

Wh-questions in the Trinidad & Tobago Signing Community

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Summary

Questions:

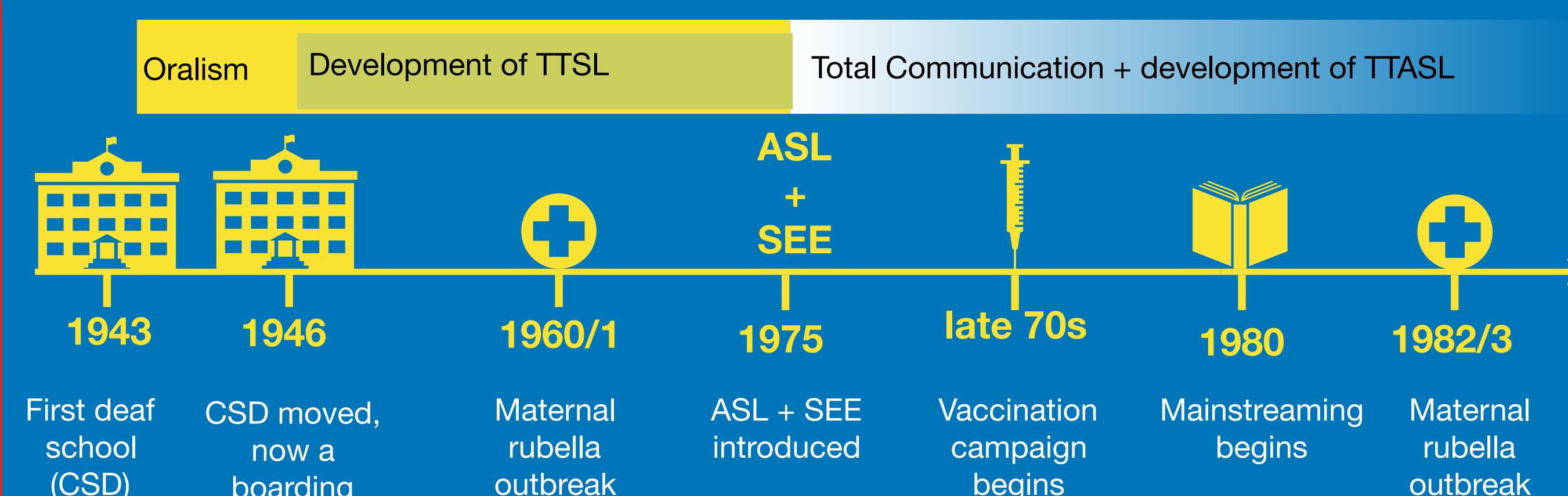
1. What do wh-questions look like in T&T?
2. What do wh-questions look like in a contact situation?

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

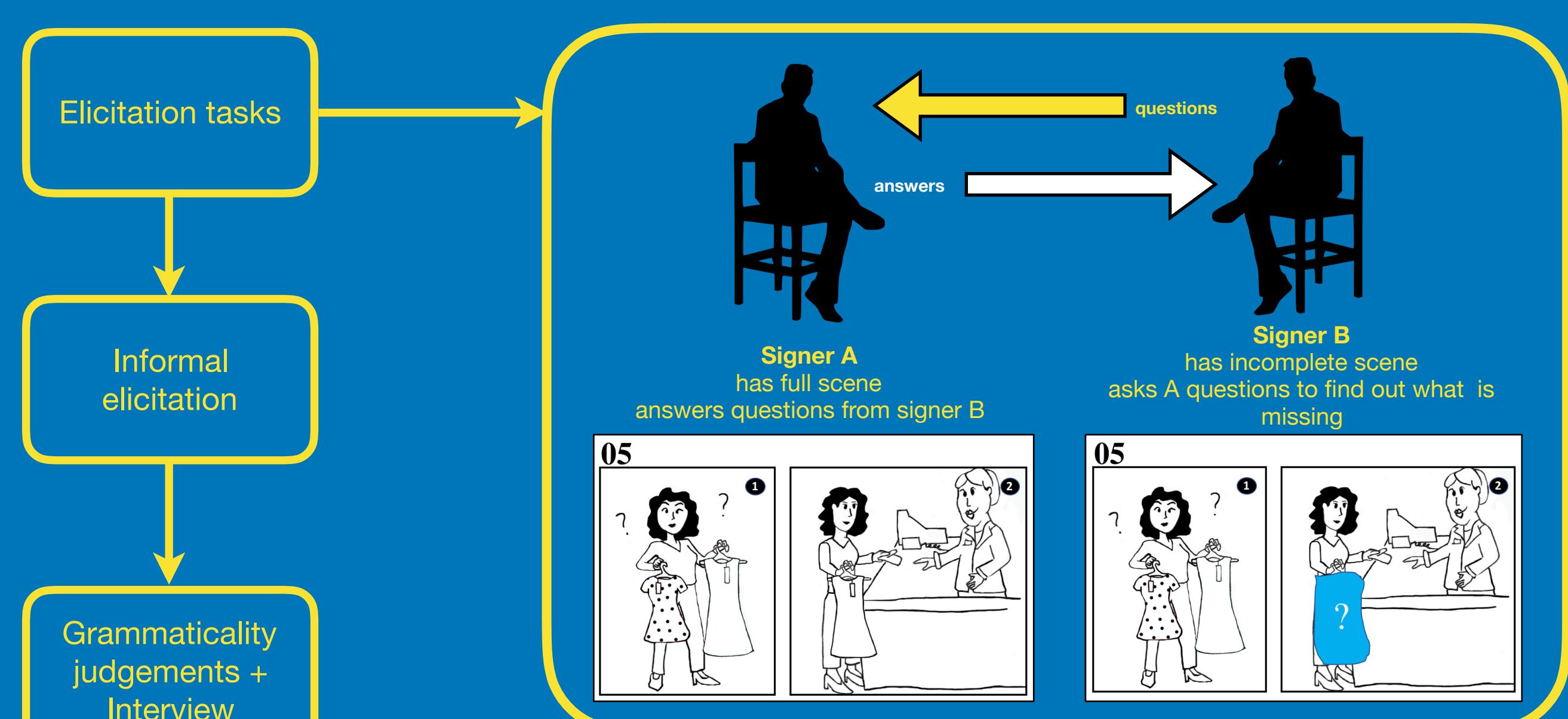
(3) NM: _____wh
MO: happen
GIRL CRY WHAT
"Why is the girl crying?" (4) _____tp _____wh+chin up
L-O-T-T-O WIN HOW.MUCH-2 HOW.MUCH-2
"How much did she win in the Lotto?"

