

# *Gestural Foundations of an Emerging Language: How Signers Adopt and Adapt Gestures*

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Gestures as a source for emerging sign languages

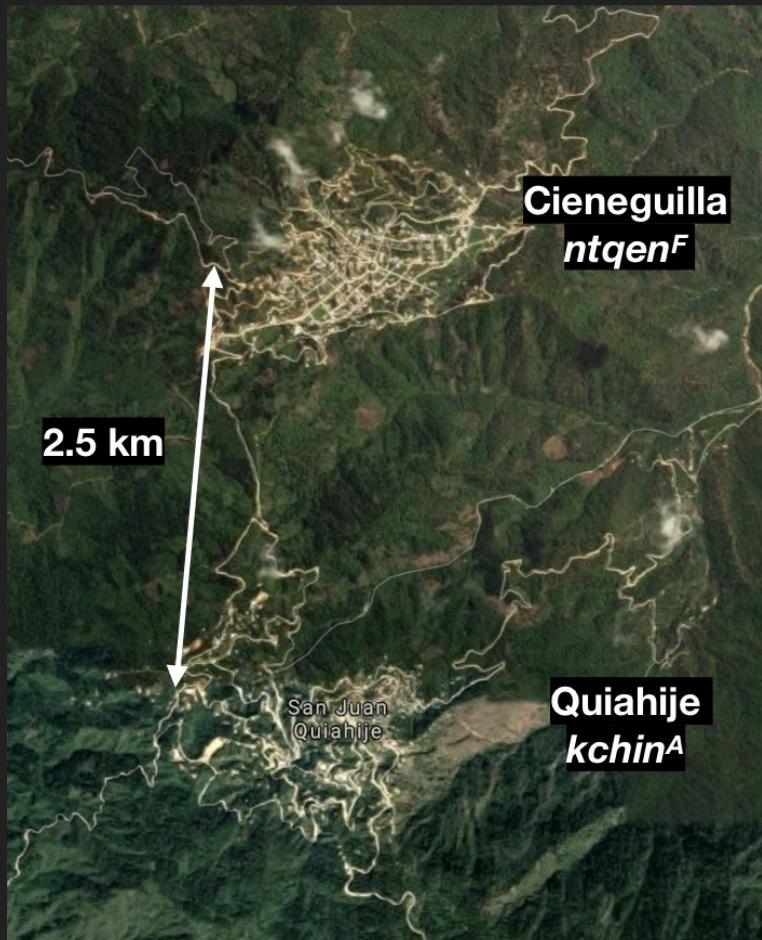
How do deaf people create sign  
languages with gestures from hearing  
people in the surrounding community?



# San Juan Quiahije Chatino Sign Language

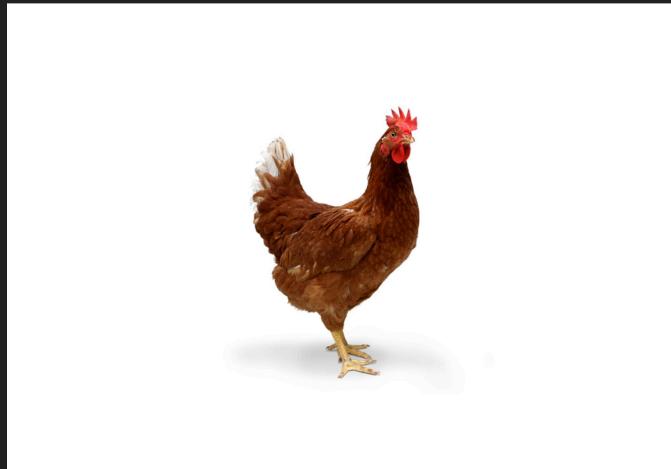


# San Juan Quiahije Chatino Sign Language



- Two neighboring villages under one municipality, San Juan Quiahije
  - Combined pop. ~3600 Chatinos (INEGI, 2015)
- Spoken languages
  - SJQ Chatino (E. Cruz, 2011; H. Cruz, 2014)
  - Mexican Spanish
- 11 deaf people — 0.3% of the population
  - A constellation of emerging family signed languages in six families (Hou, 2016)

# Animal size-and-shape specifiers



# Animal size-and-shape specifiers

How are animals represented in gestures and signers?

