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A reflexive report on filmmaking within a  
linguistic ethnography with deaf and  
hearing people in Mumbai

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## Abstract

This working paper documents the process of using video within a research project that documents communicative strategies used during customer interactions and informal conversations between deaf and hearing interlocutors in Mumbai. Since these interactions involve the use of spontaneous and conventional gestures, a visual form of communicating, the use of video was central to the project, including the production of a 80-minute ethnographic film called '*Ishaare: Gestures and Signs in Mumbai*'. The aim of producing *Ishaare* was two-fold: firstly, the film was part of the methodology since it was used as a discussion tool, and secondly, the film is key to the project's dissemination strategy. In addition to the ethnographic film, three more videos were produced within the framework of this project to document the process of creating *Ishaare*.

In this working paper, the main investigator and the two research assistants discuss the research process and the process of producing the ethnographic film, including reflection on project aims; positionality of the researchers; selection of research participants; training of cameramen; cooperation of the team; conduction of interviews; transcribing, translating, and analysing data; and structuring, editing, and subtitling *Ishaare*. In the last section, the paper discusses the way *Ishaare* was received by different discussion groups in Mumbai.

**Keywords:** Filmmaking, positionality, video analysis, linguistic ethnography, mixed methods, team research, translation, subtitling, interviewing, audience reception.

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## Introduction

This working paper documents the process of using video within a research project that documents communicative strategies used during customer interactions and informal conversations between deaf and hearing interlocutors in Mumbai. Since these interactions involve the use of spontaneous and conventional gestures, a visual form of communicating, the use of video was central to the project, including the production of a 80-minute ethnographic film called '*Ishaare: Gestures and Signs in Mumbai*'. The aim of producing *Ishaare* was two-fold: firstly, the film was part of the methodology since it was used as a discussion tool, and secondly, the film is key to the project's dissemination strategy. In addition to the ethnographic film, three more videos were produced within the framework of this project to document the process of creating *Ishaare*.

In this working paper, the main investigator and the two research assistants discuss the research process and the process of producing the ethnographic film, including reflection on project aims; positionality of the researchers; selection of research participants; training of cameramen; cooperation of the team; conduction of interviews; transcribing, translating, and analysing data; and structuring, editing, and subtitling *Ishaare*. In the last section, the paper discusses the way *Ishaare* was received by different discussion groups in Mumbai.

This reflexive report exists in a symbiotic relationship with *Ishaare*: the expectation is that readers have watched the film before reading this article. *Ishaare* can be watched online, or downloaded, in several different formats including HD.

Here is a list of videos that are referred to throughout the text, and the links:

- *Ishaare: Gestures and Signs in Mumbai* (80 minutes): <https://vimeo.com/142245339>
- *The Making of Ishaare* (22 minutes): <https://vimeo.com/142241532>
- *Training of the cameramen* (9 minutes) <https://player.vimeo.com/video/90008378>
- *Pilot in Mulund* (8,5 min) <https://player.vimeo.com/video/90006586>

## The project

Gesturing is integral in the communication between deaf and hearing people in the majority of the countries in the world, including in India. Fluent deaf signers and hearing non-signers do not share their first language (for example, Indian Sign Lan-

guage and various spoken languages) and preferred language modalities (signed versus spoken). When people from these different linguistic backgrounds meet, they often use conventional and spontaneous gestures to communicate with each other, often combined with the use of objects, and mouthing and/or writing in different languages. This project explores the translingual and multimodal communicative strategies used in deaf-hearing communicative interactions.

In order to investigate these language practices and strategies, linguistic ethnography was undertaken in public and parochial spaces such as markets, shops, food joints and public transport in Mumbai. Six deaf research participants (including one deaf-blind) were selected, and their interactions with hearing strangers and acquaintances were video-recorded. Though many of our interlocutors have experienced that the southern part and the rural areas of India feature a wider repertoire of conventionalised gestures (more intensively used than in the cities), the city of Mumbai (the most culturally and linguistically diverse city of India), was chosen for the study. Indeed, the aim of the project was to investigate communicative strategies when deaf and hearing people who are either strangers or acquaintances, with very different linguistic and class backgrounds, meet outside of the context of family, work or school.

It was decided to focus mostly on customer interactions, (including in stalls, shops, restaurants and contexts of transport), because these are contexts where people more or less “have to” interact with each other in order to buy or sell something. In addition, informal interactions were recorded in the Mumbai trains. The study scrutinized the role of speech and writing in addition to gestures in these contexts, and the role of (objects in) the location wherein the interactions take place, i.e., the immediate physical/spatial environment (such as outdoor vegetable stalls versus indoor shops with items behind glass). Furthermore, attention was paid as to how locations influenced differences in temporality: that is, during customer interactions, it was often (but not always) a priority to do the transaction as quickly as possible, while train commuters took more time for conversation.

The research focussed not only on language practices but also on how those were experienced, and on language ideologies. To that end, impromptu interviews were conducted with both deaf and hearing people whose interactions were filmed and documented. Themes that were discussed in such interviews were the discourse range of gesture, as well as perspectives on the limitations and potential of using gestures, and discourses on its difference from Indian Sign Language (shortened as ISL from now on). The data is discussed and analysed in other publications (such as Kusters forthcoming b) – this report exclusively focuses on the methodology of the project.

## Using video in research

Qualitative, video-recorded data gathered in/through sign language is mostly translated to the written version of a spoken language. Many Deaf Studies scholars engage with visual data (interviews, poetry, performances, dialogue and so on) until the point of analysis and/or dissemination: the end product is typically a text in the written version of a spoken language (mostly English) with or without accompanying drawings, pictures and/or video clips. Thus, deaf signers are often studied and represented in ways that ultimately *obscure* the visual, embodied nature of their languages, including their expertise, subjective experiences and participation. This is problematic since deaf people have long claimed a unique visuality or visucentrism in their experience of the world (though note that not all deaf people are visually oriented to an equal or similar extent, or in the same ways. An important example are deafblind people, including deaf people with Usher Syndrome (which causes reduced peripheral vision and nightblindness), who have other experiences of visuality.) Research into cognition has suggested that deaf people process visual information in qualitatively different ways to hearing people, with this difference being influenced both by the use of signed languages and the effect of hearing loss (Cardin et al. 2013, Capek et al. 2010). It is therefore long overdue that researchers tap into this unique visuality, by using visual methodologies (O'Brien and Kusters forthcoming).

Visual methodologies are those which use images such as photography, drawing, maps and films to answer research questions. These images, produced either by the researcher or by the research participant(s), can be used as stand-alone texts to be analysed, or used to elicit responses from research participants. Employing visual methods is not simply a way of doing justice to deaf participants' visucentrism, but also an enactment of deaf researchers' own visucentrism (O'Brien and Kusters forthcoming). Indeed, the production of *Ishaare* was made possible through the cooperative efforts between the deaf main researcher, two (deaf and hearing) research assistants, a company of deaf ethnographic film makers (Visual Box), and three deaf cameramen. Enabling this kind of participatory and deaf-led process is vital as most documentaries on deaf people are made by hearing filmmakers and deaf audiences often experience these as not entirely corresponding to lived deaf experiences. Indeed there is a need for deaf-led sign language media (Rijckaert 2012).

The use of video was inherent in all steps of the research process: from data production until triangulation and dissemination, to optimise reflexivity and feedback. The gesture-based interactions and interviews were video-recorded with five aims:

(1) extraction, (2) reflection, (3) projection and provocation, (4) articulation, (5) dissemination.

- (1) *Extraction* means “using video to record a specific interaction so that it can be studied in more depth by the researcher” (Haw and Hadfield 2011:2). Gesture-based interactions were recorded with the aim of further close-up observation: playing and re-playing the videos, annotating them, and making extensive notes on the interactions in the videos. The choice of sequences which are included in *Ishaare* was based on the data analysis.
- (2) *Reflection* means “using video to support participants to reflect upon their actions, understandings and constructions” (Haw and Hadfield 2011:2). *Ishaare* was shown to deaf audiences to elicit further thoughts on gesture-based interactions and reflect on the recorded utterances and practices.
- (3) *Projection and provocation*: “using video to provoke participants to critically examine and challenge existing norms, traditions and power structures.” (Haw and Hadfield 2011:2) To this aim, *Ishaare* was shown to, and discussed with four hearing groups counting 8-15 people each: hearing parents of deaf children, hearing teachers of deaf children, and two hearing lay audiences. With ‘lay’ is meant people with no background of working/living with deaf people (although during the discussion groups, it turned out that some of them did have such experience).
- (4) *Articulation* means “using video to help participants voice their opinions and communicate these to others”. (Haw and Hadfield 2011:2), which was found important in the process of giving deaf people a platform to express their experiences of communicating in the city, and important in the process of dissemination.
- (5) *Dissemination*: Firstly, since data in visual language was recorded, including Indian Sign language and gesture-based interactions; it was decided to maintain part of the original data source in the process of dissemination. Secondly, producing an ethnographic film is a way of dissemination where the research participants (rather than the researcher) are the leading voices and faces. Thirdly, it could be that documentaries are accessible to a wider variety of audiences than for example written academic texts, including for deaf audiences, because of the visual nature of sign languages (though see further). A very wide audience was kept in mind: deaf and hearing people in India, deaf and hearing people in the West, and people interested in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics.

## Summary and timeline of the project methodology

The whole project, including the employment of the team members, the production of *Ishaare* and the training of the cameramen, was funded by Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Department of Socio-Cultural Diversity (MPI-MMG).

The **project team** consisted of the following members:

- Annelies Kusters: postdoctoral researcher, main investigator of the project
- Sujit Sahasrabudhe: deaf research assistant (stage 1, 2, 3 of the project)
- Amaresh Gopalakrishnan: hearing research assistant and Indian Sign Language – English/Hindi interpreter (stage 1 and 2 of the project)
- Kinjal Shah and Atiya Hajee: Indian Sign Language – English/Hindi interpretation and transcriptions (stage 3 of the project)
- Harish Chaudhary, Prakash Khairnar and Rohan Satardekar: three deaf cameramen who took turns (stage 1 and 3 of the research)
- Visual Box: Flemish deaf media agency who trained the deaf cameramen (stage 1), and edited the ethnographic film (stage 2)

The project methodology consisted of the following steps:

### **Stage 1: Field work in Mumbai: January - May 2014**

- Exploratory discussions in three deaf clubs (Sujit and Annelies)
- Meetings with a number of potential research participants (Sujit and Annelies)
- Five-day training of deaf cameramen (by Visual Box), including the creation of a 8,5 minute mini-ethnographic film (*Pilot in Mulund*)
- Creation of 9 minute video-report documenting the training of the cameramen (*Training of the cameramen*)
- Recording six deaf participants' gesture-based interactions: 3-4 full days per participant; and recording gesture-based interactions between hearing people in public. The filming lasted 2 months in total.
- The kind of interactions that were recorded were the following:
  - Approximately 300 gesture-based interactions
  - 73 impromptu interviews (2-5 min) with hearing participants in gesture-based interactions

- 60 impromptu interviews (2-5 min) with the six deaf participants in gesture-based interactions
- Longer semi-structured interviews (1-2 hours) with each of the six deaf participants
- Creation of shotlists (Annelies)
- Start of transcriptions and translations (see below) (Sujit and Amaresh)

**Stage two: transcriptions, analysis, editing of ethnographic film: June 2014 - September 2015**

- Until April 2015:
  - translation of the three discussions in deaf clubs (Sujit)
  - translations and transcriptions of gesture-based interactions (Amaresh)
  - transcriptions/translations of short interviews with hearing people (Amaresh)
  - translations of short and long interviews with deaf participants (Sujit)
  - analysis of the transcripts (Annelies)
- Creation of storyboard for the movie *Ishaare* and for the *Making of Ishaare* (Annelies) (April - May 2015)
- Editing and subtitling *Ishaare* and the *Making of Ishaare* (22 minutes): Visual Box in close cooperation with Annelies (June - September 2015)

**Stage three: use of *Ishaare* to elicit further data: October - November 2015**

- Organisation of screening for the deaf community in Mumbai
- Organisation of seven discussions: three deaf clubs, parents of the deaf, teachers of the deaf, neighbours, media students

Below, most of the different steps of the project are described and evaluated in further detail.

