1   Introduction

Adam C. Schembri and Ceil Lucas

In the 2001 volume entitled *The Sociolinguistics of Sign Languages*, edited by
Ceil Lucas (Cambridge University Press), it is stated that, since the early
1980s, "the field of sign language sociolinguistics has virtually exploded.
There is work to report on from all of the major areas of sociolinguistics:
multilingualism, bilingualism and language contact, variation, discourse
analysis, language planning and policy, language attitudes, and work that
reports on Deaf communities from all over the world" (xvii).[1] That volume
provided chapters on all of this work. Lucas went on to observe that

the earliest sociolinguistic research in Deaf communities was shaped and perhaps
limited by at least four interrelated considerations: 1) the relationship between the
spoken language of the majority community and the sign language, particularly in
educational settings; 2) limited knowledge of the linguistic structure of the sign
language; 3) doubts as to the actual status of the sign language as a "real language";
and 4) application of spoken sociolinguistic models to sign language situations. (p. 4)

Turning now to 2015 and the current volume, we attempt here to cover the
same basic areas of sign language sociolinguistics. We intend this volume to
be used as a text in upper-level undergraduate and graduate sociolinguistics
courses, but also hope that it is a contribution which will be of interest to sign
language researchers and sociolinguists working on both signed and spoken
languages as well as anyone with a desire to know more about the sociolin-
guistics of Deaf communities. We have come a long way since the 2001
volume! While there is, of course, still a necessary focus on the relationship
between spoken languages and sign languages, especially in educational
settings, a tremendous amount of work has been done on the relationship
between sign languages in the last decade. We see some of this important

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[1] The term "Deaf" with the upper-case 'D' is used to describe communities of deaf adults and
children who share the use of a sign language and Deaf cultural values, behaviors, and traditions.
The term "deaf" with the lower-case 'd' is usually an audiological description of a person's level
of hearing, and may be used to describe people who do not use a sign language and who do not
identify with and participate in Deaf culture and Deaf communities. This deaf–Deaf distinction
will be used throughout this volume.

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work documented in Chapter 2: "Sign Languages in the World." In Chapter 2, Jordan Fenlon and Erin Wilkinson distinguish *macro* Deaf communities from *micro* ones, the latter including "deaf villages" in which inhabitants, both hearing and Deaf, use a sign language. We see deeper work on the historical relationships between sign languages, and on the effects of sign language colonialism, new technologies, and economic mobility. Chapter 2 also explores the reality of language endangerment that affects sign languages as much as it affects spoken languages. The focus on the relationship between sign languages continues in Chapter 3: "Sign Languages in Contact," by David Quinto-Pozos and Robert Adam, with consideration of contact between sign languages such as Hausa Sign Language and American Sign Language or between Japanese Sign Language and Taiwan Sign Language, and the sign language use that happens at transnational gatherings and in border areas. These studies show us the sociolinguistic features unique to language contact between two sign languages. We now also have a generation of Deaf multilingual signers, i.e., Deaf people who quite comfortably use more than one sign language, in addition to being able to read, write, and possibly speak one or more majority spoken languages. As with the 2001 volume, this work on Deaf communities expands notions of bilingualism and language contact first developed in studies of spoken languages. Studies of gesture that have emerged from sign language studies have also had the same effect of expanding the horizons of the discipline.

Significant amounts of research in the past fourteen years have vastly expanded our knowledge of the structure of sign languages. In 2001, the Lucas *et al.* volume on sociolinguistic variation in American Sign Language (ASL) was just being published. As we see in Chapter 4: "Variation and Change in Sign Languages," by Robert Bayley, Adam C. Schembri, and Ceil Lucas, we now can add descriptions of Black ASL and of variation in Italian Sign Language (LIS), British Sign Language (BSL), Australian Sign Language (Auslan), and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) to the original work on ASL. We see how this work informs our overall knowledge of sign language variation and change and also how research methods used for studying variation in sign languages may have implications for the study of variation in spoken languages. In Chapter 5: "Discourse Analysis and Sign Languages," by Cynthia Roy and Betsy Winston, we see how studies on the structure of sign language discourse have expanded and deepened our understanding of signed interaction, and have much to teach us about spoken language interaction too. Finally, Chapter 6: "Language Policy and Planning in Deaf Communities," by Josep Quer and Ronice Müller de Quadros and Chapter 7: "Language Attitudes in Deaf Communities," by Joseph Hill show us that while there have been advances in the thinking about and the recognition of the status of sign languages as "real languages" – with examples from Spain, Catalonia, and Brazil – there are still significant attitudinal obstacles to overcome even now.

