

# Foreign accent in sign language: Evidence from Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language



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TISLR 12

# Foreign accent

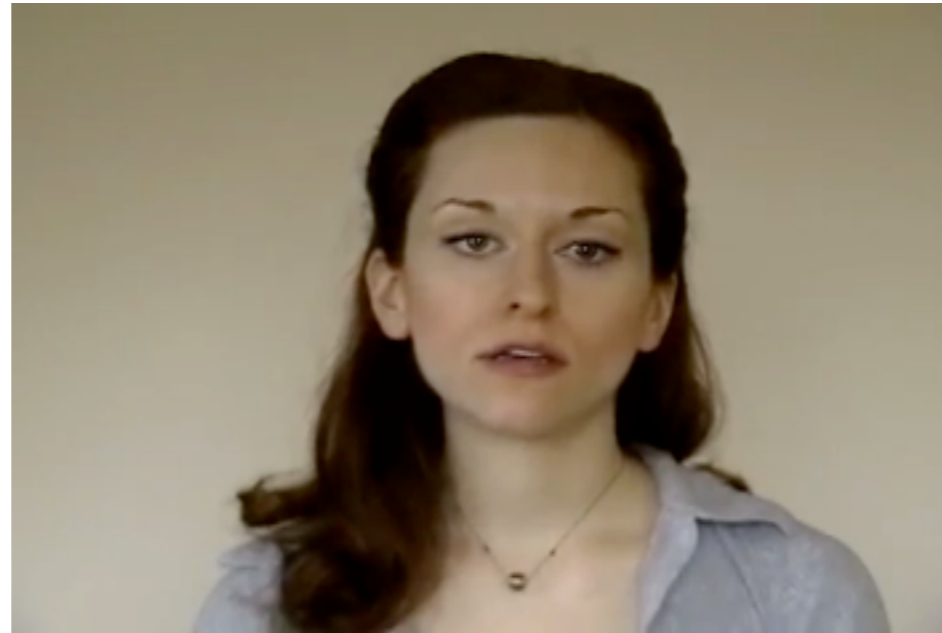
## Definition:

“Segmental, sub-segmental, and supra-segmental differences which distinguish the speech of native from that of non-native speakers.” (Flege 1981)

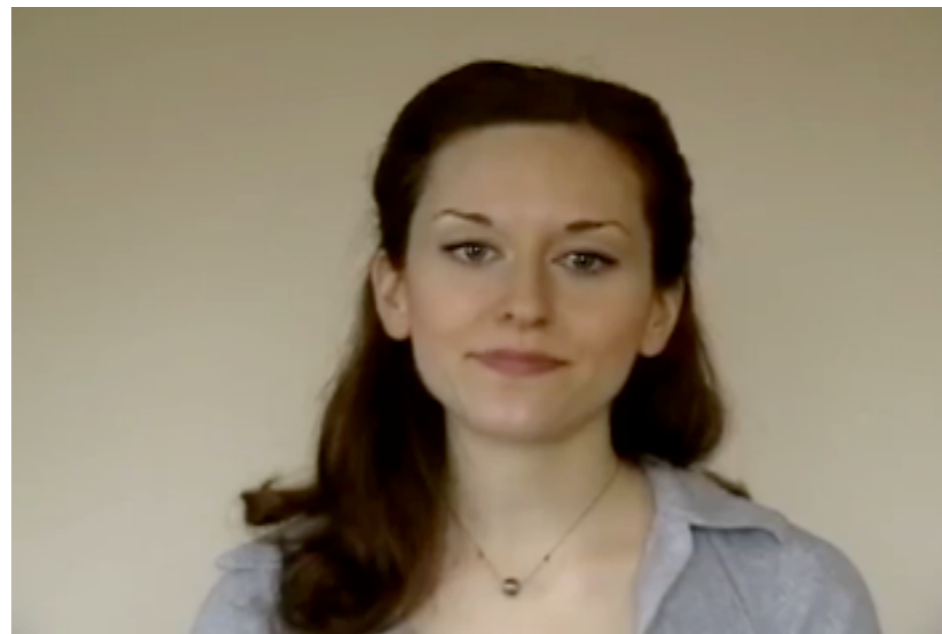
The linguistic term *foreign accent* describes a phenomenon in the fields of second language acquisition and phonology.

Speakers often transfer phonetic features, stress patterns and phonological processes from their language to a foreign language. Thus, foreign accent reveals information about the phonology of both the native and the foreign languages.

