LANGUAGE
LEARNING

LANGUAGE
IDEOLOGIES

CALIBRATION

Language learning as researcher

Researcher	Sign language learning & use in MobileDeaf	Challenges and strategies in communication
Erin	BISINDO, Kata Kolok, ASL, Auslan, BSL, IS	Limited use of BISINDO, relied on ASL/IS Understood Auslan due to BSL similarities
Amandine	KSL, ASL, English fingerspelling, gestures	Struggled with differences between "village signs" and KSL Easier communication with educated deaf refugees
Steve	BSL mixed with IS or interviewee's sign language	Difficulty with migrants using many signs from their country of origin
Sanchayeeta	BSL, FSL, ASL, ISL	English mouthing helped bridge different language backgrounds
Annelies	BSL, ISL, VGT, IS, bits of KSL and ASL	Mostly IS, but some interviewees self-declared limited IS proficiency Learned and used KSL signs

a deaf metaphor:
Calibrating
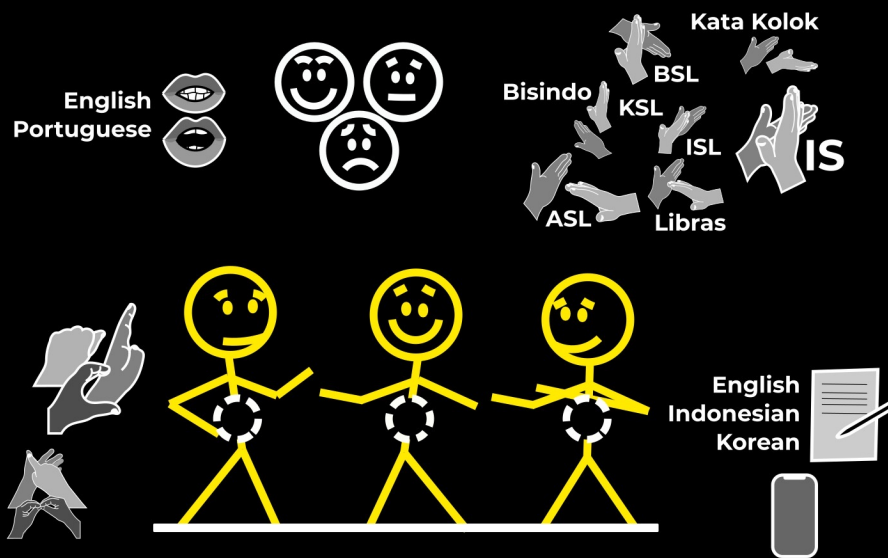
- Use of space, depiction, facial expressions
- Lexical elements from various sign languages
- Spoken languages: writing, mouthings + fingerspelling alphabets
- Drawing, photos
- Copying / repeating signs, using different signs for same concept until one "clicks"

Establishing a frame of reference and building on it

|	Languages	(Trans)languaging *(calibrating)*
Definition	Languages as categorized entities (e.g., British Sign Language, English)	Activities involving language (e.g., signing, speaking, writing, reading)
	Result of agreements to group linguistic variations together	Precedes languages as bounded entities
	Bound to a territorial area, like a nation-state	Emerges from contexts of interaction; signed & spoken languages are in contact and mixing happens naturally
Example	Deaf people learning/using/policing national sign languages (e.g., BSL, BISINDO, KSL)	Deaf people using a mix of sign languages to communicate
Language ideologies	Concerns about linguistic contamination and "spread"; preoccupation with "percentages"	Challenges the idea of discrete, countable languages, validating mixed language use

mobile deaf

Why study sign language ideologies in Deaf Mobility Studies?

- Language ideologies: the **beliefs** or **views** people hold about language(s)

- Researching ideologies is important to unpack power and the politics of belonging

- Language ideologies shape deaf people`s lives: sign language research, teaching, advocacy and opportunities

