

Kata Kolok: A Village-based Sign Language of Northern Bali

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Sign Linguistics

Some *misconceptions* on sign languages:

- Sign language is an artificial signed version of the spoken language
- Sign language is like pantomime or gesture
- There is one universal sign language

Sign Linguistics

Started half a century ago with research on:

- Sign Language of the Netherlands (Tervoort, 1953)
- American Sign Language (Stokoe, 1960)

Sign languages are natural languages which parallel the structures and acquisition of spoken languages in many ways. (Meier, Cormier, & Quinto-Pozos, 2002)

Sign Linguistics

Most of what we know on the structure of sign languages is based on research in Western sign languages.

Non-Western sign languages and so-called village-based sign languages were not included in typological studies until recently

Desa Kolok: *a deaf village*

- Clan culture
- Hindu
- 2,200 people : 47 deaf (2%)
- Deafness has been in the village for 12 generations
- Two thirds of hearing people use the local sign language: Kata Kolok
- Deaf are well integrated into the community

Sociolinguistic settings

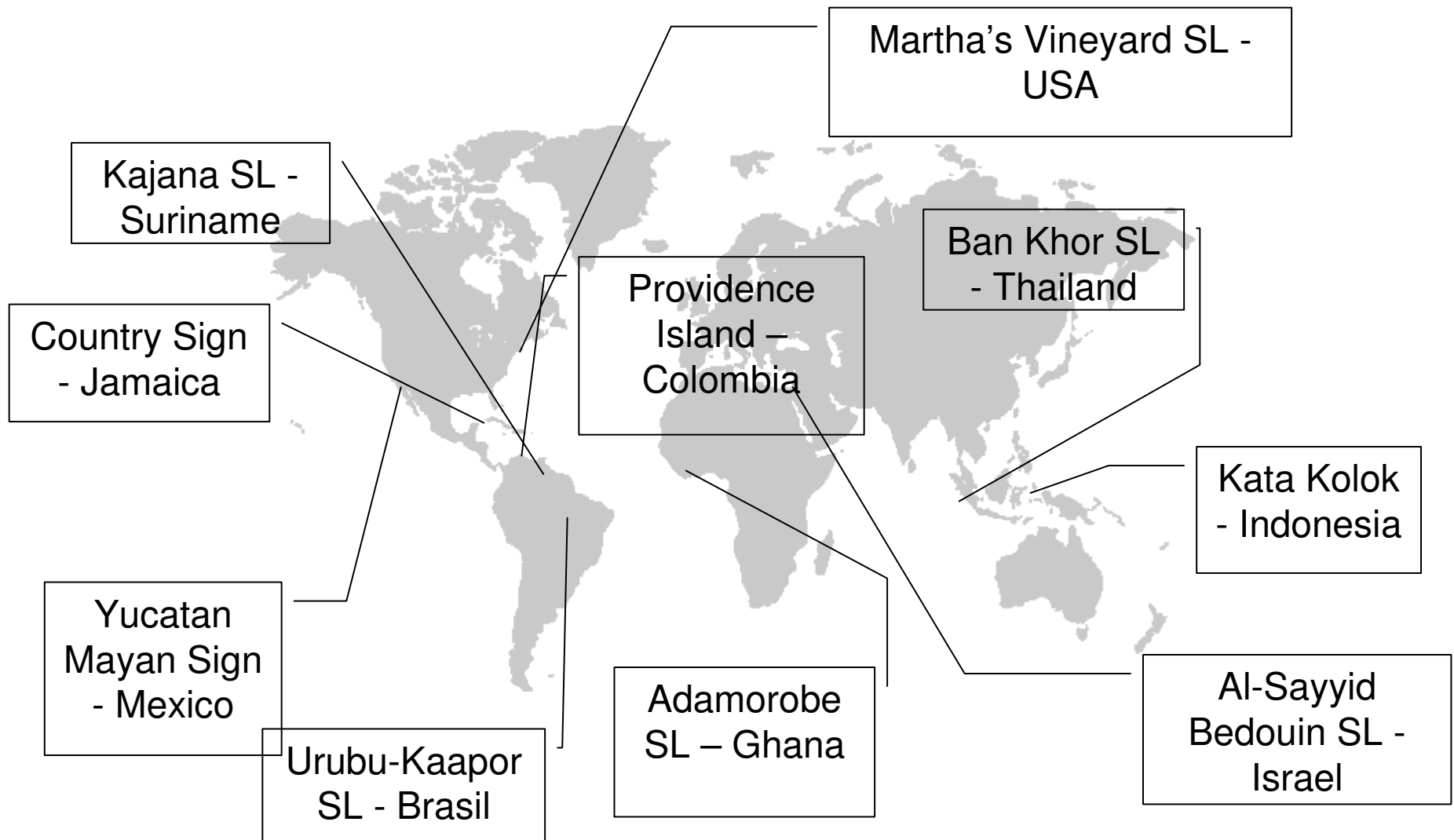
Deaf villages

- Social and/or geographic isolation of village
- High incidence of deafness, for long periods of time
- Sign language used by both deaf and hearing
- Integration of deaf in community life

