

So I'm here today to talk about the inclusion of Deaf linguists and signed languages in linguistics. First off, thank you to the Georgetown Linguistics Department for inviting me here today and especially Nic Subtirelu for coordinating the panel. I am beyond honored to join this panel - I was already following most of them on Twitter!

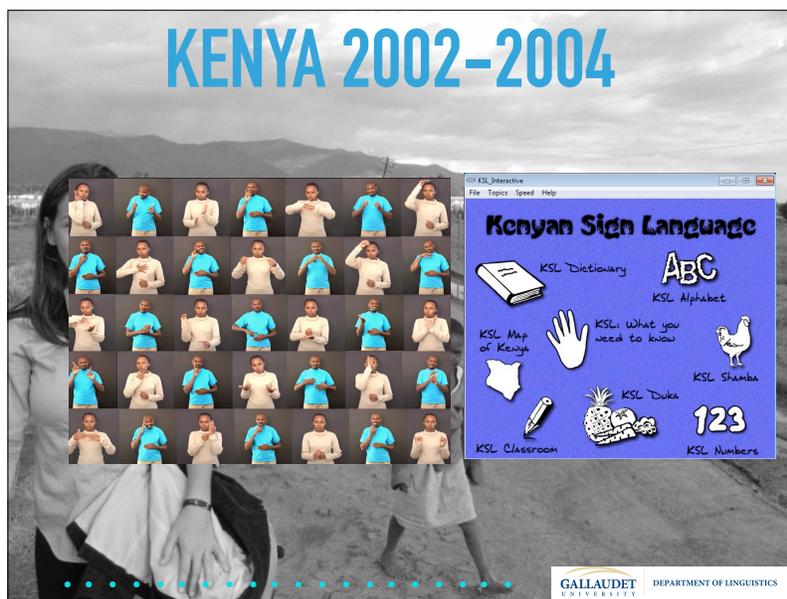
Second, I am appreciative of the space and time I've been given today to represent the Deaf community and this experience. While this is not often explicitly discussed in general conferences, let me say I'm not the first to talk about this. There are people who talk about Deaf academics and how to include the Deaf experiences in different fields of study.

For my presentation I'm focusing on signed languages in linguistics - this field is pretty young - just seven decades old (since the 1950s), I'm going to take a few minutes to explain why I'm the one up here and the sources I use. I'm drawing on my own personal/professional experiences as a Deaf person and as a linguist. Participant observation, if you will. I'm also using other resources which I'll describe after a bit more about me and my experiences since they show my stance (or position) in all of this. It's actually a bit of foreshadowing of what I will talk about in the rest of my presentation then I'll briefly describe those other resources. Then dive into my main point which you see in my title here.



I've been working professionally since 2007 but have been involved with signed language work even earlier (and probably like most people here in this room, I've been interested in language since I knew language was such a thing).

I got my professional start when I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Kenya (2002 to 2004) where I served as a Deaf Education volunteer and worked on a Kenyan Sign Language CD-ROM dictionary project there. This Peace Corps experience where I worked closely with the Kenyan Deaf community and even became fluent in Kenyan Sign Language was quite formative for me as a Deaf person, as a Deaf linguist, and as someone interested in signed languages as legitimate data for linguistics.



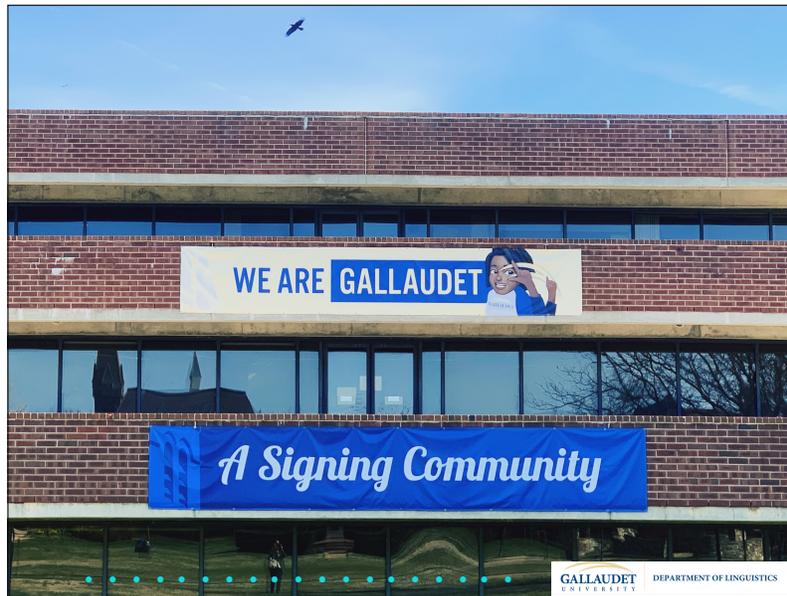
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I came back to the states after Peace Corps and headed right to Gallaudet University here in Washington DC where I studied linguistics for my MA and PhD.

For those of you who don't know, Gallaudet University is the only university in the world primarily for deaf and hard of hearing students. We are a bilingual university with American Sign Language (ASL) and English as our two primary languages with a focus on providing a signing environment (we also “provide accommodations” 😂 for hearing students who are the minority!).



