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18. Researching language attitudes in signing communities

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18.1 Introduction

Language attitudes have been a central aspect of signed language research for decades, especially in the sense of countering widely held misconceptions on signed languages (Burns, Matthews, and Nolan-Conroy 2001; Hill 2012; Kusters et al. 2020a), which include the ideas that sign languages do not have grammar, are merely gesture or mime, are universal, are based on spoken languages, can only portray concrete situations, and cannot be used to express complex ideas. Following such misconceptions, linguists recognised signed languages as bona fide languages only from the 1960s, opening the way for linguistics and sociolinguistics research (Murray 2017).

Language attitudes such as these have been instrumental in the implementation of oralist educational policies intended to prevent deaf people from signing (Kusters et al. 2020a). As a result, many deaf people do not learn to sign, or only learn to later in life, and many deaf people (whether they sign or not) have internalized these negative language attitudes (Ladd 2003). On the other hand, more positive attitudes regarding sign languages support their ongoing use and transmission (Padden 1990; Hill 2012; Supalla and Clark 2014). Krausneker (2015) offers a grid of different types of ideologies on signed languages that govern attitudes relevant to signed language policy making.

While the existence and power of language attitudes has been addressed and affirmed in sign language studies and Deaf Studies¹ in different ways, work that is specifically framed as an analysis of language attitudes in signing communities is only just emerging (Kusters et al. 2020a). Examples include the work of Burns, Matthews, and Nolan-Conroy (2001), Reagan (2011), Hill (2012), Krausneker (2015), Kusters (2014), Palfreyman (2019) and the chapters in the edited volume *Sign Language Ideologies in Practice* (Kusters et al. 2020b). In Deaf Studies and sign language research, the term *language ideologies* seems to be more widely used than *language attitudes*. Several of these scholars have used the term *ideologies* in a broad way; not only including beliefs, but also focusing on emotions and practices. An important example of this is the *Sign Language Ideologies in Practice* edited volume which,

¹ More recent convention has been to not capitalize “D”, as in *Deaf*, because the capitalization of Deaf denotes a specific cultural identity, located in a Eurocentric 20th and 21st century framework, that not all deaf people identify with. *Deaf Studies* is usually capitalized by scholars in this field, to denote the academic field.

following Ryan, Giles and Sebastian's (1982) definition of language attitudes as having cognitive (beliefs), affective (emotions) and conative (practice) components, focuses on the interplay of the cognitive and conative components of language attitudes (also see Kircher and Zipp, this volume).

Deaf communities' emergence has centred around places where deaf people have lived together or gathered frequently, such as deaf schools, within large multi-generational deaf families, in large cities, and in places with high rates of hereditary deafness. These communities, and the signed languages that are used, have historically emerged in specific geographical locations around the world, rather than in relation to specific (national) spoken languages. In the title of this chapter, *signing communities* is used to foreground that signed languages are used as one of the languages in these communities, but that not everyone who forms part of these communities identifies as deaf.

Signing communities consist of very diverse groups of people who have different affiliations with signed languages and spoken languages. There are deaf and hearing heritage signers (Pichler, Lillo-Martin, and Palmer 2018) who often learnt to sign at a (residential) school for deaf children, or from their deaf parents. This group is now skewed towards the older age groups and decreasing, especially in Western countries, due to the closure of congregated deaf education settings in favour of regular education settings. On the other hand, there is an increasing number of deaf new signers (De Meulder 2018) who have a non-heritage background and sign language acquisition path. These acquisition pathways are becoming the rule rather than the exception. There further is a growing and heterogeneous group of hearing new signers with mixed investments in signed languages, such as parents of deaf children, signed language interpreters, and sign language students. Western signing communities are now witnessing hearing children with signs or a signed language in their linguistic repertoire outnumbering deaf children: Hearing children learn to sign for example in 'baby signing' courses (Pizer, Walters, and Meier 2007), from their (deaf) parents, or at school (e.g. as an elective).

In the study of language attitudes, the inclusion of hearing signers is thus inevitable. Indeed, 'if we include family members and sign language students, it is likely that a majority of those who know national sign languages are now hearing, not deaf' (Bauman and Murray 2017: 252). To be sure, this chapter does not call for a replacement of the term *deaf communities* by *signing communities*; rather the focus in this chapter is inclusive of those hearing people who sign. For example, it includes research in classrooms of hearing novice students who learn how to sign, and language portraits by hearing signers.