## Positionality of the project leader and deaf research assistant

Annelies, the leading researcher of the project, is a deaf Belgian woman from a mostly hearing family but has a deaf younger sister, is 33 years old at the time of writing, is schooled in anthropology and deaf studies and has research experience (since 2004)



in Surinam (South-America), Adamorobe village (Ghana) and Mumbai. In these contexts, she investigated deaf people's communication strategies and language use in everyday life, amongst other themes. In the global South, she observed deaf people gesturing extensively with hearing people, and this way of communication contrasted with her experiences and observations in Europe (where hearing people are much less apt to gesture), inspiring her to the inception of the current research project.

Annelies' first visit to India (2006) was to attend a deaf-related conference, her second visit to do research (2007), and the subsequent visits (annually, including 3 years of continuous living and researching in Mumbai) were triggered by the fact that she had married a deaf Mumbaikar. During the time she spent in India, she learned ISL. Her husband Sujit Sahasrabudhe, her partner since 2007, and participant and assistant in this project, was research participant/assistant in two preceding research projects in Mumbai (2007 and 2013). Eight months before the research (2013), they moved to Germany, where Annelies started working at MPI-MMG.

Sujit is male, 38 years old at the time of writing, comes from a lower middle-class Marathi Brahmin family and has deaf parents and a deaf older brother. Previously, Sujit was involved in several deaf organisations in Mumbai including being General Secretary of YAD (Yuva Association of the Deaf) and Vice-President of IDS (India Deaf Society). Sujit is a native ISL user who can understand different variants and dialects of ISL (particularly since being acquainted with his parents' friends and their respective signing variants, and since having grown up in a deaf school in Chennai, South-India). For ten years, he taught ISL courses to prospective interpreters, and ISL teacher training courses for deaf community members. As such he not only has a strong network in the Mumbai deaf community, but also a good meta-linguistic awareness of ISL, both of which proved to be extremely valuable in the project.

In this project, Annelies and Sujit investigated the kind of (customer) interactions they engaged in themselves on a daily basis. Also, when Annelies lived in India and did her daily groceries shopping on the street markets in Mulund (the suburb in Mumbai where Annelies and Sujit lived), it was trial and error, especially in the beginning: she had to learn gesturing conventions and marketing scripts. She had to learn the usual price for fruits and vegetables and how to communicate about them: for example, a person gesturing "1 3" could mean "this is ₹13", "you get 3 of these lemons for ₹10", or "one kilo for ₹300". She learned in which situations bargaining is expected and acceptable and in which situations it is not. Furthermore, she experienced the importance of building up communicative acquaintance with sellers. Thus her position as a deaf foreigner who lived for three years in the same neighbourhood,

led to insights that she found very useful in the process of research. Sujit's position will be further discussed below.

Naturally, their own interactions (and reflections upon those) were included in the field notes that Annelies made during the research; and as she had had a long-time interest in the theme, she had written field notes on this theme for seven years preceding the project.

## Exploratory discussions in deaf clubs

To start the project, Sujit and Annelies organised discussions in three clubs for the deaf, where deaf people gather weekly to discuss a variety of themes. In organising discussions during such occasions, Sujit and Annelies followed a method that they found successful in a previous project on deaf commuters' experiences in the Mumbai suburban trains. The clubs were: BFDW (Bombay Foundation of Deaf Women), IDS (India Deaf Society) and YAD (Yuva Association of the Deaf). These are three of the larger deaf clubs in Mumbai and are attended by respectively deaf women, deaf people of all ages, and deaf youth (age 18-35). Deaf people (30-100) gathered in a room, sat on chairs or on the floors, or stood up, and Sujit took the stage. Since Sujit is a native ISL user who had years of experience leading discussions in YAD and IDS, it was decided that he would lead the discussions. The discussions were video-recorded.

Sujit started off with an explanation about the project and what the recordings would be used for, and then directed questions towards the audience, subsequently giving the stage to whomever was interested in sharing their thoughts and experiences. A wide range of people took the stage. Sujit moderated the discussions, offering new questions in the process, prompted by Annelies. Questions were for example: In which situations do you use gesture? What is the potential and limitation of communication in gesture? What is the difference between gesture and Indian Sign Language? Deaf people shared examples and experiences, and complemented or challenged examples and perspectives shared by others.





Figure: Exploratory discussion at India Deaf Society (IDS)



Figure: Exploratory discussion at Bombay Foundation of Deaf Women (BFDW)

These discussions were fruitful in that a wide range of perspectives and experiences were gathered (such as on different experiences of using gestures in different contexts such as in shops, at work, in the South of India, in villages in India and so on), constituting a wealth of data to start off the project, further informing the questions asked during interviews with the six key participants. Also, since the field work focused on these six main participants (which had pretty homogeneous backgrounds, see below), it was important that these exploratory discussions in deaf clubs (as well as the after-film discussions) included a larger diversity of perspectives. Furthermore, importantly, during discussions in deaf clubs, perspectives and experiences were not only made available for and shared with the researchers but also with the others who were present. The theme was as such introduced in the Mumbai deaf community discourses. Many people were personally engaged by the discussion: the discussions helped people think about, and express these thoughts about a particular theme that is central to their everyday lives.

## Selection of the six participants

Initially it was planned to document gesture-based interactions by ten to fifteen deaf people with hearing people, and the idea was to record several people in similar spaces (for example asking people with diverse backgrounds to do their daily shopping and commuting) and do a comparative and intersectional analysis. However, this way of collecting data would provide the team with more data than they would be able to process in the frame of this project. Taking into account the fact that creating an ethnographic film was central to the research, and that documentaries should not have too many central protagonists; Annelies and Sujit ended up selecting six deaf people who interacted with hearing people in rather different contexts. Thus the initial idea of doing a comparative analysis was abandoned, and instead the project aim was modified in order to gain an accumulative, overall insight in deaf-hearing gesture-based interactions in diverse public and parochial spaces in Mumbai.

In the process of selecting the six participants, Sujit and Annelies made use of the extensive social network of Sujit and his deaf family. They also solicited suggestions during the exploratory discussions in deaf clubs: people were asked to express interest to participate or to provide suggestions for potential participants. Sujit and Annelies visited or invited eight potential participants, asking them about their com-



munication strategies, and on some occasions they organised a pilot without camera team, to observe how those people communicated. These are the six research participants (henceforth called participants/protagonists interchangeably) and the spaces that were selected:

1. Reena: deaf Marathi woman in her forties: grocery shopping + transport
2. Pradip: deaf-blind Bengali man in his thirties: grocery shopping + transport
3. Sujit: research assistant in the project: transportation of research team, medical shops, leisure time, restaurants, clothes shopping
4. Mahesh: deaf Gujarati man in his fifties: mobile retail businessman who sells boxes of pens to stationery shops
5. Komal and Sanjay: deaf Gujarati couple in their forties who run an accessory shop with mostly schoolgirls as customers
6. Durga and his team: deaf Odia man in his thirties, who is the manager of branch of Café Coffee Day (chain) with deaf staff

The above selection was motivated by the decision to document a) interactions in which deaf people are customers interacting with hearing vendors/waiters/ticket officers/conductors and so on (cases 1-3); and b) interactions in which deaf business-owners/managers communicate with hearing clients/customers (cases 4-6). Cases 1-4 were recorded on the move, and cases 5 and 6 were recorded in a stationary location. Furthermore, based upon previous research in the Mumbai trains (Kusters 2010, Kusters forthcoming a), Sujit and Annelies were aware that a lot of informal and casual gesturing happens there, and so five of the six deaf protagonists (1-4 and 6) were also recorded during train travel.

The six participants have in common that they are aged between 30 and 60, all of them are fluent in Indian Sign Language (but use/know different variants) and all of them are middle-class Hindu Brahmins (thus roughly of the same caste and class). Five of them grew up outside of Mumbai most of their childhood and adolescence (number 2-6). Some are able to read and write in English to various extents, and most of them know features of Indian languages (Gujarati, Odia, Marathi, Hindi, Tamil, Bengali) (either lipreading, reading, writing). With Pradip, the deaf-blind person, Sujit and Annelies were familiar in advance of the project (he took part in the research on deaf commuters in the Mumbai trains) so they were aware that Pradip's strategies in gesture-based interactions with hearing people differed significantly from those of other deaf people.

In selecting the participants, gender and linguistic repertoire were treated as the most important variables. During the exploratory discussions in deaf clubs (and confirmed in later interviews and discussion groups), people stated that they did not really see differences in communication between people with different religious (such as muslim) or caste backgrounds; and that linguistic repertoire (such as knowledge of English, and literacy) and gender were more influential in people's communication strategies.

In addition to prioritising a balance in gender and linguistic repertoire; there were three other important variables in the selection of participants

(1.) *They habitually communicated in gesture.* Indeed, not every deaf person is apt in gesture-based communication: a number of deaf people is discouraged by their parents from going shopping or have subordinate roles in shopping (see Reena's comment in *Ishaare* 00:03:04); or follows expectations of (former) teachers and parents, predominantly trying to make use of speech. Thus while the deaf participants have a variety of backgrounds as regards the written/spoken modalities of spoken languages they learnt, they all have in common that they do not primarily make use of spoken language when they meet people outside of the context of family, work or school.

(2.) *The participants are confident in gesture-based interactions.* A deaf Christian lower-class shopkeeper whom was considered to include as participant, explained that he felt not confident using gesture, and that people sometimes came in his shop, asked something, then left when they did not get a clear response from the deaf shopkeeper.

(3.) *Felt comfortable with the team making recordings* for research and the ethnographic film. Thus taking into account these variables and conditions, the selected 6 protagonists are unintentionally homogeneous regarding caste and class.

