“Spoken words are cold to the heart of deaf people”: the impact of religion on the history of sign languages (Corrie Tijsseling)

A unique aspect of the history of deaf education in the Netherlands is the impact of religion on the role of sign language in education. Generally, Milan 1880 is considered a turning point in the use of sign language in deaf education. This presentation will show that the shift in methods within Dutch deaf education was a complex process that varied across institutions.

The unexpected consequences of the Milan Congress on the transmission of sign language in France (Florence Encrevé)

In France, the very strict and widespread application of the resolutions adopted at the Milan Congress of 1880 had very serious consequences for the deaf community and sign language. In this communication, I propose to first revisit the Milan Congress itself, studying it using historical methods: its origins, how it unfolded, and the main resolutions that were adopted. I will return in particular to the precise figures for the number of participants (especially deaf people), the various organising committees (Italian and French) and their divergent interests, the leadership of the congress by its president Abbé Tarra, the languages used in the debates, and the way in which the first two resolutions were discussed and adopted. Then, in a second step, I will analyse the reasons why the French republican government decided to apply these resolutions in such a brutal and widespread manner. I will clarify the centralised functioning of power in France, the issues at stake between Republicans and Monarchists, the recent defeat against Germany in 1870 and the government's need for internal linguistic reconquest, the rivalry between the two ministries in charge of deaf education, and the role of the ideology of progress - omnipresent at the end of the 19th century. Finally, in a third stage, I will present the various consequences of these decisions on the transmission of sign language in France in the short, medium and long term. Finally, in a third stage, I will present the various consequences of these decisions on the transmission of sign language in France in the short, medium and long term. In the short term, deaf children were deprived of the opportunity to learn sign language in schools. Not all of them were admitted in school because education for the deaf was not yet compulsory. Those who were admitted found themselves failing at school and were only trained in manual trades that were socially inferior. In the medium term, deaf people were gradually marginalised by a society that expected them to speak but no longer listened to them. Within the deaf community, a kind of hierarchy emerged, with speaking deaf people dominating sign language users. In the long term, however, this situation had unexpected consequences. First of all, the situation was so untenable that it led deaf people in the 1970s to wake up (Deaf Revival) and demand the return of sign language (then known as LSF) in education and all areas of society. But also, due to the absence of sign language in schools for the deaf, French was unable to interfere with sign language for several decades. No hearing teacher was able to ‘modify’ the sign language of the deaf to incorporate French. In other words, sign language remained essentially in the hands of deaf people, which allowed it to retain its own linguistic characteristics (lexical and structural). Today, since the official end of the ban on sign language in deaf education, we are seeing this phenomenon of interference begin to take hold, which is why deaf people are mobilising to preserve the integrity of LSF vis-à-vis French.

Czech Sign Language Transmission in Late 19th-Century Bohemia: The Prague Institute and the Continuity of Signing after Milan (Lenka Okrouhlíková)

The history of sign languages in Europe is often framed through the narrative of the Milan Congress of 1880 and the subsequent suppression of sign languages in deaf education. While this development undoubtedly shaped many educational systems, its impact was neither uniform nor immediate across Europe. This paper examines the situation in Bohemia in the second half of the nineteenth century and argues that the Prague educational tradition represents an important example of institutional continuity in the use of sign language after Milan. The study, therefore, asks what roles local institutional traditions, educational networks, and deaf communities played in the maintenance and transmission of sign language in the Czech lands. It further examines how these factors shaped the historical continuity of sign language during a period often interpreted in European historiography primarily through the rise of oralism. The study focuses on the Prague Institute for the Deaf and Dumb and on the pedagogical tradition associated with its director, Wenzel Frost (1814–1865) and his successors. Using exclusively primary historical sources from the nineteenth century, including institutional reports, pedagogical publications, archival manuscripts, and contemporary press accounts, the paper reconstructs the linguistic and institutional conditions under which sign language continued to be used and transmitted within deaf education in Bohemia. The Prague Institute, founded in 1786, developed within the broader Central European educational context, shaped by the Viennese and German pedagogical traditions. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, sign language was already an integral part of everyday communication within the institution. This is documented, among other sources, by Mücke's work (1834), which includes a glossary of more than two hundred signs used at the Prague institute. These descriptions indicate the existence of a system of visual-manual communication shared among pupils and teachers. A decisive phase began under the directorship of Wenzel Frost, who led the institute from 1841 until his death in 1865. Frost regarded sign language as the natural mother tongue of deaf pupils and considered it the most effective medium for their intellectual and religious education. In his writings and institutional practice, sign language was treated not merely as an auxiliary pedagogical tool but as a legitimate language of instruction. Teaching relied on visual communication supported by drawings and symbols, allowing pupils to access complex and abstract concepts. Under Frost's leadership, the institute expanded significantly and became one of the largest institutions of its kind in Central Europe, with approximately 100 pupils. The intellectual background of Frost's approach was closely connected with the ideas of Franz Hermann Czech (1836), whose work included illustrated examples of signs, while further documentation of signs associated with the Prague milieu later appeared in the publication of Johann Anton Jarisch (1851), who recorded signs in a picture dictionary. Equally important was the institutional and social environment in which this educational model operated. The Prague institute functioned as a centre for a broader deaf community. Weekly religious exhortations were conducted in sign language and were open to deaf people from outside the school, while former pupils remained closely connected to the institution. Deaf teachers were also employed, further strengthening the internal transmission of sign language. After Frost's death in 1865, his approach continued under the direction of Václav Koťátko (1865–1876) and Karel Kmoch (1876–1913). Both defended the continued use of sign language in education and maintained many of the institutional practices established by Frost, including religious instruction and public activities conducted in sign language. At the same time, the number of deaf people in Bohemia was increasing, and the educational infrastructure expanded. New institutes for the deaf were founded in Litoměřice

(1858), České Budějovice (1871), and Hradec Králové (1881). Teachers working in these schools were trained within the pedagogical tradition established in Prague, and sign language spread together with the institutional network of deaf education. Despite the expansion of specialised institutes, their capacity remained limited: in 1885, while 1,369 deaf children of school age were recorded in Bohemia, only 312 were enrolled in institutes. This imbalance meant that many deaf individuals remained outside institutional education, contributing to the formation of broader deaf networks in which sign language continued to circulate beyond the classroom. Associations of educated deaf adults were founded, most notably the Support Association of the Deaf and Dumb of St Francis de Sales in Prague in 1868. These organisations played an important role in maintaining social networks among deaf individuals and in providing additional spaces for the use and transmission of sign language. From a linguistic perspective, this development can be understood as a process of institutional transmission of sign language across generations of users. Schools for the deaf functioned not only as educational institutions but also as centres of language socialisation, where sign language was transmitted, reinforced, and gradually stabilised within a shared communicative repertoire. At the same time, the growing deaf community created social environments in which sign language circulated beyond the classroom, contributing to the formation of a relatively stable regional signing tradition. Against this background, the impact of the Milan Congress appears more complex than the traditional narrative suggests. Although oralist ideas were gradually gaining influence in parts of Europe, the Prague institute and several related institutions continued to use sign language well into the late nineteenth century. At the Prague Institute, German instructional methods were employed for teaching the majority spoken language, while sign language remained central to religious instruction and everyday communication. This coexistence of methods was not without controversy: some teachers criticised the simultaneous use of speech and signs and demanded the adoption of a single instructional approach. Nevertheless, directors defended Frost's method and the continued use of sign language, which they regarded as natural to deaf pupils and effective for educating large groups of students. In this multilingual environment, sign language functioned as a shared communicative medium for both Czech and German pupils. The Czech case, therefore, illustrates that the development of sign languages cannot be understood solely through international policy events such as the Milan Congress. Instead, local institutional traditions, regional educational networks, and the internal dynamics of deaf communities played a crucial role in shaping the historical trajectories of sign languages. By reconstructing these processes from primary historical sources, the paper contributes to the broader discussion on the emergence, transmission, and historical development of sign languages. It highlights the importance of regional case studies for understanding the diversity of historical pathways through which sign languages were maintained, transmitted, and institutionalised within Europe.