- Language ideologies drive calibration and language learning in mobility and belonging
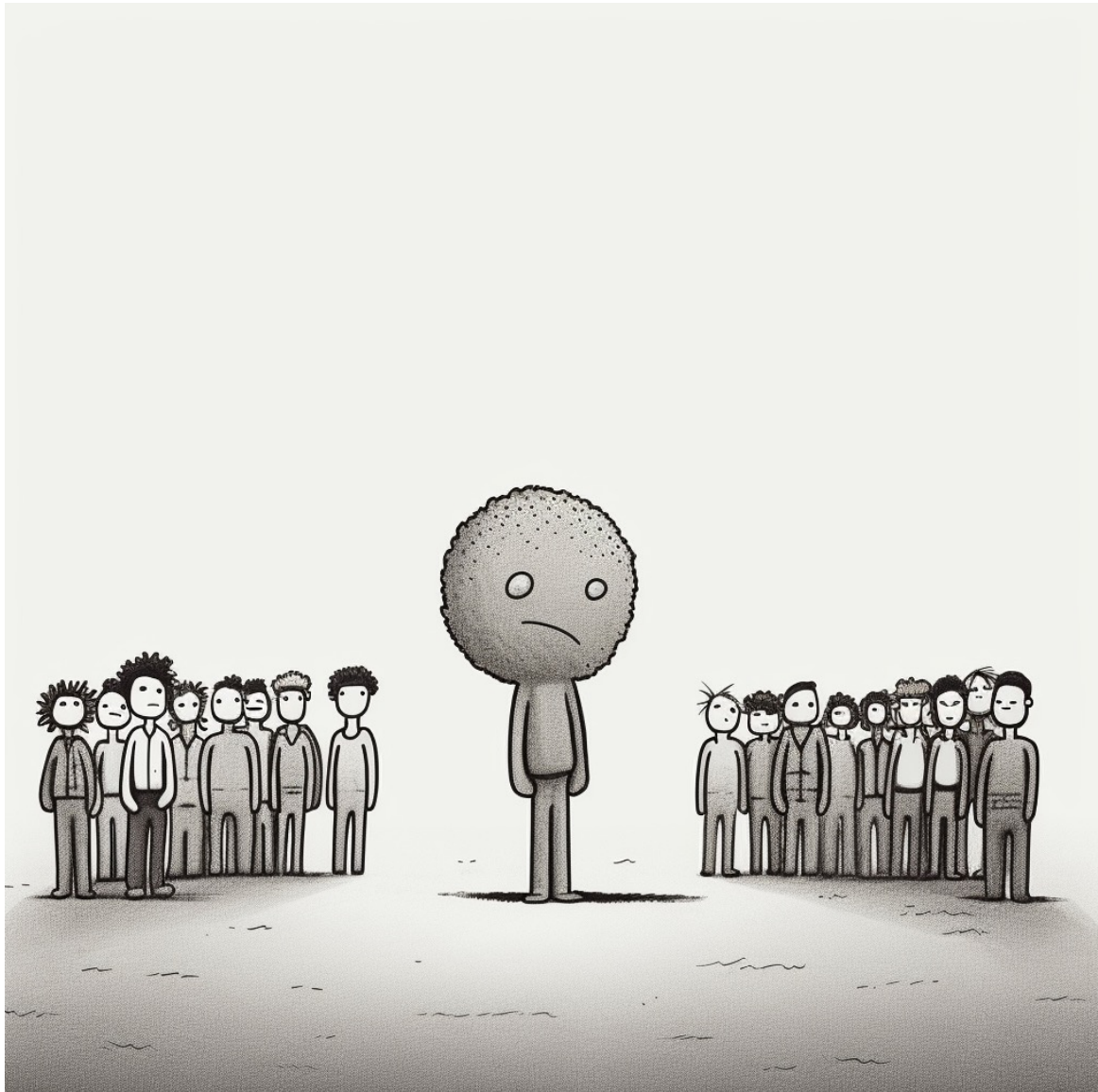
Example of language ideology: The myth of "No Language"

- **"No Language" Label Critique**
  - Used too widely, oversimplifies the situation
  - Creates a hierarchy between "real" and "non-languages"
  - Often associated with origin country
- Deaf people do communicate through gestures, objects, village signs

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	American Sign Language	**International Sign**
Geographical spread	• National sign language of US & Canada • History: spread in Asia, Africa, South-America (but evolved) • Gallaudet international students	• *Conventionalised:* Europe, WFD, Clin d'Oeil, online spaces (cf "International Sign Language") • *Unconventionalised:* (calibration) worldwide (variations!)
Learnability	• **USA + Online materials** • Also courses, dictionaries etc • Additional sign language for many	• **Traditionally: encounters** • Increasing number of courses and dictionaries, online videos
Understandability	• Simplified/modified ASL widely understood • 'American ASL' hard to understand	• "More visual": transparency • Variability/flexibility
Language ideologies	• "Killer language", "imperialist": resistance, language shaming/policing • Pragmatism: "helps to communicate"	• "Cooperative" • Can be "too European", "too ASL" • Linguistic status often contested

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episode one
International Sign unpacked

This IS
is
An ethnographic film series
on International Sign
by Annelies Kusters & Jorn Rijckaert

What does IS mean to you?

Wahyu's calibrations

- Wahyu: Deaf Indonesian tourist guide skilled at calibration
- Uses International Sign, Auslan, and BISINDO
- Adjusts signing based on tourists' nationalities:
  - Incorporates signs, mouthings, and fingerspelling from various languages (eg. German)
  - Learns and adapts during communication
  - Calibrates topics and frames of reference depending on the nationality
    - Example: Discusses Dutch colonization of Indonesia differently with US and Dutch tourists

Tourist Mobility

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Deaf Tourism in Bali

"A"

a — "sister" (Kata Kolok)
b — "sister" (Kata Kolok)
c — "sister" (ASL)
d — "sister" (fingerspelling)
e — "age" (BISINDO)
f — "age" (Kata Kolok)
g — "age" (IS)

Tourist Mobility

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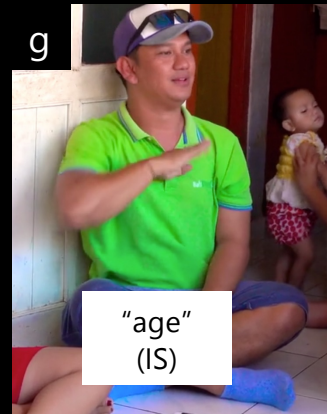
B

a "troops" (Somali)

b "troops" (fingerspelling)

c "army" (ASL)

d "army" (ASL)

Forced Migration

mobile deaf

C

a — "Prague" (sign name)

b — "Czech Republic" (fingerspelling)

c — "Czech Republic" (<= fingerwriting)

d — "Czech Republic" (location)

e — "Czech Republic" (shape)

Professional Mobility

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Collective calibration including brokering and forms of translation	X	X	X	X
Use of IS and ASL as Lingua Franca	X	X		
Use of English as Lingua Franca (fingerspelling and writing)	X	X		X
Language learning: signs from other languages, meaning of English words	X			X