# Spoken Language



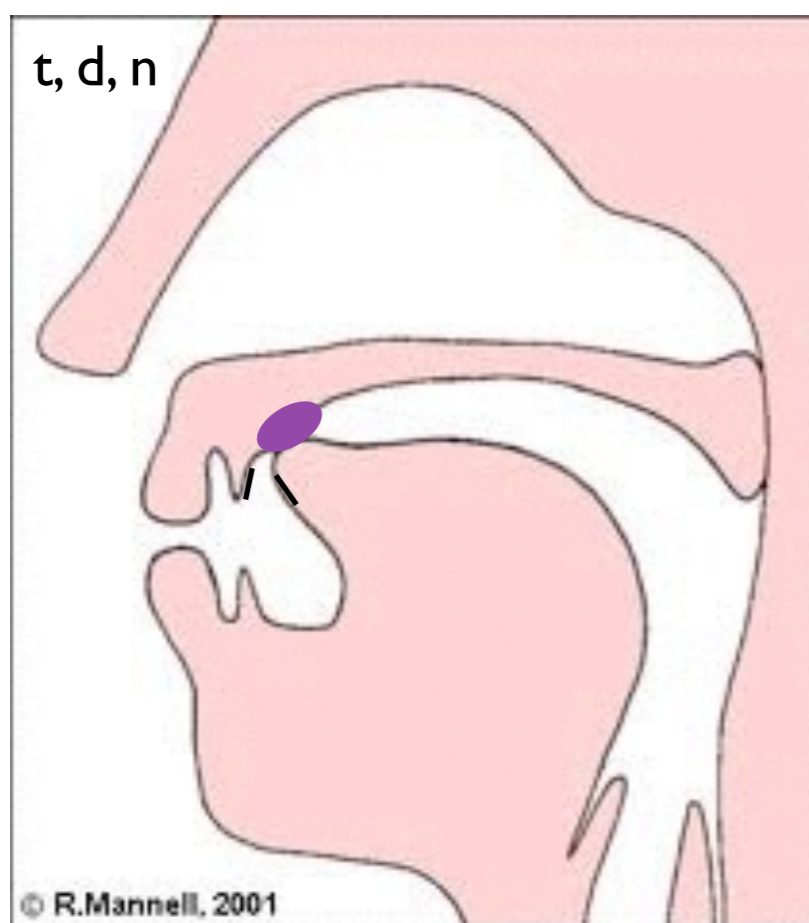
British accent (RP)



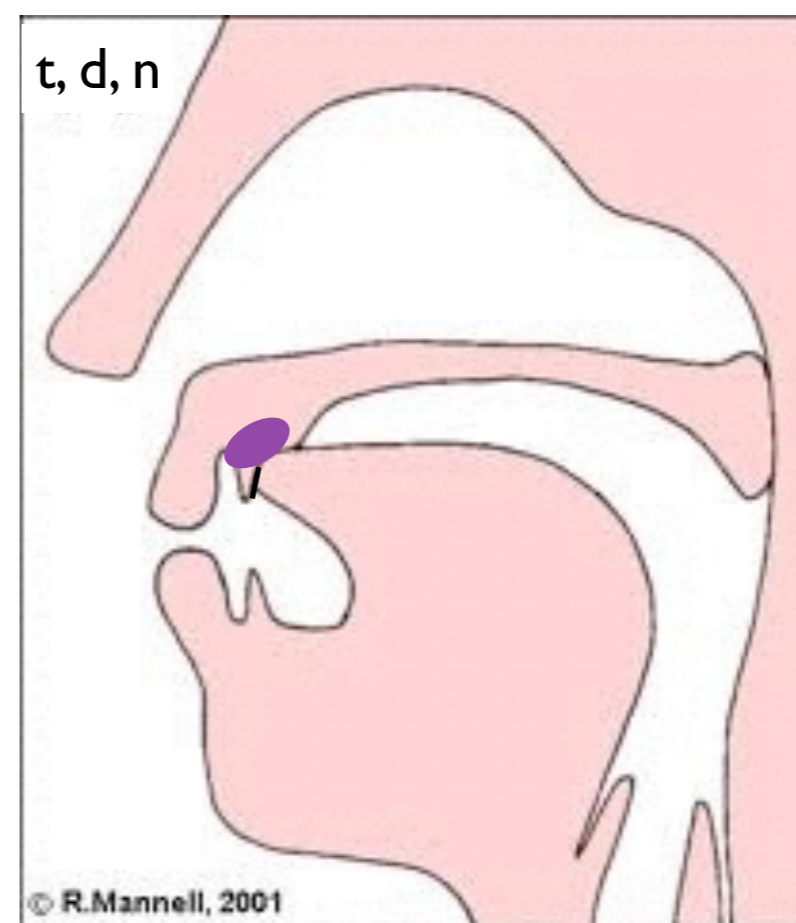
Australian accent

# Coronal stops (*Mannell 2001*)

**English coronals: alveolar**



**French coronals: dental**



# Foreign accent in sign language

“Not all sign languages look alike.” (*Klima and Bellugi 1979*)

