Language Ideologies on the Difference Between Gesture and Sign

Introduction: Squeezing the bee hive

On a Sunday afternoon in November 2015, we (the authors) organised a discussion on the difference between "gesture" and "sign" during one of the weekly gatherings of the Bombay Foundation of Deaf Women. The discussion was organised within the framework of a research project on gesture-based communication between deaf signers and hearing non-signers, led by the first author of this article. About fifty deaf women aged between 18 and 80 were present; most of them sat in cross-legged position on mats on the floor, and a small number of women sat in the back on the limited number of available chairs, all facing an elevated platform in the front of the room. The discussion was facilitated by Sujit, research assistant in the project and the second author of this article. Whomever wanted to comment or to ask questions and as such contribute to the public discussion, took the stage. At one point, prompted by Sujit, participants discussed whether iconic and pantomimic ways of explaining a concept should be called "gesturing" or "signing". One of the participants, Neeta[1], a woman aged around fifty who works as a teacher assistant in a school for deaf children, acted out how she would explain the concept "honey" to a deaf child who does not yet know the Indian Sign Language (ISL) sign for honey pictured in Figure 1 (indicating licking the hand palm).

Figure 1: Indian Sign Language sign HONEY

Figure 2: Squeezing the bee hive to extract honey

She demonstrated how she would use a sign signifying "bee" (Figure 2a), picture the shape of a beehive (Figure 2b), squeeze the bee hive to indicate that honey is extracted (Figure 2c), the extracted honey drips out (Figure 2d) and then is licked from the hand (Figure 2e). Even though a bee hive is not actually squeezed in the actual process of extracting honey, the participants agreed that this way of explaining the concept "honey" would be understood by many non-signers.

This example was discussed at length by Sujit, Neeta, and Sarita; another woman aged around fifty. At that point, all three of them stood on the stage. The discussion focused on the cases of (1.) hearing non-signers, and (2.) young deaf children who are in the process of learning ISL. Sujit asked Neeta and Sarita whether they thought this "squeezing the beehive" example was gesture or sign. Sarita responded:

Sarita: Those are gestures since the hearing can understand it. If deaf people only do the licking of the handpalm [ie, a conventional ISL sign for honey, Figure 1]

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[1] Personal names of participants in deaf club discussions are pseudonyms. Names of people who were featured in the project film (Ishaare) are real names.

	will the hearing understand? They won't. It's different, so these are gestures, used for communication between the hearing and us. [..]
Sujit:	Neeta, as a teacher, what do you think? Is it gesture or sign language? […]
Neeta:	The children [in the deaf school] use sign language naturally. I can't say if it's gestures or sign language. It's their own way.
Sujit:	Yes, yes, it's their own way, yes. But what do you think, is that [the bee hive] gesture or sign language, or are you uncertain what to call it?
Neeta:	I don't know.
Sujit:	Is it gesture or sign, you don't know?
Neeta:	I can't say. It's natural. The children's own way. They copy from the older children around them. Friends talk among each other [and share/pass on signs]. The older children use sign language.
Sujit:	So if the older children sign, what's it what the younger ones do [ie the ones who are in the process of learning ISL]? Is it signing or gesture, or maybe you don't know what it is?
Neeta:	It is natural, natural. It's natural, their own. It's signing.
Sujit:	So it's signing?
Neeta:	It's signing.
Sujit:	It's not gesturing?
Neeta:	No.

Sarita thus identified the bee hive story as gesture because it would be understandable for hearing people who don't know ISL, and therefore maps this way of communicating onto "hearing people". Subsequently, Sujit tried to lead Neeta towards classifying the bee hive example within a gesture-sign dichotomy too, but Neeta intuitively resisted the distinction. According to her, her pupils' way of communicating, even when it is not conventional ISL, is "natural", and later she specifies that it is "signing". She does initially not make a distinction between gesturing and signing, and maps signing onto deaf people, *irrespective* of whether it would be understood by hearing people or not. Sarita then said she thought Neeta did not know the concept of "gesture":

Sarita:	Ok, I think, she [Neeta] does not know the difference between sign language and gestures. She does not know. We have to explain. That's what I feel. [to Neeta:] Do you know what is sign language? What is sign language?
Neeta:	Sign language is deaf's own language.
Sarita:	And gestures?
Neeta:	The hearing use slow movement of hands, saying only few bits.
Sarita:	So squeezing the bee hive is sign language?
Neeta:	Yes it's sign language.
Sarita:	But we think it isn't!
Sujit:	No no no. It's her opinion. She is not wrong. It's what you [Sarita] think. She [Neeta] thinks it's not. Right right, ok.

Here, Neeta indicates a difference between deaf and hearing signing, acknowledging that hearing people sign slowly (and thus differently from deaf people); yet still without categorizing hearing people's signing as "gesture", as Sarita did. At a later point in the discussion, Sarita signed:

I don't want to win this. I want that you all understand the difference between sign language and gestures. (…) Sign language is all our own, it has been researched, it's related to our tradition, it's been linked to us for generations. That is sign language. Gestures are made by individuals, with imagination, to be able to communicate, to say something. (…) Gestures are based on impromptu thoughts, made up (…), created to make ourselves understood. Those are gestures. But language comes to us through generations.

Here, Sarita conforms to a widespread perspective within (sign) linguistics (see further) and also within Euro-American deaf communities. Indicated by Sujit's persistence to classify the bee hive example as either signing or gesturing, this is a perspective which has inspired and influenced the research design as a whole. Sarita is well-travelled, has had exposure to different sign languages, such as American Sign Language (ASL) used by Indian deaf friends who live(d) in the USA for years, and her sister in law lives in the UK and uses British Sign Language (BSL). Sarita's signing style was accented by both BSL and ASL, whereas Neeta signed non-accented ISL. Sarita's background and contacts probably have informed her perspective. In contrast to Sarita's opinion though, most deaf participants within the study, such as Neeta, did *not* intuitively distinguish gesturing and signing as separate concepts. Correspondingly, a widely used word in India to talk about both gestures and signs is the Hindi word "Ishaare" (which is the plural of "Ishara", a word that exists not only in Hindi but also in several other languages including Marathi and Urdu).

Given the nature of this discussion session, its use of prompts and terminology, this example vividly illustrates the nature of the research enterprise, by demonstrating academic-related "pressure" to ideologically align with either gesture or sign. In this example, widespread academic or western language ideologies (distinguishing gesture and sign) are introduced or circulated within the frame of a research project and either conform to, or differ from everyday language ideologies. In this article, *academic language ideologies* are defined as ideologies that guide scholarship. They inform and are informed by explicit theories as well as implicit assumptions built into research projects. *Everyday language ideologies* are those uttered by the (lay) participants in the research. A strict dichotomy between everyday and academic language ideologies does not work since, as we will illustrate, academic ideologies can be circulated in common everyday discourses, or overlap with everyday ones. And of course, the academy is its own "everyday" space. Yet we believe that, in the framework of this article, it makes sense to distinguish between the two, to illustrate these very processes.