Whilst this homogeneity can be regarded as being problematic, it is unclear whether and to what extent it matters. In the after-film discussions in Mumbai nobody commented upon this. Deaf people of various religious (such as muslim), caste and class backgrounds recognised the communicative practices in *Ishaare* as their own. Deaf and hearing participants in discussion groups rather reflected upon how class differences between *hearing* people influenced communication situations, and on the difference in communication between strangers versus acquaintances.

Indeed, importantly, the diversity of people with whom the six deaf protagonists interacted was large, regarding age (between about 6 years old and very old), religion, caste, class and gender. For example, people managing street stalls were often of

lower class backgrounds, and Komal and Sanjay's shop (case 5) attracted a lower/middle class clientele (mostly schoolgirls) whilst the coffee shop managed by Durga (case 6) attracted an upper class clientele of various ages/genders. Those two cases are also the cases in which a higher number of hearing women were interacting with the deaf protagonists than in the other cases where most hearing people in gesture-based interactions were male.

As can be seen in the list of research participants, Sujit was included as one of them. Initially the aim was for Sujit to be research assistant only, similar to his position in the previous research project on the Mumbai trains in 2013 (Kusters forthcoming a). However, about halfway through the field work Sujit and Annelies decided to also include him as one of the six research participants. In the film, Sujit appears when he is guiding the research team through Mumbai using various means of public and private transport, and during gesture-based interactions in situations that were not recorded (sufficiently) in the five previous case studies: medical shops, restaurants, leisure time, and buying clothes. Sujit's gesture-based interactions very much informed the project and it was decided to not limit the (self-)observation of his interactions to field notes. During the project, Sujit shared a lot of meta-linguistic reflection on gesture. Furthermore, his position as Annelies' husband meant that discussions about gestures and *Ishaare* were part of everyday life discussions not only during work time but also at home. Hence it was decided that such meta-linguistic reflection, in combination with an analysis of his own practices of gesturing, should be part of the research and part of *Ishaare* particularly since there was no plan to include a separate "guide" in the ethnographic film.

Thus Sujit appears during interviews with research participants, but also when he engages in gesture-based interactions himself and when he reflects upon these language practices. The decision to include Sujit as research participant provided him with a range of different perspectives: engaging in gesture-based interactions without or with the presence of a camera; being the observer of gesture-based interactions of the other participants; and being their interviewer; in addition to leading the exploratory discussions in deaf clubs and the after-film discussions in stage three of the project. This combination of perspectives led to the deeper level of metalinguistic reflection that he showcases in the film. Whilst his case is introduced early on in the film, it was recorded as the last one, thus his general reflections were partially based upon the previous cases.

The implication of including Sujit as participant in the ethnographic film, was that Annelies was also included in *Ishaare*. Initially, she was reluctant to feature in

the film as she wanted it to be entirely about deaf Indians' interactions and perspectives and hence she did not take the stage herself, not even as interviewer. However, during shooting, it felt unnatural for the team if Annelies tried to remain out of the picture when directing the recordings for Sujit's case, so ultimately she does appear in *Ishaare* now and then. When interviews with Sujit needed to be recorded, Annelies was the one interviewing Sujit, but she was not included in the film as interviewer or as leading/guiding figure. As such she remained in the background as much as possible, but did not erase herself from the ethnographic film altogether (in contrast, in *The Making Of Ishaare*, where the team talks about their experiences when making the film, she is appearing along with the other team members).

## Training of the cameramen

The recordings were made by three deaf cameramen who took turns. It was considered whether to hire professional (trained) hearing cameramen, or to hire deaf cameramen who would need training (since there were no trained deaf professional cameramen in Mumbai who had experience with filming documentaries). The preference was to foreground visucentric perspectives and practices in filmmaking / Sujit and Annelies knew a number of enthusiastic young deaf men in Mumbai who had filmed short fiction movies in their leisure time for several years. Visual Box, a company of deaf documentary filmmakers in Belgium, came to Mumbai to provide them with training in shooting documentaries. Visual Box had previous experience providing similar training in Belgium.

The training lasted five full days and was organised in International Sign, and is documented in the video *Training of the cameramen*. Five deaf young men attended, as well as Sujit, Annelies and Amaresh (the hearing research assistant and Indian Sign Language interpreter whose role will be further discussed later). The training was organised by Jorn Rijckaert and Thomas Eeman (Visual Box) and started with an explanation about the differences between different genres of documentaries and ethnographic films. The cameramen learnt that the team would work without a script or storyboard and that the aim was to record situations as naturally as possible, during which cameramen must be ready at all times to shoot and adapt to the changing positions of the people interacting. The prospective cameramen were used to filming



directed fiction where they tried to be creative with different camera angles; while for this ethnographic film, timing and clear framing of communication had priority.

The team learned from what angles to shoot, what to include in the frame and what not, and how to best frame different types of visual (signed and gestured) interactions: gesture-based interactions, interviews with deaf participants, and interviews with hearing participants which Amaresh interpreted. The team evaluated (parts of) other documentaries made on deaf people in Mumbai (made by hearing filmmakers) and the cameramen received feedback on the earlier films they had recorded. The team learned how to make sure that there is enough space in the frame for subtitles so that subtitles do not overlap signing hands; how to position cameras in situations where two cameras are used; how to record when the protagonist is in motion (such as walking); and which kind of environment shots to take before and after recording gesture-based interactions.



Figure: Jorn (Visual Box) teaching the team how to frame different situations



Figure: The five deaf cameramen students



Figure: Whiteboard with summary of priorities for the cameramen to keep in mind when making recordings.





Figure: Jorn instructing students how to record a person in motion.

One of the decisions to make during this training week, was what kind of camera to use. After testing various cameras, the team ended up renting a semi-professional camera (Sony PMW EX3), and using a handycam as second camera during longer interviews with deaf participants. Whilst the handycam could deliver almost as good a video quality in well-lit environments as the semi-professional camera; the latter could better adapt to circumstances in low light (for example in dim shops or when it was dark outside). It was the prospective cameramen's first time to handle a semi-professional camera.

Part of the training consisted of going outside (in the vicinity of the training venue, located in Bandra) to practice recording gesture-based interactions (in which Sujit, the research assistant, engaged in gesture-based interactions with street vendors, shopkeepers and a tea brewer) and interviews. After the first days of practicing, the team went to Mulund (without the Visual Box trainers) to record the abovementioned short pilot ethnographic film (see short movie *Pilot in Mulund*). This way the team could practice the work together and the cameramen got feedback on their materials and got insight in what would/could be done with their recordings in the

stage of editing. The pilot had the additional benefit that Annelies could evaluate who was ready to work as cameraman for the ethnographic film, and out of the five students, three cameramen were selected: Prakash Khairnar, Harish Chaudhary and Rohan Satardekar. Each of them covered two of the six case studies.

Thus, in summary, during the course, the cameramen learned what kind of footage was needed for the research project, how to record, and what kind of footage was needed from the perspective of the editors (such as the abovementioned environment shots).

By organising this training, the project also contributed to deaf community development as the three cameramen, all active in deaf organisations and associations, could continue using their skills afterwards. During the feedback session on the end of the shooting period (part of which is included in the earlier mentioned short movie *Training of the cameramen* and in the *Making of Ishaare*), they expressed that they felt happy to have learned new skills, felt proud handling a semi-professional camera, and that the experience would benefit them in the future. They also identified a number of challenges they had encountered. The camera was not only more complex to operate than the handycams and photo cameras they were used to, it also felt much heavier, and they could not take a break whenever they wanted, so a day of filming was a real physical exercise, especially since it was very hot and humid in Mumbai (with temperatures averaging 35 degrees and high humidity levels). Another challenge was the rapid switching between recording gesture-based interactions and the environment shots that were needed for *Ishaare*.

## Cooperation of the team when making recordings

When making recordings for the research, the group consisted of five people: the deaf protagonist, Sujit, Amaresh, Annelies and one of the three cameramen. When recording cases 1-4, this group was continually and rapidly moving from site to site, either to buy/order things (case 1-3) or to sell pens (case 4). The cameraman went ahead of the protagonist (the protagonist told him the direction or location they were heading for) or walked next to, or immediately behind the protagonist. Sujit and Annelies closely followed so that they could observe most, if not all, of each gesture-based interaction. In small spaces and/or crowded indoors shops where not the whole group could fit in, only Sujit or only Annelies observed, sometimes through a

window rather than inside. Last came Amaresh, who often carried the large camera bag, and who only needed to come into action when explanations about the filming were asked, or when an interview with a hearing interlocutor (such as a vendor) was organised after a gesture-based interaction. There was no sound technician in the team, so Amaresh also regularly checked the sound with a headphone. Within the team, communication happened in ISL and often was quick and economical (such as: “frame this”, “go ahead (of the protagonist)”, “going to interview him”, “capture the environment!”).



Figure: Rohan (cameraman) recording Mahesh (protagonist, white shirt, with his back to the photo camera) who sells pens to the shopkeeper of a stationery shop. Sujit and Annelies stand next to the cameraman, observing the interaction.

After gesture-based interactions (such as Mahesh (case 4) selling some boxes of pens), the deaf and/or hearing interlocutor often were interviewed. Sujit asked the questions, sometimes based upon prompts by Annelies, who positioned herself where Sujit would be able to see her. Thus Annelies was directing and supervising, but was not directly asking questions, so that participants and interpreter were addressed by an Indian ISL user.

When the deaf protagonist was interviewed (0,5-5 min, about 60 times), for example about particularities in interactions or about their history with a particular vendor/customer, Sujit stood opposite of the deaf protagonist and next to the camera-



man. Thus Sujit was not recorded. An exception were the interviews with Pradip, the deaf-blind man: when interviewing Pradip, Sujit was also recorded as he was using hands-on signing with Pradip.



Figure: Harish (cameraman) recording Sujit interviewing Pradip (hands-on signing), Annelies stands next to the cameraman.

When a hearing interactant was asked to participate in a short interview (2-5 minutes), Amaresh always first offered a short explanation about the project and also sometimes briefed them on how the interview would be conducted. Hearing people almost always agreed to be interviewed. Then, Sujit asked questions, such as on how they experienced the gesture-based interaction, what they found difficult or not difficult, why/when they made use of particular strategies such as writing, and whether they felt limited or enabled when communicating through gestures. In total, about 70 (on a total of 300+ interactions) hearing people were interviewed. The decision whether to interview someone or not was made by Annelies and Sujit and based

upon particularities in the gesture-based interactions; and they also tried to select a diverse as possible sample of people for the interviews. When doing these interviews with hearing participants, Amaresh (the interpreter) stood next to the hearing person, Sujit and the cameraman stood opposite of them (see figure). Amaresh was always included in the frame (see figure), as the film had to be accessible to Indian deaf people who use ISL.



Figure: Sujit standing next to the cameraman, interviewing a shopkeeper.



Figure: Amaresh (black shirt) stands next to the shopkeeper, interpreting.





Figure: This is what the recorded image of this interview looks like: Amaresh and the shopkeeper stand next to each other, the frame includes both of them up to their waist.



Figure: Interview outside of a shop, in which Rohan (the cameraman), Sujit, Amaresh, and the shopkeeper are visible.

