



# The significance of village sign languages for the typological study of sign languages



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# Structure of the presentation

- Research themes and aims
- Project methodology
- Examples from the data
- Conclusions



# Research themes and aims

- Typological significance of data from village sign languages:
  - counter-examples to presumed sign language universals
  - unique or unusual constructions in these sign languages that have not been evidenced in other sign languages
- Do village sign languages form a linguistic subtype in contrast with urban sign languages?



# Data collection

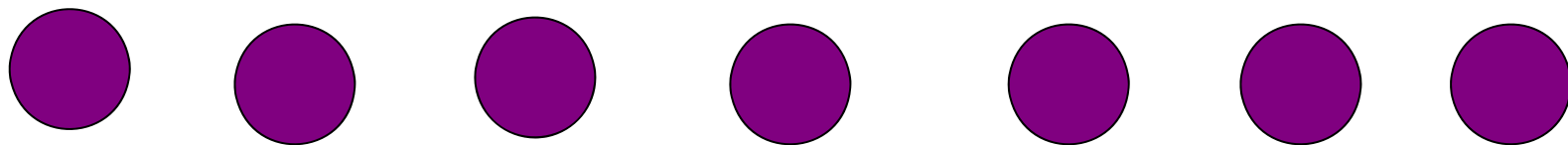
- Conversational data (mostly monologues and dialogues); organised corpora with ELAN transcriptions
- Focus on colour terms, kinship terms, and numerals
- Standardised questionnaires and elicitation materials – in progress



# Methodology for comparative research

Research protocol linguistics

Research protocol anthropology



FIELD SITES



COMPARATIVE DATA ANALYSIS



# Colour terms questionnaire, short version

## **PART 3: Semantics of colour signs**

### **Q3.1 Semantic types**

Signs belong to a number of different types depending on their semantic origin.

Which semantic types do the colour signs in your sign language belong to?

The sign is semantically related to an object, e.g. a body part TEETH to indicate `white`, or ORANGE to indicate `the colour orange`.

*List the signs in this category.*

The sign is linked to the spoken/written language either through fingerspelling of mouthing or both, e.g. ASL YELLOW

*List the signs in this category.*

The sign is non-iconic.

*List the signs in this category.*

Other, namely.....

*List the signs in this category.*



# Elicitation materials for colour

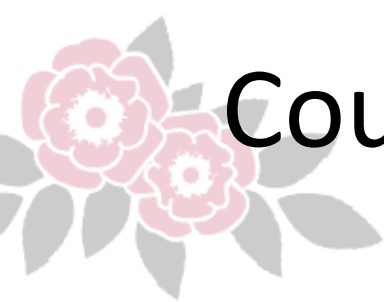




# Counter-examples to sign language “universals”: Sign space

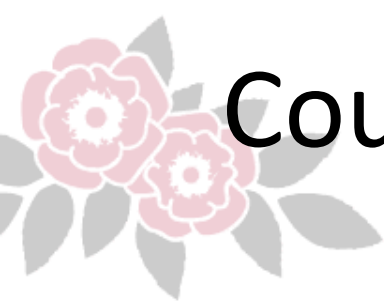
<b>Features of spatial grammar</b>	<b>Most Sign Languages</b>		
Directional verbs	YES		
Whole entity classifiers	YES		





# Counter-examples to sign language “universals”: Sign space

<b>Features of spatial grammar</b>	<b>Most Sign Languages</b>	<b>Adamorobe Sign Language</b>	
Directional verbs	YES	YES	
Whole entity classifiers	YES	NO	



# Counter-examples to sign language “universals”: Sign space

<b>Features of spatial grammar</b>	<b>Most Sign Languages</b>	<b>Adamorobe Sign Language</b>	<b>Kata Kolok</b>
Directional verbs	YES	YES	NO
Whole entity classifiers	YES	NO	YES



# Counter-examples to sign language “universals”: Sign space

Features of spatial grammar	Most Sign Languages	Adamorobe Sign Language	Kata Kolok
Directional verbs	YES	YES	NO
Whole entity classifiers	YES	NO	YES

→ These two village sign languages differ from urban sign languages, but also from each other!



# Unique / unusual constructions: Numeral systems

- Alipur Sign Language:
  - Subtractive numbers
    - e.g. “28” = “2 LESS 3 (30)”
- Mardin Sign Language:
  - 20-base numbers
    - e.g. “60” = “20 x 3”
- Yucatan Mayan Sign Language:
  - e.g. “60” = “50+10”



# Alipur Sign Language: Subtractive numbers

Examples:

“28” = “2 LESS 3 (30)”

“195” = “5 LESS 2 (200)”



# Mardin Sign Language

- Genetic deafness in the “*Dilsiz*” family over several generations, originally from Mardin area in Turkey
- Most family members now living in Istanbul and Izmir
- Severely endangered sign language with only ca. 40 signers



# Mardin Sign Language: 20-based numbers

Examples:

“40” = “20x2”

“60” = “30x2”



# Yucatec Mayan Sign Language

- 16 deaf signers in a village of 300-400 people
- Previous research on the village over the past decades, but no detailed documentation of the language





# Yucatec Mayan Sign Language: 20-based and 50-based numbers

Examples:

“30” = “20+10”

“60” = “50+10”

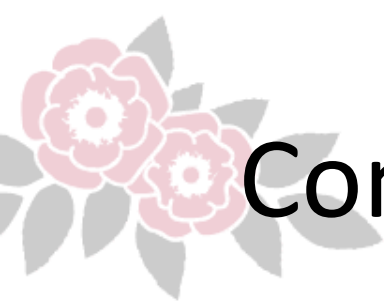


Conclusions: The significance of data from village sign languages



# Linguistic diversity

- There is more linguistic diversity across sign languages than previously expected, and data from village sign languages add considerably to this diversity.



# Community setting and linguistics

- It seems that the localised, small-scale setting in “deaf villages” sometimes enables these sign languages to have structures not found in other sign languages, e.g. absolute pointing instead of place names.



# Suggestive generalisations: An example

- THE IDEA: Village sign languages might show considerable influence from co-existing spoken languages due to the large number of hearing bilingual signers.



# Suggestive generalisations: An example

- THE IDEA: Village sign languages might show considerable influence from co-existing spoken languages due to the large number of hearing bilingual signers.
  - THE DATA: This is sometimes true, but not always. Specifics of language contact situations and their outcomes vary across village sign languages.



# Conclusions

- It is too early to decide whether village sign languages form a linguistic type in any sense.
- Any generalizations must be inductive and empirically substantiated.
- Village sign languages are certainly of great interest to typology, and we look forward to further studies.



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