Beyond Milan: Transnational Circulation, Co-Equality, and the Intensification of Deaf Political Advocacy Post-1880 The 1880 (Joseph Murray)

Milan Congress is frequently invoked as a decisive rupture in deaf history, defined as a moment when oralism triumphed and sign languages were institutionally suppressed across Europe and beyond. This narrative of rupture has structured much subsequent historiography, positioning the late nineteenth century primarily as an era of loss. Yet a more complex picture emerges when this era is examined through the transnational networks developed by deaf communities. This paper revisits the post-Milan period not as a collapse of sign language spaces, but as a phase of intensification in deaf political discourses, international coordination, and conceptual refinement of sign language as a marker of collective identity. Drawing on research into international congresses, German controversies of the 1890s, and the formation of a transnational Deaf public sphere, the paper argues that the decades following Milan reveal renewed deaf political activism and the emerge of deaf participation in public spaces. Central to this reinterpretation is the existence of transnational nodes of information circulation. Events in one national setting—such as the German petition to Kaiser Wilhelm I in 1891 protesting the "pure oral method"—were debated in other national spaces. These exchanges did more than transmit news; they framed local struggles within a shared international discourse. German deaf people drew upon comparative examples from abroad to argue for the legitimacy of sign language within the German nation. Meanwhile, deaf Americans and others followed these debates closely, integrating them into their own arguments about education and citizenship. Such circulation complicates the notion of isolated national decline. International congresses further demonstrate the emergence of deaf people's intervention in larger debates. Rather than retreating, deaf delegates advanced increasingly explicit defenses of sign language, often situating oralism as a threat to intellectual development. The discourse of the "educated" versus the "uneducated" deaf illustrates how deaf leaders navigated the tension between supporting education and rejecting specific methodologies. Throughout the nineteenth century, the trope of the "uneducated deaf" had justified the creation of schools. By the 1890s, deaf leaders repurposed that trope against oralism itself. Deaf leaders in different countries defended schooling as essential while challenging a pedagogical ideology that, in their view, sacrificed knowledge to speech. This distinction reflects a broader conceptual shift toward what might be termed co-equality. Deaf leaders did not reject participation in national life; they rejected assimilation on oralist terms. They claimed equality as citizens while insisting on the legitimacy of sign language as part of the nation, advancing a sophisticated re-inscription of national symbols rather than acquiescence to oralist ideologies. Importantly, the tone of Deaf responses intensified in the 1890s. Reframing the post-Milan period through these transnational and discursive developments shifts our understanding of rupture. Educational policy certainly hardened in many settings. Yet deaf communities responded not with withdrawal but with expanded associational life, sharpened rhetorical strategies, and intensified international exchange. Sign languages, far from disappearing from history after 1880, became increasingly central to arguments about citizenship and collective belonging. By situating Milan within ongoing networks of circulation and political self-definition, this paper proposes a historiographical shift: from a narrative of linguistic eclipse to one of contested continuity. Such a shift foregrounds deaf people's agency and highlights the ways transnational networks advanced national discourses on sign languages in the decades after 1880.

Christian Sign Choirs in Germany – A Case Study of the Berlin Sign Choir (Chae-Lin Kim)

The type of sign choir that my research focuses on is a specific group of mostly or exclusively Deaf people who perform signed art forms – as part of the liturgy - in worship services on a regular basis. The establishment of the "PAX-Gebärdenchor" (PAX-Sign Choir) in 1993, initiated by the Catholic Pastoral Care in Frankfurt and directed by Daniela Happ, a Deaf linguist, has contributed to the emergence of sign choirs (with church affiliation) in other German cities (Martin 2009). The PAX-Gebärdenchor, which no longer exists, performed liturgical texts, biblical stories, and songs in sign language based on spoken or written texts, used by hearing Christians. Whereas the signed versions initially depended heavily on the spoken versions in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, the signed performances became more and more independent from the original versions over time, foregrounding poetic elements of sign language and even creating original signed pieces (ibid.). Such a change can probably be observed with other sign choirs as well. In my poster session, I would like to share my first-hand experience of being a member of the Berlin Sign Choir for almost 10 years, from the composition process and rehearsals to the performance itself. Founded in 1999, the Berlin Sign Choir is part of the Protestant Deaf Church in Berlin. The choir performs signed pieces called either "songs" or "poetry", which are executed only visually and independently of sounding music (Kim 2025). These pieces are either adaptations of hymn lyrics and or songs that are originally written in or for sign language. The choir members develop and (re)compose them together during their weekly meetings. As the choir members put it: "the signs must flow and blend well into each other." (Interview 2023) In this context, I would like to present two original signed songs: "Hände" ("Hands") by Daniela Happ (see Gebärdenlieder 2011), and the signed song "Gott gebärdet gern" (God is pleased to sign), which was (re)composed and performed by the Berlin Sign Choir. As the title of the latter suggests, the relationship with God portrayed in the song is seen from the perspective of Deaf people, who see themselves as a linguistic and cultural minority. It challenges the notion that faith stems from hearing the word of God, an idea typically rooted in hearing and phonocentric Christian culture, as well as the idea that the deafness is something that has to be "cured" or "healed". Drawing on several interviews with Deaf choir members and Deaf Liberation Theology (Lewis 2007; Morris 2008), I will demonstrate how the Christian faith is reinterpreted within Deaf culture, particularly through singing and praising in sign language. Furthermore, the visual presentation of signed songs also challenges the sound-based, hearing-centric understanding of music (Kim 2025).