The larger research project within which the discussion in the deaf club was organised, was triggered by the encounter between the authors (who got married a few years after meeting each other): Annelies, observing how Sujit and other deaf people communicated fluently in gestures with hearing people when navigating Mumbai and wider India, felt a great contrast with Europe, where gestures are less prominently used/understood and where the distinction between gesture and sign made total sense to her. Sujit on his turn felt the same contrast during his visits to Europe.

The project consisted of linguistic ethnography focusing on deaf-hearing communication practices in public and semi-public spaces such as street markets, indoors shops, food joints, coffee houses, tea places, and public/private transport in Mumbai. Deaf people were either the ones buying/ordering or the ones selling/serving. The interactions of

six deaf key participants with hearing strangers and acquaintances were video-recorded. These interactions between fluent deaf signers and hearing non-signers were gesture-based, by which we mean that gestures were the primary means of expression, often (but not necessarily) combined with mouthing (speaking without voicing), speaking and/or reading/writing in different named languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and English (Kusters 2017). We use the term "gesturing" as a working definition to indicate manual communication between deaf people and non-signing hearing people, and we use the term "signing" to refer to (deaf) sign languages. As we point out in this article, this distinction is not without its problems and is challenged by other perspectives and ideologies. In the context of this article, we are thus adopting, but also questioning the ideological distinction between gesturing and signing.

The research focussed not only on language practices but also on how these were experienced and conceived of. To that end, immediately after gesture-based interactions, 50 short impromptu interviews (of a few minutes in duration) were conducted with the 6 deaf key participants, as well as 80 short interviews with their hearing interlocutors (such as shopkeepers or customers). In addition, longer ethnographic interviews with the six key participants were organized. A documentary film called *Ishaare: Gestures and Signs in Mumbai* was created, which is subtitled in English and can be watched online (https://vimeo.com/142245339). Before and after showing the film, six discussions in deaf clubs (such as the one in which the opening excerpt was located) were organised (1-2 hours in duration), as well as four group discussions with hearing teachers of deaf children, parents of deaf children and lay people (25-45 mins). The film was thus used to disseminate findings but also to elicit further discussion (and thus ideologies) on gesture and sign. Most participants in the study were middle-class and lower-class people (of different religions, ages, castes and educational backgrounds).

In this article we explore four different themes (not in this exact order). First, we look at academic language ideologies on the linguistic status of gesture, on the difference between gestures and signs, and on different types of signing. This analysis shows how "other" forms of signed communication, such as gesture-based interactions, are marginalised by constructing them as "not language". Second, we describe and analyse everyday ideologies of deaf Mumbaikars on the difference between gestures and signs, showing three processes at work: (1) not distinguishing gesturing and signing (ie gesturing *is* signing: the position taken by Neeta); (2) constituting continuums of signing; (3) recognizing/essentializing the distinction between gesturing and signing (ie the position taken by Sarita).

Third, we show that the distinction between gesture and sign is context-based. In contexts where deaf people feel *limited* by the use of gestures (such as in the classroom or in court), deaf participants feel a stark contrast between gesture and sign. Where gesturing *enables* them to communicate one-on-one with a wide range of non-signing hearing people in everyday life (eg. in customer interactions), they might feel it's the same as signing.

Fourth, we reflect on the encounter of two different domains of language ideologies (which we call academic vs everyday) within the context of ISL courses since 2001, and within the current research project (in 2014-2015): linguists', teachers', and ethnographers' ideologies were circulated within the Mumbai deaf community. In these discourses, a distinction between "gesture" and "sign" was introduced or maintained, and gesturing was mapped on hearing people and signing on deaf people. Separating gesture from sign had consequences for deaf people's perceptions of their signing. Sujit works as research assistant

within the current project (observing gesture-based interactions, leading discussions, conducting interviews) and as such figures in situation descriptions such as the above excerpt, but he also was one of the six case study participants (interviews with Sujit were conducted by Annelies), and has taught ISL courses for years. As such, in his position, he introduces and negotiates encounters of everyday and academic ideologies. We will illustrate that linguistic ethnography creates spaces of understanding, and engaging in, this encounter between academic and everyday language ideologies; and may be consequential in transforming both academic and everyday ideologies.

Academic ideologies on the difference between gesture and sign

Language scholars have pointed out that entities that are called "languages" are sociopolitical constructs, or "inventions", in Makoni & Pennycook's (2006) words. Salient to this article, the same applies to the borders between what is considered language and non-language. To shed light on the process of constructing gesture as "not language", I turn to Kendon's work, situating discourses on gestures in a historical context.

Historical context

Adam Kendon, a renowned gesture and sign language scholar, points out that in European society, gestures were generally regarded as a natural companion of hearing people's speech until the 19th century, and the terms "gesture" and "sign" were used interchangeably (Kendon, 2004, 2008). (Note that in many other languages or other contexts, such as in India, this widespread ideology is not history, but current, see Thirumalai, 2003.) Around that time, the societal status of gesture/sign was increasingly and negatively influenced by Darwinism: gesture/sign was regarded as primitive. In West-European everyday life, "a sober, non-moving style of public speaking" (Kendon, 2004, p. 356) was increasingly and widely idealized. Furthermore, in the middle of the 19th century, European society had shifted to a text-based society, separating the spoken word from language's gestural component.

The marginalization of gesture/sign as "not language" was core to the foundation of structural linguistics as an autonomous discipline at the end of the 19th century. Structural linguistics focused on the spoken word, which could be written down. As Woolard points out, "ideas about what is or is not a 'real' language have contributed to profound decisions about the civility and even the humanity of others" (1998, p. 17). By saying that sign/gesture is not-language, and by not focusing on gesture/sign in structural linguistics, signing deaf people were marked as non-linguistic and disabled beings, and within a Darwinistic and evolutionist framework, as primitive (Baynton 1996). Academic and everyday language ideologies thus informed each other in this process.

When sign linguistics was established as an academic discipline from the 1960s onwards (McBurney 2012), it adopted the abovementioned foundational apparatus of structural linguistics, ie a focus was established on how language-like signs functioned much like vocabularies and syntax of spoken languages. This was an enormous step forward since deaf people's signing had been dismissed on a worldwide scale in deaf education since the 19th century, in favour of a pure oralistic education focusing on speech training for deaf

people, effectively resulting in an almost total lack of (access to) formal education for generations of deaf people (Baynton 1996).

Crucial within the frame of this article, is that when the early sign linguists "proved" that sign languages are true languages, this was at the cost of the linguistic status of gesture, by *separating* gesturing and signing. Sign languages were deemed linguistic because they were regarded as arbitrary, while gestures were not (Kendon 2008, Branson and Miller 2006). By opposing sign language and gestures and grouping sign languages with spoken languages, the linguistic status of gesture is dismissed.

Today, the notion that sign language is not gesture is currently a pervasive, widespread and empowering ideology in deaf communities. A large number of sign languages has been legally recognised (De Meulder 2015). In these contexts there is a lot at stake when conflating gestures and sign languages, as is proved by the case of a dispute about a bill discussed in the Italian parliament since 2011, regarding the recognition of LIS (Italian Sign Language). It was proposed that LIS should instead be called "mimed-gestural language", to which the Italian and international deaf community reacted with outrage, since this would mean that deaf peoples' status as linguistic minorities is effectively erased (Geraci 2012). They reacted against conceptions that sign languages are not "real languages", do not have linguistic syntax, are merely gesture and mime, depend on concrete situations and therefore cannot be used to express abstract issues – these conceptions are still current, both in academic settings and in general society (eg. Krausneker, 2015).

