

WH-QUESTIONS IN THE TRINIDAD & TOBAGO SIGNING COMMUNITY

Felicia Bisnath | LinG3 (5th-6th Feb 2020)



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OUTLINE

- ▶ motivation
- ▶ about signing in T&T
- ▶ method
 - ▶ consultants
 - ▶ method
- ▶ findings + data
- ▶ conclusion

WHY WH-QUESTIONS?

Typology

- ▶ good sentence type for cross-linguistic comparison because they can be assumed to exist in all languages (Mackenzie 2009: 1133)

WHY WH-QUESTIONS?

Possible locus of modality-based
typological difference

- ▶ in spoken languages, when there is wh-movement, it is primarily to the left
- ▶ in sign languages, rightward movement is available

WHY WH-QUESTIONS?

1

2

3

4



































	REFERENCES	left periphery (no doubling)	right periphery (no doubling)	doubled at left and right periphery	in situ (no doubling)	
American SL (ASL)	Petronio & Lillo-Martin 1997, Neidle et al. 2000	yes 	yes 	yes 	yes 	
Australian SL (Auslan)	Johnston & Schembri 2007	yes 	no	yes 	yes 	
Austrian SL (Österreichische Gebärdensprache, ÖGS)	Schalber 2006	yes 	no	(yes) 	—	
Brazilian SL (Língua de Sinais Brasileira, LSB)	Müller de Quadros 2006	yes 	yes 	yes 	—	
Croatian SL (Hrvatski Znakovni Jezik, HZJ)	Kuhn & Wilbur 2006	yes 	yes 	yes 	—	
Finnish SL (FinSL)	Savolainen 2006	yes 	yes 	—	no	
Hong Kong SL (HKSG)	Tang 2006	no	yes 	no	yes 	
Indo-Pakistani SL (IPSL) ^a	Zeshan 2003, Pfau 2004, Aboh & Pfau 2009, Aboh et al. 2006	no	yes 	no	no	
Israeli SL (ISL)	Meir 2006	(no)	yes 	yes 	—	
Italian SL (LIS)	this study	no	yes 	no	(yes) 	
Japanese SL (Nihon-Shuwa, NS)	Morgan 2006	(yes) 	yes 	(yes) 	(yes) 	
New Zealand SL (NZSL)	McKee 2006	(yes) 	yes 	yes 	—	
SL of the Netherlands (Nederlandse Gebarentaal, NGT)	Aboh & Pfau 2009	(yes) 	yes 	(yes) 	—	

TABLE 1. Position of WH-items in sign languages.

Key

no: WH-item cannot occur in this position

(no): not a natural position for WH-item

yes: WH-item can occur in this position

(yes): WH-item can occur in this position, though not commonly

—: not reported whether WH-item can occur in this position

^a Indo-Pakistani Sign Language is also referred to as Indian Sign Language by Gordon (2005) and Aboh, Pfau, and Zeshan (2006). Here, we follow Pfau (2004) and Zeshan (2003) in using the name Indo-Pakistani Sign Language.

1 left periphery only

2 right periphery only

3 doubled at the left + right

4 in situ

WH-QUESTION FORMS IN ASL

(1) *Which book did Mary read yesterday?*

a. **WH-in situ**

_____ wh
MARY IX_i READ **WHICH BOOK** YESTERDAY

b. **WH-R²**

(_____) wh
MARY IX_i READ YESTERDAY **WHICH BOOK**

c. **WH-Double**

_____ wh
WHICH BOOK MARY IX_i READ YESTERDAY **WHICH**

d. **WH-L**

_____ wh
WHICH BOOK MARY IX_i READ YESTERDAY

WH-MOVEMENT IN THE SL LITERATURE

- ▶ In the ASL literature there has been debate about which periphery wh-words move to
 - ▶ Petronio & Lillo-Martin (1997) argue for the left
 - ▶ Neidle et al. (1998) argue for the right
- ▶ These groups disagree about the data itself

WH-MOVEMENT IN THE SL LITERATURE

- ▶ Abner (2011) → different patterns have different semantic properties
 - ▶ in situ = standard question form
 - ▶ wh-R = same properties as clefts
 - ▶ duplicated = emphatic focus

WH-MOVEMENT IN THE SL LITERATURE

- ▶ Cecchetto et. al (2009)
 - ▶ argue that the right periphery is the natural position of the wh-word in Italian Sign Language (LIS)
 - ▶ when movement does not occur, wh-dependency is marked by wh-NMM
 - ▶ rightward movement happens because it is cognitively easier

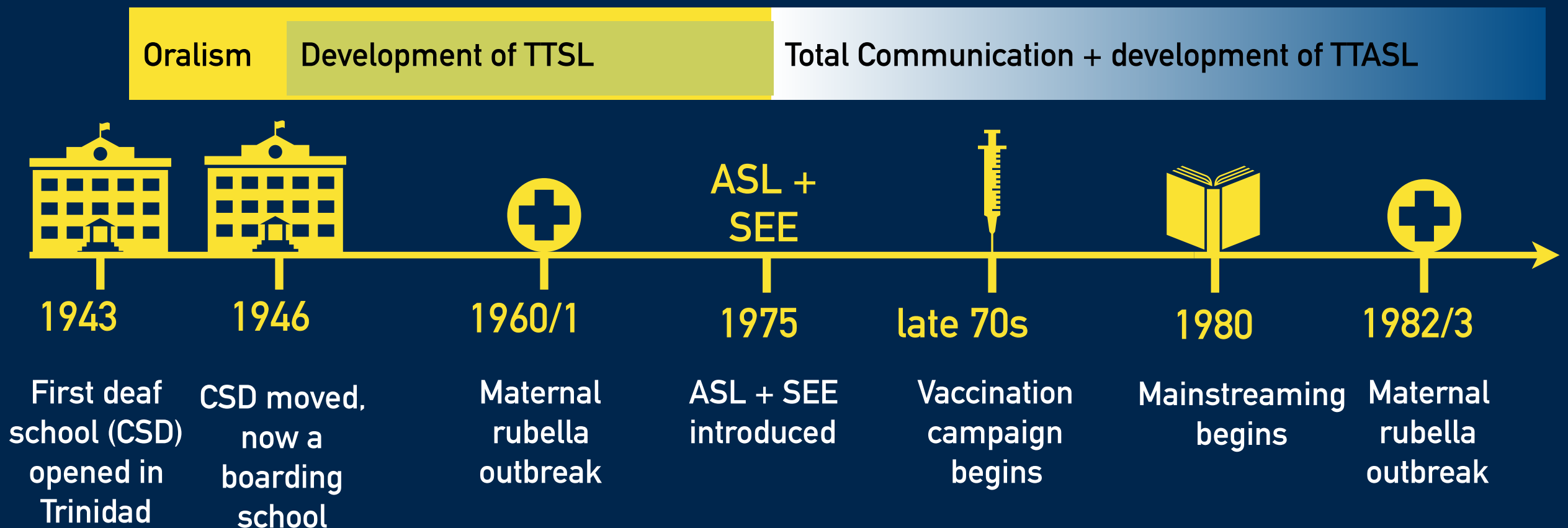
WHY WH-QUESTIONS IN T&T SIGNING?

