

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Central Lancashire</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UOA 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Championing linguistic rights and educational opportunities for sign language users around the world through Sign Language Typology research</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)  <b>The International Institute for Sign Languages and Deaf Studies (iSLanDS)</b> is a world leader in the systematic comparative research on sign languages (Sign Language Typology), and conducts the world's largest typological projects on sign language structures, using a large international partnership network. The impact of this work, often in developing countries, is seen in the domains of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improved educational attainment and professional development for marginalised groups (deaf sign language users); and</li> <li>linguistic rights for sign language users through engagement with international policy makers, non-governmental organisations and professional bodies (in India, in Turkey and with international bodies).</li> </ol>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)  Sign Language Typology, the systematic cross-linguistic comparison of sign language structures, is a new academic sub-discipline that has been developed from 2000 onwards by Ulrike Zeshan. The Sign Language Typology Research Group led by Zeshan was active at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics from 2003-2006 and subsequently at the University of Central Lancashire from 2006 onwards. From the beginning, the vast majority of members of the group have been deaf sign language users from various countries including India, Turkey, China, South Korea, Venezuela, Uzbekistan, and Japan.</p> <p>Sign Language Typology is situated at the crossroads between linguistic typology and sign language research. The most significant hallmark of Sign Language Typology consists of large-scale studies of sign languages from all around the world with respect to particular grammatical/semantic domains (interrogative and negative constructions 2000-2005, possessive and existential constructions 2004-2008, semantic fields of colour, kinship and quantification 2010 onwards). These studies involve data from several dozen diverse sign languages, and no other studies comparable in size and scope exist anywhere else at the moment. The results of this research have repeatedly provided clear evidence that sign languages have far greater linguistic diversity than was previously recognised, and that the relationship between typological patterns of signed and spoken languages must be appraised individually for each domain rather than assuming that sign languages always constitute a homogeneous linguistic type.</p> <p>In addition to journal articles and other publications, each project in Sign Language Typology leads to the publication of a major edited volume in the Sign Language Typology Series (De Gruyter Mouton &amp; Ishara Press):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SLT1: <i>Interrogative and Negative Constructions in Sign Languages</i>, published 2006 (ed. U. Zeshan)</li> <li>SLT2: <i>Possessive and Existential Constructions in Sign Languages</i>, published 2008 (ed. U. Zeshan &amp; P. Perniss, Research Assistant for this project at UCLan in 2006)</li> <li>SLT4: <i>Sign Languages in Village Communities – Linguistic and Anthropological Insights</i>, published 2012 (ed. U. Zeshan &amp; C. de Vos, Research Assistant for this project 2010-2012)</li> <li>SLT5: <i>Semantic Fields in Sign Languages</i>, forthcoming 2014 (ed. U. Zeshan &amp; K. Sagara, Research Assistant for this project at UCLan 2010-2014).</li> </ul> <p>Most of this work has been funded by (German and UK) Research Council grants awarded to Zeshan (see details below). Importantly, Sign Language Typology also involves the documentation of sign languages that have been previously undescribed. This is a necessary part of Sign Language Typology, as data from many sign languages, particularly in developing countries, are not available and therefore must be generated within each of the projects, using international networks of research partners. This research, often with partners in developing countries, has facilitated documentation and legitimisation of sign languages and user communities. These</p>

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partnerships enable us to improve educational attainment for deaf sign language users, and promote their linguistic rights through engagement with policy makers and NGOs. Most past and present members of the Sign Language Typology Research Group are deaf and hold NGO roles, e.g. on the board of deaf organisations in Turkey and India. We have had (current and graduated) 8 deaf research degree students at UCLan and 70 deaf BA students in India, and many of them have been involved in typological projects in one way or another.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

