Annelies Kusters, Mara Green, Erin Moriarty and
Kristin Snoddon

Sign language ideologies: Practices and politics

While much research has taken place on language attitudes and ideologies regarding spoken languages, research that investigates sign language ideologies and names them as such is only just emerging. Actually, earlier work in Deaf Studies and sign language research uncovered the existence and power of language ideologies without explicitly using this term. However, it is only quite recently that scholars have begun to explicitly focus on sign language ideologies, conceptualized as such, as a field of study. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first edited volume to do so.

Influenced by our backgrounds in anthropology and applied linguistics, in this volume we bring together research that addresses *sign language ideologies in practice*. In other words, this book highlights the importance of examining language ideologies as they unfold on the ground, undergirded by the premise that what we think that language can do (ideology) is related to what we do with language (practice).[1] All the chapters address the tangled confluence of sign language ideologies as they influence, manifest in, and are challenged by communicative practices. Contextual analysis shows that language ideologies are often situation-dependent and indeed often seemingly contradictory, varying across space and moments in time. Therefore, rather than only identifying language ideologies as they appear in metalinguistic discourses, the authors in this book analyse how everyday language practices implicitly or explicitly involve ideas about those practices and the other way around. We locate ideologies about sign languages and communicative practices, which may not be one and the same, in their contexts, situating them within social settings, institutions, and historical processes, and investigating how they are related to political-economic interests as well as affective and intersubjective dynamics.

Sign languages are minority languages using the visual-kinesthetic and tactile-kinesthetic modalities. It is important to recognize both that the affordances of these modalities are different from those of the auditory-oral (spoken) modality, *and* that signers, like speakers, often make use of multilingual and multimodal

---

1 This assertion is indebted to the work of Silverstein and Hanks, among others. See for example Silverstein 1979, Silverstein 1985 (cited in Hill and Mannheim 1992), and Hanks 1990 (also cited in Hill and Mannheim 1992).

language repertoires. This book explores how signers and people with whom they interact (be they signers or non-signers) understand sign languages and their relationships to other languages (signed or spoken) and modalities (including speech and writing). The authors look at ideologies regarding sign languages and connect them to ideologies regarding spoken and written languages in order to interrogate how ideologies are part and parcel of how people think about and experience multimodal communication and understanding in everyday life. In doing so, the book contributes to current theoretical trends that focus on how on-the-ground language practices draw on multimodal, and often multilingual, repertoires, conceptualized in neologisms such as translanguaging. In this body of work, there is a strong emphasis on connecting the study of language practice with the investigation of language ideologies. Yet within this research, there is a dearth of scholarship on ideologies about sign language (whether visual or tactile) and gesture, as well as their relationship to speech and writing.

In this remainder of this introduction, we draw on our own research and that of many others in order to (1) orient the reader to the concept of language ideologies; (2) review prior work on sign language ideologies, even if not named as such; (3) interrogate the relationship among various conceptual tools, such as "ideology," "theory," "insight," and "fact," used by scholars to describe what people inside and outside of academia think about, and enact in, language practices, (4) analyse several key sites where sign language ideologies consistently manifest, such as the practice of naming sign languages; and (5) review the contributions that each of the chapters makes to this volume.

Here, it is helpful to briefly introduce ourselves and our academic and linguistic backgrounds. Annelies Kusters is a deaf anthropologist from Belgium, who has conducted extensive ethnographic work with signers in Paramaribo (Surinam), Mumbai (India), Adamorobe (Ghana), and in various transnational contexts. Mara Green is a hearing anthropologist from the US. Her long-term fieldwork focuses on deaf persons in Nepal. Erin Moriarty is a deaf anthropologist from the US, whose primary research has been with deaf people and NGOs in Cambodia, as well as deaf tourism in Indonesia. Kristin Snoddon is a deaf applied linguist from Canada. Her work on sign language learning by deaf children and their hearing parents is based in Canada. All of us are white; all of us are women; all of us are fluent in at least one sign language and at least one written/spoken language. Both this introduction and our editorial work for this volume have been shaped by our particular professional and personal experiences as deaf and hearing academics working within and across modalities and languages.

1 The concept of language ideologies

An overview of the rich field of language ideology study, both within and beyond linguistic anthropology, is beyond the scope of this book (but see Woolard and Schieffelin 1994; Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998; Irvine and Gal 2000; and Kroskrity 2000a). Put simply, language ideologies are thoughts and beliefs about languages, varieties, modalities, and the people who use them. Attitudes about what language is (or is not), how and where languages are used, their value, and their origins are expressed as language ideologies (Kroskrity 2000b: 5). Language ideologies have consequences for individuals and communities, and within politics, scholarship, and education, among other domains. Language ideologies have been used to naturalize the boundaries of particular social groups, including or excluding people who may or may not use languages in accordance to a dominant group's norms and expectations (Lippi Green 1997; Errington 2000). Language use is a way of enacting social identities and belonging to certain intersecting categories such as ethnicity, gender, disability, sexuality, social class, and nationality. In this way, ideologies about everyday language practices can create shifting categories of sameness and difference.

Irvine and Gal (2000: 35) focus on the ideological aspects of language differentiation, defining ideologies both as "conceptual schemes that are suffused with the political and moral issues pervading the particular linguistic field" and as "folk theories," meaning how people think about and understand their own language. These authors also highlight how the study of linguistics and languages is in itself an ideological enterprise, a point with which we agree. In sign language linguistics, this can be glimpsed in the historical application of a spoken language framework to research and theory about sign languages, in the now-receding avoidance of studying gesture, and in assumptions materialized in delineating and naming sign languages (e.g., that languages are or should be fairly homogenous and geographically bounded; see below). As we discuss more fully later in this introduction, how we think about and represent ideologies as they manifest in both academic and non-academic settings is a complicated endeavor.

