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## Language Portraits: Investigating Embodied Multilingual and Multimodal Repertoires

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## Language Portraits: Investigating Embodied Multilingual and Multimodal Repertoires

*Annelies Kusters & Maartje De Meulder*

**Abstract:** In this article, we discuss the use of language portraits (LP) as a research method to investigate the embodied multilingual repertoires of people who use both spoken and signed languages. Our discussion is based on two studies in which most participants were deaf (one study also included hearing participants). We primarily offer a methodological contribution to the discussion around LP, since we argue that the study of linguistic repertoires of signers takes the multimodal aspect of the method to a new level. Indeed, by separating modalities (speech, signing, writing), grouping languages in different ways, and mapping them on the LP, the LP discussed in this article represent multimodal languaging more explicitly than in previous studies. Furthermore, by locating particular signs on the LP, several participants literally mapped their body when signing and gesturing in their narratives, thus performing and *becoming* their language portrait. We suggest that the study of body language (signing/gesturing/pointing) in the verbal narrations accompanying the LP thus expands the multimodal aspect of the analysis of LP.

**Key words:** linguistic repertoire; deaf; multilingualism; sign language; multimodality

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## 1. Introduction

LP are empty whole-body silhouettes in or around which research participants color or draw languages, language variants or other aspects or modalities of communication (see Figure 1 for an example of an empty silhouette and further in the article for completed drawings). Usually, the drawing/coloring of a LP is accompanied or succeeded by a verbal (or written) narrative explaining and commenting on the portrait.

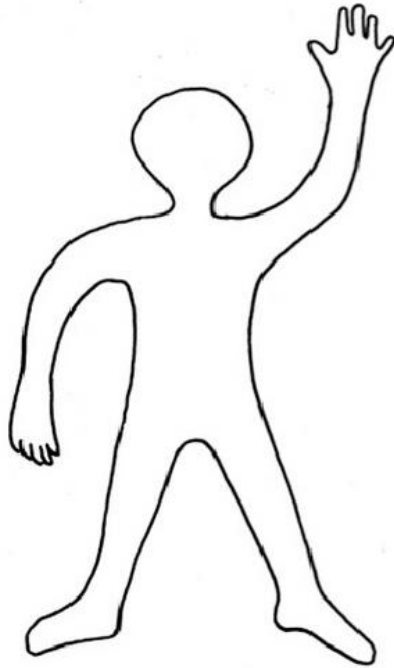


Figure 1: Silhouette used in this study [1]

The use of LP in applied language studies is in line with the concept of a visual turn (KALAJA & PITKÄNEN-HUHTA, 2018) and the focus on multilingual individuals' lived experiences and how they make sense of their language trajectories, language learning, practices and use. Often, a combination of methods is used including both textual/verbal and visual data (CHIK, 2018; DRESSLER, 2014; PIETIKÄINEN et al., 2008; SALO & DUFVA, 2018). As a research method, LP were initially utilized by KRUMM and JENKINS (2001) for exploring language awareness in multilingual children. Their adoption has since been popularized by BUSCH (2012, 2018) who used LP as a research method in multilingual schools in Austria and South Africa, as well as in other contexts, e.g., teacher training, psychotherapy and with students and participants in second language (L2) or foreign language courses. So far, the method has been utilized in different contexts or groups including migrant children (KRUMM & JENKINS, 2001), foreign language teaching (WOLF, 2014), indigenous language groups in Australia (SINGER & HARRIS, 2016), teacher education (COFFEY, 2015; LAU, 2016), family language policy (OBOJSKA & PURKARTHOFER, 2018) and bilingual education for deaf children in Vienna (KRAUSNEKER, 2005). [2]

The use of LP allows and aids researchers to see languages as embodied, experienced and historically lived. The human body can be viewed as a container and/or channel for languages (COFFEY, 2015). Depending on the prompts used, LP can also include languages that participants hope to learn, were not able to learn, or have stopped using. LP offer an alternative to the conceptualization of languages as first language (L1) and L2, native speakers, majority vs. minority language and the order of learnt languages (BUSCH, 2018). These terms are not necessarily how research participants frame the languages they use, and do not tell us much about the subjective, emotional relationships with languages which are central to personal experiences of language use and language learning (KRAMSCH, 2009; PAVLENKO, 2012). [3]

As BUSCH (2017) proposes, LP help to explore the *lived experience of language*. She approaches the linguistic repertoire as "a hypothetical structure, which evolves by experiencing language in interaction on a cognitive and on an emotional level and is inscribed into corporal memory" (BUSCH, 2012, p.521). We adopt the now widely used term "linguaging" to describe the flexible use of the repertoire. KUSTERS, SPOTTI, SWANWICK and TAPIO (2017) broaden the notion of *linguistic* repertoire to that of the *semiotic* repertoire, which not only includes (named) languages but also other semiotic resources such as gestures, facial expressions, and the use of images and objects in communication. Doing so, their approach to language is both multilingual and multimodal, including input from sign language studies, gesture studies and spoken language research, with a focus on the body, the senses and their potentialities and constraints. Such constraints include sensorial asymmetries such as hearing or not hearing. [4]

LP have been called a multimodal research method because they combine drawing and coloring with narratives (BUSCH, 2018). However, to date, the narratives in themselves seem to have largely been treated as unimodal and linear phenomena, resulting in approaching LP and the narratives as if they were opposites that complement each other. For example, BUSCH writes:

"In the visual mode, meaning is constituted by pictorial elements such as lines, contrasts, colors, areas, surfaces. Although narrations are structured in a linear and sequential way, the visual mode steers one's vision toward the whole (the *Gestalt*) and toward the relationality of the parts. Although the verbal mode favors diachronic continuity and synchronic coherence, in the visual mode contradiction, fractures, overlappings, and ambiguities can also remain unsolved" (2012, p.518). [5]

We argue that the study of multimodal, multilingual repertoires of signers takes the multimodal aspect of the method to a new level. Here we use "multimodality" in the way sign language researchers have done, encompassing speech, signing/gesturing, and writing. By separating these modalities, grouping languages in different ways and mapping them on the LP, the LP discussed in this article represent multimodal languaging more explicitly than is generally the case with LP. Furthermore, by locating particular signs on the LP, several participants literally mapped their body on it, in ways not yet documented in LP drawn by users of spoken languages. In the literature on LP there is often no or minimal information about how the narratives were recorded; we often can only guess if they were audio-recorded or video-recorded. In our own research, we found that people not only map forms of communication on the LP but also on their own body by signing and gesturing in their narratives, thus performing and *becoming* their LP. We argue that the study of body language and signing/gesturing/pointing in the verbal narrations accompanying the LP could make the analysis more multi-modal. This is also the reason that this article is multimodal, consisting of written text, figures and links to (subtitled) videos. [6]

In this article we explore the different multimodal aspects of LP and the accompanying narratives, illustrated by examples from 23 LP collected from two studies. We evaluate the different prompts used in each study and how they result in different LP, and reflect on potentials and limitations of the use of LP in research with deaf signers. [7]

We will begin with describing the two studies and how LP fit into the larger methodology, providing four LP by way of example (Section 2). Subsequently we analyze several aspects of these four examples, as well as several other LP, the meaning of particular body parts and the configuration of the portraits (e.g., how features are grouped or arranged) (Section 3). In Section 4 we discuss and summarize how our use of the method expands on earlier approaches. [8]

## 2. Doing Language Portraits with Deaf and Hearing Multilingual Signers

### 2.1 Two studies, twenty-three language portraits

In each study, one by KUSTERS, hereinafter referred to as Study 1 and the second by DE MEULDER, hereinafter referred to as Study 2, LP have been used as part of a larger multiple-methods (linguistic ethnographic) study. The focus of Study 1 is on international deaf communication (specifically linked to International Sign [IS]) and Study 2 entails the investigation of sociolinguistic sign language vitality (specifically linked to Flemish Sign Language [*Vlaamse Gebarentaal*, VGT]). For each study, LP were linked to a larger data set. Both researchers are Flemish deaf women, which entails a specific positionality vis-a-vis our research participants. We suspect that being deaf and sharing some lived language experiences with participants (e.g., signing on an everyday basis, lack of exposure to sign language as a child, experiencing barriers when using or accessing spoken language) impacted the depth of the narratives. Being known as researchers in the Flemish and international deaf community also facilitated access to participants. In this article, examples from Study 1 will be marked "\*", examples from Study 2 will be marked "\*\*." By showing LP from two different groups of participants in two different studies, we clearly demonstrate the situated nature of this method. Table 2 gives an overview of the participants from Study 1 mentioned in this article, and Table 3 gives an overview of the Study 2 participants. [9]

Study 1 was part of a larger project investigating IS. IS occurs when signers with different linguistic backgrounds meet. Its use is variable and dependent on the geographical, political, social, cultural and linguistic context in which it occurs and the backgrounds of the

interlocutors. IS often incorporates signs from various national sign languages. The LP were used in the context of [Frontrunners](#), a 9-month international deaf education course in Denmark with new participants every year since 2005, and where the language policy mandates use of IS and written English. The study took place during the first week and one of the last weeks of the 13th iteration of the program. KUSTERS used participatory video, focus groups and ethnographic filmmaking when engaging with the whole group of students. Seven out of the 17 students of the 2017-2018 group, as well as the four teachers, were involved in individual case studies entailing interviews and linguistic elicitation, and in the second field work stint (i.e., end of the 9 month course) also LP (see Table 1). These seven students are from South-Korea, Spain, Ireland, the US, Jordan, the Netherlands, and Brazil (age 19 to 33), while the teachers are from Denmark, Finland, Belgium and New Zealand (age 28 to 56). The aim of the study was to see if, where and how the Frontrunners course participants and their teachers placed IS in their LP and, for them, how IS related to their other languages.