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GALLAUDET 2005-ONGOING

ITALIAN SIGN LANGUAGE, JAPANESE SIGN LANGUAGE, IRANIAN SIGN LANGUAGE, HO CHI MINH SIGN LANGUAGE, OMANI SIGN LANGUAGE, MEXICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

I'VE TAUGHT:
PHONOLOGY

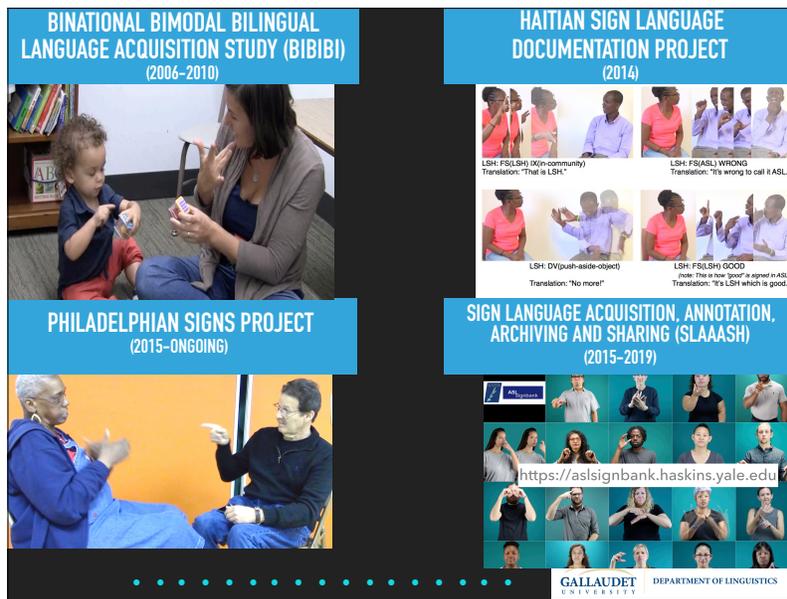
LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION

CORPUS LINGUISTICS

FIELD METHODS

During my time as a Deaf linguist at Gallaudet, I've been active in teaching linguistics, with a focus on signed languages.

This is important - we don't just focus on signed languages in our teaching at Gallaudet. We focus on linguistics with the general aim of understanding how all humans use language (Language, if you will) and use data from both spoken and signed languages. Our focus is just like everyone else - human languages. Our research though is primarily about signed languages. I've taught Field Methods. Note all of the different languages under the screenshot (those are our English names for those). I also teach phonetics/phonology courses as well as seminars on language documentation and corpus linguistics.



So there's a bit of detail going on here on the screen but specific details about each project isn't the point here. I just wanted to demonstrate how often (quite a bit) and how long (since 2006) I have been doing language documentation/corpus linguistics work - mainly in America but also internationally (including consulting).

All of this means I think a lot about working with signed language communities themselves, about how to connect this kind of work in the larger picture of human languages and linguistics. And how you need to balance the needs of both sides.

The screenshot shows a web page with a dark blue background. At the top left is a book cover for 'Innovations in Deaf Studies: The Role of Deaf Scholars' edited by Annette Kusters, Miepke de Meester, and Dai O'Brien, published by Oxford. The main content area features a video player with a man signing. To the right of the video is a text box that reads: 'Hello! Welcome to this web publication "Working Together - Manual for Sign Language Work within Development Cooperation" about how to work with a Deaf Community. The information in the manual is available both in International Sign and in written English. Enjoy!'. Below the video are logos for the 'FEDERAL ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF', 'WORLD FEDERATION OF THE DEAF', 'INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE DEAF', and 'UNIVERSITY OF GALLAUDET'. A URL <http://www.slwmanual.info> is displayed below the logos. At the bottom, there are two blue boxes: the left one is titled 'Sign Language Communities' Terms of Reference (SLCTR)' and cites 'Harris, Holmes & Mertens (2009); Adapted from indigenous terms of reference (ITR), Osborne and McPhee (2000)'; the right one is titled 'Sign Language Linguistics Society (SLLS) "Ethics Statement for Sign Language Research"' and provides the URL <https://slls.eu/slls-ethics-statement/>. The bottom right corner features the Gallaudet University Department of Linguistics logo.

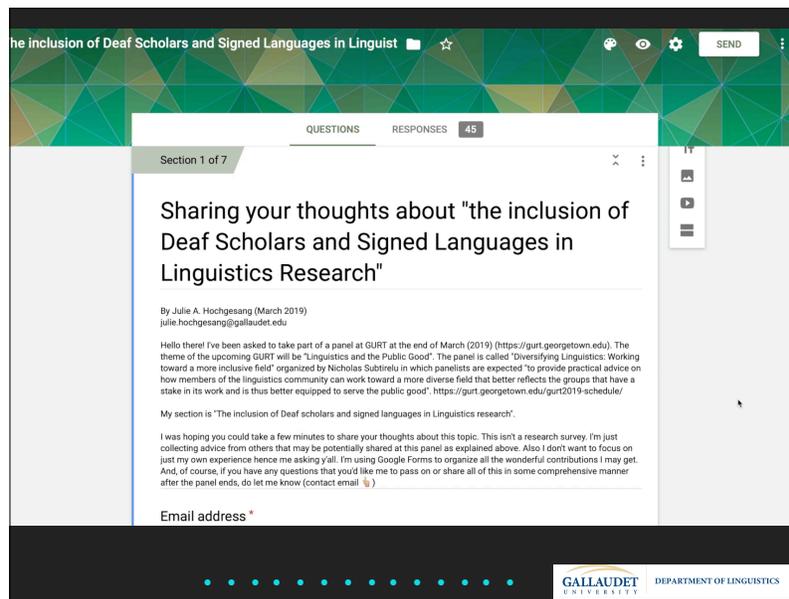
So of course when working with the community, I need to consider the ethics of working with signed language communities and rely on literature and ethical guidelines like these as well as others.

Basically they all say “work with the community and whenever possible, those community members should be leading the efforts or involved somehow from start to finish.”



But I'm not just relying on my own experiences. Today, I also want to represent what others have said about the inclusion of deaf linguists and signed languages in linguistics.

I'm a bit active on Twitter and follow quite a few people who call themselves deaf linguists or signed language linguists or are interested in that kind of info. I must have taken 1000 screenshots just to include in this talk. Unfortunately I can only share a few.



Finally I sent out a google form. Before I show you a video where I scan through it, please note that this is actually revealing about how I like to use technology which really allows me to take advantage of the multimodal resources. You're not going to be able to really read anything. That's okay. I just wanted to give you a sense of the whole thing. (show the video).

Now you see this? I can represent information in different ways. I use written English text, I link to videos of ASL signing, I use animated GIFs with both text and signing. I also use emojis! 49 people responded to this - a wide range of people - Deaf linguists, signed language linguists, twitter allies, etc.