A challenge was that Amaresh is very tall. This meant that he had to adjust his height during interviews (standing with his legs opened, see figure), so as not to tower above the interviewee too much and also make sure that he fitted inside the frame. Sometimes, he even had to sit down on a stool or chair when children were interviewed (see figure).





Figure: Amaresh standing with his legs wide apart for an interview in order to adjust his height to the short interviewee (usually the legs are not in the frame since most interviews include people from their waist).



Figure: Amaresh sitting down to adjust his height to four schoolchildren.

In advance of the recordings, Annelies considered having two cameramen working simultaneously in the team, so that each situation and interview would be recorded from two camera perspectives, but decided against it particularly because the team would mostly be recording in situations with lack of space. In hindsight, two cameras should have been used to record the interviews with hearing participants: many of their responses become only legible when knowing the question that had preceded. For examples:

Sujit: Were you comfortable with the gesturing, or did you find any difficulty?

Interviewee: No, no problem at all.

Sujit: The gestures that you do, do you use them with your hearing friends too?

Interviewee: No, normally no.

Sujit: So, has this ever happened that you were trying to say something and could not, or they were trying to say something and you could not understand?

Interviewees: We felt like that the first time we came here

Sujit's questions were not recorded, but Amaresh' translations (of Sujit's questions in ISL) to spoken English/Hindi were recorded, as well as the interviewee's responses, and Amaresh' translation of these responses to ISL. However, Amaresh' voiced translations of Sujit's questions were not included in *Ishaare*: his role in the film is only to interpret hearing interviewee's responses to ISL. Including his voiced translation of Sujit's questions (to provide context for the hearing interviewee's short responses) would have been problematic for two reasons: 1. It could have been confusing for the viewer as it could then seem that Amaresh is the interviewer rather than Sujit, and 2. It would have made those parts of the movie inaccessible for (Indian) deaf viewers who do not want to rely on the subtitles. The way to solve the issue would have been to videorecord Sujit's questions with a second camera, and to edit them in the film. Because these recordings were not made, *Ishaare* only contains responses that are legible without knowing the preceding question, such as: "If they buy something, then I tell with my hands how much it costs," and "It's a different thing to gesture to a girl on the road [to tease her]. But, here, he is not able to talk and... Yeah, so it's a language, right!"

In addition to these short interviews at the location of gesture-based interactions, longer interviews with each of the six deaf protagonists were organised, discussing themes such as their linguistic backgrounds and their ideologies on (the difference

between) gesture and ISL, and were recorded on separate occasions. On these occasions, tripods were used, and two cameras were used instead of one: the small handi-cam was used to record both Sujit (as interviewer) and the deaf research participant, and this footage was used to create the interview transcripts. The semi-professional camera recorded only the deaf research participant, and this footage was used in *Ishaare*, although images of the handi-cam were included where Sujit's question needed to be included to provide context.

Through this way of working together in team, a continuum of gesture-based interactions (and the combination of gestures with mouthing, writing and so on) and ISL (in several variants as displayed by the six research participants and the interpreter, including hands-on signing) were captured in the film. This is important because while the film's focus is foremostly on gesture-based interactions; the difference (and overlap) between gesture and ISL is one of the central themes in the film. There is a kind of paradox in the film in that *Ishaare* shows how well gesture works, but to interview hearing participants there was an interpreter, which shows experienced or perceived limitations of gesture-based communication.

## Interpretation during the interviews with hearing people

While looking for a sign language interpreter cum hearing research assistant for this project, several issues had to be taken into consideration. Firstly, the person must be able to work full-time for four consecutive months. Secondly, the person must be fluent in more than one spoken language, mainly English, Hindi and Marathi (the latter is the primary regional language used in Mumbai in addition to English and Hindi). Also, the person must have working knowledge of computers. There are only few professional interpreters in India who have reached a high level of proficiency and efficiency. Among them, Amaresh was selected as he was available for that period of time. His parents are deaf, who are also close friends with Sujit's parents. Sujit and Amaresh are childhood friends and have worked together on many occasions. Whilst most interpreters in India are female, Amaresh is male; which was experienced as beneficial for this project as the majority of the people who were interviewed were men. Also, during interviews the interpreter had to voice over for Sujit, who is also male. There were a few issues and challenges to deal with during interpretation, as explained below.

Amaresh has a good command over English and is also fluent in Hindi, which he learnt at school and uses at work. However, he is not a Mumbaikar. He was raised in Chennai, a southern coastal city of India, where the primary regional language is Tamil. Most interviews were conducted in Hindi, with the exception of case 6 (Cafe Coffee Day), which attracted a mix of upperclass people and college students who conversed mainly in English during the interviews. As the project progressed, Amaresh became more comfortable in conversing in Hindi during interviews as he became accustomed to the recurring questions and themes of the interviews. Since the project was conducted in Mumbai, where the local official language is Marathi, many interviews were conducted with locals who were Marathi-speakers. In such cases Amaresh and the interviewee conversed in Hindi, but in a handful of instances, the interviewee preferred to speak in Marathi. As Marathi belongs to the same language family as Hindi, Amaresh was able to understand the speaker while interpreting and asked for clarification in the instances where this was not the case. As Amaresh was also transcribing the interviews, he was able to identify mistakes and shortcomings in his interpreting which helped him improve his interpreting skills as the project progressed.

During the early stages of the field work, Annelies noticed that Amaresh mostly interpreted consecutively rather than simultaneously, which was generally the norm that Annelies experienced in other interpreted situations she had participated in (such as meetings and presentations in Europe). Since interviews were conducted with people having different levels of fluency and proficiency in Hindi and English and interpreting was often done in situations with a lot of background noise, Amaresh preferred consecutive interpreting over simultaneous interpreting to ensure quality and accuracy of the translations.

Another challenge was adapting to the wide variety of attitudes of people that were interviewed: Sujit more or less handled a standard set of questions, but Amaresh was the one who had to get the idea across and heard differences in hearing interlocutors' intonations, word choices, expressions and so on, and tried to match them in his translation. Although Sujit had interviewed deaf people and worked with hearing interpreters when giving presentations or attending meetings, he never had the experience of *interviewing* a hearing person with the help of an interpreter. During interviews, Sujit noticed that some hearing people looked directly at him while talking (which is preferred by most deaf people), while others constantly watched the interpreter, treating the interpreter as a go-between.





Figure: Interviewee looking at Amaresh (who is interpreting) instead of keeping eye contact with Sujit who is interviewing him.

Due to the lack of direct eye contact and clear facial expressions, Sujit frequently felt a disconnect and was unable to recognise or read the feelings or emotions of the hearing person. Being unsure how to deal with such situations when people seemed unresponsive or uncomfortable with the question asked, Sujit usually asked short questions. And Amaresh, sensing the situation, had to rephrase and elucidate, realizing the hearing interviewee needed more information. This was usually the case whenever they were asked whether sign language and gestures were one and the same, and whether hearing people also use gestures with each or not.

Sometimes, the reverse also happened, wherein Amaresh had to rephrase and elaborate the responses of the hearing interviewee to Sujit whenever the hearing person used a colloquial phrase. For example, when the hearing person says '*ho jata hai*', out of the many interpretations it could mean "it happens naturally" or "it is possible to do it".

## Participants' relationship with the camera

A much considered question before, during and after the project, was to which extent people behave “naturally” with the camera present. Below a number of thoughts, observations and experiences with regard to this theme are enumerated.

- It appeared that the deaf protagonists and most of their hearing interlocutors **didn't mind the presence of the camera**. On two or three occasions the team was asked to stop recording (such as inside a big mall). It often happened that owners, customers or guards **asked what the team were doing**, but they were either ignored because, being deaf, they didn't hear them; or purposefully ignored by the deaf protagonist who went on their normal everyday business and thus signaled to the seller or customer that they should trust them and follow their example of ignoring the camera's presence. In instances when people pressed on, seemed upset, or asked afterwards “what was this for?”, Amaresh gave a short explanation of the project, saying that the team was filming how deaf and hearing people communicate during customer interactions and that the recordings would be used for research and educational purposes. In other instances, the deaf protagonist gave a similar explanation themselves: one such instance is included in *Ishaare* (see 00:56:21).
- The aim was to record communicative interactions as they occurred, without direction, but the team quickly found it was almost **impossible to avoid any planning or direction when filming**. In case 1-4 the deaf protagonist led the team, but the protagonist's movements were more planned than they would otherwise have been. For example, when filming Reena in the market in Dadar (in the beginning of *Ishaare*), the camera was staying close to her, and the rest of the team went ahead or came afterwards, or took side-alleys in the huge market, in order not to come in the picture. Reena often walked too fast for the team to be able to keep up with her, especially since the market was a busy and crowded place, teeming with customers and vendors moving loads. The consequence was that the beginning of several gesture-based interactions was missed, as well as greetings with sellers which Reena passed. Thus the team members had to ask Reena repeatedly to adapt her pace to them and to tell them where she was heading; which could be argued to be “less natural” than her everyday way of shopping. Sujit also reflected upon this issue: he adapted the timing of his gesturing when the cameraman was shooting, such as waiting with gesturing until the cameraman was ready to shoot. In other situations though, he acted off-guard, forgetting about the camera, such

as during quick back-and-forth interactions. He also got the impression that some **deaf protagonists were a bit more sociable** with hearing people when they were filmed, than they would have been otherwise, being aware that the aim was to record how they engage in gesture-based interactions.

- Sujit thinks that **most hearing interlocutors behaved much as they would without the camera**, comparing with his own everyday experience of engaging in gesture-based interactions without camera. There were only a few exceptions (which were not included in *Ishaare*), particularly in the case of Pradip, the deaf-blind man. For example, Pradip was recorded on the street when he was asking for help for crossing the street. A couple of women talked to him and he did not respond as he did not hear them. The women then looked at the cameraman who was recording them, seemed uncertain of what was happening and thus reluctant to further interact with him. Another man who was filmed when he guided Pradip eagerly, seemed to be over-eager to be recorded. Also, when making recordings in Ghansoli, Pradip's home area in Navi Mumbai (New Bombay), a huge crowd gathered to watch (see figures). Perhaps the combination of a deaf-blind man going



Figure: Crowd in Ghansoli, where Pradip is recorded when he buys vegetables of a street seller (Pradip is in the middle, Sujit and Annelies are observing on the left, the cameraman sits on the right of Sujit).



shopping and a (sign language using) camera team including a white person, attracted this attention, in combination with the fact that the pace of living in Ghansoli public sphere felt slower than in the central areas of Mumbai, where people move in a much faster pace and seem more hurried, and where the team attracted far less attention.