2 Ideologies in sign language and Deaf Studies research

At the end of the nineteenth century, the conflation of gesture and signing, as well as their marginalization as "not language," was a core tenet of structural linguistics, in part because it focused on the spoken word in its written (transcribable) form. From the late 1950s onwards, research in sign language linguistics has tended toward an ideological resolve to separate gesture and signing, and to show that sign languages bear features such as parts of speech, morphosyntax, and duality of patterning which were first identified in spoken languages (Branson and Miller 2007; Haviland 2015). Sign language researchers have often appeared to gloss over differences between signed and spoken languages and also have strived to demonstrate complexity in sign languages as a way of showing that they are true languages (Taub 2001: 37; Vermeerbergen 2006; Haviland 2015). This concern about sign languages' status as "real" tends not to occur with other minority languages such as Spanish in the USA (Reagan 2011) and is seemingly rooted in ideologies about the superiority of the spoken modality (Senghas and Monaghan 2002; Hill 2012).

These ideologies and their ramifications are not, of course, confined to academic settings. Scholars in Deaf Studies have long recognized how the denigration and suppression of sign languages has influenced deaf people's lives and ways of seeing their languages. Indeed language ideologies have been a central aspect motivating sign language-related research for many decades. Generally held misconceptions about sign languages include the ideas that sign languages do not have grammatical structures, are merely gesture, are universal, portray only concrete situations and mime, and cannot be used to express abstract ideas (Burns, Matthews, and Nolan-Conroy 2001). Other commonly held ideologies include the folk belief that sign languages are always directly derived from and not merely influenced in complex ways by spoken languages (contradicting the idea that they are universal). Grounded in and reaffirming such misconceptions, oralist educational policies intended to keep deaf people from signing have meant that many deaf people learn to sign quite late in life, and many deaf signers have historically internalized negative perspectives regarding sign languages (Ladd 2003). On the other hand, sign languages have also carried covert prestige inside deaf communities that, as with other conscribed minority languages, contribute to their ongoing transmission and maintenance (Padden 1990; Supalla and Clark 2015). Murray (2017) describes how from the 1960s onward, deaf signers in the USA came to accept American Sign Language (ASL) as a named language indexing national boundaries, in place of what was previously known by deaf people

in this context as "signing" or "the sign language." As Humphries (2001) earlier noted, changing discourses and perceptions of deaf people and sign language have meant recalibrating not only ideas of inferiority and equality but also ideas of difference and sameness: the ways in which sign languages correspond with, and not only differ from spoken languages.

3 Terminological and epistemological questions

In the frame of this book, we find it important to address both the slippage and separation of concepts used by academics to think about how people think about language, such as "theory" and "ideology," and, tangled up in this, a some-times-misunderstanding of language ideology as meaning something like "false beliefs people have about languages."[2] We think, for example, that saying "all languages are equal in worth" is true, but it is also ideological. Saying "some languages are better than others" is, we think, false (though some languages may be better at specific things than others, or have different affordances), and it is also ideological. Sometimes people attribute "ideology" only to the latter; that is, to ideas about language that have been deemed false.

Another term that comes to mind while thinking about language ideologies is "insight." What should we call ideology and what should we deem to be something else, such as "insight" or "fact"? For example, if we posit that when two interlocutors who are respectively monolingual in, say, English and Chinese try to have a conversation, then they are unlikely to understand each other, but if two interlocutors who are respectively monolingual in American Sign Language and Chinese Sign Language try to do so that they will have a bit more success, is such a statement an insight or an ideology? What about statements such as "sign language is not universal," "sign languages are languages," "sign languages are not the same as co-speech gesture," "sign languages are not based on English/Spanish/Khmer," "sign languages are not sign systems," or "sign languages have

---

2 We recognize that the conflation of "language ideologies" with "false beliefs about languages" has a historical grounding in Marxist conceptions of ideology as masking relations of exploitation. However, as the term "language ideologies" currently circulates, the Marxist sense of ideologies as having a particular relationship to class and labor, along with "power, hegemony, and contradiction" (Povinelli 1998: 597) is often unmentioned. Thus we want to bring to attention, and into question, the way in which "language ideologies" as a generalized analytic often seems to imply that language ideologies are what (other) people (and usually not academics) believe, falsely, to be true about language(s).

grammar"? Are these statements facts or ideologies, or both? Indeed, the opposites of these claims are often seen as "false beliefs" (see Krausneker 2015, and the chapters by Calton, Spooner, Marie, and Kurz et al.), but we if take seriously the idea that ideologies are always part and parcel of practices, then the claims we put forth are also ideological — although, we would argue, true.

Relatedly, one of the questions we grappled with when editing this book is the difference between vernacular ideologies and scholarly theories. We tend to talk about local ideas and understandings of language as "language ideologies," while the subjects of academic writing are described as "theory." The way we see it, vernacular ideologies are (at least sometimes) also theories of language, and theories of language are also ideological. In a very different context, anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2001: 209) cautions us to be "attentive to the elisions any process of translation entails, especially when the language of social science claims a self-transparent universalism, and the language used by 'ordinary people' is understood as a poor approximation of their reality." In trying to trouble this hierarchical dichotomy, one might avoid the word ideology altogether, as Green (2014a, b) has done. Another way of negotiating this issue is using the term ideologies for both disciplinary/academic and vernacular/local understandings, as Austin and Sallabank (2011) and Kusters and Sahasrabudhe (2018) have done.