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

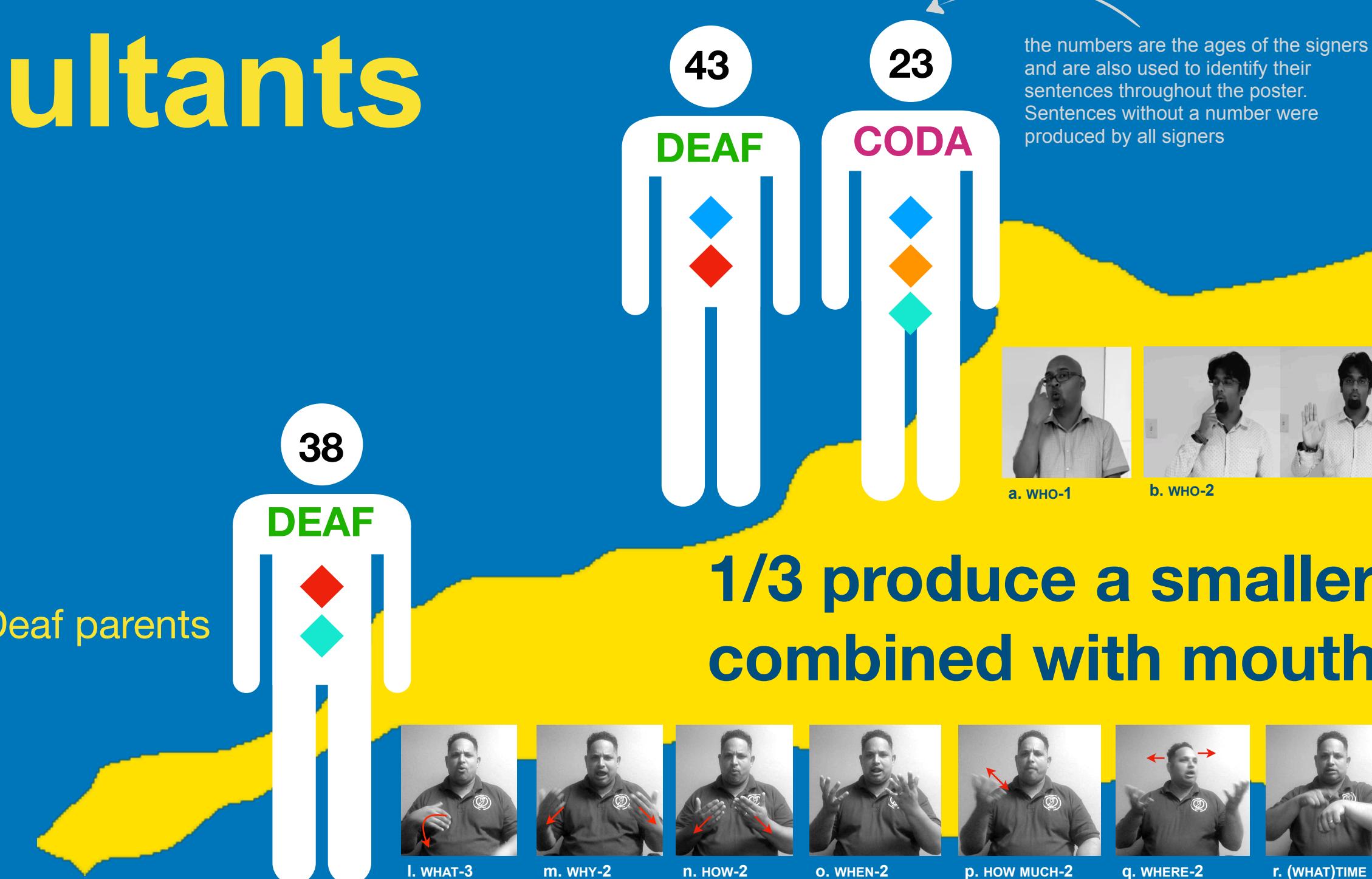
Wh-words: 2/3 signers produce a wh-paradigm resembling ASL

Method



Consultants

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



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

Discussion

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)