- It was very **hard to record spontaneous interactions between deaf people and either strangers or acquaintances outside of the context of customer interactions**, such as spontaneously meeting and greeting people on the street: in most instances the cameraman was unprepared or not present. For example, when Annelies and Sujit took an auto rickshaw to Andheri, to drop off the rented camera after a day of shooting, the driver started a conversation with Sujit, about a cricket match and about the upcoming elections. Sujit sat on the back bench so such a conversation would have been very difficult to film anyway, given the small size of autorickshaws, but it is a good example of spontaneous interactions that were not recorded although they could have provided interesting insights in gesture-based small talk. In the trains, it was more feasible to record such interactions, however in the trains there was the additional challenge that the team was able to get only limited permission to film.
- The movie only shows successful interactions: *Ishaare* shows how people often partially understand or misunderstand each other and need repetition or alternative ways of relaying info, but in the end, people usually understand each other. **What the camera did not capture were instances where deaf protagonists refrained from engaging in gesture-based interactions** because they expected in advance that they would not be successful. Mahesh, for example, was going to order tea for himself and the research team. Annelies asked for *kesar* milk instead of tea and Mahesh said he felt unconfident about ordering this, as there was no *kesar* milk in view at the tea stall so he would not be able to point. And Pradip, for example, takes what he called “a deaf interpreter” with him when he goes shopping for clothes (which the team tried to record but they were not allowed to film in the mall where Pradip went), which he feels to be much more difficult than buying edibles, for example. These are instances where it is important to acknowledge that the **video-recordings are but one part of the research project, in which only a limited and well-defined set of gesture-based interactions is captured**. They are located within the wider project also containing data gathered during the exploratory discussions in deaf clubs, interviews, informal conversations and field notes on Annelies’ and Sujit’s own gesture-based interactions.



- In the after-film discussions in stage 3 of the research, deaf people who watched the ethnographic film said it felt “true” and “natural” but also one-sided: they argued that the ethnographic film **only shows those examples where hearing people are cooperative**. During the six discussions in deaf clubs (three before and three after the production of *Ishaare*), deaf people reported instances where they were shooed away by vendors, dismissed, made to wait forever, or experienced other rude behavior. The film only shows those interactions where there is good-will to communicate. Perhaps hearing people were more inclined to behave because a camera was present. Therefore, people in the deaf clubs wondered what kind of results the team would have gotten when using hidden cameras instead of a very visible semi-professional camera. These comments are another example of how important it is to use multiple methods in a qualitative research project: these discussions made more clear what *Ishaare* is, and is not about: *Ishaare* is not about the full spectrum of deaf-hearing interactions in public space, but about the use of different strategies during deaf-hearing interactions that are featured by cooperation and willingness.
- Several viewers (both deaf and hearing) **wondered how natural the hearing interviewees’ replies** were, being suspicious particularly of some of the positive responses, such as the ones in the figures below. They wondered whether the presence of the camera had triggered people to utter those positive comments. Also, some



Figure: Screenshot of *Ishaare* where a man is saying that he thinks Reena is more smart than hearing people.



Figure: Interview with two customers at Café Coffee Day who say they go to this particular branch because of the deaf staff.

deaf people wondered whether the translations were correct. Still, the wide range of different attitudes of hearing people towards deaf people (going from pity to admiration), was also identified in a previous research project with deaf people in urban India, *without presence of a camera* (Friedner 2015).

- **It was tried to record the use of (co-speech) gesture between hearing people;** so as to give the viewers of *Ishaare* an impression (even if it's only a fleeting one) of the difference between the use of gestures in hearing-hearing communication and in deaf-hearing communication. Annelies sent the cameramen out (in pairs) to several locations within the city (including the central areas such as Fort and Colaba, and the Northern suburbs such as Kalyan), to record the use of gestures between hearing people. The cameramen reported that this was very hard especially as it was just two of them rather than the full team: people mistrusted them, were suspicious of the large camera, asked why they were filming, and it was hard to catch the occasional gesture. However, by using the zoom-function and by making multiple trips, they were able to make a good number of recordings of hearing gestures, which can be seen in the film's intro and sequences in between chapters.

## Transcriptions and analysis

The process of transcribing and translating the videos started immediately after filming commenced: Annelies created shotlists that included information on the location, kind of images, description of the images, and notes on their quality. Sujit translated the deaf club discussions and the deaf interviews, and Amaresh translated interviews with hearing people, to written English; using the software tools ELAN and Transcriptions. Transcriptions of videos containing gesture-based interactions, done by Amaresh, were more challenging. Since Annelies had a particular interest in multi-modality, communication strategies, language/modality choices, and overlap between gestures and speech/writing, the transcriptions had to be done in such a way as to help in this study. In order to make this possible, transcriptions were recorded on different tiers, each tier representing a particular modality. For instance, all gestures by the deaf participant were recorded on a tier, and all gestures by the hearing vendor were recorded on a separate tier. Separate tiers were also made for mouthing and speech. (see figure) Some interactions also featured an additional participant in the scene. Such cases were dealt with by introducing a separate tier for that participant.

The screenshot displays the ELAN software interface. At the top, a menu bar includes 'Bestand', 'Bewerken', 'Annotatie', 'Tier', 'Type', 'Zoeken', 'Bekijken', 'Opties', 'Venster', and 'Help'. The main window shows a video of a man in a blue checkered shirt gesturing to a man in a red and black uniform behind a counter. To the right of the video are control panels for 'Volume' (set to 100) and 'Snelheid' (set to 100). Below the video is a timeline with playback controls and a 'Selectie' field. The bottom section is a multi-tiered transcription timeline with the following tracks:

- D1-Gesture** (20): GC: "Yes, I will put it and give"
- D2-Gesture** (11): GC: "Shall I put all three in this cup?"
- H-Gesture** (20): GC: "Yes", GC: "Three... put three in it. Okay...", GC: "Alright"
- D1-Mouthe** (0)
- D2-Mouthe** (0)
- H-Mouthe** (1)
- Spreek** (18): SH: "HAAN" (Ye), SH: "TEEN, TEEN, TEEN, EK CUP ME TEEN" (T), SE: "THANK YO"

Figure: ELAN-window with transcription of a gesture-based interaction.



Since the aim was not to do a phonological/morphological/syntactical analysis of gestural interactions, **semantic interpretation** was used to annotate gestures. That means, the **meaning** of the gestures was tagged for that gesture and not the actual gloss for the gesture (see figure). While transcribing, unique codes were developed to tag the actions. For example, if the participants wrote on paper with a pen, the code ‘WPP’ was affixed, and if they wrote on their palm using their index finger, then the code ‘WFH’ was used, and so on.

While tagging ‘Mouthing’, care was taken only to tag those actions where it was clear to Amaresh that the participant actually mouthed the word(s) in order to get the idea across. The tagging method was also used to tag mouthings in different languages. For example, the participant used English, Hindi, or Marathi, which were tagged by affixing the codes ‘ME’, ‘MH’, and ‘MM’ respectively. A similar process was followed for transcribing speech.

During the process of analysis, Annelies watched all videos of gesture-based interactions in ELAN along with the transcriptions, and when doing so, she paid close attention to the different tiers; creating an Excel document summarizing strategies and actions of deaf and hearing interlocutors, making notes on whether speech/gesture/mouthings overlap or not (see figure) and notes on which parts seemed suitable, representative and/or interesting to include in *Ishaare*. Creating this Excel document helped Annelies to make sure that she closely observed every step and strategy in interactions. In addition, extensive notes were made in a Word document, including further thoughts, observations, remarks, starting the process of theorizing and synthesis by comparing instances, noting specific strategies or instances, and so on.

Mahesh VP Borivli-51	says that he doesn't hear, sells pens / shows pens	says he already has the pens	hearing speech and gesture overlap
	shows more pens	shakes and says in hindi that he doesnt war	hearing speaks more than gesture
	gestures to ask if he doesnt need any pens	shakes head	hearing gestures more than speech
Mahesh VP Borivli-52	gestures he's deaf, sells pens similar to the ones in th	says in Hindi if he wants a pen and that he'l	hearing speaks without gesture
	shows pens	gestures that he has those and no one buys	hearing speaks more than gesture
	shows other pens (repeatedly) asks: "thats it?"	shakes head and says in hindi they already confirms	hearing speaks more than gesture hearing gestures without speech
Mahesh VP Borivli-72	shows pens	gestures he wants to see other pens and fa	hearing gesture and speech overlap
	shows pens	gestures to take it away	hearing gestures without speech
	shows pens	gestures to ask how much	hearing gestures without speech
	writes on paper how much	gestures to take it away	hearing gestures without speech
Bhiwandi Part 2 C1 065		asks what they are doing (filming)	hearing speech and gesture overlap
	gestures to keep quiet and asks what they want	asks for pen and paper	hearing gestures without speech
		talks to cameraman again	hearing speaks without gesture
	asks to pay attention	other hearing chooses earrings	hearing gestures without speech
	gives earrings	fat girl asks for pen and paper again	hearing gestures without speech
	gives pen and paper	writes	hearing writes
	writes back (a few words and gestures in combination)	confirm they understand	hearing gestures without speech
		replies in writing	hearing writes
	now explains that we are shooting a movie on deaf in	replies in writing	hearing writes
	explains the movie will not be in the theatre	gestures she wants a small bag for her earr	hearing gestures without speech
	gestures "2" to say its 20 (hindi mouth)		

Figure: Two excerpts of Excel document with analysis of gesture-based interactions.

Finally, all transcripts of interviews, discussion groups, as well as all field notes, and notes made during the analysis of the videos, were coded in Atlas.ti. During the process of writing, excerpts of interviews, field notes and discussion group data will be retrieved with the help of these codes.

The screenshot displays the Atlas.ti interface. On the left, a transcript of an interview is visible, with time stamps and text. On the right, a coding scheme is shown, consisting of a list of codes and their corresponding labels. The codes are: 'Int Male', 'Int new', 'Int H CCD', 'Hearing realise deafness - an...', 'IDEO gesture takes more time...', 'IDEO deaf-hearing communic...', 'IDEO ISL is not known by hear...', and 'IDEO through both ISL and sp...'. The transcript text includes questions and answers about visiting a CCD outlet, realizing deafness, and communicating with deaf people.

Figure: coding of an interview in Atlas.ti

## Structuring and editing the film

Since the choice of sequences which are included in *Ishaare* was based on the data analysis, the film's storyboard was created only about one year after the recordings. When Annelies finished analysing all data, she created a first draft of the storyboard in an Excel document, copy pasting parts of her analysis spreadsheet on which she had marked interesting/representative examples. Her aim was to include as much as possible variation in ways of communication and ideologies.

She planned for a number of key themes to be present in the film: the importance of context or particular spatial 'scripts' to understand gesture; interactions with strangers vs acquaintances; the role of (objects in) the particular location of interactions (such as vegetable stalls versus (coffee)shops where items are displayed behind glass, versus the Mumbai trains); the role of writing and mouthing/voicing; differences between gesture and ISL; the discourse range of gesture; and misunderstandings/miscommunications and how they are solved. Each theme was explored by more than one protagonist, but it is not the case that each theme was brought by each of the six protagonists.