Urban signing communities

- Most deaf children are born to hearing parents (late L1 acquisition)
- Deafness causes isolation from hearing majority
- Institutionalized
 - Mouthings, fingerspelling
 - Standardization of vocabulary

Deaf villages across the globe



Why village-based sign languages are interesting

- Time depth: relationship between age and language structure
- First language acquisition: deaf children growing up in rich signing environment
- Sign language typology: village-based sign languages seem to lack structures found in larger national sign languages
- Bilingualisme: two languages from different modalities

Village-based sign languages

- Understudied, underdocumented
- Endangered by the use of dominant national sign languages in government institutions for the deaf (Nonaka, 2004)

Current project

- Building a corpus including data from:
 - elicited material to compare to other sign languages
 - (semi)spontaneous conversations
 - deaf and hearing signers (of varying proficiencies)
 - child signing
 - 1 hearing baby of deaf parents (4 months)
 - 2 deaf toddlers
 - 2 6-year-olds, one hearing, one deaf

Child signing



Current project

- Building a corpus
- Setting up deaf school in cooperation with one of the elementary schools providing education with Kata Kolok as language of instruction

Kata Kolok & Balinese

Shared elements

- emblems (lexical signs),
- negation markers (headshake, handwave)

Kata Kolok & Balinese

(Marsaja, forthcoming)

Kata Kolok is not based on the surrounding languages spoken Indonesian or spoken Balinese, nor on Indonesian Sign Language.

However, some gestural aspects of spoken Balinese have entered Kata Kolok.

No language-internal (linguistic) aspects based entered Kata Kolok, and this may be due to lack of institutionalization.

Language contact between languages from different modalities

Modalities in Balinese

- Visual-gestural
GESTURE
 - Hand/manual gestures
 - non-manual gestures (e.g. facial expressions)
- Vocal-oral: spoken words
- LANGUAGE**
- Orthographic: written words

Modalities in Kata Kolok

- Visual-gestural
LANGUAGE
 - Manual signals
 - Non-manual signals
- *Not present*
- *Not present*

Research question

- What is gestural and what is linguistic in a signed language?
- How do gestural elements from Balinese get incorporated into Kata Kolok?

Pointing

- Pointing is one of the primordial forms of language (Kita, 2003)
- However, it is considered gestural in spoken languages.
- One in every 5.7 signs in Kata Kolok is an index finger point

Pointing debate (in sign language literature)

- **Some** (Engberg-Pedersen, Lillo-Martin a.o.) have analyzed pointing signs in sign languages linguistically as:
 - Pronouns
 - Determiners
 - Verbs of movement and location
 - Auxiliaries

These forms are directed to grammatical (spatial) loci

Pointing debate

- Others (Liddell a.o.) give a non-linguistic account:
 - Loci cannot be implemented phonologically.
 - Pointing signs (and agreement verbs) behave differently if the referent is not present.
 - Infinite number of pronouns is inconceivable in a language

*Pointing signs are directed to (mental) entities, not loci.
Pointing and related phenomena are a process of association.*

Pointing debate

- Middle position:

Although pointing signs may have originated from co-speech pointing gestures, they have been *grammatized* in sign language structure. In some cases they may still be gesture-like.

Gesture versus language

Okrent (2002)

A modality-free notion of gesture

How do meaning and form relate?

- Conventionalisation
- Gradual, continuous meaning

Forms of pointing



Approach

- Annotation of form of pointing:
 - Index finger, full hand, lips pointing
 - Palm orientation
 - Shape of finger (bend, straight, lax)
 - Movement
 - Eye gaze
- Identify the way the form of pointing correlations with the type of referent

Conclusions

- Village-based sign languages provide valuable input for linguistic theory
- In order to know what is gestural and linguistic in signed and spoken languages we should compare face-to-face interactions in both cases
- Linguistic theory needs a definition of gesture which not based on modality alone

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