Adding a new kind of data point

- ▶ wh-questions have been studied in less than 50 (related) sign languages, **none** of which are **from the Caribbean** (Zeshan 2006)

SIGNING IN TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

HISTORY OF DEAF EDUCATION



(Braithwaite et al. 2011)

IMPORTANT TERMS

- ▶ **TTSL** = that variety developed at the **CSD** from **1946-75**
- ▶ **TTASL** = that variety developing **after** **1975**

CURRENT SITUATION

- ▶ ~2000 deaf people
- ▶ ageing deaf population_(Lamb 2014)
- ▶ TT/ASL + SEE used in schools
- ▶ TT/ASL used by religious bodies e.g.
Jehovah's Witness Organisation

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON TT/ASL

- ▶ “looks like Signed English with heavy initialisation of signs” (Parks & Parks 2012: 9)
- ▶ basic word order = SV0, but SOV is possible (Kwok 2015)
- ▶ I assume SV0

INTERIM SUMMARY

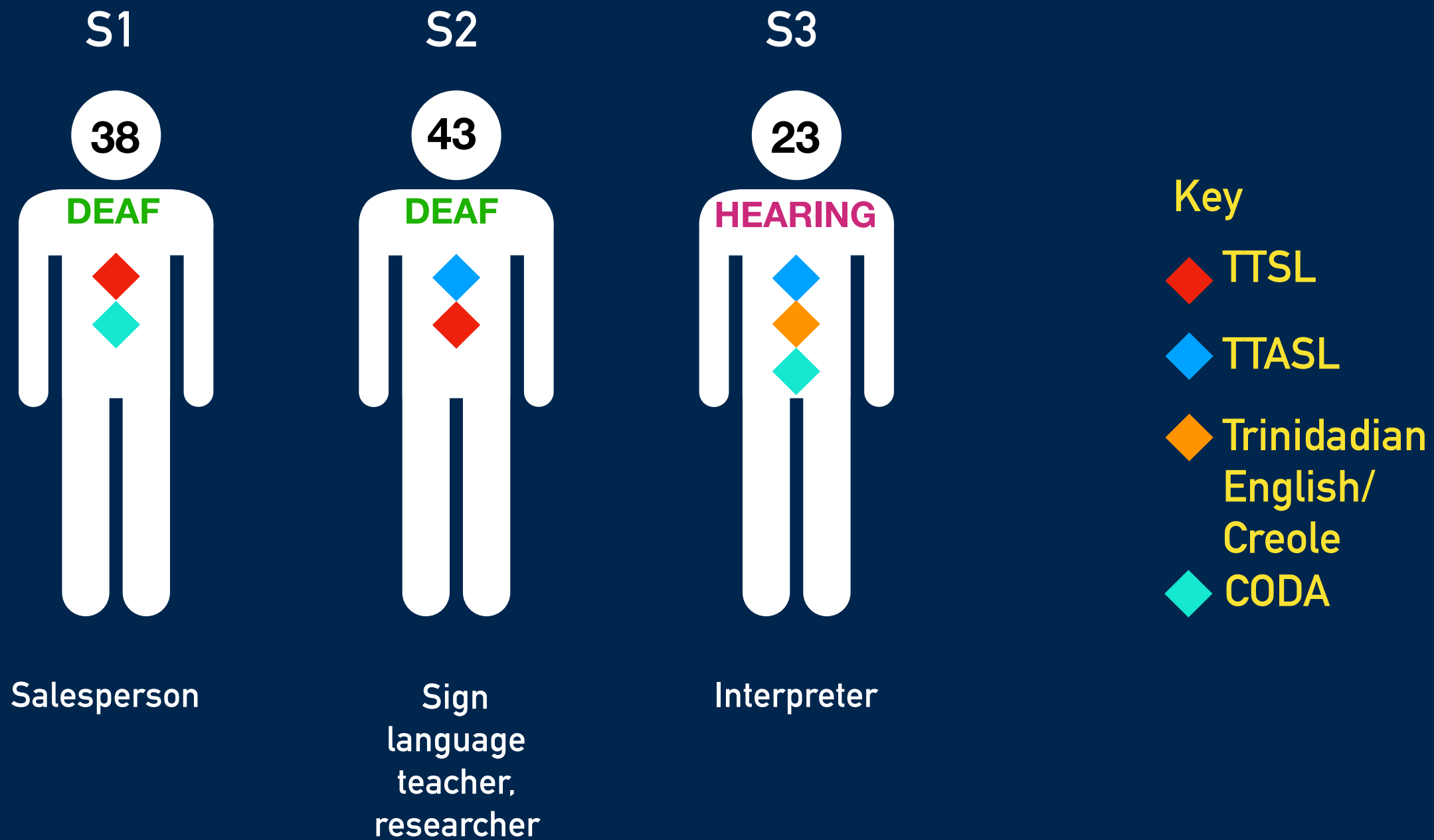
- ▶ T&T signing is a contact situation involving TTSL, ASL, SEE, and spoken and written Trinidadian English/Creole
- ▶ The concept of TTSL can mean different things to different kinds of signers