‘A’ handshape: different production in two SLs



American Sign Language (ASL)



Chinese Sign Language (CSL)

# Foreign accent in sign language

Contact between the Sign Language of Mexico (LSM) and ASL signers (*Quinto-Pozos 2008*).

'F' handshape: different production in two SLs



ASL



LSM accent

# Foreign accent in sign language

How can we characterize *foreign accent* in sign language?

Israeli Sign Language (ISL)

&

Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language (ABSL)

# Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language (ABSL)

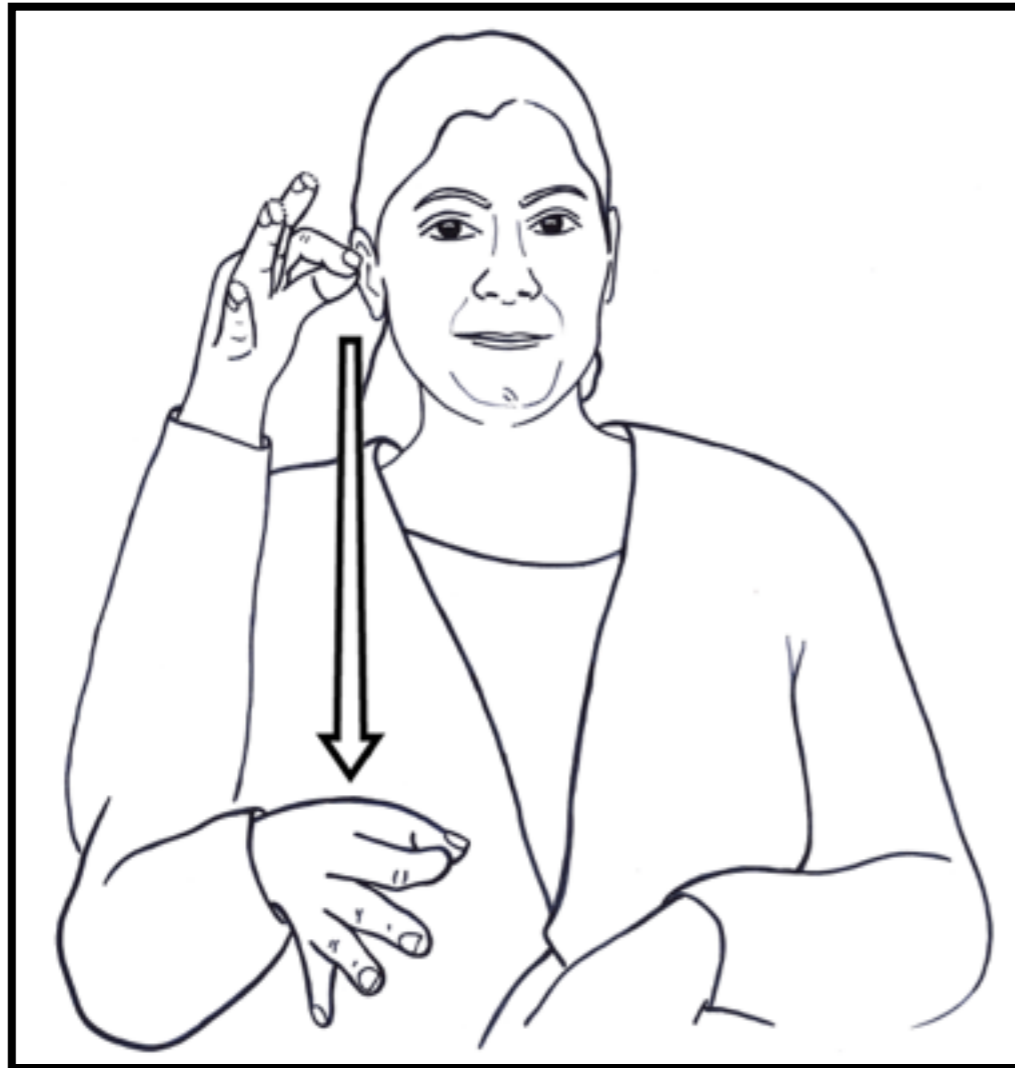
(Mark Aronoff, Irit Meir, Carol Padden, Wendy Sandler)

- First 4 deaf people were born 75-90 years ago.
- ~ 4500 residents.  
~ 130 deaf (Kisch 2012).
- ABSL second language of the village.
- Young generation - contact with ISL (mostly vocabulary).





