Chapter 1

Introduction

This volume is the result of a study that addressed several unknowns about a signed language contact phenomenon known as *International Sign*. International Sign (abbreviated IS) is a form of contact signing used in international settings where people who are deaf attempt to communicate with others who do not share the same conventional, native signed language (NSL).[1] The term has been broadly used to refer to a range of semiotic strategies of interlocutors in multilingual signed language situations, whether in pairs, or in small or large group communications.

The research herein focuses on one type of IS produced by deaf leaders when they give presentations at international conferences, which I consider to be a type of sign language contact in the form of *expository IS*. There has been very little empirical investigation of sign language contact varieties, and IS as a conference lingua franca is one example of language contact that has become widely recognized for its cross-linguistic communicative potential.

The larger piece of this research examines comprehension of expository IS lectures created by deaf people for other deaf people from different countries. By examining authentic examples of deaf people constructing messages with lecture IS, one can uncover features of more or less effective IS, and one can become better informed about IS as a sign language contact strategy. By investigating sociolinguistic features of IS contact, and identifying factors impacting its comprehension, one might ascertain optimal contexts for using IS as a means of linguistic accessibility. This research contributes to a limited literature about IS and aims to help

1. Following convention in the sign language literature, the capitalized word *Deaf* is used when referencing communities, languages, and the broad cultural-linguistic identity of members worldwide of the minority group of deaf SL users. The lowercase term *deaf* is used throughout in a general sense to refer to persons who do not hear, regardless of their identification with other deaf people, degree of audiological deafness, adherence to Deaf cultural norms, or fluency in their local SL.

stakeholders—deaf people, international deaf leaders, conference planners, IS trainers, and interpreters—improve our understanding of IS as a unique linguistic and cultural phenomenon.

The IS phenomenon has received increased attention in recent years (de Wit, 2010; Green, 2014; Hiddinga & Crasborn, 2011; Mesch, 2010; Mori, 2011; Whynot, 2013, 2015). Even as I was finishing this book, a timely new volume appeared, offering insights into the linguistic description, usage, and status of IS (Rosenstock & Napier, 2016).

IS is not a Deaf community sign language (one that is established with native users). It is not a conventional language, yet at international deaf events it functions as a contact language with some form-meaning conventions. The degree of effectiveness that an IS communication system achieves, however, remains elusive. Whether one refers to it as a "language of gestures" (British Deaf Association [BDA], 1975), an advanced or expanded contact pidgin (Supalla & Webb, 1995; Woll, 1990), a type of "foreigner talk" (Adam, 2012; Quinto-Pozos, 2007), or a lingua franca (Rosenstock, 2004), its customary use in global social and political contexts suggests that IS contact has semiotic value among some deaf people. Requests for IS interpreters have increased in recent years in Europe (Nardi, 2008), although interpreters have been asked to provide services into IS for communication access since 1977 (Scott-Gibson & Ojala, 1994). The European Union of the Deaf (EUD) provides a position paper on its website[2] regarding the use of IS as an auxiliary language for audiences of diverse SL backgrounds; it is used daily in many of their activities. The EUD emphasizes the priority of the rights of deaf people to have communication access in their "national or community" sign language (EUD website). They regard IS as an imperfect solution, arising out of a need for a common lingua franca among deaf persons in international contact.

It has grown customary for international conferences pertaining to deaf people to include interpreted and direct expository IS. Direct IS address is created by presenters; however, interpreted IS includes target messages between IS and the spoken and/or signed language of the conference. Conference planners typically limit interpreting services to the host country's sign language (English, for example), the host country's spoken/written language (if different than English), and increasingly,

2. URL (last accessed July 18, 2016): http://www.eud.eu/about-us/eud-position-paper/international-sign-guidelines/ _

International Sign. In some cases, IS is replacing conventional sign language as an official conference language.[3]

IS also appears frequently on informational websites either as a translation or as directly communicated content. (See Rosenstock & Napier, 2016, p. 2, for a detailed list.) In addition, it is recognized and used with increasing regularity in formal contexts for communication (direct and interpreted) in European Union institutions, the United Nations (UN), and other European government organizations (de Wit, 2016). This occurs in tandem with provision of NSL interpreting, as the Directorate General for Interpretation of the European Commission (SCIC—Service Commun Interprétation-Conférences) reports that 13 NSL interpreters and 10 IS interpreters are available to work for the European Commission (de Wit, 2016, p. 9). Notably, the profession of sign language interpreting is not controlled for quality, and it is not officially recognized in Europe (de Wit, 2016).

Due to the rising demand for this type of contact language interpretation, a special designation that identifies "qualified" IS interpreters was recently established by a World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) and World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) task group "to regulate and monitor the standards of IS interpreting in international contexts" (Best, Napier, Carmichael, & Pouliot, 2016). The presence of IS alongside NSLs brings an interesting juxtaposition for provision of "language" access by sign language interpreters. There remains an ongoing need to assess empirically what constitutes effective interpretation from and into a mixed sign language contact variety and how this compares to provision of traditional NSL interpretation. Meanwhile, and perhaps as a point of departure, there is a need to understand the IS contact phenomenon as an example of meaning-making with sign language contact forms and features of language in the visual modality.

Meaning is a central theme in this research and recurs in the sparse IS literature, but meaning conveyance in IS has not been examined closely. Interpreters working in IS are challenged to achieve true semantic equivalence in their target interpretations, given the limitations of IS's "lexically limited and partially improvised" system (McKee & Napier, 2002, p. 50).