Signed languages often consist of a number of varieties (e.g. urban and/or rural varieties, older vs. newer generations of signers, elite vs. non-elite) that have developed as a result of social factors that shape the lives of deaf people, including those that have had an impact on spoken languages, such as geography, social segmentation, class, gender, race and so forth. These often co-exist or correspond with the abovementioned social factors that are particular to signing communities, such as the devaluing of sign languages in general, communication policies in deaf education settings, and differential embodiments (such as being DeafBlind) (Lucas and Bayley 2011; Edwards 2014; Palfreyman 2019).

Signers, like speakers, often make use of multilingual and multimodal language repertoires; especially today, giving the growing number of multilingual signers. They live and work in settings that more often than not involve language contact between signed, written, and spoken languages and may use several signed languages and spoken languages (the latter in their oral or/and written modality). Therefore, language attitudes regarding signed languages may pertain to signed languages, and/or their relationships to other languages (signed or spoken) and modalities (including speech and writing). The cognitive component of language attitudes (i.e. language ideologies, see Ryan, Giles and Sebastian 1982) involves ideas about boundaries and the vitality of signed languages, especially in terms of contact with hegemonic languages and modalities, such as spoken English and/or American Sign Language (henceforth: ASL) (see Hill 2012; Kusters 2020; McKee and McKee 2020). Scholars have studied language attitudes in relation to the above-mentioned signed language varieties; linguistic authority, authenticity and ownership; and the emergence (or development) of new sign languages and new subject-specific vocabulary (see e.g. McCaskill et al. 2011 for the African American variety of ASL).

The rest of this section outlines a number of methods that have been used in the study of language attitudes regarding signed languages. In Section 18.2, a number of implications for planning and research design are discussed including issues of researcher positionality and research ethics. In Section 18.3, some pertinent problems with regard to data analysis and interpretation are covered, more specifically issues of translation and of presenting original signed language data. In Section 18.4, a new and emerging trend in signed language attitude research is introduced: the use of visual methods such as ethnographic film and language portraits. In the three case studies that follow in Section 18.5, various methods discussed in this chapter are situated in research contexts.

18.1.1 Interviewing

Different types of interviewing can be used in the study of language attitudes in signing communities: structured, semi-structured, and ethnographic (also see Karatsareas, this volume, on semi-structured interviews). Often, interviews are combined with other methods described below (such as participant observation, focus groups, and data-elicitation with video). The data from interviews are then either analysed with the other data or presented separately (e.g. Spooner 2020). Research on sign language corpora can also include an interview component focusing on language attitudes. One of the components in the British Sign Language (henceforth: BSL) corpus project (2018) was the elicitation of language attitudes in interviews in pairs. Participants were asked questions such as on the difference between BSL and English, BSL and Signing Exact English, and perceptions of regional variations of BSL (Schembri et al. 2013). In another example of a multi-methodological study of sign language attitudes, Mitchiner (2014) used surveys and interviews to investigate the attitudes, beliefs and practices on bimodal bilingualism in ASL and English by 17 deaf families with children with a cochlear implant in North America.

18.1.2 Data-elicitation with video

Video clips of signers can be used to elicit language attitudes that are expressed through categorization of forms of signing. Hill (2012), based on Lucas and Valli (1992), conducted a study on attitudes towards sign language among deaf people in the U.S. using methods to elicit quantitative and qualitative data. He asked 74 participants (younger, older, white, black, native and non-native signers) to rate 60 videoclips of signers as ‘strong ASL’, ‘mostly ASL’, ‘mixed’, and ‘non-ASL’. In case participants were provided with social information (such as deaf/hearing family, deaf/hearing school, etc.), their perceptions of the signer’s social identity (e.g. the signer was culturally deaf, non-culturally deaf, or hearing) were a significant criterion in the participant’s evaluation of their signing skills/fluency. Hill also used video clips to elicit data by asking participants to classify if signing was ASL, Mixed, or Signed English (ASL with English structures and invented forms for English grammatical elements) and then connected these classifications to value statements. In this study, Hill investigated the ways in which the personal attributes of the signer, specifically, race, age, and signing fluency, shaped perceptions of the signer, showing that there is a correlation between the

signer's attributes and perceptions of attitudes, pointing to the risk of using different people as signing or speaking models in a study of language attitudes.