Nevertheless, in an academic context, we believe that we can challenge the distinction between gesture and sign more or less "safely": now that the linguistic status of sign languages (as a category of language) has long been established in the field of sign linguistics, we see more and more sign language scholars turning their attention towards gesture.

Linguistic perspectives on gestures versus signs

In the 1980s, (co-speech) gesture was "rediscovered" (independently of sign language studies), when language researchers of spoken languages started to use audio-visual technology to investigate language, and started to focus on what they called non-verbal communication. In this process, gesture was initially mostly regarded as an "add-on" to speech (Kendon, 2008) rather than (part of) language (Kendon, 2014). Meanwhile, bridges between sign linguistics and gesture studies have been built and within this process, researchers had to come to terms with the difference, similarity, or relationship between gestures and signs.

In the 1980s, Kendon had observed that gestures could function in different ways in alternation with speech, or in the absence of speech, and observed an evolution from gesture to sign (Kendon, 1988). McNeill (1992, p. 37) took this observation further and arranged forms of gesturing and signing on a continuum, calling it *Kendon's continuum*:

"Gesticulation -> Language-like gestures -> Pantomimes -> Emblems -> Sign Languages."

By gesticulation is meant "idiosyncratic spontaneous movements of the hands and arms accompanying speech". By "language-like gestures" is meant gestures that are "grammatically integrated into the utterance; an example is "the parents were all right, but

the kids were [gesture]"". By "pantomime" is meant that "the hands depict objects and actions, but speech is not obligatory" (while gesticulation and language-like gestures are accompanied by speech) (McNeill, 1992, p. 37). By emblems is meant "well-formed" (p. 38) conventional gestures such as the OK sign (thumb and index finger in contact) which are usually not accompanied by speech. Sign languages, McNeill writes, are "full-fledged linguistic systems" (p. 38), with a lexicon, a syntax, arbitrariness of signs, standardization of forms, and a community of users.

In summary, the continuum moves from *No Convention and Speech* to *Convention and No Speech* (Gullberg, 1998): "As we move from left to right: (1) the obligatory presence of speech declines, (2) the presence of language properties increases, and (3) idiosyncratic gestures are replaced by socially regulated signs." (McNeill, 1992, p. 37). Within this process, the signing space becomes more restricted, a number of two-handed forms tend to become one-handed, movement patterns and lexical signs become simplified and can turn into arbitrary forms, and signs can be recombined with other forms (Kendon 2004).

Several authors have taken up the continuum, expanded it or criticized it. For example, Singleton et al. (1995) argue that gesticulation should be excluded from the continuum which, they argue, should include only gesture types produced in the absence of speech. Gullberg (1998, p. 95) on the other hand, differentiated the gesticulation anchor of Kendon's continuum by distinguishing five different kinds of gesticulation (beats, abstract deictics, metaphoric, concrete deictics, iconics). Kendon (2004, p. 106) identifies a number of shortcomings of Gullberg's intervention and suggests that "it seems that rather than expanding Kendon's continuum we should multiply it". In the same line, McNeill (2000, p. 2-5) suggested, eight years after his publication of the continuum, that there was not one, but four continua (Figure 3).

Figure 3: McNeill's continua (McNeill, 2000, p. 2-5)

McNeill omitted the "language-like gestures" of the initial continuum (without explaining why) and while "gesticulation" and "sign language" are always on the extremes of the continuum, emblems and pantomime do not always take the same position. These authors all have distinguished different "kinds" of gestures but just one "kind" of signing. In the next paragraph we discuss classifications of different kinds of signing.

Apart from these models of gesturing evaluating into sign, several scholars (one of the earliest was Emmorey, 1999) defended the perspective that signers do employ gestures *within* signed discourse, defining gesture as "any sort of expression in signing that can't be analysed in discrete, categorical terms" (Kendon, 2004, p. 350). Recently, the distinction between gesture and sign was discussed in a target article by Goldin-Meadow and Brentari (2017a) and an extensive series of responses in the form of open peer commentaries in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. Goldin-Meadow and Brentari (2017a) take the viewpoint that signers gesture just as speakers do, thus sign has gestural components (just as speech) and therefore, sign should be compared with speech-plus-gesture. Comparing "co-sign gesture" and "co-speech gesture", they state that distinguishing between sign and gesture "allows us to understand the conditions under which gesture takes on properties of sign." (p. 1) They (2017b, p. 50) argue that "Forms in spoken languages and in signed languages are not necessarily gestural *or* linguistic; some forms can be gestural *and* linguistic."

Yet if we don't distinguish between gesture and sign, the problem of when gesture is or becomes sign or when a form is both gestural and linguistic, does not pose itself. This is the position taken by Kendon (2014) in more recent work: he agrees that co-speech gesture resembles signing in many ways, however he does not regard gesture as categorically different from sign. He argues instead that the kinetic actions of gesturing and signing are cut from the same cloth (calling for a focus on "visible action as utterance") and that it thus does not make sense to consider whether signers do gesture in signed discourse (Kendon 2004).

Classifications and sociolinguistic contexts of signing

Kendon's and McNeill's continua are abstracted schemas which are disjuncted from the sociolinguistic contexts of gesturing and signing. In what follows, we discuss a number of classifications of signing along their use in different linguistic ecologies. Different forms of signing (further described below) have been organised on a developmental cline, and would roughly look like this: homesign - communal/rural/family homesign - village/indigenous/rural/shared sign language - national/urban sign language. Importantly, there usually is, at some point, the construction of a break between sign and/or gesture as (homesign) "system", and "sign *language*" (also see Goldin-Meadow and Brentari 2017b). These classifications are not always presented on a continuum and should not be interpreted as a further specification of the sign-language end of Kendon's continuum.

National and urban sign languages are used in large deaf communities, often concentrated in urban areas and/or spread over large geographical areas. National sign languages often have (regional) variants, including school-based, age-based and sometimes gender-, ethnicity- and race-based variants. In many cases, these sign languages have been institutionalised e.g. they are used in schools to teach and interpreters are trained to interpret to and from these languages.

Village, rural, or shared sign languages (different terms for roughly the same phenomenon) are used in (often rural) small-scale communities that exhibit a relatively high rate of hereditary deafness, often higher than the rate found in general populations, that occur over at least a few generations. In these communities, the sustained presence of hereditary deafness and community-wide frequent social interaction between deaf and hearing people have led to the emergence of sign languages shared between deaf and hearing residents (Nyst 2012; Zeshan and de Vos 2012). Parallel to the development of sign linguistics and its urge to "prove" that sign languages' structures were as linguistic as those of spoken languages (see McBurney 2012 for a review), scholars researching village sign languages have laboured to place them on a par with urban and national sign languages, and to distinguish them from homesign and gestures commonly used in the environment.