Initially Annelies kept the six different cases separate in her first storyboard draft, but the eventual aim was to interweave the different cases with each other, following a specific thematic structure. Jorn Rijckaert (Visual Box), who has a Master in Film Studies and Visual Culture, initially edited the six cases separately (and each one was much too long: case 2, with the deaf-blind man, was the longest one: 45 minutes!). In the second stage of editing, Annelies and Jorn started interweaving the cases, carefully structuring the film so that the viewers would have enough information to grasp each situation and to be able to see the bigger (nuanced) picture. Furthermore, Jorn also paid attention to streamlining the time of the day in the images, (ie afternoon, evening, morning) so that there would not be a constant switch in the daylight/time of the day.

Whilst it would probably have been easier for Annelies and Visual Box to sit together regularly during the process of editing, this was physically not possible. Annelies was in Germany whilst Visual Box worked from their office in Belgium. However, the cooperation went very smoothly. To create the structure of the film, Visual Box (re)arranged the storyboard by printing screenshots and summaries and putting them on large whiteboards, and sent pictures of parts of the whiteboards to Annelies via Whatsapp in case of questions or in case of wanting feedback. So, working on the film in this way, editing, re-editing, moving sequences around, and

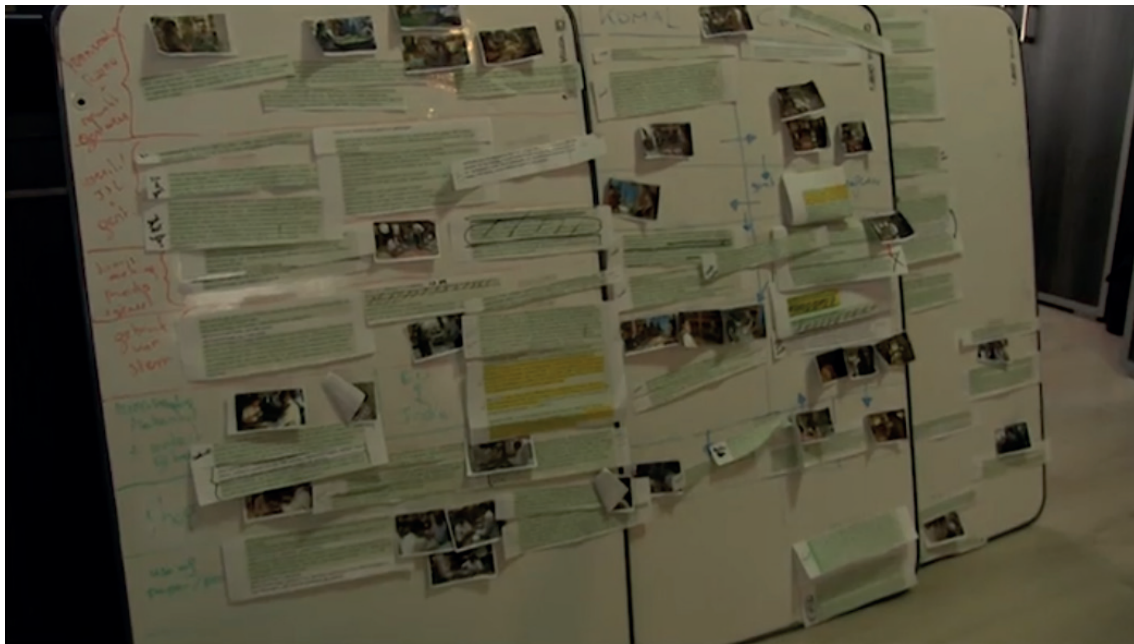


Figure: Visual Box' whiteboard with quotes, screenshots and descriptions of sequences of Ishaare.



restructuring the movie over and over again, the story of *Ishaare* started to take shape. Jorn regularly sent the Adobe Premiere file to Annelies for her to watch intermediary versions of *Ishaare*, and shorter sequences were filmed with smartphones and shared via Whatsapp in order to ensure quick communication.

After completing the first cut, the subtitles were added (see further), and Visual Box employed a hearing sound editor to streamline the sound. The soundtrack of the film was intentionally kept very simple and basic: only ambient sound from the environment, the voices of people interacting and so on, are included, and no other sounds (such as music or a guiding voice) were added. Thus, the sounds corresponded to the images on screen. Particularly since the editorial team, director, research team, protagonists are predominantly deaf, this felt as the most correct and logical way forward. There were two exceptions to this general pattern, though.

Firstly, at the end of the movie when the team is introduced to the viewers, an Indian music tune was added. Secondly, during the interviews with deaf persons (not the short interviews after gesture-based interactions, but the longer interviews), the sound was switched off. The reason for this was that there were a number of interviews with almost no sound, so the sound editor asked if she should switch off the sound in all those instances. Since there was no vocal component of communication, and the surroundings/background also were not of importance to the interview fragments, it was decided this could be interesting for hearing viewers, offering them the opportunity to go native in a sense. The idea behind this decision was that switching off the sound in these sequences is kind of a message that sign language (as opposing to gesture which is often combined with speech) is entirely visual and usually does not have/need a vocal component. Afterwards, it appeared that hearing viewers had mixed feelings: some of them didn't mind, others found it distracting/disturbing, yet others found it intriguing and positively surprising.

After the subtitling and sound editing, the film was showed to a test audience by uploading *Ishaare*, and providing the test audience with the link and a password to access it. The test audience consisted of ten deaf and hearing people in Flanders, India, and other countries; with and without prior knowledge of India; including experts on filmmaking, India, and Deaf Studies. They were asked for feedback such as on the pace and length of the film as a whole and of particular parts in particular; and on the subtitles.

The film is pretty long: 80 minutes. Several viewers (of the test audience and afterwards) have admitted they found it long though not necessarily "really too long". When they were asked which parts they would have removed, they did not have con-

crete suggestions as they felt the sequences were all necessary because of the way they had been interwoven in the film structure. The pace of the film is pretty fast, which balanced its length somewhat, but people felt some sequences were repetitive, particularly in the Bhiwandi (case 5) sequences “because they had already seen it all”. Cutting in the Bhiwandi sequences was no option for Annelies and Jorn since this case did not return in the concluding chapter on casual and informal conversation outside the context of customer interactions; and since Annelies and Visual Box wanted to include perspectives of children (ie. the school girls who were customers in the Bhiwandi shop), which were lacking in other parts of the film.

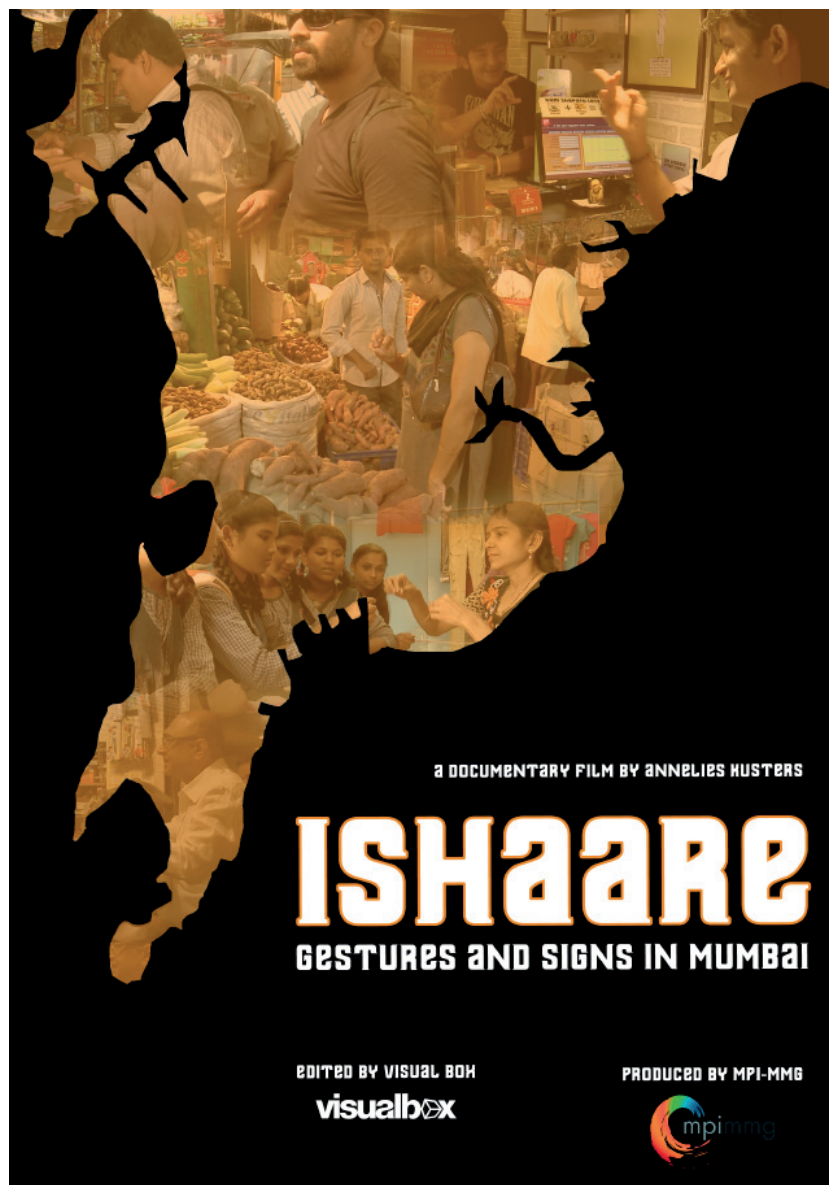


Figure: Poster of Ishaare

## Subtitling *Ishaare*

Subtitling *Ishaare* was one of the biggest challenges in its production. There were multiple decisions to be made as to how to subtitle, and what exactly to subtitle. Annelies decided to subtitle the movie in English since this would make the film accessible to as broad an audience as possible (though see some notes on access in the next section). Furthermore, she wanted to use the subtitles to give viewers as much information as possible as to how people communicate in gesture-based interactions and how they combine gesture with speech and writing. For example, sometimes people's speech overlapped with their gestures (communicating the same message in two different modalities); other times speech and gesture did not overlap (the person was communicating different but complementary messages in different modalities, such as writing a place name and then gesturing the directions). Gesturing and speech sometimes happened simultaneously, other times, people spoke/write before/after uttering particular gestures. And importantly, people speak/write/mouthe in different languages, mostly Hindi, Marathi and English. As mentioned above, all this information was present in the ELAN transcriptions. Annelies considered:

- using different formats for different languages (for example normal text for spoken English, bold for English translations of other spoken languages, italics for English translations of gestures, bold italics for English translations of ISL)
- using different font colors to indicate in the subtitles that people sometimes *voice* English/Hindi/Marathi but other times only *mouthe* or *write* words (for many deaf viewers, the difference would not be apparent when watching *Ishaare*).
- positioning subtitles on the interactant (to make clear who was saying what, and also to deal with the fact that sometimes two or more people talked/gestured at the same time)
- using two different lines of text (under each other) to indicate when speech/writing and gesture overlap and when they don't.

However, Annelies and Visual Box realised that even if they would find a way to include as much information as possible in the subtitles, it would be too much for viewers to take in: most probably, it would distract, confuse, and frustrate the viewers, rather than enlighten them. Thus the subtitles were strongly simplified: everything was subtitled in the same font, format and color. Description and analysis of linguistic details of gesture-based interactions will be disseminated in other ways such as during presentations and in publications.