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Deaf Tourism in Bali

Comparing signs

- Tourists from India, Italy, and their Indonesian guide exchange Auslan, LIS and ISL signs for "belief" at Balinese temple.
- Copying and chaining = key practices for learning and comparing signs
- DEAF-SAME doesn't mean SIGN-SAME, but comparing signs helps establish connection
- Openness to signs shows interest, respect and morality = cosmopolitanism

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Signs as souvenirs and anchors

Tourist Mobility

- Souvenir:
  - Harish and Heena share new signs with friends back in India, like souvenirs

- Anchor:
  - Sharing signs is part of deaf networking
  - BISINDO signs DEAF and LIKE create potential connections for future encounters

Language buddies and brokers
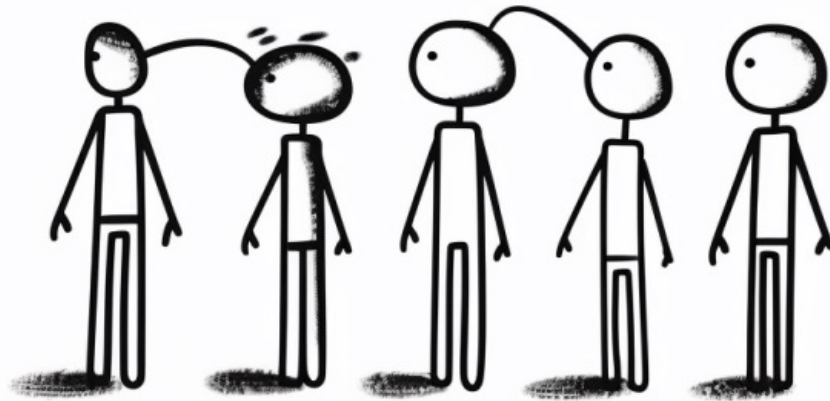
- New signers: Learn sign language(s) later in life

- Example: Ronja (Germany), DGS (German Sign Language) new signer

- Travel buddy: Sabrina, helps Ronja learn IS and ASL

  - Sign language brokering: Informal interpreting

  - Sabrina feels responsible: "my child"

#deaftravel
Deaf Tourism in Bali

During Abendessen I met different signers, it was so new to me.

Indonesian "A"   Croatian "A"

Tourists engage in language shaming

Tourist Mobility

- Language shaming: mock, undervalue, disrespect, degrade particular ways of using language ("backwards", "stupid")

- Deaf teacher in Bali, Ferdy Yanto, clashed with Croatian tourists over BISINDO sign for "A".

- Tourists wanted him to change his sign, used offensive gestures

- Yanto insisted on respecting Balinese culture.

- Yanto chided their lack of deaf cosmopolitanism ("no respect for difference") => "dirty-minded lesbians from Croatia"

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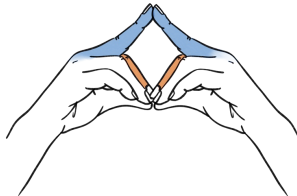
I am frustrated. From England, Belgium.

Tourist Mobility

"Sign to me, not to the children"

ASL in Bali: perceived as threatening BISINDO

- Example: A Balinese deaf teacher discouraging tourists from signing with deaf children to avoid "contaminating" BISINDO"

- Denial of direct encounters: deaf moral conflict

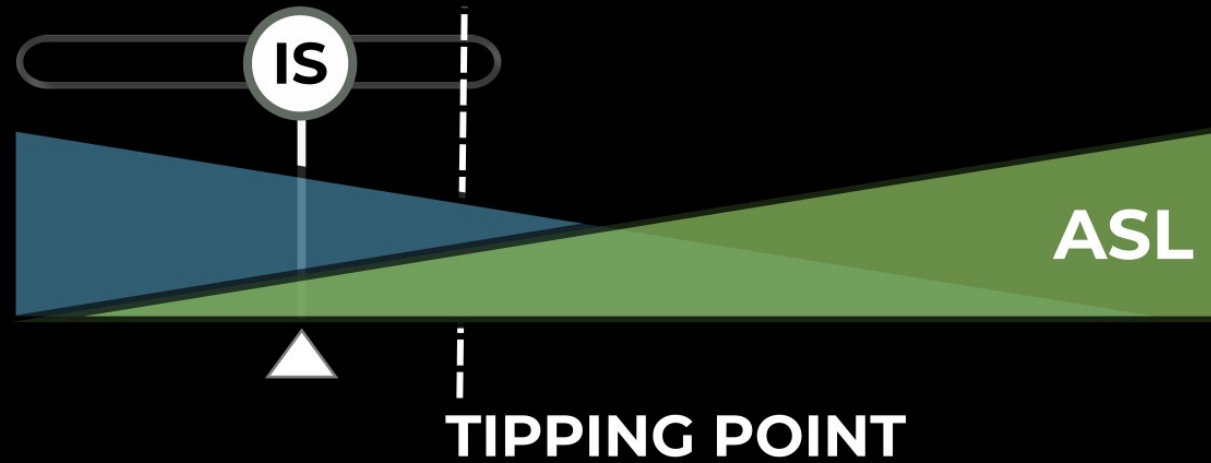# Calibration repertoire

Professional Mobility

Start of Frontrunners course
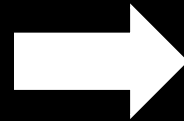
- Varied IS proficiency: some have to work harder to understand