Academic language ideologies inform and are informed by explicit theories as well as implicit assumptions built into research projects. For example, in trying to avoid influencing local language practices, sign language linguists studying village sign languages have attempted not to use the linguists' own national sign languages with study participants (Erard 2019). Everyday language ideologies are those uttered by (lay) participants in research. For example, Moriarty Harrelson (2019) describes how deaf tourists in the Global South have taken up these discourses regarding not exposing deaf people in the Global South to the tourists' sign languages. As these examples illustrate, however, a strict dichotomy between everyday and academic language ideologies does not work since academic ideologies can be circulated in common everyday discourses (Murray 2017, Kusters and Sahasrabudhe 2018), and either conform to, or differ from everyday language ideologies. And of course, the academy is its own "everyday" space.

We might also ask whether the strategies that people use, and their reflections on those strategies, are ideological or practical, or both. For example, if a deaf person chooses a particular way of communicating with a hearing person, such as writing, over another way of communicating, such as speaking or gesturing, and explains that they expect the first way of communicating to be more successful, is their explanation an ideology or an insight leading to pragmatic decisions (see Kusters, this volume)? Another important question is how we know when practices reflect ideologies or not. When people choose to commu-

nicate using certain language modalities instead of others, does their choice of modality reflect implicit ideologies about these modalities and their affordances, experiential knowledge about the effects of these modalities and their affordances, or both?

Returning to our earlier theme, we can ask more broadly: When is it useful to think of statements as facts, as insights, as ideologies, or as theories? How might we understand the relationship between ideologies and pragmatic choices influenced by (among other things) the effects of ideologies? In a different but fundamentally intertwined sense, how do we as authors and editors decide when to frame certain ideologies about sign language as wrong or right? While recognizing that we may not be able to answer these questions, we can remain conscious of these issues in the study of the relationships between language ideologies and practices. There is a fine line between asserting, as we have done, that all beliefs about language are ideological (including our academic "truths") and rendering oneself unable to say that some things are untrue (e.g., the idea that sign languages lack grammar). Calling certain statements about languages ideologies and not others has political implications. For political reasons, we need and want to support certain ideologies (or insights, facts, and theories), but we should be transparent about doing so. In this book we have tried, and encouraged the authors to try, to focus on specific discourses and statements about languages, language modalities, and their relationships to each other (whether these discourses and statements are disciplinary or vernacular, and whether we call them ideology, insight, fact or theory) and to also recognize that ideology can be implicit in practice and that practice can also conflict with ideology, as when there is a conflict between what people think they (should) do versus what they are actually observed to do.

4 Key sites for manifestation and investigation of sign language ideologies

4.1 Naming languages

The naming of a sign language, even as it has practical applications in creating an object of study and political applications in creating an identifiable target of policy, is in itself an ideological act. While only a few of the chapters in this book address this phenomenon explicitly, each of them (this one included) takes part in it, as all our chapters use language names.

In many cases, as in the earlier cited example of ASL (Murray 2017) the naming of sign languages is a result of intellectual and political trajectories driven by specific research and political goals. In some circumstances, sign languages as named and bounded systems appear to only come into existence when they have been recognized or documented by a researcher or any other official person or entity, such as a deaf association or NGO (see Moriarty, this volume). This can be in (partial) accordance or contrast to how deaf people themselves talk about their communicative practices, which we discuss in more depth below.

Rather than using locally authored terms or signs to name sign languages, researchers have frequently named languages by connecting them to locations, as with the examples of British Sign Language, or BSL (the national sign language of the United Kingdom), Adamorobe Sign Language (a village sign language in Ghana), and Bamako Sign Language (an urban sign language in Mali). Researchers also use different standards to group varieties as language. As Palfreyman (2018) argues, there are several implications connected to naming sign languages. If, in the tradition of James Woodward, each regional and urban variety is given a different name, that would mean that there would be more than 500 named sign languages in Indonesia alone. When Indonesia's deaf national association gave sign language practices in Indonesian the name Bahasa Isyarat Indonesia or BISINDO, they chose to adhere to what are seen as politically strategic moves to gain official recognition of a single, unified sign language and thereby more supports and services for deaf people (Palfreyman 2018). But who decides what counts as a language? When does the goal of increased human rights and public services for deaf people justify, or not, making an ideological claim for a unified sign language for each nation?

Naming sign languages involves organizing them into precise categories based on their characteristics, the implication being that sign languages are clearly and neatly bounded, as are their users. Naming sign languages territorializes them, fixing them to a place and group of people. In some contexts, this can be empowering, as in the case of ASL; however, it also becomes problematic when ASL becomes fixed to the United States, obscuring the use of ASL in Canada and in other countries, as glimpsed in ongoing Canadian deaf Facebook community discussions regarding substituting the term "Canadian Sign Language" or CSL. This discussion, however, leads to further problems regarding which of the multiple sign languages used in Canada is to be termed CSL. ASL can also become fixed to a specific ideology of the identity of ASL users, leading to the erasure of Black deaf ASL signers in the United States (McCaskill et al., 2011), for example, or to ideas that ASL has spread through the world like a virus, contaminating and/or displacing "local" sign languages (see Moriarty Harrelson 2017). This does not mean, however, that there are not cases where sign languages actually do

displace other sign languages, such as in the case of Thai Sign Language and Ban Khor Sign Language (Nonaka 2004) or Cambodian Sign Language (see Moriarty, this volume).

