaf. He attended himself and explained through sign language that these videos that are being made for our own benefit, for the teachers teaching in the school, for dissemination, and also we can keep these signs for much later, so in 100 or 200 years you can all still see and understand them, and these are our signs. Sibaji is well versed in technology, he is a researcher. He explained all this to the deaf, and they all accepted. ...There were no repeated instances like that, only this one time.

Like CEED, SP also sought local help in dealing with payments to the consultants. As they are unfamiliar with this line of work, people may perceive that payment is too high, too low, or not on equal terms for everyone. Therefore, a local intermediary is better placed to advise a researcher from outside the community, to handle payments, and to give satisfactory answers to queries from consultants.

SP: I solved this problem by not dealing with money issues myself. I delegated this responsibility to one of the leaders in the village. I gave him the money, and he wrote down all the names and distributed all the money, managing everything himself. Then complaints stopped and it is now solved. That person can explain everything, why and how someone gets paid more, or less, and I don't have anything to do with it. Managing it in this way works much better, and there are no problems now.

6. Deaf researchers and research teams

The concept of "Deaf-led research" and the involvement of deaf researchers in working with communities is becoming increasingly salient (e.g. Ladd, Gulliver & Batterbury 2003; Atkinson, Gleeson, Cromwell and O'Rourke

2007). Therefore, it is relevant to consider how deaf researchers themselves regard their role with respect to a research setting. Previous discussion in the literature focuses on deaf researchers working in their own communities, and sometimes the approach is used in international collaboration (e.g. Leeson and Sheikh 2009). Interestingly, deaf researchers from the same country, but not from the same community within each country, are both “insiders” and “outsiders” with respect to the village sign language communities. Therefore, the experiences described by CEED, HD and SP add an interesting new angle to such discussions.

CEED discusses the building of a close relationship with a signing community as a deaf researcher, which relies on his skills in adapting to the cultural situation and developing a warm relationship with the deaf people in the village, as well as his ability to absorb the local sign language variety with relative ease.

CEED: As a deaf person, I had a good rapport with the deaf there. ... Secondly, they were very happy that I respected their signs. I consistently showed respect for their own signs, and did not try to teach them anything, and they appreciated that. ... I have more relationships with the deaf people; it is more the visual mode that’s different. I also know the hearing interpreters and have a network with them, but my gut feeling is that I am linked more to the deaf people. They tell me a lot of stories, I am in their homes a lot, we talk, play games, share stories and take photos. I am also fine with the hearing people, but I spend less time with them, and it is mostly for work, it’s different. This is not a problem though, and the attitude is positive on both sides.

The notion of respect appears repeatedly in our professional dialogues, and has been one of the key “ingredients” in working with these communities. Moreover, this project was also an opportunity for CEED to get training and build skills and confidence as a researcher, as is evident in some of the quotes in previous sections. The skills basis necessary to benefit from and engage with a research project develops not only in the participant community but also in the researchers.

SP comments on the various aspects of his identity in relation to the research setting in the village. Being deaf and being Indian are both considered relevant factors in the quote below, while the consequences of being a male researcher, having a different religion and not being from the village itself were discussed in Section 5.

SP: I feel that going there as a deaf researcher, and it being the first time (for research), it was a positive experience for all. They did not feel anything negative, for example that someone already came before and didn’t pay me, or someone came and just took away the video data from us; there weren’t any stories like that. I saw this as positive. ... Maybe later if someone else

comes and wants to make video recordings, there could be problems; that is a different topic, I don't know. When I went for the first time, it was lucky, as I am deaf, I am Indian, and I am a researcher. So they were all happy for me to do the filming, and it was positive.

Among the several markers of identity (male, researcher, deaf, Indian, Hindu), being deaf does stand out as very important with respect to the relationship with deaf signers in Alipur.

SP: There is a community of 150 deaf people, and the hearing population is very large, about 15,000 to 20,000 people. I don't really know them, I only know a few people, those who can sign and who I have met. For example, when I walk to the school, I meet those (hearing people) who have their shops on the way to the school, selling food and drink. So when I walk past, they all see me regularly and know me. But the village is quite big, and in the more peripheral areas I don't know anyone. There may just be some casual conversation in a very limited way. With the deaf, I have got a very deep relationship. All of them know about my work, what I do, about my life, my family, we also talk about their work, and we exchange and share everything in full. With the hearing people, I have less interaction, maybe just a short question, like they may ask where I'm from, or what my work is, that's all. I do not feel a special connection. Even if they can sign, I still do not feel like communicating openly, we just talk less.

HD reports a similar immediate connection with the deaf participants in the Mardin Sign Language project.

HD: It is very easy for me to meet the deaf participants. I just look at them once, and they look back, and we have that visual contact. ... If there is a mixed team of deaf and hearing researchers, it is very easy to do a good data collection. ... The deaf (researchers and participants) will all be signing away with each other, and collect rich data easily.

The reference to "rich data" hints at another consideration, which has to do with research methodologies and the quality of data, in addition to and indeed building on community-researcher relationships. This relationship is discussed in more detail by HD, and again the notion of mutual respect is important.

HD: It is really very important to have deaf researchers. ... When I meet (a deaf participant), I feel that we have things in common, not related to the research, something personal, something that is the same about me and the other deaf person. I feel there is something different, like a difference in the way I ask questions, in the way I approach people. Yes, we do have the same culture, but also, academic work is something very different. When I interview people (for research), I feel there is quite a good attitude. ... Many deaf people regard me with a tremendous amount of respect, and they look up to

me, and this is mutual. I contribute something, they contribute something, and there is a lot of respect and reciprocity.

However, how a deaf researcher may be regarded by the community of sign language users in the field is not always straightforward. In addition to the above quotes, HD also reports some conflicting attitudes on the part of the Mardin Sign Language community.

HD: For the Mardin Sign Language using community, seeing a deaf researcher is very puzzling. They respect it, but also can't quite believe it. They feel it is like magic that a deaf person can do research, it is something tremendous. They do not have any information about what happens in other parts of the world, that there are deaf people with MAs and PhDs who are academics. Of course all these deaf researchers are skilled, but the MarSL community does not have any information about this. I feel that they regard me in a puzzled kind of way, as if this may be a dream only. I tell them that I am a researcher, and they say, how can you be a researcher? You do not speak, you can't hear, how do you do research? I explain to them that it is a matter of cognitive capacity, and that I can function visually. I have explained that to them, but it just needs some time (to sink in). They do not yet regard it as normal that a deaf person can be a researcher, but with time, they will understand.

This kind of experience may no longer be common in the industrialised countries of Western Europe and North America, but is certainly relevant in our context. We are now familiar with lines of argumentation such as in Leeson & Sheikh (2009:8–9), who emphasise that the specific course they are reporting on is “about Deaf people, taught by Deaf people, delivered in signed languages, and informed by Deaf-led research” and that “the key for success is partnership with Deaf academics and organisations of Deaf people”. First-hand evidence about how such an approach plays out in other regions of the world is comparatively rare, and it is important to accumulate such first-hand evidence from the field in order to inform our views.

7. Conclusions

In this chapter, we have aimed at summarising fieldwork experiences in three communities with small-scale minority sign languages as expressed by deaf researchers working in their home countries. Rather than discussing research ethics and best fieldwork practice abstractly, the present chapter includes detailed case studies and first-hand evidence.

Many of the issues and approaches discussed here are familiar from research on spoken languages, and in particular, research on endangered languages has been concerned with issues of ethics, including within complex

fieldwork settings (cf., for instance, Grinevald 2007; Thieberger & Musgrave 2007). However, comparable literature on endangered sign languages is still rare. Therefore, detailed case studies from which to build a more robust data base of fieldwork practice on endangered sign languages are of particular value. As Debenport (2010:241) emphasises with respect to endangered spoken languages, “each of us involved in field-based research is incredibly closely tied to the specific variables of our own field sites, making it beneficial for us to thoroughly consider the conditions under which other research projects and community/academic partnerships are taking place”. This is no less true of research on endangered sign languages.

Moreover, there is a particular need for contributions by researchers from developing countries, as many endangered languages, both signed and spoken, are located in developing countries, but the majority of linguists working on these languages have been from industrialised countries. As pointed out in Section 1, the “voice” of such participants in academic discourse is of considerable value. As and when a more extensive data base of case studies can be assembled, the field of sign language linguistics will be able to derive its own conclusions in terms of best practice and research ethics for work on endangered sign languages. Our chapter is a contribution to this emerging academic discourse.

Acknowledgements

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expresses his gratitude to the Deaf Chican villagers for providing essential background information about Mayan cultural life. Sibaji Panda expresses his thanks to the deaf friends in Alipur who have supported his research, as well as special thanks to Fazil Raza, who as a fluent hearing signer has helped with facilitating the various stages of fieldwork and opening of the “Unity School for the deaf”.

Notes

1. In this chapter, we are not using the differential spelling of “deaf” (for audiological deafness) versus “Deaf” (for cultural deafness), as we feel it does not reflect the realities of rural signing communities.
2. Obviously, “voice” is used here in a metaphorical sense, meaning the views and opinions of deaf researchers. However, we chose to keep the term “voice” because of the association with other academic literature, where this term is commonly used.
3. EuroBABEL stands for “Better Analyses Based on Endangered Languages”; see details about the project in the acknowledgements. The UK strand of the project runs from September 2009 to February 2013.
4. This was in 2005.
5. This has important consequences for the notion of “informed consent”, as detailed in Section 3.2.
6. On the video, CEED uses some Chican signs to quote how he talked to the local people, e.g. using the sign TIE+GLASSES to talk about city-dwellers.
7. With the exception of female signers in Alipur, given the cultural context (see Section 4.1 and Section 5).
8. Here CEED is referring to Marsaja (2008), a book with an accompanying CD with video clips.
9. Various labels are in use for such approaches, including Participatory Action Research (PAR), Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), community-participatory research, and the like (Harris, Holmes & Mertens 2009).
10. There is a special needs school some 30 minutes’ drive away that a few of the deaf children and young people from Chican have been attending, and some of the teachers there have become interested in Chican Sign Language.
11. This refers to the pilot project funded by the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP).
12. Endangered Languages Documentation Programme at the School of Oriental and African Languages in London.

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Part II

Profiles of shared-signing communities

Adamorobe: A demographic, sociolinguistic and sociocultural profile

Annelies Kusters

Adamorobe is a village located in Ghana, 40 km from its capital Accra, in a valley east of the Akwapim Ridge. Its founders are Akwamu Akan speaking Southern Akwapim Twi. Although there is an increasing number of detached houses, the village mostly consists of brick or clay houses in a traditional compound structure: rooms built around an inner courtyard, where people do everything in the open air, e.g. wash clothes, prepare food, and socialise. There is no sewage system and no water pipes, but there is electricity, a number of people have a car, and televisions and mobile phones are omnipresent.

Since 1961, several researchers and visitors have reported a high prevalence of deafness in Adamorobe (such as David, Edoo, Mustaffah & Hinchcliffe 1971; Osei-Sekyereh 1971; Amedofu, Brobby & Ocansey 1999; Nyst 2007). The number of deaf people counted by these visitors has varied from 34 to 45, but has seemingly remained more or less stable. It also appears that the overall population has grown dramatically, i.e. from 405 in 1961 to 3,500 people in 2012, as a result of both births and immigration. This means the percentage of deaf people in Adamorobe has strongly declined, from 11 % in 1961 to 1.1 % in 2012.

The variations in deaf population – for example, I counted 41 deaf people in 2012, while Nyst (2007) counted only 35 in 2001 - is largely due to deaf people's immigration and emigration rather than from births and deaths. It appears that a number of deaf villagers reside and work outside the village on South Ghanaian cocoa farms, temporarily or permanently. Also not all deaf people living in Adamorobe were born there: at least three deaf men from surrounding villages or Accra married deaf women in Adamorobe.

In 2012, most deaf people had hearing parents (28/41) and one or more deaf siblings (26/41). It appears that this 'recessive sensorineural deafness' (Meyer, Muntau, Timmann, Horstmann & Ruge 2001) is caused by the 'deaf gene', i.e. a Connexin 26 R143W mutation which was probably spread in Adamorobe through marriages between the founding Akan matrilineal clans, starting in the late eighteenth century (Nyst 2007).

While the total number of deaf people in Adamorobe seems relatively stable, the deaf population is ageing, i.e. it appears that fewer deaf people are born now than in the past. This is probably the result of a dual cause that impeded the circulation of the 'deaf gene': firstly, the people from Adamorobe increasingly married immigrants, and secondly, since 1975 deaf people are not allowed to marry each other anymore because deaf-deaf marriages (formerly common in Adamorobe) invariably brought forth deaf offspring. In addition, because of a local belief that deafness is passed on by men, hearing women are not willing to marry deaf men. Therefore, in 2012, amongst the deaf people aged above 20 there were more single deaf men (54%) than women (44%), and deaf men were less likely to have ever been married (most single deaf women had been in marriages with hearing, or sometimes deaf, partners for long periods). As a result, 87.5% of the deaf women had children with one or more partners, whilst only 23% of the deaf men had at least one child. Even though deaf-deaf marriages are not allowed by law, 26% of the deaf adults aged above 20 were in a relationship with a deaf person, i.e. four couples. Three of these four couples were childless and one couple had a deaf child.