Finally, it means I'm not just relying on my own experiences/opinions for this presentation. I reached out to those who work in the field - themselves deaf linguists or work in signed language linguistics or have shown some interest in it (for example on Twitter, I've seen plenty who don't know signed languages but have become interested because we tweet about it). I'm grateful to those who've filled out this form for this! I had to leave so much out because just 20 minutes today!

INCLUSION OF DEAF LINGUISTS AND SIGNED LANGUAGES IN LINGUISTICS



So based on all of that - I've got a few things to discuss about the inclusion of deaf linguists and signed languages in linguistics - as you might expect, there's a lot to discuss. I've just chosen a bit for today. I'm going to make two main points and give some general discussion about each including relevant issues or ongoing questions.

INCLUSION OF DEAF LINGUISTS AND SIGNED LANGUAGES IN LINGUISTICS



(abstract) The first question my presentation tackles is why include signed languages in the study of linguistics? Why not is a better question. If linguists study human languages, then signed languages are an important part of that domain. It has been amply demonstrated through seven decades of research that signing is a modality suited to the primary expression of human language, just like speech. To exclude the modality of signed language (and to just equate speech with language) is to miss a part of the whole story. There are persistent misconceptions and even active efforts to suppress signed languages for many reasons, not to mention that the signing communities are much smaller, making it difficult to bring signed languages to a more equal footing to that of spoken languages. The picture isn't entirely bleak - contributors to the Google form I sent out notice how mentions have increased in more general contexts in the last seven decades.

INCLUSION OF DEAF LINGUISTS AND SIGNED LANGUAGES IN LINGUISTICS



So when signed languages are included in the study of linguistics or other related disciplines, then the discussion becomes much more richer and comprehensive. When such inclusion occurs, then Deaf linguists (also those related to the Deaf communities especially children or relatives of Deaf people like “CODAs” (Children of Deaf Adults)) should be a part of the process simply because “nothing about us without us” - a common cry among different populations that have found themselves the object of study by linguists, anthropologists and etc. Those who have lived the experience bring much to the process of studying it. It seems relatively straightforward to include Deaf linguists but in reality, there are considerable barriers to such inclusion (e.g., lack of awareness and accessibility). When signed languages were first studied, it was hearing people who were studying, publishing and teaching about all of this. And they didn’t always sign well or even at all.

Stokoe notation - representation of phonemic form of the ASL sign for "linguistics"

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So with that as the main point - it's a no-brainer that signed languages should be included in the general study of linguistics and that those who use signed languages should be directly involved as much as possible. Most of you here today probably already get the general gist - I mean this is related to a more general theme that all of the panel presentations have touched upon as well before this - that there is incredibly rich diversity in language communities (spoken or signed) all around the world and anytime we want to focus on those, we need to take the lead from the communities themselves. So for this particular part of human experiences, this is the world I live in. I'm going to take you along with me for a bit of what I experience. This is drawn from my own experiences, what people say on Twitter, the Google form and so on.

The image displays the cover of the book 'A Dictionary of American Sign Language on linguistic principles' and a black and white photograph of its authors. The book cover features the title in a serif font, with 'A DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE' in a larger, bold font, and 'on linguistic principles' in a smaller font below it. The cover art consists of a grid of hands in various sign language gestures, with the top row in white, the middle row in yellow, and the bottom row in red. To the right of the cover is a photograph of three people: a man on the left, a woman in the center, and a man on the right, all seated at a table and engaged in conversation. Below the photograph is a blue box containing the following text:

STOKOE, W. D. CASTERLINE, AND C. CRONEBERG. (1965). A DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE ON LINGUISTIC PRINCIPLES. SILVER SPRING, MD: LINSTOK PRESS.

[HTTP://GUPRESS.GALLAUDET.EDU/DASL.PDF](http://gupress.gallaudet.edu/dasl.pdf)

At the bottom of the slide, there is a row of seven blue dots and the Gallaudet University logo, which includes the text 'GALLAUDET UNIVERSITY' and 'DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS'.

The field basically got its start with William Stokoe - a hearing American man who learned ASL when he was an adult. Here we see one of the most early works on ASL from a linguistic perspectives and this helped get signed languages on the map for linguistics. Here we see Stokoe meeting with two deaf scholars who worked with him on the dictionary. Stokoe went on to publish hundreds and those two (Casterline and Croneberg) didn't remain active. In the early days, people who published most of the work on signed languages in linguistics were hearing academics who may not have signed that well or at all.

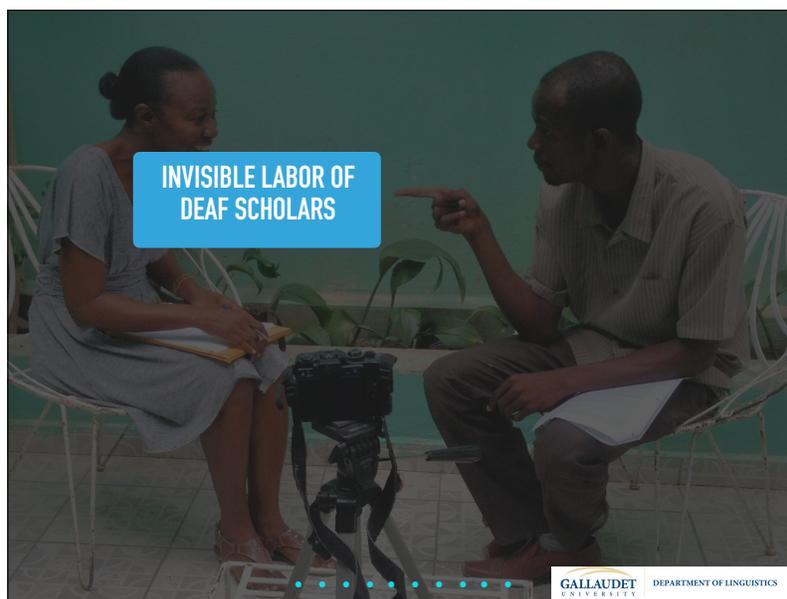


In signed language projects, we're usually the fieldworkers - the ones on the ground - not the ones leading the projects. We're the ones who interview, elicit, annotate, and code. We don't often lead projects or serve as first authors.