Measure the height of animals by:

- delimiting the distance between the human hand and the real-world ground
- delimiting the distance between the two human hands



A common Mesoamerican strategy!

TURKEY

DOG

# Animal size-and-shape specifiers

Birds and mammals are distinguished by the positioning of palm orientation of the dominant hand

For birds, the palm represents the tip of the head

For mammals, the ulnar side of the hand represents the back of the neck



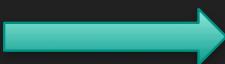
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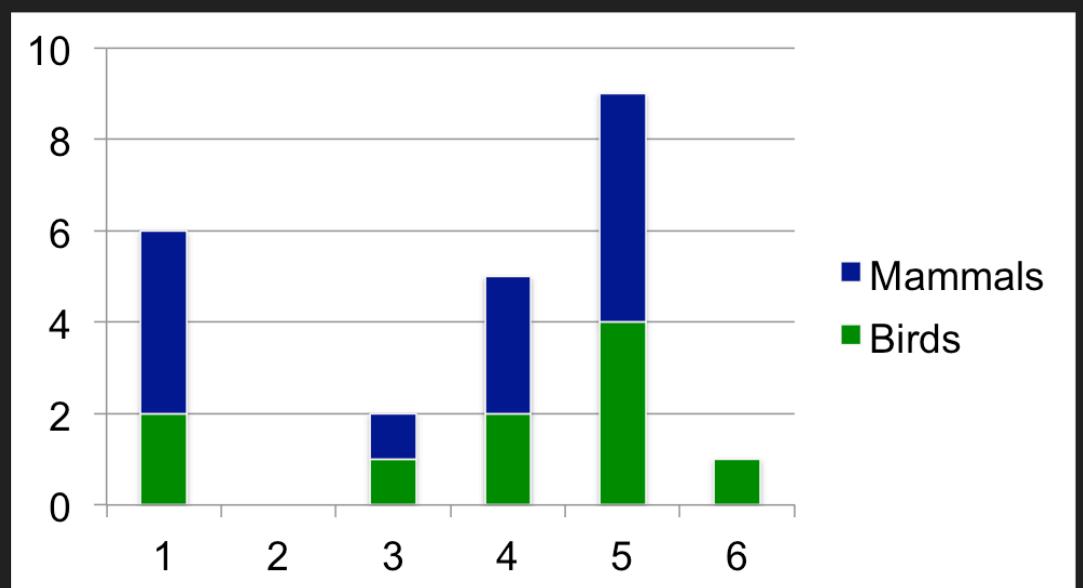
DOG

## Animal size-and-shape specifiers

A vocabulary elicitation of 20 animals from 6 deaf people of different families

25% of the responses ( $n = 90$ ) are borrowed from gestures

The borrowing varies across the signing families 



(Hou, forthcoming)

# Pointing constructions



(Mesh, 2017)

# Pointing constructions



Nearby target



Distant target

# Pointing constructions



- For hearing gesturers, how systematically does elbow height convey information about target distance?