The sign language used by Adamorobe villagers is known as Adamorobe Sign Language, or AdaSL (see Nyst 2007). Because no sociolinguistic research has taken place in this village yet, the number of AdaSL signers and their proficiency is unknown, but participant observation has highlighted some sociolinguistic patterns. Firstly, people who are able to sign especially well are close relatives of deaf people, people who grew up with deaf people, friends of deaf people, or people who work with/near deaf people (for example having adjoining farms). Secondly, there seems to be no difference between the signing proficiency of men and women. However, there are differences in age: children generally do not know AdaSL unless they have deaf (grand)parents, live with a deaf person in the compound, or have deaf neighbours. It appears that more elderly people than young or middle-aged people are proficient in AdaSL. In addition, the deaf villagers are more fluent in AdaSL than their hearing peers. Nevertheless, many hearing people are fluent in AdaSL and/or mix this language with spoken Akan. Finally, most (recent) migrants do not know AdaSL.

In everyday life, deaf people interact naturally with hearing people through sign language, but the majority of them also frequently engage in deaf-only conversations. These conversations generally last considerably longer than deaf-hearing interactions. Most deaf-hearing interactions are rather short; longer ones typically consist of one-to-one conversations in which the hearing interlocutor is particularly trusted by the deaf person. Hearing people do not usually participate in deaf group conversations.

Deaf villagers express that “deaf people are the same”, sharing their first language and certain ontological experiences, and feeling connected and united. However, at the same time, something that is very strongly emphasised by both deaf and hearing people is deaf-hearing connectedness and unity in Adamorobe. They stress that the villagers are as one, a family, and that they do all kinds of things together, communicating through sign language.

Adamorobe is thus a deaf-inclusive place. At the same time, these local perspectives and practices are supplemented by (or sometimes contrary to) global processes, agents and discourses (see Figure 1).

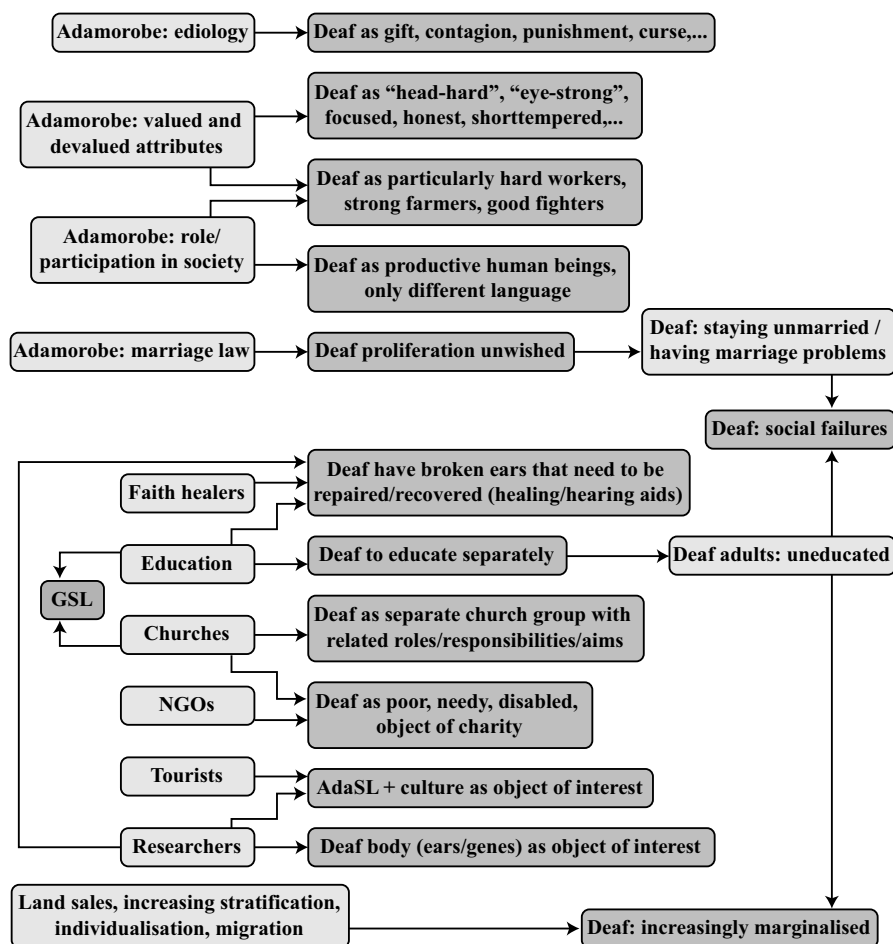


Figure 1. Perspectives on deafness in Adamorobe

Processes that have caused the marginalisation of deaf people in the West, and constructed them as disabled, have influenced deaf-deaf and deaf-hearing social practices in Adamorobe. Capitalism, Christianisation and commodification of lands are associated with increasing fragmentation, stratification and individualism in Adamorobe, as well as a diversification of employment options and greater importance being placed on education.

In religious and educational contexts, deaf people are now separated from hearing people, which was not the case in the past, with traditional Akan religion and family-based education. In 2009 there were about 15 Christian church groups active in Adamorobe, one of them specifically for deaf people, led by a Lutheran pastor who comes from Accra weekly. As regards education, the three schools in Adamorobe are not accessible to deaf villagers. Between 1963 and 1980 there were a few failed attempts at establishing education for them (both inside and outside the village). Since 2000, deaf children from Adamorobe routinely attend the boarding school for the deaf in Mampong.

Adamorobe was introduced to the concepts of deaf church groups and deaf education by the American educator Andrew J. Foster, who arrived in Ghana in 1957. As a result, many deaf adults know some Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL), which – at least in the initial stages of its development - has been strongly influenced by ASL). The deaf schoolchildren use GSL as their first language, which renders AdaSL potentially endangered (Nyst 2007). Nevertheless, in Adamorobe, GSL does not seem to have a higher status than AdaSL. Both the deaf adults and schoolchildren believe it is beneficial and prestigious to be bilingual in both sign languages.

Churches, NGOs and visitors often aim charitable donations and development projects at the deaf villagers, but this tends to construct them as needy, and aggravates the difference between them and their hearing counterparts, whilst it appears that in the past, deaf and hearing villagers were farmers with similar incomes. Nowadays, deaf adults in Adamorobe feel disadvantaged because they are nonliterate and their array of possible life choices is narrower than that of educated hearing people. Many hearing people in Adamorobe have small businesses; work as tailors and seamstresses, hairdressers, carpenters, and teachers; and/or commute to and from Accra daily. But most deaf people are subsistence farmers, which seems to be insufficient for esteem in Adamorobe anymore. Due to the rapid expansion of Accra upto Adamorobe's vicinity, especially in the last few years, almost all the lands on the hills surrounding the valley where Adamorobe is located, are now sold, mostly to estate developers. Deaf (and hearing) people who had their farms on these lands, now need to go far from the village for farming,

which further marginalises them and the profession of farming. Deaf people also have ceased to have roles as town guards or warriors. In addition, due to the high number of migrants that come with Accra's expansion, and the general stratification and individualisation, relatively fewer hearing villagers know sign language well, and deaf-hearing interactions are less frequent and shorter in duration. The aforementioned marriage law also marginalises deaf villagers.

However, in everyday life, the people of Adamorobe still lead their lives side by side. Differences between deaf and hearing people, ambiguity in social interactions and historical changes in deaf-hearing relationships are prevalent, but in the end, these people choose to celebrate unity and 'sameness'.

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Alipur Sign Language: A sociolinguistic and cultural profile

Sibaji Panda

Alipur Sign Language (APSL) is an indigenous village sign language used in Alipur, in the state of Karnataka in southern India. Alipur is a large village of approximately 20,000 inhabitants, of which 150 are deaf. The village is located 80 kilometres north of the garden city of Bengaluru (Bangalore). The village is well known in the area for its gemstone cutting and polishing. Its main spoken languages are Urdu and Hindi, and villagers have varying degrees of familiarity with the language of the surrounding area, Kannada (a language from the Dravidian family).

Alipur is a small Shia Muslim enclave in a predominantly Hindu area, which is linguistically and socially isolated from the surrounding area. This makes the village rather unusual, and there are no other known cases of religious minority communities with a high incidence of hereditary deafness in India. All of the villagers belong to the Shia Muslim community, except for a few families who are from other religions including Hinduism.



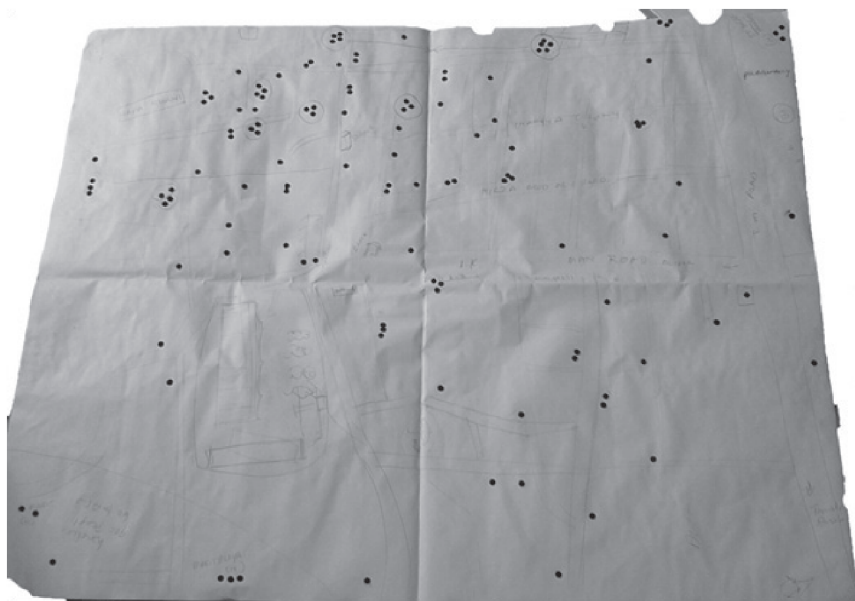
Fig 1. Map of Alipur as seen on Google Map.

Alipur is believed to be 300 years old, and was established when Islamic sultans ruled the area. In the pre-independence period, Shia Muslim communities in India were a minority within the Muslim community itself. After establishment of the Madrasa¹ in Alipur, many people of Shia faith moved to Alipur and settled down for reasons of safety, cultural and religious integrity, and economic occupations. After independence, the population and economy of the village grew rapidly, with trade attracting many migrants. The main occupations are farming as well as carving, polishing and selling precious stones. The precious stone trade has traditionally been an important type of occupation in Alipur, and a few individuals own large businesses including overseas. However, there are hundreds of small traders, and small stone cutting and polishing industries exist in the residential homes. Many of the deaf people in the village have taken up stone carving and polishing as their vocation and get paid well for the work they do, as they are often considered to be good skilled workers in the industry. Some of the deaf people in Alipur have a considerable range of vocational skills. For example, one of the deaf men in the village is skilled in construction work, making tiles, electricity repairs and fitting, carpentry, and plumbing. Getting work has not been difficult for the deaf, as they say people know their skills and contact them easily, particularly through the village tea stall that is run by a deaf man.

Whereas most Indian villages still have huts and hamlets, the houses of Alipur have concrete roofs, and there are a few high-rise buildings and mansions owned by the millionaires of the gemstone industry. Two huge Madrasas (an Anjuman-e-Jaafria and Madrassa Hussainia) in the village are testimony to the religious faith of the Alipuri community. The village has more than a hundred shops and businesses, and recently acquired a hospital, post office, and bank. Alipur has several schools, and both males and females have access to education. A few schools offer instruction in English at secondary level, which is comparable to the education available in urban areas. One of the schools is an English medium school and is affiliated to the Indian Central Board of Secondary Examination, which means the school offers quality education to the villagers. The schools, hospitals and other institutions for public services are run by a number of village trusts established by the villagers and based on their faith of serving their community. In rural India, it is quite rare for a single village to possess a range of such public service facilities.

Alipur has long had a high incidence of deafness, due to generations of endogamous marriage patterns stemming from the village's religious customs, isolation, and beliefs about outsiders. Currently, there are 150 deaf villagers, who comprise nearly 1% of the total population; this is 10–20 times

higher than the usual proportion seen in the general population. Deafness occurs throughout the village, but is more strongly represented in particular families, some of which have had deaf members for several continuous generations. One of these is referred to as 'the deaf clan'.