*Homesign (*also *home sign)* emerges in the context of communication of deaf people who are not exposed to a sign language with their families (Goldin-Meadow, 2012). Some urban and national sign languages are believed to have emerged out of home-sign variants (Kegl et al. 1999). Nyst et al. (2012, p. 268) emphasise that the term "homesign" has been used to describe two distinct phenomena. One phenomenon pertains to "deaf children growing up in hearing environments with no exposure to a conventional sign language, following oralist educational advice". The other phenomenon pertains to the signing practices of deaf persons in rural areas where gesturing/signing is considered to be the

natural way for communicating with deaf people and where an extensive conventional body of gestures is in use. Concentrating on West-Africa, Nyst et al. (2012) coin the term "rural homesign" for the latter. Zeshan (2011) uses the term "communal homesign" for similar contexts.

The distinction between "rural homesign", the widespread use of conventional gestures in gesture-prone areas such as Mumbai (Kusters 2017), and "rural/village/shared sign languages" is blurry. Different researchers have categorized *similar* language practices either "gesture", "homesign", or "sign language". For example, Jepson (1991, p. 41), called manual communication in rural villages in India "Rural Indian Sign Language" or RISL, which she defines as "a collection of related community-based or even familiosyncratic idioms used by deaf individuals and by the hearing when they interact with deaf people." Jepson argued that "despite the idiosyncratic nature of these systems" (p. 41), they were similar enough to label them together, but she does not give an argument for labeling RISL as a "language". Zeshan et al. (2005) suggest that Jepson mistook hearing people's gesturing and home signs, for a sign language.

Such practices of naming reflect and challenge distinct academic ideologies about what constitutes language and not language. For example, Nyst et al (2012:269) suggest that rural homesign could be said to be (sign) *language* rather than a (homesign) *system*, since "rural home sign varieties meet the criteria of a) a community of users, and b) transmission across generations", implying that non-rural homesign may not constitute sign language. Similarly, Branson et al. (1999) write "sign language" and "signing" rather than "gesturing" when writing about "isolated" deaf people's (rural/communal home) signing with hearing people in rural areas in Bali, arguing that sign language is a natural part of the linguistic mosaic in the area. In reaction to Nyst et al. (2012), de Vos and Zeshan (2012) suggested that the existing taxonomy of sign languages needs to be further expanded and specified by further conceptualizing the in-between areas between homesign and fully fledged sign languages. Yet they do not question the linear construction of the taxonomy, leaving the ideology of a developmental cline of manual communication implicit.

The developmental basis of such classifications of sign languages has been criticized by several scholars**.** Nyst (2012:566) identified and criticised assumptions of putting sign language types on developmental clines or continuums:

1) There is an ultimate stage of sign language development, a sort of "super sign language". (…)
2) All sign languages in the world will eventually move towards the ultimate stage of development if given the opportunity.
3) There is a hierarchy among sign language types as to which sign language has advanced more on the developmental cline.

Hou (2016:17) resisted situating San Juan Quiahije Chatino Sign Language (Mexico), which she called "a constellation of family sign languages" in the extant taxonomy of classifications: "The typological diversity of sign languages suggests that mapping simple correspondences between a sign language, their language ecology, and structure may overlook and underestimate the actual and potential diversity of sign languages and signing communities" even though there might be some generalizations possible (Nonaka 2012).

Similarly, Green (2014:1) resists to classify "natural sign", an emic term used by deaf Nepalis, "to designate various modes of signing that are neither NSL [ie Nepali Sign

Language] nor a foreign sign language". Natural sign is not directly taught in the context of formal education, but "learned in homes and neighborhoods." Natural sign is used in urban and rural contexts and it can refer to NSL signers' communication with hearing people, as well as with deaf Nepalis who do not sign NSL. We suggest that "gesture-based communication" in Mumbai refers to the same phenomenon that Green's interlocutors called "natural sign", and that Jepson called RISL.

In the cases studied by Branson and Miller (1999), Hou (2016), Green (2014), Jepson (1991) and Kusters (2017), there is no widespread fluency or a strongly and broadly conventionalized body of signs as is the case for some village sign languages, yet people engage in signed communication. We surmise that these cases actually constitute the *standard* of deaf-hearing gestural/signed communication in much of the Global South. We are thus not looking at an "inbetween" area of communication as de Vos and Zeshan (2012) seem to suggest. Green challenges the notion that

> that either deaf people communicate in *ad hoc* sign systems known as home sign because they are "isolated" or they communicate in a fully conventional sign language. (…) The corollary of this assumption is that deaf and hearing people only communicate in unusual circumstances; natural and local signing practices disrupt these assumptions." (P 7-8)

Summarised, linguistic ethnography focusing on everyday life, approaching language as *action* rather than as a bounded system and focusing on *locally authored language ideologies* (Green's "natural sign"), problematises the academic ideologies underlying the abovementioned classifications (ie the constitution of a break between language and not-language, and the classifications in themselves). Similarly, several responses to Goldin-Meadow and Brentari (2017a)'s article call for a focus on processes and language usage rather than categories and dichotomies. We now turn to everyday theories on gesture versus sign in Mumbai, comparing and contrasting them with the above outlined academic perspectives, and with Green's findings.

Everyday language ideologies in Mumbai

In the study of everyday language practices and ideologies, Pennycook and Otsuji (2016) argue, we should work with language labels used by participants in research (cf Green's adoption of "natural sign"), and at the same time subject the labels to critical scrutiny. In this section we are focusing on language ideologies that were elicited as forms of metapragmatic commentary; but we are not disjuncting these ideologies from contexts of use, since our scrutiny of language ideologies on the difference between gesture and sign is informed by our analysis of 300 gesture-based interactions.

The data on language ideologies suggests that participants do or don't organise gesture and sign in separate categories, collapse the categories, or organise them on continua that partially overlap with Kendon's or McNeill's continua. Certain language ideologies are more dominant (more widely shared) than others. We will show how particular language ideologies with regard to gestures are related to the contexts in which they are used. As we illustrate below, the discussed conceptualisations of gesturing and signing are grounded in the sociolinguistic, temporal and affective contexts of communication.

Gestures and signs within the same category

The six key participants in the study, who were recorded when engaging in gesture-based interactions with hearing customers, service-providers, shopkeepers, drivers and fellow commuters are called Mahesh, Reena, Komal, Pradip, Durga and Sujit (see Kusters 2017 for more detailed accounts of communication strategies). All of them are in their thirties to fifties. Reena and Komal are women and the others are men. Pradip is deafblind. Durga, Komal and Mahesh were recorded in their capacity as sellers/baristas and Pradip, Reena and Sujit as customers. All of them were recorded in public transport too. Most of the discussions pertained retail and transport contexts, which are defined both by the mediating function of the materiality of commodities (specific goods or services, to be sold/bought) and its orientation toward a specific end (sale/purchase).

When participants were interviewed by Sujit about their language practices and language ideologies, Sujit consistently talked about GESTURE versus SIGN in his questions. The signs for GESTURE and SIGN were produced in different ways, see Figures 4 and 5. The signs for GESTURE were not widely used and were possibly imported from abroad. In their responses, Mahesh, Reena and Komal (and Neeta in the opening excerpt) did not typically distinguish gesturing and signing in separate concepts, using one of the signs for SIGN even when they talked about hearing non-ISL-signers' manual language practices. Durga and Pradip adopted one of the signs for GESTURE at times, though it might be that they did so because Sujit used these signs in his questions. This suggests that GESTURE and SIGN were not commonsensically or consistently perceived or presented as two different named categories. Correspondingly, Green (2014) writes that in Nepal, the overarching category is SIGN (not to be confused with SIGN LANGUAGE which refers to NSL): p 26 "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* NSL, natural sign, or a foreign sign language." Green points out that the category does not include co-speech gesturing that is not directed at deaf people. Even though the ideology of separating gesture and sign and discounting gesture's languageness (in favor of the notion that sign language *is* language) is widespread in many deaf communities, this master category SIGN (that includes gesturing) seems to be an intuitive one for many deaf people.