3. The 2016 International Gesture Studies Conference in Paris noted English and International Signs (interpreting services) as their two official conference languages. URL (last accessed January 12, 2016): http://isgs7.sciencesconf.org/?lang=en

At the same time, because some common features of NSLs are observed in IS, it is suggested that these aid in comprehension by varied signers in an audience. Interpreters are described as using a free approach to creating target IS (McKee & Napier, 2002), and by using their understanding of SLs, they produce "pared down" messages in a recognizable way to deaf audience members, who in turn rely on their life experiences and world knowledge to comprehend conveyed information (Scott-Gibson & Ojala, 1994). Common features of different SLs and adjustment techniques of IS interpreters (and perhaps deaf IS presenters) have yet to be connected to improved IS discourse comprehension. Without knowledge of linguistic (and other sociolinguistic) factors for improved IS comprehension, training and provision of IS for communication access run the risk of being less effective than desired.

Jordan and Battison (1976) were two of the earliest sign language researchers to question the long-held assumption that SLs are universal and that signers from all corners of the globe have little to no difficulty understanding each other. Forty years later there is a relative dearth of works on sign languages in contact and resulting phenomena to prove or disprove this assumption with respect to some form of "international sign." Nonetheless, IS has gained restrained acceptance to some degree as communicative access for international attendees with limited or no knowledge of conference languages. In other cases, IS is used as a lingua franca when deaf people gather without the use of conventional signed language interpreting services.

The topic of IS and the issues pertaining to it are prevalent in current discourse in international Deaf (and interpreting) communities. Rosenstock aptly notes that although IS usage previously was viewed as an ad hoc, "emergency" communication solution (Bergman, 1990 in Rosenstock, 2016), "the widespread and increasing use of IS today suggests it is no longer an emergency situation" (p. 99), but rather it indicates deaf peoples' highly valued desire for interconnectedness, and further, that there is a "need for this variety" of contact language (Lucas, in Rosenstock & Napier, 2016, p. 3).

It is my hope that linguistic examination of IS phenomena, usage contexts, and questions about comprehensibility will not be misconstrued as antithetical to manifestations of deaf collectivity (Ladd, 2003)—global Deaf identity—but rather, appreciated as timely in seeking to understand the unique sociolinguistic circumstances of signed language users

in contact. Perhaps this study can contribute to a dialogue about where contact strategies like IS serve aims toward a desire for connectedness and where they are effective for language access.

PROBLEMS WITH DEFINING INTERNATIONAL SIGN

The nomenclature "International Sign" is a popular descriptor of contact signing, regardless of contexts and individuals or SLs involved in such contact. It is imperative to lay clear boundaries around SL contact phenomena in research endeavors so that public discourse moves toward a disciplined analysis of varied types of SL contact phenomena. Expository, presentation-style IS is one possible type. Therefore, what people are calling "IS" requires clearer definition and description as groundwork for empirical study.

Contact languages are complex communication systems. Even linguists seem to disagree on boundaries around contact phenomena befitting labels such as "pidgin, 'extended pidgin,' 'interlanguage,' 'imperfect second language (L2) learning,' 'jargon,' etc." (Winford, 2003, p. 268). Importantly, researchers of spoken language pidgins and contact varieties do not categorize all spoken language contact phenomena into a singular "International Speech." A special case worth mentioning is the spoken and written system "Esperanto," which is an example of an international, auxiliary contact language that has been in use by a small number of proponents since its creation by L. L. Zamenhof in 1887 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2003; Universal Esperanto Association [UEA], 2011). Esperanto is an artificial communication system, unlike the evolution of modern-day IS. However, some parallels can be seen in the early development of IS-type contact. Although in modern times IS is evolving naturally as a variety of SL contact, efforts between the late 1950s through 1975 tried to address the limited lexicon of what was an early international sign language pidgin.[4] Committees on standardization and planning created dictionaries for international signs, or what was promoted as *Gestuno:*

4. A pidgin is characterized as a simplified communication system resulting from contact between interlocutors who do not share the same language (Winford, 2003).

International sign language of the deaf (BDA, 1975; Supalla & Webb, 1995). As will be seen in this study, some of these promoted signs are still present in recent IS usage.

To date, a standard definition of IS has not been established in the literature. In 2007 the WFD General Assembly came to an agreement to use the term "International Sign" or IS, rather than "International Sign Language," identifying the need for further research to justify it as a language (Mesch, 2010). That same year, a WFD survey was conducted on the perspectives on and the definition of IS, which reported mixed assertions and opinions by laypersons, international deaf leaders, and several linguists. Conflicting claims and suggestions are noted, such as "It fulfills all criteria of human language," "[Its] temporary usage means the form of IS is too variable or unpredictable to be named 'a language' in the sense of a conventional system," "It has a sufficiently high level of conventionalization [….] lower than in national sign languages; but higher than in other kinds of cross-sign communication," and "It is a form of contact signing" (Mesch, 2010, p. 6). The report also notes a disagreement with characterizing IS as a pidgin or creole language,[5] given IS "expanded" grammar, simple lexicon, and lack of generational transmission. It is also suggested that there are two types of communication: conventionalized IS and informal communication between the users of national SLs (p. 13). This WFD publication clearly characterizes the lack of consensus about IS and demonstrates the need for more empirical investigations.

Supalla defines IS as "a contact language arising whenever two or more deaf people meet and communicate" (2008a, p. 1) and suggests that IS used in regular meetings of the WFD is a "standardized variety of pidgin language" (p. 2). The recent WFD survey report mentioned above makes a distinction between two types of IS communication (Mesch, 2010). The first is an informal *ad hoc* signing method between people who do not necessarily know each other's SLs. The second is a conventionalized form of IS by groups of signers. In this study I focused on the latter type, and even more specifically, on group communications that are in the form of presentations seen at global deaf conferences and meetings.

5. A creole language is typically characterized as a pidgin that has expanded over a generation and structurally developed via nativization (native speakers of the pidgin); however, the boundaries of creoles, their emergence, and difference from expanded pidgins are topics of debate in the contact language literature (Mufwene, 2007, 2008).