September 2017 (first field work stint)	May 2018 (second field work stint)
Group: Focus group Ethnographic filmmaking	Group: Discussion of ethnographic film Creating participatory videos + discussion of the videos
Individual (10 students, 4 teachers) Individual interview Linguistic elicitation	Individual: (7 students, 4 teachers) Retrospective interviews Linguistic elicitation Language portraits

Table 1: Frontrunners study research methods [10]

Study 2 included the use of LP 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 VGT. Apart from LP, DE MEULDER used interviews and language diaries (DE MEULDER & BIRNIE, submitted). The participants were ten deaf and two hearing signers based in Flanders, age 18-62. This is a much broader range of participants than in many other studies. Indeed, KALAJA and PITKÄNEN-HUHTA (2018) urged for visual methods in applied linguistics research to be used in a broader range of contexts (i.e., not just education) and a broader age range (i.e., not just young people and teachers). 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 a 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. LP were used to surpass the limitations of vitality research that is often focused on language dominance and language competition (LAMARRE, 2013). Indeed, with the use of LP we do not focus on the predominance of language use when comparing one language to another. [11]

Both studies used the silhouette of the abstract [gingerbread-man](#) (see Figure 1). This is a silhouette with little gender-specific details and no clothing, but also not "naked" (e.g., no toes are visible) (BUSCH, 2018). Some participants in both studies drew eyes, ears, hair, a mouth, a heart, clothes (mostly pants), symbols (e.g., a spiral, arrows), or objects (e.g., suitcase, balloon or globe). One participant changed the direction of the face so that it looked sideways (see Figure 5). Without representation of any specific body movement, the posture implies a dynamic, writes BUSCH. Indeed, in both studies there were participants who interpreted the raised hand as "signing" (e.g., symbolizing the first sign language that was learnt) or as a hand reaching into a different world.

Name	Country
Hyemi	Korea
Mark	New Zealand
Aline	Brazil
Filip	Belgium

Esther	Spain
Majdi	Jordan
David	US
Ole	Denmark

Table 2: Study 1 participants mentioned in this article

Name	Age
Alexander	30
Delphine	30
Lena <sup>H</sup>	23
Ludo	62
Marieke	30
Sam	32
Sarah <sup>H</sup>	37
Diane	56
Stijn	30

Table 3: Study 2 participants mentioned in this article. They all reside in Flanders, Belgium. Hearing participants are marked "<sup>H</sup>" [12]

## 2.2 Prompts

LP as a method are highly sensitive to variation in instructions (CHIK, 2018), and prompts are informed by particular research questions and theoretical frameworks. SALO and DUFVA (2018) asked participants to mark the different languages they knew, linking them to different colors or symbols. COFFEY (2015, p.504) asked participants to "call to mind the people and places that they associate with their different languages, and to reflect on their emotional responses to the languages in their repertoire [and then] to imagine these emotional responses as colors." These prompts thus align with the named or bounded languages paradigm as well as the idea of linking one language with one color. BUSCH (2018, p.7) criticized this approach, arguing that such simplifications of "complex heteroglossic constellations (...)" could result in an undesired reduction of complexity." [13]

In Study 1, influenced by a prompt used by BUSCH (2018), people were asked to draw languages or modalities that were *important* to them. As a result, some of the participants therefore deliberately excluded several languages they were fluent in. In Study 2, following BUSCH's (2016) use of a more flexible prompt, DE MEULDER 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 color they would attribute to them and which part of the body they associated with them. In Study 2, participants were allowed to use the given silhouette, to draw a new one, to draw a second one and to draw inside or outside the figure. [14]

In Study 1, KUSTERS asked the participants to tag/label the colors they used with written terms, while DE MEULDER did not do so in Study 2, in order to stay away from the bounded language paradigm. However, several of the participants in Study 1 did not tag languages as bounded, but instead described actions (such as "run"), or modalities (e.g., "sign"). [15]

These prompts reflect the aim of the studies: the main aim of Study 2 was to explore language biographies and aspirations, while the aim of Study 1 was to investigate how one specific form of communication (IS) was placed within multilingual repertoires of internationally mobile deaf signers. The slightly different prompts in each study, in combination with the different research contexts, resulted in different LP: Study 1 participants mostly stayed within the contours of the silhouette and colored the whole figure or many sections of it, treating the body as a container of languages, while Study 2 participants were less inclined to color in sections of the silhouette and many of them drew outside of the

figure, thus situating the body within their environment. When the portrait was finished, participants were asked to explain it. Both the process of drawing and the narrative were filmed. [16]

Most participants easily understood the purpose of the LP and what they were expected to do. However, some participants required significantly more explanation. Others understood the task in technical terms but did not understand the purpose. These were older participants (50+) and deaf participants from Study 2 who were still learning to sign or for whom VGT was not the language they were most proficient in or felt the most comfortable with and who could be described as "new signers" (DE MEULDER, 2018). For the older participants, it is reasonable to assume that this is mostly linked to limited exposure to discourses about VGT during their formative school years. Conversely, one 18 year-old deaf new signer participant from Study 2 remarked that he found it hard to link feelings to language or communication. Additionally, for him there was the language barrier of not being fluent enough in VGT to narrate the portrait well. This was in contrast with the Frontrunners context where LP were carried out after nine months of regular metalinguistic reflection, for example in classes and workshops on bilingualism, multilingualism and language learning. [17]

### 2.3 Narrative

Most researchers consider the combination of the LP and narratives as essential, although not every researcher asks for it (e.g., LUNDELL, 2010). BUSCH (2016) regards the LP and the narrative as one data set: "As a multimodal method, the language portrait provides two sets of data that permit inferences to be drawn about how speakers interpret their linguistic repertoire: a visual one and a narrative one. Meaning is created through both modes; one is neither the translation nor simply the illustration of the other" (BUSCH, 2016, p.8). While narratives in most other research studies working with LP seem to be predominantly verbal, COFFEY (2015) asked participants to write a text to accompany their LP (but not all participants did so)—as did BUSCH and BUSCH (2008). In Study 1 and in Study 2 the narratives (which succeeded the LP) were in IS and in VGT, respectively, except for two cases. One hearing participant in Study 2, the mother of a deaf child, preferred to express herself in Dutch, as did one deaf new signer participant. For these participants, a VGT/Dutch interpreter simultaneously interpreted the participants' narratives and interpreted any questions in VGT back to them in Dutch. For some participants in Study 1, the narrative was rather succinct, while for other participants in Study 2, the narrative accompanying the portrait led to a whole new conversation sometimes lasting over one hour. This was especially the case with three couples who were interviewed and who watched each other's narrative and commented upon them. [18]

When participants finished their narrative, in some cases additional questions were asked of participants, for example because a part of the narrative was not clear or because we wished to have more explanation about the use of a specific color, symbol, or location in the LP. This sometimes resulted in changes or additions to the portrait. Some participants, in both studies, while signing their narrative or after having finished it, realized they had forgotten or omitted something and asked if they could add this. [19]

In most analyses of LP, the portrait is treated as a finished product and the narrative as subsequent to the LP (though see SALO & DUFVA, 2018 for an example of a participant commenting on her portrait *while* drawing it). The sequence of drawing and coloring, and the amount of time people take between additions, can be meaningful in itself, as in the following example involving Alexander, a hard of hearing participant in Study 2 who was interviewed in a coffee house where the baristas know some signs, hence speech was not used in interactions with them:

"I realize I forgot one thing in my portrait, can I change that? Well, I need to be honest (*laughs*). I realized it too late. (*takes a red pen and draws ears*) Yes, sometimes I hear Dutch and other languages. Well, it has to be correct doesn't it? I didn't realize before because it was quiet here [in the coffee house] and I'm not wearing my hearing aid now. But someone just shouted something and I heard. I didn't keep this from you or anything, I just wasn't aware. I didn't wear my hearing aid because you are deaf and because I know I can use gestures here (*laughs*)." [20]

This example illustrates the effect of the environment (sudden noises, a sign/gesture-friendly environment) and the researcher's effect on the drawing of and additions to the portrait and on the narrative, e.g., the decision not to wear hearing aids when interacting with us because

it was not deemed necessary, and the statement "I didn't keep this from you or anything." Indeed, BUSCH (2018, p.7) stated:

"We do not understand the language portrait, therefore, as a representation of the individual language repertoire 'as it is', but as a situational and context-bound production that is created in interaction between the participants, framed by the specifications (silhouette, prompts for drawing and commenting, range of colors, etc.) and the setting." [21]

For the purposes of analysis and writing, the narratives from Study 2 were translated into Dutch and those from Study 1 translated into English, but in the process of analysis and dissemination we both stayed close to the videos, going back and forth between transcript, portrait and video. We also included the subtitled videos in this article<sup>1)</sup> and in presentations (see Figure 2), for which we obtained the participants' consent.



Figure 2: Screenshot of subtitled video with quote [22]

## 2.4 Four language portraits

Below are examples of four different LP, two from each study. The narratives are not presented in their entirety but as selected excerpts. We chose these four examples because of the variety they display in terms of talking about language(s) and the ways participants configure the relationship between languages, different aspects of languaging, and their bodies. [23]

### Hyemi\*

Hyemi\* (34) is from South-Korea. She attended deaf schools until she was 20 (then she enrolled in university). She uses Korean Sign Language and written Korean and knows a bit of written Japanese and English. She first learnt IS from Koreans who had attended the Frontrunners course in previous years.