A couple of reasons why that happens -

- 1) We deal with a lot of "invisible labor" (we need to secure interpreting, we need to think about accessibility, we need to prepare slides well in advance, we need to be our own advocates and etc)
- 2) We're often not in the position to do so. In the US, almost half of Deaf Americans don't go on to college and under 1 percent of us get a PhD. (see graphic by Garberoglio et al 2019)

This is why I share my content on social media (especially by adding videos) so much to help level access to those who don't have access to resources of academic institutions (like online journal access).

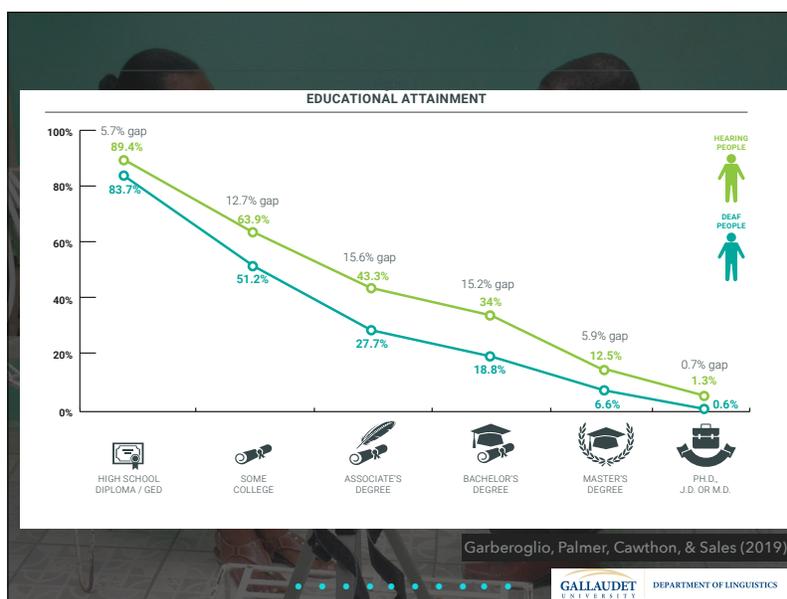


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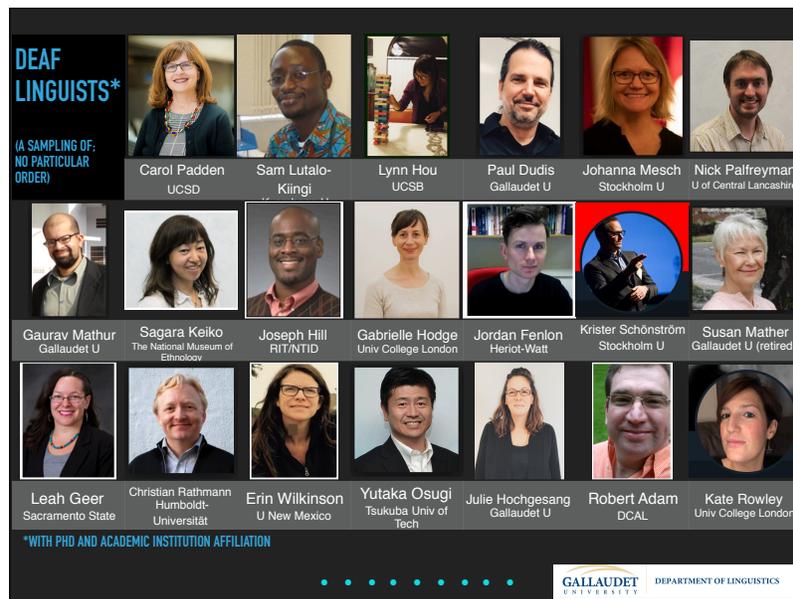


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But yes Deaf linguists do exist! More so recently in the couple last decades. Here I show a sampling of them so not all Deaf linguists are up here and this doesn't count those who are in related fields like linguistic anthropology or Deaf Studies. The people on the slides here have PhDs and are affiliated to some academic institution. Information about affiliation named from my Google Form or Internet searches as of March 2019.

There's not that many but we're out there. More in North America and Western Europe. Not many people of color. Half Deaf people don't continue on to college, let alone graduate school. So there are a lot more Deaf scholars, colleagues that don't have PhDs.

Interesting actually - the Google form that I showed you before? I asked there if they knew any Deaf linguists and to name them. A lot of responses were actually substantial (surprising to me!) but they also named people who worked with signed languages and were actually hearing not Deaf. And of course the field (over seven decades old) involves a lot of hearing linguists who sign well and those who are related to the Deaf community somehow (CODAs - Children of Deaf Adults; relatives of Deaf adults; friends, etc). The importance of working with Deaf linguists and other colleagues are highlighted by Joseph Hill's comment on my Google form about working with Deaf people.

At the end of this presentation, I have a link to a list of resources including an actively edited Google form that maintains lists of Deaf academics (not just linguists) if you're interested.