INTERIM SUMMARY

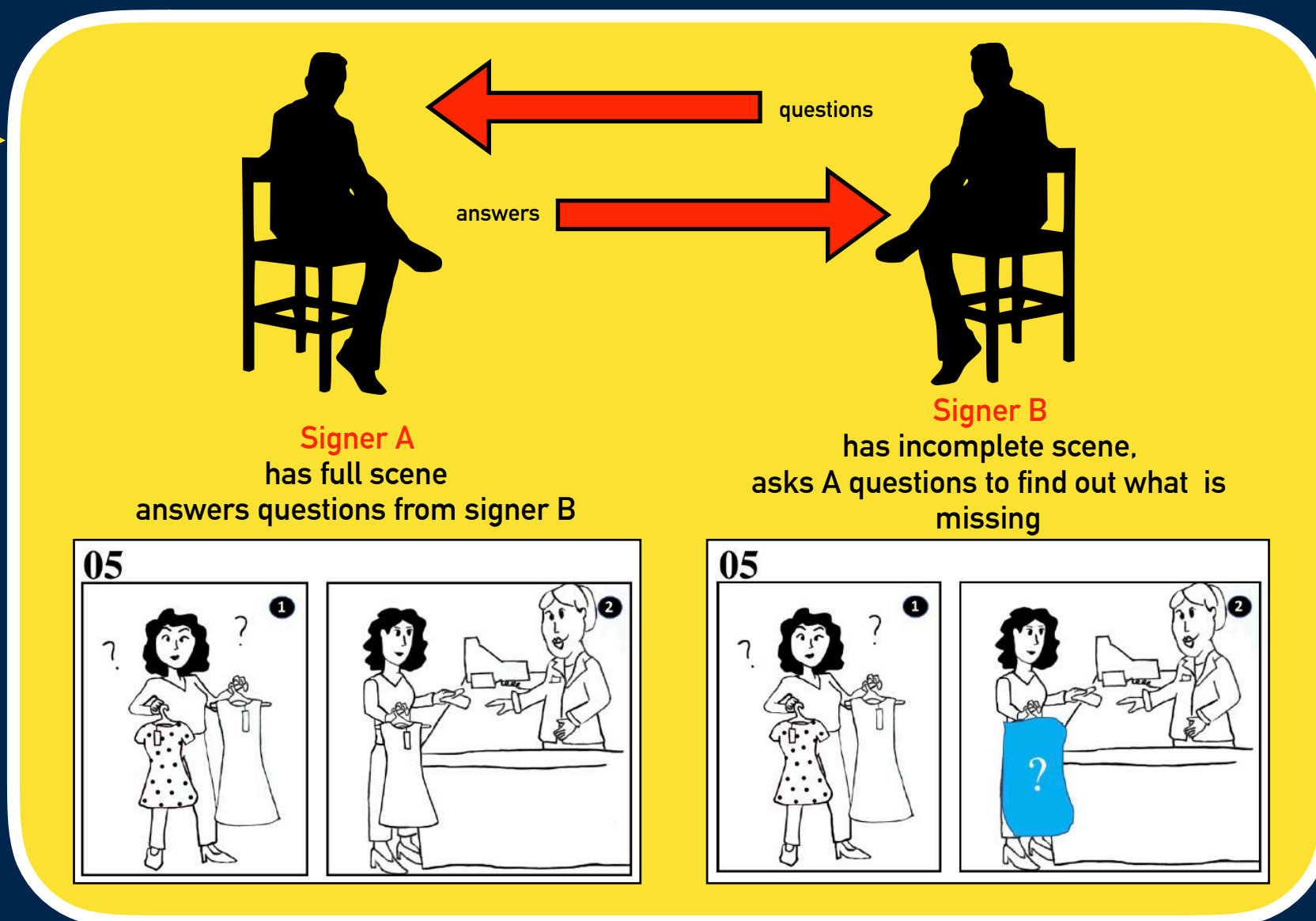
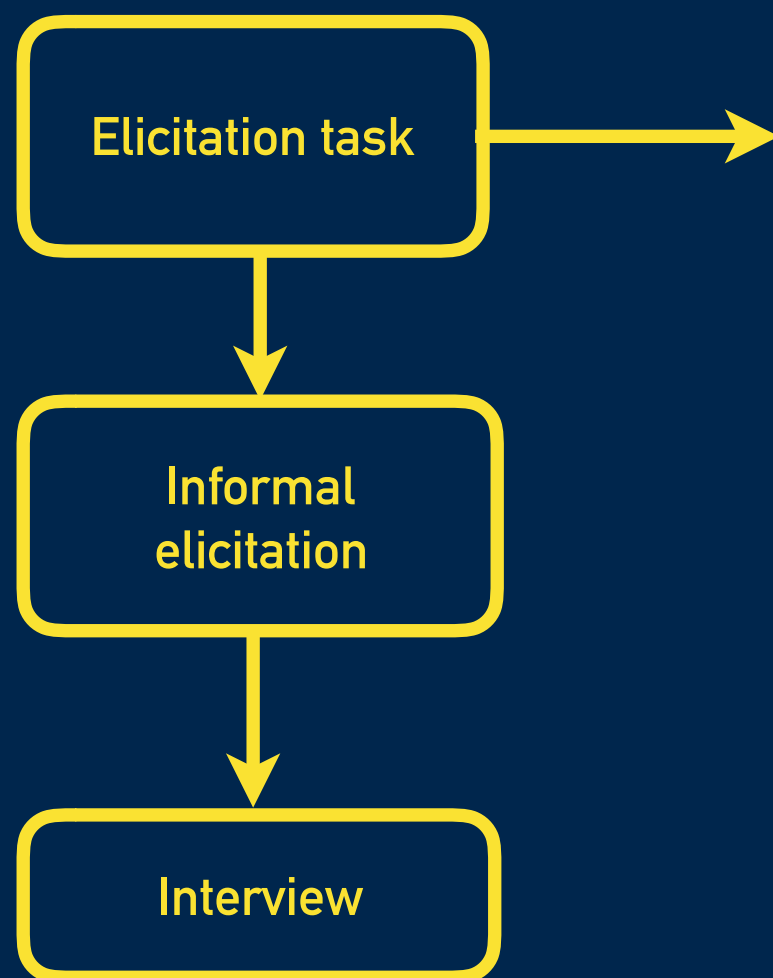
- ▶ Trinidadian English/Creole + ASL ideologies present, which could affect ideas about acceptability