Looking back, we see that the four interrelated considerations that shaped earlier research on the sociolinguistics of sign languages have changed or have been replaced. As can be seen in the six chapters in this volume, current and future research will

- have to deal with signing in transnational settings and the outcomes – code-switching, code-mixing, borrowing – that result from the contact between Deaf bilinguals and Deaf multilinguals;
- need to explore the effect of new technologies on discourse structure and on data collection methodologies;
- include analyses of variation in sign languages beyond ASL, LIS, BSL, Auslan, and NZSL, and should begin to explore how so called 'second wave' and 'third wave' approaches to the study of variation (Eckert 2012) can be usefully applied to an understanding of sign language use in Deaf communities;
- focus on the endangerment of sign languages due to colonialism and the rise of medical technologies such as cochlear implants;
- involve the various stances on the recognition of sign languages and analyses of language planning and policy activities;
- be concerned with shifts in attitudes and ideologies concerning sign languages.

These are considerations that research and experience have made possible since 2001. Remarkably, however, the basic underlying motivation for studies of sign sociolinguistics past and present has not shifted. In the 2001 volume, Lucas referred to what guided Stokoe in the preparation of the *Dictionary of American Sign Language* (DASL). As early as 1957, Stokoe was aware of the thinking of George Trager and Henry Lee Smith: "They insisted that it was pointless to study languages alone. Languages, they said, had to be studied along with the cultures of their users. One must examine not just the forms and structures of a language but also its actual use and content" (Stokoe 2001: 59). This sociolinguistic perspective clearly guided the inclusion of Croneberg's groundbreaking appendices in the DASL, appendices that showed how language, culture, and deafness worked together to form unique communities. The importance of studying the sociolinguistics of Deaf communities remains the same: first, the recognition that sign languages have sociolinguistic lives like other systems that we recognize as languages reinforces the status of sign languages as "real languages." Second, this recognition and accompanying legitimization of sign languages allows for the discussion of what the medium of instruction should be in Deaf education and to the question of why it should not always include sign languages; it allows for the improvement of services for Deaf people, such as signed/spoken language interpreting, and continues to open new career paths for Deaf people as sign language researchers, teachers

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of Deaf children and adolescents, interpreters and interpreter trainers, and teachers of sign languages. The study of the sociolinguistics of Deaf communities in all of its aspects contributes to the continuing empowerment of Deaf people all over the world.

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2　Sign languages in the world

Jordan Fenlon and Erin Wilkinson

Introduction

What is multilingualism?

Multilingualism, the use of two or more languages by an individual or a community is described as a 'powerful fact of life around the world' (Edwards 1994). If we consider that there are an estimated 195 countries in the world today against the 7,106 living languages listed in the *Ethnologue*, we might assume that for most of the world's population, multilingualism is a common occurrence (Lewis, Simons, and Fennig 2013). But what do we mean by multilingualism? Research in this field is interested in how languages coexist alongside other languages and the factors that contribute to the various multilingual environments throughout the world. For example, people who know more than one language may or may not be equally proficient in each of their languages; they may only be as proficient as is necessary and their use of different languages may be confined to specific social settings or groups. The extent to which these language communities interact with one another may also vary. Additionally, some languages may not have any official recognition within the nation states in which they are found, and this may affect how these languages are perceived by others.