4.2 Standardisation and purism

Sign languages, their boundaries, and their use have a way of arousing strong emotions in both deaf and hearing people. Social media, especially Facebook, has become a forum where deaf people throughout the world elucidate, clarify, and debate the origins and "correctness" of certain signs. For example, a recent vlog posted on Facebook by a deaf woman from the USA criticized a name sign used to denote the state of Louisiana. The sign starts with one hand making the "L" hand-shape, then enclosing the thumb of the "L" into a "A" handshape made by the opposing hand, which then becomes a sign signifying defecation. The Louisiana vlogger claimed that the origin of this sign was in "trash talk" at a basketball tour-nament for schools for the deaf in the southern US and that it is not the correct sign. She then demonstrated what she considers to be the correct sign, a combi-nation of fingerspelling "L" and "A" with a single hand. This discussion is only one of many examples of how deaf people are engaging in "grassroots" efforts to standardize ASL. Some ASL users have started using "new" signs, de-initializing signs such as "culture," "philosophy," "family," and "interview." We have seen this process referred to as the purging of English from ASL. This, too, has been debated on Facebook by duelling vloggers. The Facebook vlogs show the emo-tional investment of many deaf ASL users in maintaining the boundaries of their sign language, which has been referred to as the "precious heritage of the Deaf community" (Moore and Levitan 1992) and "the core of a culturally Deaf identity" (Benedict and Legg 2012).

This investment is not limited to ASL users. Moges (2015), for example, has addressed the removal and addition of certain signs from Eritrean Sign Language, a process she refers to as demissionization. In the United Kingdom, a popular show on the website BSL Zone, *Deaf Funny,* has a recurring sketch featuring the "BSL police," a parody that shows how commonplace it is for policing and cor-rection of particular signs or ways of signing to occur among sign language users. This is an activity fraught with ideology. For example, it would be considered by many deaf and hearing signers to be wrong for a hearing, non-native signer to correct a native deaf signer. In turn, this point brings another issue to the fore-front: Who is a native signer? This question is especially relevant to sign language users because of the small number of people who are born into families that use sign language as a primary language.

4.3 Classifying and evaluating languageness

When a deaf person does not use a named spoken or signed language (which could be a national, regional, urban, or local sign language), they are often said to "have no language," even when they do communicate (Moriarty Harrelson 2019). Indeed, an indirect implication of naming sign languages is that deaf communicative practices sometimes seem to be forced into existing linguistic paradigms. Certain elements like gestures and pointing are marginalized because recognizing their communicative potential may be seen to challenge the truism that a given sign language is a "bona fide" language based on its close fit with conventional definitions of languages as established in spoken language research (Kendon 2008; McBurney 2012). Indeed, some language scholars have suggested that different forms of gesturing and signing can be classified on a developmental cline (see Figure 1). Importantly, there usually is, at some point, the construction of a break between sign and/or gesture as (homesign) "system," and "sign language" (see Goldin-Meadow and Brentari 2017).
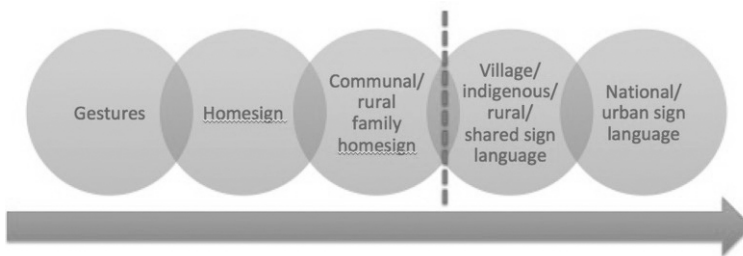

Figure 1. Developmental cline.

Categories such as "homesign" and "shared sign language" are infused with ideas about what they are, what they can do, and where, how, and by whom they are used. The idea that language and not-language can be neatly separated, and that forms of signing can be organized in accordance to a classification system is in itself an ideology, based on the idea that language(s) have neat or clear boundaries. In these debates, forms of signing often become abstracted from the contexts in which they are used, as Green (2017) argues. It is through linguistic ethnography that researchers have been able to reach a deeper understanding of these forms of signing and their sociolinguistic contexts, often through investigating naming practices and ideologies of deaf signers, and by challenging the classifications themselves (Le Guen, Safar, and Coppola 2019; Hou and Kusters 2020). For example, studying the use of gestures by fluent users of Indian Sign

Language when communicating with hearing non-signers disrupts the classification of gesture as neatly separated from other language forms and situates the use of gesture squarely in everyday language practices (Kusters 2017).

Green (2014a) demonstrates how following local naming practices not only respects those practices but also challenges the tendency of researchers to focus on national, urban, and regional sign languages *or* on other forms of signing. Rather, Green (2014a: 26) writes that in Nepal, "sign" can encompass multiple kinds of signing, which get further differentiated as needed: "The sign *sign* may be used to refer to signing-in-general as well as to a specific form or instance of signing, which may be *categorically* [classified by signers as] NSL, natural sign, or a foreign sign language." She further resists classifying the emic term "natural sign" used by deaf signers in Nepal into already-existing typologies created by researchers, asserting that it is not, for example, commensurable with either "gesture" or "home sign."

A similar master category of "sign" (that includes what in some schema might be classified as gesturing) has elsewhere been identified as intuitive for many deaf people (see Kusters 2014; Kusters and Sahasrabudhe 2018). A study of everyday ideologies of deaf people in Mumbai showed either an analytical collapse of gesture and sign or a distinction between them, depending on the context. In this study, as compared to academic ideologies regarding the difference between gesture and sign that are more focused on form, deaf people were more focused on hearing status and other contextual factors when deciding whether something counted as gesture or sign (Kusters and Sahasrabudhe 2018).