Figure 4: Two different signs for GESTURE

Figure 5: Two different signs for SIGN

The fact that many deaf Mumbaikars use the concept SIGN in ways that encompass both ISL and gesturing, does not mean that no difference was identified between deaf and hearing signing whatsoever. When they were asked to explain the difference between deaf and hearing signing, deaf people usually said that hearing people "sign a little bit," or that hearing people's signing is SIMPLE and SLOW. People expressed this either by adapting the sign for SIGN by slowing it down and enlarging it; *or* by signing that the signing is SLOW or SIMPLE (thus adding an adjective in the form of a separate sign). Here, Komal and her husband Sanjay talk about the hearing customers they receive in their accessory shop:

Sanjay: They know how to sign a little bit. They can't understand our way of communication. We sign well.

(…)

Komal: I sign fast if they sign well and slow if they can't sign. But they will understand our signs.

Sujit: Ok, right. Do you feel gesturing with hearing and signing with deaf is the same?

Komal: No, we communicate with hearing people through very simple signs.

Note how Komal does not adopt Sujit's sign for GESTURE but instead continues to use the term SIGN and specifies that the way of signing is adapted to the interlocutor. (See *Ishaare* 01:04:13 and 01:07:34 for some demonstrations by Reena and Mahesh). These perspectives understand gesture and sign as the same type of semiotic system, SIGN, with variations in speed, movement and specificity).

Introduction of the separation between "gesturing" and "signing" in the ISL class

While the above utterances put gesture and sign in the same category, (some) deaf people in India (also) *do* conceptually distinguish between gesture and signing by using the sign GESTURE. An important space where ideologies about sign versus gesture were introduced and circulated were the ISL courses which were incepted in May 2001 (Zeshan et al., 2005), and were organised in five different branches of AYJNISHD (Ali Yavar Jung National Institute of Speech and Hearing Disabilities) all over India. They were not the first ISL courses ever, but importantly, they were organized within the primary government institute that provides services such as audiological testing and hearing aid fittings, and undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate courses for teachers for the deaf and audiologists.

The ISL course materials are built around the notion that ISL is a language, with a lexicon, and a grammar, reflecting structural linguistic perspectives based on linguistic research on ISL by German researcher Ulrike Zeshan (Zeshan, 2000), and was organised with the aim of training sign language interpreters, training deaf sign language teachers, teaching sign language to professionals working with deaf people, and to anyone else who is interested. The course consists of three different levels with each level amounting to 3 months full time, or a longer period of part-time teaching. The syllabi of the first two levels were written by Ulrike Zeshan. An ISL Teacher Training (ISLTT) course has regularly been organized for deaf people since 2001 and uses the same syllabi as the ISL courses. The ISLTT courses were mainly attended by deaf youth (in their late teens, twenties and early thirties), many of whom showed leadership potential. Many of the deaf ISLTT students did not aim to become a sign language teacher, but to learn about ISL.

Central to the first level of the ISL course is a refutation of prejudices or "wrong beliefs" about sign language, including: "Sign languages are NOT just gestures and pantomime, but do have their own grammar." (Zeshan et al., 2005, p. 23) Sujit was student in this ISLTT course in 2004, and testified: "I didn't know the word gesture. I thought when we meet hearing we sign with them and when we meet deaf we sign with them too." Sujit worked full-time as Master Trainer teaching ISL and ISLTT courses between 2005 and 2013, and following the course materials, he taught his students that gestures are limited, and "just words without grammar". Because of the ISLTT course, attended by about 200 deaf people

over the past 16 years (in groups of up to 15 people) a sizable group of deaf people has been taught these theories: "The effect of the training on deaf people who participate in the course can only be described as dramatic. Usually, deaf Indians do not believe that their sign language is a "proper language" that has a grammar of its own." (Zeshan et al. 2005, p. 28).

Thus, in the ISLTT courses, two processes that are significant to this research project happened: *1. gesturing was separated from signing and 2. signing was named "ISL"*, ie the master category "SIGN" was differentiated. During the discussions we organised, some deaf people in Yuva (Youth) Association of the Deaf (YAD) said that they previously already had the concept for gesture in their mind, but no separate sign or word for it, however, others testified that these two processes were much more profound than just learning new words: it meant a new way of looking at manual communication. In the same vein, Makoni and Pennycook (2006, p. 10) write that "languages" were often introduced (ie constructed as language) into communities or places where previously languages were not constructed as such, and importantly, "these were not just new names for extant objects (languages pre-existed the naming), but rather the invention and naming of new objects. The naming performatively called the languages into being." This becomes very obvious in a testimony by a deaf woman in her twenties in YAD who had attended the ISLTT course:

> Before the ISL class while I used gestures with hearing people, (…) I thought that hearing people can use signs. They can sign and can improve their signing (…) but later I realized they were not signs but gestures. Before I joined the ISL class, I didn't know the word "gesture". Didn't know the meaning. In ISL class we realized what it was. I was totally taken aback after this realization. Earlier I thought it was good that the hearing were signing. Even though slow, it was good and they could improve. (…) That's when we let the gestures remain for what they are, seeing gesture as not sign language and thus something not to focus on, and continued to focus on signing with deaf people.

Other young deaf people in YAD reported a similar moment of waking up, which they described as a positive and helpful realization. After learning that sign language is deaf people's own, fully-fledged language, essentially different from gesturing with hearing people, and that they were *not signing* with hearing people, they ideologically distanced themselves from gesturing as not-deaf.

Branson and Miller point out that for many people, "the question 'when is a way of communicating a language?' is not an issue" (2006, p. 129). In this line, deaf people in our study were generally not so much concerned with the *linguistic status* of sign language or gesture (with the exception of Sarita in the opening excerpt), even after the ISL classes. Instead of echoing the widespread (academic) language ideology that "gesture is not language and sign language is a language"; the ideology that had been circulated was the connection of gestures to hearing people and ISL to deaf people. In the next sections, we explore in further detail how participants experienced the differences between GESTURE and SIGN; or in other words: between hearing SIGN and deaf SIGN.

Perceived differences in style and grammar

Deaf people's signing is perceived as smaller spaced, faster, less expressive/pronounced/elaborate, and more relaxed than gestures. The following quotes by deaf people (during interviews and in discussions in deaf clubs) elaborate on this:

- "Deaf's hand movements are really soft and hearing's hand movements are really hard."
- "Deaf people use ISL smoothly with each other and communicating with hearing in gesture is rather heavy."
- "We, deaf, sign EATING like this [relaxed, small signing, shoulders to the back instead of bent forwards] because we have used this sign since a long time. It's related to our habit to sign."
- "When we gesture with hearing, it is more difficult to have eye contact and the body language differs. Not the same as deaf people."