Diachronic change in Jordanian Sign Language (Bernadet Hendriks)

Jordanian Sign Language (Lughat al-Ishāra al-Urdunia, LIU) is the sign language used in Jordan. It is closely related to the sign languages used in Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian areas and also (but with more lexical differences) to other sign languages in the Middle East (cf. Hendriks and Zeshan 2008, Hendriks 2008). This paper explores the ways in which LIU has changed over the past 25 years. Considerable changes have been noted in the lexicon, phonology and syntax of the language, mainly due to the influence of the surrounding spoken language (Arabic) and the influence of other regional sign languages as well as International Sign. In addition, many new items, and sometimes new variants of signs, have been added to the lexicon of the language due to technological innovations. The first part of this paper will discuss the lexical of LIU and the phonological changes that have taken place in the language, as these are closely connected. Changes at the lexical level are often related to

technological innovations, in particular social media. Social media has made communication between signers in different countries in the Middle East much more common, which results in lexical borrowing. In particular, LIU has borrowed quite a few, often religious, signs from Saudi Arabian Sign Language. The fact that Jordanian interpreters tend to work in Gulf States for a number of year after their certification to earn more money than they would in Jordan is also a likely factor. When these interpreters move back to Jordan, they tend to introduce signs from the country they worked in. Initialization, which was completely absent from the language 25 years ago has also been adopted into LIU. It may be that initialization is a strategy that has also been borrowed from other countries, since a number of the signs that have been borrowed from Saudi Arabian Sign Language are initialized. More research into the sign languages of the Gulf region would be needed to confirm this. Social media has also made it possible for Deaf Jordanians to interact with Deaf people Deaf people in other parts of the world, and many more Jordanian Deaf people now know some International Sign than 25 years ago. Borrowing from International Sign also takes place, particularly when it comes to country and place names. Thus, many Jordanian signs for country names have been replaced by international signs, particularly by the younger generation. Apart from lexical changes and initialization, there are also a number of twohanded signs that have gained a one-handed equivalent because of technology. Holding your phone when signing during a video-call makes it hard to use two-handed signs. Commonly used signs, such as TIME or HOUSE have therefore been adapted for use during video-calls as can be seen below for the sign TIME: Fig. 1: TIME Fig. 2: one-handed variant of TIME This example is particularly interesting, because it is not the non-dominant hand that has been dropped, but the dominant hand, after which dominance reversal has taken place, with the chin touching the wrist of the previously non-dominant hand. Using locations near the face is helpful when signing to a phone, since even at arm's length only the head and a small part of the upper body is visible. The second part of this paper will look at the syntactic changes, which seem to be mostly caused by the influence from the spoken variety of Arabic which is used in Jordan. This influence seems to come mainly through the educational system, and the word-for-word signing that tends to be used there. Syntactic changes are mainly changes in word order. They show up particularly when it comes to negators and question words, but also in the order of nouns and accompanying numbers. Hendriks (2004) states that numbers in LIU follow the noun, whereas in Jordanian Arabic only the number one comes after the noun, while the number two is mostly expressed as a dual suffix. From 3 onwards, the numbers come before the noun. Although numbers in LIU can still follow the noun, they are now commonly signed before the noun, which also affects numeral incorporation. When it comes to negators and question words Hendriks (2004) states that they are clause final, and marks clause initial occurrences as ungrammatical. In Jordanian Arabic, however, negation normally occurs before the verb, and question words are clause initial. Again, over the past 25 years the influence of Arabic on LIU has caused the word order to become less consistent than it used to be. Although sentence final negators and question words are still deemed to be correct, signers will also use these them in the same position in the sentence as Arabic does. When asked for grammaticality judgements they do not feel there is a difference. Both technology and education have thus caused considerable changes in LIU over the past 25 years, but in different parts of the language. Whereas technology has mainly been responsible for lexical changes, the use of Arabic word order in education has led to syntactic changes.

The right to which sign language? Towards language policy for an indigenous sign language (Jeremy Kuhn, Sybil Vachaudez, Samantha Prins, Juan Ajsivinac, Carlo Geraci and Robert Henderson)

Goals. We describe philosophical and legal frameworks for understanding language policy, and discuss how these may converge or diverge for sign languages in different linguistic contexts, notably in cases in which indigenous sign languages are in competition with other sign languages.

Competing philosophies on language. Geraci et al. (2025) describe two philosophies that may underlie language policy: constitutivist, on which a language is an important feature of a community and depriving someone of their language is in itself an injustice, and instrumentalist, on which language is above all a tool to attain other societal objectives. Neither of the perspectives is inherently 'wrong'; both are based on valid considerations about fundamental human rights. However, the two philosophies can lead to very different language policies: the former leads one to embrace multilingualism; the latter generally leads one to prefer a monolingual society. These two philosophies can be discerned in different kinds of legal frameworks. Constitutivist considerations underlie minority rights frameworks: many countries have laws that protect linguistic and cultural minorities. For example, the Italian constitution (1947) signaled a clear break from the fascist era by explicitly stating the objective to protect linguistic minorities (Art. 6), although the first implementation of this principle was in 1999 (Legge 482/1999). Instrumentalist considerations underlie disability rights frameworks: for example, such considerations can be seen to appear in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007), which aims to break down barriers, enabling full inclusion of disabled persons into society. Interestingly, Trovato (2013) observes that both philosophies point in the same direction when it comes to a Deaf person's right to sign language. The argument is based on the fact that any delay in language acquisition impacts language competence (Mayberry 1993), that language deprivation has a negative impact on cognitive, social, psychological, and socio-economic wellbeing (Glickman & Hall 2018), that success with prothestics (e.g. cochlear implants) has variable individual outcomes (Peterson et al. 2010), and that learning a sign language has no detrimental effect on spoken language acquisition – and perhaps even a facilitative effect (Davidson et al. 2013). Hence, the right of deaf children to sign language goes beyond questions of identity; it's not just the right to have one's own language; it is the right to have a language, tout court. When a country or community has a single sign language, both instrumentalist and constitutivist considerations lead one to conclude that Deaf individuals have a right to this language. On the other hand, when a country or community has more than one sign language, the philosophies may again be in competition. This is the case for many Indigenous sign languages.

Highland Mayan Sign Language. We discuss the specific case of Highland Mayan Sign Language (HMSL). There are a number of small sign languages in Maya communities in Highland Guatemala. These languages are distinct from a nationally recognized sign language, Lensegua, and are used by communities that often have very little access to education and other other societal services. As a result, these languages are particularly precarious, at the intersection of two minority groups: deaf and Indigenous (cf. McKay-Cody 2020 on 'multiple marginalization').

In the last few decades, minority languages have had increasing increasing amounts of governmental recognition in Guatemala. First, spoken Mayan languages have had increasing recognition and support since the late 1980s (Maxwell 2020), notably including the 2003 passage of the Ley de Idiomas Nacionales (Decreto No. 19-2003), officially recognizing all 24 Indigenous languages of Guatamala in the areas in which they are spoken. The recognition of spoken Mayan languages flows out of an Indigenous rights framework. Of note, in 1995, peace accords ending nearly four decades of

genocidal war affirmed, among other things, the rights of Indigenous people to their languages and cultures and access to services in those languages. Second, as alluded to above, sign language was officially recognized in Guatemala with the passage of Decreto 3-2020, which recognizes and approves Lensegua as the sign language of deaf people in Guatemala. Lensegua (Lengua de Señas de Guatemala) is a non-Indigenous sign language centered on Guatemala City and Quetzaltenango; it has been taught in schools for the Deaf and in Deaf clubs like ASORGUA (Asociación de Sordos de Guatemala) beginning in 1945 (Rodriguez 2019). Despite being recognized officially in 2020, Lensegua is in fact rather poorly documented: no grammar of the language has ever been published, and training and materials for teachers of deaf children, especially in rural areas, are anecdotally rather sparse and unsystematic. The 2020 law notably also includes no mention of potential signing communities in Mayan regions, who may use a sign language different from Lensegua. Spoken Mayan languages are thus recognized by an Indigenous rights framework. NonIndigenous sign languages like Lensegua are recognized by a disability rights framework. But Indigenous sign languages like HMSL fall through the cracks, not appearing in either set of laws.