Discourse context cannot be neglected in a discussion about IS contact. Meanings are always produced and understood within subjective contexts and usage events (Janzen, 2014; Langacker, 1987; among many others). Because the nomenclature "International Sign" has been a popular descriptor of an assumed singular language-like variety—regardless of contexts and individuals or SLs involved in such contact—in my research, I drew clear boundaries around a specific discourse genre of IS, and then tested it for understanding.

As mentioned earlier, expository IS is a *contact language between more than two different SL users that occurs in the form of expository, formal discourses*. Expository IS is created by deaf presenters and interpreters who render a mixed SL system to a diverse SL-using audience in the form of unidirectional address, typically at global deaf conferences and meetings where large and small groups of mixed SL users convene. All references to IS forthwith refer to this contact variety of international contact signing.

Contact Language and IS

The reality for deaf people in varied communities around the world is economic and linguistic disparity. Deaf citizens experience disparity in their access to educational and economic opportunities, which is directly impacted by the success or lack of national recognition of their natively occurring languages and provision of services in those languages. Additionally, there are national discrepancies in government state wealth that also influence the extent of services available to deaf citizens, and this influences any outreach efforts to those citizens or others in neighboring communities.

Fewer than 5% of deaf people learn their sign language (i.e., American Sign Language) as a first language from deaf parents (Fischer, 1978; Schen & Delk, 1974 cited in Newport, 1999). Low numbers of native SL learning have been reported for many users of community or urban SLs in Australia and England (Schembri, Cormier, Fenlon, & Johnston, 2013), Europe, Latin America, and Africa (Brentari, 2010). A sociolinguistic reality of imperfect learning of one's native SL impacts second language (L2) learning as well. Imperfect learning of one's first language (L1) complicates phenomena where SLs are in contact.

Language contact phenomena involve a variety of structural and linguistic outcomes and are influenced by the status of the languages in

contact, such as interlocutors' attitudes, characteristics, and bilingual skill, among other variables (Lucas & Valli, 1992). Contact between two SLs involves lexical borrowing, foreigner talk, code switching and interference, and the development of pidgins, creoles, and mixed systems (following Ferguson & DeBose, 1977; in Lucas & Valli, 1992). It is shown that signers quickly adapt their signing style depending on their interlocutor. Contact phenomena result from communicative accommodation where interlocutors exhibit degrees of convergence and divergence from each other (Giles, 1973). IS signing presenters and audience members are in a unique situation where numerous languages are in contact, and the communication is not targeted toward features of any *one* SL as an L2, but toward features that are assumed to be understood in all SLs.

Languages are imported through contact between groups of people, some of whom have money, social and political institutions, and large numbers of users (Mufwene, 2008). Contact is also a natural factor in the development of all languages. It is widely known that English is a global lingua franca (Crystal, 2003). English has an effect on deaf communities as well, through regular contact with speakers and the importation of English to international deaf communities (Kellett Bidoli & Ochse, 2008). In terms of SLs, most of the contact has arisen out of the sharing of educational methods and the work of religious missions from one country to another (Woll, Sutton-Spence, & Elton, 2001). French Sign Language (Langue des Signes Française, LSF) has had a profound influence on sign languages in North America and Europe, particularly American Sign Language (ASL), Russian Sign Language (RSL), and IrishSL (p. 30). ASL and British Sign Language (BSL) have impacted SLs in several African countries (Lule & Wallin, 2010).

The widespread influence of NSLs such as BSL and ASL is seen in contact situations that employ IS. Woll (1990) showed BSL prominence in the IS lexicon at one international venue. LSF and other European SLs influenced the original committee-created dictionary of *Gestuno* (the first attempt at capturing an international communication system of signs). Furthermore, ASL lexicon has been part of the instruction of IS training courses in Australia and Hong Kong.[6]

Both ASL and BSL have influenced the sign languages of countries in Africa and Asia through education and missionary work, as well as

6. IS intensives, Melbourne, Australia, 2011, and personal communication with Jenny Lam, UHK.

continued influence of "learned contact" with ASL via international programs and leadership graduates of Gallaudet University (Woll, Sutton-Spence, & Elton, 2001). Foreign forms are also sometimes more highly valued, and therefore, borrowing is one type of contact effect, such as the borrowing of Kenyan SL (KSL) into Ugandan SL (USL) after a period when educated deaf persons returned to Uganda from higher education institutions in Kenya (Lule & Wallin, 2010). Describing the transmission of SLs in Mediterranean Europe, Quer, Mazzoni, and Sapountzaki (2010) note that major urban centers in Rome, Athens, Madrid, and Barcelona helped maintain and develop each country's NSL, mainly due to the situation of deaf schools in these urban cities. They note:

> Nowadays, many signers have been exposed to foreign sign languages, mainly ASL, but also other European sign languages and International Sign (IS). In Spain Catalan signers have at least passive knowledge of LSE. This does not mean that there is a sign language bilingual situation in Catalonia, as LSC is the sign language used by Catalan signers almost exclusively. This is, for instance reflected in the curriculum for interpreter training in Catalonia, which devotes most of the sign language proficiency hours to LSC, with some additional LSE and IS learning. (Quer, Mazzoni, & Sapountzaki, 2010, pp. 98–99)

Many ASL video materials are available in web-based video repositories such as YouTube. Websites hosted in different countries stream Internet media for exchange of ideas and information, and creates easy access to foreign signed languages. A query of YouTube video archives in June 2016 using the search phrase "American Sign Language" prompted over a million results. A search for videos bearing the tag "British Sign Language" resulted in 77,500 results; "Língua Brasileira de Sinais" returned 20,000 items; Brazilian Sign Language 12,100 video items; "Japanese Sign Language" resulted in 74,800; "日本手話指文字" returned 6,940; while "Auslan" prompted 33,200.[7]