- Students learn to calibrate:
  - Adjust signing speed
  - Be more visual or use gestures
  - Exchange national signs
  - Avoid ASL signs

8 months later

- All are proficient in IS
- Communication is faster
- Still use of ASL (some new signs, some signs kept, others removed)
- Using signs of each other's sign languages
- Calibration repertoire expanded:
  - More control over signing speed
  - Can switch ASL on or off
  - Ability to adapt IS usage to audience
- Persistent impact of large cultural and linguistic distances

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episode one
International Sign unpacked

This is IS
An ethnographic film series
on International Sign
by Annelies Kusters & Jorn Rijckaert

In other places,
language use might be different.

episode one
International Sign unpacked

This
is IS

An ethnographic film series
on International Sign
by Annelies Kusters & Jorn Rijckaert
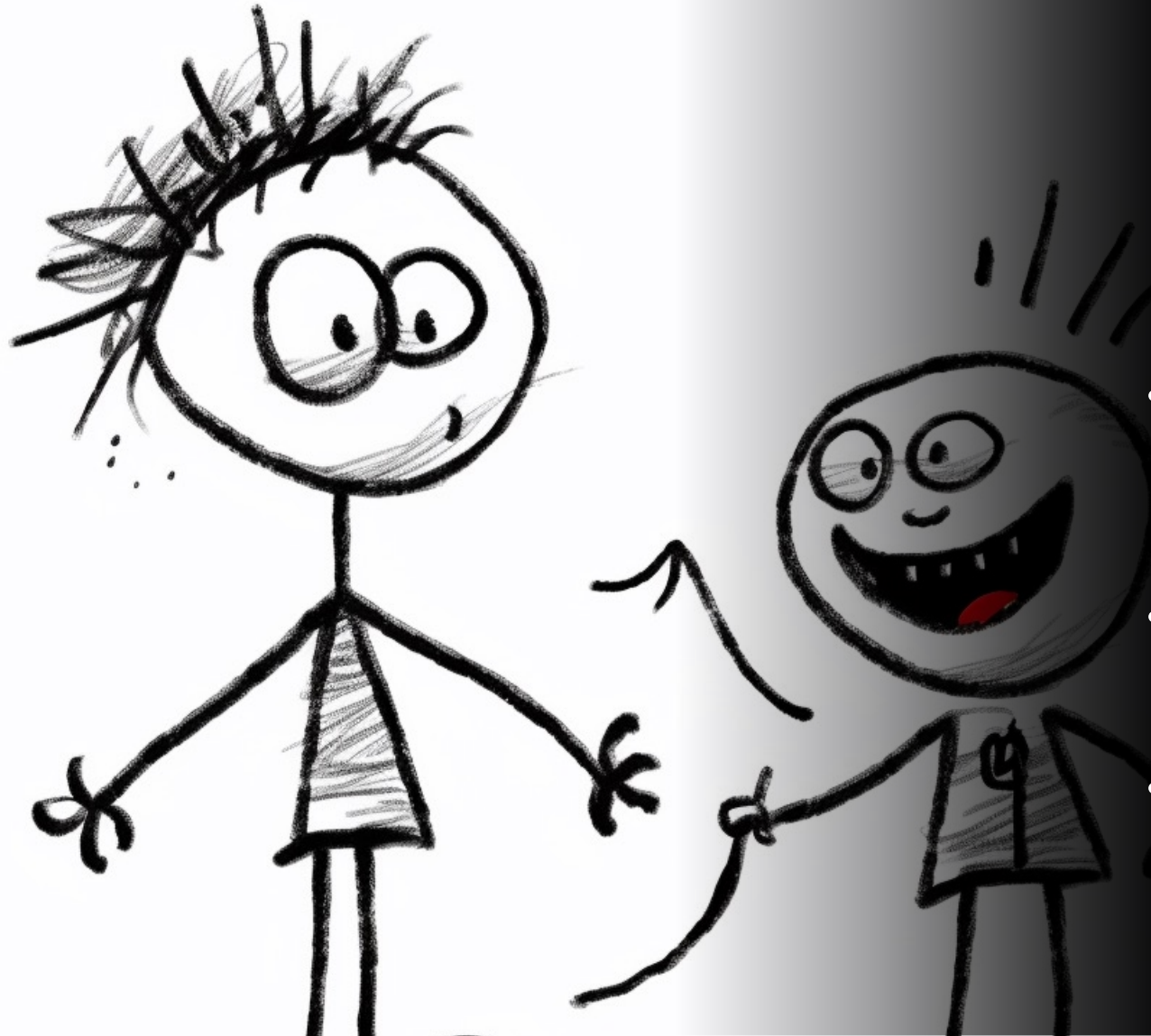
Humor as curiosity and/or shaming

Professional Mobility

- Arabic and Asian signs seen as source of curiosity, othering and entertainment
- Linguistic humor *can* be a form of language shaming
- Identifying linguistic racism in humor can be challenging, especially with friends!

DOOR in Kenya: spaces of calibration vs spaces of separation

	Spaces of Calibration	Spaces of Separation
Language Use	Mixing of various sign languages (but KSL as lingua franca) – the film asks: is this International Sign?	Strict separation between languages Maintaining bounded national sign languages
Settings	Dinners, sports, informal gatherings	Translation labs
Purpose	Social interaction, shared understanding	Accurate translation, preserving linguistic boundaries

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Learning "full" languages rather than 'bits'

- Expectations for deaf migrants
  - Learn the host country's written language and national sign language
  - Aim: belonging and access to social and educational spaces

- Language learning pathways
  - Formal settings (eg. City Lit)
  - Informal learning in deaf sociality (eg. Shakespeare pub)
  - Online self-study (sometimes already before moving)
  - New signers: some people learn to sign for the first time after arrival!