*Fig 2. Map of Alipur showing location of Deaf inhabitants.*²

APSL is quite different in structure from Indian Sign Language, which is used in the areas around Alipur. Due to the longstanding high proportion of deaf inhabitants, the majority of villagers use APSL (albeit with varying degrees of fluency), regardless of their hearing status. This distinguishes Alipur from other Indian villages where deaf individuals use various ad-hoc manual communication systems known as Home Sign (Jepson 1991). While APSL's sociolinguistic situation is somewhat unique, similar cases have been noted, such as that of Chican Sign Language in Mexico, Kata Kolok in Bali, Adamorobe Sign Language in Ghana, and Mardin Sign Language in Turkey (cf. chapters in Part I of this volume). Deaf APSL users tend to be monolingual, with minimal (if any) literacy, and until very recently, no access to formal education.³

One of the unique characteristics of the village is the interaction and communication between the hearing and deaf villagers. Though no specific survey has been conducted, it is obvious that the sign language community is considerably larger than the group of 150 deaf inhabitants in the village.

Sign language is used in all spheres of life, where both deaf and hearing people often communicate without much difficulty. A few of the hearing villagers are particularly fluent signers, but most people seem to communicate in APSL well enough to fulfil basic communicative needs. Most of the fluent hearing signers are immediate relatives of deaf people, such as hearing people with deaf siblings. Most retailers in Alipur seem to have some level of signing proficiency in order to communicate with deaf customers. Due to the extensive network of multiple cross-cutting relationships between extended families, all families have some connection or other with deaf relatives, either immediate or further removed (e.g. a second cousin).

This situation has resulted in a need for communication with deaf individuals for almost all villagers, who are exposed to sign language in various forms and with greater or lesser limitations. Recently, there have been efforts to promote the use of APSL in Alipur more actively. Interestingly, Alipur has its own television channel (Ali Channel), which recently began broadcasting some APSL signs as a community initiative (see Dikyuva, Escobedo Delgado, Panda & Zeshan, this volume). The multimedia video with APSL vocabularies and dialogues has been helpful for spreading APSL among the villagers.

Villagers contend that APSL is as old as the village itself. The majority of the deaf and hearing villagers believe that deafness in Alipur began when an early settler arrived with a deaf relative from Iran, to find a wife for the latter. The oldest deaf man in the village, who is in his 70s, says his grandparents were sign language users. This suggests that APSL has existed for at least six generations. Further investigation is needed to shed light on exactly when deafness occurred in the village for the first time. Within the ‘deaf clan’, the family tree that was constructed during fieldwork shows deafness going back at least six generation.

Comparing the setting of various rural sign languages with each other, Nonaka 2009:212 observes that “[t]he communities where indigenous village sign languages have appeared are geographically, culturally, and linguistically diverse, yet they share a remarkably similar constellation of socioeconomic and demographic features”. However, in Alipur this setting appears to be changing, as recently there has been increasing language contact with urban sign language varieties, particularly those used in nearby city Bengaluru (Bangalore). Two deaf villagers have studied there, one for six years and one for six months. Many others work outside Alipur (especially in Bangalore), where they also tend to socialise with the local deaf community. Due to the internet, films of other sign languages are now available to the deaf villagers, and teachers at the deaf school often use American Sign Language (ASL)

instead of APSL. Contact has also occurred because of deaf people from other parts of India visiting the village, including a deaf researcher. APSL's number signs may have already been affected by this (Zeshan et al, in prep.).

Observations from initial fieldwork suggest that in Alipur, deafness is more of a social disadvantage than in comparable villages like Chican (cf. Escobedo Delgado, this volume). The local arrangements for dowry payments, for instance, differentiate between deaf and hearing villagers (of both genders). Marriage customs in Alipur appear to discriminate against deaf villagers, because they normally pay a higher dowry (typically cash and jewellery) to 'compensate' for their deafness. Hearing women pay less than deaf women, and hearing men pay nothing at all if they marry a deaf girl, while deaf men must pay. In addition, marriage between two deaf people is discouraged, because the villagers believe this lessens the further spread of deafness, and they doubt whether a deaf couple would be able to cope with the practical aspects of parenting, e.g. day-to-day communication. Deaf villagers express unhappiness with this arrangement, and say that being free to marry deaf people would enable them to escape the discrimination of the dowry system. However, they also fear that life would be difficult and may lead to having deaf children if they are married to a deaf spouse. Deaf men and women in the village are married to hearing partners and lead a successful family life. There are usually no communication barriers as most hearing people tend to know sign language or are ready to cope with the communication demands after marriage. These marriage patterns have been part of the social customs in the village for centuries, and are not seen as a social stigma.

Traditionally, deaf people were not thought to be educable, and deaf boys start working at a very young age. Nevertheless, in the past few years, education has become available to the deaf children of Alipur. Around 2001, a deaf school was established in the village, but it closed after only one year as the teacher could not use APSL. Since 2008, a deaf school has been open in which boys and girls are educated separately and taught by deaf teachers. Deaf children are now acquiring English literacy, with APSL as the medium of instruction. Progress of the students who attended has been remarkable considering the limited amount of time they spent in the school, the limited resources and shortage of APSL-using qualified teachers. Within the national education scenario, deaf children in India do not receive education in their own language i.e. Indian Sign Language, and do not attain the expected educational standard. However, with very limited efforts and resources, APSL users taught by deaf teachers have been able to attain a functional level of literacy relatively quickly.

Deaf people participate in local trade and business, but appear disadvantaged in terms of employment, perhaps due to their lack of formal education and insufficient numeracy and literacy in the local language. Most deaf people work as labourers in the gemstone or construction industries, although some of the deaf people work as tailors or shop-keepers, including two who run their own small groceries. There are several focal points in the village where deaf men meet regularly; for example, one deaf man runs a tea stall where male villagers sign with each other, particularly in the evenings.

Gender separation is strong in Alipur, and deaf women have fewer opportunities to socialise and sign outside the immediate family. Therefore, it is possible that there may be differences in the signing of deaf men and deaf women in the village. However, opportunities for conducting research on APSL with women in the village are quite limited, in particular for male researchers, so no data or information is available so far on whether there are any relevant gender distinctions in APSL.

Research on APSL and the Alipur community is very recent (see Panda 2010; Dikyuva, Escobedo Delgado, Panda & Zeshan, in prep.). The first visit by a researcher took place in 2007, and subsequently, a pilot project funded by the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme began in 2008, marking the beginning of research on the language and the community (Panda 2010). At some stage, geneticists visited the village and collected DNA samples, but no publications are known to have resulted from this. Expeditious study is crucial because of the aforementioned increasing contact with urban sign language varieties, which is an indicator of potential language endangerment.

Recently, sign language varieties used by the younger generation and the older generation are diverging rapidly. A number of factors are responsible for this development. Firstly, younger deaf people from Alipur have become increasingly mobile and frequently travel to the city (Bengaluru), where they meet deaf friends who use American Sign Language (ASL).⁴ Deaf people can now travel more easily because of the complimentary bus pass given to disabled people by the state government, which means that deaf people do not have to pay for any travel within the state. Secondly, the two deaf teachers at the deaf school in Alipur often use ASL in the school. One of them is a native of Alipur who was educated in Bengaluru up to high school level and uses both APSL and ASL. The other teacher is an ASL user from Bengaluru and has acquired APSL after coming to Alipur. Therefore, ASL influence has affected the deaf children in Alipur who attend the deaf school. Finally, internet has become available on mobile phones, and the deaf signers are fascinated with the other sign languages that they can see on videos posted on the internet.

The above factors pose a serious threat to APSL and might affect the language's vitality in the near future. When the first sign language data were collected in 2007, there was no literacy among deaf people except for two individuals who attended a deaf school outside Alipur, and no influence of other sign language was noticeable. For instance, no fingerspelling was observed in the first data collected in 2007. Some deaf people of the older generation have started complaining why the children are "using strange Bengalaru signs". Now communication is sometimes difficult between younger deaf people with ASL and English skills and those who are sole users of APSL and have no knowledge of ASL and English.

In recent years, literacy education has resulted in improved access to information, independence, and opportunities, and this is appreciated by most deaf people in Alipur, as well as the parents of deaf children. Students who attend the deaf school can now read and write, exchange text messages, and are members of social networks on 'facebook'. On the other hand, it is possible that with increased language contact, APSL will soon become endangered. The Alipur community is now aware of this potential development through discussions in workshops, and the future of APSL will depend on the collective linguistic decisions of the community.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. A Madrasa is a school for Islamic education, and can also be used as a place of worship.
2. This map was created in Alipur by several consultants from memory and therefore does not represent all deaf inhabitants exhaustively.
3. The Unity School for the Deaf was opened in 2008 to impart literacy education in English. However, education has not been formal and the deaf school has not been recognised officially as a special needs school yet.
4. ASL is used widely in the nearby city of Bengaluru by those deaf people who have been through formal education. ASL has been used in schools and religious services since the post-independence period. This is unusual in India, where Indian Sign Language is used in virtually all urban areas. However, Bengaluru is one of very few places where there is a limited spread of ASL due to language choice in particular deaf schools. All deaf signers in Bengaluru who use ASL are also fluent in Indian Sign Language, and outside the city, only Indian Sign Language is used.

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Algerian Jewish Sign Language: A sociolinguistic sketch

Sara Lanesman and Irit Meir

Algerian Jewish Sign Language (AJSL) is a sign language that developed in a Jewish community in the Algerian city of Ghardaia. As the entire Jewish community in Algeria left the country by 1962, the language migrated with its users, and is in use today mainly in Israel and in France. AJSL, then, is a “village sign language” without a village. The sociolinguistic sketch of the language refers both to its development in its original locale, Ghardaia, and to its maintenance in present-day Israel.

1. AJSL in Algeria

Ghardaia is located in the northern Sahara Desert region of Algeria, in the M’zab area. It was founded in the 11th century by Berbers belonging to the Ibadiyya sect, a schismatic Muslim sect who is characterised by a puritanic interpretation of the Koran (Briggs & Guède 1964:9, Nagel 2004:27). According to M’zabite and Jewish oral traditions, Jews arrived at Ghardaia, the main town in the M’zab area, during the 14th and 15th centuries, and established a Jewish community there. The community lived in its own walled quarter (called *mella*) in the south-east part of the town. Though members of the Jewish community maintained commercial and economical relations with their Muslim neighbours, marriage was strictly within the community, which gave rise to a closed and rather isolated community. This social isolation that lasted for at least 500 years gave rise to a community with several distinct physical characteristics, among them elongated heads, slight tendency towards blond or red hair, and deafness. In 1954, the Jewish community numbered 1,091 members, and the entire population of Ghardaia was about 12,500 (Briggs & Guède 1964:9). At that time there were 25 deaf individuals in the community (2.5%). We do not have information about the distribution of deafness within the families in the community, but all the people we interviewed have deaf relatives, and therefore it can be deduced that deafness ran in specific families. However, according to Briggs and Guède’s (1964:12) description, deaf people participated in social events and “had about as rich a

social life as anyone”. From interviews we conducted with nine AJSL signers (see chapter XX in this volume) we learn that hearing people could sign very well, and the sign language that arose in the community served as the major means of communication between deaf and hearing members.

Based on the interviews we conducted, we further learn that deafness goes at least 5 generations back in the community. However, it is difficult to get more precise information about the interaction of the deaf people in Ghardaia with other deaf people, since all the people we interviewed had left Algeria about 50 years ago, and could not recall whether there was any contact with deaf people from outside the community. Furthermore, there are no sources of information about Algerian Sign Language,¹ and we have no information about deafness in the Muslim population of Ghardaia. Therefore it is difficult to establish whether the language developed *de novo* or was influenced by other signing systems. The Jewish community in Ghardaia had social contacts with at least two other Jewish communities in the area, the communities in Laghouat and Aflou. Deaf people in these communities also use AJSL.

Deaf children, boys and girls, in Ghardaia did not go to school, and therefore remained monolingual in AJSL. The hearing members of the community used their dialect of Arabic for everyday communication. The hearing boys, who went to school, studied Hebrew as well, in order to read the scriptures, and some of them also eventually acquired French for business discussions. Most of the hearing girls stayed at home, and therefore were not exposed to languages other than those used at home (spoken Arabic dialect, and AJSL if there were deaf people in the close surroundings).

The financial status of deaf people did not differ significantly from that of hearing people. Deaf men held ordinary jobs such as goldsmiths and porters in the market. Some were quite wealthy, while others were poor. Deaf people, men and women, were married to hearing spouses. Therefore, it seems that deaf people were integrated into the hearing community, AJSL serving as a main means of communication, used by both deaf and hearing. Nonetheless, deafness was considered as a punishment from God. According to the local superstition, deafness may be the result of having sexual intercourse during menstruation, which is considered a serious religious offence.