When we consider sign languages, we find many examples of multilingualism that parallel those described for spoken languages. In this chapter, we describe how multilingualism is a fact of life for nearly (if not all) signing individuals. We begin with a brief description of sign language as languages in their own right followed by a description of the different environments in which sign languages can thrive and the patterns of transmission that define them so that one can appreciate where, why, and how sign languages exist today. We also describe the types of multilingual environments that characterize the lives of deaf individuals and the factors that contribute to or against multilingualism.

Sign languages are real languages

To begin with, some common myths about sign languages are addressed here. First, sign languages are real languages. Research into sign languages as

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legitimate languages was hindered at first by the belief that sign languages were visual representations of spoken languages or primitive forms of communication (e.g., Bloomfield 1933). It was not until the work of Stokoe (1960), which demonstrated that signs consisted of sub-lexical components, that the linguistic status of sign languages was taken seriously. Since then, much research has been undertaken across the language sciences highlighting how sign languages provide a valuable insight into the way that languages work (e.g., Emmorey 2002). Second, sign language is not universal. Many believe this myth to be true due to the iconic nature of many signs or the mistaken belief that they are artificial languages. Instead, sign languages are languages that have developed independently from one another within deaf communities around the world and have been demonstrated to be typologically diverse (e.g., Zeshan 2004). We cannot expect that a signer using Australian Sign Language (Auslan) will be able to communicate fluently with a signer using Italian Sign Language (LIS, Lingua dei Segni Italiana).

Once we accept these two facts, that sign languages are real languages and that many of the world's sign languages have evolved independently from one another, we can begin to appreciate the potential for linguistic diversity that sign languages represent. However, formal investigation of sign languages have been historically biased towards Europe and North America, although a growing number of studies are investigating non-Western sign languages (e.g., Zeshan and de Vos 2012). Additionally, efforts to document and describe the world's sign languages are still in its infancy; few sign languages can be said to have a dictionary that is completely representative of its lexicon and large-scale documentation projects (e.g., sign language corpora) have only been possible in recent years due to advancements in video and transcription technology (Johnston and Schembri 2013). For sign languages in non-Western countries, this kind of research effort may not have even taken place.

Official figures for sign languages are also unlikely to provide us with a complete picture of multilingualism within the world's deaf communities. The *Ethnologue*, the most reliable count of the world's languages, lists 137 sign languages and acknowledges that this figure is likely to be inaccurate (Lewis *et al.* 2013) (see Woll *et al.* (2001) for a detailed discussion on the issue of counting the world's sign languages). Census figures describing the general population and the languages that they use are frequently controversial. Usually, such surveys cluster together people with hearing loss without differentiating between signing and non-signing deaf people or they do not ask census participants directly to specify if anyone uses a sign language at home. Official figures from deaf organizations are also questionable; while the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) estimates there are 72 million deaf people worldwide (World Federation of the Deaf 2013b), it is unclear what this figure is based on. The lack of accurate and detailed longitudinal census

surveys severely hinders our attempts to understand the distribution of sign languages in the world. Rather than attempt to quantify the number of the world's sign languages, we aim to describe instead how multilingualism is a fundamental characteristic of deaf communities in the world today. We do this with a look at the past (e.g., what are the factors that lead to a sign language community), the present (e.g., what is the status of these languages today? To what extent do they interact?), and the future (e.g., what changes in the near future are likely to have an effect on the use and distribution of sign languages around the world?).

What factors lead to a sign language community?

What are the general characteristics that contribute to a sign language community? Their emergence is typically spontaneous, independent (to a certain extent) of spoken languages and other sign languages, and often against a changing socio-political background. For ease of explanation, we group sign languages of the world into two broad categories (following Schembri 2010): sign language macro-communities and micro-communities (other terms that have been used to describe these communities include, for example, 'deaf community sign languages' and 'village sign languages' respectively, Padden 2011). Here, we explain the typical social and linguistic characteristics that make up these two communities.[1]

Macro-communities

Sign languages from macro-communities generally refer to sign languages used across nation states. These include, among others, languages such as Auslan, Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS, Língua Brasileira de Sinais), British Sign Language (BSL), French Sign Language (LSF, Langue des Signes Française), American Sign Language (ASL), and Japanese Sign Language (NS, Nihon Shuwa). This category may also apply to sign languages located in large urban centres such as Hong Kong Sign Language and Hausa Sign Language.