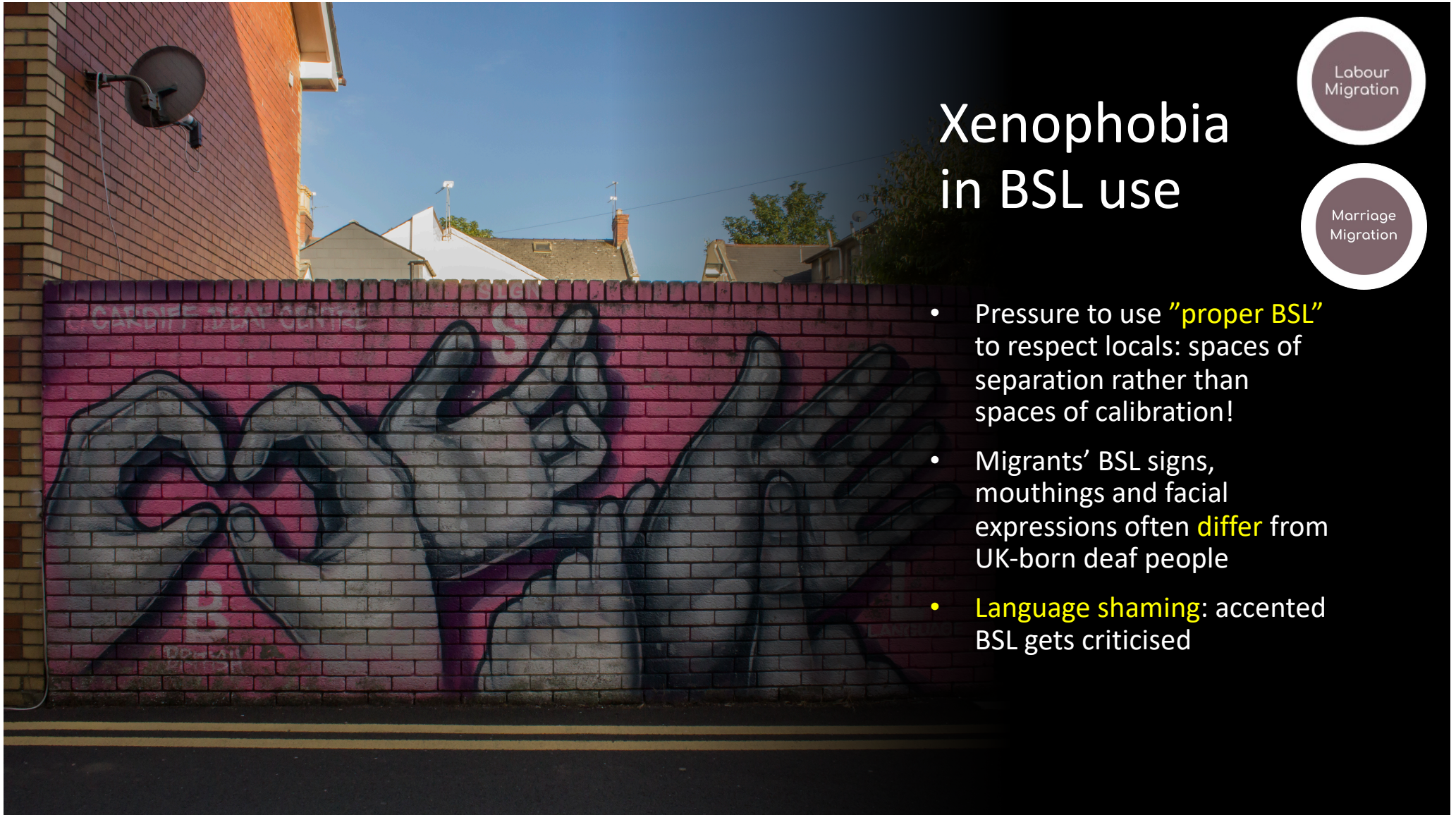Marriage Migration

Labour Migration

mobile deaf

Marriage
Migration

Language learning (or not?)

Marriage Migration

	Sana (5 years in UK)	Meera (20 years in UK)	Shahina (6 years in UK)
Context	Married into a deaf family. Transition to a "stiffer" British signing style. Aspiration to work with deaf children.	Limited time due to work, housework, and caregiving responsibilities.	Hyper-mobile, frequently traveling between countries (India, Dubai).
Challenges	Disadvantaged in accessing higher-level BSL courses due to limited English proficiency	Experienced prejudice, language shaming, and anti-migration rhetoric as an ASL user in the UK	Initially unmotivated to learn more fluent/pure BSL due to lack of stability in the UK.
			Lockdown led to increased use of BSL (less mobile)
Language Use	Uses BSL. (acquired through family and formal learning).	Uses SSE with hearing friends and ASL (learned in India) with some British deaf people and other Indian migrants.	Uses ASL with husband in the UK (also a migrant)
			Uses basic BSL with hearing interpreters and with British deaf.

Xenophobia in BSL use

Labour Migration

Marriage Migration

- Pressure to use "proper BSL" to respect locals: spaces of separation rather than spaces of calibration!