Subtitles were positioned more to the right or to the left to indicate who was speaking/gesturing/signing, but overlapped in the middle; otherwise the viewer has to move his/her eyes too much, while time is of the essence when reading subtitles and simultaneously viewing the images. Like the semantic interpretation of gestures in ELAN, subtitles in *Ishaare* contain the *meaning* of what is said, and not *how* it is said. This way, the viewers get insight in which information is actually exchanged.



Figure: Positioning of subtitling to the right or left, with overlap of subtitles in the middle.

Visual Box inserted the subtitles, based on the ELAN and Transcription transcripts and saw that in particular parts, the subtitles were going too fast. Gesture-based interactions in the film often consist of pretty fast back-and-forth conversation with a lot of repetitions. Thus the subtitles were shortened, such as by not subtitling each occurrence of pointing, beckoning, nodding, shaking heads or greeting, and to leave out most of the repetitions (which are however crucial in gesture-based conversations). Here is an example: on the left is the first draft of subtitles, on the right the final, shortened version for the same sequence (*Ishaare* 00:17:39).



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>- Hey, does this go that way? To the tower. The Pagoda, the temple there?<br/>         * Yes, this one goes.<br/>         - Hey, how much is it?<br/>         * It's 50/-<br/>         - It's 50/-?<br/>         * Get the ticket over there.<br/>         - Over there? They said it's not there but over here.<br/>         * No, it's over there.</p> | <p>- Does this go to the Pagoda, the temple?<br/>         * Yes<br/>         - How much?<br/>         * It's 50/-.<br/>         Get the ticket over there.<br/>         - They sent me here.<br/>         * It's over there.</p> |
|---|--|

The subtitles in *Ishaare* combined information of different modalities, for example when a shopkeeper nods, points (=gestures), and says in English: “28 28 28” (=speech), he is subtitled as “Yes? It's 28” (“Yes” refers to the nod, “It's” to the pointing and “28” to “28 28 28”, which was shortened since repetitions were left out of the subtitles) (*Ishaare* 00:35:21).

Several viewers of the test version found this second version of the subtitles still too fast-paced, so in the final cut, Annelies further simplified and shortened the subtitles, such as by merging several utterances in less subtitles, and lengthening most subtitles' duration (subtitles should remain in-screen for at least 3-4 seconds, depending on their length). She left in a number of subtitles of pointing/nodding/beckoning though (“see there”, “yes”, “come”), because when viewers read the subtitles all the time, they can easily miss a nod or pointing in the conversation. What is missing from subtitles though, is what people write when they are writing on paper, hands and so on. When people wrote, it was simply subtitled as “(*writing*)”, in order to alert the viewer to the fact that writing was inherent to the conversation.

After the test run, “broken English” was also corrected in order to make the subtitles better readable and more agreeable to read especially for deaf viewers who were confused why the English in most of the subtitles was correct (as most of the subtitles were a *translation* of ISL, gesture, Hindi, Marathi) and not in those few examples (which were literal transcriptions of what people said). Subtitles in the final version of the movie were checked by an English editor at MPI-MMG.

Another challenging decision was whether and how to subtitle Amaresh' translations of hearing interviewees' utterances. As mentioned before, most of the translations were sequential rather than simultaneous, which means that a hearing person says something, Amaresh listens, then translates. Sometimes the signed translation partially overlapped with the spoken utterance. Also, because of the challenging pro-

cess of interpretation (as set out above), interpretation was not always literal. Thus one of the test-viewers suggested to also subtitle the interpreter and to use another color for speaker and interpreter in the cases of simultaneous interpretation. Subtitling both utterances (ie the original utterance and the translation) could have given some interesting insights in processes of translation, but also could have caused more confusion (and would have meant that these parts were more heavily subtitled whilst Jorn and Annelies wanted to simplify rather than complicate the subtitles). Instead it was decided to subtitle only what the hearing person said (ie the original source); and not Amaresh' translation instead, or in addition to this. A subtitle in italics saying "interpreting into Indian Sign Language" was inserted where Amaresh' translation does not overlap with the hearing speakers utterance, because some people watching the test-version said they felt they were "missing information" otherwise, since all other communication is subtitled. (see figure)

Adding "interpreting into Indian Sign Language" as a subtitle had another important implication: Indian Sign Language became named as such. In contrast, in interview fragments and in the title of the ethnographic film, a distinction was mostly made between "gestures" and "signs"; without naming "signs" as "Indian Sign Language". Calling "signs" "Indian Sign Language" implies that there is more than one sign language and that Indian Sign Language is specific to India.



Figure: Interview with subtitle "(interpreting into Indian Sign Language)"

## Access to *Ishaare*

People watching the final cut of *Ishaare* generally approved of the pace of the subtitles, but they felt they were so busy reading the subtitles that they could not watch the gesture-based interactions at the same time. In some parts of the film this problem is especially acute, such as where Reena and Mahesh give examples of how deaf people sign particular words or phrases and how hearing people would gesture these same words or phrases in other ways (*Ishaare* 00:09:48, 00:29:10, 01:04:25, 01:07:33). They demonstrate the difference but the viewers can't see it because they need to process the information in the subtitles. Several solutions were offered by viewers:

- People who were especially interested in the specific gestures and communicative strategies used, narrated that they either paused and rewinded on multiple occasions, or watched the film more than once: when having (half-) memorized the storyline, there is more time to watch the gestures.
- Yet another suggestion was to further simplify the subtitles, by subtitling only words and no sentences; or to leave out the subtitles for the gesture-based interactions altogether, in order to “force” the viewer to watch them. However, in that case, people who don't know Indian conventional gestures and marketing scripts would have a very hard time understanding these fast-paced interactions.
- A third suggestion was to add a voice-over in the film so that hearing people could listen and watch the gestures at the same time, a suggestion which was not adopted for several reasons: 1. One of the pillars of the movie is not to overtly privilege speech and voice over visual communication. 2. The intention was for the sound stream to be kept as simple/natural as possible and 3. Adding a voice-over felt unfair towards deaf non-Indian viewers, who also have to access the movie through the subtitles, and already miss information that hearing viewers can access through the sound stream (such as whether an interactant is voicing or only mouthing, and switches between spoken languages). The result is that hearing viewers of the film have more access to details on the language practices, particularly when they know (features of) English, Hindi, ISL and Indian conventional gestures.

Thus, altogether, *Ishaare* was significantly more accessible for people with a fluent command of Indian Sign Language, Indian gestures or English. Non-Indian deaf people who were not fluent in reading English felt they had difficulties accessing the film (and Annelies translated the subtitles to Dutch, her native language). The same was true for hearing viewers in India who did not know English well: during the screening for the group of parents of deaf children, the English subtitled interview

parts with deaf people (not the gesture-based interactions themselves) were voiced-over (live) into Hindi by Kinjal Shah, a hearing sign language interpreter who was sitting in the audience.

## Ishaare as a discussion tool: deaf people in Mumbai

The aim of stage 3 of the research, ie the field work in Mumbai in October and November 2015, was to use *Ishaare* in order to further elicit language ideologies, and to disseminate research findings to the Mumbai deaf community early on, in advance of starting the process of dissemination through writing. The idea was not merely to organise “feedback sessions” or “film discussions”, but also to further reflect on gesture-based interactions, using the movie as a tool to refer to during discussion, either in affirming or challenging ways.

This was an experimental and innovative aspect of the methodology, since audience reception of ethnographic documentary films is an under-researched method and theme (Rutten and Verstappen 2015). As Rutten and Verstappen (2015) document, an anthropological documentary can be received very differently by different audiences, and for filmmakers, screenings can lead to unexpected surprises about people’s reactions. Having screened an Indian documentary film on migrants in London, Rutten and Verstappen document a variety of reactions by a variety of audiences with different backgrounds (regarding class, nation, age, ethnic group, urban versus rural location and so on): recognition and identification, curiosity, feeling estranged, feeling certain parts are controversial or comical. Rutten and Verstappen (2015:416) state that “visual anthropology has much to gain from taking audiences seriously, not only as students that may learn something through our films, but also as teachers, who may have something important to say.”

Annelies and Sujit first organised a screening for the deaf community in Mumbai, in a hall that could seat 1000 people (to make the film accessible to as broad an audience as possible), and distributed tickets (funded by MPI-MMG) through several deaf clubs and organisations. The screening consisted of three parts: a 15-minute presentation in which the aim of the research and the ethnographic film were explained, then, *Ishaare* was showed, and then *The Making of Ishaare*.





Figure: Sujit and Annelies presenting the research framework during the premiere of Ishaare.



Figure: Audience waving their hands (= deaf way of applauding) after Ishaare's premiere.

The day after, Annelies and Sujit visited BFDW (the women's deaf association), and the next weekend IDS and YAD (the general and youth deaf associations) for 1,5-2 hours of discussion in groups that were manageable in numbers. The number of attendees varied between 30 and 100. Like the exploratory discussions in stage 1 of the project, these discussions were led mostly by Sujit (sometimes prompted by Annelies), although Annelies asked a few questions as well. Questions included: What were you thinking when you watched the film? What have you learned? What did you think of the interviews with hearing people?

Some people started telling about their experiences of gesture-based interactions, but that was not really what Annelies and Sujit were looking for, as they already had gathered such data in the exploratory discussions that were held in the clubs before the recordings. Yet, the film led to some further discussion of the difference between sign and gesture. It also appeared that the film had led to increased awareness about the importance of acquaintance and cooperation between interactants for the success of gesture-based interactions; several deaf people contrasted the film with negative experiences in daily life. Many people also came with suggestions for situations that also should be recorded to create a more complete picture: such as communication in banks (which they said is much more difficult than buying vegetables), at the doctor's, in villages, in families. A few people expressed that after watching *Ishaare*, they had a better understanding of emic perspectives on the difference between gesture and sign. People sometimes referred to specific excerpts in *Ishaare* when giving examples, and in this way having watched the film aided discussion. For example, there were a few comments on hearing perspectives that were portrayed in the film; expressing scepticism on some hearing people's positive utterances about deaf people.

However, interestingly, and against Annelies' and Sujit's expectations, most deaf people seemed to find it difficult to reflect on the film, especially in BFDW and IDS. While many of them enjoyed and applauded the film (such as "Very good", "The best!"), it seemed that many people couldn't explain what they found good or even what the movie was about. Annelies and Sujit had expected that the film would in fact be most accessible for deaf Indian signers because they were the only ones who would not need to read the subtitles (because deaf interviews were in ISL, gesture-based interactions were featuring deaf people, and hearing people's quotes were translated into ISL by the in-screen interpreter). However, while perhaps the language itself was accessible, a number of deaf Mumbaikars reported that they found it hard to identify the connecting thread in *Ishaare*; asking "What is the message?", "Where is the politics?", or saying that the point did not "hit" them.