All of these factors impact the international contact between deaf people. Moreover, deaf people are subject to language contact trends

7. A query of the English phrase, "International Sign 'language'" prompted (121,000) results; however, only two-thirds of the hits show content related to IS phenomenon, with varied examples of what is called "International Sign (language)." It is likely that other queries in different languages (i.e., Spanish or Japanese) may return additional video examples of IS.

occurring within their surrounding spoken language communities. For example, political changes impact SLs in different ways. A lexical study of Taiwanese Sign Language (TSL) indicated evidence of influence from Japanese Sign Language (JSL) on modern TSL, which stemmed from periods of Japanese occupation between 1895 and 1945 and influence from Chinese Sign Language (CSL) beginning in 1949 from contact with deaf mainland China refugees (Sasaki, 2007).

Contact effects have also occurred with the spread of IS usage. Hoyer reported on the situation in Albania, when foreign signs in IS were brought into the country when its political and social economy began opening to the world in the late 1990s. External aid to a changing Communist country brought foreign forms into the long-suppressed Deaf community. As a result, IS signs now appear in Albanian Sign Language (AlbSL) (Hoyer, 2007).

The international Deaf community (via WFD) aims toward sign language rights, recognition, and access (Bergmann, 1990; Moody, 2007; Scott-Gibson & Ojala, 1994). Efforts continue toward the documentation, protection, and recognition of natively occurring SLs in many countries, and toward deaf persons' rights to civic access by way of their NSL. Meanwhile, the emerging IS contact system is used, ironically, in the international discourse on deaf persons' NSL access rights. Deaf people demonstrate a regular reliance on IS as a contact strategy in relatively high-stakes international meetings, as evidenced by IS interpreting provision over several decades of international conferences of the WFD and ongoing work of the EUD.[8] At the same time, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), promotes Deaf people's rights to an NSL that is part of their country's cultural, social, historical, and religious heritage (WFD, 2014). The concurrent values of language diversity and language reduction/standardization through an auxiliary contact IS system present an interesting dichotomy of ideas, which may be further fleshed out in public discourse about IS in the coming years.

8. Personal communication with Mark Wheatley, executive director of the EUD, September 2011.

EMERGENCE OF IS CONTACT AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR MODERN IS USAGE

Circumstances that are cultural, social, historical, political, and economic create separate, somewhat isolated populations of deaf people with distinct communities and native SLs. Yet, deaf people have a long history with contact signing strategies across SLs, which are first documented in Europe (Moody, 2002). Language contact often occurs between signed and spoken languages of deaf people's surrounding communities (Lucas & Valli, 1989, 1992). Contact between sign languages in Europe and other developing continents and countries was made by way of colonialism, and civic, religious, and educational missions (Brentari, 2010; Quinto-Pozos, 2007), but the languages used by deaf people in their local communities are mutually unintelligible to each other. This is true even when the national written and spoken language is shared, as is English for the United States and the United Kingdom, where ASL or BSL is the community language (Deuchar, 1984; Kyle & Woll, 1988).

Cross-linguistic contact is part of mankind's sociopolitical and economic histories (Mufwene, 2008), and deaf communities' SLs are not immune to these processes. Contact continues to occur more frequently over the past half century given modern advances benefitting deaf communities. One of the earliest documented SL contact systems was a variety of North American Native Indian sign language. It served as an intertribal lingua franca for indigenous speakers of varied native spoken languages in the 1800s–1900s, before English replaced this contact signing system (Davis, 2005, 2007). Additional evidence of deaf people in civic life 150 years ago points to the existence of some form of "universal" signing, a SL contact phenomenon between native users of different SLs (Moody, 2002). One such example comes from reports of banquets held in Paris, France, in the 19th century at the Institute Nationale des Jeunes Sourds (INJS) pertaining to the education of deaf persons. Reportedly at these banquets, "Sign is the only language permitted. Reports, minutes, correspondence, memoranda, everything is read in this language which deaf people from all parts of the world understand wonderfully well" (Ferdinand Berthier, 1850, trans. in Moody, 2002, p. 10).

Since Berthier's time, much more is known about the diverse, distinct SLs of the world. Assumptions about the phenomena of cross-linguistic contact signing noted above, particularly that they are easily understood, have yet to be fully investigated. It is unknown whether and to what

extent attendees at these banquets understood one another. Most of the "international" contact in those years was between Europeans and North Americans and their colonies, which means there were regular communications and perhaps a more stable "trade" communication system through these connections. Evidently, enough content was conveyed in order for exchange of ideas regarding methods for the education of deaf people in those participating nations. These exchanges contributed to the foundational history of deaf people's education in Europe and the United States during the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Lane, 1985) and a sociopolitical organizing effort of deaf people in different countries (Moody, 2002, 2007).

Any contact variety of "international" signing observed in the mid-1800s has undoubtedly undergone much change during the past 160 years. Languages undergo gradual change over time and with natural evolution, and changes occur through competition, selection, and ecology (Mufwene, 2008). Regularly used trade contact varieties maintain the most robust elements of the languages in contact, and are less susceptible to the morpho-syntactic breakdown that accompanies contact (Mufwene, 2007). While Mufwene describes the nature of spoken language evolution in light of trade colonization and educational missions to non-Western countries, sporadic contact between different SL users for educational exchange created opportunities for SLs to interact and create structurally reduced language varieties. Without historical linguistic evidence, it is difficult to claim that the robust elements of early international signing contact resembles the expository IS used in conferences today. It is unlikely that these are the same "variety."