These issues may also arise when thinking about how best to support hearing parents of deaf children in their efforts to communicate. The following question came up during a workshop we held in Edinburgh, Scotland, as part of the process of creating this book: Is it more productive to emphasize to parents that the particular sign language they are learning is a real language, with its own grammatical structure, or is it more productive to validate non-standard gestural communication and encourage them to focus on effective and unselfconscious communication over "correct" signing?

Questions of how to categorize diverse signed communicative practices are further complicated by considerations of the complexity of signers' lived experiences. Around the world, many deaf people communicate in something other than what has been regarded as a conventional, full or standard sign language. On the one hand, it is critical to recognize the richness, creativity, and possibilities of these deaf people's linguistic and communicative repertoires. On the other hand, it is important not to ignore the everyday struggles of deaf people who do not use a standard or widely shared sign language. Writing about these practices brings up many questions. Do we call what they are using a language,

home sign, natural sign, family sign? How is this question related to the degree to which communication in these modes can be considered successful or not? As analysts, according to what standards do we judge success, and where do we locate failure — in the system, in the interaction? As Green (2014a) has argued, interlocutors' willingness or refusal to do the work of communicating plays as important a role in how conversations unfold (or not) as do the affordances and limitations of semiotic resources.

It is also important to note that in both academic and non-academic discourse, we have noticed anachronistic ideas in efforts to classify communicative practices. Our sense is that these ideas, bearing a resemblance to a global evolutionist scheme, often surface in discourses about deaf people of color and/ or those living in the global South. Such signers are often described as isolated and having "no language" if they have not had the experience of formal education in a setting with other deaf students or the means to interact with other deaf people who use a shared sign language (Moriarty Harrelson 2019). While taking into account the complexities of such situations, it is critical to be cognizant of how such discourses are reminiscent of colonial ideologies about indigenous language complexity and indigenous people's civility and intelligence, historically situated in areas of colonialism and missionization such as in Africa (Irvine and Gal 2000) and in Asia and the Pacific (Jourdan and Angeli 2014).

4.4 Understanding

In thinking about the analysis of ideologies and practices involving both more and less "standard" or "conventional" practices, the issue of understanding is critical. When two or more people are engaged in a communicative interaction, when do each understand, misunderstand, or not understand each other? Is this experience mutual, or does one person understand more, less, or differently than the other? Goffman (1964) points out that in everyday conversations, our understanding of each other just has to be "good enough." What counts as "good enough" varies according to context and is influenced by both ideology and experience, which in turn influence each other. In certain situations, it may be that deaf persons expect to (not) understand other deaf or hearing people. The experience of signing together may at times supersede the goal of deep referential understanding. As an example, our editorial meeting in October 2017 included a workshop attended by a number of deaf and several hearing academics from different countries; we communicated primarily in International Sign including heavy use of both ASL and BSL. At the end of the workshop, there was general agreement that we had not understood everything that was said in a referential

sense. But there was also consensus that we had understood enough, and that our experience of direct communication was worth the loss of referential understanding. Thus, a moral commitment (Green 2014b) to communicate directly as signers influenced our willingness to tolerate understanding less than we might have, had our workshop been conducted with interpreters and/or in a context of a single signed or spoken language. In other settings, moreover, our expectations and tolerance would have been different. For example, Friedner (2016) describes how the value of understanding is foregrounded and made active by a deaf sign language teacher working with deaf students who were previously taught by hearing individuals who did not know sign language. Indeed, in this context and others, failing to reveal to another deaf signer when one does not understand may be to breach a cultural taboo; i.e., if you don't understand and don't tell the other signer, you are violating a cultural norm that values understanding.

Another way that understanding may impact sign language ideologies is in relation to signers' devaluation or criticism of specific kinds of signing. Here, we are thinking about signing that closely follows the grammar and/or lexicon of a spoken language, especially but not only when that signing includes signs that specifically represent grammatical features of the spoken language (e.g., Signed Exact English, Signed Nepali). In these contexts, there is often a spectrum of signing practices, and signing that appears to be based on a spoken language is often both denigrated and considered better by diverse interlocutors. In some cases, resistance to such practices are about a symbolic disavowal of the power-laden influences of a dominant language, taking the form of language policing and language purism. However, we wonder whether more general resistance to spoken-language-based signing (or signing that appears to reference spoken languages) may be because *it is (or can be) difficult to understand for many signers*. In other words, what may be expressed as dislike of a kind of signing used by other deaf people because of its perceived origins in speech may instead or also be a profound discomfort with seeing (or touching) a modality that is "accessible" but a grammatical structure that is not. When people do not understand each other, we suggest, they often look for a reason why; and if that reason can be captured by something like "that kind of signing looks more English" it may be more the Englishness and less the not-understanding that circulates in discourse.

We might also consider how our own experiences of being able to take understanding or being understood for granted (or not) influence our expectations. One of us, Mara, is hearing and grew up in the USA, a country where she speaks the dominant language. During fieldwork in Nepal, she found herself at times frustrated with a close friend and research associate, when she realized that he did not always, or even often, ask for clarification when they were conversing and

he did not understand something. After thinking about this for a long time, she has come to the perspective that growing up and into adulthood, he did not have the privilege of regularly understanding people; she posits that *he had to learn how to be okay with partial understanding*. This does not, of course, mean that her friend does not deeply value spaces where understanding is easy, such as among deaf friends, but rather that not-understanding or partial-understanding is far more a "social fact" for him than it is for her.

