

SUMMARY

Preliminary results from a project exploring the unique semiotic repertoires and practices of **d/Deaf migrants in Austria**

Main research focus: How does the **language background** of deaf migrants influence their **current languaging**?

Results reveal **heterogeneous and extensive semiotic repertoires**, including diverse semiotic resources of varying degrees of conventionalization

METHOD

Semi-structured interviews conducted by a Deaf native signer of Austrian Sign Language (ÖGS):

- How do participants describe their **semiotic repertoires** and languaging practices?
- How do they describe their **linguistic background** and language socialization?
- How do they communicate during the interview situation?

6 out of 20 interviews carried out so far:

- Participants from Afghanistan, Denmark, Hungary, Latvia and Iran who have been in Austria for 2+ years
- Ages 20-44
- Equal numbers of men and women

References

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 Zeshan, U. (2015). "Making meaning": Communication between sign language users without a shared language. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 26(2), 211-260.

GENERAL PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- Deaf migrants in Austria **learn both a new signed and a new spoken language** – usually in a very short time (around 6-7 months for ÖGS, several months longer for German)
 - » The majority of the participants is **at least quadrilingual** and actively uses at least the 2 sign languages and German
- Not just language socialization in country of origin but the **time period immediately after arrival in Austria** is crucial
 - » Development of ÖGS is dependent on whether and when they (find and) join the Austrian Deaf community
- **Correlations between language use in family, school and private life**: If the participant used sign language in one of these areas in the country of origin, they likely also did so in the others
 - » More sign language use in country of origin appears to predict success in learning ÖGS (and German?)
- All participants have good ÖGS and German skills and **use German-based ÖGS mouthings**
 - » Participants with knowledge of IS occasionally use English-based mouthings as well
- Sources of communicative difficulties in these (advanced ÖGS) signers are often due to the participants' **unfamiliarity with regional variation of ÖGS**
- Communicative difficulties arising through unfamiliar signs are generally resolved through
 - » Substitution of (up to five) alternative variants
 - » Literacy-based strategies (e.g. fingerspelling related German or English terms)
 - » Descriptive or functional explanations
 - » Provisions of examples

A COMPARISON BETWEEN TWO MIGRANT SIGNERS

Both came to Austria at the age of 9
 Both were fitted with two BTE hearing aids later in childhood
 Both went to the same school for the deaf

PARTICIPANT 05 (born and raised in Latvia)

- **Child of deaf signers**: contact with Deaf community in Latvia
- Raised bilingually in Latvian and Latvian Sign Language (LSL)
- As a child, P05 did not consider SLs to be real languages
- Identifies as hard-of-hearing
- **Current language preference: spoken German**
- **Heritage language attrition** (but uses LSL more than ÖGS)
 - » Result of minimal contact with Deaf community
- **German preference due to:**
 - » **Help from mother in acquiring both Latvian and German** by explaining concepts in sign
 - » Mother also often uses German with her to accommodate (although it is not the mother's preference)
 - » Upon arrival in Austria, the parents planned for P05 to soon transfer to a hearing classroom

PARTICIPANT 01 (born in Afghanistan, moved to Pakistan at age 4)

- **No contact with Deaf community** before coming to Austria
- Communicated only by pointing, gesturing and some mouthing:
- Vague idea of different spoken languages
- Identifies as Deaf
- **Current language preference: ÖGS**
- Fluent ÖGS signer but successfully uses German at work
- **ÖGS preference due to:**
 - » Upon arrival in Austria, **ÖGS was most accessible**
 - » Formed friendships with both Deaf and hearing peers
 - » Family learned to sign ÖGS for her

Differing ideologies of parents:

- » **P01 parents**: "blank slate" regarding deaf education
- » **P05**: German development is prioritized