- Migrants' BSL signs, mouthings and facial expressions often differ from UK-born deaf people

- Language shaming: accented BSL gets criticised

When I arrived here I was criticised a lot.

Signing with/for/like **hearing** people

1. **BSL Dependents**: Essential for accessing services
    *   BSL critical for working with hearing interpreters and obtaining key services

2. **BSL Experts**: Seeking approval
    *   "Is my BSL okay?": Deaf migrants seek hearing interpreters' validation

3. **BSL Novices:** Prejudice
    *   Deaf migrants accused of signing like "a hearing new signer."

Labour Migration

Marriage Migration

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Kakuma Refugee Camp language use and learning

Forced Migration

Context	Language	Reasons
Deaf refugees in camp schools	ASL, KSL, SEE	• Formal signing, educational settings, English-oriented • Older generation learned ASL in camp schools, while younger generation learned KSL • Some deaf refugees believe that fluency in ASL may increase chances of resettlement in the US
Informal communication	Informal KSL, village signs, home country signs	• Communicating with friends and acquaintances • Communicating with hearing people

Note: KSL = Kenyan Sign Language, ASL = American Sign Language, SEE = Signing Exact English, IS = International Sign
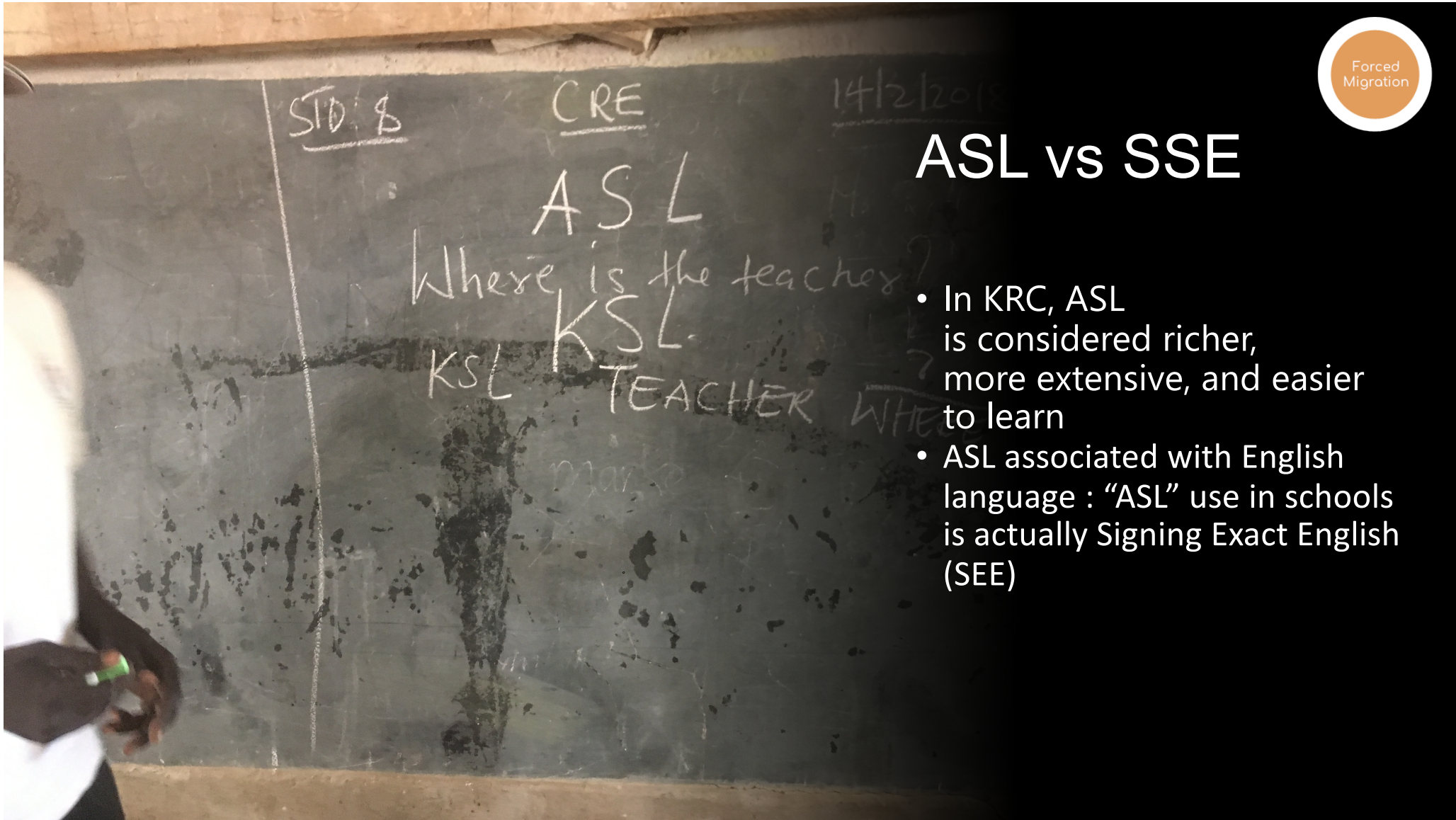
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I use Kenyan signs.

Forced
Migration

I never been to school.

ASL vs SSE

- In KRC, ASL
is considered richer,
more extensive, and easier
to learn
- ASL associated with English
language : "ASL" use in schools
is actually Signing Exact English
(SEE)

Ideologies about *entire countries* having "no sign language"

- KRC Refugees' deny existence of sign language in Sudan/Somalia

- Contrast: DOOR: South Sudan Sign Language Bible translation (mix of village signs and signs used in deaf schools)

- Perception of "no sign language" reasons
  - War, forced migration, lack of education (not knowing deaf schools)
  - Local signs devaluation, complex sign influences
  - Fear of returning to war-torn countries, Western resettlement desire

So, "a citizen of the world, how far can we take that idea"?