People thus describe how different forms of signing *feel* differently, in proprioceptive, kinetical and affective terms. Furthermore, people said that gestures produced by or for hearing people were more elaborate and expressive and took more time to produce. Similarly, Jepson, 1991, p. 46 pointed out: "Unlike UISL, where pantomime is a last resort when signing breaks down, RISL incorporates pantomime into its structure."). Also, gestures were more often two-handed, for example the ISL sign for 30 is done with one hand (Figure 6) while in gesture people would repeat "ten" thrice, ie "ten ten ten" (Figure 7) (although they also could express "30" in a similar way as in Figure 6). In *Ishaare* (00:29:12)*,* Mahesh demonstrates how deaf people would sign "Want to go to the movies?" quickly and compactly, with one hand (Figure 8) while hearing people would use two hands and would be more expressive (Figure 9).

Figure 6: 30   *Figure 7: 30 (3 x 10)*

Figure 8: MOVIE (deaf)   *Figure 9: MOVIE (hearing)*

Seemingly in contradiction to the above is our observation of language practices: the research showed that gesture-based interactions can be very succinct, economical and quick. A vendor gesturing "one three" could mean "this is ₹13", "you get three of these for ₹10" or "one kilo for ₹300": this is interpreted in context. Also, interactions can consist almost entirely of head movements and facial expressions (see Kusters 2017).

Some deaf people said gesturing was "just words". In one of the discussions in deaf clubs, a man in his fifties or sixties said:

We gesture with hearing people such as *dosa,* tea, *idli* [*dosa* and *idli* are Southern Indian dishes], so there is good communication. Deaf people, on the other hand, actually use ISL. Communicating with hearing through gesture is just for understanding each other.

Importantly, this quote suggests that regarding gestures as "just words" was not necessarily understood as a negative or limiting characteristic of gesture-based communication: gesturing facilitates understanding (which is further discussed below). However, it also has been demonstrated that gestures are typically produced within grammatical structures similar to those of sign languages (Kendon, 2014). For example, in

Mahesh' example "want to go to the movie", MOVIE is embedded in a longer utterance (ie a sentence). Therefore, saying that gesture is "just words" and implying that there is no grammar in gesture-based communication could be said to be a form of *erasure*, in order to differentiate it from sign language and spoken language.

In other words: when trying to find a difference between gesture and sign, the explanation of the difference is focused on a subset (or moment analysis) of gesture-based interactions (ie gesture-based utterances as longer and more expressive, or as "just words") and subsequently essentialized.

Perceived similarities and differences in lexicon

Participants often pointed out differences and similarities in lexicon of gesturing and signing; focusing on conventionalized versus non-conventionalized lexicon, the size of the conventionalized lexicon, and regional differences in conventions.

First, deaf people pointed out *overlap in lexicon* of gesturing and signing (or of hearing signing vs deaf signing), for example the sign/gestures for question words, WATER, ANGRY, TOILET are used in (at least the Mumbai variety of) ISL *and* in deaf-hearing gestures in Mumbai (Figures 10, 11, 12, 13). Pradip pointed out that hearing people would not understand the American Sign Language (ASL) sign for water (Figure 14), but would understand the ISL sign for water (Figure 11). Here, gestures and signs in India are constructed as being the same, and they differ from speech in Hindi, English and other spoken languages, and from ASL.

Figure 10: WHAT/WHERE/HOW?

Figure 11: WATER   *Figure 12: ANGRY*   *Figure 13: TOILET*

Figure 14: WATER (ASL)

Second, while people pointed out overlap, it was also argued that gestures often are polysemous (ie have different meanings) and therefore *less specific* than signs (for example, the gesture in Figure 11 could mean "water" or "beer" or "drink") and employable in *more different contexts* (since they are widely known). It was said that, in comparison, ISL has a broader and more specified lexicon in the sense of having signs for more different concepts. The notion that just one gesture can be polysemous is discussed in Kendon's work on emblems (quotable gestures): "for each of the [emblematic] gestural forms studied, a unifying, abstract semantic theme could be established which, through its intersection with a particular context, came to have a specific meaning" (Kendon, 2004, p. 340). For example, when using the question-marker-gesture/sign (Figure 10) when pointing at something at a street stall, it's understood that the price is requested. In another context, such as when pointing at a child, the same questioning gesture/sign might mean "what gender/age is that child"? Similarly, the famous and versatile Indian "head wobble/nod" is adapted (and

15

combined with facial expressions) to communicate different meanings including "yes", "good", "I don't care", "thank you", and "I understand".

Third, participants pointed out that gestures and signs could *differ* in lexicon. Examples often included different gestures for "marriage", (see *Ishaare* 09:46), many of them based on enactments of cultural marriage practices such as throwing rice, making music on a flute, and beating drums. A widespread ISL sign for marriage is made by closing two palms on each other (Figure 15). In the India Deaf Society club, a man in his forties said: "The palm on palm sign for marriage is a sign. The drum beating is not a sign. It's a gesture". He was following the reasoning that hearing conventions should be marked as "gestures" and deaf conventions as "signs". (However, the drum beating was also recognised as an (older) Mumbai variant of ISL, which again shows the blurriness of gesture-sign boundaries.)

Figure 15: MARRIED/MARRIAGE

Figure 16: WHAT/WHERE/HOW? (South)

Third, deaf people talked about regional variation of gestures and signs. For example in South India, the common question marker is different and latter is incorporated in the southern varieties of ISL (see Figure 16, contrasting with Figure 10). Thus, in other regions, other conventional gestures are used and some are incorporated in the regional variants of what deaf people regard as the deaf signing (ISL) lexicon. In summary, this discussion on conventions in gesture and sign is thus much more complex than the process of "no conventions" to "conventions" in Kendon's and McNeill's continua.

Fourth, while deaf people pointed out that both gesture and sign display regional variation, the fluent and fast communication in deaf signing in ISL was regarded as a fundamental, qualitative difference between gesture and sign. Gestures were as such contrasted with a "united" ISL, which was ideologically constructed as a nationwide language. In that act, people thus minimalised or backgrounded the fact that ISL has regional variants as well. (Note: The ISLTT teaching materials (videos) actually mainly incorporates the Delhi variant). Some deaf people have argued that there are in fact several sign languages in India rather than one sign language with regional variants, using names such as Keralan Sign Language, West-Bengali Sign Language and so on.

Gesture as a flexible and adaptive form of communicating

During the group discussions and interviews, we considered the range of themes about which people could communicate, and the different kinds of contexts in which people could communicate in gestures and signs. Many deaf people said that in gesture one cannot "talk about the future or the past", or about abstract things. Instead, they said, one can only talk about simple things such as "are you well?" or "do you want to eat?". Sujit, who led these discussions, often questioned and challenged this perspective openly, giving the example that deaf and hearing people can talk about politics, sports, about saving money for the future and so on. These examples similar to Mahesh' examples in *Ishaare,* where he demonstrates how hearing people would gesture "Keep money, when married, keep money

16

in the bank and get interest" (01:07:36), and: "Congress [political party] is the best (…) Very few people vote for BJP. Congress is a big party and very good." (1:08:27). Sujit reported that during the research project, he realised that there are less limits to gesture than he had taught his ISL and ISLTT students. He had taught his students about these limits, even though he had engaged in gesture-based interactions since his childhood and had experienced communicating in gestures about a broad range of topics. Similary, after seeing *Ishaare*, Sarita (the woman who features in the opening excerpt) commented that the limits of gesture are lesser than she had imagined before and that Mahesh' examples woke her up: "I now have realized it myself. That this is it. I forgot it. I have the ideas, am educated but I just forgot about it. That this is there. It impacted me." This shows how language ideologies can become readily adopted even when they contradict practice, and challenging, analysing and overturning these perspectives was part of the research project.