Most of the international sign language contact opportunities that continued into the 20th and 21st centuries only recently included host locations outside Europe or North American. The first Asian-based international deaf event took place in 1991 at the WFD Congress in Tokyo, Japan. Other non-Euro-American venues were chosen for events such as the 1989 Deaf Olympic Games in New Zealand, the 1999 WFD Congress, 2005 Deaflympics in Australia, the 2006 Theoretical Issues in Sign Language Research (TISLR) in Brazil, the 2009 Taiwan Deaflympics, and the 2011 WFD Congress in South Africa.[9] Therefore, the picture of

9. Data collected from World Federation of the Deaf website (https://wfdeaf.org) and Sign Language Linguistics Society (SLLS) events website (http://slls.eu/tislr-conferences/).

what people are referring to by "International Sign" is still very much what I assert to be a "moving target." Explanation of how it works and the level at which it works needs much more evidence-based description.

An important factor influencing the way IS emerges relates to the frequency and scope of language contact between users of different SLs. Regular, consistent cross-linguistic signing contact has taken place since the creation of the Comité International des Sports des Sourds (CISS) in 1924. CISS is the organization that hosts major international sporting competitions for deaf people from as many as 77 countries, notably the Summer and Winter Deaflympics. The Summer and Winter Deaflympics take place 2 years apart from each other, every 4 years, respectively, and are sanctioned by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and World Deaf Championships for thousands of athletes, officials, volunteers, and spectators.

One of the primary contexts where IS is used is through the work of the WFD. The WFD was originally established in 1951 in Rome, Italy, at the first World Congress, under the auspices of the Italian Deaf Association and with the later support of the European Nation States. The WFD continues to serve its mission as an international nongovernmental organization representing approximately 70 million deaf people worldwide. The WFD has maintained ongoing consultative liaison work with UNESCO, the United Nations, and the World Health Organization (WHO) since 1958. Civic activity has spanned national borders for more than 50 years, stemming from the work of the WFD, which is currently based in Helsinki, Finland. WFD regional development initiatives have had major impact on sign languages in contact, in an effort toward quality of life improvements for the world's deaf communities.

Influences on IS and SL contact in general come from international development work by organizations and institutions serving deaf people. Several leaders active in the international deaf community of educators, researchers, national deaf associations, and the WFD were educated at Gallaudet University. Gallaudet University has positively impacted the educational and economic upward mobility of deaf Americans; it also contributes outreach work and promotes contact with other nations' deaf citizens. The university is globally recognized as the only liberal arts college founded to serve the higher education of deaf persons.[10] Prestige

10. Gallaudet University Office of Research Support and International Affairs (URL: http://www.gallaudet.edu/rsia/international-affairs.html)

is afforded the university by deaf people from countries that do not have the same amount of civic access and economic privilege. In one sense, it stands as a symbol to deaf people that a historically misunderstood, marginalized group of "disabled" people can achieve civic equality and impact their local and national community. In another view, the university's far-reaching influence is sometimes criticized, in social media and on website blogs. The university has international collaborations and influence through their Center for International Programs and Services Department, which creates additional opportunities for deaf people in varied countries to have contact with ASL users. Foreign SL influence on indigenous SLs from cross-cultural educational and civic exchanges has been previously noted in recent work on SL contact (Hoyer, 2007; Quinto-Pozos, 2007).

Additionally, in 1989 and 2002, two major international Deaf arts and culture conferences—Deaf Way I and Deaf Way II—took place in Washington, DC, in affiliation with Gallaudet University. There were more than 9,000 attendees from all over the world at Deaf Way II in 2002. It is interesting to note that even in the short 13-year gap between Deaf Way I and Deaf Way II, the number of different SLs present in the interpreting on stage in the opening plenary platforms had significantly reduced from as many as 12 SLs to 3 SLs. One rationale is the prohibitive cost to provide interpreting services in numerous different SLs. In recent years IS has been seen as a potential solution to providing access—albeit compromised—to diverse SL users (Scott-Gibson & Ojala, 1994).

There are other regularly occurring international conferences related to deaf communities and SLs. Many of these rely on IS as a lingua franca. Major events that have global impact on deaf people are Deaf History International (DHI), the International Congress on Education of the Deaf (ICED), TISLR, and the WASLI. A handful of additional international events are regularly listed on the WFD site. Many of the above-noted events are held in a host country every 2 to 4 years, and contribute to continuous annual international activity and forums for cross-linguistic contact.

Activities within major international deaf-related events offer opportunities for users of different world SLs to come into contact on a regular basis. A review of international deaf events over the past 80 years shows this trend of increased global contact opportunity among deaf leadership. In the 3-year period between 1924 and 1927 there were two international

deaf events; between 1981 and 1983 there were three; between 2005 and 2007 there were seven; and between 2010 and 2013 there were 10 international deaf events where expository IS (and other forms of contact signing) served as an auxiliary conference "language." Therefore, opportunities for SL contact have quadrupled in the past 20 years with the potential to increase in the coming decades.

In addition to the venues and events outlined above, the modern-day advances of video technology and other infrastructural developments increase global contact between varied nations' citizens. This continues to influence the opportunities for contact between users of different SLs. Web-based video repositories such as YouTube and DeafRead, among several other online sites based in different countries, stream ongoing Internet sign language media. In 2009 an innovative website came online that offers a news journal and international deaf news programs and reporting, which the creators promote as "broadcasting in International Sign." The site, www.H3world.tv, has gained popularity in recent years and is promoted at major international Deaf conferences, where the media staff film and create on-location news stories for publication on the website. Deaf people with an Internet connection need not travel to meet and interact with other deaf people from a different SL background, thanks to web-based communication through Skype and other Internet protocol video conferencing.

Global interaction between users of varied SLs is on the rise in the past two decades with expanded contact with more than European and North American signers. This study considers some of the ways that sign languages create meaning, and in particular if these meaning-making mechanisms convey information in IS to different NSL signers.