18.1.3 Focus groups or group discussions

Focus groups or discussion groups, which is when a group of participants are given a specific topic or questions to guide a discussion, have been organised on their own or as part of a larger project that for example also includes interviewing (also see Hornsby, this volume, on focus groups). Adam (2016) organized discussions in pairs or threes of elderly deaf signers of the Australian Irish Sign Language, discussing (among other themes) attitudes towards this disappearing minority language and its use in relation to the majority sign language in Australia, Australian Sign Language (henceforth: Auslan). Kusters and Sahasrabudhe (2018) organised six discussions with groups of between 30-100 deaf people in Mumbai, in a study of gesture-based communication. Discussions explored deaf people's experiences of using gestures with hearing non-signers, language attitudes towards gestures, and thoughts about the difference between gestures and signing (Indian Sign Language). By addressing larger groups rather than organising smaller focus groups, the researchers tied in with an established tradition in India (and elsewhere) of deaf club leaders and members taking the stage and addressing audiences in these clubs when wanting to explain things, to raise questions, and to discuss issues. This method does not allow for deep insights in individual attitudes, but it allows for the study language attitudes as presented in/to a large group, and responded to by others in that group.

18.1.4 Critical discourse analysis of media and policy documents

A study of archives and online media can reveal how language attitudes are institutionalised and/or impact on general perception and policies (Krausneker 2015). De Meulder, Murray, and McKee (2019) discuss how sign language legislation needs to be achieved, implemented and understood through national legislative processes taking into account local language attitudes, and how campaigns for the legal recognition of signed languages are often grounded in language attitudes about sign languages as bounded etc. (see Walsh, this volume, for a discussion of Critical Discourse Analysis of print media). For example, Conama (2020) focuses on the impact of language attitudes on the campaign for recognition of Irish Sign Language (ISL) in Ireland between 1981 and 2016. Conama uses documentation of the progress such as debates in the parliament, newspaper articles, online media, historical

accounts of Irish deaf education and government reports to identify language attitudes and their impact on policy making. Although not explicitly naming them, these studies use what is called societal treatment methods in language attitude studies (e.g. Garrett 2010). This can be observational, participant observation, ethnographic studies, and studies of sources in the public domain that display the treatment afforded languages and language varieties and their speakers within society.

18.1.5 Ethnography

Ethnography is not strictly a method but an approach that involves the examination of people and their practices within their specific context, the use of a theoretical framework to guide data analysis, and/or the development of a theory that can emerge from this analysis.

Ethnography often entails a combination of different methods, but the primary methodology is participant observation and the use of fieldnotes to document what is being observed or experienced. Participant observation means being present in various domains of life of research participants by observing them and actively engaging with them, by doing the same activities as participants, as well as having informal one-on-one/group conversations with them. This process is guided by research questions and a process of triangulation, but it also allows for other salient themes and patterns to emerge, which then further guides the process of participant observation. Participant observation is ideally suited for the study of the three components of language attitudes (cognitive, affective and conative, also see Kircher and Zipp, this volume).

Ethnography in classrooms for example, can lay bare language attitudes that are embedded in curricula. Scholars have studied language attitudes in classrooms where a sign language is taught to interpreter students, to parents of deaf children, or others, and have identified classrooms as important spaces for sign language teachers to challenge widely spread naïve or negative language attitudes regarding sign languages. In addition, certain prescriptive attitudes regarding sign language use are passed on (Snoddon 2016, 2020). Classrooms are thus spaces for students not only to acquire language, but also particular language attitudes. Classroom observations allow to catch examples of explicitly or implicitly challenging and/or ‘feeding’ language attitudes. Researchers have combined observations with interviews with students and teachers, and the analysis of textbooks and pedagogical choices encountered in the classrooms (Calton 2020; Marie 2020; Snoddon 2020).

Through ethnographic research we can study how people talk about signing in their everyday lives in various contexts, and how language attitudes in these contexts are related or in conflict (Hou and Kusters 2019). For example, Moriarty (2020a) examines sign language standardization projects in terms of attitudes towards language ownership and sign language sovereignty in Cambodia, describing the various forces at work in this setting, such as the import of ASL by a French non-governmental organisation in 1997 and the concurrent efforts to develop a national sign language. Doing ethnographic research in a number of settings in deaf communities means encountering various attitudes including those on rural versus urban varieties (Green 2014), and sign languages that are imported from abroad and reactions to this import (Cooper 2015; Moges 2015; Moriarty 2019). De Meulder has used language diaries (see case study 3) to investigate language practices, choices and ideologies of deaf and hearing signers in Flanders. She found the self-reported nature of diaries useful to understand specific factors, such as language ideologies, that drive language and modality choice (De Meulder and Birnie 2020). Multisited research can be especially enlightening in this regard by showing that there can be a range of language attitudes within a particular group of people or locations. Parks (2014) for example documents different attitudes towards ASL in Central and South America, showing that these attitudes include a variety of responses ranging from adoption of certain signs and sign languages to rejection.