“They have insights as deaf linguists that have been informed by their biosocial and linguistic experience as deaf people. So that allows me to view their work as authentic and trustworthy. Also, I believe that they haven't been given enough credit for their work and enough opportunity to extend or promote their work unless they work with their hearing allies. ”

-Joseph Hill RIT/NTID (Black deaf sociolinguist working on language variation, language attitudes, and empirical account of black deaf people)

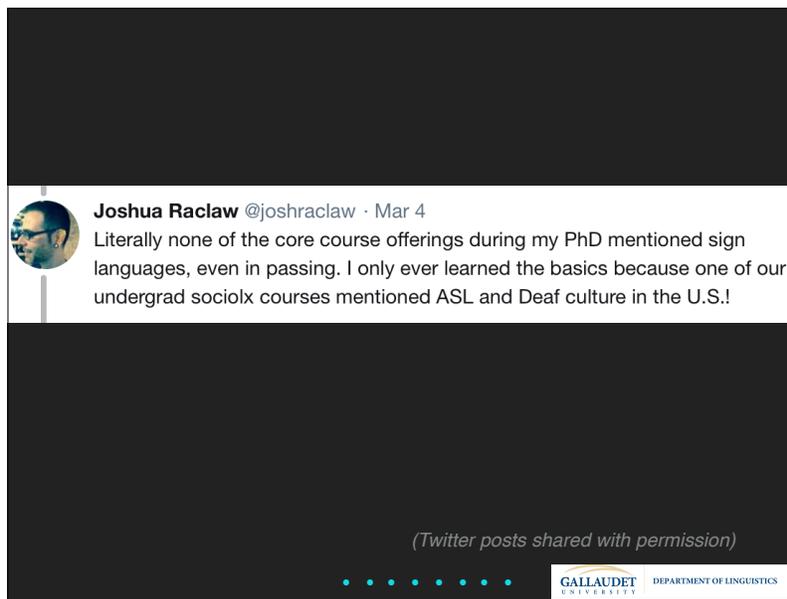
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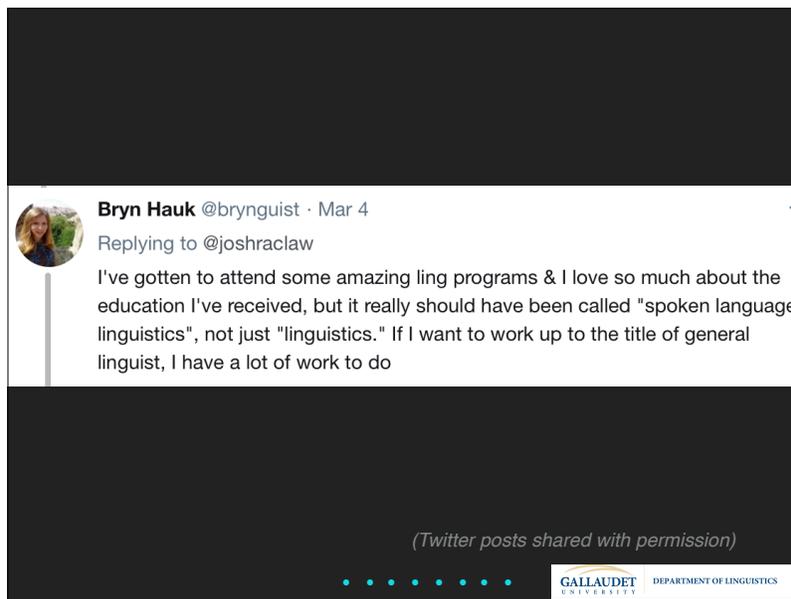
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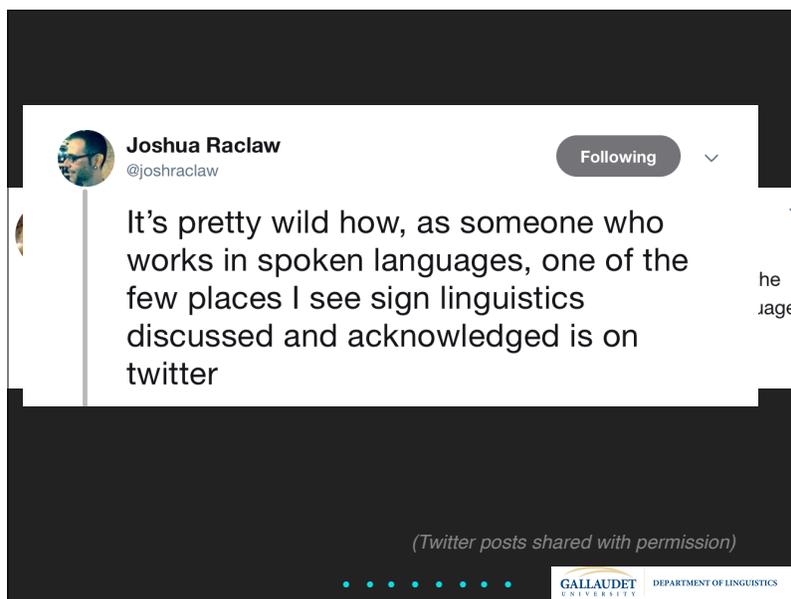
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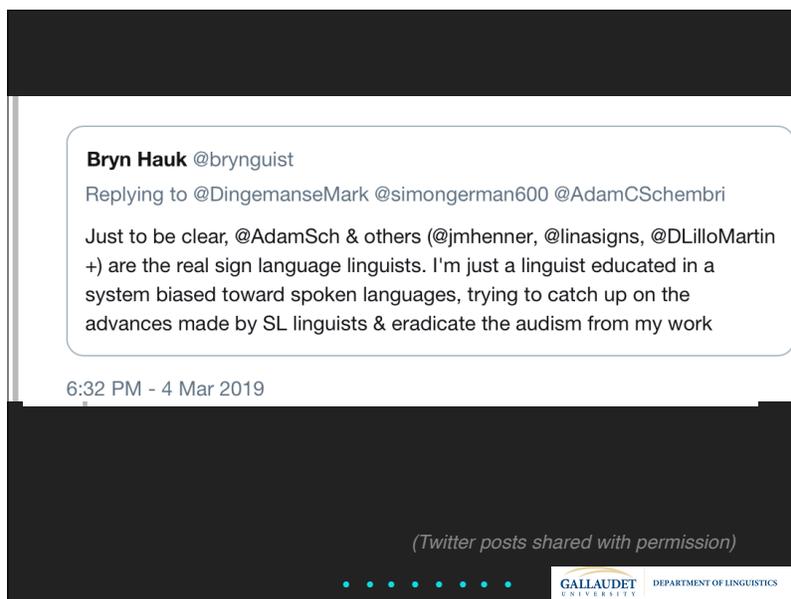
Bryn Hauk and Joshua Raclaw on Twitter (Screenshot on slide, used with permission) discussion of how they're surprised at no mention of signed languages in their graduate studies of linguistics. And for Joshua, not until Twitter did he really come across signed languages, signed language linguistics and Deaf linguists.