Cultural grounding of HMSL. While we have noted that the right of Deaf people to sign language goes beyond questions of identity, in the case of deafness in Indigenous communities, access to Indigenous sign languages is important for specifically constitutivist reasons. HMSL has many examples highlighting the deep connections between the sign language and Maya culture. For example, HMSL has an inventory of conventional handshapes can be combined with gesture to express size for different semantic classes, including birds, quadrupeds, children, and crops. All these forms also appear in the gestural repertoire of hearing Maya people to designate the same semantic classes (Massarello, 2023), and have culturally-specific origins. For instance, the curved 5-handshape of the 'child' classifier derives from a Maya greeting in which an elder places their hand on a child's forehead. Similarly, depictions of a palm-up Bhandshape associated with corn and other crops can be found in classical Maya epigraphy (200- 900 CE), suggesting an ancient pan-Maya origin for the classifier (Fox Tree, 2009). Perhaps due to these shared cultural references, hearing Maya people are often able to communicate quite well with their Deaf neighbors through gesture; if so, transitional education to Lensegua might in fact run the risk of isolating Deaf people from their own local communities. Attitudes of non-Indigenous signers of Lensegua towards the way that Indigenous people sign are anecdotally often dismissive, sometimes describing it as incorrect or even vulgar. And yet, it turns out that Lensegua itself incorporates a number of HMSL signs. These include, for example, the sign for 'dog', derived from the HMSL classifier for quadrupeds, and one sign for 'nobody'/'nothing', pronounced by sweeping the index finger across the lips, used by nonIndigenous signers of Lensegua, but which also appears in HMSL and in the gestural inventory of hearing people Maya people. The history of HMSL is thus also part of the history of Lensegua. Looking forward. In the talk, we will discuss our own outreach activities in Guatemala, and potential avenues forward that would recognize the importance of Indigenous sign languages, and grant Deaf Maya individuals the right to their linguistic heritage within their communities.

Impact of Technological Innovations on the Production of Sign Language Exams: Translation and Linguistic Standardization (Débora Wanderley, Janine Oliveira and Sávio Gomes)

The present study, situated within the fields of Sociolinguistics and Applied Linguistics, aims to: (i) analyze the impact of technological innovations on the translation of academic exams from Portuguese into Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS), thereby constituting the textual genre of 'video-based exams'; and (ii) investigate how such innovations have contributed to the emergence of processes of linguistic standardization in Libras. Following the enactment of the LIBRAS Law and other legal documents that have shaped language policies in Brazil, large-scale examinations, such as the Proficiency Examination, the entrance examinations for Brazilian higher education institutions (HEIs), and the National High School Exam (ENEM) in Libras, have adopted video formats to ensure the linguistic rights of deaf participants. Over the past 20 years, it has been observed that audiovisual tools, interaction design, and linguistic choices in LIBRAS have evolved from being mere recording supports to functioning as structuring elements of the text. The first objective of this study is (i) to analyze the technology employed in the video-based examinations offered by HEIs and the ENEM in LIBRAS reveals the technical development of these productions, which have transitioned from simple largescreen projections to complex interfaces developed by multidisciplinary teams. In the first video-based exam made available to deaf participants, the technology for individual computerbased testing was not yet established for large groups; therefore, the solution adopted was collective projection on a large screen. In this format, participants were unable to review questions according to their individual needs, and the exam duration was determined by the timing of the video presentation (Quadros et al., 2009). Video-based exams have evolved in line with available technology, reaching their current format as implemented in the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) entrance exam and the ENEM, in which each participant receives the exam system on a USB drive and navigates through the question videos via an interface that employs "interaction design resources" (Amorim, 2019). The second objective (ii) is to examine the phraseological patterns in LIBRAS found in test items publicly released by institutions such as the UFSC, the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), the National Institute for the Education of the Deaf (INES), proficiency examinations, and the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (INEP, particularly through the ENEM). The study focuses on the lexical choices and syntactic structures employed in the translations. The findings indicate that, between 2006 and 2016, there was greater diversity in these choices, whereas in subsequent years a process of linguistic standardization can be observed, evidenced by increased lexical and syntactic stability in Libras test items. The findings from both objectives point to two main impacts: the technological evolution of video-based examinations and the standardization of phraseological patterns in Libras test items. Technological advancement appears to have been a key factor in this process, as it enabled the consolidation of more uniform practices in the translation and production of test items in Libras. Furthermore, the use of tools such as teleprompters and the provision of mirrored images in studio settings have enabled real-time feedback, which is essential for the self-monitoring of spatial syntax in LIBRAS by deaf translators during recording. It is argued that the interplay between technology, linguistics, and translation not only consolidates the 'video-based exam' as a textual genre in Libras (Silva, 2019), but also ensures autonomy, reading fluency, and linguistic comfort for Deaf individuals.

History of sign language and deaf education in Gabon (Tatiana Richie)

The study delves into pivotal aspects of deaf history education, encompassing key events, influential figures, sign language descriptions, and state education policies. In the African context, there is a vital interdependent link between history and deaf education policies (Kiyaga & Moores, 2003; Miles, 2005; Amoako SF, 2019; Hadjah, 2024). Following A.J. Foster's arrival in 1979, other actors assumed pivotal roles in shaping the history of the deaf in Gabon, influencing the landscapes of both state and private education, as well as deaf associations (Mouziengou, 2018). Although the literature recounts the historical facts concerning this community, it is nevertheless essential to examine the gaps in this history, particularly the use of sign languages in the country's five schools for the deaf and deaf associations. What is the history of sign language and deaf education in Gabon? Although this field is very recent and poorly documented, we have adopted a primarily qualitative approach, supported by discourse and literature analysis. This methodology is based on discourse and literature analysis, drawing on both official and unofficial reports. Mouziengou's (2018) historical work, which draws on official and unofficial reports, as well as interviews with key informants (personal and professional accounts). In addition to my personal experiences and my knowledge of deaf education, I will document the challenges facing this field in Gabon. This research aims to shed light on historical grey areas and highlight the multilingualism of sign languages specific to Gabon. The findings of this historical analysis of deafness point to key events marking significant periods and the unsuspected role of certain figures in historical narratives, the need to rethink language and education policy regarding deaf people, which appears to have reached its limits over time, and finally the existence of a common language of communication, the local sign language LSG, at the heart of this multilingualism where several variants are used in each geographically distinct institution.