METHOD

CONSULTANTS



METHOD



ELICITATION | PREVIOUS WORK I



(a)

VEICOLI COINVOLTI

	0 1 2		0 1 2		0 1 2
	0 1 2		0 1 2		

LUOGO

--	--	--	--	--

DINAMICA DELL'INCIDENTE

--	--	--	--

ORA

--	--

FERITI

0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5

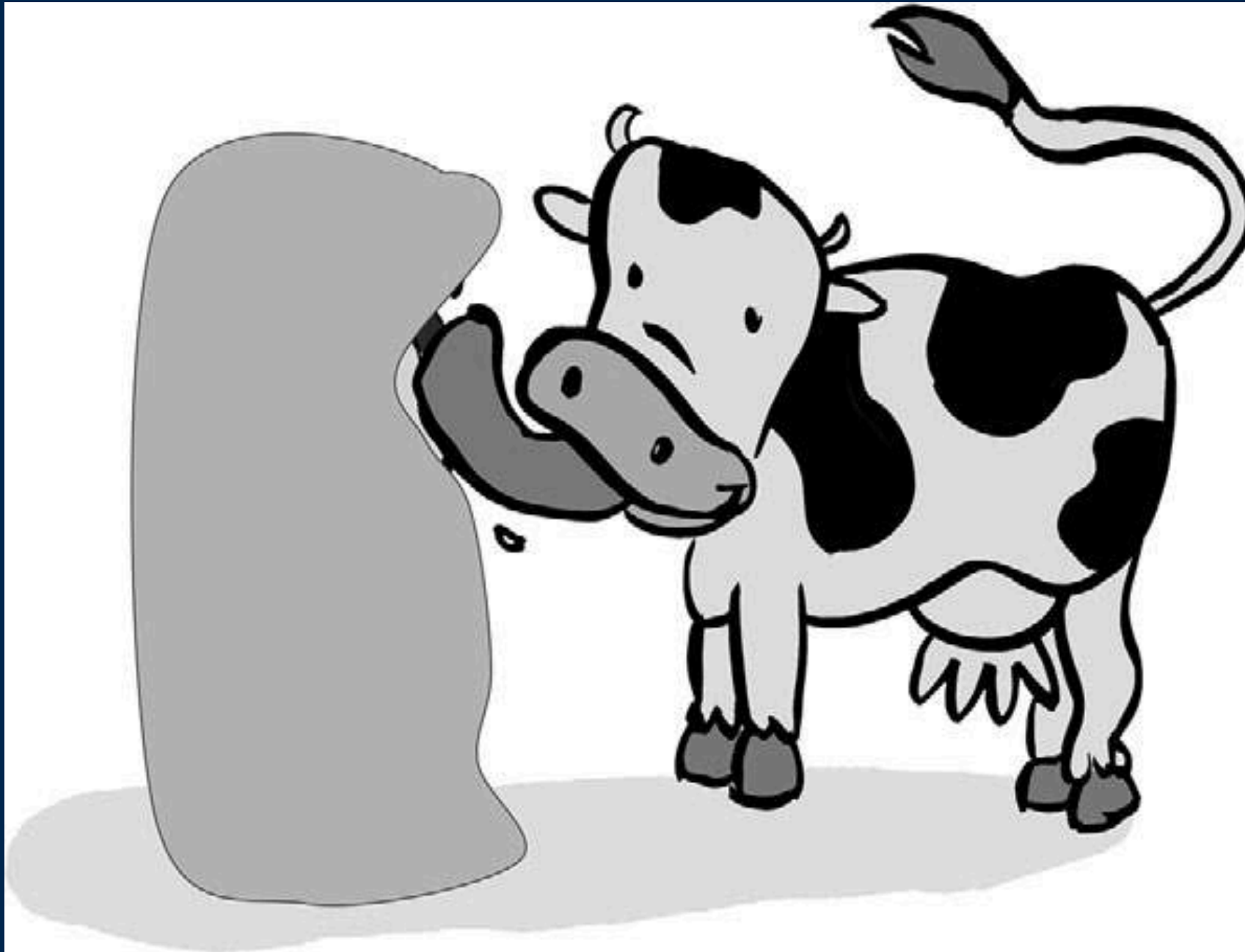
DANNI MATERIALI

SI	NO

(b)

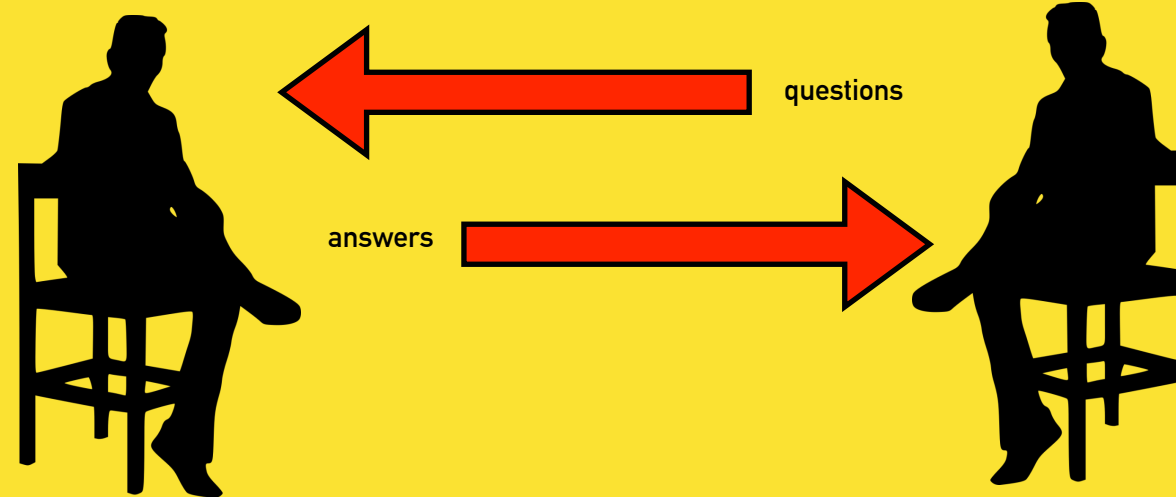
Fig. 1: (a) Car-accident scene. (b) Insurance form