Ethnography also is useful for identifying local naming, labeling and categorizing practices of signing varieties (see e.g. Green 2014). Through repeated field visits over a period of 10 years in the shared signing community of Adamorobe, Ghana, Kusters (2019) studied qualic evaluations of language: Similarities are identified between language forms on the one hand and the sensuous experience for example of objects. Through a process of repetition, these evaluations become conventionalised in language attitudes. It is only through recurrent participant observation over 10 years that the connection between these language attitudes and other discourses became clear. Longitudinal ethnography in signing communities also allows researchers to identify shifts in language attitudes (Kisch 2012; Nonaka 2014).

18.1.6 Autoethnography

Autoethnography can be used to research personal emotions and perceptions related to sign language (O'Connell 2017; Weber 2020). Weber (2020) investigates shifts in her own language attitudes throughout her life, and how these shifts in attitudes were related to the

communities she was involved in, in Saskatchewan, Canada, and Gallaudet University, U.S. She provides an autoethnographic account of her acquisition of ASL in the context of diminished access to ASL role models and the use of ASL at Gallaudet University which at the time was an educational environment primarily mediated by signed English. In her autoethnography she uses selections from her autobiography (Weber 2013), based on personal diaries, archives, interviews with family members, photographs and art works. She outlines how her language attitudes were shaped by her professional training as educator for deaf children and her acculturation as a speaking deaf person, examining changes in her own language attitudes throughout different periods of her life. Autoethnography is also a productive way to investigate language attitudes in families with deaf members (De Meulder, Kusters, and Napier, forthcoming).

18.2 Planning and research design

Doing research with deaf signers entails a number of methodological and ethical issues. For example, surveys are often nonideal, especially if they are in a written language. Some researchers have partly mitigated this by including signed videos in surveys (Smeijers et al. 2014; Young and Temple 2014). Research on language attitudes with regard to signed languages should foreground study *in* these languages rather than *of* these languages. In deaf-related research, there often is a distrust toward researchers who do not sign or are not fluent signers. Often, consent forms are not translated into a signed language and participants have no clear idea how the data will be used (Singleton, Jones, and Hanumantha 2014). The presence of researchers working in the fields of sign language linguistics and other Deaf Studies-related research not fluent in sign language also raises questions about translation, analysis, and interpretation of data. When doing research via interviews or discussions, it is crucial that these are video-recorded and that researchers stay close to the videos when analyzing data. Language attitudes can underlie the choice for particular signs or structures, and particular facial expressions that may be subtle and hard to catch or interpret for non-fluent signers and hard to lay down in translations to written languages.

Researcher positionality, and as part of this the researcher's competence in a signed language, is often not openly discussed in publications on signed languages and Deaf Studies research. It is important to reflect on how positionality may impact on the kind of language attitudes data one can generate, and how these data are interpreted. This goes far beyond competence in signed languages. Participants' positioning towards the researcher's background will impact on attitudinal statements and feelings they share with the researcher

(or not). For example, in early studies of Black ASL in the U.S., the positionality of hearing white researchers resulted in some barriers for their data collection (Woodward 1976). McCaskill (2011), as a Black deaf woman herself, was able to gain access to these communities but also faced challenges because of her affiliation with Gallaudet University, as some community members perceived Gallaudet as the ‘ivory tower’, a place where research was done, far removed from their everyday concerns.

Hou (2017) takes an intersectional perspective on her researcher positionality when studying signed language socialisation in Mexico: She reflects on how her positionality impacted and shaped her research; more particularly her deafness, gender, race, ethnicity, education, mobility, and citizenship.