Figure: After-film discussion at India Deaf Society

There is a tradition of documentary filmmaking in India, Discovery World sessions are screened on TV in India and many fiction films are subtitled in English on the TV (though because of generally limited English literacy rates among deaf people in Mumbai, subtitles only provide fragmentary access). A few news sessions do have an in-vision Indian Sign Language interpreter. Still, while deaf people do watch serials, documentaries, films, and news on the TV, they might not have the experience of fully accessing and critically watching documentary films. *Ishaare* is not a film in which a lot of guidance is given: the viewer has to look for the lead/structure themselves. Films produced by Indian deaf people either contain fiction and/or a very clear moral message such as “study well”, “save trees”, “don’t hit women”, “work hard”, “don’t cheat in exams”, “don’t cheat on your partner” “don’t throw rubbish on the street” and so on.

*Ishaare* in contrast was much more nuanced. The primary purpose of *Ishaare* was to portray underresearched communication strategies and “spreading a message” was not the first priority, though *Ishaare* could be (and has been) used in that way, such as to demonstrate that it is possible to communicate in gesture, and that speech

is not necessary in everyday interactions. Indeed, customer interactions and travel are the classic example that (ignorant) hearing people use when arguing that deaf people should be able to (or be taught to) speak (see *Ishaare* 00:20:40). Only a very small minority of deaf people seemed to understand that the film could be used to illustrate this, not only to hearing parents, teachers and lay people, but also to deaf people who were not confident using gestures rather than speech when communicating with shopkeepers for example.

Altogether, Annelies got the impression that one of the purposes of the movie was not reached to a satisfactory extent: letting research results flow back into the community by means of an accessible means of dissemination. This made Sujit and Annelies aware that it is necessary to organise presentations and workshops, engaging directly with the audience, rather than (only) making them the passive audience of a film: preceding the film with a 15-minute presentation was not enough to make the majority understand how the film was embedded within a research project. Another way to engage with this audience could be to produce a different style of film, with clearer guidance.

In this context it is very important to mention that in Mumbai, the concept “gesture” is still quite new (in stark contrast with the perspectives of many international viewers for whom “gesture versus sign” was an established way of looking at deaf-hearing and deaf-deaf communication). Indeed, while the *use* of gesture is widespread in India, the concept of gesture is less well-known: in emic discourses, hearing people’s gesturing was often called “(slow simple) signing”. In Hindi, the word for gestures/signs is one and the same: *Ishaare* (hence the title of the film). Often, deaf and hearing people’s *Ishaare* were distinguished by explaining that hearing’s *Ishaare* is often slower, bigger, more context-dependent and less specific; rather than by separating “gestures” and “signs” in different concepts. That being said, the concept of “gesture” was by no means absent in India and in the Mumbai deaf community, but it was definitely less established than in western deaf communities or in sign language research, for example.

Also, deaf people in Mumbai longed for comparisons. They were aware that the project was motivated by Annelies’ fascination on the contrast between the West and India, since she found that successful gesture-based interactions are much more common in India (and other countries in the global South) than in Europe. Some deaf Indian people said that it would have been enlightening if the film also included a depiction of gesture in Europe, rather than only being provided with a “mirror”.



During the after-film discussions it also appeared that a film made in the context of a research project can positively impact a community in ways unexpected or unpredicted by the researchers: deaf people in Mumbai valued *Ishaare* for certain aspects other than those the researchers regarded as central to the project:

- The most important impact or intervention for Mumbai deaf people was seeing Pradip, the deaf-blind protagonist, who made a lasting impression on many viewers: the movie has led to an enormous boost in deaf-blind awareness. Pradip is well known in the Mumbai deaf community but viewers expressed that even though they had conversed with Pradip or other deaf-blind people, and knew how to communicate using hands-on signing, they had no idea about how Pradip communicated with hearing people when he was on his own.
- The second most important impact was that many deaf people were extremely happy with the portrayal/recognition/attention for three deaf businesses (ie cases 4-6): many deaf people taking the stage in the deaf clubs told which other deaf-led businesses (such as pan-makers, a sandwich stall, a deaf rickshaw driver) they knew, and that these deaf people communicated in similar ways as the ones portrayed in *Ishaare*.
- Many deaf people appreciated that ISL and situations central to their everyday lives were captured in the movie.
- Others appreciated the portrayal of bargaining by deaf people in *Ishaare*, stating that deaf people should not be passive and submissive.
- Several people commented they were happy to see that a “Discovery Channel movie” was made on deaf people (although it was not the first of its kind, see for example *Beyond Silence*, a ethnographic film movie directed by Vidyut Latay in 2012 and recorded in Mumbai).

### Ishaare as a discussion tool: hearing people in Mumbai

After the discussion groups in deaf clubs, four film screenings and discussions with hearing people were organised: in each case, there was a pre-film discussion, then *Ishaare* was screened, and then a second discussion was organised. In contrast to deaf audiences, hearing audiences in India seemed to better “get” the film, perhaps because the film portrayed interactions by “others” and new insights, or because as hearing people they had better access and more exposure to more genres of films in general compared to deaf people.

Two of the discussions were with teachers and parents of deaf children respectively. Based upon many deaf people's experiences, teachers and parents of the deaf often believe very much in the need for deaf people to *speak* to be able to go to shops or to gain employment, and model their educational practices to this, to the extent of prohibiting the use of sign and gesture. The aim of targeting those groups was to demonstrate (with the ethnographic film) how deaf people navigate society if they do not speak and are not accompanied by hearing people who speak for them. The educational policy of the school that was selected is not straightforward in favor of or against one particular way of communication, but instead favorable of combining gesture, sign language, speech and so on. The school was chosen because it is one of the bigger and more well-known schools for the deaf in Mumbai.

In the pre-film discussions Sujit gathered perspectives on how the participants (8 parents and 8 teachers) thought deaf people communicate in the city, and on the difference between gesture and sign. While parents didn't have a clear idea about this difference, most teachers did. The conversation with teachers was enlightening because they had very specific experiences with, and perspectives on the use of gesture versus sign language. For example, they expressed that gestures are important to communicate with deaf children who use gestures at home and don't know ISL yet; and that they use gestures rather than ISL in informal conversations, using ISL when teaching particular concepts. The difference between gesture and ISL became clearer to them after viewing the movie even though they already had preconceived ideas on the difference, so in that aspect seeing the movie aided and further triggered the discussion. As for the parents, after the screening they had a better understanding of what could be regarded as differences between gestures and signs. The screening for parents was experienced as hugely eye-opening by them (for example, some of them said that they now felt more confident in letting their children going to shops), yet in the frame of the research this screening did not yield a lot of new data.

The two other film discussions were organised with lay people: a class of 15 students in a postgraduate course on community media, and a group of 11 friends and relatives of a neighbour of Sujit's parents. Both groups found the movie very educative and they said their pity for deaf people was replaced by respect or that they wanted to learn sign language. In the respect of data elicitation, the discussion with the media students was most enlightening, since several of them gave informed and detailed perspectives on gestural communication and were especially critical of perspectives in the interviews recorded with a range of customers at Café Coffee Day.

They said that some hearing interviewees were idealising their interactions with the deaf staff to that extent that it seemed theatrical.



Figure: Screening for group of hearing neighbours, in a neighbour's living room.



Figure: Discussion with group of teachers of the deaf.

Thus, the screenings and discussions were central in starting the process of dissemination in Mumbai; and different groups regarded different aspects of the film as eye-opening; and their reception of the film was eye-opening for the research team on its turn. The film discussions which were experienced as most fruitful to elicit research data were those with the deaf audiences, the hearing teachers, and the media students.

## Reception by international audiences

Reactions in Mumbai naturally differed from how international audiences experienced the film. The Internet link to the film was spread through social media and in 2015 and 2016 the film was screened during several film festivals in India, Europe and the US, and discussed in several academic settings in Europe and the US. The themes of feedback and discussion ranged from appreciation of the “real life feel” of the film, the nuance of its narrative, the detailed depiction of communicative strategies, the insights on the continuum of gesture and sign and on the wide discourse range of gesture, astonishment and wonderment about the contrast with the West, the deaf-blind man’s strategies, and the diversity of hearing people’s attitudes towards deaf people, signs and gestures.

Appreciation came from deaf people worldwide, sign linguists, sociolinguists of signed and spoken languages, anthropologists, and scholars who focus on India; who found the film a rich source for exploring language ideologies and language practices; also to be used when teaching. In 2016, the Society for Visual Anthropology (SVA) awarded *Ishaare* with the Jean Rouch award, given to exceptional anthropological films that demonstrate a commitment to collaboration with research subjects thus honoring Jean Rouch’s legacy of cinema verité and shared anthropology. By these audiences, *Ishaare* was thus valued for the collaborative process of producing it, and as a visual way of disseminating the project, to be watched in addition to, or instead of, reading (forthcoming) academic publications on the research project.

It seems that since the film is directed by a non-Indian academic researcher and edited by a non-Indian editor, non-Indian (academic) frames of reference (such as the strongly established distinction between gesture and sign) impact the film, and consequently impact the reception of the film by its various audiences.



## Conclusion

The most important methodological decisions that were made, and insights that were gained during the research, were:

- The combination of Indian/non-Indian and deaf/hearing backgrounds in the team; and the combination of the position of researcher and protagonist in Sujit's case proved to be very fruitful.
- Filmmaking was very fruitful in the frame of the wider project methodology: the exploratory discussions, after-film discussions and field notes on gesture-based interactions were important to help identify the contours of the recordings (ie: the film is about deaf-hearing gesture-based interactions where both parties are *confident* and/or *cooperative*); to judge "how true" the recorded data was to everyday life in Mumbai and beyond Mumbai; to include more perspectives than just the protagonists'; and to precede and complement data from the six case studies.
- One of the purposes of creating *Ishaare* was to produce a visual representation of, and access to the research findings, but the paradox of *Ishaare* is that most people can't really watch the visual communication because they are too busy reading the subtitles.
- Subtitling the film entailed many important decisions as to what, why and how to subtitle and thus which linguistic information is shared, unavoidably leading to differences in access to the language use in the film. For example, deaf Indians, deaf non-Indians, hearing Indians with a broad linguistic repertoire including Hindi and English, and deaf or hearing people who don't read English all have differential access. Detailed analysis of language choices and multimodality is offered through written publications.
- For many people in the Mumbai deaf community, the connecting thread and main points of *Ishaare*, as an ethnographic film with limited guidance and impacted by non-Indian frames of reference, were hard to access. The insights gained by the research need to be disseminated through further presentations in Mumbai.
- While Indian deaf and hearing people are the faces of *Ishaare*, the director and editors of the film are non-Indian, thus non-Indian frames of reference also impact the film.
- Using the film in a targeted way to elicit more data on language ideologies had mixed results: in some cases (the deaf audiences, teachers and media students) it

worked better than in others. Yet the after-film discussions were enlightening in every case, since different audiences received the film in different ways.

- There are several ways in which the research has benefitted the Mumbai deaf community: such benefits included the training of five deaf cameramen, the discussions in deaf clubs which were found entertaining/interesting by many; and people were inspired, educated, delighted or enlightened by certain aspects of *Ishaare* (most importantly deaf-blind communication, and recognition of deaf businesses).

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