2. AJSL in Israel

Between the years 1943 and 1962 the entire Jewish community left Ghardaia and immigrated, mainly to Israel and to France. The first wave of immi-

gration was between 1943–1950. Due to growing tension between Berbers, Muslims and Jews in the M'zab area and in Algeria in general, 500–600 Jews immigrated to Israel and France (Briggs & Guède, 1964). In 1950–1951 the tensions in Algeria diminished to some extent and the Jews stopped leaving Algeria. Some immigrants who were unsatisfied with life in Israel returned to the M'zab region at that time (from the archives of Beit HaTfutsot #73772).

In the 1950s, a second wave immigration began, motivated both by the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and by the Algerian War of Independence with France. The Jews of the region were regarded as French allies, and as such they felt increasingly unsafe in their homes and began to leave, again. The last wave of immigration from Algeria to Israel was in 1962. No Jews remain in Algeria today.

There are no sources concerning deaf Algerian immigrants in Israel or in France other than the interviews we conducted. Therefore all the information about the lives of deaf Algerian immigrants in Israel is based on these interviews.

The emigration from Algeria changed the life of the community members in every aspect of life. First, the community itself disintegrated. Part of the community immigrated to France while the other part moved to Israel. Those who moved to Israel settled in different places in the country. Thus, members of the Ghardaia community no longer shared a physical location, and consequently the close-knit relationships between the community members collapsed. Secondly, they had to learn a new language, Hebrew, to adjust to the fact that the Jewish society in Israel was, by and large, secular, and they had to find housing and jobs.

The deaf members encountered other deaf people, who used a different sign language, Israeli Sign Language (ISL) and were part of a Deaf community with Deaf clubs and activities held by and for members of this community. Many of the members of the Deaf community were educated, an issue that was thorny and painful for the Algerian immigrants. AJSL users felt that they were singled out and stigmatised because of their origin and language, and consequently stopped using the language with other ISL signers.

Today almost all AJSL users are bilingual in ISL and AJSL. We do not have demographic data concerning the number of current AJSL signers in Israel, and their marriage patterns. However, from the interviews we conducted, we learnt that these signers use AJSL mainly with their nuclear family, both with hearing and deaf family members. They use ISL for interaction with members of the Israeli Deaf community, and since many deaf Algerians married deaf non-Algerians, they use ISL with their spouses and children too. Even in families where both spouses are of Algerian origin, the

deaf children use ISL, and barely understand AJSL. According to our investigation, there are hardly any people younger than 50 that can use the language fluently. AJSL is not used in schools, nor is it used in any official meetings of the Deaf community. No official resources (such as interpreting services) are available, and many people, including members of the Deaf community, are unaware of its existence. The first public mention of the language was in a conference on multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism in deaf communities in Israel, held by the University of Haifa (April 14, 2008). Currently there is a growing interest in the language among AJSL users, and some of them are eager to participate in projects aiming to document the language.

Notes

1. Ethnologue (<http://www.ethnologue.com>, accessed in 2012) has just one line on Algerian Sign Language: "It has influenced the deaf community in Oujda in northern Morocco". Other internet sources inform that Algerian Sign Language was recognised in 2002 as the main means for communication for the hearing impaired community (<http://www.conseilconstitutionnel-dz.org/languages-of-algeria.htm>, accessed in 2012), and that it developed from French Sign Language, as is evidenced by lexical similarity (over 50% of the signs). Yet they do not cite any sources for this statement, and they do not provide any description of the language (<http://www.sourds.net/2010/09/28/%C2%ABla-langue-des-signes-algerienne-est-une-revendication-des-sourds%C2%BB/>, accessed in 2012).

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Al-Sayyid: A sociolinguistic sketch

Shifra Kisch

The village of Al-Sayyid is located in the northern Negev, the southern arid region of present-day Israel. Its Bedouin inhabitants are all related through kinship and named after their common ancestor who settled here in the mid-19th century. Al-Sayyid is home to a shared signing community where deaf and hearing signers use Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language (ABSL), an indigenous sign language that has emerged over the past 90 years.

Following the practice of cousin marriages, Al-Sayyid's grandchildren intermarried: four of these unions bore deaf offspring. The first deaf siblings were born between 1924 and 1940. The Al-Sayyid are now estimated¹ to number 4,500 men, women and children, of whom nearly 130 are deaf. These deaf individuals are distributed throughout Al-Sayyid's major lineages representing five apical ancestors, each a son of Al-Sayyid the founder.

To this day kin-endogamy (between and within these lineages) accounts for over 60% of marriages (Kisch, this volume). Genetic research,² conducted among the Al-Sayyid in the early 1990s, identified autosomal, recessive non-syndromic deafness, associated with intermarriage. Demographic and genealogical data I have been recording since 1995 show a stable incidence of congenital deafness of 2.5–3%.³ The recessiveness of the genetic mutation, the fact that the majority (80%)⁴ of deaf individuals were born to hearing parents, and the fact that deaf adults were until recently always married to hearing partners, further contribute to the blending of deaf and hearing.

Not only did kin-endogamy induce high incidences of deafness, it also accounts for a dense social network in which both hearing and deaf people are embedded. Many members of the community have at least one deaf individual among their household, in-laws, peers, or neighbours. Consequently, all deaf and many hearing Al-Sayyid infants are exposed to signing from birth, within the family environment, with additional (deaf or hearing) adult models in the community.

Sited on one of the highways connecting the northern Negev and the Dead Sea, the village of Al-Sayyid lies less than 20 kilometers from the Negev's district capital of Beersheba. In fact, this highway divides the original village into two parts and beside the road are situated several garages, grocery stores, and one of the village's four mosques. In the village there are several smaller

grocery stores. The larger part of the village, south-west of the highway,⁵ is spread at the foot of a moderate hill, on top of which the village's first school and clinic are located. The village now has three elementary schools and two (HMO) clinics. Until 2005, Al-Sayyid was one of the many Bedouin villages officially unrecognised by Israeli authorities due to the state's refusal to recognise or negotiate land claims. Despite the current process towards recognition,⁶ most parts of the village still lack basic infrastructure, including paved roads, running water, connection to the national electricity network, sewage and waste disposal.

Most homes are modest cement-brick constructions of two to four rooms with flat tin or concrete roofs. There are also several new two story red tiled houses belonging to the few more affluent residents.⁷ Generally, village homes are arranged in compounds of several households of extended families. The village is made up of several dense clusters of multiple compounds, as well as slightly more dispersed compounds. The geographical distribution of the residential clusters partially corresponds to the five main lineages. Many dirt roads crisscross the village leading to its residential clusters, neighboring villages and the adjacent highway. Most households have a television⁸ and, increasingly, more men and women have mobile phones, but only a few have an internet connection. In most (multiple-household) compounds there is at least one car owner.

Formerly semi-nomads, the Negev Bedouin are the native Arab inhabitants of the Negev. The Negev Bedouin have a very high proportion of young people; more than half of the population is under the age of 14.⁹ Fertility rates are high and kin-endogamy and polygyny are common. The Negev Bedouin constitute one of Israel's most marginalised minority groups. Bedouin (men) are mostly enrolled in the lower strata of the labour market. With a population of over 210,000, the Negev Bedouin make up roughly a fourth of the otherwise predominantly Jewish-Israeli Negev inhabitants.

Most deaf and hearing Al-Sayyid signers are embedded in several diverse language communities. Hearing signers communicate in both sign language and the local spoken Arabic dialect. Literacy in Hebrew and/or Arabic is increasingly common. Additionally, most men and increasing numbers of women regularly communicate in Hebrew for work, administrative or medical matters. The majority of deaf signers are, or have been, members of student signing communities at school and boarding school outside the village, where communication between students was mostly based on Israeli Sign Language (ISL). Since people regularly move between languages, code switching and mixing are common. Deaf signers may code switch or blend ISL and ABSL, while many hearing signers often switch between speech and

sign, use signed Arabic, or voice over their own or other people's signing in mixed-group interactions.

Neighboring Al-Sayyid are two villages inhabited by two groups of the Qderat Bedouin that exhibit comparable rates of deafness and hearing signers (Kisch 2007 and this volume). Here too, shared signing communities have emerged. The first Qderat deaf descendants are coevals of the first deaf Al-Sayyid siblings and their deaf descendants started attending the same schools around the same time.¹⁰ Despite the fact that they can easily demonstrate several obvious lexical variations, the signing of the Al-Sayyid and Qderat is mutually intelligible and they do not consider their signing to constitute separate languages. Moreover, comparable lexical variation exists within the Al-Sayyid community. Both hearing and deaf people often refer to it as 'our language'.

Many lexicalised signs bear evidence for the historical depth of ABSL. For instance, the sign for 'adult woman' or 'mother' is based on the iconic representation of a form of veiling no longer practised. Similarly, the sign for 'butter' derives from the iconic representation of the churning of milk, rarely seen nowadays, for in most households butter is no longer domestically produced (Kisch 2008). The compound place name COW-THERE (pointing to the actual north), referring to the region where some families took their cattle to graze in spring, is still used by some to sign 'Tel-Aviv' (or more generally to indicate the country's central urban agglomeration).

ABSL is used in diverse settings and communication contexts, from casual conversation to resolving disputes and storytelling, and from transactions in local garages or grocery stores to the simultaneous home translation of broadcasted news and other TV programmes. More formal medical, bureaucratic and legal interactions (in Hebrew or Arabic) are often interpreted into ABSL by accompanying relatives. State funded interpreting services (ISL/Hebrew) are also increasingly employed in such formal settings. Even within the village, ABSL is no longer used exclusively. Like schools outside the village, Al-Sayyid schools take a Total Communication approach to deaf education, based on ISL. Al-Sayyid deaf staff members (along with the non-Al-Sayyid teachers of the deaf) insist that the language of instruction should be exclusively ISL. However, hearing Al-Sayyid staff and peers (lacking command of ISL) regularly use ABSL to communicate with their relatives on school grounds.

Signing is not restricted to deaf signers; in fact hearing signers outnumber deaf signers. Roughly a third of the hearing population is observed to sign regularly. Whereas there are 130 deaf signers, there are more than 700 hearing signers, even when only the most immediate signing relatives are included.

This minimum estimate is based on a sample survey comprised of only those hearing signers, such as siblings (and half-siblings), partners and children of deaf individuals, that were regarded by other household members, including at least one deaf relative, as competent signers. Yet (unquantified) ethnographic data indicates there are many more hearing signers than this partial survey suggests, because there is a significant number of hearing signers who have no immediate deaf relatives.

However, the relative ease of communication between deaf and hearing, as well as the status of signed communication, does not solely depend on the number of fluent hearing signers. Indeed, hearing Al-Sayyid use the local sign language with varying degrees of proficiency. Some use local signs only to accompany spoken Arabic. But, even those least proficient often demonstrate awareness of the pragmatics of signed communication and can discuss practical matters fairly easily, preferring translation for more intensive interaction; skilled signers can readily be found to mediate, translate or tutor others in improving their signing skills. Largely due to this widespread awareness and experience of the viability of signed communication, deafness in Al-Sayyid does not make for social marginalization or isolation; deaf people are not categorically shunned or stigmatised. Rather than being considered a defect or disability, deafness is commonly perceived as a condition requiring the use of signed communication.

As manifested in both common attitudes and practices, this relatively inclusive social reality is grounded in daily experiences, that contest the disablement of deafness. There is no evidence that additional characteristics are perceived as inherently attached to deafness, nor are certain social roles or activities reserved for deaf people. The absence of local myths to account for deafness discloses the common perception of deafness as a form of human variation that does not require explaining or fixing. Thus, attempts to reduce the rates of deafness by means of genetic testing and counselling were not received without controversy; compliance to the program was low (Kisch 2004). Likewise, most (hearing) parents were initially reluctant to respond to the active promotion of cochlear implants (CIs). However, over the last five years, after parents were convinced it would increase their children's opportunities, as many as 14 Al-Sayyid children have been implanted.

The status of deaf people is gradually being eroded by the differential and restricted structure of their opportunities. The education available for hearing Negev Bedouin is rather dismal, but deaf education has fared worse. While hearing children have been able to attend school since the late 1960s, deaf Al-Sayyid children started attending a Hebrew school for the deaf in Beer-sheba only in the early 1980s. Later, some of the male deaf students could

also continue on to receive vocational training at a more distant boarding school. Only in the 1990s were the first classes for deaf students opened in Arabic schools, and in 2004, the first kindergarten (followed by elementary school classes) opened in Al-Sayyid. Out of the total of 134 deaf descendants among all generations of Al-Sayyid, only 14 have never had any form of schooling, and deaf people attend school for longer on average compared to their hearing peers. Nonetheless, literacy among most deaf students remains poor. The separate and mostly inferior schooling available for deaf students presents the most obvious structural disparity between deaf and hearing Al-Sayyid. This schooling has not been designed to prepare students for matriculation certificates, and so higher education has not been available to deaf students. Their options are limited to a few vocational training programmes.