Ethnography can also entail the researcher taking different positions in the study, that is, switching hats, such as in the abovementioned study on gesture and sign in India and the film *Ishaare: Gestures and Signs in India* (Kusters 2015) that was created in this project. In addition to leading the abovementioned discussion groups, Sahasrabudhe was a research participant in the sense of being one of six in-depth case studies covered in this film; at the same time he was also a research assistant in the other five case studies, doing observations and interviews (Kusters, Sahasrabudhe, and Gopalakrishnan 2016). During the research project, his language attitudes relating to gestures shifted, as well as his understanding of the difference between gestures and signs (Kusters and Sahasrabudhe 2018).

18.3 **Data analysis and interpretation**

Because transcriptions and publications are often in English, the use of sign language is often erased in data analysis and publications (Young and Temple 2014). There are ongoing challenges with translating signed languages, which do not have a widely used written form. Researchers working with sign languages often use linguistic glosses, simplified representations of individual signs. These do not capture the multidimensional and multimodal nature of signed languages (Crasborn 2015; Quer and Steinbach 2019). In written texts, particular signs are represented by these imperfect glosses, which are then detached from the actual signs (Hochgesang 2019). This problem can partially be mitigated by inserting pictures or (links to) videos of particular signs or longer signed utterances. It is also important to consider additional ways of dissemination such as via articles in signed languages, vlogs, documentary film, ethnographic film. In the study of language attitudes, it is crucial to capture and closely analyse how people sign when talking about language and

communication: Attitudes may be expressed in subtle facial grammar, or particular choice of lexicon, and aspects of those may be untranslatable.

Sharing excerpts of original data via these publication venues may not be an option when data is deemed sensitive by participants or researchers: When data is video-recorded it means that participants are identifiable in this data, and there may be issue of anonymity and confidentiality coming with the challenge of researching in signing communities that are often tightly networked (Singleton, Jones, and Hanumantha 2014; Hill 2015). To use face-blurring technology in some way would remove facial grammar, an important aspect of signed languages, and people may be still identifiable by the particular signing styles.

The study of sign language attitudes and interpretation of data is in itself political, especially because signed languages are still devalued in deaf education settings and policy arenas; also, there is a history and current phenomenon of hearing researchers who themselves demonstrate negative attitudes towards sign languages and deaf people in their research (Robinson and Henner 2017). These attitudes then become canonized as academic ideologies in publications that inform the practices and policies of educators and policymakers (Kusters et al. 2020a).

18.4 New or emerging trends

An emerging trend in the study of language attitudes related to signed languages, and in Deaf Studies (O'Brien and Kusters 2017), is the use of visual methods in line with the visual turn in applied language studies (Kalaja and Pitkänen-Huhta 2018) and Deaf Studies (O'Brien and Kusters 2017). An example is the use of language portraits, empty whole-body silhouettes in or around which research participants color or draw languages, language variants or other aspects or modalities of communication. Usually, the drawing/coloring of a portrait is accompanied or succeeded by a verbal (or written) narrative explaining and commenting on the portrait (Busch 2012, 2018). The method is now also used in the study of signed languages and/or deaf participants (Krausneker 2005; Kusters and De Meulder 2019; De Meulder, Kusters, and Napier, *forthcoming*). Language portraits lend themselves well to investigating the affective component of language attitudes because narratives accompanying language portraits very often contain the expression of emotions related to language varieties. They also give insight in the cognitive component (i.e. language ideologies), for example they give insight into how people collapse or separate languages and language varieties and

modalities by mapping them on the body (Kusters and De Meulder 2019). The use of language portraits to study language attitudes is explained in Section 18.5.3.

Another key example of visual methods is the use of film and video which has a long history in ethnography (Pink 2013). Use of film and video in linguistic ethnography allows researchers to attend to deaf people's embodiment, sensory experiences, and perceptions as they influence communication strategies and modalities in situated encounters, within the material and physical settings in which communicative encounters take place (Kusters, Sahasrabudhe, and Gopalakrishnan 2016; Moriarty 2020b). The use of video captures people's deployment of diverse visual and tactile resources, and how deaf people's communicative practices are shaped by differential sensorial access to certain communicative modalities (De Meulder et al. 2019). Filmmaking allows for movement away from lingual bias (Moriarty 2020b), which is the predisposition to treat signing as primary in deaf communication and the exclusive analytical focus on the production of signs and grammatical features. In this respect, filmmaking can connect the study of the conative component of language attitudes and how language is conceptualized and experienced, by including real-life interactions as well as interview quotes. The video that is produced can then be used during interviews and/or discussion groups to elicit commentary on attitudes, beliefs and ideologies about signed languages (Kusters, Sahasrabudhe, and Gopalakrishnan 2016). The case studies presented in Sections 18.5.1 and 18.5.2 expand on this.