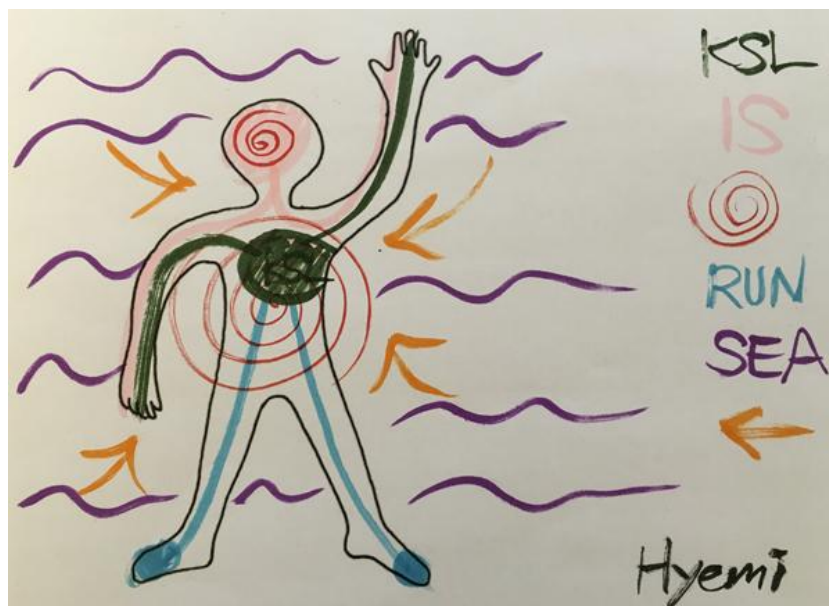


Figure 3: Hyemi's LP (see <https://vimeo.com/320747737> for the video<sup>2)</sup>)



Hyemi:	Green ( <i>pointing at LP</i> ) means I am proficient in Korean Sign Language [KSL]. ( <i>Pointing at LP</i> ) IS, which I am learning, is pink.
Researcher:	Why is KSL on your heart?
Hyemi:	KSL is the language I've used since birth and is in my heart/chest.
Researcher:	Why is KSL on your arm too?
Hyemi:	Because of signing. IS is on my head and on my arm too. That is the same ( <i>pointing at LP</i> ). The other thing is running—because I never stop signing, I don't stand still ... I continue signing and am active like running around. ( <i>Pointing at LP</i> ) I drew a spiral because of the circulation that I have in my body. When I see a person signing to me, it stirs around in my upper body, mixing with my own feelings and finally I sign/express myself and the other person takes in my signing in the same way, mixing with their own feelings. The spiraling is in my upper body and head simultaneously. A repetitive process that goes on and on. ( <i>Pointing at LP</i> ) Arrows show who I am, how my signs are received by others and how others sign to me, and how my signing comes back to me. This is how I learn. ( <i>Pointing at LP</i> ) Water—I used purple water instead of blue water because purple is a great color meaning how there is not one target but that there are vast possibilities/infinity. I dive into purple water and we can exchange and sign away ... I'm deaf. Above the water there are hearing people and under the water belongs to deaf people. Deaf people's colors get mixed up together. ( <i>Pauses</i> ) Yeah, I am happy to see my drawing.
Researcher:	How did you choose the colors?
Hyemi:	(...) Korean Sign Language is in my bloodstream that's why I think I did it first.
Researcher:	Why green for Korea?
Hyemi:	I was born ... (...) Uhm ... nature.. Yes, it is because of nature.
Researcher:	And for IS, why did you choose pink?
Hyemi:	Why I chose pink? Uhm ... This language is truly beautiful. The first time I was here, I was so inspired by this beautiful language, it's sparkling ... Pink is a beautiful color too. ( <i>Pointing at LP</i> ) A red spiral—it means power, learning a lot, in a fast way, strong, quick "mixing/circulating" in the head and chest. ( <i>Pointing at LP</i> ) Blue—the world is blue and I run all over the world. ( <i>Pointing at LP</i> ) Orange—the arrows have a clear point/aim. I need a clear aim for running—that is why I chose orange. [24]

MARK\*

Mark (28) is from New Zealand. He is from a deaf family, one of the Frontrunners teachers, and was himself a Frontrunner student in 2014-2015. He teaches the Frontrunners in IS and a group of young deaf Danish people in Danish Sign Language.



Figure 4: Mark's LP (see <https://vimeo.com/320752255> for the video)

<p>Mark:</p>	<p>This (<i>pointing at LP</i>) on my feet is reflective of trees, showing roots. The first language that surrounded me and I grew up with is that of New Zealand. Then on my upper legs I have put English. I began language with signing, then I subsequently learned written language. The belly is what I am doing now. My work and my life are in Denmark. In the way that what I eat goes to my stomach to be processed, my learning is the same—it needs to be processed. Then, somewhat higher are emotions, which are close to my heart and so that is why I put LIS there [LIS is Italian Sign Language, the language of Mark's new boyfriend]. I am interested in learning that new sign language quickly and I'm really excited by it. The hands and under-arms symbolize IS because IS can help me with different sign languages. If I can't establish communication in some sign language I can quickly turn to IS and get communication going. For example, if I don't understand LIS, IS can help me. If I don't understand Danish, IS can help me). My upper arm is for ASL [American Sign Language; Mark lived in America for one year to study when he was 17]. If IS isn't helping, ASL can help. The other hand is for Danish Sign Language because I use it for every day communication. The head is divided to symbolize the need to match and adjust communication to different people, or the division shows choosing different—preferred—signs. The others (<i>pointing at upper chest on LP</i>), AUSLAN [Australian Sign Language], BSL [British Sign Language]—I learned some of these through traveling. I learned them to show respect for the languages that I came across. (...) [For example,] When I was in Brazil—I learned a few of their signs. I can see the smiles on people's faces when I do that, showing that there is a desire to connect. (...)</p>
<p>Researcher:</p>	<p>You mentioned ASL. Was it intentional to draw IS under ASL? Is there a reason you drew it on your right hand?</p>
<p>Mark:</p>	<p>I am a right-handed person. I write with my right hand. It is my strength when communicating with people—meeting people. My right hand shows my strong side. On my left hand I have Danish. My right side is for signing fluently. I traveled to a [deaf international] camp in Asia, and they sign a lot of ASL. My ASL which is at my upper arm—it can flow into my IS right hand. (...)</p>
<p>Researcher:</p>	<p>How did you choose the colors?</p>
<p>Mark:</p>	<p>New Zealand is a very natural place—there are trees and everything is green. Green is also a spring color. It's the first color you see when plants start to grow. You see everything green and then it changes to different colors, so that's why I chose green because for me, it grew first. IS is blue as are the Earth, water and sky. LIS is red for blood and passion. Orange, I took without any particular reason. ASL is intentionally not in some strong shiny color. Pink, I used for "other," it's like I can pick some of it but not</p>

really embrace it fully, maybe like some people that take it but don't admit they really love it, they take it to show they are fine with it. Those (pointing at others) have no reason. [25]

DELPHINE\*\*

Delphine (30) is deaf, has a deaf family, a deaf partner (J) and a hearing son (K). They sign VGT, ASL and LSFb [French Belgian Sign Language] at home.



Figure 5: Delphine's LP

Delphine:	Two people are important to me: (Pointing at LP) K and (pointing at LP) J. I hold both hands. (pointing) That's an important part, where I come from, grounded in LSFb. My parents, sister, they are there (pointing at LP). I come from there. My parents took me to deaf events, that's all there (pointing at LP, moving her hands over the green roots). That connection with my roots has always been there, and made me the strong person I am today. The core in my chest (points at LP) that is who I am. My life, my identity. Several different currents pass through my core. (Pointing to LP, then to J): one language connects me with you, ASL, (pointing to left hand) "be with me" (points to right hand): this says "come, I will show you the way" and refers to LSFb or French. This points to the future. (Pointing to the butterflies) That's not really spoken language, no, it refers to the languages I use to think: English, Dutch and French. When I want to do deep thinking, I can't do that in sign language. That's more linked to writing, reading a lot ... Sign language is more like the language of my everyday life. (Pointing at hands) This is the [deaf] community, signing different sign languages. (Pointing to the yellow around the hands): This means something positive; when I'm with the community I always feel good, I always like to go.
Researcher:	You are the first person who made the face look sideways.
Delphine:	Yes, that's something I really didn't think about before. I wanted the face to look at the hands and the future. (Gestures taking her child in her right hand) "Come with me K and look at the future, we go together." Maybe that's why.
J:	Why did you draw an ear?
Delphine:	I don't really know, because someone needs to have eyes, ears and a mouth? (Laughs)
J:	(Laughs)
Delphine:	Maybe because I can hear someone talking in my right ear, yes, someone standing behind me.
J:	(Pointing at the mouth) And what is the red mouth?

Delphine:	I first colored it black but I wasn't happy with that so I colored it red to cover it ( <i>laughs</i> ). No special reason ( <i>laughs</i> ).
J:	Maybe because you don't like to speak? ( <i>Laughs</i> )
Delphine:	Yes I do like it. I have to make an effort to do it but I like it. So you are not entirely correct ( <i>laughs</i> ).
Researcher:	So sign languages are more inside the figure, and spoken languages outside of it?
Delphine:	Yes, signs come from within me, to express emotions. Not so for spoken languages. For me they are not about emotions, I'm not attached to significant people in my life through spoken languages.
Researcher:	Any specific reason for the three arms?
Delphine:	I wanted to draw more, but I decided to stick with three sign languages. I'm open to learning new ones. Spoken languages no, I feel I have enough of those. [26]

### LENA\*\*H

Lena (23) is hearing, and the partner of one of the deaf participants, Sam.