During the adult lives of the first deaf descendants, farming and animal husbandry – the previously dominant sources of livelihood – became severely restricted and income increasingly depended on wage labour. Bedouin men generally inhabit the unskilled, lower strata of the Israeli labour market, with unemployment rates among the highest in the country. Among the Al-Sayyid, sources of income are diverse, including jobs as watchmen, mechanics, tractor or truck drivers, or seasonal agricultural or construction workers. Many commute daily or weekly to work all over the country. There are small business owners and over a dozen hearing young men who have studied abroad in medicine, dentistry, pharmacology and law. Though there is a growing number of both male and female teachers, Bedouin women are otherwise rarely involved in paid labour. Among young deaf Al-Sayyid women however, the rate of employment as trained and untrained educational staff at the local schools is slightly higher than that of their hearing counterparts. With poor literacy but relative ease of access to a limited number of vocational courses, most deaf men and women occupy the middle to lower range of occupations. The recent recession has left many hearing and most deaf men unemployed and dependent on welfare benefits with occasional informal day work.

Over 30 years of separate deaf education (and consequent differential work opportunities) have reduced the social space shared by deaf and hearing Al-Sayyid and transformed deaf people's social networks. This has contributed to the emergence of deaf sociality associated with the use of ISL, as well as a preference for deaf-deaf marriages. In 2004, the marriage of a deaf Al-Sayyid woman to her (non Al-Sayyid Bedouin) classmate constituted the first deaf-deaf marriage among the Al-Sayyid. Since then, half of the marriages of deaf Al-Sayyid women have been with deaf partners almost

exclusively from outside the community. Deaf-deaf marriages were initially received with some apprehension, as many deaf and hearing considered the familiar arrangement (the marriage of a deaf and hearing signer) advantageous. Besides, family members and deaf candidates often lacked the social networks to arrange deaf-deaf marriages. This illustrates that whereas the sociolinguistic space shared by deaf and hearing Al-Sayyid is generally accommodating for deaf people, established structures and practices may – as any social configuration elsewhere – both facilitate and restrict (deaf) people.¹¹

Since 2005, a team of four linguists¹² has published extensively on the linguistic structure of ABSL. From the late 1990s the Al-Sayyid have received occasional media attention from regional, national and international media. Publicity among the general public has also increased with two documentaries and the publication of a popular science book.¹³

Notes

1. Obtaining accurate and reliable demographic data is obstructed by the fact that unrecognised (or newly-recognised) settlements are only very partly included in data published by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS). Additionally, The Al-Sayyid now reside under different municipal jurisdictions, and some still reside outside the jurisdiction of any local or regional council.
2. Scott et al (1995, 1998). These publications are also often quoted to state that all deaf individuals are “descendants of two of the five adult sons of the founder” (Scott 1995:965). However, this conclusion was based on partial data collected at the initial phase of the genetic study. Also the use of the term tribe to refer to the Al-Sayyid, used by Scott et al. and in several other publication, is inaccurate.
3. Kisch 2000; 2004; 2008. Last updated survey conducted in the summer of 2011 listing 130 congenitally deaf individuals (Kisch, this volume). Higher rates noted for the Al-Sayyid case are mostly based on (over)estimations of the number of deaf individuals or outdated figures for the total population.
4. Based on my last survey of the total deaf population (rather than a sample) in summer 2011.
5. The smaller north-eastern part of the village is contiguous to one of the seven Bedouin state established townships, and has access to limited municipal utilities. It is no longer part of the Al-Sayyid village as defined in the state recognition plan.

6. It has been in the process for several years now, but a master plan for the village is still in preparation and negotiation. An approved master plan is required for the provision of many services and building permits. Connection to running water supply and the paving of several asphalt roads are underway.
7. With the prospect of full recognition and lowered risk of demolition, these houses were built by several businesses owners (such as a garage or construction company) and a few young dentists and lawyers.
8. Several Israeli and Jordanian channels offer limited but regular on-screen sign language interpreting, to ISL and LIU respectively.
9. The Negev Bedouin Statistical Data Book, No. 3. 2010; The Galilee Society 2010.
10. For over 30 years deaf Qderat and Al-Sayyid students have had regular contact; together they made up a third of the deaf students at the relevant elementary schools (Kisch 2007; Kisch, this volume).
11. Kisch 2007; 2008.
12. Sandler et al 2005 and other publications by these authors.
13. For review of this book see Kisch 2009.

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Sociolinguistic sketch of Ban Khor and Ban Khor Sign Language*

Angela M. Nonaka

Ban Khor is a small, Theravadan Buddhist, wet-rice agricultural village in the northeastern *Issarn* region of Thailand. Like other communities in the area, Ban Khor is highly multilingual. Nyoh, alongside Thai, are the primary languages of everyday life, although Lao, Phuthai, and Soe are also used there. Sociolinguistically, however, Ban Khor is different from most other hamlets in the area. Due to a high incidence of hereditary deafness, the community has a significant number of deaf residents, and in less than a century, they and their close interlocutors spontaneously created a new sign language. For decades the language thrived, expanding rapidly and widely in use throughout the community among both deaf and hearing villagers. That trend began to change, however, early in the 21st century as a consequence of sudden and intensive contact with the national sign language and national Deaf community. By the late 2000s dramatic language shift was occurring and in just half a decade, Ban Khor's local sign language has become endangered.

In-depth analysis of the multiple causes, changing processes, and altered practices underlying and impacting sign language shift and endangerment in Ban Khor is the focus of the main paper on BKSL in this volume. That chapter also provides a detailed account of Ban Khor's ethnographic particulars.

Referred to here as 'Ban Khor Sign Language' (BKSL) for purposes of documentary specificity, the manual-visual language indigenous to the community of Ban Khor, Thailand, is locally known as *pasa kidd*, the 'language of the mute.' As the term itself suggests, Ban Khorians deem BKSL to be a language (*pasa*) that they recognise to be different from others they have seen—i.e., other village sign languages as well as the national sign language, Thai Sign Language (TSL). *Pasa kidd* is a local vernacular expression. While it is used and understood by Nyoh speakers, there is some uncertainty among native speakers as to whether *kidd* is actually a Soe language word. Whatever its etymological origin, *pasa kidd* is distinct from the Thai language expression *pasa bai*, which also translates as 'language of the mute.' Due to the spread of Thai in Ban Khor, the local sign language is also sometimes referred to as *pasa bai*. The label 'Ban Khor Sign Language' is used

here to distinguish the village sign language used in Ban Khor from other manual-visual languages found in other villages in Thailand, sign languages that are also referred to locally as the ‘language of the mute.’

Ban Khor Sign Language exhibits the traditional subsystems of natural language, including: phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, and boasts a rich lexicon (Nonaka 2004, 2007, 2010). As a full-fledged human language, Ban Khor Sign Language also evinces the linguistic unit of ‘discourse,’ which includes the many genres, registers, and speech acts of a given language as used in conversational interaction by native speakers/signers. This is certainly true of Ban Khor Sign Language, which evidences a robust range of discourse forms (Nonaka 2007, 2004). A wide range of speech acts in BKSL have been observed and recorded, including: greetings, questions, answers, rhetorical questions, directives, complaints, compliments, offers, acceptances, declinations, summons, thanksgivings, apologies, criticisms, approvals, congratulations, accusations, and warnings. In addition, various discourse structures—i.e., linguistic registers, genres, and activities—have been identified in the language, such as: ordinary conversation, politeness, baby talk, narrative, humor, gossip, quarrels, teasing, language play, interpretation of texts, and cultural meta-commentary.

The village sign language in Ban Khor developed at some point in the early decades of the 20th century. Documentation of the language, however, did not begin in earnest until the start of this millennium. Thus, by the time formal study of the language commenced, BKSL was already a full-blown language. This fact is evidenced by the robust presence of diverse discourse forms and discursive structures and strategies that underscore the viability of BKSL as a full-fledged language of complex reasoning.

The descriptions and analyses of Ban Khor and Ban Khor Sign Language in this volume derive from one of the longest and most extensive continuous studies of a village and its local sign language. Generated through long-term, in-depth, four-fields anthropological research, the Ban Khor data corpus spans well over a decade (1996–2012) and includes hundreds of hours of video recordings of BKSL *in situ*, in the context of everyday village life. The linguistic data ranges from formal elicitation experiments to natural conversations and was collected from speakers/signers ranging in age from infants to nonagenarians. Formal elicitations were filmed individually, in dyads and in groups. The BKSL data set of natural conversation is especially rich, capturing quotidian talk across multiple domains of everyday life (e.g., at home, at work, at temple). Its centerpiece is a sub-corpus of language socialization data consisting of 11 consecutive months of ethnographic

focal-follow study of five children (ages 18 hours – 3 years) acquiring Ban Khor Sign Language. In addition to robust linguistic data, the Ban Khor corpus also contains extensive, diachronic demographic information about individuals and their social networks; periodically updated historical and politico-economic data about the community; as well a various mappings of the village.

The scope and duration of the Ban Khor research project are analytically valuable, providing an unusually detailed social context for undertaking diachronic study of a village sign language. Since both linguistic and anthropological data were collected simultaneously at intervals for 10–15 years, the Ban Khor case study is an unusually rich corpus for investigating issues of language change. Reflective of major alterations in the local language ecology, the nature and direction of linguistic change in BKSL has changed dramatically within the last decade. After decades of expansion, BKSL is now contracting, a process that is unlikely to abate. While studies of other village sign languages are expanding understanding of processes of language emergence, it is hoped that examination of Ban Khor and BKSL will shed light on the causes and consequences of village sign language endangerment.

***Acknowledgments**

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Chican Sign Language: A sociolinguistic sketch

Cesar Ernesto Escobedo Delgado

Chican Sign Language is a village sign language used in Chican, Mexico. The village of Chican has a population of 720, most of whom are ethnically Mayan. It is located in Tixméhuac Municipality in the State of Yucatan near Merida Capital.¹

Deafness in Chican goes back at least three generations. Currently, Chican has 17 deaf signers; eight are female and nine are male. The signers range from seven to 78 years of age, with all age ranges represented. Two of the deaf villagers are married to each other and have two deaf sons. Six of them have hearing spouses, and a further six are single. The vast majority of the deaf villagers have the surname Colli Colli. Some deaf villagers have married hearing spouses from places outside Chican, such as Teabo and Merida. These spouses are not native signers, but acquire Chican Sign Language and Mayan gestures as additional languages. There are also 21 CODAS (Hearing Children of Deaf Adults) in the village.

Due to the unusually high incidence of deafness in Chican, all deaf villagers and a large number of hearing villagers use Chican Sign Language. The hearing villagers also speak Spanish and/or Mayan, and a few also know English because it is taught at government-run secondary schools. People who live in Chican generally have positive attitudes about signing. In 2011, a total of 547 people in Chican were surveyed, of which 121 (22%) were fluent in sign language, 211 (38%) had some competence, and 215 (39%) had no signing skills.

Figure 1 shows the layout of Chican, including the location of deaf people's homes (circled). There are three clusters of households containing deaf members, and the largest of these clusters comprises five households.

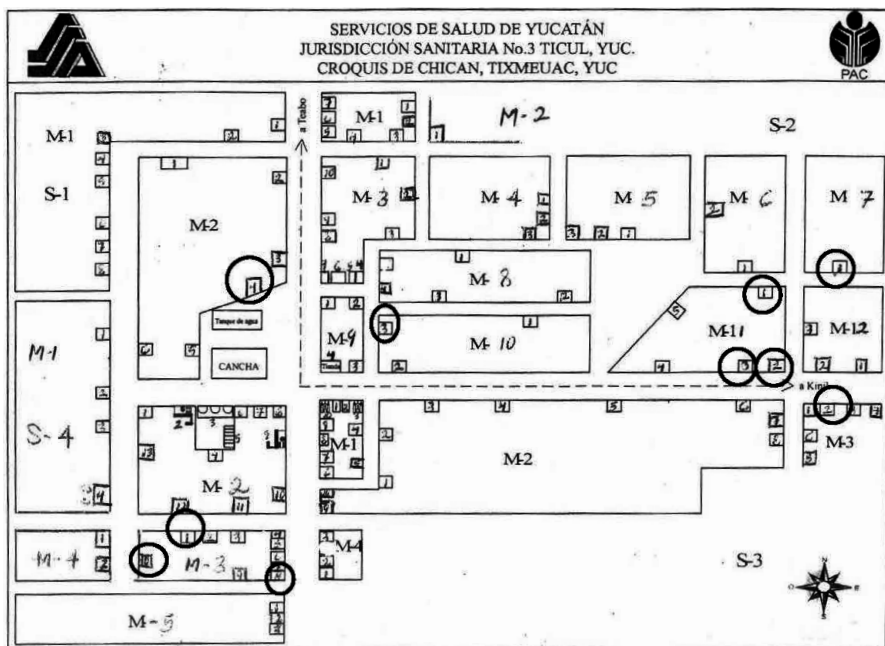


Figure 1. Map of Chican.