All together now: Complementary community roles in language creation Lengua de Señas (Marie Coppola, Ann Senghas)

Nicaragüense (LSN; Nicaraguan Sign Language) emerged over the past 50 years among a newly formed peer group of deaf children in a school setting. Here we examine how learning capacities, patterns of social interaction, and developmental stage dynamically interact to produce new linguistic systems. Prior to the 1970s, most deaf people in Nicaragua grew up without contact with other deaf people or access to a pre-existing sign language. In such contexts, children often develop homesigns with hearing relatives and neighbors—a situation that remains common worldwidei and continues for most deaf Nicaraguans today. ii Although a few clinics and educational initiatives in earlier decades brought some deaf individuals together, these settings did not foster sustained peer networks, or provide opportunities for transmission of any emergent signing to new learners. iii This social context changed dramatically in 1974, when a center for special education in Managua established classrooms for deaf students, followed a decade later by a vocational program for adolescents with disabilities. Although neither program explicitly taught students a sign language, they created dense, age-graded peer networks. Deaf children and adolescents now interacted daily—in classrooms, on playgrounds, on buses, and in one another's homes— transforming their homesigns and converging on a shared sign language. iv,v,vi This language has since been transmitted to new cohorts of children entering school each year, growing from 25 youths to a community of more than 1,600 deaf signers ranging from preschool to older adulthood.vii To reconstruct how LSN has changed over time, we

adopt an apparent-time approach,[viii] in which differences among progressive age cohorts today reflect ordered earlier stages in the language's history. Comparing successive cohorts allows us to trace the emergence of new linguistic structures and their spread across the community. Figure 1 represents the community, beginning with homesigners previous to 1974 (and subsequently), and progressing downward through LSN's first three decades and cohorts. By comparing successive cohorts, we can trace the emergence and change of particular linguistic features across time, like reading geological strata in stone. Crucially, this approach reveals developmental asymmetries: older signers do not fully adopt innovations introduced after their own period of acquisition, allowing cohort differences to persist and making it possible to observe language change in progress. We integrate this apparent-time perspective with a developmental analysis to examine how individuals at different life stages contribute to language creation. Child learners play a central role in innovation. As they acquire language from variable input, they detect and reinterpret patterns, establishing new mappings between forms and functions. We illustrate this process through changes in the use of pointing and spatial devices in LSN, where forms initially used to indicate locations are reanalyzed to refer to participants in events and become integrated into systems for marking argument structure. However, the emergence of new structure is only one part of language creation. For innovations to become part of a language, they must also spread and stabilize. This process depends critically on social interaction[ix] and on the changing roles of individuals across the lifespan. Dense peer interaction among children promotes rapid alignment within and across individuals, allowing innovations to become conventionalized within a cohort. As cohorts become teachers, parents, and community leaders, they re-structure the social environments in which transmission occurs, and they become language models for both deaf and hearing children. In this way, later development contributes to stabilization and the maintenance of shared patterns, even as it involves less uptake of new grammatical innovations. Thus, the intersection of a learner's age and changing environmental factors means that each cohort acquired LSN under distinct social conditions, varying in community size, density of peer interaction, and the linguistic patterns present in the language of their models.[x] Comparisons across subpopulations with different language ecologies further clarify these dynamics. For example, hearing children (Codas) of deaf adults who arrived in LSN's first decade (Cohort 1) and Cohort 2 signers both learned the language from Cohort 1 signers. However, the Codas' signing shows less alignment and greater variability than Cohort 2 signers, who acquired the language in dense peer networks. This contrast highlights the role of horizontal interaction in promoting convergence and the importance of social organization in shaping how linguistic systems spread.[xi] Our central claim is that language emergence is a distributed, cumulative process shaped by complementary contributions across developmental stages. Children introduce new structure by reanalyzing varied communicative forms in their environment, while adolescents and adults promote convergence, transmission, and stability. Language creation thus reflects the interaction of learning processes and a dynamic social ecology, through which language evolves, like an organism, progressively adapting to its community of learners and users.

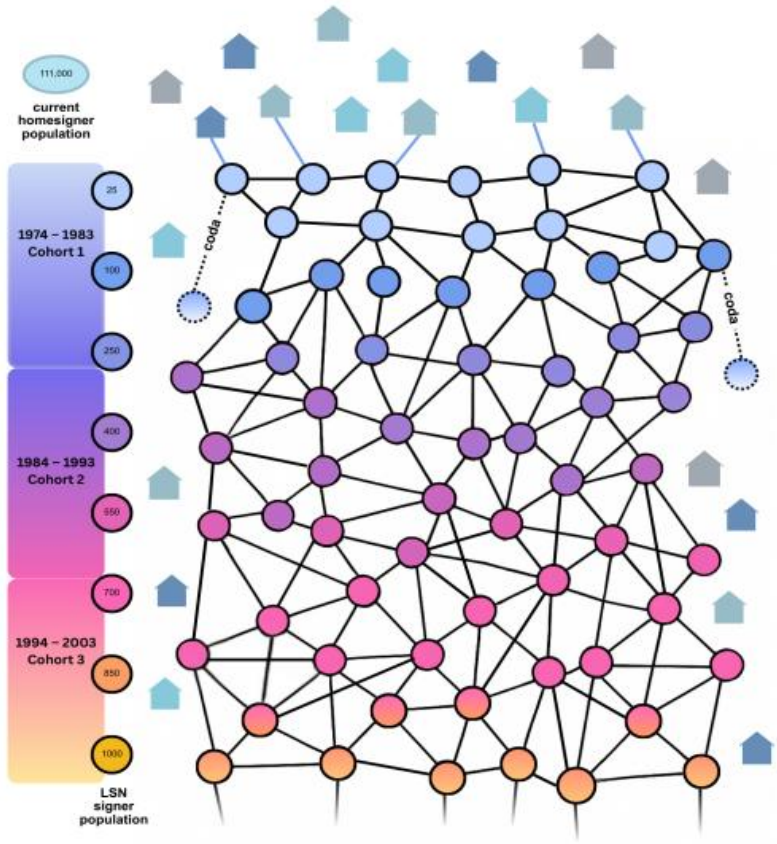

Figure 1. A depiction of the history of the deaf community and emergence of LSN. Each node represents a signer; houses represent individual homesigners, most of whom remain outside the signing community. Lines connecting some homesigners to early Cohort 1 signers represent the initial signers who entered the community with their homesigns. Hearing Codas (dotted outlines) are connected to their Cohort 1 parents with dotted lines; note the lack of connections to signing peers. The progressive colors of the nodes depict the gradual changes as communicative interactions and the developmental stage of the learner jointly and dynamically reshape the language. The timeline (left) begins at the top and indicates the three decades associated with their respective age cohorts of signers; while the timeline ends in 2003, new cohorts of children continuously enter the signing community. Numbers in circles give cumulative community size.