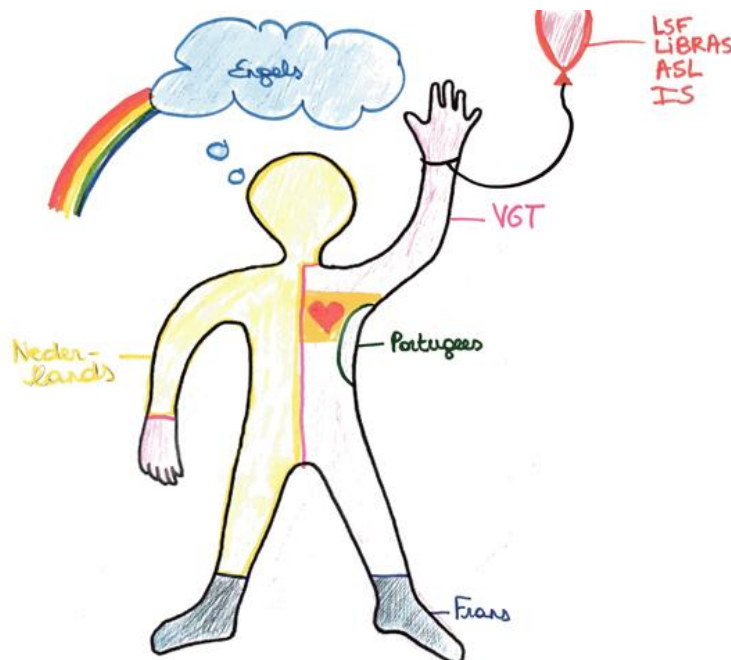


Figure 6: Lena's LP

Lena:	I divided my figure in two parts ( <i>signs/gestures her body in two parts</i> ), left ( <i>the side of the heart</i> ) is VGT, and right is Dutch, my head included. Because I always think in Dutch, not in VGT (...). My heart ( <i>points to her heart</i> ) is VGT because I'm with Sam. It's half of my body because I sign every day and it's a big part of my life. Like I said, sometimes it feels like a second mother tongue for me. But ... ( <i>points to the feet</i> ) I put French on both of my feet, in blue because it's my favorite color. But also black because though I like French I have also disliked it. When I studied it, it was heavy and I felt I wasn't good enough. I felt really insecure. That's why French is at my feet because it made me feel stuck. But VGT also has a thin line on the side of one foot ( <i>points</i> ), since I also often feel insecure about VGT, never about Dutch. ( <i>pointing</i> ) Around my heart there is yellow because that is my family. So they share the place with the pink of my heart ( <i>laughs</i> ). ( <i>pointing</i> ) Portuguese is on my side because I have a tattoo there I got in Brazil. It's a small part of me. I'm not fluent but it's a part of me because I lived there for six months. ( <i>Points</i> ) English is everywhere, in blue, because for me English <i>is</i> everywhere but most of all when I'm learning something or doing creative thinking or watching a TV series. That's also why it is in a cloud above my head. And then there is the balloon with LSF [French Sign Language], Libras [Brazilian Sign Language], IS and
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	ASL because I always feel I'd like to learn those languages but it's hard because I don't often use them; they are like a balloon that always risks slipping out of my hands.
Sam:	(Points) Why the rainbow?
Lena:	Because English really means a lot to me. I don't use it with the people I love, but for me it's a gateway to learning, a job, to maybe living abroad. My future is English.
Researcher:	Why are the feet in blue but also black?
Lena:	Feet really mean that they keep me on the ground, keep me heavy. It's like I can't fly, I'm stuck. Feet are not a nice place for me. I'd rather not see them. But VGT is linked to one foot only, not both, because it's not all negative. I just sometimes feel nervous when I have to use VGT. Never when I'm with Sam, but ... I often say to Sam "today I signed really badly" or "I feel bad" or "I feel insecure." Or for example after a family party [with Sam's deaf family] I often say to Sam "sorry I really signed badly today." I <i>want</i> to do it better. For me the difference is also that when I make a mistake in English that's ok, that's a second language for almost everyone. But VGT for me is more than a second language; is a part of my identity. It's a language I use at home, with my partner and his family. If I make mistakes in VGT, that really matters to me. More than in English, for example. [27]

### 3. Analysis of LP

In this section, we further dissect these four LP and also give examples from other LP. In doing so, we draw on other analyses of LP, corroborating some findings, but we also illustrate that there are some uses of LP that are specific to signers. Therefore, our analysis will focus on two particular aspects of the LP: the body parts and the grouping of language(s) in or outside the silhouette. These aspects are most relevant to the aim of this paper, i.e., to demonstrate how LP can be used to illustrate multimodal language/languageing. We will refer to other aspects such as use of colors, drawings and language labels where relevant but will not focus on them. [28]

#### 3.1 Body parts

When looking at the configuration of language portraits, COFFEY (2015) in his LP detected a clear pattern of core-to-periphery. The mother tongue or most significant languages were often placed in the core, located in the head or chest, while languages that were less used were drawn further from the core as a sign of perceived distance. The pattern of more important languages being associated with the head and torso was also found by SINGER and HARRIS (2016), while one of SALO and DUFVA's (2018) participants used the legs for a language that felt "far." Interestingly, this core-to-periphery pattern is not strongly present in our data (although Study 2 data showed a similar pattern in terms of what participants drew inside and outside the silhouette, see below). While many participants in both studies (such as Hyemi, Figure 3) placed their most important languages in their core, a number of participants in Study 1 placed their first language(s) in their feet, connecting it with roots (such as Mark, Figure 4: New Zealand Sign Language, and Esther, Figure 10: Catalan, Catalan Sign Language and Spanish). This does not correspond to the pattern of feet being associated with distance. We will now focus on the meaning of a few body parts across a number of LP in our studies. We do this to show that while in many ways, LP by signers contain similar patterns as those of spoken language users, there are also deaf- or signer-specific elements to these LP. [29]

##### 3.1.1 Hands and arms

"I need my hands to sign—from now until the end. My hands are invaluable. I can miss everything, but not my hands. They are invaluable for me" (Ludo\*, see <https://youtu.be/eTzsdAS9SbM> for the video).

Hands (and to a lesser extent arms) are important deaf-related body parts (and therefore often feature in deaf art-forms (DURR, 2006) because of the obvious reason that their use is principal in sign languages. Eight out of 12 participants in Study 1 and eight out of 11 participants in Study 2 put sign languages on their hands, sometimes extending into their arms, or put different sign languages in their arms and hands (see e.g., Mark, Figure 4). In

Study 2, for Marieke (Figure 7), aged 30, who mostly grew up with spoken Dutch at an oral deaf school in mainstream education and learned to sign when she was 16, hands and arms signified the most natural and valued part of her linguistic repertoire: the way she likes to express herself and communicate with others.

"I prefer to communicate through my hands. That for me feels the most natural, the most logical, the most self-evident, the easiest, the most ... yes, my hands—to express myself but also to receive. ALWAYS BEEN IN ME USING MY HANDS 'KISSFIST'<sup>29</sup>). I feel this gives me the best outcomes for communication. But I didn't always use my hands and I didn't always realize it, up until now. But now I realize 'yes, of course, that's it'. I want to continue like this, I feel good this way" (see <https://youtu.be/swKfkkkGgf0> for the video).



Figure 7: Marieke's LP

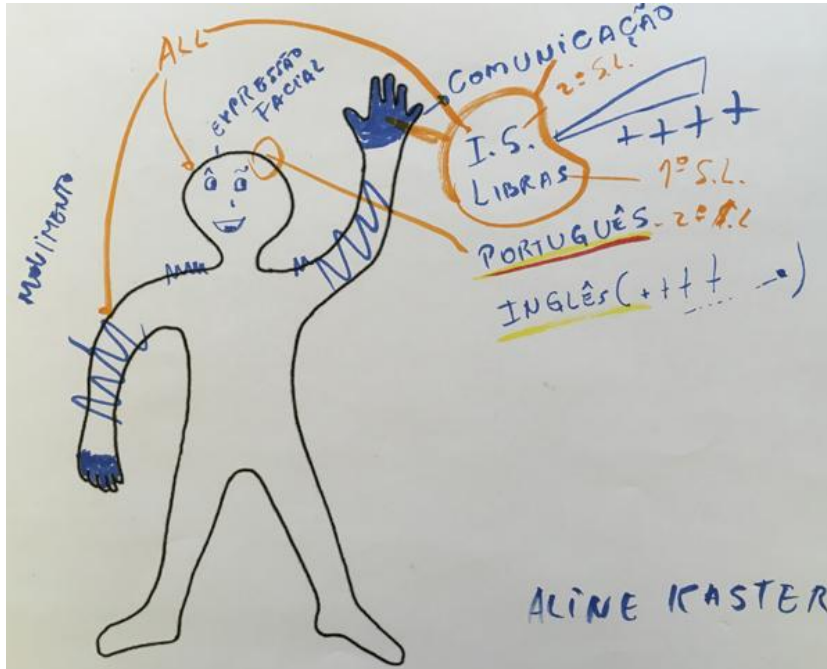


Figure 8: Aline's LP

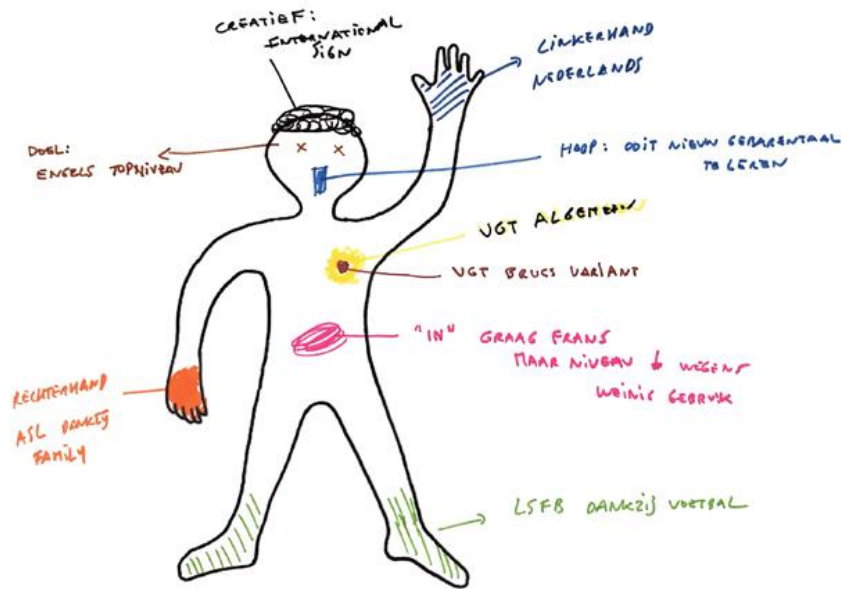


Figure 9: Sam's LP [30]

The hands were also connected with writing, an activity that is often contrasted with speaking. In Study 1, Aline from Brazil (Figure 8) comments: "I feel I did it wrong! Look! Portuguese is on the head because of reading and writing, and on the hands [for signing] ... but no, that is not right. (...) Hands are also used for writing, eh? And for typing." She does not mention speech in any language, so her hands are central to communicating in signed language (IS and Libras) as well as in written language (Portuguese and English). Similarly, Sam in Study 2 (Figure 9) associated his left hand with Dutch:

"For me that [Dutch] is specifically linked to the written form. Not so for sign language. Yes, I speak Dutch as well, but, ... For me, speaking means just 'forcing' to express myself through my voice. Real Dutch for me, is writing. Speaking is not real Dutch. That is just trying to make communication successful." [31]