# Foreign accent in sign language



ISL

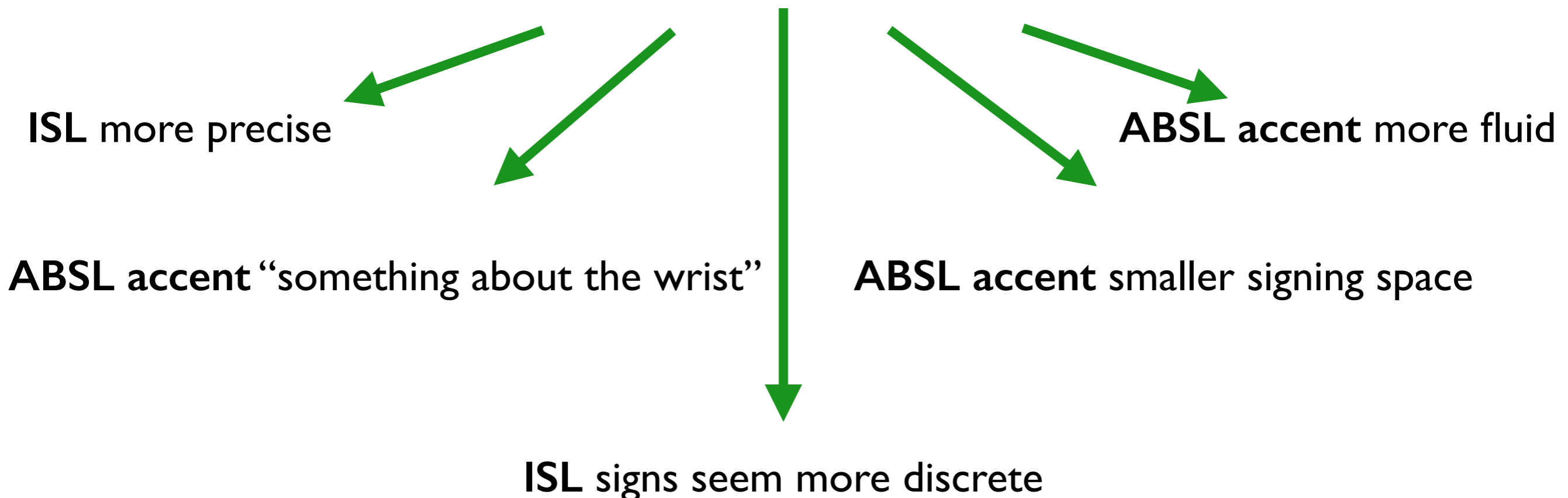


ABSL accent

**“It looks different.”**  
(ISL deaf consultants)

# First impression

“It looks different.”  
(ISL deaf consultants)



# Data

## 1. Citation forms

6 ISL signs borrowed into ABSL in vocabulary list.  
20 native signers; 7 ISL signers, 13 ABSL signers.

## 2. Narratives

2 ABSL female signers (~20 years)

Signed in their natural language - ABSL mixed with many ISL signs.

1 ISL female signer (~30)

Glossed and translated the narratives and signed them in her natural language - ISL.

The videotaped data were analyzed in phonetic detail and compared.

# Comparison

## Within signs

- Lax handshapes
- Back of hand salience
- Wrist breaks
- Movement simplification