ELICITATION | PREVIOUS WORK II

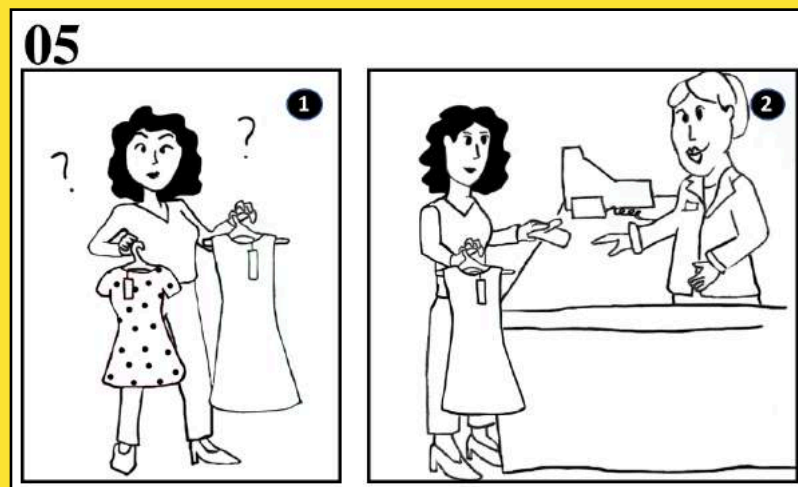


Friedmann & Sztermann (2011: 220)

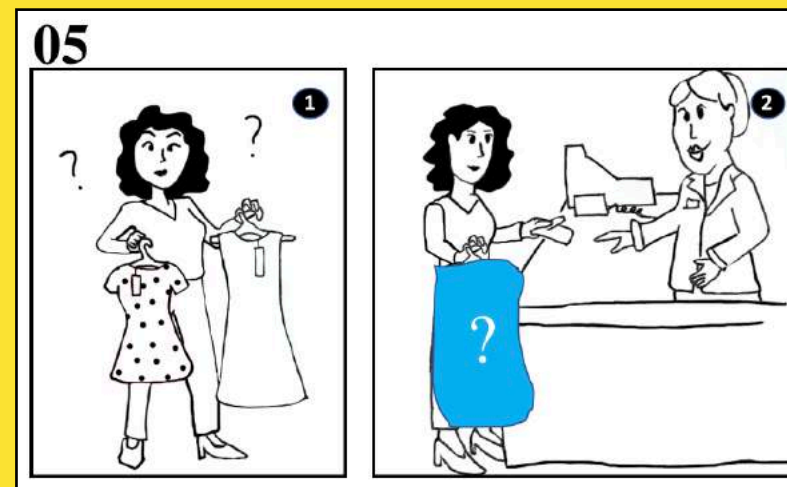
METHOD



Signer A
has full scene
answers questions from signer B

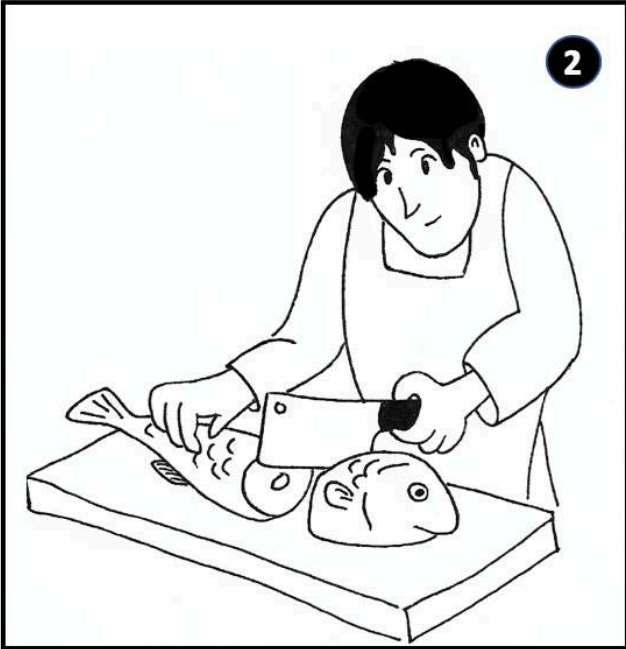
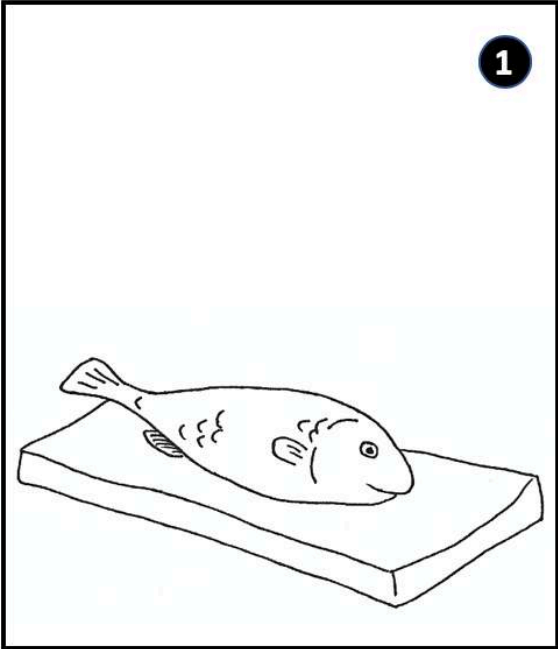


