



# Lexical changes in signs used by young deaf users of NGT

A poster presentation at 13<sup>th</sup> TISLR conference by Richard Cokart, Corline Koolhof & Trude Schermer

## Introduction

Like all other languages Nederlandse Gebarentaal (Sign Language of Netherlands, henceforth NGT) is prone to variation. Our previous studies (Cokart & Schermer 2013, Cokart et al 2016) investigated whether lexical items in NGT and syntactic structures have undergone changes over a certain period of time. Interestingly, we found age-related variation in both studies.

Around 2008 it was noted that deaf young people aged 16-20 years old in the Netherlands had been developing and using their own lexical signs for concepts related to their lifestyle and interest in contrast to previous generation signers. This has been attributed to the implementation of bilingual deaf education around 1995. A small study was conducted in 2009 to investigate this what at that time was labeled 'street language' in NGT (de Ronde et al 2010). In total 144 lexical items were found that were being used only by young deaf people aged 16 - 20. These signs were produced on a dvd-rom and were incorporated as a special variant in the online NGT dictionary of the Dutch Sign centre.

Fast-forwarding a decade later, the situation with respect to NGT is changed substantially. The bilingual model (NGT-Dutch) never took off as a full-fledged part of the curriculum in deaf education, as a consequence of the influx of children with a cochlear implant whom attend regular mainstream schools. Currently, bilingual education in both NGT and Dutch is only offered at three primary schools for the deaf in Haren, Sint-Michielsgestel and Rotterdam at a very modest level and one secondary school in Haren.

## Research question

The question was raised whether the current generation of deaf pupils in schools for the deaf, whom still have access to bilingual education in NGT and Dutch, and deaf pupils who attend regular mainstream education recognize and still use the lexical items we found in our 2009 study in a similar manner as 10 years ago. And in case these signs are still in use: are there any phonological or morphological changes? We started a pilot study and the first results are presented in this poster.

## Contact

r.cokart@gebarencentrum.nl  
c.koolhof@gebarencentrum.nl  
t.schermer@gebarencentrum.nl  
www.gbarencentrum.nl

## Methodology

### Participants:

- In total 7 participants aged 16-18 years old participated in this pilot study;
- 3 participants are deaf of deaf parents; all attend a secondary school for the deaf in Haren, all of them have contacts in the deaf community {DS1, DS2 and DS3 in graph}
  - 1 participant is deaf of deaf parents; attended a deaf primary school and is now attending a regular mainstream secondary school and is active in the deaf community {DDHS1 in graph}
  - 3 participants are deaf of hearing parents; all of them attend a regular mainstream secondary school;
    - 1 of them attended a primary school for the deaf in Utrecht until group 4, subsequently transferred to a regular primary school with interpreters; still has contacts in deaf community {HS1 in graph}
    - the second one attended a primary school for the deaf in Zoetermeer until group 2, subsequently transferred to a regular primary school with interpreters; still has contacts in deaf community {HS2 in graph}
    - and the third one (with CI) attended a primary school for the deaf in Utrecht until group 4, subsequently transferred to a regular elementary school without interpreters; rarely has contacts in deaf community {HS3 in graph}

All participants were interviewed and video taped by a deaf NGT researcher whom is a native signer. The participants were shown 158 clips in which a native signer signed a sentence containing the target lexical item. After each clip the researcher asked questions whether they recognize those signs, whether they still use them and whether they have another sign for the lexical item.

## Composition of 143 lexical items

Participants were shown 158 clips with 143 lexical items<sup>1</sup> which were divided in 4 categories;

- Category 1; 26 lexical items which are almost alike the standard signs except that they underwent a phonological change
- Category 2; 96 lexical items which are signed completely different compared to the standard signs
- Category 3; 11 lexical items with synonyms, all of them do have 2 or 3 synonyms that differ from the standard signs; totaling 26 different signs
- Category 4; 10 lexical items which could be classified as a slang. These lexical items contains a very specific meaning and is only used by young deaf people