# Pointing constructions

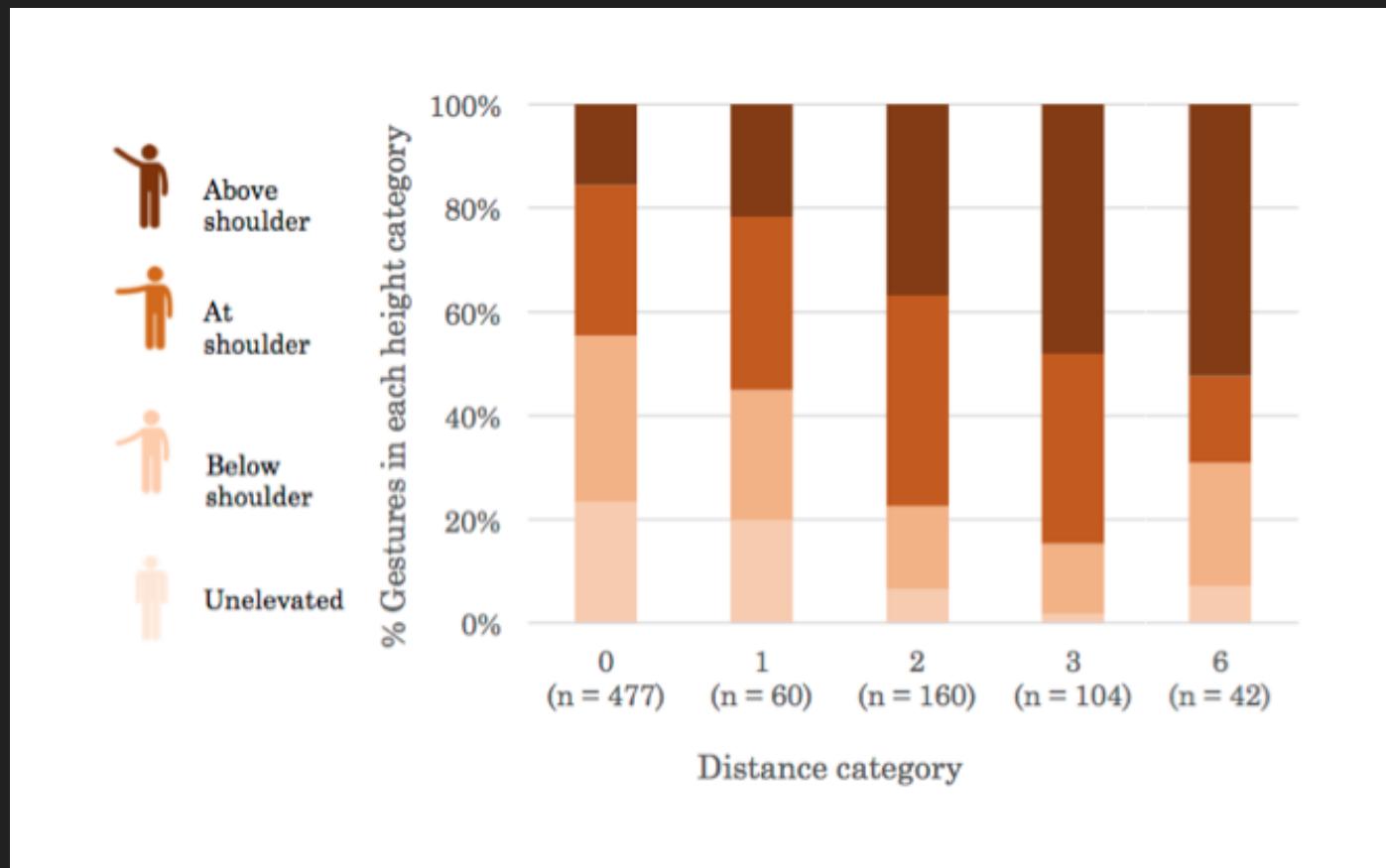


- For hearing gesturers, does handshape convey information about target distance?