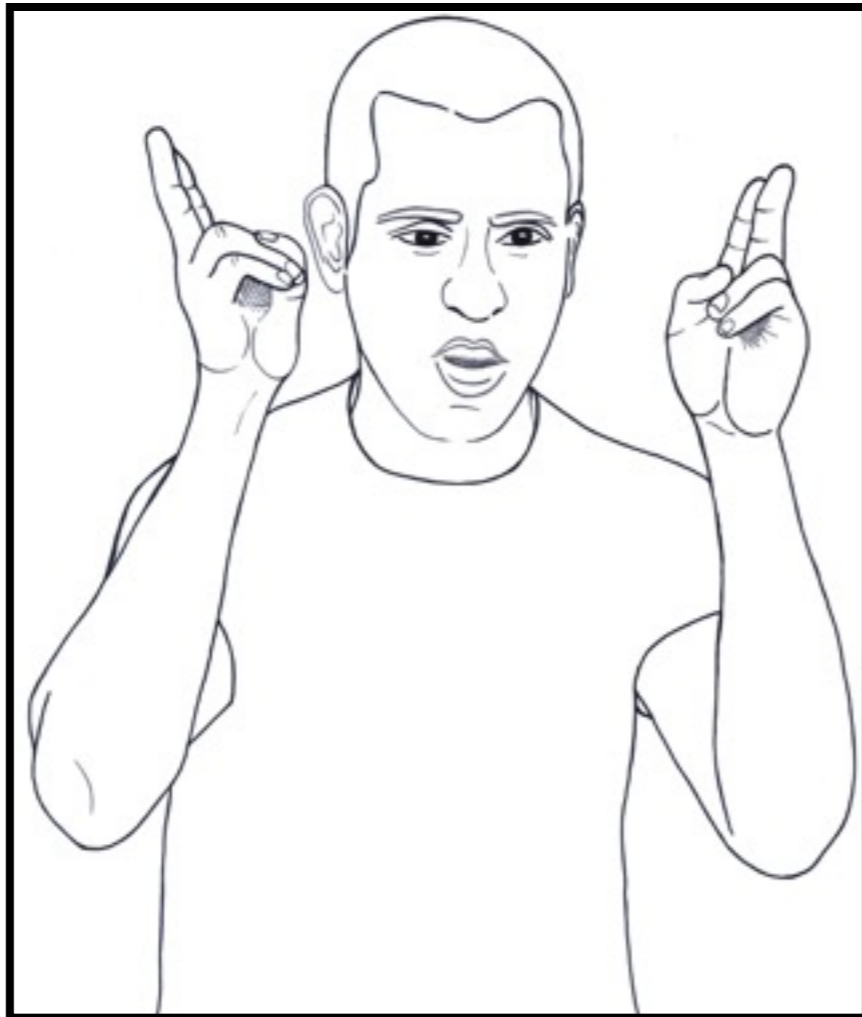
## Across signs

- Location assimilation
- Non-dominant hand mismatch

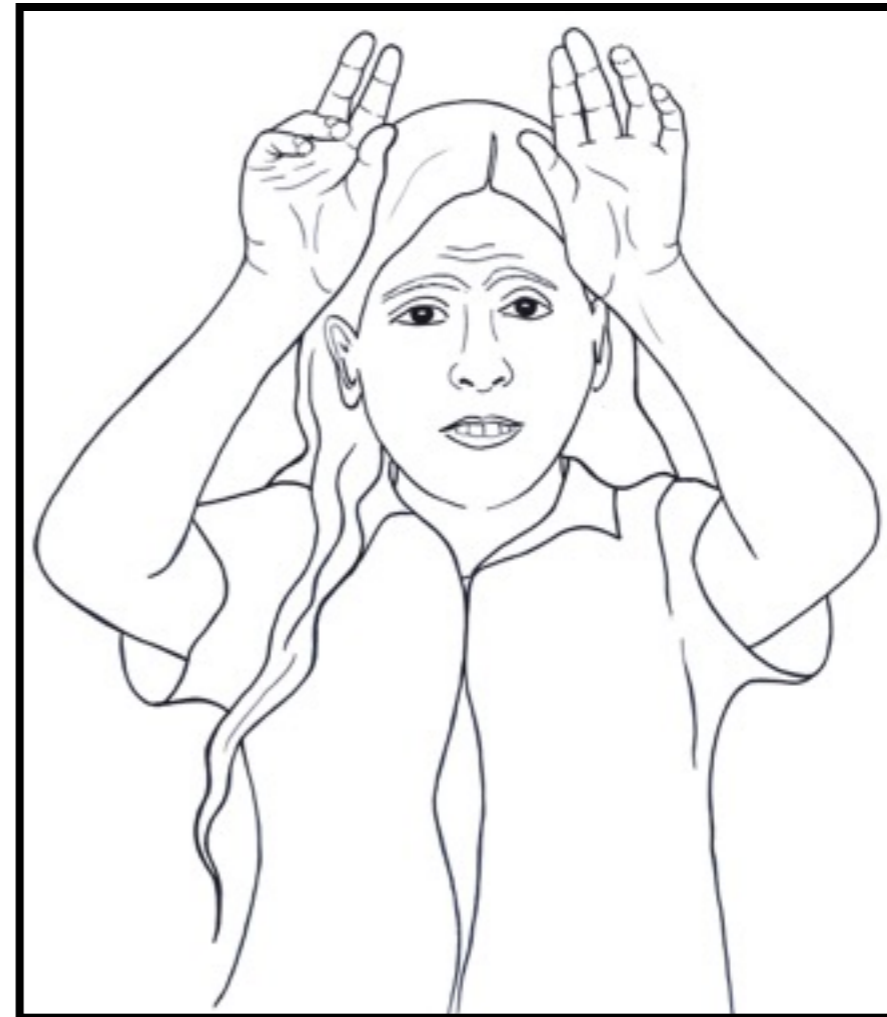
# Within signs

## Lax handshapes

Vocabulary: DONKEY



ISL

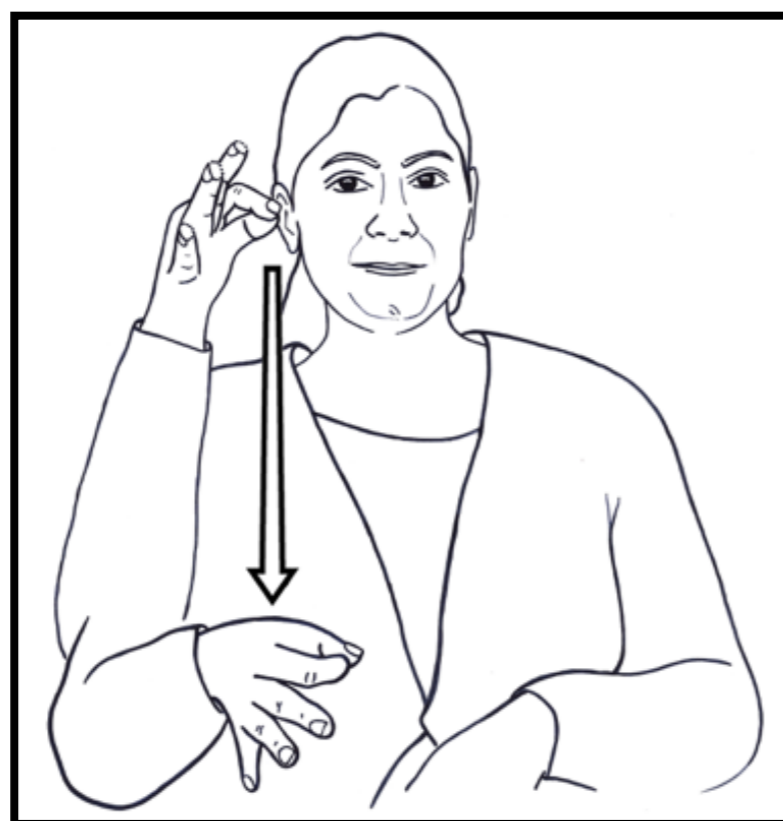