Sign languages in macro-communities are described as large stable signing communities that emerged from the European tradition, beginning in the late eighteenth century, of bringing deaf children together in residential schools. Although references to the use of signs date back to 1550 in Spain (Plann

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[1] We do not consider other types of sign languages such as alternate sign systems used by hearing people when the use of speech is forbidden (e.g., the signing observed by Warlpiri Aboriginals, see Kendon 1988) or artificial sign systems created to assist learning (e.g., Cued Speech; see LaSasso, Crain, and Leybaert 2010), since they cannot be described as primary sign languages emerging from deaf communities (the focus of our chapter).

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1997) and 1575 in Britain (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999), linguists tradition-
ally believe that the conditions provided by residential schools acted as a
catalyst that led to the stabilization and widespread use of sign languages that
we observe today (Schembri *et al.* 2010). Prior to this period, deaf people may
have lived in isolated communities with little or no contact with other deaf
people and any sign language in use was likely to be highly variable. This
historical account means that the age of sign languages in macro-communities
is often associated with the establishment of the first deaf school and, as such,
are considered young languages when compared to most spoken languages.

The educational policy used in schools during this period varied across the
world. Beginning in France and afterwards in other parts of Europe including
Spain, Portugal, Sweden, and Italy, deaf children were taught using sign
language as the medium of instruction (McBurney 2012). In contrast, the oral
method, established at a deaf school in Leipzig, Germany, was subsequently
adopted by other German-speaking countries as well as educators based in
parts of Scandinavia and Italy (McBurney 2012). In the United Kingdom and
Austria, it is believed that a combined system of sign and speech was in use
(Dotter and Okorn 2003; Kyle and Woll 1985). Whatever the medium of
instruction, sign languages were able to flourish as pupils continued to sign
outside of the classroom. The Milan Congress in 1880 marked the widespread
adoption of the oral method in deaf schools in many countries (McBurney
2012). As a result, the system of deaf education in the late nineteenth and early
to mid twentieth century is typically known as the period where increasing
emphasis was placed on the ability to speak. It was not until the mid to late
twentieth century when sign languages were argued to be legitimate languages
that they again began to occupy a credible role in deaf schools in many parts of
the world.

But why should residential deaf schools play an important role in the origin
of sign languages? This is because – typically in these macro-communities –
only 5–10 per cent of deaf children, born to deaf signing parents, will acquire
sign language in the home (Mitchell and Karchmer 2004). Most deaf children
are born into hearing, non-signing families who may have never encountered a
deaf person in their lifetime. This means that, for many deaf children, the
process of language acquisition and transmission is very different to that seen
in children learning to speak. Deaf schools therefore typically provide the first
point of encounter of widespread sign language use for many deaf children.

In addition to deaf schools, deaf clubs have historically flourished within
macro-communities. These clubs have organized political, cultural, and
sporting events, providing space for deaf individuals to interact with each
other. Together with deaf schools, deaf clubs are considered to play a crucial
role in the establishment and maintenance of the concept of a 'deaf commu-
nity' (Ladd 2003; Padden and Humphries 1988). Deaf individuals choosing to

interact within the deaf community frequently pride themselves on being a part of a community which defines them as a member of a linguistic minority as opposed to one that defines them by their level of hearing.

It should not be assumed that all sign language users in macro-communities are deaf. Hearing people are also likely to use a sign language for a variety of reasons. They may be parents or siblings of a deaf child, or hearing children born to deaf parents. They may also be an individual who, later in life, has decided to learn sign language. In the United States, ASL is the fourth most popular language taught in universities (Furman, Goldberg, and Lusin 2010) which suggests a large population of second language hearing signers that may or may not be a part of the American Sign Language community. The degree to which these hearing signers use sign language everyday is likely to vary depending on their background and motivations for doing so (and also the degree to which it is available in colleges and universities throughout the nation). The crucial point here is that formal sign language instruction may be available within the nation states of these macro-communities. Instruction may be aimed simply at teaching a second language or for interpreter-training programmes with the aim of enabling access for deaf people to a variety of educational, legal, and medical services in their countries.