#### Research on comparative typological sign linguistics:

- Zeshan, U. (2006): Interrogative and negative constructions in Turkish Sign Language. In: Zeshan, U. (ed.): *Interrogative and Negative Constructions in Sign Languages*. Sign Language Typology Series No. 1. Nijmegen: Ishara Press. pp. 128-164  
– Book chapter, available online at <http://www.oapen.org/search?identifier=453832>
- Schwager, W. & U. Zeshan (2008): Word classes in sign languages – Criteria and classifications. In: Ansaldo, U., J. Don & R. Pfau (eds.), *Studies in Language* 32:3, 509-545.  
– Journal article, REF output
- Panda, S. & U. Zeshan (2011): Reciprocal constructions in Indo-Pakistani Sign Language. In: Evans, N., A. Gaby, S. Levinson & A. Majid: *Reciprocals and Semantic Typology*. Typological Studies in Language No. 58. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. pp. 91-114.  
– Book chapter, REF output
- Zeshan, U. (2011): Sign Languages. In: Dryer, Matthew S. & Haspelmath, Martin (eds.) *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Munich: Max Planck Digital Library.  
– Available online at <http://wals.info/chapter/139> (Irregular Negatives in Sign Languages) and <http://wals.info/chapter/140> (Question Particles in Sign Languages).
- Zeshan, U., C.E. Escobedo Delgado, H. Dikyuva, S. Panda & C. de Vos (2013): Cardinal numerals in rural sign languages – Approaching cross-modal typology. *Linguistic Typology* 17:3. – Journal article, REF output

**Evidence of quality:** Publications are in journals and established book series (Sign Language Typology Series, published by De Gruyter Mouton & Ishara Press from SLT3 onwards; Typological Studies in Language published by John Benjamins). Research was supported through a grant of over EUR 1m by the German Research Council (DFG) in the Emmy-Noether post-doctoral programme of excellence awarded to PI Zeshan (2003-2008), and, for a comparative study on small-scale rural sign languages, by over EUR 800,000 through the European Science Foundation awarded to a consortium led by Zeshan (see Impact Case Study on sign language endangerment). *The World Atlas of Language Structures* is a prominent major reference work in linguistic typology.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

#### Improved educational attainment and professional development for marginalised groups

The iSLanDS Institute is unique in that the vast majority of staff and students have always been deaf sign language users, from a variety of countries. This approach defines our unique research opportunities and underpins most of the impact that the Institute has had. Capacity building in international deaf communities is one of our aims, and all deaf staff and students involved with iSLanDS have furthered their educational attainment and career development. This includes the following:

- 5 deaf MA by Research students and 3 deaf MPhil/PhD students pursuing their studies at iSLanDS (graduations: 2 MA by Research in 2010/11; 2 MA by Research in 2012/13; 2 MPhil/PhD and 1 MA by Research expected in 2013/14). There are no hearing students.
- 5 deaf researchers working on various (current and completed) research projects at the Institute (from India, Turkey, Mexico, the UK, and Japan). In addition to professional development, most of them also have a range of functions in international deaf organisations (see below). Two of them are undertaking MPhil/PhD studies as part of their personal development programme.
- 70 deaf students from 9 countries studying in a BA programme and an accompanying university access programme with our partner in India (Indira Gandhi National Open

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University); 10 graduations in 2012/13. There are no hearing students. This programme has grown out of a research partnership and is led by a deaf Indian staff member (Panda) at iSLanDS. The programme is moving to a new Indian institution in 2013/14.

These students and graduates often go on to train other deaf people, typically in short-term training programmes. This is part of our multi-level “train the trainers” model, whereby iSLanDS uses its international research projects to train young deaf academics, who can then provide training to the wider deaf communities in their home countries. For instance, MA by Research student Paul Scott has established a partnership with the British Council in Jordan, which has provided training for deaf peer tutors of English literacy (13 participants trained in 2013 and three further groups of trainees in process of being set up). An Indian BA graduate trained 14 deaf peer tutors of English literacy in August 2013 at a large deaf school in India.

Through the Ishara Press, of which Zeshan is Editor-in-Chief, young deaf academics can access opportunities to build their CVs through publishing their work or serving on editorial boards, thus avoiding barriers often faced with other academic outlets. Publications in the Sign Language Typology series have included work by five deaf authors in SLT2 and work by six deaf authors in SLT4. Three of the eight current members of the editorial board of the Sign Language Typology Series are deaf.

The Sign Language Typology Research Group began organising a workshop series in Cross-Linguistic Sign Language Research (CLSLR) in 2005, and this has now developed into a major international conference series re-named SIGN and now attracting ca. 200 participants regularly. SIGN conferences are unique in that they are held exclusively through sign language and systematically include deaf participants from developing countries from both academic and non-academic circles. Thus SIGN4 was held in New Delhi in 2009, SIGN5 in Turkey in 2011 and SIGN6 in Goa in 2013. At the latter conference, representatives of the National Association of the Deaf and the Goa Association of the Deaf were invited keynote presenters. These conferences are a major hub for international deaf academics and for knowledge transfer to international deaf communities. In 2013, an international conference committee was established with members hailing from Belgium, Germany, Nepal, China, India and the UK.