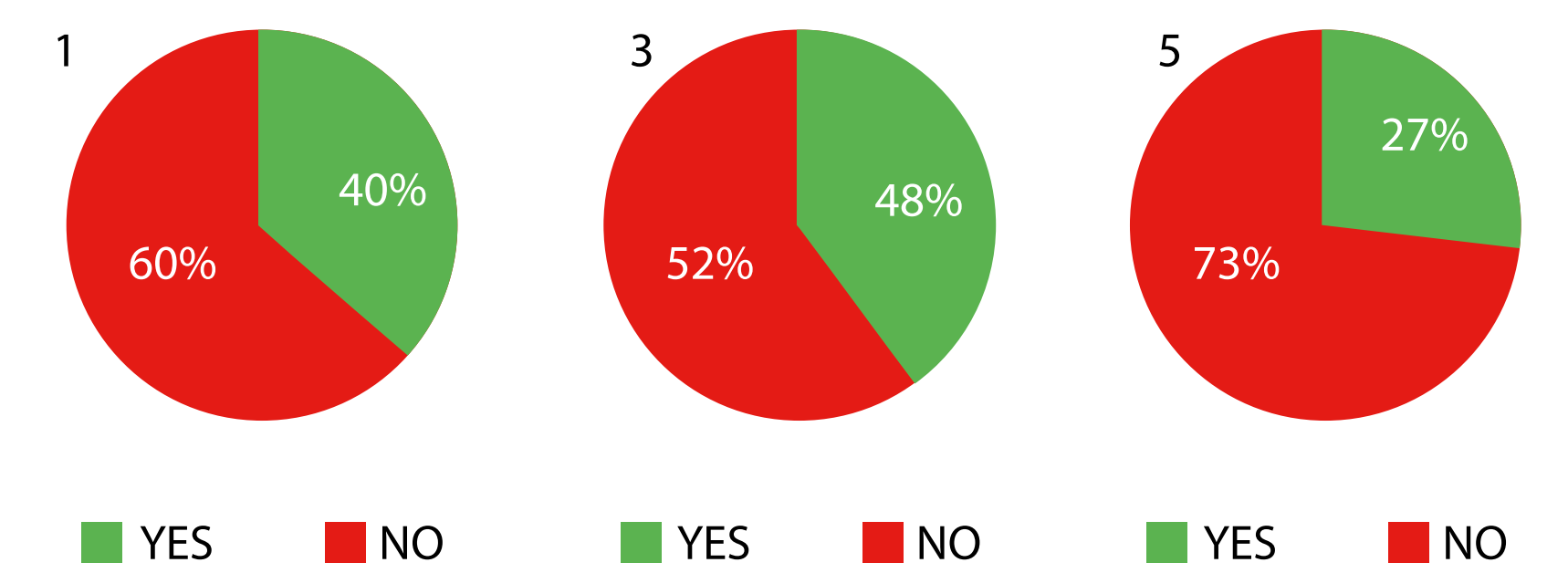
<sup>1</sup> One lexical item (BEEST [BEAST]) was not shown as it was a part of two compounds (as seen in VIESBEEST [DIRTYBEAST] and LIEGBEEST [LIARBEAST])