SIGN LANGUAGES, DISTINCT YET SIMILAR

Sign language linguists increasingly understand more about the signed languages (SLs) used by deaf people in their local communities, that they are rich, distinctly different, and are mutually unintelligible from one another. It is known that many of them are distinct languages, but they share some similarities, due to the visual-spatial modality and shared articulators of hands, arms, face, and torso. An online resource *Ethnologue* reports more than 140 different SLs observed in numerous

world communities;[11] while not all in this list have been verified to be NSLs,[12] many natively occurring and distinctly different signed languages are linguistically explored and described in the literature (among many, Smith, 1987; Smith & Tang, 1979, for Taiwan Sign Language [TSL]; Deuchar, 1984; Woll & Sutton-Spence, 1999, for British Sign language [BSL]; Fu & Mei, 1986, for Chinese Sign Language [CSL]; Stokoe, 2005 [1960, 2005]; Klima & Bellugi, 1979, for American Sign Language [ASL]; Johnston, 1989, Johnston & Schembri, 2007, for Australian Sign Language [Auslan]; Woodward, 1991, for SL varieties in Costa Rica; Corazza, 1993, for Italian Sign Language [LIS]; Zeshan, 2000, for Indo-Pakistani Sign Language [IPSL]; Boyes Braem, 2003–2005, for Swiss German Sign Language [DSGS]).

Research on SLs provides material and opportunities to explore language and cognition. In the SL literature, language universals are discussed within the modality as well as across modality. A justification is made for a sign language typology where visual-gestural language ought not be measured by traditional descriptions of spoken and written language (Slobin, 2005). Documented SLs are characterized as historically young compared to spoken languages, and the added differences in articulators and the perceptual system are also named as influential on the linguistic structures in SLs (Meier, 2002). In addition, some researchers suggest that the complex sociolinguistic situation of signing communities contributes to unique characteristics of SL grammars (Schembri et al., 2013). Others have assessed SL structure vis-à-vis the structure of spoken and written languages, contributing to the linguistic validity of

11. Ethnologue website URL: www.ethnologue.com/subgroups/sign-language

12. Fischer (1998) distinguished native sign languages from natural sign systems. A distinction is made here about native signed languages, which occur naturally and develop across generations. Natural sign systems are evolved systems deaf people use to communicate with hearing people. "Natural" is used in a semiotic sense and also signifies a highly iconic relationship between a spoken, written, or gestural sign (symbol) and its referent (Fischer, 2002). Both are also distinct from artificial codes for SLs created for deaf education. Natural is also used in the literature to refer to spontaneously occurring and spreading community SLs (Bavelier, Newport, & Supalla, 2003; Sandler & Lillo-Martin, 2001). Throughout this book I use the term *native signed language* to refer to conventional, established community SLs (i.e., JSL, BSL, etc.).

SLs (e.g., Aronoff, Meir, & Sandler, 2005; Klima & Bellugi, 1979; Sandler & Lillo-Martin, 2006).

Ease of understanding across SLs has yet to be proven, yet gestural roots, common grammatical and iconic features, are given as the reasons behind these claims. Significant to this study is recent evidence that both gesture and linguistic elements play complementary roles in the way SLs create meaning (de Beuzeville, Johnston, & Schembri, 2009: Ferrara, 2012; Liddell, 2003; Schembri, 2001), and a multimodal approach can enlighten us to the way linguistic and gestural elements contribute to all languages. Although the SLs of the world are relatively young and less studied than spoken languages, we do know that contact effects between signed and spoken language users impact the development and change in all SLs. Last, as mentioned earlier, SLs rely on a variety of semiotic devices that are linguistic and gestural to create meaning. This is important to the current study given that very little is known about the amount of gesture and linguistic material used to construct meaning in IS and comprehend it, particularly when compared to NSLs.

Signers appear to use resources from their own NSLs to communicate with foreign signers (Rosenstock, 2004; Woll, 1990). Linguistic and gestural elements from NSLs are observed in IS, as indicated in a small number of published studies (McKee & Napier, 2002; Rosenstock, 2004; Supalla & Webb, 1995). Because previous research suggests lexical signs, gestural elements, and depicting signs (Dudis, 2004, 2014)[13] to be important elements in meaning-making in IS, in the first part of this research (study one), I examined the frequency and distribution of these signs in expository IS. These elements were assumed to impact comprehension. The focus here was on fully lexical signs (whether borrowed or lexicalized by the users), partly lexical depicting signs, and nonlexical signs (gestures and enactments), following Johnston and Schembri (2010).

13. Schembri (2003), following Liddell (2003), makes a case that the "classifier" may be a problematic term for what Supalla (1986) and others have additionally referred to as "classifier structures" or "verbs of location and motion." Schembri calls them "polycomponential signs" (2001) or "depicting signs" (Johnston & Schembri, 2007). I adopt the term "depicting sign" here going forward, unless citing others who specifically use other terms.

THE RESEARCH STUDY

The visibility and formal recognition of IS in varied cross-linguistic settings juxtaposes two incongruous views about signed languages. On one hand and contrary to myth, there is no singular, universal signed language. Laypeople often assume that visual-spatial languages can be simplified to a universal gestural communication system, which comes from the uninformed view of signed languages as nonlinguistic pantomimes. Naïve questions are often posed to deaf people and interpreters about whether "sign language" is a globally universal type. Typically taken with slight offense, we are quick to defend the fact that languages are diverse, whether signed, written, or spoken.