In some cases, language practices are studied in the frame of a study that focuses on language attitudes. Recording with video can be disruptive in the research setting, unless smaller, less intrusive equipment is used, such as a smartphone or a smaller video camera, which allows for more natural data as people become comfortable with the camera's presence (Moriarty 2020b; De Meulder, Kusters, and Napier, forthcoming).

18.5 Case study: Language attitudes in deaf tourism in Bali

My current research project (author 3) explores language ideologies and languaging practices in international encounters, specifically, deaf tourism. In deaf mobility, there is often significant contact between various national and local sign languages. As deaf people travel and interact with people who use different national or local sign languages, they often acquire new linguistic resources in a short time, such as the adoption of new signs from other sign languages or the blending of different sign languages (Moriarty 2020b). This sometimes leads to expressions of concern about the vitality of certain sign languages.

As they engaged in deaf tourism in Bali, many deaf tourists intentionally sought out communicative experiences with local deaf people, learning and using new signs in national and local sign languages. The languages included Indonesian Sign Language (henceforth: BISINDO), and to a lesser extent, a hyperlocalized sign language, Kata Kolok, a sign language used by deaf and hearing people in a village in north Bali, and spoken languages, specifically, Indonesian and/or English. Mobile deaf people such as tourists or development workers carry with them ideas about the vulnerability of sign languages outside of Europe and North America. These attitudes lead to languaging practices, such as learning BISINDO before visiting a school for deaf children in Bali or communicating in gestures to avoid using ASL.

The fluid conditions of and the practices involved in deaf tourism shaped the methodologies for data collection that I used in the field, including participant observation, field notes, video recordings, visual methods for data elicitation showing a video made by a tourist about Bengkulu to the residents of Bengkulu and eliciting their reactions to the video, the collection of artefacts such as Instagram photos, and so forth. In this section, I focus on the use of ethnography to collect data on language ideologies and practices (see Section 18.1.5 above).

After a year of online data collection on deaf tourism, I conducted seven months of fieldwork in Indonesia. During fieldwork, I found a smartphone exceptionally useful for the documentation of people, places, and language practices, especially on the move. The mobility of this project's participants necessitated nimble methodology with light, easily portable equipment that could capture fleeting data. I used a notes app on my smartphone for jottings, as well as its camera for video and photographs to record moments in the field for later descriptive writing up of the interactions and discourses I observed.

Participant observation in conjunction with interviews led me to insights regarding certain moralities and stances about the use of a hegemonic sign language, such as Auslan and ASL, in settings outside of their national contexts. For example, I accompanied a tour group composed of tourists from the United Kingdom and France to a school for the deaf in Denpasar, Bali, where we were greeted at the entrance by a Balinese teacher, who was deaf himself. He welcomed us to tour the school but before we went in, gave us specific instructions not to sign in our national sign languages or International Sign, as not to 'confuse' the children with our foreign signs. He told us that he did not want the children to learn 'wrong' signs from us. He instructed us to sign to him directly, and then he would translate into BISINDO for the children. Observing this encounter, I realized that this teacher

believed that exposure to foreign sign languages was a threat to the integrity of the indigenous sign languages in Bali. Later, I followed up on this observation in an interview, and the teacher explained to me that he was concerned about the spread of hegemonic sign languages in his country.

The language attitudes I observed in deaf tourist encounters in Indonesia varied from context to context. In a tour group of mostly young, highly mobile deaf Europeans, most of whom knew some ASL, there were less overt expressions of negativity towards ASL, as compared to the abovementioned school for deaf children. In a different tour group, comprised of older people from Australia, some tourists expressed concern about the possibility of ‘corrupting’ BISINDO by using Auslan with the school children. In some contexts, tourists of different nationalities viewed the teaching and learning of signs from their national sign languages as a sign of conviviality and cosmopolitanism – but this was within a mostly homogenous group of deaf people from countries with established sign languages.

The process of learning new signs as an enjoyable and convivial experience was not experienced by everyone. It was not an equally accessible opportunity, such as in the case of a new signer from Germany who was somewhat vexed by her difficulties understanding and using International Sign with the other members of her ten-day multilingual tour group. As one of the stops on their itinerary, the group visited the Monkey Forest in Ubud, a popular tourist site. There, she saw hearing people speaking German and she excitedly left the deaf group to converse with the German-speakers in speech.