For many literate deaf people, writing/reading spoken languages is more accessible, agreeable and less limiting than speaking/lipreading them. Hands also took on meanings other than signing. For some participants in Study 2, hands signified the relationship with specific significant others, mostly family, such as for Delphine (see Figure 5), for whom the hands signified the relationship with her son and partner but also with other deaf people. Also in Study 2, Sarah is the hearing mother of a deaf child. For her, the left raised hand signifies the connection with her son's world: "I associate the hand with reaching out to my son, to his world [...]. For me it means holding out a hand to him. Like, yes, I'm hearing, but I want to go for it and hold out my hand to that other world." Sam, who connected his left hand with written Dutch, connected his right hand with ASL: "My right hand for me is ASL. As a child my parents took me to Canada to visit family and I learned ASL there. That's why the right hand is for ASL (shows the VGT sign for 'taking someone')" (see <https://youtu.be/gdzVU1KvirU> for the video). [32]

### 3.1.2 Face and throat

The meaning ascribed to face and throat in LP is often related to perceiving and producing language. Eyes are often important in deaf discourses because they signify a visual way of being, deaf people as "people of the eye" (LANE, PILLARD & HEDBERG, 2011) and sign languages as languages using a visual-gestural modality. Like hands, they often feature prominently in any kind of deaf branding, such as logos of deaf organizations. Some participants effectively linked eyes to seeing or acquiring languages, such as David from the U.S.: "Eyes are necessary, of course, for ASL and IS. To be able to receive language and to be able to adjust your own signing to other people that you see while communicating (pointing at hands)." Interestingly, one participant in Study 2 also linked eyes (not ears) to accessing spoken languages: "I see all languages through my eyes. I also learned Dutch through my eyes." Other participants saw eyes as tools to understand hearing non-signing people through lipreading. In Study 2, Ludo signed:

"Mouth and eyes refer to spoken communication with hearing people who do not often have contact with deaf people: colleagues, strangers, neighbors. 'Oral' [i.e., speaking] and signing because they

can't sign. That's why better 'oral' plus signs [i.e., speaking with some signs to hearing people]. Mouth and eyes to lipread [i.e., lipreading what hearing people say back]." [33]

None of the participants, except Delphine in Study 2 (Figure 5), drew ears on the figure, although Study 2 participant Alexander added them later (see the example in the coffee house, Section 2.3). This might indicate that for participants in these studies, communicating as a deaf person is essentially unrelated to not being able to hear. Mouths and eyes were more often deemed important. For deaf people, the mouth often has contentious meaning since it is associated with being forced to use speech: two of the older participants in Study 2 therefore connected the mouth with negative feelings or barriers and another participant in Study 1 consciously did not draw a mouth. Filip (Figure 13) from Belgium (one of the Frontrunners teachers) commented:

"I didn't use any colors for the mouth. No spoken languages. Not even Dutch. (...) I went to Belgium recently with the Frontrunners 3 weeks ago. We were in the train when I said 'Gent.' It just slipped out of my mouth. Why is that? Maybe because I was used to pronouncing some words while I was growing up. (...) I still do not think the mouth is important. Not important enough to put down on my drawing. Only reading." [34]

Like Marieke's, Filip's education in a deaf school in Flanders was very speech-oriented, an educational policy which he still openly resists. In his case, thinking that it was not important to draw a mouth might be an overt stance of resistance by omission. Other participants connected the mouth with speech in a way that was not negative, such as Delphine (Figure 5 and selected narrative above) and Esther from Spain. Esther indicated that she is comfortable with speaking only one language (Catalan), therefore coloring Catalan on the throat, locating (written) Spanish and English at other places on the body (Figure 10). Filip's and Esther's examples further confirm that the written modality of spoken languages is much less fraught or used more than the spoken modality. [35]

Some participants made entirely different connotations to the mouth. Sam (Figure 9) drew a blue square on his mouth. When asked if this had to do with speaking, he said it was linked to "hope" because he hoped to learn a new sign language one day by living abroad and learning that country's sign language: "I didn't know how to write H-O-O-P [hope] on the figure so I drew it at the mouth to refer to the sign 'hope'" (Figure 2) (see <https://youtu.be/r3T0D7KLoOU> for the video). This refers to the VGT sign for "hope" which is signed at the mouth. One other participant from Study 2, pasted a lexical sign on their LP: Diane (56), drew an orange circle on her throat, narrating:

"I feel small again now (*holds back her tears*). (to Ludo) Always, right? OK—I remember when I was small, I always wondered in my heart and my stomach, all through when I was growing up, why I didn't sign. People often told me 'you cannot speak.' That really frustrated me. They were wrong; there was nothing wrong with my head, I was smart, I signed well. But that didn't count for them—I couldn't speak. That has always bothered me, and it still does. You can see that on the drawing: my heart, head and stomach, they are connected. When people say such things to me, that goes direct to my heart, it hurts my heart and then my stomach. That's how I get stomach infections" (see <https://youtu.be/ZlocNan15NY> for the video). [36]

This is a very clear example of the emotionally and bodily lived experience of language. Not only does it show a psychosomatic/visceral explanation, the circle on the throat is interesting since to express in VGT that something very much bothers someone, one grips the throat (see Figure 11). In this LP, the sign became linked to the meaning and to the place on the body where the specific sign is made. This is similar to Sam linking "hope" to his mouth. Diane's and Sam's locating of specific VGT signs on their LP (without actually drawing the signs as is often the case in deaf art, see DURR, 2006) indicates that they imagine and embody their language portrait as a signing person.



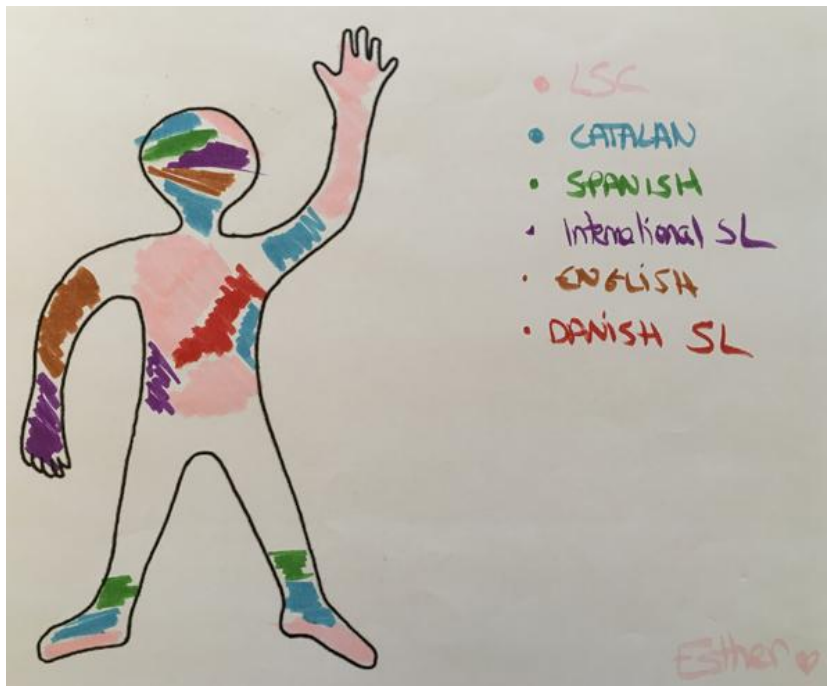


Figure 10: Esther's LP



Figure 11: Diane making the "throat-gripping" sign [37]

### 3.2 Configuration of the portraits

As indicated by the portraits discussed above, the signed and spoken modalities are not represented by a simple binary with sign languages always being connected to the hands or eyes and spoken languages to the mouth or throat. The portraits represent a much more complex picture: signed and spoken languages can be placed all over the body and outside of the body and in different relationships to other signed or spoken languages (the latter in the spoken or written modalities). In the 23 LP, it is illuminating to see where and how languages and/or modalities are placed in relationship to each other. Deaf people are often perceived as people *relying* on sign language because they are seen as having a limited knowledge of written language and/or proficiency in spoken language. This knowledge and proficiency is often proclaimed to be peripheral to the deaf experience. Research is often fragmental, focusing on one of deaf people's languages (often sign language) or the barriers to accessing spoken language or learning a written language for example, but is seldom holistic, focusing on the total experience of language. The power of LP therefore also lies in confirming that many deaf people have a multilingual repertoire and that different modalities are related to different languages, e.g., preferring to use, or mostly use, written versions of spoken languages, or speaking one language but only writing another language. The use of LP also demonstrates that different contextual values are attached to different modalities and languages. To analyze this further, we take a closer look at different configurations of language portraits. [38]

### 3.2.1 Languages as co-existing and/or in contact

One participant in Study 1 (Majdi from Jordan, see Figure 12) grouped languages together in the same body part and color. As such, he sees them as strongly connected or as part of the same master category. He combined the spoken/written language used in his country as connected to the sign language used there (Arabic and Jordanian Sign Language), and IS to English. He thus grouped languages across context or location of use. He was the only participant who combined a signed and a spoken language in this way.



Figure 12: Majdi's LP [39]

Some participants located a single language on different places on the body, together with one or more other languages in some places but not in other places. For example, three participants from Study 1 put all their languages in their brain (using different colors), and then located all or some of their languages in one or more other places of their body as well, such as in Mark's LP (Figure 4). Filip put six languages next to each other in his brain (Danish SL, Flemish SL, IS, Dutch, Danish, English), and drew Flemish SL also in his heart and in the feet (Figure 13). While in his LP he grouped all his languages together, in his narrative he pointed out that he uses all these languages in different contexts and explicitly separated them according to modalities of signing, reading, and writing. He teaches in IS; signs Danish Sign Language with his colleagues and wife; signs VGT with his children, sister and mother; reads English for work; reads Danish and Dutch books and newspapers; and writes Danish and Dutch back and forth with non-signing people. He explains why he let VGT stand out by locating it in three places in his body:

"I love VGT, it is my roots. I love it and that is why it is on my feet and on my heart. However, sometimes people are surprised that I forget some Flemish signs. Danish Sign Language I know how to sign, but Flemish Sign Language I forget signs sometimes. Well, yeah ... ." [40]

There is thus a tension between feeling closest to a language while also feeling it slowly slipping away after having moved abroad (12 years ago).

