

Wh-questions in the Trinidad & Tobago Signing Community

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Summary

Questions:

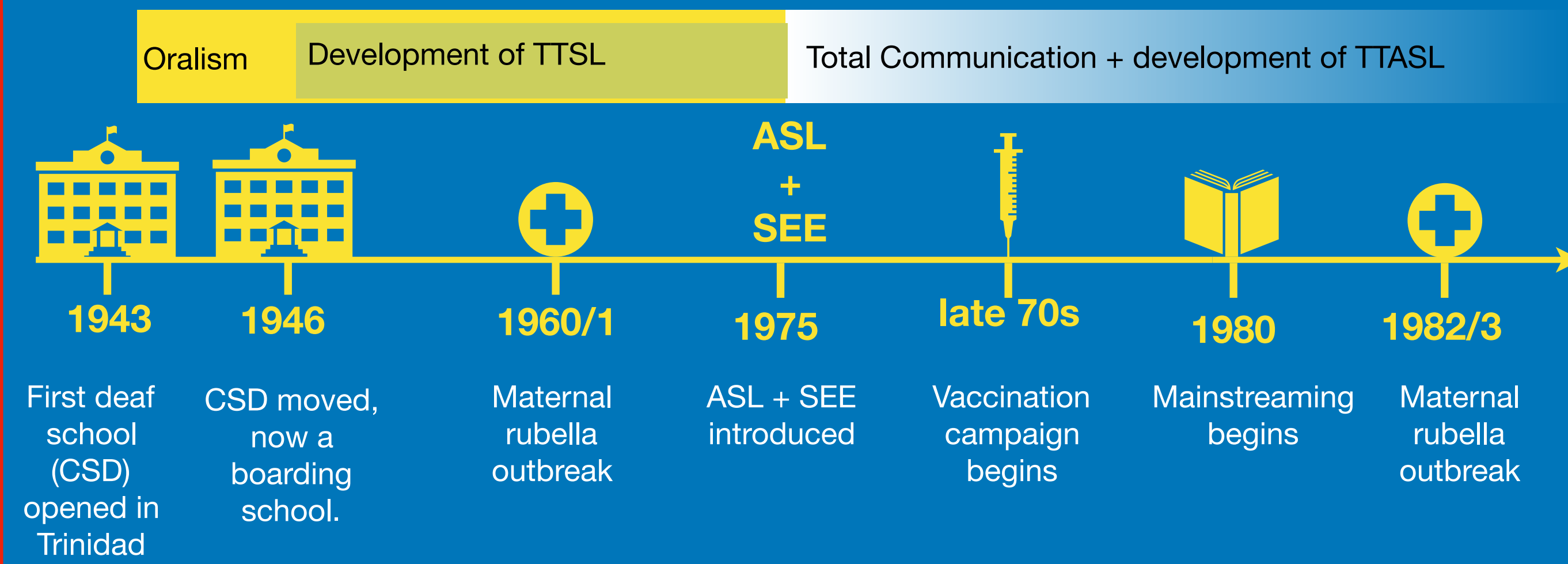
1. What do *wh*-questions look like in T&T?
2. What do *wh*-questions look like in a contact situation?

Motivation: *Wh*-questions in T&T and on Caribbean SLs are understudied.

Major findings:

1. Structures attested in sign language *wh*-typology attested in T&T
2. Lexical similarities between T&T signing and ASL could be due to contact

History of deaf education



Now

- Deaf population = ~2000
- Not all signers aware of different varieties in T&T
- In this poster, TTSL is that SL created at the CSD from 1946-75 and TTASL, that SL developing after 1975
- TTSL not formally taught, TT/ASL and SEE taught

Results

NMM = brow furrow + squint

- obligatory on *wh*-sign
- scopes across entire clause (3), minus topicalised constituents (4)
- can occur without manual *wh*-sign and mouthing in cases that seem to be conventionalised (1). Otherwise, at least *wh*-mouthing required (2).

(1) NM: _____*wh* (2*) NM: _____*wh*
MO: name MO: drink
IX₂ NAME IX₂ DRINK
"What is your name?" "Which drink is yours?"

(3) NM: _____*wh*
MO: happen
GIRL CRY WHAT
"Why is the girl crying?"

(4) _____*tp* _____*wh+chin up*
L-O-T-T-O WIN HOW.MUCH-2 HOW.MUCH-2
"How much did she win in the Lotto?"