ABSL accent

# Within signs

## Back of hand salience

Narratives: EXACTLY



ISL



ABSL accent

	ISL	ABSL
Back of hand salience	38%	68.4%
<i>% of video frames</i>		

# Within signs

## Wrist break

Vocabulary: CUCUMBER



ISL



ASL accent

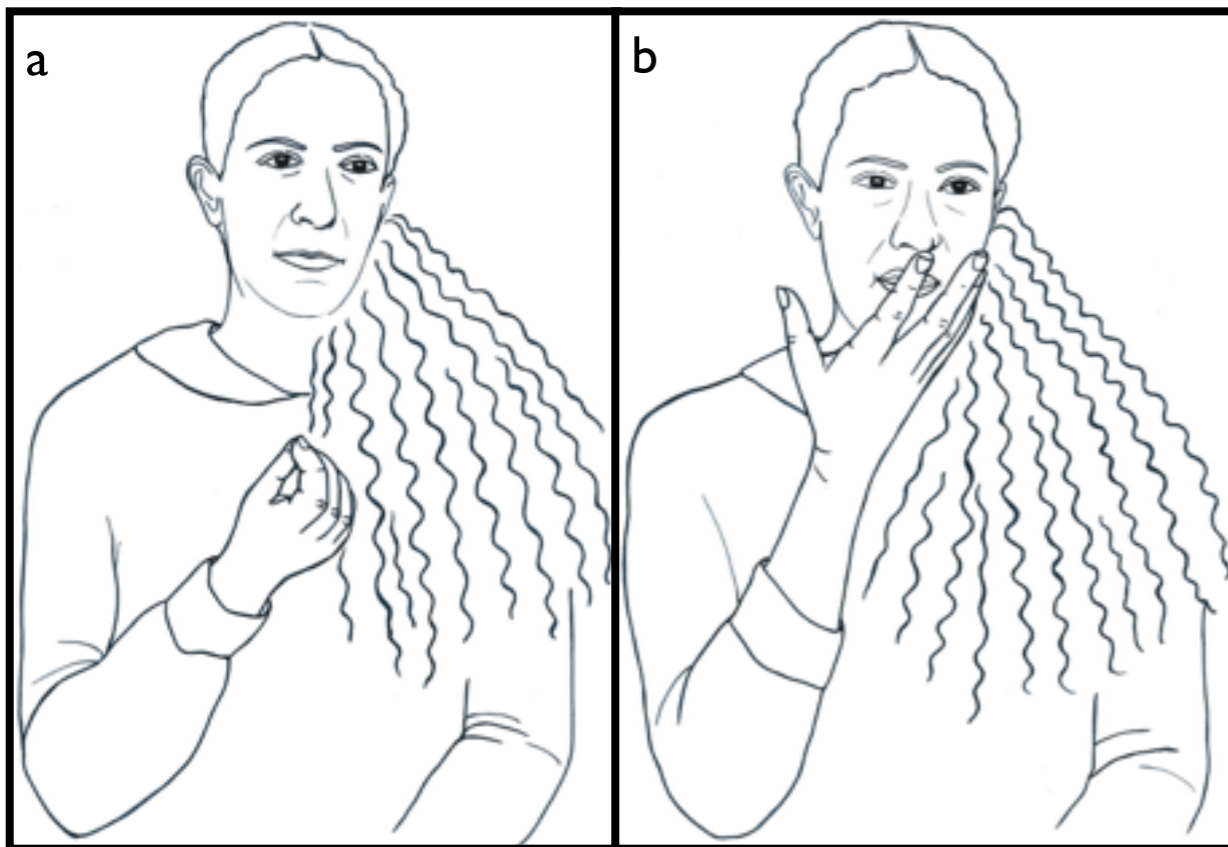
	ISL	ASL
Wrist break <i>% of video frames</i>	<b>34.70%</b>	<b>51.20%</b>

*Distalization (Brentari and Poizner 1994)*

# Within signs

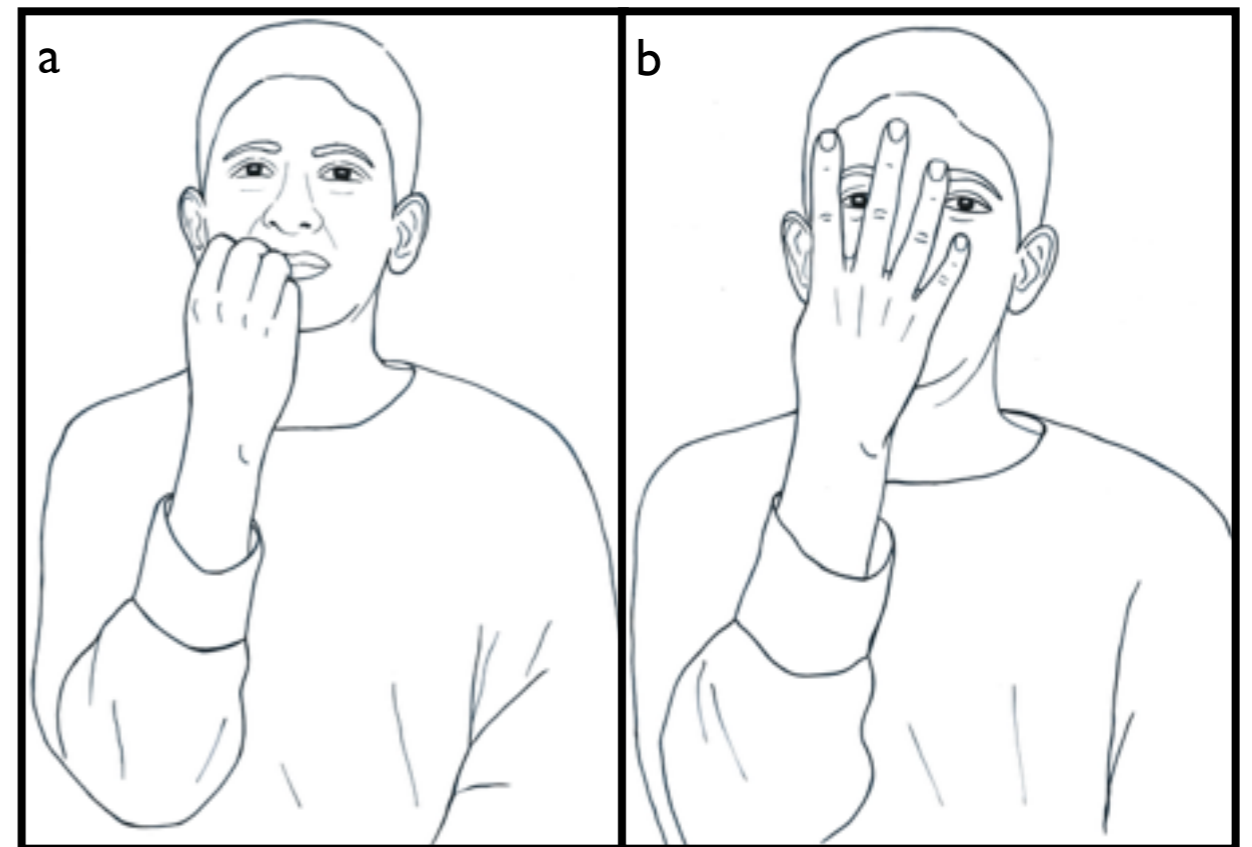
Movement simplification - less/no path movement.