- Deaf Cosmopolitanism Validated
  - Calibration
  - Linguistic border crossing
  - New sign language learning
  - Curiosity about others' signs
  - Valuing "openmindedness"

- Deaf Cosmopolitanism Challenges
  - Mobile deaf individuals face xenophobia, linguistic racism and language shaming
  - Pressure for "correct" or "natural" signing
  - Communication effort varies among individuals, reflecting power imbalances
  - A "cosmopolitan attitude" is a privilege (mostly advocated by people who do not have to "work hard")

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Blue sky thinking vs. practical impact

- Our funding: European Research Council Starting Grant, fostering scientific innovation and 'blue-sky thinking without a practical impact requirement
  - Deaf Mobility Studies as new (sub)field
  - Deaf ethnographic film as new genre

- BUT! Recognizing responsibility:
  - Deaf communities seek empowerment from academic research
  - We documented (some very serious) examples of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, ableism, vidism, audism, and linguicism
  - Need for deaf scholars to take part in processes of addressing systemic forms of abuse, violence, oppression

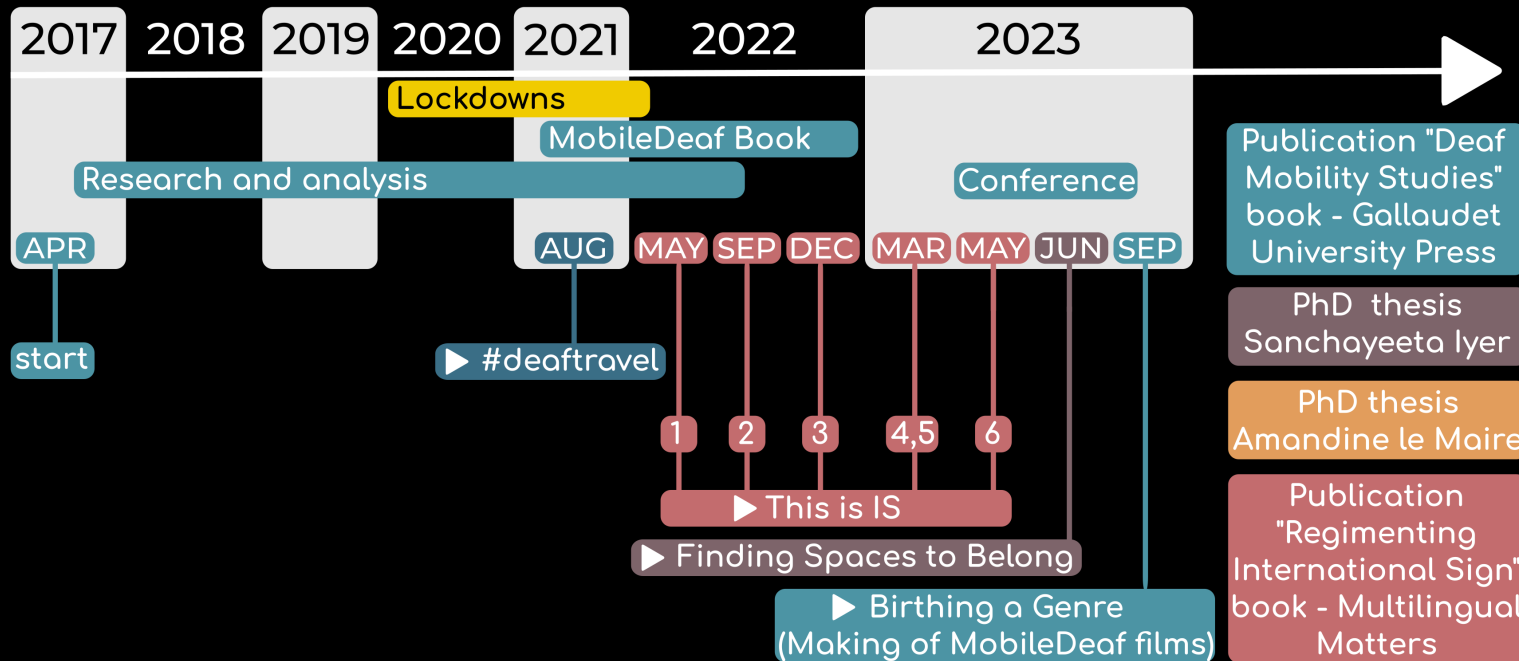| Engagement in non-academic fields	Specific Examples
Self-definition & community	• MobileDeaf films lead to individual and collective reflection and attitudinal changes
Teaching & training in non-academic contexts	• Annelies giving sessions on IS for eg. interpreters • Sanchayeeta teaching a workshop on migration and racism for the European Union of Deaf Youth • Amandine teaching in schools
Advice and/or policy discourse *Do get in touch if we can support !*	• Erin working with the ACLU as an expert witness • Steve worked with Deaf Hub Wales on an 18-month connecting communities' project • Annelies advising on the online course "International Sign today" and a policy statement by the European Union of the Deaf • Amandine's research findings on forced migration cited by WFD in UN report • Sanchu and Steve presented findings at a University College London event to support work with policy makers
Creation of resources *(grant application in progress)*	• Forthcoming summaries/recommendations for policymakers and advocates • Forthcoming teaching and workshop materials