Travel between Chican and the nearby towns of Merida, Tekax, Peto, Teabo, and Oxkutzcabo is available by bus, van or car. Villagers commonly travel to these places to shop. Within the village itself, there is a doctor's clinic and health care centre, a yogurt factory, and a local government office with voting facilities.

Crafts and skills which are particularly central to the village's culture include hammock-making, tortilla-making, sewing, spinning, building straw houses, and farm work. Agriculturally, the village relies on producing cows, chickens, and the achiote shrub, an inedible plant whose seeds are valuable for their use as food colourants. Deaf villagers may be employed as cleaners (especially women); builders; bricklayers; artisans; woodcutters; farm workers; vendors selling sodas, crisps, confectionary, fruits and vegetables; and makers of tortillas, hammocks, and clothes (again, women especially). The hearing villagers tend to work in similar capacities but some hold professional positions, including a professor and an accountant. Five hearing villagers have university degrees. Several villagers travel outside Chican for work, to places such as Merida.

In terms of religious culture, Chican is predominantly Catholic with a Presbyterian minority. Religiously, deafness is viewed as a normal phenomenon

and does not have negative associations as it does in some other cultures; medical explanations for deafness are accepted by the villagers. Interpreters or 'companions' commonly sit next to deaf villagers in church to translate the sermons.²

Special education is not available in the village, and at the village's three schools, the teachers do not use sign language. There are currently only four deaf villagers of school age. Chican has one preschool; one primary school, which three of the deaf children currently attend; and one secondary school, which the fourth attends. All three schools run on a matutinal schedule. Outside the village, in Tekax de Alvaro Obregón, there is a government-run special school for deaf pupils as well as those with physical and/or learning disabilities. This school relies on oral, sound-based and total communication methods, with very little emphasis on Mexican Sign Language (LSM). However, one teacher at this school has expressed an interest in learning Chican Sign Language and is eagerly anticipating the publication of a sign language dictionary.

Though there are several Chican Sign Language interpreters who translate for health care appointments, political campaigns and elections, they are not trained or qualified. But most interpreters in Mexico use LSM and do not know Chican Sign Language, so Deaf people from Chican will often ask a hearing villager to interpret for them instead.

Technology available in the village includes several television channels as well as local and mobile phone networks. However, only hearing villagers use mobile phones, and their efficacy is inadequate anyway due to weak signals in the area. On-screen LSM interpreters are sometimes shown on news programmes, but televisions are uncommon, as are DVD players. Internet facilities do not exist in Chican, but the hearing villagers travel to Tekax for access. Deaf villagers tend not to use the internet or mobiles due to their limited proficiency in Spanish and Mayan. Computers are a rare sight in the village, apart from in the schools. Webcams are also scarce.

In terms of assistive technology, hearing aids are widespread, due to donations by many charities. Cochlear implants have not yet been used within Chican.

Signers do not generally move out of the village, but they have some contact with signers of other languages, especially LSM users from Merida. The deaf children of the village have been known to learn a few LSM signs (e.g. those for 'airplane' and 'water', as well as the alphabet) from teachers at the special school in Tekax. At one point, Jehovah's Witnesses from Merida wanted to teach LSM to the deaf villagers with the aid of a DVD and a paper copy of the manual LSM alphabet, but the villagers refused, and were

unable to watch the DVD in any case because that technology is unavailable in Chican. Foreign researchers have also visited the village, but have not attempted to teach their country's sign languages.

Notes

1. Maps of the area are available at <http://www.maps-of-mexico.com/yucatan-state-mexico/yucatan-state-mexico-map-b2.shtml> and <http://mexico.pueblosamerica.com/mapas/chican> (accessed 03 February 2012)
2. A picture of Chican's Presbyterian Church is available here: <http://galeon.com/chican/templo.html> (accessed 03 February 2012).

Kata Kolok: An updated sociolinguistic profile

Connie de Vos

Kata Kolok is a sign language used by the deaf and hearing inhabitants of a farmers' village in the North of Bali, in the region of Buleleng. The hearing villagers refer to Bengkala as *Desa Kolok* - which is Balinese for 'deaf village' – and its sign language as *Kata Kolok* 'deaf talk'. The deafness in Bengkala is recessive, non-syndromal, and sensorineural and it is caused by a mutation of the gene referred to as *DFNB3* or *MYO 15a* (Friedman et al. 2000). The mutation that causes deafness is widespread throughout the village population, and as a result 2.2% of the villagers are congenitally deaf, but 17.6% of the hearing community members also carry the 'deaf' version of the gene (Winata et al. 1995). A reconstruction of the village's lineages reveals that the first person to be affected by this gene was born seven generations ago (Liang et al. 1998). However, it was not until five generations ago that the language was used by a small group of deaf signers and it is this event that marks the emergence of *Kata Kolok* (de Vos 2012).

According to demographic counts in 2008 Bengkala's population is approximately 2,740 (Astika 2008). A visit to the community in September 2011 has identified 46 deaf signers, spread throughout the *dadya* 'village clans'. Notably however, 8 deaf individuals have migrated to other parts of Bali, Indonesia, and even Australia for educational, socio-economic, and marital reasons. A map of the current geographical distribution of deaf individuals in the village is presented in Figure 1. Because the central village is small and covers less than a square kilometre, deaf and hearing villagers live in close proximity of one another and frequently interact at food stalls and kiosks throughout the village.

Apart from casual chatting, *Kata Kolok* is also used in professional, liturgical, and educational settings by both deaf and hearing villagers. It is, for example, used in water pipe maintenance – which is vital to the village's farming activities – and by the village nurse when she tends to deaf villagers. *Kata Kolok* is also used in child-directed signing between infants and their caregivers where either the infant or the caregiver (or both) are deaf (Marsaja 2008:103). The sign language even surfaces on the rare occasion when a *pandetta*, a Hindu priest, is possessed by a deaf god during a trance. Since 2007 *Kata Kolok* has been also been used as a language of instruction in the village's elementary school (Kortschak 2010).

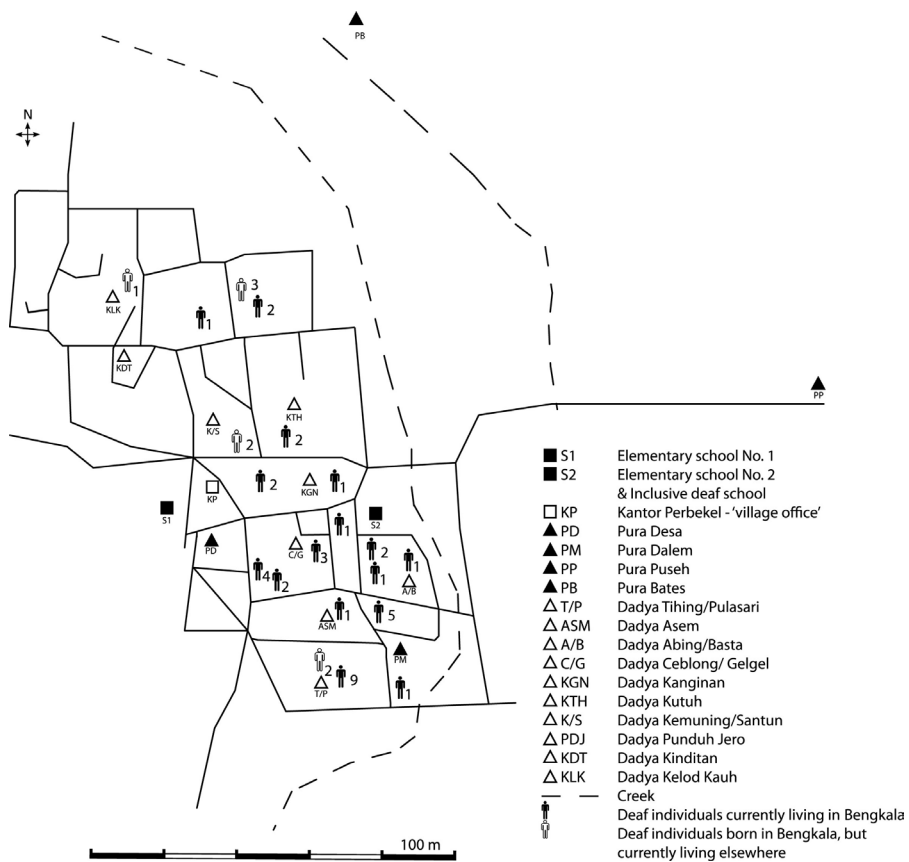


Figure 1. The geographical distribution of deaf individuals in Bengkala in 2011

Deaf villagers use signs to communicate with their hearing relatives, as well as many of their hearing friends and colleagues, and a survey conducted in 2000 has indicated that at least 57% of Bengkala's hearing population can understand and use Kata Kolok with varying degrees of proficiency (de Vos 2012). As a result, deaf signers from Bengkala do not experience the same social inequalities as many Deaf signers from urban signing communities do. The integration of deaf villagers is also mirrored by the fact that they have equal chances of getting married and similar professional opportunities (Branson et al. 1999). Moreover, many village activities are shared between deaf and hearing villagers. These include the Hindu ceremonies as well as issues pertaining to village security. In these joint activities the deaf villagers are well-integrated into the wider hearing community.

Most of the deaf and hearing villagers earn a living by dry-land farming. Crops are grown in and around the village, including turmeric, ginger, peanuts,

corn, cassava, bitter cucumber and cashew nuts. In addition, seasonal fruits such as *rambutan*, guava, mangoes, bananas, and oranges are cultivated. Local businesses include food stalls, construction work, carpentry, transport, and tailoring. Most of the villagers earn a living by farming other people's land, and make less than 10,000 Indonesian rupiah a day (Marsaja 2008). As such, they live in poverty, even by Indonesian standards. The main religion of Bali is Hinduism; all inhabitants of Bengkala are Hindu. Hindu ceremonies play an important role in the lives of the villagers, as they form an occasion to socialise with clan members, prepare and eat special food, and have time away from more onerous duties.

Although deaf individuals in Bengkala do not share the same kind of struggles as deaf individuals outside the deaf village, there are some indications that here, too, a social construction of deafness may be found, which is shared by both deaf and hearing villagers. Most strikingly, all villagers believe in a deaf god who dwells in the village cemetery. Secondly, deaf villagers are referred to in a different yet positive way that distinguishes them from hearing villagers. In general, Balinese people are called by their first name, which is determined by the birth order within a family. For example, the fourth child in a family is called Ketut, independent of gender. When hearing villagers talk about deaf individuals in spoken Balinese, they preface the person's given name with the word *kolok*. For example, a deaf man called Getar would be referred to as *kolok Getar*. *Kolok* is a title meaning 'deaf,' and although the use of the word *kolok* is perceived of as stigmatising in other parts of Bali, this does not seem to be the case in Bengkala. In fact, the *kolok* men are often characterised as particularly strong yet sensitive, and dominate the village's civil defence brigade for this reason (see also Marsaja 2008:72). The deaf men are also responsible for burying the dead at the village's cemetery.

A third piece of evidence for the social construction of deafness in Bengkala stems from the existence of a 'Deaf Alliance' (Marsaja 2008:73). Deaf men, sometimes joined by deaf women, will gather in a ritual to slaughter an animal and prepare *lawar* (chopped meat and vegetables with spices) followed by the sharing of *tuak* (palm wine). At these deaf gatherings a deaf dance is often performed, called the *janger kolok* (also see Marsaja 2008:75). At the start of the ritual, the deaf men sit in a semicircle. The *kolok* leader taps a beat on an empty box, while the other men produce a visual rhythm by arbitrary, waving hand movements. This part of the dance is also accompanied by regular high-pitched yells from the deaf signers. After several minutes, one of the men will get up, drink a glass of *tuak*, and enter the semicircle; he then performs a dance that mimics martial arts. The *janger kolok* is also

performed at more formal occasions, such as Indonesia's annual Independence Day on 17 August. On these occasions no alcohol is involved, the *kolok* wear special uniforms, and a few women may join the dance. See Figure 2 below for an impression of such a formal performance of the *janger kolok*.