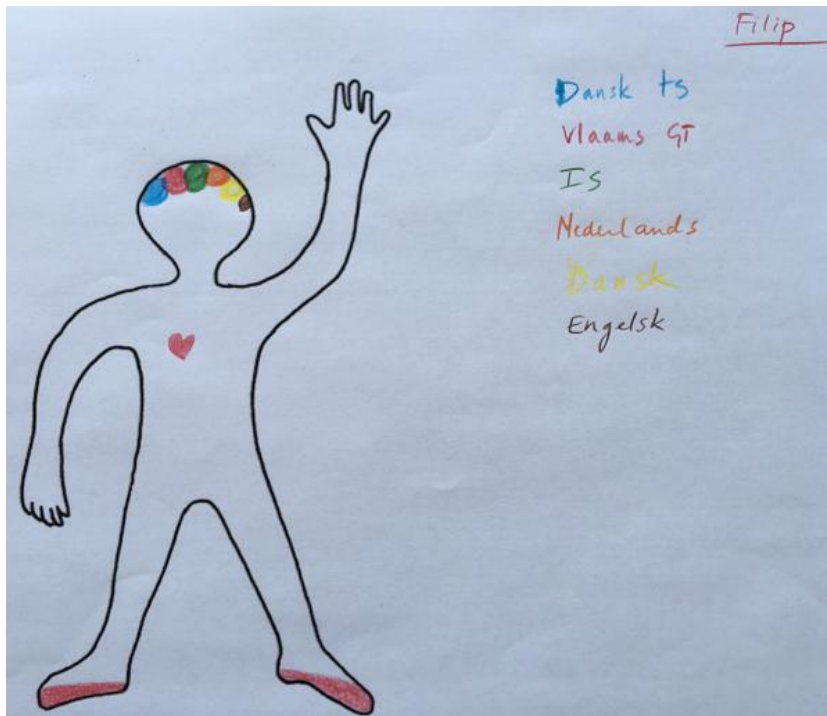


Figure 13: Filip's LP [41]

Sometimes, languages were placed in more than one place on the body, together with other languages. Esther from Spain (Figure 10) put Catalan Sign Language (LSC) in her head, chest, belly, left arm and feet. Spanish she located in her head and feet, and Catalan in her head, left upper arm, belly and feet. She explained:

"First I picked Catalan Sign Language and put it on my body in my chest/stomach and close to my heart plus my feelings in my belly. I sign better in Catalan Sign Language. Also, my deaf family gave me this sign language so I keep it close to me. It is within me, my heart, chest and belly [see Figure 14]. It is part of my hands because I sign it. Placing it on my feet shows I stand on the ground of my country and it rises up into me from there. Catalan is part of my whole body. It is also part of my mind because I think in Catalan Sign Language. (...) Then I put down written Catalan. I colored my belly to show a bit of connection with my feelings. I drew it from my lips to the chest because I use Catalan if I speak. I do not use other languages for that purpose. My mind covers Catalan too for thoughts, and arms too because I feel it is connected to Catalan Sign Language." [42]

Esther explained that she intentionally did not put some of her languages in the portrait: for example, she did not include Spanish Sign Language in her LP even though she knows it, explaining that she does not feel a personal relationship with Spanish SL ("I don't think of it as in me.").



Figure 14: Esther: "Catalan Sign Language is *in my heart, chest and belly*" (see <https://vimeo.com/320749282> for the video) [43]

When we look at the places where Esther put LSC, the language that gets the largest coverage in her LP, we see she connects it to her core (chest, belly), to signing fluently (the hand), to her roots (the feet), and to thinking (the head). When she signs, she touches the body parts she is talking about. Sign languages often place signs for thinking on or in front of the head while the sign "gut feeling or intuition" is often placed on the belly and emotions on the chest. Some participants, such as Esther, chose matching locations on the LP. Non-signers also might connect gut feeling to the belly (as the word "*gut* feeling" implies) however, in sign languages people may place their hands on that part of the body to form the sign. Furthermore, in signing space, people can, literally, take a language and place it somewhere, and in the narratives they do this either on the LP or on the body, or both, which is what Esther does in Figure 14, placing LSC in her heart, chest and belly (the part in italics in the figure caption indicates what she signs in the screenshots). Ludo, one of the older participants in Study 2, signed that sign language is invaluable for him and that his heart is deaf/with deaf people. During the narrative of the portrait and also during interviews, he often touched his heart when talking about deaf people or sign language (Figure 15).

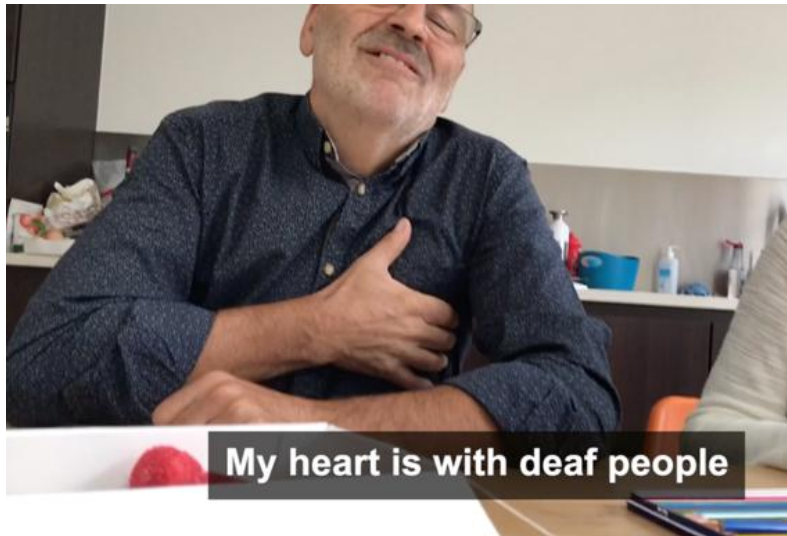


Figure 15: Ludo touching his heart [44]

Returning to Esther, we also see she groups Catalan Sign Language with other languages on the feet, head, arm and chest. Interesting in Esther's narrative is her separation of the modalities of speech and writing (indicating she uses Catalan for both, in contrast with Spanish and English), placing Catalan and Catalan Sign Language together, as roots in the feet as languages of thinking and feeling, but also on the arm and hand to indicate the relationship between Catalan and Catalan Sign Language. She is probably referring to the use of Catalan mouthings and possibly also to Catalan-influenced structures in Catalan Sign Language. Similarly, Majdi's combination of Arabic and Jordan Sign Language also could be related to language contact. [45]

Two other participants from Study 1 placed languages next to each other on the hand/arm to indicate language contact, however they did this for two signed languages rather than a signed and spoken language. Mark (Figure 4) and David both placed IS in relation to ASL. The more conventionalized versions of IS often include a lot of ASL signs. Mark, who has lived in the U.S., specifies that his ASL (which is on his upper arm) can extend into his IS (on the hand) (Figure 16). David, who is American himself, colors one hand red (ASL) and the other blue (IS), with the respective arms in the opposite color: "I sign IS sometimes and I need to correct it to ASL. I am still a bit confused. My inner dial is not set properly, I'm always ambivalent and mixing them up." This influence of ASL in IS is resisted especially in the European context (including in the Frontrunners course) where ASL is often seen as an imperialist language. This resistance is possibly the reason for the other Frontrunners not including ASL in their LP, even though all of them know ASL (from basic to fluent) they do not relate personally to the language. Another possible reason is that they might see their ASL knowledge as subsumed under their IS knowledge.



Figure 16: Mark: "ASL [located on right upper arm] can extend into IS [located on right hand]" (see <https://vimeo.com/322226892> for the video) [46]

### 3.2.2 Drawings inside or outside the figure

In general, Study 2 participants tended to draw both inside and outside the figure and thus represented languages and modalities inside and outside the body, while Study 1 participants mostly colored inside the figure (with the notable exception of Hyemi, who drew all around the silhouette, see Figure 3). This is probably due to the difference in prompts used in either study as in Study 2 participants were explicitly told that they could draw/color outside the figure. Often, but not always, the tendency here is to draw/color the more important languages/modalities in terms of symbolic (not necessarily instrumental) value, inside the silhouette. For example, Delphine put her sign languages (VGT, LSF, ASL) inside her figure or on her arms/hands while her spoken languages (Dutch, French, English) were represented as butterflies outside the figure (Figure 5). She thus literally included a distance between her body and her spoken languages, narrating that while she uses them to think, they are not the languages by which she is attached to significant others. Similarly, while Sara (the hearing mother) (Figure 15) put English and Flemish dialect in her head, and written Dutch on her right hand, she drew VGT on the left raised hand (see above). From her heart, lines depart to her hands and head to signify that the languages run through her body with her heart as the core, and that the more important languages she uses with significant others are located close to her heart. Above her head, in a green rectangle, she put "ASL, Italian, Spanish, French, German ..." to signify that these are the languages she would like to learn or know better (Figure 17).