According to anecdotal evidence and practice, there are unique, shared qualities of SLs, whereby different signers appear to understand one another readily. Spoken language users do not seem to have the same ease of accommodation across language boundaries. Signed language users take pride in a rich, productive pantomimic and iconic motivation that underpins *seeing* a language, rather than *hearing* it. Further, transnational communication practiced by deaf people permits them to overcome linguistic borders and contributes to a "sense of connectedness between Deaf people of different origins" (Signs2Cross).[14] The International Sign phenomenon therefore has significant cultural power that must be appreciated, even if we do not fully understand how and to what extent it functions, yet.

The Impetus

The impetus to this study is three decades of living and working alongside deaf people, as a friend and as a multilingual interpreter. It has afforded me opportunities to interact with linguistically and culturally diverse deaf people in my multicultural home city of Boston; in my new home in Melbourne, Australia; at international conferences and international deaf sporting events; as well as when I visited, worked, or lived in foreign Deaf communities for periods of time. Experiences communicating with deaf people who use a different SL from my own occurred on many occasions. Through these, I had opportunities to act alone or with

14. Retrieved January 2016 from URL: http://www.acm5.com/signs2cross/international-sign/

deaf colleagues providing "visual gestural" interpreting (V-G), as it was called in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the Northeastern United States. It was suggested that this mixture of mime, ASL, and what is considered an iconic gestural approach was an effective way to communicate with deaf people who used a different sign language, who were immigrants, or who did not have fully formed ASL for a variety of social, educational, or cognitive reasons.

Trained deaf interpreters who hold national qualifications currently do much of this code-mixing work in many states in the United States and to some extent in Australia.[15] Personal conversations with colleagues indicate a set of shared intuitions and assumptions, which may or may not be correct, about gesture and universals of signed languages as key elements for communicating with other signers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Numerous experiences have shown me that effective communication in these cases is not guaranteed, and when it appears to be effective, it is difficult to describe or explain.

While completing my master's degree in Intercultural Relations, I was intrigued by the interaction of cultural frame on communication, particularly in my daily work as an interpreter. The way interpreters represent diverse deaf people in multicultural communities of the United States and in international events has been a driving curiosity in my regular practice and is an underlying theme of this study. Moreover, as an ASL user living in Australia for over 5 years, I observe firsthand some of the challenges of communicating cross-linguistically and misunderstandings that arise from my own reliance on contact signing and interlanguage. When interpreting with deaf migrants in linguistic transition from an ASL-based sign language to Auslan, I observe successes and failures in their attempts to make meaning of sign language contact. This leaves me with many questions about the limits and affordances of sign language contact for interim and long-term solutions.

15. The U.S. Registry for Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and the National Accreditation Authority of Translators and Interpreters in Australia (NAATI) have qualification processes recognizing this unique work of trained Deaf interpreters. Between 2012–2014 and 2016 I contributed to the NAATI Deaf interpreter recognition process and subsequent qualifications that identify a need for "non-conventional signed language" interpreting, which includes using IS-type contact as a form of language access.

Personal experience as a professional interpreter, including work with IS, also prompts my queries. As a conscientious practitioner and educator, I often reflect on the effectiveness of my own and others' interpretations, given the impact on deaf people's human rights and quality of life—socially, economically, and politically. There is an inherent responsibility to interpreting, and there is merit in regularly questioning whether our target interpretations are understood.

Interpreted IS is not, however, the main subject of this investigation, although it may be informed by the findings. In this research I choose to examine direct IS output from deaf, IS lecturers. I acknowledge that there are potential differences that would impact comprehension of IS created by interpreters (interpreted IS) from a source language compared to IS created by deaf signers (signed IS), as posited by Rosenstock (2004). Closer look at this warrants a valuable, yet slightly different study. Yet, interpreters adopt many of the signs and cross-linguistic communication strategies used by internationally active deaf individuals; therefore, it makes sense to assess how deaf people use IS to communicate with audiences of different SL users.

In a paper presented at the 2007 World Association of Sign Language Interpreter conference, Moody stated, "[…let us] never forget that IS was developed by Deaf people and belongs to Deaf people" (Moody, 2007, p. 8). This study is focused on the way deaf individuals communicate with IS, avoiding the additional processing layer that interpretation adds to the final target message created. Cokely (1992b) described the complex interpretive processes that are involved in decoding a source language message and rendering it into a target sign language interpretation. The interpreting process presents a complicating element to the already complex cognitive demands of communicating into a code-mixing system. Direct IS output from deaf, expository IS users is of interest, and findings here will likely inform the target IS construction decisions by interpreters.

IS Training and Research Gaps

As a result of increased opportunities for cross-linguistic SL contact during the past 25 years, there is interest in IS among members of Deaf communities and interpreters for learning how to use "it." IS has garnered growing attention by deaf people and interpreters across the world, and as a result, individuals and organizations offer ad hoc or formal short courses or training sessions in IS for the purpose of training interpreters

and for personal use.[16] Woll (1990) was first to note that these offerings are made without sufficient research foundations.

To date, there is still no corpus-based dictionary or empirically described conventional IS linguistic system to inform curricula for IS training. Although certain skills such as multilingualism (Mesch, 2010), linguistic flexibility to improvise (McKee & Napier, 2002), and international travel experience (Moody, 2002) are important for IS interpreters to possess, the complex training needs for learners of IS (particularly those who wish to interpret with it) and proper preparation to do the work are a topic of current discourse (Oyserman, 2016; de Wit, 2016). Workshops and provision of IS interpreting and IS teaching materials continue to be offered, with an acknowledged need for additional research around specific "language" and practice competencies for effective IS communication.

Professional SL interpreting associations and policies about provision of interpreting have developed exponentially since initial foundations of the profession emerged in the middle of the 20th century in North America, Western Europe, and Australia (WASLI, http://wasli.org). Meanwhile, the use of International Sign (IS) as a cross-linguistic communication system is increasingly relied upon to meet a need for language access at conferences and in recent years has replaced provision of multiple NSL interpreting services.