Figure 2. The janger kolok, a deaf dance

I would like to conclude this sociolinguistic sketch by describing the marked increase of national and international contacts with the Kata Kolok signing community in recent years. Since 2009, two volunteers have been involved at the deaf unit that was set up in the village's elementary school. This project has been funded by a Dutch foundation called Vrienden van Effatha, and these contacts have led to many visits by (mostly) Dutch tourists. Furthermore, following a publication supported by the World Bank (Kortschak 2010), Bengkala has attracted considerably media attention from regional, national, and international newspapers and television programmes. Kata Kolok signers even feature in the jingle that precedes the daily news on tvOne – one of Indonesia's national broadcasting agencies. Bengkala has since become a famous attraction, and there are few Balinese people who have not heard of it (cf. de Vos 2012). In response to these changes, the Deaf Alliance has been registered with the regional government since early 2012

and now comprises a group of both deaf and hearing community members that advocate the interests of deaf villagers and their hearing relatives (de Vos & Palfreyman, forthcoming). This group evaluates requests for media coverage and research projects and arranges interpreting when necessary. The Deaf Alliance, together with a local artist as well as two deaf mothers, has also begun educating deaf villagers through the production of a pedagogical dictionary of Kata Kolok (de Vos & Palfreyman forthcoming). While it is uncertain how this increased contact with the outside world may play out in future, it is clear that the Kata Kolok signing community is sufficiently empowered to manage the changes at hand.

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Sociolinguistic sketch of Konchri Sain

Keren Cumberbatch

Konchri Sain is the minority sign language in Jamaica. Konchri Sain originated in the agricultural village of Top Hill and spread to the immediately neighbouring communities. Top Hill is approximately 110km from Kingston, the capital of Jamaica. Like some other postcolonial territories, Jamaica has an official language, which is the language of its former coloniser, existing alongside a nonofficial Creole lexified by that language. English, is the official language of Jamaica. Patwa, also called Jamaican Creole, is an English-lexified Creole. It is widely believed in Jamaica that the parish of St. Elizabeth has the most basilectal form of Patwa. Interestingly, it is in this same parish that one finds Konchri Sain, the rural sign language indigenous to Jamaica. Moreover, the language attitudes of the hearing toward Patwa are the same of the Deaf toward Konchri Sain. These indigenous Caribbean languages are treated as primitive, undesirable and indicative of low socio-economic status of its users. However, while Patwa continues to be used by the masses despite the negative language attitudes, Konchri Sain faces its deathbed. There is a change of tides approaching as language rights advocates lobby for official status for Patwa and public opinion is swinging in its favour and the research into Konchri Sain creates awareness of its status as a heritage language.

Besides the spoken languages, English and Patwa, Konchri Sain has other signed communication systems in its environment. Signed English, American Sign Language and Jamaican Sign Language are all used by the Deaf in Top Hill and surrounding communities. American Sign Language and Jamaican Sign Language are mutually intelligible and it can be argued that Jamaican Sign Language is a dialect of American Sign Language. Signed English and American Sign Language were introduced to the area in 1975 when American Mennonite missionaries established a school there. Prior to having a school in Top Hill, children were usually sent to Kingston for education. Those children experienced additive bilingualism. They used Signed English and American Signed English at school and Konchri Sain when they returned home. Regrettably, the school in Top Hill practised subtractive bilingualism. The use of Konchri Sain at school even outside of the classroom was strongly discouraged. Some elderly persons in Top Hill reported being punished for using Konchri Sain in the playground. The school staff

also instructed parents that they should not use Konchri Sain at home as this was not in the best interest of the children and would impede their learning. Thus began the death of Konchri Sain.

Up to this point, Konchri Sain and Patwa were the main languages of the area. The deaf used Konchri Sain and the hearing used Patwa and Konchri Sain. Being a hearing person who was fluent in both a spoken and a signed language was the norm. Due to a high incidence of deafness in the area, deaf persons were usually born into families with deaf relatives and no social stigmas were attached to deafness. Several deaf informants reported that hearing caregivers like parents, grandparents and aunts, taught them Konchri Sain. This has changed. Now the only monolingual users of Konchri Sain are elderly. Since Signed English and American Sign Language were the languages of instruction at the school, they became the languages of daily life in the Deaf community. Interaction with other Deaf across the island and migration to urban areas increased. Exposure to Jamaican Sign Language being used by urban Deaf led to a further loss of prestige for Konchri Sain. Jamaican Sign Language was seen as having more value. Today, the average Deaf adult uses Jamaican Sign Language as his primary means of communication. Deaf Church services are conducted in Signed English with interpreting provided for monolingual Konchri Sain users. Most middle-aged deaf adults are bilingual in Konchri Sain and Jamaican Sign Language. When asked about their knowledge of Konchri Sain, deaf and hearing young adults often reply that they know a few signs and do not consider themselves users of the language. They learnt the words they know from parents and others in that generation. Konchri Sain is not associated with the young. An aim of research into Konchri Sain structure has been to stimulate awareness of the status of Konchri Sain as a heritage language and foster positive language attitudes towards it in the community. Fortunately, this is happening. There is now an interest among the elderly in passing the language on to the next generation. It is hoped that the younger community members, both deaf and hearing, will become proactive in attaining fluency in Konchri Sain.

Mennonite missionaries are still present in the community working at the school. They use Signed English and American Sign Language. This is also different from most Deaf schools in the island where the primarily Baptist American missionaries have been recalled. This contributed to the evolution of Jamaican Sign Language as there was no longer constant direct input of American Sign Language users into the communication system of the Deaf.

Sociolinguistic profile of Inuit Sign Language

Joke Schuit

1. Geography

Inuit Sign Language, or Inuit Uukturausigtit (IUR) in Inuktitut, is a language of Nunavut, Canada's Arctic territory (see Figure 1 below), where 85% of the population is Inuit. The name Nunavut means 'our land' in Inuktitut, the spoken language of the Inuit. Nunavut is Canada's largest territory, encompassing about 2 million km² (or 787,000 square miles). About 32,000 people live in 25 communities spread throughout the territory (Census of Canada 2011, available online). Travel to and among Nunavut's communi-

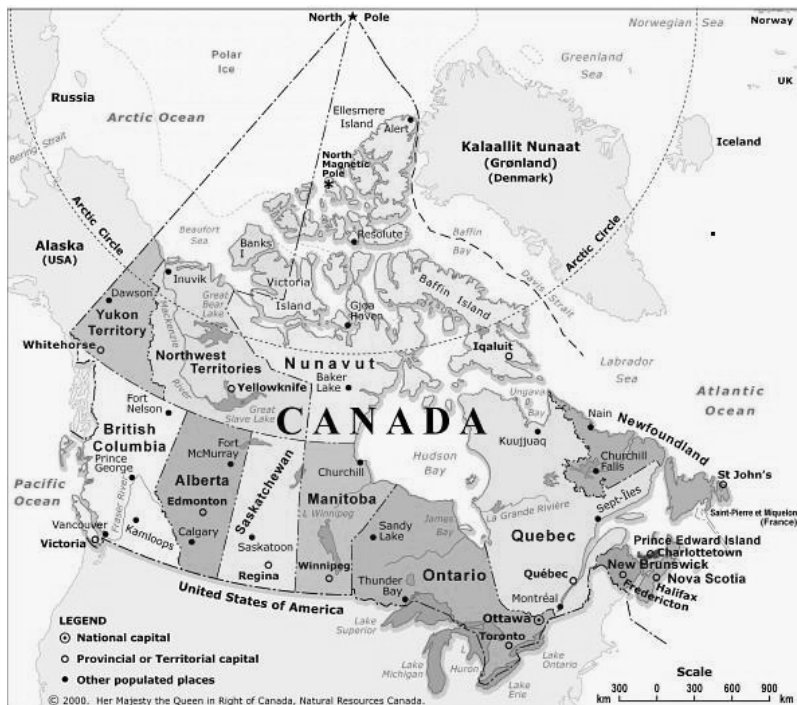


Figure 1. Map of Canada.

ties is by airplane, as there are no roads connecting them. In Nunavut, transportation can be by car, truck, all-terrain vehicle or snow mobile, although snow mobiles cannot be used in the summer. Flights between the communities are rather expensive, and face-to-face contact among deaf Inuit from different communities is rare. IUR is thus used in quite an extraordinary sociolinguistic setting: less than 40 deaf signers use the language as their sole means of communication, and they live in different locations, spread across an immense area. IUR is not used in a single village community, as are the other sign languages described in this volume. The geographical spread of the sign language is somewhat reminiscent of Plains Indian Sign Language, as was pointed out by an anonymous reviewer. However, Plains Indian SL is mainly used as an alternate sign language by hearing people (Davis 2010). In contrast, IUR is no longer used by hearing people, but signs were previously used by hearing Inuit in communication with people from different dialects (Olsthoorn 2010), and possibly also for trade.

Information about IUR has been gathered in the communities of Baker Lake, Rankin Inlet and Taloyoak (see Figure 2 below). It is possible that deaf Inuit live in all the communities, but whether they use IUR or American Sign Language (ASL) is not known.

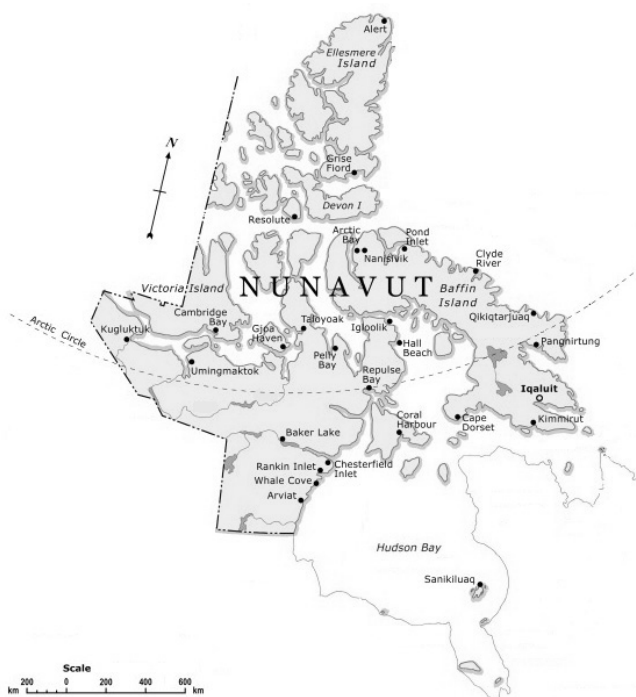


Figure 2. Map of Nunavut.

2. History

Historically, the Inuit were hunter-gatherers, and led a nomadic life (Wachowich 1999). For this reason, MacDougall (2000) suggests that the origins of IUR could be similar to those described for Aboriginal people in North and South America and Australia, whose sign languages developed as alternate communication systems used during hunts, and/or as *lingua francas* in cases where the people spoke mutually unintelligible languages or dialects (see MacDougall 2000). Indeed, signs were used in Inuit culture as early as the 18th century to communicate among different bands (Olsthoorn 2010). For reasons unknown, a rather high percentage of Inuit were born deaf or became deaf. The signs already existing in Inuit culture probably were used with the deaf children, and evolved into a sign language.

3. Social situation

It should be taken into account that the situation of deaf people in southern Canada is quite different from that in Nunavut, and different sign languages are used. In English-speaking parts of Canada, ASL is used, and French-speaking parts use Quebec Sign Language (LSQ). Some elderly deaf people in the Maritime Provinces (New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia) still use Maritime Sign Language, a variety descended from British Sign Language, which is nearly extinct (Yoel 2009). However, none of these languages is related to IUR.

The territory of Nunavut is multilingual; most of its inhabitants speak at least two languages: Inuktitut and English. Inuktitut is the traditional language of the Inuit, and has many dialects. English, being one of Canada's official languages, is indicated by almost half of the inhabitants of Nunavut as the language most often used at home (Census of Canada 2006, online).

Deaf Inuit use either ASL or IUR. Those between the ages of 40 and 60 were sent to schools for the deaf in southern, English-speaking Canada. In these schools, various communication systems were used, but all were associated with non-Inuit culture and language. Educated deaf Inuit therefore use ASL, Manually Coded English, or a sign language/system in between. Deaf children nowadays attend school in their home community, with the aid of an ASL/English interpreter. IUR is not acquired by any of these deaf children, and is therefore highly endangered.

IUR is used by deaf Inuit who have had little or no formal education. All signers are over 40. Using statistics, MacDougall (2000) estimates that

approximately 47 deaf Inuit use IUR as their main means of communication. However, interviews carried out by the author during a fieldwork visit in March 2009, in which the inhabitants of nine communities gave information about deaf people, seem to indicate that this number is too high. If MacDougall were correct, there would have to be 75 deaf people overall in those communities (based on the Census of Canada 2006), but the interview participants suggested there were about 20. MacDougall (2000) also reports that up to 75% of the hearing population in Baker Lake signs, but to what extent they have mastered IUR is as yet unclear.

There appears to be no negative attitude toward deafness among the Inuit, and especially no social exclusion because of deafness. Although the descriptive project did not focus on social relations, no restrictions regarding marital patterns or employment were observed. Deaf Inuit, whether they use ASL and IUR, seem able to freely choose any occupation, and can be artists, hunters, clerks and general labourers.

The general attitude towards sign language is positive, and many Inuit regard it as a natural, full language, albeit distinguishing between the native sign language (IUR) and the non-native one (ASL). No official interpreters exist for IUR. Often a family member or friend acts as an interpreter when needed.