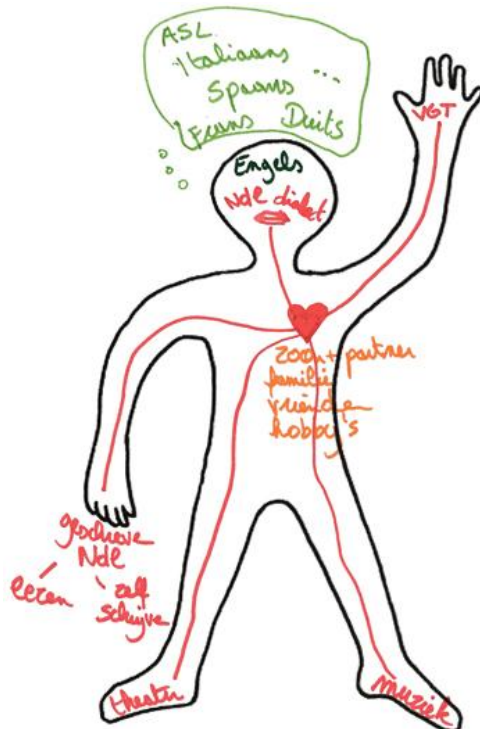


Figure 17: Sara's LP [47]

While Lena, a hearing participant from Study 2 (Figure 6) located VGT, Dutch, French and Portuguese inside her silhouette, she made her left hand hold a red balloon with "LSF, LIBRAS, ASL, IS" to signify that she would like to learn or know these sign languages better

but it is hard because she cannot use them often enough so the balloon always is slipping away. English she drew in a cloud above her head with a rainbow next to it because it is "everywhere" and for her is a gateway to learning, but not a language she uses with significant others. [48]

Another, slightly different example is from Marieke, who put VGT and Dutch in her head, and several other languages as a fan in her chest, to signify that she thinks in VGT and Dutch but has an intrinsic interest in (learning) other languages (Figure 7). Outside of the silhouette she drew lined paper, to signify that to document something, she likes to write. The drawing as a whole she surrounded with yellow rays of light, an aura to indicate that her preferred semiotic repertoire includes her whole body and its relationship to the wider environment. [49]

Interestingly, the three older participants in Study 2 did not label any language on their silhouette but only used colors and in their narrative mostly talked about modalities/semiotic repertoire. One of those participants referred to VGT outside the silhouette, by drawing three red lines from her raised hand and writing "waar is VGT (where is VGT)" at the end of them. One of the deaf participants who is not fluent in VGT and in his narrative indicated that he was still in search of his identity, also did not label or mark any languages on his body. Probably, this is due to different metalinguistic awareness between these participants. [50]

### 3.2.3 Grouping along modalities and psychosomatic aspects

In the examples above, we emphasized that in the context of spoken languages, our participants often explicitly connected specific languages to specific modalities (e.g., Esther speaks and writes Catalan but only writes Spanish and English). They made these separations and clarifications in their narratives and sometimes also chose related locations in the portraits (e.g., Esther coloring Catalan on the throat and Sam connecting the hand to written Dutch). Some participants emphasized modality even further, placing it centrally or organizing (parts of) their portraits along modalities rather than languages. For example, Marieke who knows multiple sign languages (Figure 7) indicated she uses her hands for signing. Similarly, Aline (Figure 8) located both Libras and IS in her hands by coloring the hands blue and drawing a jarred line in the arms, but then separately listed them both in the label, and drew a bar showing increase and +++ symbols next to IS to indicate that she is still learning. Thus, while she separated the sign languages in her narrative, in her LP she combined them in one color and one place, thus constructing the languages as separate but as being connected to the same body part, as embodied in the same way.

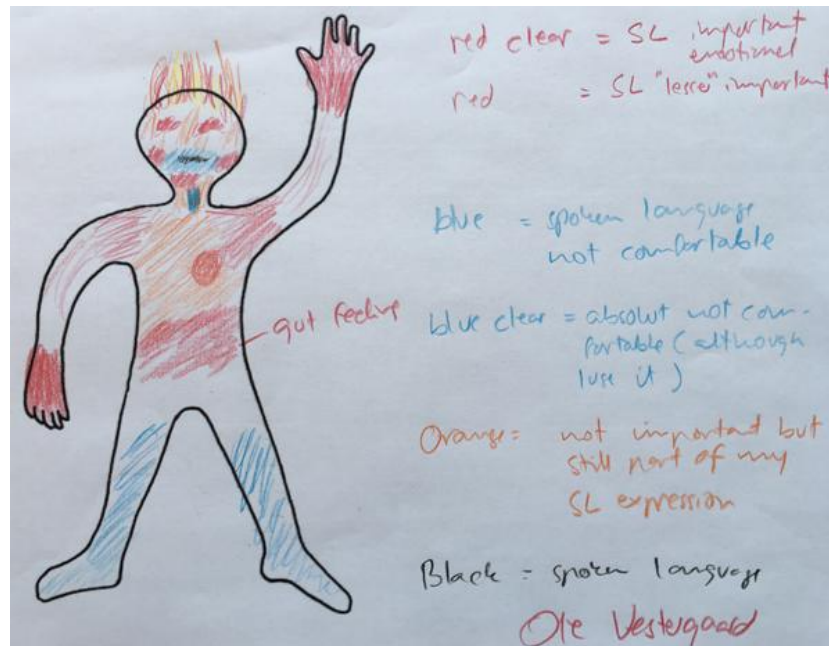


Figure 18: Ole's LP (see <https://vimeo.com/321217750> for the video) [51]

From Study 1, Ole's portrait (Figure 18) is an interesting case in point: he used different colors to signify a number of different modalities. Ole used red to color his hands, stomach, heart and face, which he saw as symbolizing signing. He connected the mouth and throat, which he colored blue ("a cold color"), to the simultaneous use of signing and speaking (in Danish and Danish Sign Language). He connected this also to blue colored legs: he

explained the legs signify insecurity and discomfort "because whenever I am not sure about something, I move them all the time over each other and fiddle." Sign-speaking, i.e., using speech and sign at the same time, is a way of signing often used by deaf signers who have had an oral-focused education and is therefore often associated with being non fluent and/or to adhering to an oralist-based teaching philosophy. Ole indicated his colleagues make fun of him when he signs in this way, which he saw as part of himself but also connected to discomfort. He separated this from speaking without signing, which he drew as black, in the center of the mouth. For facial expressions he used orange: "I think over 50% of communication is on the face. A lesser percentage is on the hands. I can recognize all the facial expressions of people regardless of whether I can understand these people or not." He sees facial expressions as common to all people and languages, be they deaf or hearing, signing or speaking, and treats it as a modality in itself. To indicate confusion because he uses different sign languages on a daily basis, he drew orange and red hair-like lines that appear as a fire arising from the head. On an everyday basis he uses Danish Sign Language with Danish signers, Danish Sign Language adapted for non-Danish signers (the three other Frontrunners teachers) and IS: "It [the fire] represents complexity because I have to change languages." Ole's emphasis on the process of languaging and how it makes him feel, is reminiscent of Hyemi's portrait (Figure 3), with its portrayal of the body as swimming in a purple sea, running all over the world and, in that process, language as impressions coming towards her in the form of arrows, as well as a spiraling in the body, chest and head) to indicate its interactive nature and that it is an embodied process involving different parts of her body. [52]

Going back to Ole, he groups different kinds of signing together in the same color/locations but at the same time, through his choice of colors and drawing he also indicates that they confuse him and can clash. He distinguishes sign language with normal mouthings (red) from mouthing (almost) every word in Danish Sign Language (which comes naturally to him) and sign-speaking (which feels uncomfortable) (blue). He thus organizes his drawing in terms of modalities (distinguishing signing, sign-speaking, speaking, and facial expressions but not marking writing), and in terms of psychosomatic aspects (confusion and discomfort) rather than languages. Stijn, a deaf new signer participant from Study 2 linked Dutch (located in his heart), English (located above his head), French (also above his head) and VGT (located both in his head and above it) with "hard communication," chaos in his head and pressure on his shoulders. In both his hands, he drew a red heart with a line indicating "hands: non-verbal language" because for him that was the most important part of communication (see Figure 19). This shows that for him every language and modality currently cause discomfort and confusion, which radiates to specific parts of his body, while the non-verbal communication part of his repertoire (use of eyes, touch) has the most significance.

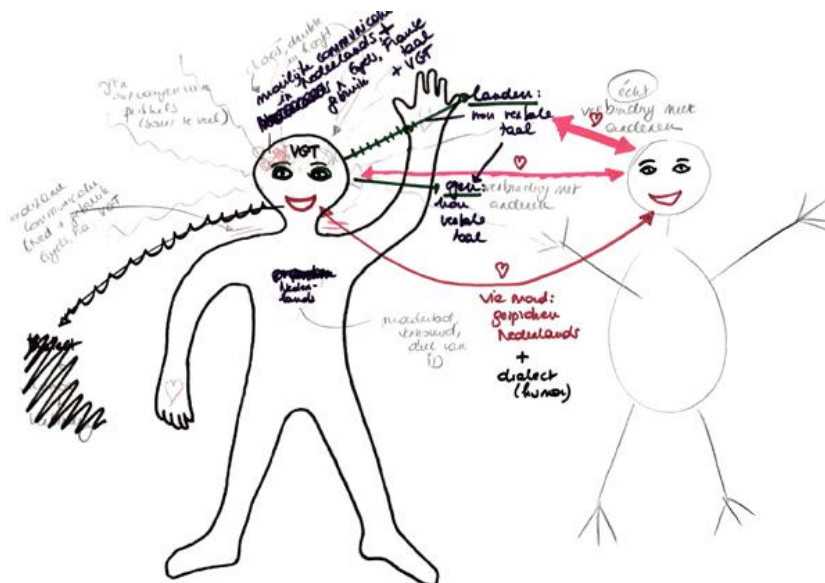


Figure 19: Stijn's LP [53]

In Ole's narrative it also becomes clear that different modalities are also related to different languages, e.g., speaking (Danish), sign-speaking (Danish and Danish Sign Language) and signing (IS and Danish Sign Language). In this we see a pattern, as it is consistent with other participants' insistence on clarifying in which modality they use a language comfortably, or

not (e.g., the emphasis on written rather than spoken language and their often complicated relationship with speech). [54]

In summary, there are a number of different ways our participants configure the relationships between different languages, i.e., grouping languages as part of the modality of signing or speaking; grouping languages along geographical location or context of use; placing them next to each other to indicate language contact (between sign and spoken language or between two sign languages); and placing them inside or outside the figure. There is a regular occurrence of placing languages that use a different modality (signed, spoken, written) in the same body location. This section therefore complicates the findings reported in the previous section on body parts. For the participants in our studies, being a signer is not simply being someone who uses hands to communicate and eyes to access language. Rather, for most of our participants, one or more sign languages are part of broader multilingual repertoires and participants see their languages as co-existing, while languages also take on special meanings or have specific connotations and are seen as being in contact with other languages. What stands out is that distinguishing modalities of use is paramount in the LP and especially the narratives, as it is in everyday deaf lives. [55]

#### 4. Discussion

In this section, we discuss some benefits and challenges of using LP as a research method in the context of deaf signers. First, we want to remind the reader that we used the portraits as part of two wider studies and only after other research activities such as interviews, focus groups, participatory video, ethnographic filmmaking and language diaries. This is different from most other cases where LP have been used as an introductory method for getting an overview of participants' repertoires before giving them other tasks (e.g., doing home recordings in OBOJSKA & PURKARTHOFER, 2018). One clear benefit is that LP elicit information on the individual and embodied *experience* of language use, rather than understanding the semiotic repertoire as a mere toolbox (BUSCH, 2018). The use of LP further enables a thick description of multilingual selves because of the variety of "associative, metaphorical and symbolic elements" it depicts (SALO & DUFVA, 2018, p.442). Indeed, in our LP, people drew balloons, books, arrows, and other metaphors related to language. People also metaphorically interpreted body parts, such as feet representing roots. In other interviews in our studies, when discussing language biographies, language diaries and language ideologies, the use of metaphors was less frequent. Importantly LP also include languages that are not known.