Interpreters who work in international settings and interface with deaf leaders from distinct SL communities continue to incorporate contact strategies used by deaf people in these settings, with expository IS figuring more prominently every year. However, providing interpretation via an unstable contact language has not been without controversy.

The first attempts to provide IS interpreting at international conferences in 1977 and 1979 were met with much criticism, due to excessive pantomime renditions or otherwise robotic interpreter performances (Scott-Gibson & Ojala, 1994). In the following decade, IS interpretation still garnered controversy as a double-edged sword in the provision of cost-effective language access for participants who could not afford to bring their own interpreters. A debate centered on linguistic access for deaf people with no NSL interpreters. Concern arose about potentially

16. In recent years I have personally attended or have been asked to assist with provision of IS training.

undermining indigenous SLs by providing IS contact signing. These value conflicts and some debate about linguistic access continue.

In the past, some SL linguists have contended that there are limitations to communicating academic or scientific information with an IS contact system. *The Amsterdam Manifesto* originally raised concerns about accessibility to full conference content (Rathmann & Mathur, 2000). The document recommended reliance on full NSLs in academic forums, typically the host country SL and any other SL that is highly represented in conference attendees (e.g., BSL or ASL). The recommendations were aimed at academic and scientific communities, and not necessarily for sporting and cultural events such as Deaflympics and Deaf Way. Recent shifts in thinking about these recommendations are observed with the increased expectation that IS interpreters and conference presenters use IS. Notably, however, at the 2013 London TISLR conference, the decision was made to forgo the provision of IS interpreting and offer conference interpreting in only fully conventional languages: BSL, English, and ASL. This decision was controversial when a number of deaf attendees did not know BSL or ASL and could not access the conference content. Subsequent changes in expectations about conference language policies led to discussion among the Sign Language Linguistics Society (SLLS) and local organizers of TISLR 12 in Melbourne in 2016.[17] There appears to be no simple resolution; however, debates are important and indicate evolving shifts in thinking about linguistic access at international deaf conferences. Consideration for the most appropriate approaches to providing language access at international conferences continues to place IS as central to these discussions.

Thus, speculation and conjecture about IS contact varieties merit careful evaluation of the phenomena for linguistic access. Well-researched recommendations about contexts for usage are needed. This research is one such attempt to look closer at factors for IS comprehension and address implications for IS usage.

17. I personally served on the TISLR 12 local organizing committee primarily in the role of coordinator of interpreting services. The provision of IS interpreting was considered with much care and investigation into the sociolinguistic profile of attendees. As a result, a cost-benefit analysis led to the decision to not provide IS interpreting for the full academic program, and interpreting services were well received. I discuss the implications of this experience further in the concluding chapter of this book.

Problem Statement and Significance

Expository-genre IS functions as an auxiliary, second language for participants when their NSL is not one of the official conference languages. Yet, the quality of information conveyed by expository IS is not completely understood. Very little is known about factors for IS comprehension, and it has not been critically compared to NSLs. Given the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), which grants the right to language access in one's own native SL, it is important to examine differences between receiving information in the IS versus in one's NSL. Although some audience members may not understand it very well (Rosenstock, 2004), international events and conference policies continue to include expository IS (whether interpreted or direct) as an official conference "language." Consequently, the effectiveness of IS contact signing is often assumed, yet it remains untested. In addition, IS training programs are offered with limited research underpinnings, and there remains some degree of mystery around "qualifications" to provide IS interpreting. It is important to continue to evaluate the potential for gleaning information from formal IS presentations (and other IS contact forms).

The research presented in this volume looks at meaning-making NSL patterns in IS and whether they are understood by diverse IS audience members. It examines expository IS lectures by deaf presenters, makes comparisons to NSLs, and assesses sociolinguistic factors for IS comprehension, with an intent to seek a richer description of what varied audiences understand from IS lectures. New empirical information will inform international conference language policies, research-based training efforts, and IS interpreting and usage where it is recruited for communication access. The aim is to seek insights for potentially more effective IS and appropriate applications.

Research Questions

The primary aim of the study was to investigate the communicative effectiveness of IS by focusing on its comprehensibility across a variety of signers. It addressed the following research questions and their related subqueries:

1) How comprehensible is expository IS, and for whom?
    a) To what extent are global and detailed messages in IS understood?

b) How does comprehension of IS compare to comprehension of NSLs?
c) Do audience demographics play a role in IS lecture comprehension?

2) What is the distribution of linguistic elements in the IS lexicon, and does this affect comprehension?
a) Does increased comprehension of IS correlate with increased use of lexical signs sourced from a NSL (e.g., ASL)?
b) Do depiction and gesture influence intelligibility of expository IS?

3) How effective is IS for universal access to lectures?

Answering these questions can bring new insights to an issue that continues to confound many international stakeholders—deaf leaders and interpreters—who work to uphold the advancement of the rights of deaf people.

This research makes a unique contribution to what is known about IS comprehension and a description of signs and semiotic forms used by deaf IS lecture presenters. It identifies frequent sign forms through a corpus-based approach, reporting 200 high-frequency signs used in expository IS by deaf presenters who originate from 10 countries across five continents. It is also the first study undertaken that answers questions about the amount of lexicon, depicting signs, and gesture appearing in presentation IS and tests how these elements impact the effectiveness of IS discourses. It is the first study to assess comprehension of IS created by deaf presenters as opposed to target IS texts created by interpreters. This research extends Rosenstock's 2004 study of interpreted IS by describing IS used by deaf presenters and by using multiple approaches to assessing comprehension.[18] An overarching question remains regarding the communicative effectiveness of IS. This is the first study to examine the gap in communication between IS and what is communicated in a NSL.

18. Throughout this volume I will refer to the 2004 work as "the Rosenstock study."