Recognition without Transformation? Tracing sociolinguistic trajectories of Italian Sign Language (Amir Zuccala' and Sabina Fontana)

The recognition of national sign languages has long been—and remains—at the center of sustained advocacy by Deaf associations worldwide. In Italy, formal national recognition of Italian Sign Language (LIS) was achieved only after decades of mobilization, including public protests, demonstrations in front of Parliament, local sit-ins, conferences, lobbying actions, and organized marches. These claims have been repeatedly foregrounded in collective moments such as the International Week of the Deaf and the World Day of the Deaf. Prior to national recognition (Law 69/2021), LIS had already been the object of various local and regional measures, with provinces and regions promoting its diffusion and visibility across territories. This paper examines the sociolinguistic dynamics shaping LIS before and after legal recognition, situating Italy within broader international debates on sign language recognition and language policy. Drawing on historical reconstruction, policy analysis, and insights from ongoing ethnographic research with Deaf communities, the contribution traces the advocacy processes that led to recognition and interrogates their outcomes. Building on prior descriptive and theoretical work on LIS (Fontana et al. 2015; Volterra et al., 2022), the paper provides an updated overview of current developments, focusing on how recognition has reconfigured language practices, institutional arrangements, and symbolic legitimacy. Particular attention is paid to the expansion of interpreter training programs within universities and the persistence of a translation-oriented model, which often prioritizes mediated access over the creation of Deaf-centered spaces and epistemic autonomy. In dialogue with comparative perspectives on sign

language recognition (Geraci, 2012; De Meulder et al. 2019; Fontana, 2022), the Italian case is analyzed as part of a broader pattern in which legal acknowledgment may simultaneously enable visibility and reproduce structural constraints. The paper also explores emerging sociolinguistic implications of artificial intelligence (De Sousa 2025), highlighting both risks—such as the technologization of communication and potential marginalization of Deaf expertise—and opportunities for new forms of language transmission and accessibility. Overall, the contribution argues that while recognition has altered the sociolinguistic landscape of LIS, it has not fully transformed underlying power relations. By foregrounding the perspectives and demands of the Italian Deaf community, the paper contributes to understanding how legal recognition interacts with language ideologies, institutional practices, and evolving communicative ecologies in shaping the histories and futures of sign languages.

Across borders: Tracing Spanish signs in Portuguese Sign Language (LGP) (Carla Benge, Mariana Martins, and Marta Morgado)

Portuguese Sign Language (Língua Gestual Portuguesa, LGP) is widely regarded as a largely independent sign language whose historical connection to Swedish Sign Language seems to be limited to the manual alphabet introduced during the early development of deaf education in Portugal, from 1823. While this historical link has often been emphasized in accounts of LGP's origins, closer examination of its lexicon reveals several signs that appear identical or highly like those used in Spanish Sign Language (Lengua de Signos Española, LSE). This study investigates historical contact situations that may explain the presence of these forms and explores how Spanish signs entered the LGP lexicon. The research emerged within the broader project of compiling an etymological dictionary of LGP, as a joint project between the Portuguese Deaf Association (APS) and the Association of LGP Teachers (AFOMOS). During the process of documenting possible origins of LGP signs, several lexical items were identified as close equivalents to forms used in LSE. These correspondences were particularly noticeable among signs that display relatively low degrees of iconicity, making independent parallel development less likely. Because these forms do not align with the known Swedish influence on LGP, they prompted further investigation into historical interactions between deaf communities in Portugal and Spain. The primary sources of evidence for this study come from semi-structured interviews with older deaf signers at the APS, who shared personal experiences and community narratives concerning past contacts with LSE. These interviews, combined with lexicographic comparison between LGP and LSE forms, revealed three key contexts through which Spanish signs may have been transmitted into the Portuguese deaf community. The first context dates to the late nineteenth century, when Spanish nuns were involved in the education of deaf children in Portugal. Historical accounts from interviewees indicate that these educators used signs brought from Spain in Catholic deaf schools. Because schools functioned as central sites of language transmission within deaf communities, the introduction of Spanish signs in this educational environment likely facilitated their spread among Portuguese students and subsequent generations of signers. Examples of such signs are GUILT, UGLY and DIRTY, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Examples of LSE signs used by Spanish nuns in Portuguese deaf schools

A second context emerged in the early twentieth century through organized football matches between deaf teams from Portugal and Spain. According to interviewees, these events were regular occasions for social interaction between deaf participants from both countries. Such repeated cross-border contact among peers may have introduced additional vocabulary, reinforcing the diffusion of Spanish signs. The third context involves individual linguistic influence within the deaf community. Interview data highlighted the case of a deaf Spanish woman who married a prominent deaf community leader in Portugal. Through her active participation in local deaf networks, she reportedly introduced several signs used in Spain, some of which were subsequently adopted by Portuguese signers. This example illustrates how individual community members can function as important vectors of language transmission. The comparison of entries from the developing etymological dictionary of LGP with LSE signs revealed several cases of lexical similarity that are difficult to attribute to coincidence, especially given their relatively low iconicity, such as REMEMBER, CAKE, NORMAL and VERY WELL, as shown next.

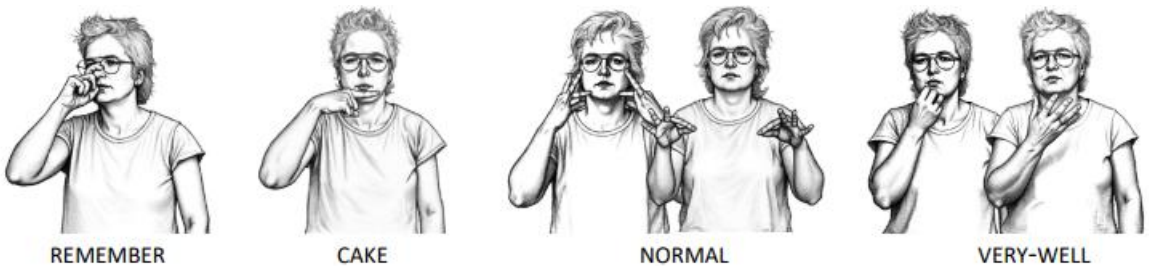

Figure 2: Examples of LSE signs adopted by Portuguese signers

These findings suggest that lexical borrowing through social contact offers a plausible explanation for at least part of this overlap. Rather than reflecting a structural genealogical relationship between the two languages, these similarities appear to result from multiple episodes of historical interaction between deaf communities across borders. This study highlights the importance of combining lexicographic research with community-based historical knowledge when investigating the origins of sign language vocabulary. By drawing on interviews with older deaf signers and comparative lexical analysis, the research uncovers previously underexplored pathways of linguistic contact between Portugal and Spain. More broadly, the findings contribute to ongoing discussions about language contact, lexical borrowing, and the complex social histories that shape the development of sign languages.