Signer B
has incomplete scene, asks A questions to
find out what is missing

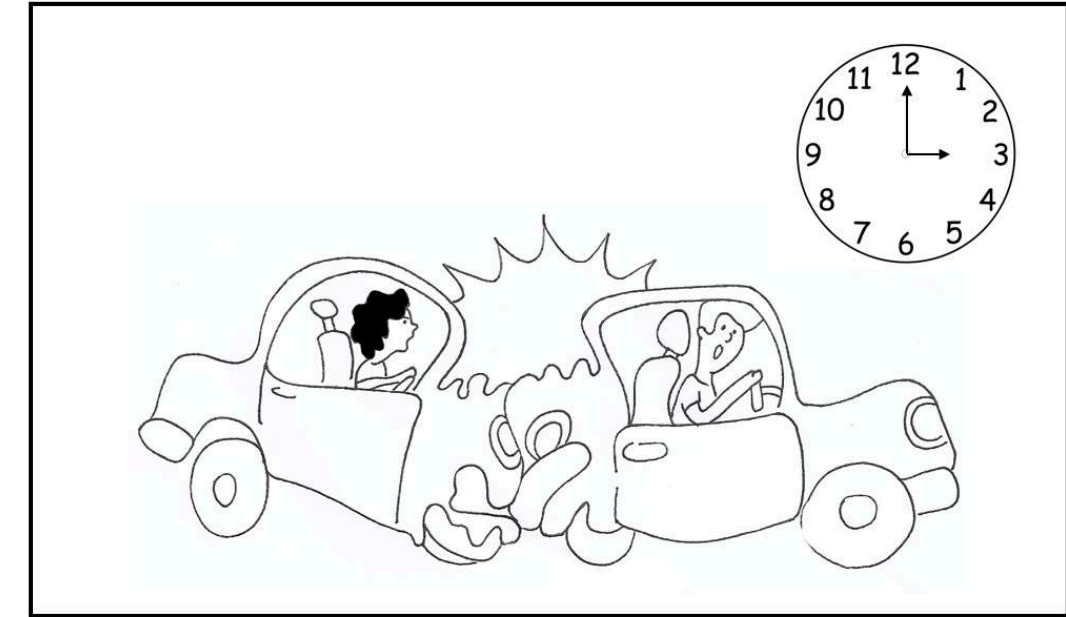


METHOD

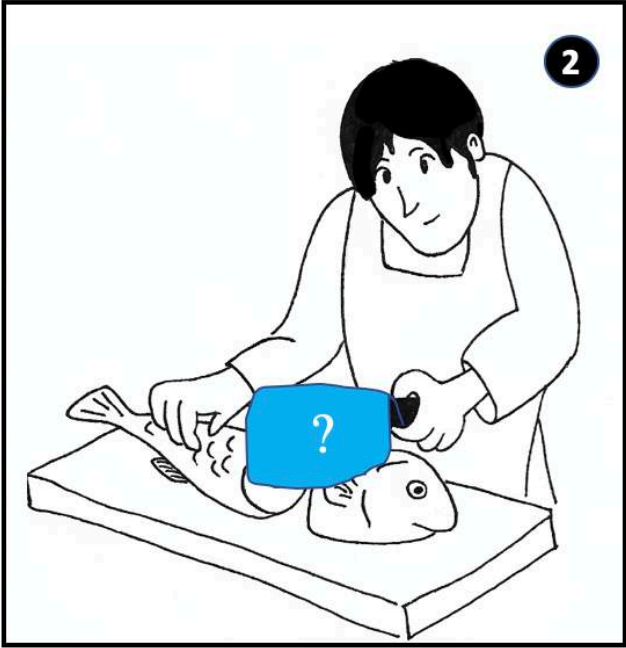
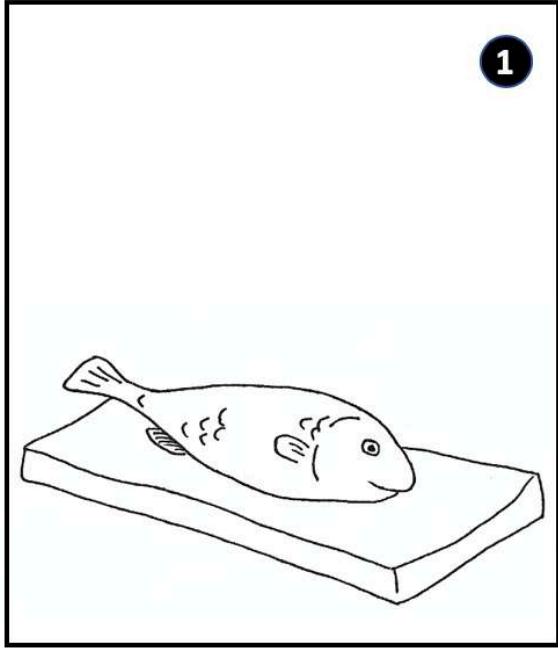
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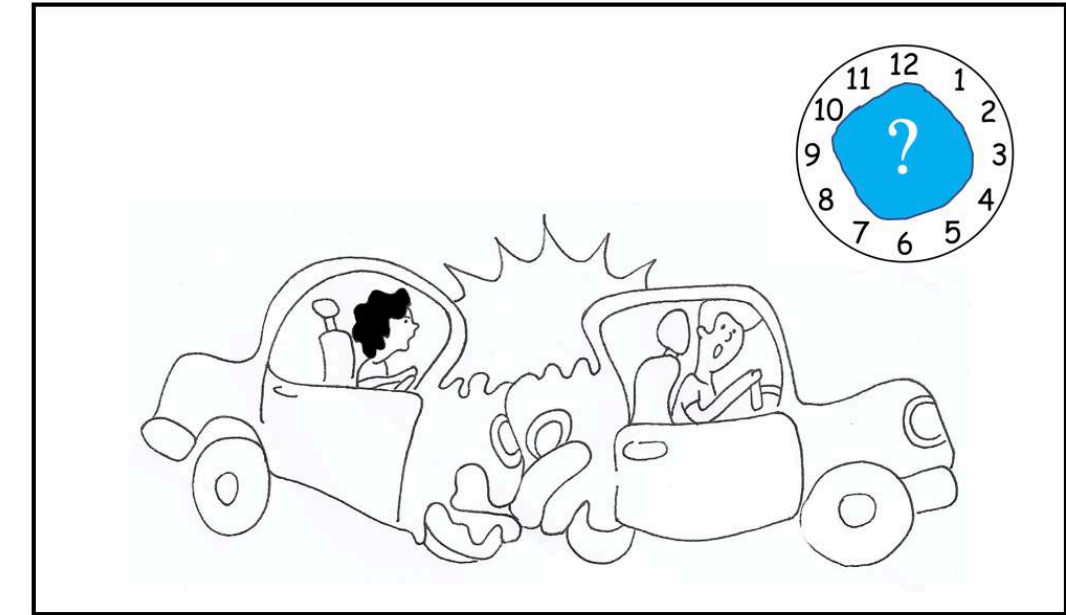
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04