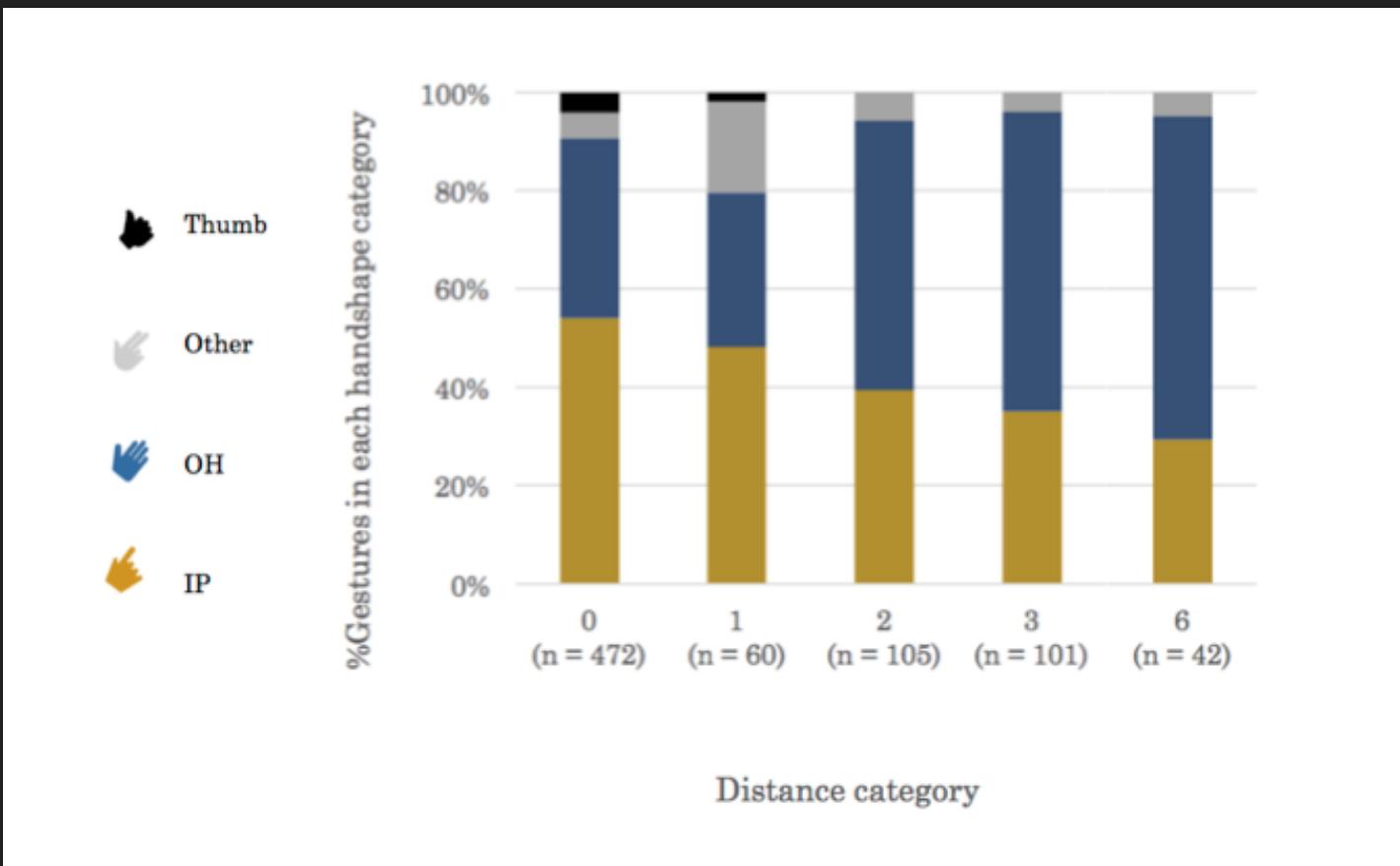
# Pointing constructions



# Pointing constructions



# Pointing constructions



# Pointing constructions



- Do deaf signers share the elbow height conventions of hearing gesturers?

# Pointing constructions



- Do deaf signers share the handshape conventions of hearing gesturers?

# Pointing constructions



Nearby target



Distant target

# Pointing constructions



# Negative emblems



(Mesh & Hou, forthcoming)

# Negative emblems

## WAG

For hearing gesturers,  
this form means 'no'  
or 'don't.'

These meanings are  
retained by signers.



# Negative emblems

## TWIST

For hearing gesturers,  
this form means ‘there  
isn’t any [of X]’.

This meaning is  
retained by signers.

But signers ALSO use  
the form to mean,  
‘not’, ‘no’



# Negative emblems

## PALM-DOWN

For hearing gesturers,  
this form means  
'nothing more' or  
'not at all'.

These meanings are  
retained by signers.

But signers ALSO use  
the form to mean, 'this  
is completed'



# Negative emblems

## PALM-UP

For hearing gesturers,  
this form means  
'I don't know'.

This meaning is  
retained by signers.



# Negative emblems

DEAD

For hearing gesturers,  
this form means  
'dead', 'no', or 'stop it'.

These meanings are  
retained by signers.

But signers ALSO use the  
form as an emphatic  
version of 'not at all'



Gestures as a source for emerging sign languages

The case study of Chatino Sign Language allows us to better understand the process of adopting and adapting gestures for new sign languages.

Thank you!

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