Vocabulary: FLOWER



ISL

path + internal movement



ABSL accent

internal movement



# Across signs

## Location assimilation

- The location of a sign is not the location of its citation form but that of the preceding sign.
- This type of assimilation can result in smaller signing space and less discrete signs.

	ISL	ABSL
Location assimilation <i>% of video frames</i>	4.1%	15%

# Across signs

## Non-dominant hand (NDH) mismatch

**Anticipation:** NDH assumes handshape and location of the next two-handed sign before the dominant-hand starts the transitional movement.

**Perseveration:** NDH keeps its handshape after a two-handed sign, while the dominant hand signs the following one-handed sign.

	ISL	ABSL
Anticipation & Perseveration <i>% of two-handed signs</i>	<b>15.6%</b>	<b>52.5%</b>

## Anticipation



HOME LOOK APPEALING

## Perseveration



HOME CLEAN

## Non-dominant hand spread (NDHS) (*Nespor and Sandler 1999*)

Application of anticipation & perseveration of the NDH is restricted to the prosodic domain of a phonological phrase.

**NDHS does not cross constituent boundaries.**

**ABSL accent - NDH mismatch**  
**No clear regularity**

	ISL	ABSL
Anticipation & Perseveration <i>% of two-handed signs</i>	<b>15.6%</b>	<b>52.5%</b>

# Conclusion

“It looks different”

(ISL deaf consultants)

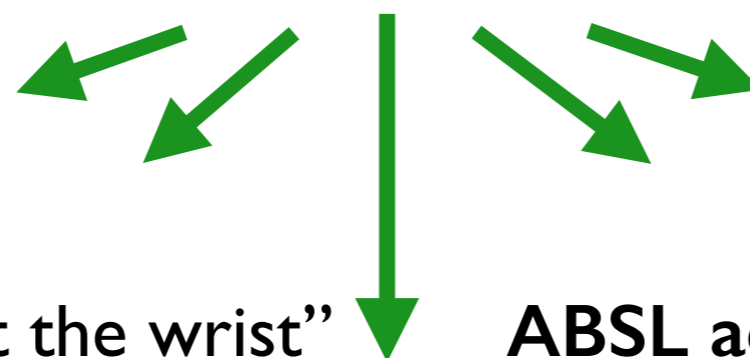
NDH mismatches in ABSL

Lax handshapes in ABSL

ISL more precise

NDH mismatches in ABSL

ABSL accent more fluid



ABSL accent “something about the wrist”

Wrist breaks in ABSL

Movement simplification in ABSL

ABSL accent smaller signing space

Movement simplification in ABSL

Location assimilation in ABSL

ISL signs seem more discrete

Lax handshapes in ABSL

Location assimilation in ABSL

NDH mismatches in ABSL

Back of hand salience in ABSL accent

# Conclusion

- We have identified parameters for analyzing foreign accent in sign language, which can serve others in investigating this phenomenon in other sign languages.
- ABSL does not have a crystallized phonological system (*Sandler et al 2011a*).

However, the community signals itself as a social group through a characteristic accent even before a phonological system has fully developed.

*“Systematic properties of speech production are determined not simply by the need to achieve lexical contrast...speakers not only produce lexical items in sufficiently distinct form that their message can be successfully conveyed to listeners, but in doing so...[they] signal aspects of their social identity.” (Docherty and Foulkes 2000)*

# Thank you!

## Acknowledgments

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# References

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