Word order = clause-initial(5), -final(6) + duplicated(7). -final preferred

(5) WHO-1 EAT FISH ← rhetorical question form for signer 38

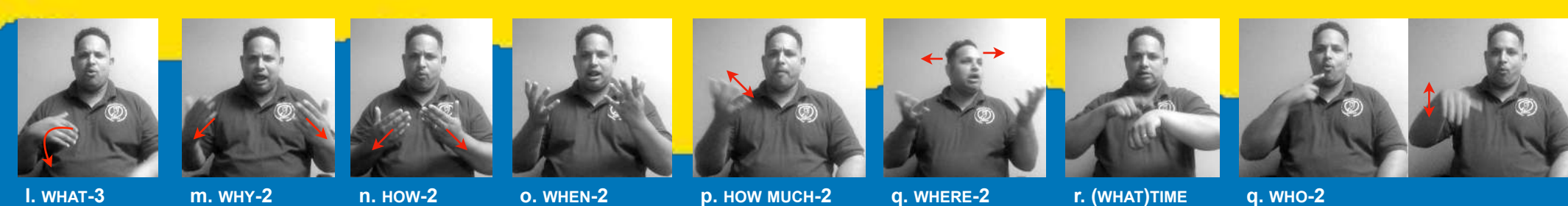
(6) FISH EAT WHO-2
"Who ate fish?"

(7) _____*wh* ← duplication only done by signer 23
WHY-1 GIRL CRY WHY-1
"Why is the girl crying?"

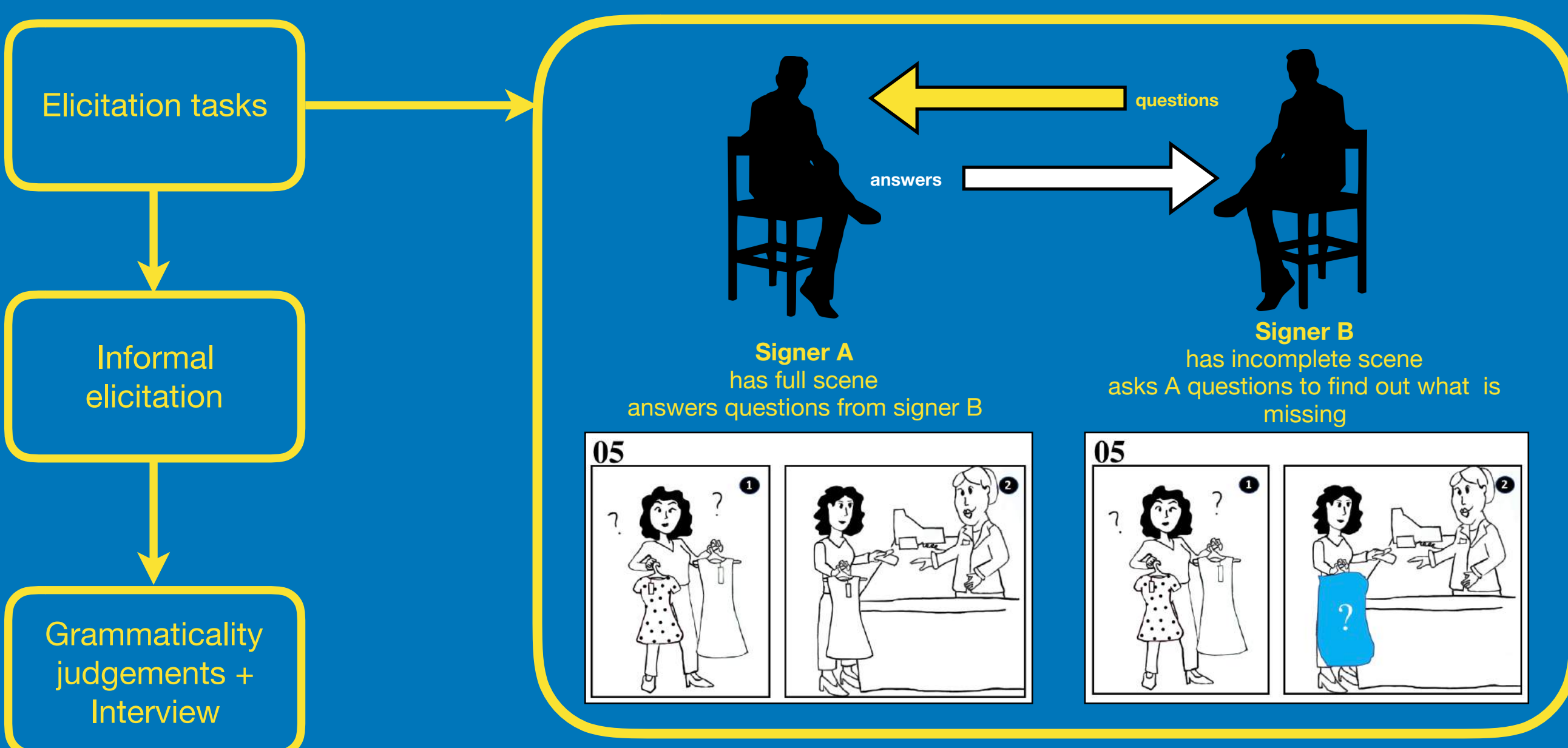
Wh-words: 2/3 signers produce a *wh*-paradigm resembling ASL