Importantly, when reflecting on limits of the discourse range of gesturing, it was pointed out that the limits of gesture decrease or dissolve when people are acquainted or when they sign slowly and patiently and take the time to communicate and to try different ways of expressing the same idea. In the practice of gesture-based communication, people rephrase and use different modalities such as mouthing and writing things down in different languages, and using objects to communicate (see Kusters 2017) (It should be noted though, that in many contexts, deaf-hearing gesturing does not involve writing or mouthing). Canagarajah (2009) notes that in South-Asia, people are "radically other-centred" and have an orientation toward interacting with people using different languages and are open to unexpectedness and deviations of linguistic "norms". In our study we learned that when people have more time, and when material circumstances were less crowded (ie in shops or trains), they generally were more oriented towards each other, and gesture-based communication between strangers would be more successful in general.

Within this respect, gesturing was regarded as something that deaf people do better or more skilled or in more diverse ways than hearing people do, because they are more experienced in it. A young deaf woman commented: "I see that deaf people right from their childhood face communication barriers with hearing people but then find another way to get through. (…) Deaf express themselves through gesture a lot more often than the hearing." Hearing people not only generally take longer to express themselves, but also to understand the other's gestures.

Thus, a crucial difference between gesturing and signing, one that goes far beyond the above described differences in lexica, form and style, is that gesturing was described as a form of manual communication that is spontaneous and creative, context dependent, adapted by/to interlocutors, and used with more freedom than signing:
- "Because hearing people don't understand signs, they get confused. If they learn our signs, and later they see a different sign [for the same concept], they feel something is wrong because of the difference. (…) They get confused. And then they pick their own way [of signing]."
- "ISL and gesture are different. Gesture is good because hearing people can see and make up gestures independently and it gives them freedom to make themselves understood".
- "We have different ways of gesturing till hearing people understand. Using our sign language, we don't need do to that. We sign and the other understands at once."

Thus, gesturing, since it is less fixed and specific but still meaningful, is a way to bridge different language backgrounds. Taking this in consideration during the course of the

research, Sujit's perspective on gesture changed: in hindsight, he would have less uncritically accepted the ISL course syllabi contents. He would have adopted the concept "gesture", comparing and contrasting with ISL, yet without discounting or erasing its affordances and its importance in everyday life. Also, frequent gesture-based interactions between acquaintances often lead to informal ISL learning (and thus a further blurring of the boundaries gesture/sign or deaf vs hearing sign), especially in work places, in train compartments for people with disabilities and in some families.

Sign/ISL as PERFECT, REAL/TRUE, and FULL

Deaf people expressed that in ISL, they felt less limited in the range of themes they could talk about, that more different registers were used including ambiguous talk, formal talk to address audiences, and linguistically complex humor. Three adjectives that were often used to express the difference between gesture and sign were PERFECT, REAL/TRUE; and FULL: in sign language, deaf people can have perfect, deep, and full communication. There was a strong sense that sign language helps deaf people forward. Some deaf youth expressed the following:
   -"Deaf's signing is perfect and skilled, it's connected to our own life experiences and we understand each other fast. Sign language helps us to develop our intelligence."
   - "Communicating with deaf people goes really fast and communicating with hearing people is really soft and easy. With hearing people, we use simple gestures and share talking with each other. With deaf people, we can talk about anything we want."

Similarly in Green's (2014) study, NSL is used within a network of NSL signers which they call DEAF SOCIETY, a "sphere of easy communication", (p. 9), and ease of communication is deeply valued. Focusing on the urban Indian context, Friedner (2015) writes about how deaf signers circulate in different deaf spaces such as churches, literacy courses, vocational courses, friend groups, multilevel marketing schemes, to be able to learn and communicate in ISL. Constructing ISL as an India-wide language has been helpful in the construction of centralised and regional availability of training and services such as the ISL and ISLTT courses in five branches of AYJNISHD, vocational and professional training courses, and the recent inception of the government-funded Indian Sign Language Research and Training Center (ISLRTC) in Delhi in 2012.
      In general, there seems to be increasing meta-linguistic awareness of ISL, and ideologies about ISL are linked with, and infused with international discourses, processes and trends. People have discussions about ISL legislation, the boundaries of ISL versus other signed languages and International Sign, and about regional variants of ISL, in the abovementioned deaf spaces, in Whatsapp groups, video logs and Youtube posts.
      In these contexts of teaching, learning and presenting in deaf groups, a sharp distinction is made between signing ISL and other forms of signing/gesturing. Indeed, regarding many situations *outside* of retail contexts, people said gesture did not suffice. People wished their family, colleagues and teachers would sign as fluently as their deaf friends. We asked during interviews and discussion groups in which situations deaf people would want the assistance of ISL interpreters rather than to communicate through gestures.

Importantly, participants pointed out that interpreters can create access, but also can create other kinds of barriers and boundaries between deaf and hearing people, since interpreters are in-between persons, while gesture-based communication is usually direct. It was pointed out that in complicated or critical situations such as at the police, in the hospital, in court, being forced to communicate in gesture would often be experienced as limiting and/or oppressing, and sign language interpreters should be present in such situations. Other contexts where the presence of interpreters or sign language would be needed or appreciated is when addressing groups or participating in groups such as contexts of learning, giving presentations and participating in staff meetings.

Conclusions

Sujit, as a teacher in the ISL and ISLTT courses had internalised the gesture-sign distinction throughout the years and as such his lens aligned with Annelies', who initiated the research project. Throughout the course of the research however, we gradually realised how profoundly this lens had shaped the phrasing of the research questions (eg: "what is the difference between gesture and ISL?"). We realised that when people do not use a separate word to distinguish gesturing and signing, this is not merely a question of knowing or not knowing specific terminology and theory, but connected to a particular lens on manual communication. In this respect, the bee hive example proved to be a turning point in our research. After the discussion in the women's club, Sujit used the example in other deaf club discussions, asking whether it was gesture or sign. As in the example above, responses and perspectives were varied, and many people were confused and felt ambivalent: in this example, the gesture-sign distinction felt arbitrary.

"Linguists and applied linguists can avoid being imprisoned by their own semiotic categories," argue Makoni and Pennycook (2006, p. 17); by critiquing the constructions of "languages" by disinventing them and then reconstituting them. This is "a process that may involve both becoming aware of the history of the construction of languages, and rethinking the ways we look at languages and their relation to identity and geographical location" (Makoni and Pennycook, 2006, p. 3). As we have demonstrated in this article, it is crucial to consider different (everyday and academic) language ideologies on a par, and to confront them with each other in this process of disinvention, reconstitution and resetting.