#### Supporting linguistic rights for sign language users

In addition to capacity building, one of the most important activities that sign language researchers can engage in is to lobby for the linguistic rights of deaf sign language users through awareness-raising and work with and for deaf organisations. In many countries, particularly developing countries, sign languages still do not have any recognition and deaf sign language users are denied even the most basic services such as accessible education and professional sign language interpreting. iSLanDS members are engaged in a large number of functions within international non-governmental organisations, policy makers and professional bodies, which highlight the needs of sign language users:

#### Zeshan (Director of iSLanDS)

- President of the Deaf Empowerment Foundation in the Netherlands (2004 – present), and Director the International Deaf Empowerment Foundation in the UK (2010 – present)
- Ambassador for Deaf Parenting UK (2009 – present)
- Consultancy on sign language endangerment for UNESCO and the Foundation for Endangered Languages (2012 – present)
- Consultancy as member of the Expert Group on Sign Language and Deaf Studies at the World Federation of the Deaf (2013 – present)

#### Panda (Lecturer, from India)

- Vice President, All India Federation of the Deaf, New Delhi (2010 – present)
- Vice President, Indian Sign Language Interpreter Association (2008 – present)
- Founding member and trustee, Ishara Foundation, Mumbai (2005 – present)
- Board member, Sign Language Linguistics Society (2007 – 2012)
- Member of Expert Committee, Rehabilitation Council of India (2011 – present)
- Consultancy as member of the Expert Group on Developing Countries at the World Federation

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of the Deaf (2013 – present)

Dikyuva (previous MA by Research student, from Turkey, graduated 2011)

- Board member, World Federation of the Deaf (2011 – present)
- Board member, Turkish National Federation of the Deaf (2011 – present)

Lutalo-Kiingi (current MPhil/PhD student, from Uganda)

- Consultancy as member of the Expert Group on Sign Language and Deaf Studies at the World Federation of the Deaf (2007 – present)

This multi-level engagement provides a basis for lobbying for and supporting the development of sign language services internationally. For instance, iSLanDS members have been involved in a £4m initiative by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment with the aim to establish an “Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre”, and in the creation of a “Sign Language Board” at the Turkish National Deaf Federation. The iSLanDS Institute’s MPhil/PhD student Lutalo-Kiingi gave an invited keynote lecture at the 6<sup>th</sup> World Congress of African Linguistics in Cologne (WOCAL 2009), which gave prominence to sign language research in Africa for the first time at WOCAL. The WOCAL Standing Committee subsequently decided to organise a sign language workshop at each WOCAL conference in the future, and has included sign linguists on the committee. One of the Sign Language Typology projects overlaps with work on sign language endangerment at iSLanDS (see impact case study on sign language endangerment for details of the impact of this work).

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)iSLanDS public domain sites:

- We report regularly on our projects, events for the general public, and achievements of our staff and students via the iSLanDS blog at <http://islandscentre.wordpress.com> – the blog has had over 8,700 views to date.
- The SIGN conference site is at [www.signconference.org](http://www.signconference.org)

BA programme in India:

- British Council success stories of the UK-India Education and Research Initiative resulting in the BA programme at <http://www.ukieri.org/distance-education-in-sign-language-04.html>
- Deaf Empowerment Foundation (the DEF operates a scholarship programme for the BA programme, funded through profits of the Ishara Press) at [www.def-intl.net](http://www.def-intl.net)
- Award for Sibaji Panda as “Best Rehabilitation Professional” by Dr Karan Singh, Member of India’s Upper House of Parliament; see blog post at <http://islandscentre.wordpress.com/2012/12/17/islands-lecturer-sibaji-panda-receives-award-in-india/>

Work with international NGOs:

- World Federation of the Deaf [www.wfdeaf.org](http://www.wfdeaf.org) – CONTACT 1: Hasan Dikyuva, Board Member, World Federation of the Deaf, responsible for coordinating the WFD’s expert groups
- Report on English teacher training for deaf peer tutors by the British Council in Jordan on Jordanian television at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rvEMwe9JYFU> and in the Jordan Times at <http://jordantimes.com/article/teacher-training-project-seeks-to-empower-people-with-hearing-speech-impairments>