A few deaf signers acknowledge deafness as a 'connecting factor'. It would be somewhat misguided to equate this to the Deaf identity found amongst Deaf people in urban societies, as no specific characteristics that could be classed as Deaf culture are recognised among deaf Inuit. In addition, IUR signers all identify strongly with the Inuit culture, rather than with Deaf culture. Therefore it would perhaps be more appropriate to refer to a 'deaf connection' in this case. The situation in other parts of Canada is different (see Carbin & Smith 1996).

In order to determine the status of sign language in their territory, the Nunavut Ministry of Culture, Language, Elders, and Youth (CLEY) set up a focus group in 2006. As a result of the focus group, a lexicology project (the Inuit Sign Language Lexicon Project) was established, as was a project aimed at documenting the history of Nunavut's deaf inhabitants. Both projects were concluded in 2008, and the Minister of CLEY declared in the Legislative Assembly that "the uniqueness and importance of Inuit Sign Language" be recognised (Nunavut Hansard, 16-09-2008, available online).

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Mardin Sign Language: Signing in a “deaf family”

Hasan Dikyuva

Mardin Sign Language (MarSL) is a recently-documented, small-scale sign language used by an extended family in Turkey. MarSL originated in Mardin, a town in south-eastern Turkey close to the Syrian border. Its development, dispersion and user community approximates the situation of other rural community sign languages. Beginning around the 1930s, MarSL developed as a result of genetic deafness in this family, which includes at least four successive generations of deaf individuals (Dikyuva & Dilsiz 2009, Dikyuva & Zeshan, in press). The family’s name, *Dilsiz*, means ‘deaf’ (literally ‘tongue/language-less’) in Turkish. The name *Mardin Sign Language* was coined by researchers; the signers themselves refer to their language as *dilsizce* (Turkish for ‘deaf language’) or *eski işaretler* (Turkish for ‘old signs’).

MarSL is currently used by an estimated 40 people, including both deaf and hearing members of the Dilsiz family. It is mainly used at home and at family gatherings such as weddings. The language is highly endangered and not acquired by children any more.

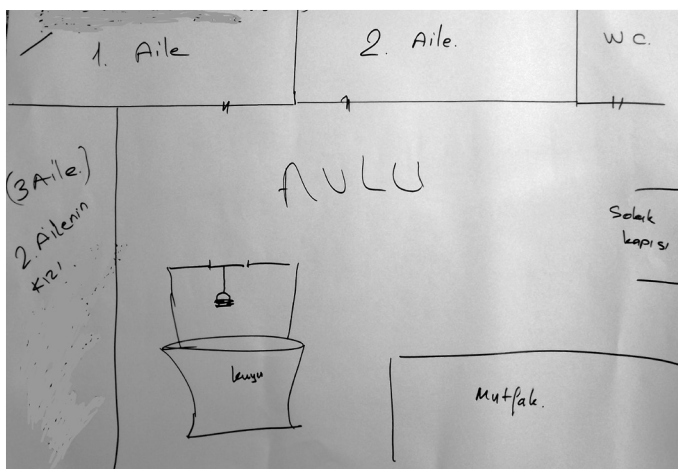


Figure 1. The Dilsiz family compound in Mardin

Figure 1, which was drawn by an elderly MarSL consultant, depicts the multi-family compound where the Dilsiz family lived when the sign language first

developed (the written labels are in Turkish). This is an atrium-style (*aulu*) building with an open courtyard, as was typical of the area at the time. As Figure 1 illustrates, the compound has a central courtyard around which three related families (*ail*) live. These three families constituted the core of the MarSL community. Family 1 and family 2 were established by an uncle and his nephew, both of whom had a large number of children of partly overlapping ages. Family 3 consisted of the eldest daughter from family 1, her husband and one child.

Each family's living area opens into the central courtyard, which itself opens onto the street (*sokak*) to the right of the picture. Everyone in the compound shared the bathroom and kitchen (*mutfak*) facilities, and the well in the courtyard. Therefore, communal living was the norm, and all hearing people in the compound were fluent in the sign language used by the several deaf family members in the *aulu*. Later on, several of the children from families 1 and 2 moved out of the compound as adults and established independent homes elsewhere in Mardin.

Figure 2 shows part of the Dilsiz family tree. This is only a small selection of the family; a more extensive diagram created by several consultants during research includes several hundred names. The deaf individuals are marked by grey colour in the diagram. There are both male and female family members among the deaf, though males are in the majority. The two eldest deaf individuals that could be identified were a brother and sister. Halil and Abdüsselam were the heads of family 1 and family 2 respectively. When their children (mostly born in the 1950s and 1960s) were growing up in the compound, sign language use was already fully established.

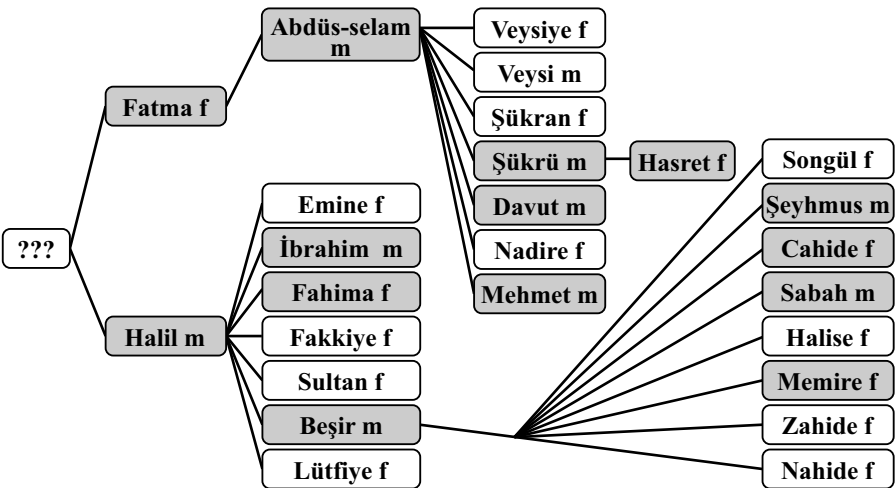


Figure 2. Part of a family tree diagram of the Dilsiz familz

Figure 3 shows a map of Mardin from a time period around the 1950s, as remembered by MarSL consultants. Mardin has developed and grown rapidly since then, but at the time had a single circular main road. In the area surrounded by the road, one could only travel on foot. The crosses indicate where deaf people lived at the time. Most of them are from the Mardin family, but there were several other deaf individuals as well as another family with several deaf siblings, all of whom participated in signed communication. The dotted lines represent the distance between houses, and the accompanying numbers reveal the walking time in minutes.

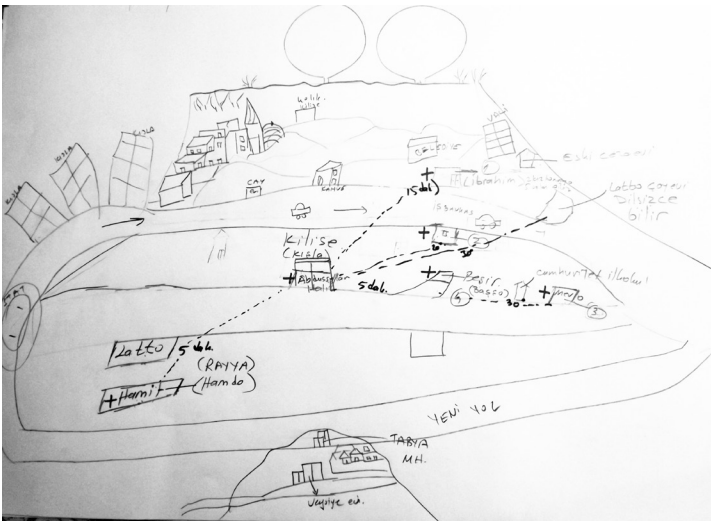


Figure 3. Map of Mardin as represented by MarSL consultants

Due to community dispersal and increasing contact with Turkish Sign Language (TİD), MarSL is now on the brink of extinction. Most of the fluent MarSL users are in their 50s and 60s, and the oldest living user is a hearing woman in her 70s. About 25 years ago, family members began moving to Istanbul and Izmir in search of better employment opportunities. The deaf family members then came into contact with the large and well-organised Turkish Sign Language using communities in these cities. Deaf children born since then attended school for the deaf in Istanbul and Izmir, and therefore shifted to using TİD instead of MarSL. Today, some family members remain in Mardin, but not any of the deaf individuals.

As the first estimated use of MarSL dates back to the 1930s, this constitutes considerable time depth compared to many other sign languages (cf. Nonaka 2009). From the 1930s to 1980s, there is very little evidence of any contact with TİD, because Mardin did not have schools, clubs or associations

of deaf people using TİD. Most of the deaf children growing up in Mardin never went to school.

Therefore, MarSL has existed in two quite distinct settings: where the language first arose (ca. 1930 – 1985), and where it is in decline (ca. 1985 – present). The former was multilingual with respect to spoken languages, namely Turkish, Kurdish and Arabic. The Dilsiz family's main home language was the local variety of spoken Arabic, and there is evidence of contact between MarSL and spoken Arabic, particularly in the occurrence of mouth movements accompanying some of the signs (see Zeshan et al. (in prep.) on cardinal numerals in MarSL). In the latter setting, all deaf members of the Dilsiz family are either monolingual in TİD (the younger members, who go to deaf schools and deaf clubs in the urban deaf community) or bilingual in TİD and MarSL (the older members, who maintain social networks through both sign languages). Perhaps surprisingly, MarSL is maintained mainly due to hearing family members, who are 'sign monolingual' in MarSL and do not know TİD because they have little incentive to associate with the urban deaf community (see Lanesman 2012 for a parallel case in Israel). Thus, the deaf family members use MarSL in communication with their hearing relatives, and the monolingual TİD signers have a limited ability to do so. Spoken language shift is also evident in the family, as hearing people have been shifting from Arabic to Turkish. Presently only the oldest hearing family members have limited competence in spoken Turkish, while all others have increasingly strong socialisation in Turkish through education, media, work and social life in Istanbul and Izmir.

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Yolngu Sign Language: A sociolinguistic profile

Elaine L. Maypilama and Dany Adone

Yolngu Sign language (henceforth YSL) is an indigenous sign language used by both deaf and hearing Yolngu people in Arnhem Land, northern Australia. Both the hearing and deaf population refer to YSL as ‘action’ in English and as *djama gongdhu* ‘work with hands’. In this study we focus on YSL as used in the Galiwin’ku community on Elcho Island.



Galiwin’ku community started as a Methodist (now Uniting Church) mission in the 1930s. Today together with Yirrkala and Mililingimbi communities it is one of the three largest Yolngu communities in Arnhem Land.

Officially there are 5,000 speakers of Yolngu languages scattered across Arnhem Land, with 2000 in Galiwin’ku. This number can shrink between 800 and 900 in the dry season when the indigenous people are very mobile.

The population speaks Djambarrpuynu, one of the Yolngu Matha languages. The community is multilingual with speakers of other Yolngu Matha language groups: Gupapuyngu, Gumatj, Liyagawumirr, Datiwuy, Galpu, Golumala, Rittharngu, Warramirri, Wanguri, Dhaluwangu. The community uses both Djambarrpuynu and YSL to communicate and can be regarded as a bimodal bilingual community (Maypilama & Adone 2012). Some *balanda* 'white' people working as shopkeepers, policemen, teachers, doctors in the community also use some of the basic signs to communicate with the deaf and hearing Yolngu people.

In 1994 there were five deaf people on the island (Cooke & Adone 1994). In 2012 we identified 7 deaf people in the community; one male child around four, two female adults, between forty and fifty, one male adult in his late twenties, one male adult in his late sixties, and two teenagers. Based on the information provided by the health clinic in July 2012 and Butcher's work (p.c) we expect a high number of hearing-impaired members of the community. There is no information available on the pattern of deafness in the community and it does not seem to be a link between deafness and surnames. As far as occupation is regarded, there is a deaf man working as a painter, a deaf woman working in craftsmanship.

Deaf people seem to be well integrated into the community. Evidence for this comes from the high level of involvement on their part in serious discussions regarding the community, as well as their leading function in ceremonies and other social tasks. There is no negative attitude towards YSL and the deaf members of the community. YSL is regarded as another Yolngu language like the other Yolngu languages mentioned earlier in this paper. It appears the language is severely endangered for reasons discussed in Maypilama & Adone (2011). Although indigenous people are known to be very mobile in the dry season, none of the deaf people in the community have travelled further south to e.g. Central Australia where Kendon (1988) identified sign languages. However both Yolngu hearing and deaf Yolngu people have contact with people using Tiwi hand signs and signs from West Arnhem Land.

Some of the deaf Yolngu people have attended primary school together with hearing children. But there is no school for the deaf in the community. Recently a teacher of AUSLAN has been teaching the male child AUSLAN and signed English.

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