



# Toward Assignment 2

Nir Segal – February 27, 2026

Reading: Osborn, Lawrence (1999). A linguistic Big Bang. New York Times Magazine.

## The birth of a language

- What is the “ground zero” that Managua’s deaf children had to start from?
- What is the role of the teachers in the children’s development of a language?
- What is the deep problem of using a signed alphabet instead of a signed language?
- What is the distinguishing feature of signs that are “obvious enough”?
- What does the metaphor “being present at the Big Bang” mean?

## Exploring ISN

- What strategy does Kegl use to get insights into the children’s grammar?
- What system for verb agreement is described for the verb *speak*?
- What is a pidgin?
- What are the social dynamics of the linguistic development? Is there a leader, or is it “democratic”?
- In what sense do prepositions work like verbs in ISN?
- What is a name sign?

## Looking for a linguistic “bioprogram”

- What is the difference between younger and older signers? What motivates it?

- What is the difference between joining an ISN community very early and doing so later?
- Why is the case of ISN so important for our understanding of the human faculty of language?
- What kind of relation between the biological and instinctive component and the exposure to linguistic stimuli is highlighted?
- What is the “limbo” in which homesigners are stuck, according to Morford?

## A template to start writing about the reading

- (1) Choose any of the options below and complete the template.
- a. The case of the San Judas primary school.
  - b. The case of Villa Libertad.
  - c. The case of Winston and Anselmo Aleman.

In this paragraph/presentation, we’ll discuss the evidence that the case of the deaf children in Villa Libertad offers for understanding language as a human instinct and for its creative nature. When we say language is a human instinct, we mean \_\_\_\_\_.

The creative component of language refers to \_\_\_\_\_.

The NYT article reports the case of \_\_\_\_\_, who \_\_\_\_\_.

This case shows that language is a human instinct because \_\_\_\_\_.

... Moreover, \_\_\_\_\_ ...