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MobileDeaf Timeline

Forced Migration · Labour & Marriage Migration · Professional Mobility · Tourist Mobility

belonging
languaging
networks
immobility

2017 **2018** **2019** **2020** **2021** **2022** **2023**

Lockdowns

MobileDeaf Book

Research and analysis

Conference

APR

AUG

MAY SEP DEC MAR MAY JUN SEP

start

▶ #deaftravel

1 2 3 4,5 6

▶ This is IS

▶ Finding Spaces to Belong

▶ Birthing a Genre
(Making of MobileDeaf films)

Publication "Deaf Mobility Studies" book - Gallaudet University Press

PhD thesis Sanchayeeta Iyer

PhD thesis Amandine le Maire

Publication "Regimenting International Sign" book - Multilingual Matters

A forthcoming book based on the MobileDeaf project

Deaf Mobility Studies

Annelies Kusters, Steven Emery, Sanchayeeta Iyer, Erin Moriarty, and Amandine le Maire

Available in Spring 2024

GU PRESS **Gallaudet University Press**

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MobileDeaf: Dissemination

Links to clips

Published ethnographic film
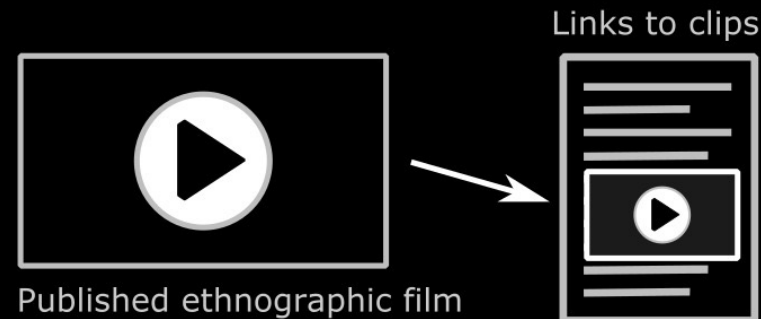
Filmmaking

- Context is more present
- Sign language as used everyday
- Can see the data itself
- More interesting for various audiences
- More broadly accessible (but not for all!)

Writing

- Evoke context: images, metaphors, stories (field notes!)
- Examples that are not in the films
- Abstract concepts, theoretical
- Detailed analysis of interactions

Did you know that…..

… we interviewed about 200 people, in boats, schools, on beaches, mountains, in homes, in pubs?

… we have written about 1000 pages of field notes based on our observations?

… our interviewees originate from 74 different countries ?

… we hosted deaf visiting scholars from Finland, Costa Rica, and Singapore?

… we involved deaf researchers in numerous reading groups, in several international workshops funded by MobileDeaf?

… Steve went to a Bingo evening in a London deaf café for observations, and won, for the first time ever?

… when Amandine woke up one morning during her field work in Kakuma Refugee Camp, she saw she had shared the room with a scorpion?

… Sanchu has become a coffee junkie since joining MobileDeaf?

… during her field work on deaf tourism, Erin went to the "Monkey Forest" in Bali over 25 times!

… Annelies has collected a stack of press cards she obtained to make it easier to do research at conferences and events!

…. once, when Sanchu and Steve went to a pub for observations, Sanchu was refused entry because the bouncer thought she looked younger than 18!

… we won the Heriot-Watt University Research Team of the Year award in 2022?

… Amandine and Sanchu gave birth to Priya and Joshua since the start of the project?

… Annelies' second child was 9 months old when she applied for the MobileDeaf funding, and he is 8 years now?
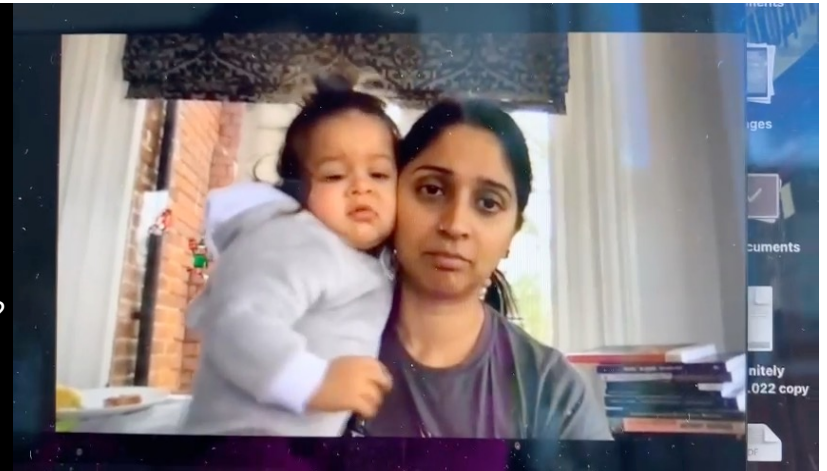
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Closing Conference: Deaf Mobility Studies

Thank you!

This conference

- Coordinators
- Volunteers
- Administrators
- Presenters
- Interpreters, captioners, Wovenink
- Participants

The MobileDeaf project

- Filmmakers (Visual Box)
- About 200 research participants
- 5 co-researchers and research assistants
- Webdesign & data visualisation (Signfuse)
- In-house interpreters
- Our other regular interpreters
- SoSS Finance
- Our mentors and colleagues
- Our families and friends
- European Research Council
- Heriot-Watt University

European Research Council
Established by the European Commission