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audism

"The notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or to behave in the manner of one who hears."

-Humphries (1977)

<http://libguides.gallaudet.edu/c.php?g=773910&p=5553053>

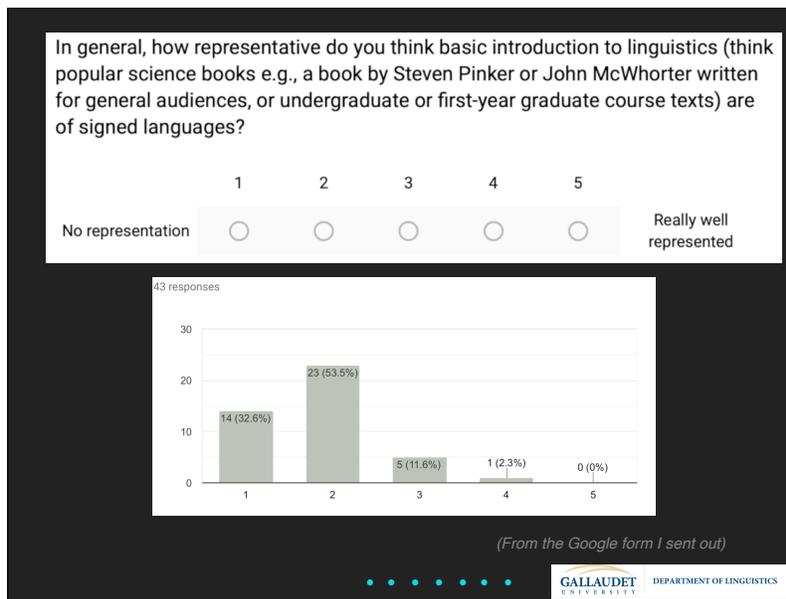


(Twitter posts shared with permission)

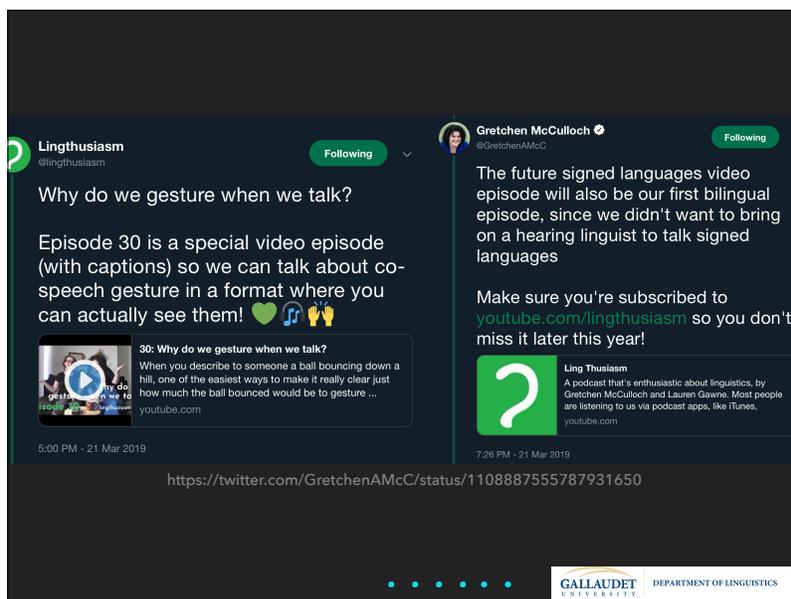


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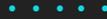
On the google form I discussed earlier, I asked about this representation in texts. Non-scientific inquiry about people's opinions about representation in general linguistic texts. I also asked about primary research texts like articles and what not. It's a bit better there.



A positive indicator of how things are changing. A tweet by Lingthusiasm shows an upcoming podcast that has been filmed and made captioned (accessible!) to show gesture then there'll be one about signed languages. I know that this isn't a "publication" in the traditional sense. But an online platform gives us greater ability to accommodate different modes like my Google form indicated so I think we as a field need to recognize different platforms for "published" academic content.

“The "ghettoization" of signed language research in conferences. Tracks or sessions devoted to "signed languages" or the like separate us from the main sessions discussing our research focuses and methodologies and make us invisible to the broader linguistics community. They also exoticize signed languages, making them seem more inaccessible as a subject of research or even interest to Hearing researchers. I'd love to see increased normalization of signed language research by including it in other tracks and sessions.”

-Deborah Wager, UNM (Hard of Hearing, a PhD candidate in New Mexico) *(shared with permission - from my Google form)*



Conferences and books often separate signed languages into their own sessions, conference tracks, chapters, sections of books - making it seem like signed languages are in their own world but really they could be more incorporated.

Georgetown University Round Table 2019 (The sessions with diamonds on them are the sessions with ASL interpretation.)	
3:30 PM	Invited Panel: Diversifying Linguistics: Working Toward a More Inclusive Field (Auditorium)
	Kirby Conrod, University of Washington Stephany Dunstan, North Carolina State University Julie Hochgesang, Gallaudet University Nicole Holliday, Pomona College Gloria Park, Indiana University of Pennsylvania Minnie Quartey, Georgetown University
	

Positive counter-examples of separation of signed language linguistics in academic conferences and publications -

My talk today on this panel!

An upcoming open access MIT handbook on data management edited by Andrea Berez-Kroeker et al mentions how signed languages are included and she even writes to all contributors to be mindful of this (this was suggested by Deaf linguist Nick Palfreyman). (Not presenting this, just including in the notes here - Other examples of non-inclusive language are: “oral” presentations instead of “stage” presentations; not including “sign”, “signed”, “signing” as a legitimate modality for primary expression of language; etc)

“We are aiming to be inclusive of sign languages in this project, and have included several (entries) specifically about sign linguistics. In this spirit, please double-check that your submission is mindful of the fact that not all languages are spoken. For example, ‘language users’ is a good neutral term to replace ‘speakers.’”