"Our repertoire is not determined solely by the linguistic resources we *have*, but sometimes by those we do *not* have; these can become noticeable in a given situation as a gap, threat or a desire. (...) It not only points backward to the past of the language biography, which has left behind its traces and scars, but also forward, anticipating and projecting the future situations and events we are preparing to face" (BUSCH, 2017, p.356). [56]

Several participants indicated that they wanted to learn another signed or spoken language or wanted to improve their proficiency in a given language. Again, this expression of desires linked to the future was less frequent in the other parts of the studies. [57]

Furthermore, many participants focused on *emotions* (such as anxiety, pleasure, pain, stress, joy, fear) regarding the multilingual experience, related to particular societal or interactional contexts and to aspirations, desires and memories. SALO and DUFVA (2018, p.424) point out that emotions are "particularly relevant in cases of experiences related to migration, a minority position, discrimination and marginalization." So while the participants referred to emotions common in LP descriptions elsewhere, e.g., of learning the language of a new partner and associating this with love (Mark's language portrait), there were also 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 LP, some participants included frustrations about being forced to speak or not understanding spoken language. The importance of modalities is illustrated, e.g., by Hyemi's example of the positive emotion of being immersed in a signing deaf environment (a purple sea), Ole's separation of modalities rather than languages and his ambivalent relationship with mouthing versus voicing. The absence of a language modality in one's repertoire or the late addition to it is also very important in this context, indicated by the deaf new signers narrating about learning/using VGT, Diane about the absence of signs in her early life, and Marieke about only recently establishing semiotic preferences. Essentially, deaf signers comment on the



*feeling* of signing, speaking, writing, i.e., the feeling of doing language (HOFFMANN-DILLOWAY, 2018). [58]

LP also show the situated nature of the language repertoire. For example Study 1 participants mention Danish Sign Language a lot because the Frontrunners program is located in Denmark and there are also programs in Danish Sign Language in the same venue. Study 2 participants, in a meeting organized one year after data collection, indicated that they recognized the situational aspect of the LP, that it is a snap-shot of a moment in time and place that is fluid. Several of them said their LP would be different now because of changes in personal circumstances, such as employment status or relationships. [59]

The LP were highly individual. Most participants really enjoyed the method, wanting to keep their portrait or have a picture of it. The method allows people to create something about themselves that is also really *their* property, *of* themselves, and not just of the research project. Interestingly, compared to the individual interviews held in advance of the LP, the LP gave a far more individual perspective than these interviews. For example, most of the Study 1 participants did not include ASL in their LP even though many of them have strong opinions and feelings about ASL and ASL was a prominent theme in the interview preceding the portrait. However, it seems they did not relate to ASL as *in* themselves. In Study 2, in interviews not related to the LP, participants very often talked about "us" and "we," "we have to," "we should," "we won't." In the narratives related to the LP, this became "I," "me," "I want," "I should." While in interviews people might tend to follow more what is expected from them, 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 collective, a group (LADD, 2003): "the deaf community," "deaf world," "deaf people." 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 (see also BUSCH, 2017). [60]

LP as a research method also have some challenges that future researchers wanting to use the method with signers should be aware of. It matters who is administering the portraits: participants may be more willing to talk about language-related emotions with people they trust, who have certain experiences in common and who are fluent signers. We found the method to work better with people with a higher metalinguistic awareness and who can express themselves well. In this way, the method has the risk of becoming an elite method; working best with—and thus primarily showing—the experience of highly educated, (mobile) multilingual deaf people. On the other hand, the level of abstraction that LP entail may also make them more suitable for people who struggle to express themselves and easier than just asking questions. Pointing and drawing can help to overcome situations where words are lacking for whatever reason, which is why the method is also suitable to use with children. Also, while in our studies multilingual deaf people participated (due to the European/Frontrunners contexts), this is not imperative, and one could as easily use the method with bilingual British or American deaf people for example, which means the LP could, for example, foreground speaking/writing English and signing BSL or ASL. Some participants might be resistant to drawing, e.g., because they never draw, think it is silly, a children's activity or think it won't lead to any useful information. We sensed this resistance in some participants but since LP were not the only method used in the overall studies, this was balanced out by the other methods. [61]

We suggest that LP can be used in a wide range of contexts regarding deaf people and not just in research. LP could be used in group contexts e.g., in classrooms to reflect on one's own experience of languages and appreciate the complex embodied language experience of others. They could also be used individually in various kinds of therapy. LP that were collected elsewhere can be shown as examples by teachers when teaching in deaf awareness trainings, in teacher training programs and in interpreter training programs; they can be used to acknowledge deaf people's complex, multifarious, multimodal embodied experiences of language. [62]

DUFVA, ARO, ALANEN and KALAJA (2011) emphasize that visual and verbal research tools relate to different cultural-historical traditions. We argue that this is the case also for different traditions of modality use. Both spoken and signed languages are embodied phenomena but are expressed through different means and the LP also reflect this. The abovementioned meanings of hands and eyes, and the sometimes, ambivalent meanings of mouths and throats are obvious examples. However, while eyes and hands often feature prominently in

deaf art forms (see DURR, 2006), contrary to our expectation this is less the case in the LP and only half of the LP in Study 1 and less than half in Study 2 had eyes drawn on them. In Study 1, the hands and arms were often (but not always) the location of the most loved sign languages or first sign languages and other sign languages were placed elsewhere in the body. All in all, this might signify hands being more important than eyes in the LP and productive/expressive language more important than receiving language. [63]

The LP and the narratives in our studies do thus foreground language and languaging as a multimodal phenomenon, existing in different modalities. Furthermore, the narratives themselves are a multimodal phenomenon, in that people *become* their portrait. SALO and DUFVA (2018, p.427) write that "the verbal articulations [in the narratives] bring in dimensions that cannot be visually represented." Statements like these overlook the existence and affordances of sign languages where simultaneous structures, a use of three-dimensional space, and pictorial and iconic language use abound. We noticed that in the case of signers, the embodiment/expression of the narrations exists in symbiosis with the LP. The narrations of our participants included people pointing at or touching parts of their body and engaging in placing/pasting particular emotions on particular places of both their body and their LP (e.g., Sam's "hope," and Diane's "throat-pinching" sign). Furthermore, people take a language and place it somewhere, either on the LP or on the body, or both (e.g., Esther's "in me," Figure 14) and let them flow in each other (e.g., Mark's example of ASL extending into IS, Figure 16), or place themselves in the middle of the context they drew (e.g., Hyemi, Figure 3). Literally, people perform and *become* their LP when they sign about it. We imagine that some aspects of this also could occur in spoken narratives, such as gesturing, pointing at or touching body parts. [64]

A keen awareness and insistent focus on modality thus seems to be inherent in many LP in our studies. In addition, the narratives (and connection between LP and narratives) were constructed multimodally in several different ways. This article is thus a call for researchers to pay more attention to multimodality in the construction and analysis of LP, even when working with non-signers. [65]

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## Notes

- 1) The videos are subtitled in English. Videos from Study 1 are in IS, videos from Study 2 are in VGT. [<back>](#)
- 2) All videos had been accessed on 9 August 2019. The photos and videos were created within the frame of the two studies described in this article. Participants have given their permission for the authors to share these materials in this article. [<back>](#)
- 3) Glossing in capital letters was used here to stay close to the original signs. "Kissfist" means literally kissing on the wrist area of the fist to indicate someone really loves something. [<back>](#)

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## Authors

**Annelies KUSTERS** is associate professor in sign language and intercultural research at Heriot-Watt University, where she is based since April 2017. She leads a research project called "Deaf mobilities across international borders: Visualising intersectionality and translanguaging," funded by the European Research Council (2017-2022). KUSTERS' work is situated at the intersection of social and cultural anthropology, social and cultural geography and applied linguistics, in particular the study of multilingualism, transnationalism and mobilities. She makes use of visual methods in her work, including the creation of ethnographic films.

### Contact:

Annelies Kusters  
 Heriot-Watt University  
 Henry Prais Building 2.01  
 Edinburgh EH14 4AS, United Kingdom  
 E-mail: [a.kusters@hw.ac.uk](mailto:a.kusters@hw.ac.uk)  
 URL: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5228-7363>

**Maartje DE MEULDER** is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Namur Institute of Language, Text and Transmediality (NaLTT) of the University of Namur, Belgium. She specializes in deaf studies and applied language studies. Broader research interests include sign language rights, sign language maintenance and revitalization, multilingualism, and sign language interpreting from a socio-political perspective.

### Contact:

Maartje De Meulder  
 Namur Institute of Language, Text and Transmediality (NaLTT)  
 University of Namur  
 Rue de Bruxelles 61  
 5000 Namur, Belgium  
 E-mail: [maartje.demeulder@unamur.be](mailto:maartje.demeulder@unamur.be)  
 URL: <https://maartjedemeulder.be/>

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