Another question emerges when a novice hearing signer finds it easy to communicate with a deaf signer (often because the deaf signer is performing skilled accomodations). Will this sense of ease lead to the hearing signer being further motivated to increase her fluency, or will she assume that she is far more competent than she actually is? Similarly, we wonder whether signing tourists (whether deaf or hearing) sometimes think they have learned more of the sign language of the place they are visiting than they actually have, because they are indeed, at least to some degree, understanding and being understood by the signers they are meeting. Indeed, we may even misunderstand the degree to which we have (been) understood. What is of importance to this book is that understanding, not understanding, partial understanding, and mis-understanding are inherent to language practices. Moreover, when people don't understand each other, they often try to understand why, and this in turn impacts language ideologies.

5 Structure of the book

As this introduction suggests, thinking through sign language ideologies in practice is a vast undertaking filled with questions and contestations about everyday experience, analytic approaches, and ethical issues.[3] In the remainder of this book, the authors of the chapters present situated analyses of what people do with languages in everyday life, and how they experience and rationalize their linguistic actions, such as language choice, language switches, language creation, and translation. We have grouped the chapters into four sections, though there are resonances across sections as well.

The first section, titled "Sign language ideologies: Setting the scene," focuses on the embodiment of sign language and of sign language ideologies (by deaf or hearing bodies) and more specifically, what knowing, learning, and embodying

---

3 In this section of the introduction, we use the terms deaf or Deaf in accordance with the author whose chapter we are discussing.

sign language means to new and long-time signers. It analyses how being-in-the-world unfolds in relationship to sign languages; for example, how sign language learning is experienced as transformational by both deaf and hearing learners, and how it is paired with learning about deaf ways of being-in-the-world (deaf cultures, deaf epistemologies, deaf ontologies). The chapters in this section are based on research in a variety of settings, including classrooms, deaf communities, and non-governmental organizations. Joanne Weber's chapter presents the case of Saskatchewan, Canada as a microcosm of ideologies and attitudes surrounding sign languages. She provides an autoethnographic account of her journey in late acquisition of ASL in the context of diminished access to ASL role models and the use of ASL in an educational environment primarily mediated by signed English transliterators. Anne E. Pfister's chapter reveals how learning Lengua de Señas Mexicana (Mexican Sign Language, or LSM) was a life-changing event for deaf participants in Mexico City, most of whom were exposed to sign language relatively late in life. This chapter draws attention to particular language use — in the form of colloquial expressions and related descriptive concepts — to describe deaf participants' memories and contemplations of language learning. Gabrielle Hodge's chapter explores the semiotic ecology of a contemporary dance collaboration between deaf signers of Auslan (Australian Sign Language) and hearing speakers of English and other spoken languages. The chapter describes how a densely indexed, multimodal and multilingual composition unfolded, grounded in: one that is grounded in — and therefore reflects — the semiotic (and ideological) ecologies in which signers and speakers live, and what happens when they merge. Theresia Hofer's chapter is an ethnography of the signing practices of 25 deaf Tibetans living in Lhasa, capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in China, who use sign language as their main or preferred form of communication with one another. The chapter explores diverging sign language ideologies with regard to deaf Tibetans' language use, including Tibetan Sign Language (TSL) and a local variety of Chinese Sign Language (CSL), neither of which are static or bounded entities.

The second section, titled "Sign language ideologies in teaching," starts with a chapter by Cindee Calton exploring the connection between ideologies about ASL and pedagogical choices in college ASL classrooms in the United States. She analyzes the language ideologies expressed in interviews with ASL and other second language teachers, the ideologies expressed in the textbooks selected by ASL and other language teachers, and pedagogical choices encountered in the classrooms. Drawing on an ethnographic study of a community-run center for teaching sign language in Hanoi, Vietnam, Aron S. Marie's chapter explores how language ideologies shape the stakes of sign language interpreting, the positionality of interpreters, and the criteria Deaf community leaders use to screen

potential interpreting students. In this setting, the stakes of language ideologies and their impact on interpreting are high: like many countries, Vietnam has multiple and often competing ideologies surrounding the use of sign language. The chapter by Kristin Snoddon discusses the ideological impact of introducing the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) into the domain of sign language teaching, in relation to findings from ongoing ethnographic action research studies of developing CEFR-aligned courses for teaching ASL to hearing parents of deaf children. In this context, ideologies inherent to the CEFR and its implementation in both European and Canadian settings are met by ideologies regarding teaching hearing parents ASL, and instructors' own ideologies surrounding ASL curricula and pedagogy.

The third section, titled "Sign language and literacy ideologies," focuses on everyday experiences of the use of written language by deaf signers. It highlights deaf persons' experiences of learning written language (both in the form of writing spoken languages and writing sign languages through SignWriting) and using written language in everyday life (often in alternation with sign language, spoken language, or gestures), in customer interactions, in peer-to-peer teaching, and in classrooms. Ruth Anna Spooner's chapter presents findings from a qualitative research study with fifteen deaf and hard-of-hearing high school students about their language and literacy experiences. Under the misconception that ASL is a language with "no rules" and "complete flexibility," the students delight in the apparent linguistic freedom they have in ASL and view English more negatively on account of it having "too many rules" and being "too complicated." The chapter by Julia Gillen, Noah Ahereza, and Marco Nyarko examines literacy and language practices in Uganda and Ghana in regard to the everyday life experiences of deaf sign language users in multiple modalities, with a particular focus on their experiences with English literacy, including in online domains, where in literacy practices deafness may potentially be unmarked. The chapter by Erika Hoffmann-Dilloway explores how the use of SignWriting, a movement-based writing system, affects German students' ideologies regarding the sensory and social underpinnings of the production and perception of language. This chapter attends to the ideological mediation through which physical sensations can be thought to be transformed across modalities into visible signs and written markings, and, purportedly, back into physical experience, and how, in this particular ethnographic setting, these processes in turn affect users' ideological framings of writing practices and social relations. Annelies Kusters' chapter focuses on deaf and deafblind people's use of writing, and ideologies connected to writing, in interactions in Mumbai that involve deaf customers, baristas, shopkeepers, and commuters communicating with hearing customers, drivers, and shopkeepers. This chapter provides insight into practices and ideologies regarding the comple-

mentarity of different modalities, how they exist in hierarchies, and how different literacies come into play.