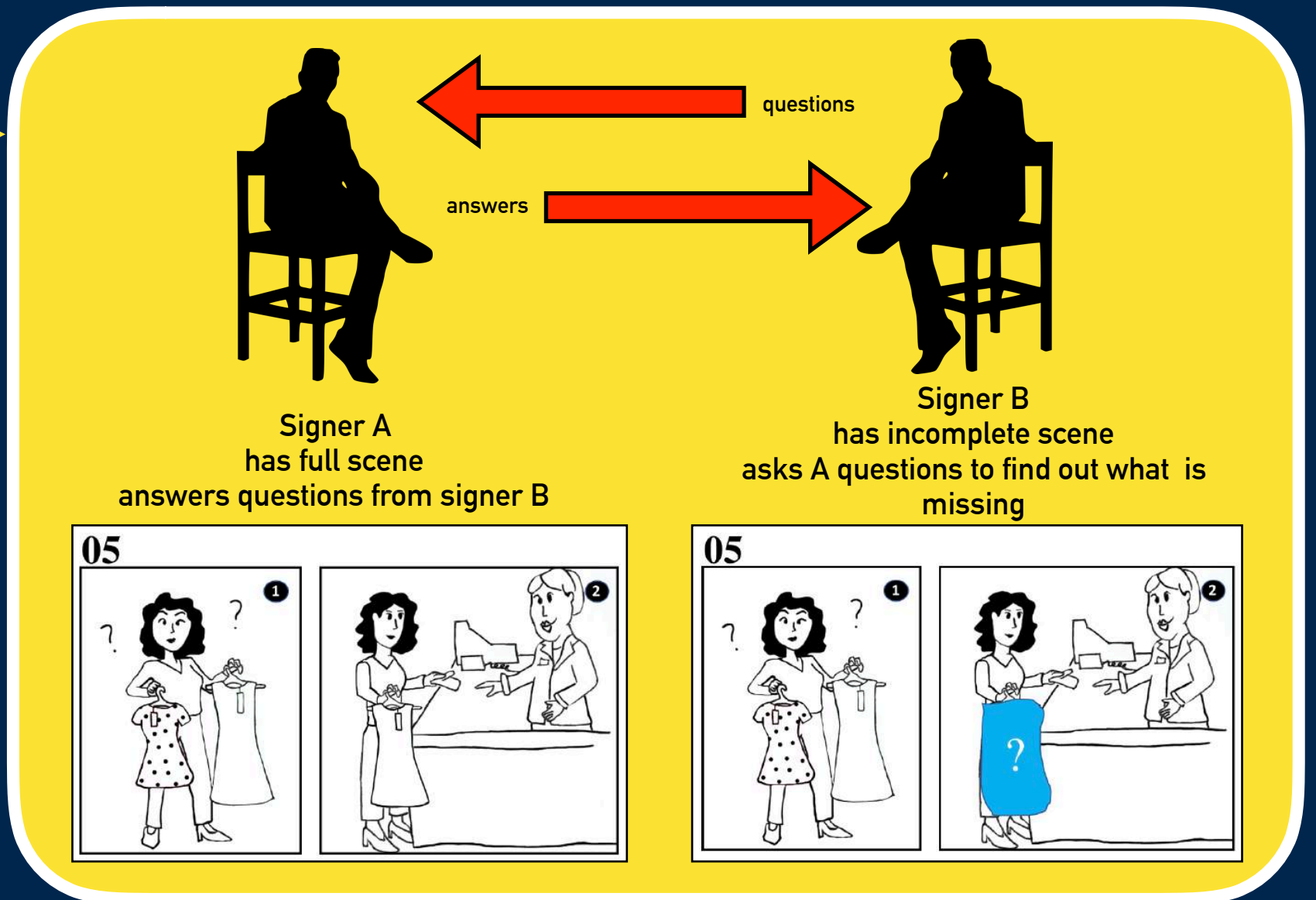
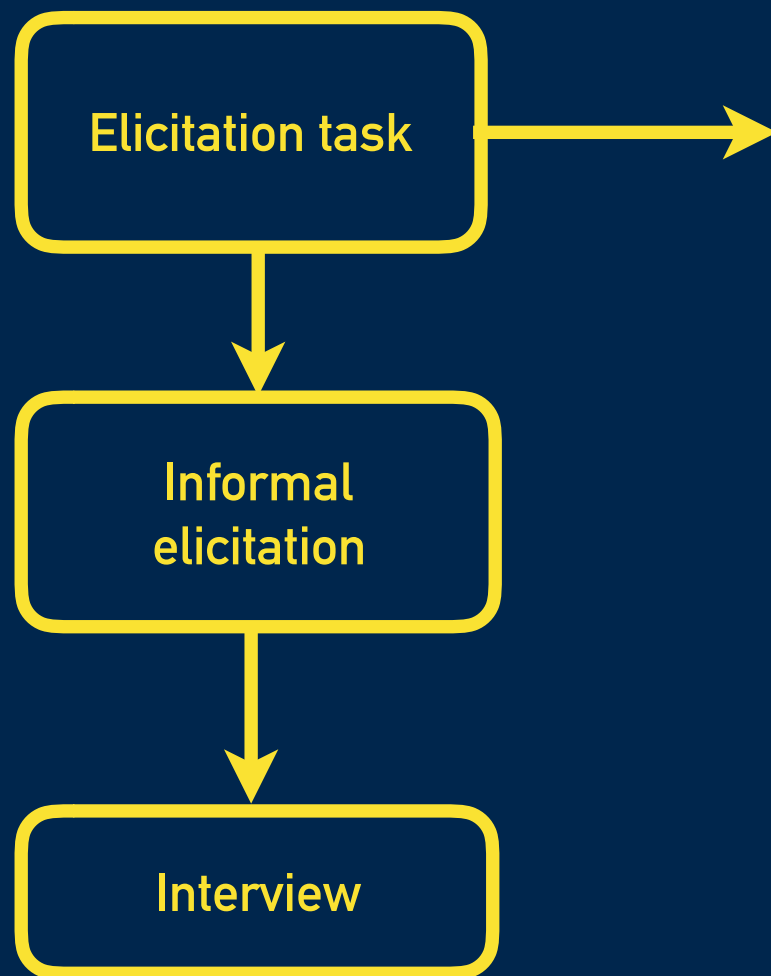
08