History, Emergence, Transmission, and Development of Malawian Sign Language: Challenges and Progress (Malonje Phiri)

Malawian Sign Language (MSL) remains under-documented despite its central role in the educational, social, and political participation of deaf communities in Malawi. Its historical development reflects broader global patterns in which sign languages were marginalized within formal education systems shaped by oralist ideologies institutionalized (Quinn, 2010; Phiri, 2021) after the Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf of 1880 in Milan (Lane, 1984). As Lane (1984) documents, the Milan resolutions had enduring international consequences, promoting speech- only approaches and restricting the use of sign languages in classrooms. Early missionary-established schools for the deaf in Malawi mirrored these approaches (Phiri, 2021). Nevertheless, consistent with contemporary research demonstrating that sign languages naturally emerge in communities of deaf interaction (Sandler, Padden, & Aronoff, 2022), MSL developed organically through peer-to-peer communication in schools despite institutional prohibitions. The linguistic legitimacy of sign languages, first systematically articulated by William Stokoe (1960), laid the foundation for subsequent recognition of signed languages as structured, rule-governed systems. Several deaf studies emphasize sign languages not only as linguistic systems but as central to identity, epistemology, and social belonging (Ladd, 2003). Within this framework, MSL can be understood as a community-generated language shaped by interaction, adaptation, and evolving sociopolitical engagement rather than as a derivative or incomplete system. This study investigates the historical emergence, transmission pathways, and contemporary sociolinguistic status of MSL within education and advocacy. It examines how MSL developed in early deaf education institutions; how it has been transmitted across generations through schools, deaf associations, community networks, and interpreter training initiatives; what forms of language contact and borrowing influenced its lexical expansion; and how it is positioned within national policy and education systems. A qualitative historical-sociolinguistic design was employed, combining archival document analysis, policy review, and semi-structured interviews with former students from two early schools for the deaf, alongside key informant consultations with deaf community leaders and sign language trainers. The2022 publication of Malawi's first comprehensive sign language dictionary is analysed as a milestone in corpus planning. Findings indicate that although early institutions attempted to restrict signing, deaf students sustained and expanded MSL through informal peer networks. Schools functioned as paradoxical spaces of both suppression and innovation. Intergenerational transmission extended beyond residential school settings into community clubs, urban centers, and sign language training programs. Engagement with international advocacy networks, particularly through the World Federation of the Deaf, and regional initiatives in the late 1990s facilitated lexical borrowing and exposure to global deaf rights discourse. Borrowed signs were culturally adapted, illustrating localization and linguistic creativity. Using the Expanded Graded Inter-generational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), by Lewis and Simons (2010), MSL is classified as Level 5, "developing," reflecting active community use with emerging but incomplete institutional support (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2023). The 2022 dictionary represents progress in corpus planning, expanding lexical documentation and supporting standardization. District-based training for hearing individuals shows growing awareness, though public interpretation services remain limited, constraining access to education, healthcare, 2 legal systems, and civic participation. Recent sign language policy research suggests that sustainable development of a sign language typically requires integrated planning across corpus, status, and acquisition domains, as well as legal recognition of the language within national frameworks (De Meulder, Murray, & McKee, 2019).Although Malawi has

taken initial steps toward curriculum development to position Malawian Sign Language (MSL) alongside Chichewa and English within the education system, the process of institutionalization remains incomplete due to limited formal recognition, inconsistent implementation across schools, and insufficient policy enforcement and resource allocation. Consistent with disability-inclusive development discourse (United Nations, 2016), the absence of accessible language services is a structural barrier to equality. Emerging scholarship emphasizes community agency as central to language vitality, social sustainability, and epistemic justice (Kusters, De Meulder, and O'Brien, 2017). The trajectory of MSL demonstrates resilience under historical suppression and contemporary structural constraint. Community ownership has been pivotal in sustaining inter-generational transmission and promoting standardization. This study provides an updated sociolinguistic assessment, contributing to scholarship on under- documented African sign languages, informing inclusive education policy, interpreter provision, and disability rights, and recognizing MSL as a linguistic and cultural resource essential for equitable participation and educational attainment in Malawi.

Algerian Sign Language: Historical emergence, regional variation, and the challenges of documentation in a postcolonial context (Hicham Abdelouafi)

Algerian Sign Language, or Lughat al-Isharat al-Jazairiyah (LIJ), 1 represents a unique case of sign language emergence and development within a complex postcolonial linguistic landscape. This paper traces the history of LIJ from its origins in French colonial Algeria (1830–1962) to its current status as an unrecognised but vibrant indigenous sign language, examining the geopolitical, educational, and sociolinguistic forces that have shaped its evolution. The history of LIJ begins in 1872, when Chargebœuf, a deaf educator from Bordeaux, established the first formal class for deaf children in Algiers, introducing French Sign Language (Langue des Signes Française, LSF) as the medium of instruction. This manualist foundation was abruptly reversed in 1887 when Mr. and Mrs. Roussière established an oralist school aligned with the 1880 Milan Congress ideology, suppressing signed communication in favour of spoken French instruction. For seventy-one years (1887–1958), this remained Algeria's sole educational institution for deaf children, serving exclusively French and European settlers until it finally opened to native Algerians in 1958—a mere four years before independence (Abdelouafi, 2024a, forthcoming). This colonial legacy fundamentally shaped LIJ's development, embedding approximately 50% LSF-derived lexicon while indigenous varieties emerged organically within Algeria's deaf communities (Abdelouafi, 2018, 2019, 2024a, 2024b, 2025). Today, LIJ exhibits significant regional variation across Algeria's vast territory, from northern urban varieties (Algiers, Oran) to southern dialects (Adrar/Touat, Laghouat, Ghardaia). These variations reflect the country's broader linguistic diversity, encompassing both Arabophone and Amazigh (Berber) cultural-linguistic groups. Varieties that have appeared in research include the LIJ of Adrar, which differs substantially from northern dialects (Abdelouafi, 2018, 2019); LIJ of Oran (Mansour, 2007); LIJ of Laghouat (Djama, 2016); and the now-endangered Algerian Jewish Sign Language (AJSL) of Ghardaia, a village sign language that survived the 1962 Jewish exodus and continues to be studied as a unique case of a sign language without its original community (Lanesman & Meir, 2012a, 2012b). Despite its vitality and daily use by thousands of deaf Algerians, LIJ remains constitutionally unrecognised, excluded from formal education, and critically under-documented. The Algerian government's standardisation efforts, including the 2017 publication of a 1,560-sign dictionary (MSNFCF, 2017),