-Andrea Berez-Kroeker, Bradley McDonnell and Eve Koller
(editors of the forthcoming *Open Handbook of Linguistic Data Management* MIT Press Open *(shared with permission)*)

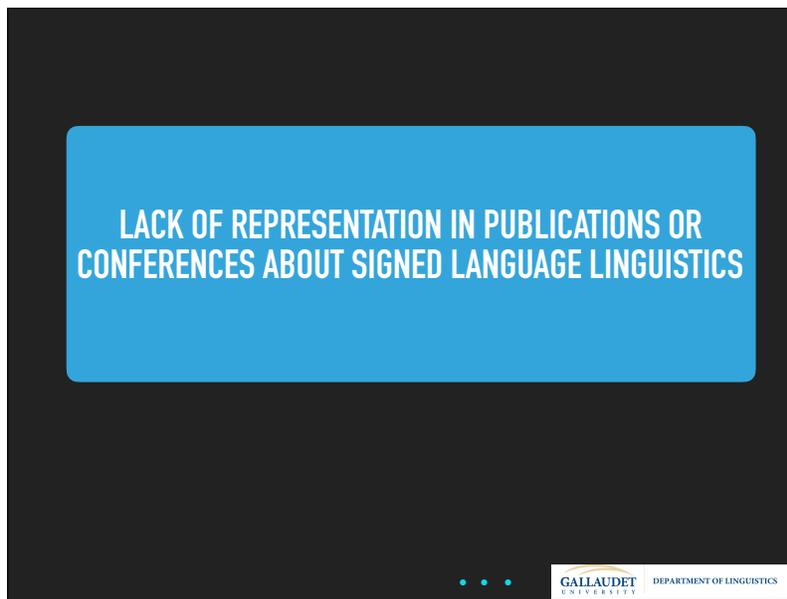
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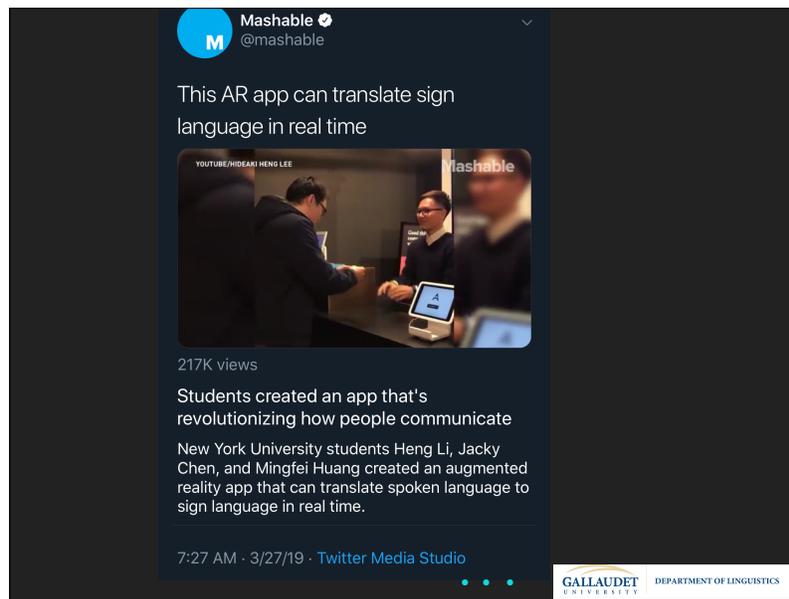


Representation in publications or conferences is problematic -

A recent book on signed language linguistics got published with no deaf authors/editors

My experience at an international conference where interpreters were not provided even after I asked because it was too expensive. In exchange they let me attend for free. There was one signed language poster session. I went up to different posters and tried signing with the people who were presenting these posters- out of 12, only one could communicate with me (this happens often).

And there are tons of projects where people try to invent apps, gloves, computer programs, little bots to help deaf people. There are often NO deaf people advising these projects. If there were, we'd tell them we don't want these kind of products (<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/11/why-sign-language-gloves-dont-help-deaf-people/545441/> and <http://grieve-smith.com/blog/2016/04/ten-reasons-why-sign-to-speech-is-not-going-to-be-practical-any-time-soon/>)



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An example of how conferences can become more accessible - especially those that focus on signed languages and are often dominated by non-signing exchanges. This is a bilingual and bimodal tweet by Danny De Weerd and myself after a conference called SIGN8 in Brazil in 2017 where everyone signed. We were so impressed by the level of accessibility for all participants that we tweeted this to share with others. I don't show the video but the link is there if you like (and if you're non-signing, let me know and I'll make you a text transcript)

Speaking of Twitter, it's become a kind of "conference coffee break" - know how conferences are great for networking? Like how it's neat how you're able to meet new and old colleagues over coffee and discuss ongoing ideas for articles, grants, collaboration and whatnot. That's not so accessible for deaf people for many reasons. But Twitter changes all of that!

@jahochcam and @GretchenAMcC
(Twitter DM conversation last week)

“I consider Twitter one big conference coffee break. You know how conferences are for networking? Well when I go, it's hard to network because there's no interpreters or people feel awkward. It's so much more accessible on Twitter.” - *Julie*

“Yes exactly, that's what I love about twitter, it's like the coffee break part of a conference!” - *Gretchen*



An example of how conferences can become more accessible - especially those that focus on signed languages and are often dominated by non-signing exchanges. This is a bilingual and bimodal tweet by Danny De Weerd and myself after a conference called SIGN8 in Brazil in 2017 where everyone signed. We were so impressed by the level of accessibility for all participants that we tweeted this to share with others. I don't show the video but the link is there if you like (and if you're non-signing, let me know and I'll make you a text transcript)

Speaking of Twitter, it's become a kind of “conference coffee break” - know how conferences are great for networking? Like how it's neat how you're able to meet new and old colleagues over coffee and discuss ongoing ideas for articles, grants, collaboration and whatnot. That's not so accessible for deaf people for many reasons. But Twitter changes all of that!