## References

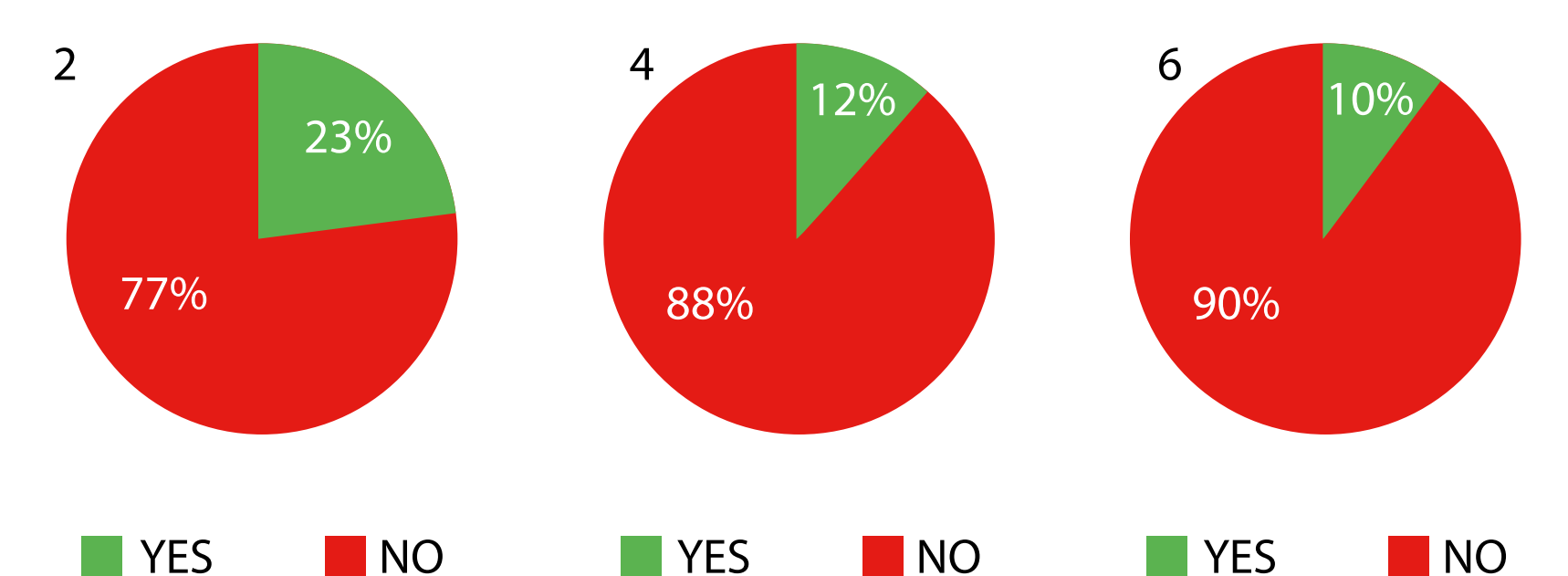
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## Results

### DO YOU RECOGNIZE?



### DO YOU STILL USE?



Graph 1 + 2: The average results of all 3 participants (DS1, DS2 and DS3) at deaf school for all 158 signs

Graph 3 + 4: The average result of deaf of deaf parent at regular school (DDHS1) for all 158 signs

Graph 5 + 6: The average results of all 3 participants (HS1, HS2 and HS3) at regular school for all 158 signs

## Conclusion

The data in this pilot research show us the following:

- Participants who attend a deaf secondary school recognize on average 40% of the signs used by deaf youth in 2008 which is more than participants who attend a regular secondary school whom only recognized 27% out of 158 signs
- Participants who attend a deaf secondary school still use on average 23% of the signs used by deaf youth in 2008 while participants who attend a regular secondary school only use 10% out of 158 signs
- One exception to the above is participant DDHS1 who recognized 48% of the signs; she however indicated that she only used 12% of the signs used in 2008. Participant DDHS1 probably recognized a high number of the signs used in 2008 because of the fact that she has a wide network in the deaf community
- One important outcome of the interviews is that the size of the network in the deaf community is an important indicator of how likely the participant is to recognize and use signs used by deaf youth in 2008
- This research also showed us how quickly the youth variant in NGT has changed over time; 97 signs (61%) out of 158 signs used in 2008 are not used at all anymore by this younger generation
- Furthermore, 49 signs (31%) out of 158 signs are not recognized at all by any of the participants and 26 signs (16%) out of 158 signs were recognized by only one participant from which we conclude that roughly half of the 158 signs are not recognized anymore by this generation of young deaf signers.
- A number of signs have undergone phonological changes such as RELAX and TO DARE TO DO
- We found only one instance of a sign which has undergone a morphological change: the sign used for KWAAD (PISSSED OFF) is now being used for MIJN BEST DOEN (DOING MY BEST)
- This research also provided us with a list of newly coined signs by the current deaf youth attending deaf secondary school
- Only one out of 10 possible slangs are still being used by both groups; WAT GEIL (HOW HORNY)