When we consider deaf signers living in macro-communities from the point of view of multilingualism, it is easy to see why all deaf signers can be considered multilingual. A very large proportion of deaf community members are born into homes that use a spoken language. These members may learn to sign at school but, even in school, there is usually some emphasis on the national spoken and written languages. For those individuals born to deaf signing parents, there will still be some degree of interaction with a spoken language from an early stage. In other words, these members contend with the fact they use a minority language that exists alongside a national spoken and written language(s) used by the overwhelming hearing majority. This fundamental fact means that sign language users in these communities are all at least bilingual by default.

To summarize, sign languages in macro-communities are transmitted primarily through peers at schools or are learned later in life. They are minority languages surrounded by majority-spoken languages, consist of both deaf and hearing signers, and are young languages. In the next section, we turn to sign languages arising in micro-communities.

Micro-communities

Sign language micro-communities are characterized as small labour-intensive economy-based communities, with a much higher incidence of deafness than that seen in developed countries and urban communities. These communities

can be traced back centuries; for example, one of the earliest known communities was located on Martha's Vineyard off the east coast of the USA during the eighteenth century (Groce 1985). Individual sociocultural characteristics of these micro-communities determine the type of language transmission and their degree of stabilization. These sign languages may also be referred to as minority, indigenous, rural, shared and/or village sign languages (Nyst 2012; Zeshan and de Vos 2012).

It is unclear how many of these communities exist today or may have existed. Sign language research has uncovered many, such as those in Alipur, India (Panda 2012), on the island of Grand Cayman in the Caribbean (Washabaugh 1981), Chican, Mexico (Delgado 2012; Johnson 1994), Bedouin Arab communities in Israel (Kisch 2008; Sandler, Meir, Padden, and Aronoff 2005), Bali, Indonesia (Branson, Miller, and Marsaja 1996; de Vos 2012; Marsaja 2008), Adamorobe, Ghana (Kusters 2012; Nyst 2007), Ban Khor, Thailand (Nonaka 2011), Jewish Algerian immigrant communities in Israel (Lanesman and Meir 2012), Douentza, Mali (Nyst, Sylla, and Magassouba 2012), Konchri Sain, Jamaica (Cumberbatch 2012), Inuit communities in Canada (Schuit 2012), a Mardin village in Turkey (Dikyuva 2012), and the Yolngu community in Australia (Maypilama and Adone 2012). Nyst (2012) notes that no such communities are currently reported in Europe, although they may have existed in the past.

These communities are typically characterized as having a higher incidence of deafness than that observed in macro-communities (an incidence rate of 0.1% is typically reported for macro deaf communities, Martin *et al.* 1981; Woll, Sutton-Spence, and Elton 2001). For example, an incidence rate of 3.2% is observed among Bedouin Arabs in Al-Sayyid, Israel and 2% in the village of Desa Kolok, Indonesia (Nyst 2012). This incidence rate leads to a high number of deaf signers and hearing signers living in close proximity who are related by blood or marriage. This setting means, in contrast to macro-communities, that deaf children are much more likely to acquire a signed language from signing parents or from other extended family members and neighbours who can sign.

Given that these communities are characterized by a high degree of interaction between hearing and deaf signers, it is not surprising that these communities (like macro-communities) can be considered bilingual. However, a unique characteristic of these languages is that they can also be in contact with a more dominant sign language as deaf children in these communities are often taught at a school that uses the national sign language. The collected papers in Zeshan and de Vos (2012) show that minority sign language users are more likely to know another sign language used by the larger population. For example, in the Adamorobe, Ban Khor, Algerian Jewish, Al-Sayyid, Konchri Sain, Mardin, and Yolngu communities, some deaf signers are