Open Letter to Springer Editors
January 18, 2021

Dear editors, Drs. Merchant, Warhade, and Adhikari,

I am a signed language researcher, deaf American Sign Language (ASL) user and linguistics professor at Gallaudet University in Washington DC, USA. I am writing in regard to the dismayed reaction I had to the chapter - "Implementation of Hand Gesture Recognition System to Aid Deaf-Dumb People"[i] that you were overseeing as editors. As you can see below, many colleagues expressed mutual dismay at this article, and have contributed to, and co-signed this letter. My colleagues and I represent various deaf signing communities, the signed language research community, deaf pioneers in sign language technologies, and allied fields in computer science, psychology, interpreting, disability services, disability studies, signed language teaching, linguistics, audiology, biomedical science, and mental health, among many others.

We are appalled that this work was allowed to be published. We question the peer review process that enabled such publication. It is clearly and immediately evident that the authors are not working with the relevant signing communities, where they live and research. The technology they are discussing is claiming to solve a communication problem, when in fact it is not. For instance, the dataset described by the authors only contains eight gestures. All of us work with signed languages – the databases we use to support our work, with some examples listed below, contain several thousands of entries, and these thousands of entries do not come close to capturing the full lexicons of our signed languages. Promoting false beliefs that signed languages are not linguistic communication is highly problematic and refuted by historical and current research (see references below).

This publication raises significant ethical issues. In the past few years, members of the deaf communities and signed language researchers have agreed on very clear guidelines about this kind of work (e.g., Harris, Holmes, Mertens, 2009; Singleton, Martin, & Morgan, 2015; Ethics Statement from Sign Language Linguistics Society). First and foremost, work of this nature must, at a minimum, be done in collaboration with the communities who stand to be most impacted by this work. Better yet, this work should be led by members of these communities. In this case, deaf scholars in the relevant communities must be involved. Second, authors and editors of any paper, in any field, have an obligation to ensure that relevant literature has been consulted. Had you done so in this case, this chapter would have never made it to print given the already-rich literature related to these topics.

As editors, you have a responsibility to ensure that the language and framing used by your authors are appropriate and respectful. Offensive terms like "deaf and dumb" and "deaf-mute" have been outdated for over 50 years and are rejected by the communities the terms attempt to describe. Framing deaf people, a minority group, as "victims" and contrasting them to "ordinary people" is unbelievably insulting. Implying that signed languages are not "linguistic communication" is factually incorrect. This kind of language is unacceptable in an academic publication, violates APA guidelines for disability as outlined here, https://apastyle.apa.org/style-

grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/disability, and offends the deaf signing communities and allies. Deaf people are fully capable of learning to read and write fluently in whatever spoken language is locally used, on top of using their signed languages which are equally as full, complex, nuanced and expressive.

Recent efforts have tried to bridge the divide between emerging technology research groups, and the deaf scholars, engineers, and scientists who have the relevant content knowledge. One such example is the CREST (Cultivating Research & Equity in Sign-related Technology) Network, a virtual community of people working in the fields of technology related to sign language (e.g., sign language documentation, sign language recognition, sign language technology, or sign language animation). Along with connecting with their local deaf community, we would encourage authors Ghule and Chavaan to consider connecting to, and learning from, this network if they plan to continue research in this field.

Ultimately, we call for the immediate retraction of this chapter and the issuance of an apology. We await your reply at your earliest convenience. This open letter has been posted online (10.6084/m9.figshare.13600940[ii]). In closing, we share the following for your future reference.

"Do deaf communities actually want sign language gloves?" by Dr. Joseph Hill[iii]

"Indian Sign Language should be declared official language, but only taught by Deaf trainers" by Dr. Alim Chandani[iv]

"Why Sign-Language Gloves Don't Help Deaf People" by Michael Erard (which cites several signed language researchers and their objections, including myself)[v]

Sign Language Translating Devices Are Cool. But Are They Useful? By Emily Matchar (features quotes from Deaf perspectives)[vi]

Open letter from the University of Washington Department of Linguistics[vii]

Harris, R., Holmes, H. M., & Mertens, D. M. (2009). Research Ethics in Sign Language Communities. In *Sign Language Studies*, 9, 2 pp. 104–131). https://doi.org/10.1353/sls.0.0011

Singleton, J., A. Martin, & G. Morgan. (2015). Ethics, Deaf-Friendly Research,and Good Practice When Studying Sign Languages. In E. Orfanidou, B. Woll, & G. Morgan (Eds.), *Research Methods in Sign Language Studies*, pp. 7-20. Hoboken: Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Sign Language Linguistics Society (SLLS) Ethics statement[viii]

"The FATE Landscape of Sign Language AI Datasets: An Interdisciplinary Perspective" by Danielle Bragg, Naomi Caselli, Julie A. Hochgesang, Matt Huenerfauth, Leah Katz-Hernandez, Oscar Koller, Raja Kushalnagar, Christian Vogler and Richard E. Ladner will

be published later this year [here](ix)

"Sign Language Recognition, Generation, and Translation: An Interdisciplinary Perspective" by Danielle Bragg, Oscar Koller, Mary Bellard, Larwan Berke, Patrick Boudreault, Annelies Braffort, Naomi Caselli, Matt Huenerfauth, Hernisa Kacorri, Tessa Verhoef, Christian Vogler and Meredith Ringel Morris (laying out five calls to action for the community was published [here and won best paper award)](x)

[CREST Network (Cultivating Research and Equity in Sign-related Technology)](xi)

Some corpora and signbanks (alphabetical order), which exemplify work done by or with the signed language communities

[Asian Signbank](xii)
[ASL Signbank](xiii)
[Auslan Signbank](xiv)
[BSL Corpus](xv)
[BSL Signbank](xvi)
[Danish Sign Language Dictionary](xvii)
[DGS Corpus](xviii)

[Finnish Signbank](xix)
[LIBRAS Signbank](xx)
[NGT Corpus](xxi)
[NGT & Global Signbank](xxii)
[Russian Sign Language Corpus](xxiii)
[Singapore Sign Language Signbank](xxiv)

Sincerely,

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Dr. Cecily Whitworth, PhD in Linguistics, deaf advocate, USA

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[i] https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-15-8391-9_14

[ii] https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/_/13600940

[iii] https://www.nature.com/articles/s41928-020-0451-7?proof=t

[iv] https://theprint.in/opinion/indian-sign-language-should-be-declared-official-language-but-only-taught-by-deaf-trainers/432627/

[v] https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/11/why-sign-language-gloves-dont-help-deaf-people/545441/

[vi] https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/sign-language-translators-are-cool-but-are-they-useful-180971535/

[vii] http://faculty.washington.edu/ebender/papers/SignAloudOpenLetter.pdf

[viii] https://slls.eu/slls-ethics-statement/

[ix] https://dl.acm.org/journal/taccess

[x] https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3308561.3353774

[xi] https://www.crest-network.com

[xii] http://cslds.org/asiansignbank/

[xiii] https://aslsignbank.haskins.yale.edu

[xiv] https://www.auslan.org.au

[xv] https://bslcorpusproject.org

[xvi] https://bslsignbank.ucl.ac.uk

[xvii] http://tegnsprog.dk

[xviii] https://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/meinedgs/ling/start_en.html

[xix] https://signbank.csc.fi

[xx] https://signbank.libras.ufsc.br

[xxi] https://www.ru.nl/corpusngtuk/

[xxii] https://signbank.science.ru.nl

[xxiii] http://rsl.nstu.ru/site/index/language/en

[xxiv] https://web.archive.org/web/20141020001726/http:/www.sadeaf.org.sg/about-sgsl.htm