



Sign language endangerment

Prof. Ulrike Zeshan

International Institute for Sign Languages and Deaf
Studies

University of Central Lancashire

Preston, UK

uzeshan@uclan.ac.uk



Types of signing communities

High level of
institutionalisation

+INST

Low level of
institutionalisation

-INST

Rural communities
with hereditary
deafness

VILL

Sources of SL endangerment

SIGN LANGUAGES ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE TO INTERVENTIONS! ACCESS TO SIGN LANGUAGE IS A LINGUISTIC HUMAN RIGHT FOR DEAF PEOPLE.

+INST

- Medical advances:
Prevention and "cure" of deafness
→ community fragmentation
e.g. Australia
- Misguided policies, e.g.
Signed codes, standardisation
e.g. Arab World

-INST

- Imported sign languages from abroad
e.g. West Africa

VILL

- Urban sign languages
-E.g. Adamorobe in Ghana, Ban Khor in Thailand
- Community demography



Differences between sign language and spoken language endangerment factors

- Elementary recognition of signing as language is still not universal.
- Language names and boundaries often ill-defined for sign languages – “X-country sign language”
- Notion of language family not well defined.
- No widespread practice of writing sign languages.
- Atypical peer-to-peer language transmission within deaf education rather than generation-to-generation.
- “Diglossic” situation between sign language and signed code in some cases.
- Particular importance of schooling to language maintenance.
- Important factors outside language and culture, e.g. medical factors.



Add example videos