The final section, titled "Sign language ideologies in language planning and policy," includes Audrey C. Cooper's chapter, which examines the circumstances of hearing people's ideological stance toward Deaf people in Việt Nam, and Deaf social organizers' actions that seek to re-center government and development aid attention on a sociolinguistic grounding of Deaf experience. This chapter shows how everyday practices reproduce conditions of exclusion for Deaf people who use Hồ Chí Minh Sign Language as well as how Deaf social organizers leverage contemporary language and development aid mobilities to address the detrimental consequences of socio-linguistic ideologies. John Bosco Conama's chapter takes a critical autoethnographic approach in examining the timeline of developments in the campaign for recognition of Irish Sign Language (ISL) in Ireland between 1981 and 2016. Given the Irish Deaf community's heterogeneity, possessing fluid boundaries, various language ideologies have come to bear on the question of how ISL recognition was obtained. Christopher A.N. Kurz, Jeanne E. Reis, Jonathan Henner, and Barbara Spiecker's chapter presents findings from a case study of a multi-stage process of sign coinage that iterates between development, evaluation, maintenance, and sharing of academic terms in ASL. In this chapter, ideologies about ASL are explored, along with motivation for viewing ASL as an academic language in environments where the prevailing perception is that English is superior for academic discourse and domain-specific terminology. Erin Moriarty's chapter examines sign language standardization projects in terms of 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 NGO in 1997 and the concurrent efforts to develop a national sign language. The chapter frames this in-depth example as a case study of how languages are caught up in projects of national belonging and claims to citizenship. The book concludes with an afterword by Joseph Murray.

We want to end this introduction by recognizing what is absent. There is significantly less diversity in the geographical, ethnic/racial, and linguistic backgrounds of our editors and authors than there would be in a world with more equitable distribution of resources. There is also less even attention to the various regions and settings of the world than is ideal, with a higher number of chapters about North America than about any other continent, and with nearly all the chapters focused on urban settings. The relationships between minority and majority sign languages and among racial and regional sign varieties, such as Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) and ASL in Canada, Black ASL and White ASL in the US, or Mumbai-based and Kerala-based Indian Sign Language in

India, are not analyzed here, nor are the diverse experiences of deaf immigrants around the world.

In our discussions, another important issue surfaced that we have been unable to address here: how to take account of complicated and power-laden local, national, and global connections without disregarding the fact that places outside of the global North do have their own histories that cannot be reduced to the influence of the North. Put another way, we find it important as researchers to both trace circulations of ideologies through deaf travel, education, and organizations like the World Federation of the Deaf, while also recognizing that similar ideologies might appear in multiple locales, each with its own specific sociohistorical context.

We view this book as building on, contributing to, and extending past conversations, and we hope that it will be followed by many more.

References

Austin, P. K., & Julia Sallabank. 2011. Introduction. In Peter K. Austin & Julia Sallabank (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Endangered Languages*, 1-26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Branson, Jan & Don Miller. 2007. Beyond "language": Linguistic imperialism, sign languages, and linguistic anthropology. In Sinfree Makoni & Alastair Pennycook (eds.), *Disinventing and reconstituting languages*, 116–134. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Burns, Sarah, Patrick Matthews & Evelyn Nolan-Conroy. 2001. Language attitudes. In Ceil Lucas (ed.), *The sociolinguistics of sign languages*, 181–216. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Erard, Michael. 2019. Studying an emerging sign language won't kill it – so what are linguists scared of? *Mosaic Newsletter*. Retrieved February 27, 2019 from https://mosaicscience.com/story/research-emerging-sign-language-linguists-ethics-bsl-asl-deaf/

Errington, Joseph. 2000. Indonesian('s) authority. In Paul V. Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of Language*, 205–228. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.

Friedner, Michele. 2016. Understanding and not-understanding: What do epistemologies and ontologies do in deaf worlds? *Sign Language Studies*, 16(2). 184–203.

Goffman, Erving, 1964. The neglected situation. In P. P. Giglioli (ed.), *Language and social context*, 61–66. Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books.

Goldin-Meadow, Susan & Diane Brentari. 2017. Gesture, sign, and language: The coming of age of sign language and gesture studies. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 40*. 1–60.

Green, Elizabeth Mara. 2014a. *The nature of signs: Nepal's deaf society, local sign, and the production of communicative sociality*. Berkeley, University of California dissertation.

Green, Elizabeth Mara. 2014b. Building the tower of Babel: International Sign, linguistic commensuration, and moral orientation. *Language in Society, 43*. 445–465.

Green, Elizabeth Mara. 2017. Performing gesture: The pragmatic functions of pantomimic and lexical repertoires in a natural sign narrative. *Gesture, 16*(2). 328–362.

Hanks, William. 1990. *Referential Practice: Language and Lived Space among the Maya*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Haviland, John. 2015. Hey! *Topics in Cognitive Science,* 7. 124–149.