Adam Schembri
@AdamCSchembri

3 days ago, 5 tweets, 1 min read [Read on Twitter](#)

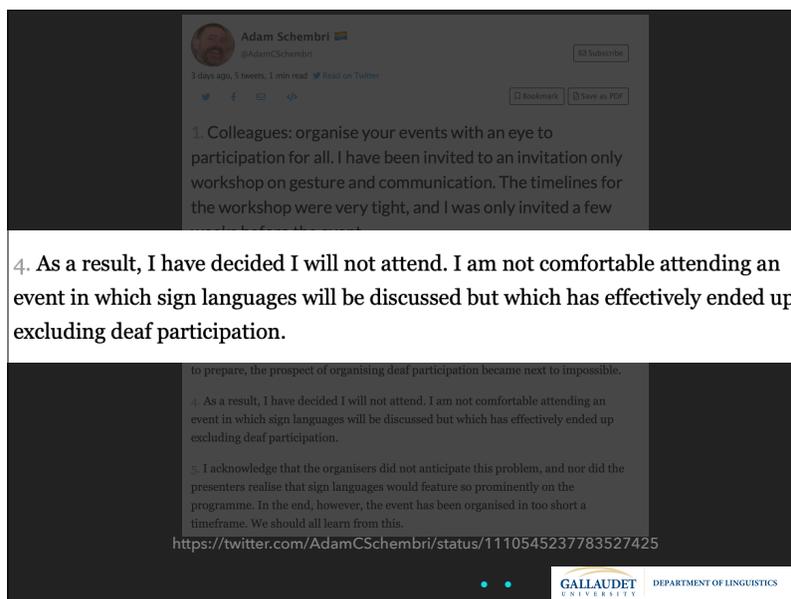
[Bookmark](#) [Save as PDF](#)

1. Colleagues: organise your events with an eye to participation for all. I have been invited to an invitation only workshop on gesture and communication. The timelines for the workshop were very tight, and I was only invited a few weeks before the event.
2. We only received the programme last week. From the presentation topics, it turns out that this event will involve many presentations on sign languages, home sign as well as gesture. I noticed, however, that no deaf participants had been invited.
3. After raising this with the organisers, they agreed to invite some deaf colleagues, but had not budgeted for interpreting or live captioning services. With so little time to prepare, the prospect of organising deaf participation became next to impossible.
4. As a result, I have decided I will not attend. I am not comfortable attending an event in which sign languages will be discussed but which has effectively ended up excluding deaf participation.
5. I acknowledge that the organisers did not anticipate this problem, and nor did the presenters realise that sign languages would feature so prominently on the programme. In the end, however, the event has been organised in too short a timeframe. We should all learn from this.

<https://twitter.com/AdamCSchembri/status/1110545237783527425>

GALLAUDET UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS

Adam Schembri, a hearing signed language linguist and ally to deaf scholars, recently tweeted this thread. I know it may be hard for you to read on the screen here. But you'll have access in the presentation notes I shared with you. Basically as you see in the text I embiggen here, he says since there's a conference with no Deaf colleagues representing that side, he'll not be attending.



Adam Schembri, a hearing signed language linguist and ally to deaf scholars, recently tweeted this thread. I know it may be hard for you to read on the screen here. But you'll have access in the presentation notes I shared with you. Basically as you see in the text I embiggen here, he says since there's a conference with no Deaf colleagues representing that side, he'll not be attending.



Conclusion - I have so much more to say. My colleagues who helped fill out the Google forms do too. And I've largely represented my side of it. There are so many more signs. I have a colleague - Joseph Hill - who studies Black ASL. Another - Lynn Hou - who studies rural sign languages. And yet another who studies ProTactile ASL (how DeafBlind Americans communicate) and so on and on.

I have one last anecdote that gives me hope for the future. I have several more but I'll just share this one. Amelia Becker is a doctoral student here at Georgetown. Her dissertation with Lisa Zsiga as her chair is about American Sign Language phonology. I'm on the committee as well. When I came here for the proposal defense, I was expecting Amelia as a hearing student who uses English to speak and the ASL interpreters sign for her since almost everyone in the room was hearing except me. Amelia chose to sign. I was so surprised but that one choice made the situation so much more accessible for me. This is a sign of good change.

So hopefully this introduction here has gotten you started thinking about how you could change your practices or perspectives. I'm not asking you to become experts in signed language linguistics or fluent in ASL but just thinking about inclusion of these stories in the work you do because they're there. And your thinking about it has incredible impact. I can't tell you how much it has meant to see the words "deaf" or "signing" out there. We see and we care. I look forward to sharing our stories more with you and I look forward to hearing yours. Thank you.

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(I wish I could have added everything from their contributions which totaled 50 pages!)

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Links to info about:

Deaf linguists and other deaf academics (an actively maintained list)

Ethical guidelines for working with signed language communities

Places doing work with signed language linguistics

Other relevant articles

Etc.



AVAILABLE HERE
[HTTPS://SHWCA.SE/DEAFLING](https://shwca.se/deafling)

RESOURCES FOR WORKING WITH SIGNED LANGUAGE COMMUNITIES

The ASL App (by Deaf people) <http://theaslapp.com>

On Instagram

[@theaslapp](#) [@aslconnect](#) [@signedwithheart](#) [@deafinitelydope](#)
(plenty more to find by following those to start with)

ASL online classes <https://www.gallaudet.edu/asl-connect> or
<https://truesdayasl.com>

If in the DC area, face-to-face classes list:

<https://www3.gallaudet.edu/clerc-center/info-to-go/national-resources-and-directories/asl-classes.html>

**IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN
LEARNING ASL**

SLIDES AND CONTACT INFO AVAILABLE HERE 
(LINK TO [HTTPS://SHWCA.SE/DEAFLING](https://shwca.se/deafling))



CONFERENCE HASHTAG #GURT2019

JULIE A. HOCHGESANG

GURT2019

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Thank you! 