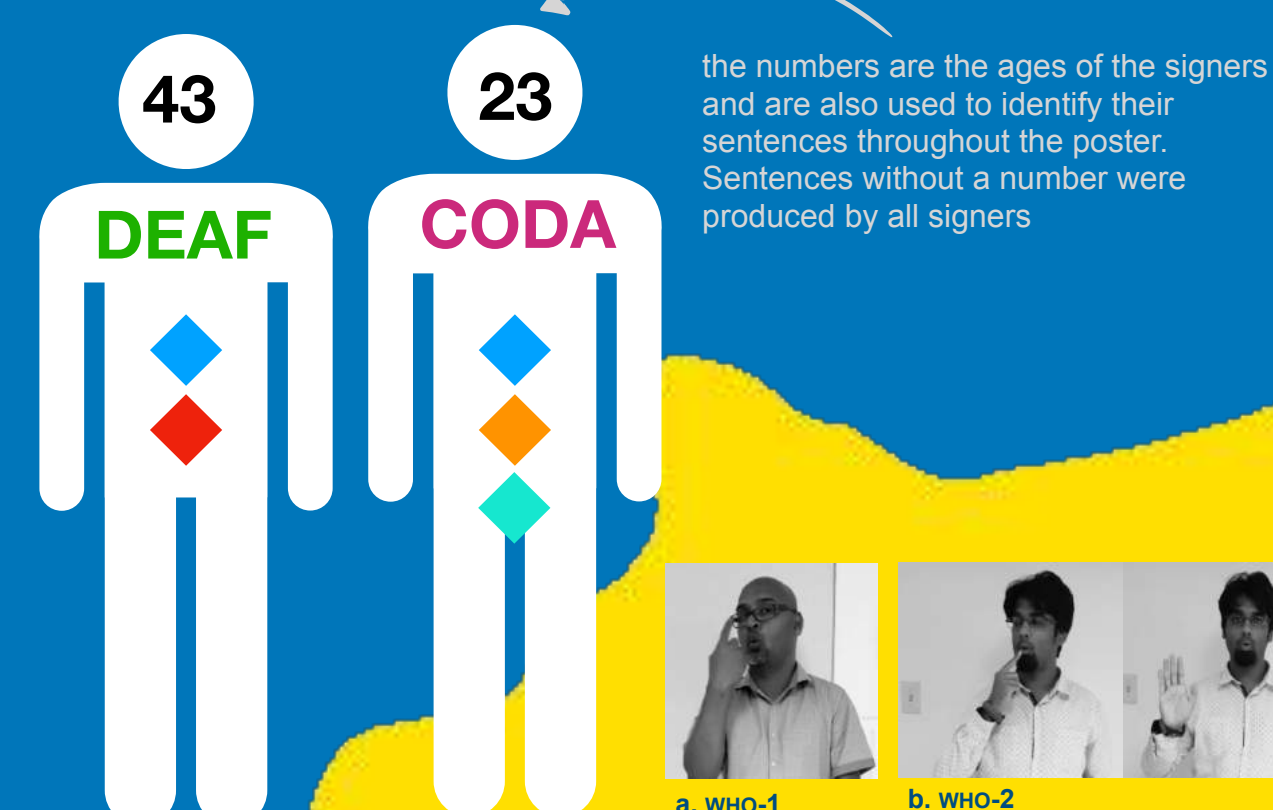
1/3 produce a smaller, different paradigm that mainly uses a flat palm combined with mouthings, with some movement and/or NMM



Method



Consultants



- Key
- ◆ TTSL
 - ◆ Deaf parents
 - ◆ TTASL
 - ◆ Trinidadian English/Creole

Discussion

Typology

- *Wh*-questions in T&T align with other sign languages
- There are 2 different *wh*-paradigms used by different groups of signers
 - According to Zeshan's (2006) typology, the ASL-like paradigm (TTASL) is type C i.e. idiosyncratic signs for each *wh*-word
 - the other paradigm (TTSL) looks like something between type B i.e. a general interrogative sign covers most of the *wh*-words (as in Brazilian SL + Japanese SL) and type C
- An almost identical 2-paradigm situation exists in New Zealand SL, which has a similar history of deaf education
- Mouthings are also used to disambiguate *wh*-signs by older signers of NZSL and in Yolngu SL (a shared SL)
- Maybe when SLs emerge when groups of deaf people must negotiate communication with hearing people, *wh*-handshapes will resemble the co-speech gesture that accompanies questions, and disambiguation left to other means, like mouthing

Contact

- Contact with ASL seems most apparent in the lexicon, since it is unlikely that TTASL would have developed exactly the same system on its own
- Similarities with ASL in the form of NMM could have arisen on their own because the same form is attested in other SLs; however, more research is needed to determine if the scope of NMM is the same as that of ASL
- Similarities in word order could also have arisen on their own since many SLs show the 3 word orders attested in T&T. The preference for clause-final position could be due to this being the natural position of the *wh*-word, as some have argued, or because of the influence of education



Get more details and find more of my work here! Presented at TISLR13 (Hamburg, September 26-28th, 2019)