Hill, Joseph. 2012. *Language attitudes in the American deaf community*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

Hill, Jane H. & Bruce Mannheim. 1992. Language and world view. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 21. 381–406

Hou, Lynn & Annelies Kusters. 2020. Linguistic ethnography of signed languages. In Karin Tusting (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Ethnography,* 340–355. London: Roudledge.

Humphries, Tom. 2001. On deaf-mutes, the strange, and the modern deaf self. In Lois Bragg (ed.), *Deaf world: A historical reader & primary sourcebook*, 99–114. New York: New York University Press

Irvine, Judith T. & Susan Gal. 2000. Language ideology and linguistic differentiation. In Paul V. Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of Language*, 35–84. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.

Jourdan, Christine & Johanne Angeli. 2014. Pijin and shifting language ideologies in urban Solomon islands. *Language in Society,* 43(3). 265–285.

Kendon, Adam. 2008. Some reflections on the relationship between "gesture" and "sign." *Gesture,* 8(3). 348–366.

Krausneker, Verena. 2015. Ideologies and attitudes toward sign languages: An approximation. *Sign Language Studies*, 15(4). 411–431.

Kroskrity, Paul V. (ed.). 2000a. *Regimes of language: Ideologies, polities, and identities*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.

Kroskrity, Paul V. 2000b. Regimenting languages: Language ideological perspectives. In Paul V. Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of language: Ideologies, polities, and identities,* 1–34. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.

Kusters, Annelies. 2017. When transport becomes a destination: Deaf spaces and networks on the Mumbai suburban trains. *Journal of Cultural Geography,* 34(2). 170–193.

Kusters, Annelies & Sujit Sahasrabudhe. 2018. Language ideologies on the difference between gesture and sign. *Language and Communication,* 60. 44–63.

Ladd, Paddy. 2003. *Understanding Deaf culture: In search of Deafhood*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Le Guen, Oliver, Josefina Safar & Marie Coppola (eds). 2019. *Emerging sign languages of the Americas.* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Lippi-Green, Rosina. 1997. *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*. London, UK: Psychology Press.

Mahmood, Saba. 2001. Feminist theory, embodiment, and the docile agent: Some reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival. *Cultural Anthropology,* 6(2). 202–236.

McBurney, Susan. 2012. History of sign languages and sign language linguistics. In Roland Pfau, Markus Steinbach & Bencie Woll (eds.), *Sign language: An international handbook*, 909–948. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

McCaskill, Carolyn, Ceil Lucas, Robert Bayley & Joseph Hill. 2011. *The hidden treasure of Black ASL*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

Moges, Rezenet T. 2015. Challenging sign language lineages and geographies: The case of Eritrean, Finnish, and Swedish sign languages. In Michele Friedner and Annelies Kusters

(eds.), *It's a small world: International deaf spaces and encounters*, 83–94. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

Moore, Matthew & Levitan, Linda. 1992. *For hearing people only: Answers to some of the most commonly asked questions about the Deaf community, its culture, and the "Deaf reality."* Rochester, NY: Deaf Life Press.

Moriarty Harrelson, Erin. 2019. Deaf people with "no language": Mobility and flexible accumulation in languaging practices of deaf people in Cambodia. *Applied Linguistics Review,* 10(1). 55–72.

Moriarty Harrelson, Erin. 2019. "I never expose them to my sign language!": Morality in Deaf Tourism. Retrieved February 27, 2019 from http://mobiledeaf.org.uk/i-never-expose-them-to-my-sign-language-morality-in-deaf-tourism/.

Murray, Joseph. 2017. Academic and community interactions in the formation of Deaf Studies in the United States. In Annelies Kusters, Maartje De Meulder & Dai O'Brien (eds.), *Innovations in Deaf Studies: The role of deaf scholars*, 77–100. New York: Oxford University Press.

Nonaka, Angela. 2004. The forgotten endangered languages: Lessons on the importance of remembering from Thailand's Ban Khor Sign Language. *Language in Society, 33*. 737–767.

Padden, Carol. 1990. Folk explanation in language survival. In L. Bragg (ed.), *Deaf world: A historical reader and primary sourcebook*, 104–115. New York: New York University Press.

Palfreyman, Nick. 2018. *Variation in Indonesian Sign Language*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Povinelli, Elizabeth A. 1998. The state of shame: Australian multiculturalism and the crisis of indigenous citizenship. *Critical Inquiry*, 24(2). 575–610.

Reagan, Timothy. 2011. Ideological barriers to American Sign Language: Unpacking linguistic resistance. *Sign Language Studies,* 11(4). 606–636.

Schieffelin, Bambi, Kathryn Woolard & Paul V. Kroskrity (eds.) 1998. *Language ideologies: Practice and theory.* Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Senghas, Richard J. & Leila Monaghan. 2002. Signs of their times: Deaf communities and the culture of language. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31. 69–97.

Silverstein, Michael. 1979. Language structure and linguistic ideology. In Paul R. Clyne, William F. Hanks & Carol L. Hofbauer (eds.), *The elements: A parasession on linguistic units and levels*, 193–247. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.

Silverstein, Michael. 1985. Language and the culture of gender: At the intersection of structure, usage, and ideology. *Semiotic Mediation: Sociocultural and Psychological Perspectives.* 219–259.

Supalla, Ted, & Patricia Clark. 2015. *Sign language archaeology: Understanding the historical roots of American Sign Language*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

Taub, Sarah. 2001. *Language from the body: Iconicity and metaphor in American Sign Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vermeerbergen, Myriam. 2006. Past and current trends in sign language research. *Language and Communication,* 26. 168–192.

Woolard, Kathryn A. & Bambi Schieffelin. 1994. Language ideology. *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 23(1). 55–82.