As I accompanied various tour groups, I observed conversations and languaging practices that revealed certain attitudes about sign language contact in tourism. I followed up on my observations with interviews, which then revealed more insight into language attitudes in deaf tourism, such as the desire to learn new signs in a new national sign language or International Sign. Observations of conversations between tourists of different nationalities during a tour led to the insight that in transnational encounters, deaf people often engage in metalinguistic conversations, comparing certain signs from their native signed languages and speculating about the origins of certain signs, and/or the influence of particular hegemonic sign languages, especially ASL and BSL, on less widely used sign languages.

18.6 Case study: Attitudes towards International Sign

I (author 1) study all three components (cognitive, conative, and affective) of language attitudes on International Sign (henceforth: IS). IS takes place when signers of different (sign) linguistic backgrounds come together, and its use is variable and dependent on the geographical, political, social, cultural and linguistic context in which it occurs and the backgrounds of interlocutors. It often incorporates signs from national sign languages, as well as fingerspelling and mouthing in different spoken languages, but also showcases a higher rate of iconicity than is often the case in national sign languages (Rosenstock 2008). There are studies of conventionalised (Whynot 2016) and less conventionalised uses of IS (for unconventionalised IS, see Zeshan 2015; Byun et al. 2018).

In international deaf gatherings, a complex set of language attitudes circulates regarding IS. Examples are perspectives on the role of iconicity and gestures, ASL and English (in mouthings, fingerspelling, writing) in IS which in turn influences people's signing. Opinions about the use of lexicon from ASL and of English mouthings and fingerspelling in IS vary widely, going from resistance to acceptance (Kusters 2020). Facial expressions and iconicity are said to be central to IS but also cause culturally related misunderstandings.

Between 2017 and 2019, I engaged in 7 different case studies, accompanied by a deaf camera team, since we are making an ethnographic film on language attitudes in relation to IS. One of these cases is the Frontrunners13 group in Denmark. Frontrunners is an international deaf education course, where the language policy mandates IS and written English.

In September 2017 we filmed the arrival of 17 new Frontrunners travelling from Brazil, Jordan, Togo, South Korea, Belgium, France, Denmark, Spain, Ireland, Norway, Italy, Czech Republic, and USA. We recorded the early stages of IS use in this group: how people communicated, rephrased or explained when the other did not understand, brokered, and proffered spontaneous remarks about their experience of this communication process. I also did individual interviews about perspectives on IS with 10 Frontrunners and 2 teachers. The last day, I organized a group discussion on IS, on the same themes as the earlier organized focus groups.

We returned for a week in May 2018. The last day of the May field work, we showed a 35-minute film based on the recordings of interactions, interviews and focus group made in

September (see Kusters 2018 for excerpts). When we showed this montage to the group it was received with laughter and surprise. After the showing of the film, people reflected on changes of signing in the group, and on the utterances in the film, referring to concrete examples in the film. They talked about the use of fingerspelling (now less used in general), mouthings (some people still use mouthings from other languages such as Portuguese and French), and ASL (it was said that ASL is used less in some contexts and by some people, but also more in other occasions).

Examples of utterances include: ‘I now understand that English is not essential for IS, contrary to what I thought before’, ‘Oh, I used a lot of ASL, and now I don’t, because people here told me not to, and I can better separate ASL from IS now’, ‘Now I feel IS is like *my* language, back then it wasn’t, even though I could sign in IS’, ‘Back then, I found fingerspelling in English incredibly hard and it’s still like that even though I expected I would significantly improve my English here’, ‘While in September I thought IS was 60 per cent ASL, now I don’t think that anymore’, ‘I thought abundant facial expressions are absolutely central to IS but now I think that’s not necessarily the case’.

People reflected on their own signing, on other’s signing, and on the specific variety of IS used in the Frontrunners group. They discussed the question of who influences IS use in the group and if there is a particular ‘Frontrunners13 IS’. They also reflected on changes in signing styles, and changes in language attitudes compared to September.

Although I had a list of themes and questions to be covered after the film screening, a rich discussion unfolded unprompted. Ethnographic film on language attitudes helps people reflect and to have a discussion on their own terms, yet without going off-topic. Certain themes that were covered in-depth were themes central for the IS experience of the Frontrunners, such as brokering in IS (for each other) in the classroom.