have been developed primarily by hearing professionals with limited community consultation. These materials exhibit substantial borrowing from foreign sign systems (LSF and Arab Signs), contain inaccuracies, and have been largely rejected by native deaf signers as culturally inauthentic. The post-independence period has seen LIJ navigate multiple challenges: the Arabisation policies that elevated Modern Standard Arabic while marginalising both Tamazight and signed languages; the persistent influence of French in education and deaf associations; and the recent proliferation of foreign sign languages (LSF, various Arabic sign languages) in formal and digital spaces, creating lexical confusion and displacing indigenous variants (Djaballah & Abdelouafi, 2024). The Algerian deaf community now faces an existential threat: without 1 The Arabic acronym LIJ (Lughat al-Isharat al-Jazairiyah) was first proposed and systematically used by Abdelouafi (forthcoming) to refer to Algerian Sign Language. This Arabic-derived acronym was deliberately chosen to reflect the language's cultural and linguistic identity within Algeria, distinguishing it from French-derived names (e.g. Langue des Signes Algérienne, LSA) and avoiding confusion with other sign languages such as Argentine Sign Language (Lengua de Señas Argentina, LSA) or American Sign Language (ASL). 2 comprehensive documentation, recognition, and educational integration, younger generations risk losing their linguistic heritage to externally imposed systems (Abdelouafi, 2025). This paper draws on historical archival research, linguistic analysis of regional LIJ varieties, and ethnographic engagement with deaf communities across Algeria. It argues that LIJ's history exemplifies broader patterns of sign language emergence in postcolonial contexts, where colonial educational legacies intersect with indigenous language practices. The Algerian case illuminates critical questions about sign language transmission: How do geopolitical shifts (colonisation, independence, Arabisation) shape sign language development? What happens when standardisation efforts exclude native signers? How can documentation practices honour regional diversity while meeting practical communication needs? The paper concludes by proposing a community-centred framework for LIJ documentation and revitalisation, emphasising deaf-led language planning, comprehensive bilingual education models, and the urgent need for professional interpreter training programmes. As Algeria considers the development of an LIJ-Tamazight dictionary, the lessons from LIJ's history become increasingly relevant, not only for North Africa but for sign language communities globally navigating the tensions between preservation, standardisation, and change

Changing Signs & Signs of Change: How variation and language contact shape change in Flemish Sign Language (Margot Janssens, Jorn Rijckaert, Heidi Verhelst, Fien Andries, Inez Beukeleers, Beatrijs Wille, Hilde Nyffels, Mieke Van Herreweghe and Myriam Vermeerbergen)

In this presentation we would like to introduce a recently started project on language variation, contact and change in Flemish Sign Language (VGT), a language operating within a rapidly transforming deaf sociolinguistic ecology in the northern part of Belgium. While historically, residential deaf schools were crucial sites for the acquisition and transmission of VGT, fostering regionally distinct varieties centered around these institutions (Van Herreweghe & Vermeerbergen, 2009), since the 2000s, societal changes, such as mainstream education and the increased use of cochlear implants, have reduced opportunities for many deaf children to acquire VGT (Meurant et al., 2013). Moreover, local deaf clubs now play a less central role (De Meulder, 2008), while digital communication technologies have created new spaces for interaction across regions and age groups (Soetemans & Vermeerbergen, 2023). Furthermore, increased deaf mobility, through international events, migration, and online spaces, further exposes Flemish signers to other sign languages and

International Sign (IS) (Kusters et al., 2024). Lastly, these factors raise the question of whether VGT is converging to or diverging from the historically related LSFB (Loncke, 1986), the sign language used in the southern part of Belgium. Within this evolving landscape, regional, supra-regional, and international varieties increasingly interact, giving rise to a sociolinguistic environment in which generational and contextual differences in VGT use can be observed. While variation in VGT has been documented (Vanhecke & De Weerdt, 2004), we still lack a systematic account of how multiple, simultaneous contact pressures interact with language variation to drive language change. This project addresses this gap by asking: (1) How do regional and generational varieties of VGT change, and is there evidence of ongoing leveling or spontaneous standardization? (2) How does prolonged contact with Dutch influence VGT? (3) To what extent do VGT and LSFB converge or diverge? (4) How does exposure to other sign languages and International Sign through deaf mobility and digital communication affect (lexical) change in VGT? To answer these questions, the project combines corpus-based analyses of regional and generational VGT data with targeted qualitative methods (sociolinguistic interviews, ethnographic participant observation) as well as surveys and focus groups on language attitudes. As such, we aim to map out patterns of ongoing change, examining both structural usage and social evaluation across age groups and interactional contexts. Building on this design, we will operationalize these questions across four tightly connected lines of research. We will (1) trace regional and generational patterns of variation in order to identify loci of change and assess whether emerging supra-regional norms coexist with the maintenance of local features. We will (2) model the impact of Dutch contact, examining how social and cognitive mechanisms reveal restructuring at the level of constructions. We will (3) compare VGT and LSFB data to determine whether ongoing contact leads to structural convergence or reinforces divergence between these historically related languages. Finally, we will (4) analyse the impact of unimodal contact with other sign languages and IS, looking at use of lexical signs and constructions resulting from this international exposure, focusing on their form, meaning and communicative function, as well as usage patterns, and social evaluation across age groups and contexts. Zooming out, we hypothesize that language change in VGT is accelerated by the interaction of several factors: Intense and layered contact, changed opportunities for intergenerational transmission, the fact that only a minority of signers acquire VGT from deaf native-signing parents, and limited institutional codification and standardization. Within this setting, we expect to observe both centripetal tendencies (e.g., supraregional leveling and emergent standardization facilitated by remote communication and the decrease of deaf schools (Van Herreweghe & Vandemeulebroucke, 2016)) and centrifugal dynamics (the persistence or revalorization of local and generational features).

A window into language contact, transmission, and change: A study on personal name signs in Langue des Signes de Côte d'Ivoire (LSCI) (Angoua Tano, Erin Wilkinson and Ashley Beard)

In 1974, Reverend Andrew Foster, a Deaf African American educator, established the first school for Deaf students in Côte d'Ivoire. For more than fifty years, the École Chretienne Ivoirienne pour les Sourds (ECIS) in Abidjan has functioned not only as an educational institution but also as a central meeting point linking urban and rural Deaf communities. Through this institution, American Sign Language (ASL) has played an important role in the development of the signed language used in Côte d'Ivoire, commonly referred to as Langue des Signes de Côte d'Ivoire (LSCI). Despite this long-standing contact, the structure of LSCI remains only partially understood, particularly regarding its

historical relationship with ASL (Tano 2025). In this paper, we examine one specific domain of the lexicon personal name signs as a window into processes of language emergence, transmission, and change. Our analysis draws on a dataset of name signs collected from LSCI signers in 2025. A total of 141 tokens of name signs were documented from seven signers, of which 20 duplicate tokens were excluded, resulting in a dataset of 121 distinct name signs. These data allow us to examine the phonological organization of name signs in LSCI and to compare them with patterns described for ASL. While both systems show systematic use of initialized handshapes, movement, and body locations, our analysis reveals that the phonological patterns of LSCI name signs are not simply borrowed from ASL. Instead, they appear to have been selectively adapted and reorganized through longterm language contact. For example, the name sign used for Reverend Andrew Foster in both languages shares the initialized handshape corresponding to the letter A, reflecting the given name Andrew, and occurs in a similar location on the neck. However, the two forms differ in palm orientation and precise point of contact, illustrating how shared elements may be restructured within different phonological systems.

LSCI: Reverend Andrew Foster. **ASL**: Reverend Andrew Foster.

We argue that these patterns reflect a process of linguistic hybridization shaped by educational history, community interaction, and local linguistic practices. Rather than representing straightforward borrowing from ASL, the LSCI name sign system demonstrates how contact can generate new phonological configurations over time. By examining name sign systems across more than five decades of contact between ASL and LSCI, this study contributes to broader discussions on how sign languages emerge, transform, and stabilize through sustained interaction between Deaf communities.