Academic language ideologies can be extremely empowering for communities: in many ways, the scientific construction of sign languages as languages has been "convenient fiction", in the words of Makoni and Pennycook (2006, p. 27), "to the extent that they provide a useful way of understanding the world and shaping language users". Linguistic research on sign languages, in which sign language was distinguished from "merely" gesturing, is a very important example of this (McBurney 2012), as well as the processes of official sign language recognition and sign language institutionalisation in a large number of countries. But, Makoni and Pennycook (p. 27) continue, such constructions "are very inconvenient fictions to the extent that they produce particular and limiting views on how language operates in the world." We argue that the latter is what happens when "other" forms of signed communication, which authors have called gesture-based interactions, RISL, rural homesign or "natural sign", are marginalised by constructing them as "not language" or as "inbetween" forms of communication. We believe that since sign linguistics now has a firm basis to rely upon, the time is now ripe to (re)turn to the study of these forms of communication.

Importantly, deaf people emphasise that gesturing *enables* them to communicate in a visual and flexible way with hearing people who do not know ISL. The ideologies about the affordances and limitations of gesture-based communication very much correspond with Green's (2014:26) characterization of the affordances of natural sign:

> NSL signers also implicitly and explicitly characterize natural sign both as perfectly adequate for communication – with a broader range of people than NSL – *and* as imposing limits on communication. (...) Natural sign thus emerges as a mode of communication that is simultaneously, and contradictorily, powerful and limiting.

Gesture-based communication is experienced as limiting when compared to ISL. Sign language is experienced as extremely liberating, helps people develop their intelligence, knowledge and enables more complex, specific, nuanced conversation and learning, but "full" sign language is not understood by hearing non-signers, in contrast to gesture-based languaging.

In some contexts the distinction or difference between gesture and sign is more palpable, in other contexts it's less so. Where the use of gestures limit deaf people (such as in the classroom with nonsigning teachers, or in court without interpreter), deaf participants feel the contrast with sign language and its affordances is great. Where gesturing does not limit them, or not as much (such as in customer interactions), but rather enables them to communicate one-on-one with a wide range of non-signing hearing people in everyday life, they might put it in the same category as signing. This finding is in line with Pennycook and Otsuji's (2016, p. 274) suggestion that it seems not useful just to *identify* language ideologies but that we need to "understand people's perspective on language in relation to their local everyday practices and trajectories". In different situations, similar language practices are experienced differently, and might be expressed differently in language ideologies. The functions of gesture-based communication, as well as its contexts of use, differ from those of sign language use, and *both* are regarded as essential in the communicative practices and semiotic repertoires of our deaf participants in everyday life.

However, some academic ideologies on forms of gesturing and signing, organising them on (fixed) continua or in classifications, have de-localised and de-contextualised fluid language practices; simplified and essentialised their difference; or made distinctions where language users typically do not experience such distinctions. In classifications of different kinds of signing, gesture-based communication (or natural sign, or RISL etc) is not included, or placed "in-between" or "ad hoc" communication while this study has showed that they are not necessarily *experienced* as such: *it's all signing*. Such classifications of forms of signing, or considerations of languageness, thus do no justice to the here investigated everyday language practices (Kusters 2017) and ideologies. By engaging in the process of disinvention and reconstitution of the distinction between gesture and sign, academic research on gesture and signing can become more multifaceted and more connected to fluid everyday language practices and everyday language ideologies, accounting for their range of affordances and how they are experienced.

Is this process of "disinventing" sign languages potentially dangerous for those attempting to propagate and communicate language ideologies about sign languages as distinct? We believe this depends on purpose and context: aiming to promote certain language ideologies in advocacy settings in order to achieve linguistic human rights, differs from aiming to understand, from a scientific perspective, how ideologies give shape to (and are given shape in) everyday and academic contexts. We think it is important to be aware

though that both of these perspectives *are* grounded in language ideologies and promote or produce ideologies.

Summarised, in the study of everyday language ideologies about gesture and sign in Mumbai, we saw three processes at work: (1) categorising gesture and sign within the same master category sɪɢɴ (ie gesturing *is* signing); (2) constituting continuums of signing skills; and (3) recognising or even essentialising the difference between gestures and signs in dichotomies. Some of these ideas overlap with the academic ideologies on gesture versus signing, such as the attention to extents of conventionalisation of lexicon (in common with Kendon's and McNeill's continua), yet everyday language ideologies on conventionalization are more complex and multilayered than the latter.

The often combined existence of these three seemingly contradictory processes demonstrates that within everyday language ideologies, the distinction between gesturing and signing is fluid, changeable, negotiable and context-dependent: "popular metalinguistic terminologies are flexible, malleable and open to change" (Pennycook and Otsuji, 2016, p. 260). This means that, what one person sees as signing, the other may regard as gesturing (as demonstrated by the squeezing the bee hive example), and what people mean by these labels may vary.

Also, the formulation of the potential and limitations of gesture-based communication has been challenged, nuanced and detailed within the discussions and interviews in this research project, such as the notion that in gesture-based communication one cannot talk about abstract themes or about the future, or that it only consists of words. People often use apparently normative and static language labels and essentialise gesture-based language practices (gesture as "more expressive", as "only words") but they also put emphasis on their flexible potential (gesture as flexible/adaptive). Sometimes, these everyday language ideologies obscured or contradicted the language practices that were observed (for example, the ideas that gesture can only "talk about the now", "cannot talk short", that gesture is "only words", or that gesture uses a larger space than signing). If we would disregard the study of the language *practices* that are under discussion and only focus on ideologies, we would engage in the process of erasure of the potential, features and affordances of gesture-based communication. Linguistic ethnography can shed light on language practices and how they do or do not seem to be reflected in language ideologies, and the other way around.

The fact that descriptions of language use can *change* in the process of discussing and researching them means, according to Pennycook and Otsuji (2016, p. 270),

> either that language ideologies may be fairly flexible - the shifts people make in their discussion of language use indicate these beliefs are not so entrenched - or that people may have a range of ideologies available for thinking about language - the shifts people make are discursive moves that mobilise other ideologies.

We think it might be a combination of these: deaf people, including us, openly discussed their views and challenged each other in the discussion groups, and shifted between ideologies when the concerned contexts of language use shifted. In sum, there is a "push and pull between fluid and fixed language use and descriptions," (Makoni and Pennycook, 2006 p. 270) for which we need to account.

The fact that Pennycook and Otsuji (2016) write about the *availability* of ideologies, or access to ideologies, is important. We have demonstrated that differences in language ideologies are also the result of varying degrees of *awareness* of various language ideologies, be they explicit or implicit (in language usage), everyday or academic (Kroskrity,

2000). In this case, ideologies on the difference between gesture and sign are related to the import of (western) structural linguistic perspectives in the ISLTT course and through the current research project. The introduction and circulation of the gesture vs signing distinction did not always resonate with the research participants and the researchers, and was further given shape *and* challenged within the process of research. This shows how linguistic ethnography is itself driven by language ideologies; that linguistic ethnography creates prime spaces of understanding, and engaging in, the encounter between academic and everyday language ideologies; and may be consequential in effecting everyday ideologies (and vice versa).

Acknowledgments

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