18.7 Case study: Attitudes towards Flemish Sign Language in Flanders

I (author 2) used language portraits (henceforth: LPs) as part of a larger mixed-methods study exploring the language practices, choices, motivations and ideologies of deaf and hearing signers in Flanders, Belgium, and how these are linked to the sociolinguistic vitality of Flemish Sign Language (Vlaamse Gebarentaal, henceforth: VGT). Apart from LPs, I used interviews and language diaries (De Meulder and Birnie 2020). The participants were ten deaf and two hearing signers, ages 18-62. Some of the participants were heritage signers

while others were new signers. They all used at least VGT and Dutch in their everyday lives. An initial interview entailed participants narrating a language biography in which they were given the opportunity to reflect on their language learning trajectories and linguistic practices, and the purpose of the language diary was explained. After participants returned their diary, a second interview was planned to reflect on the diary entries, to allow for additional questions and for participants to produce a LP and subsequent narrative, which was filmed. I decided to use LPs to address the limitations of vitality research that is often focused on language dominance and language competition (Lamarre 2013) and because the visual aspect of the method seemed to be well suited to the kind of data I wanted to generate. Some of these portraits and parts of narratives can be found in Kusters and De Meulder (2019).

I asked participants to think about the languages/modalities they use now, used in the past or hoped to use in the future, languages/modalities they associated with specific persons or places, or other ways to express themselves; how they felt about them; which colour they would attribute them, and which part of the body they associated with them.

All narratives were in VGT except for two cases – one hearing participant, the mother of a deaf child, preferred to express herself in Dutch, as did one deaf new signer participant. For the purposes of analysis and writing, the narratives were translated into Dutch but in the process of analysis and dissemination I stayed close to the videos, going back and forth between transcript, portrait and video. My own positionality as a Flemish deaf woman meant that I shared being deaf, and some lived language experiences, with some participants. This probably impacted positively on the depth of the narratives.

Language portraits were useful to give insight into the affective and cognitive component of language attitudes. Many participants focused on emotions (such as anxiety, pleasure, pain, stress, joy, or fear) regarding signing and the multilingual experience, related to particular societal or interactional contexts and to aspirations, desires and memories. These emotions were often linked to specific body parts such as the heart but also the belly and throat. Referring to emotions is common in LP descriptions elsewhere, but my portraits also included emotions connected to the particular experience of being a deaf signer. For deaf signers, language-related emotions, scars, and desires are strongly connected to language modalities. In their LPs, participants for example included frustrations about being forced to speak or not understanding spoken language, or expressed their desire to learn new signed languages. The absence of a language modality in one's repertoire or the late addition to it is also important in this context, indicated by deaf new signers narrating about learning/using

VGT, and other deaf participants narrating and drawing about the absence of signs in their early lives or their recent establishment of semiotic preferences.

The cognitive component of language attitudes was illustrated for example by participants collapsing or separating languages and language varieties and modalities by mapping them on the body. Interestingly, the signed and spoken modalities were not represented on the LPs by a simple binary with signed languages always being connected to the hands or eyes and spoken languages to the mouth or throat. The LPs represent a much more complex picture: Signed and spoken languages can be placed all over the body and outside of the body in different relationships to other signed and spoken languages (the latter in the spoken or written modalities). Grouping languages as part of the modality of signing or speaking was one way participants configured the relationship between different languages – other ways were grouping languages along geographical location or context of use, or placing them next to each other to indicate language contact (between signed and spoken language or between two signed languages) (Kusters and De Meulder 2019).

The usefulness of this method to generate data about language attitudes was particularly in the combination of methods. The interviews and diaries focused more on the cognitive and conative component of language attitudes. In the interviews, participants talked about their language beliefs and ideologies. The diaries gave insight into how the daily routines of participants were related to specific language practices, and the self-reported nature of the diaries generated data about participants' language beliefs. The portraits were the most useful to generate data about the affective component of language attitudes. In fact, compared to the individual interviews held in advance of the LPs, the LPs gave a far more individual perspective than these interviews. While in interviews people tend to follow more what is expected from them (affected by social desirability and/or acquiescence bias), the LP allows them to focus on their idiosyncratic repertoires and highly personal experiences and desires. This is significant, because deaf people are often seen as a monolithic group, a collective (Ladd 2003). Also, in discourses on the positive aspects of multilingualism, people's struggle with certain languages or modalities is sometimes silenced and the LP can give access to those feelings without participants becoming overwhelmed by them.

Suggested further readings

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