COMMENTS ON THE ELICITATION TASK

- ▶ maybe too abstract
- ▶ was not very successful with the people I worked with
- ▶ English prescriptivism has an effect

METHOD



FINDINGS

WH-WORDS I (TTASL)



a. WHO-TTASL1



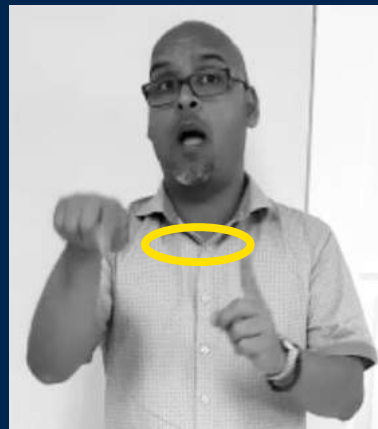
b. WHO-TTASL2



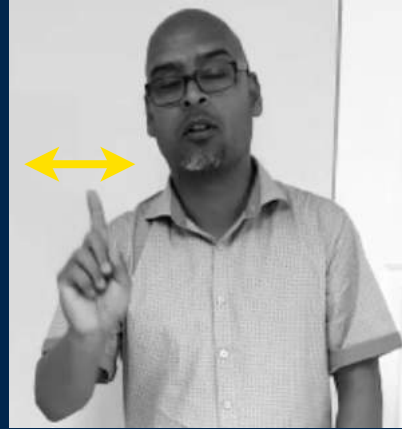
c. WHAT-TTASL1



d. WHAT-TTASL2



e. WHEN-TTASL



f. WHERE-TTASL



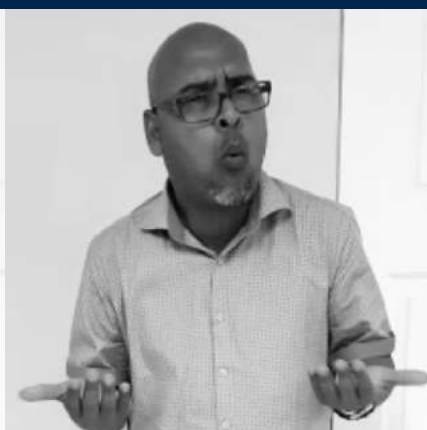
g. WHY-TTASL



h. WHICH-TTASL



i. HOW-TTASL



j. HOW.MUCH-TTASL



WH-WORDS II (TTSL)



I. WHAT-TTSL



m. WHY-TTSL



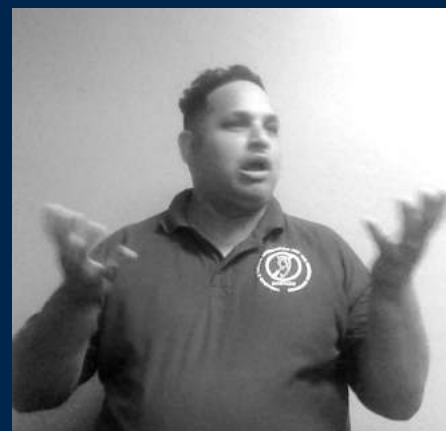
n. HOW-TTSL



o. WHEN-TTSL



p. HOW MUCH-TTSL



q. WHERE-TTSL



r. (WHAT)TIME



q. WHO-TTSL



NON-MANUAL MARKING



furrowed

brows + squint

- ▶ always on wh-word
- ▶ scope
 - ▶ wh-word only
 - ▶ entire clause except topicalised constituents

SIGNER 1

- ▶ Produced WHO, WHAT, WHAT-TIME, HOW-MUCH, WHEN, and WHERE in clause-final position
- ▶ Produced WHO in clause-initial position 3/5 times
- ▶ Used duplication twice with WHO and WHY

SIGNER 1

deaf

TTASL



^{wh}
WHO COOK IX₂
“Who is cooking?”

SIGNER 1

deaf

TTASL



YOU UNIVERSITY PAY PU ^{wh}WHO PU

“Who is paying for your university?”

SIGNER 1

deaf

TTASL



WHO SCOOTER WHO PU^{wh}

“Who is on the scooter?”

SIGNER 2

hearing

TTASL

- ▶ generally produced wh-words clause-initially or duplicated
- ▶ when asked, said that he prefers the wh-word at the end of a sentence
- ▶ other signers rarely produced the duplicated form

SIGNER 2

hearing

TTASL



_____wh
WHY GIRL CRY WHY
“Why is the girl crying?”

SIGNER 2

hearing

TTASL



_____wh
WHERE ACCIDENT PU

Where did the accident happen?

SIGNER 3

deaf

TTSL

- ▶ consistently produced wh-words in clause-final position

_____ WH

HE BUY YESTERDAY **WHAT**

_____ WH

YESTERDAY HE BUY **WHAT**

‘What did he buy yesterday?’

SIGNER 3

deaf

TTSL

- ▶ clause-initial wh-word is the rhetorical question form

CONCLUSIONS

- ▶ evidence for movement in TTSL or TTASL is not clear
- ▶ more research on the scope of wh-NMM and PU needed
- ▶ need to find a way to collect data better and to deal with the contact situation

Thanks!

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