

# Signs of Globalisation: What is ASL doing in NZSL?

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# Language relationships

- NZSL 'sister languages' are BSL and Auslan – many Auslan & BSL signs have been borrowed into NZSL
- ASL is a different family (foreign), but ASL signs seem to be increasing in NZSL

## Contact with ASL through ...

- **Internet** – lots of ASL material online
- **International travel** & events. WFD, CISS, camps ...  
ASL is a power language and a strong part of I.S.
- Deaf leaders & teachers in NZ who are **bilingual** in ASL and NZSL
- ASL signs in **Auslan** (& TC) come into NZSL
- **Immigrants** (eg, US, S. Africa, Phillipines)



# Research questions:

## Use

- How much ASL vocab is commonly used in NZSL?

## Attitudes

- Do signers see ASL signs as 'foreign', or as part of NZSL?
- How do deaf NZSL users feel about borrowing signs from overseas?  
Threat, or boost, to NZSL?

# 3 parts of the research

**1. Identify ASL signs** in NZSL vlogs and in dictionary

*(what people do)*

**2. Online survey** - sign use preference (NZ/ ASL variants)

*(what people say they do)*

**3. Interviews** – ideas about overseas influence and change in NZSL

*(what people think & feel)*



# 1. ASL signs in NZSL vlogs

We looked at 52 public online posts in NZSL (eg, newsletter, announcements, vlogs). We found:

- **305** different ASL (origin) signs used
- Only **85** of these signs in NZSL Dictionary
- This suggests a lot of 'new' ASL vocab is now used in NZSL

# Examples of ASL signs used in everyday NZSL



action



talk



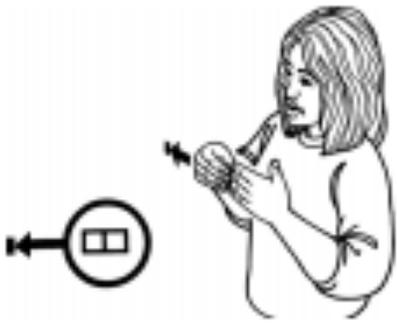
sorry



language



skill



lead,



system



chair, sit



feel



internet

# Examples of ASL signs used in everyday NZSL



supervise



culture



biology



complicated



assume



symbol



research



doesn't  
matter



inform



approach

## 2. Online survey

99 people completed the survey

### Age:

16-29	15%
30-49	50%
50+	35%

### Gender:

Male	20%
Female	73%

Deaf/hard of hearing	79%
Hearing	21%

### Country of schooling:

- NZ 85%
- Other 15%

### Location:

Auckland	31%
Wellington	21%
Christchurch	17%
Others	31%

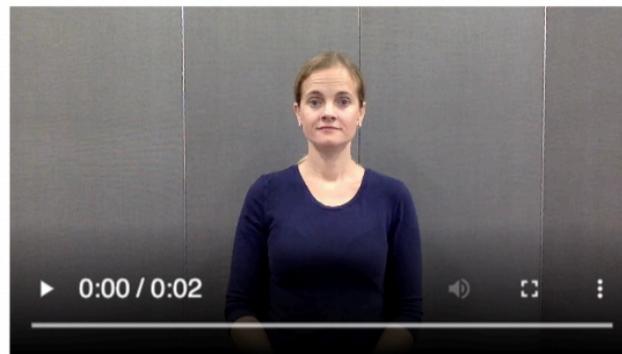
### Have you ever lived overseas?

Yes	35%
No	65%

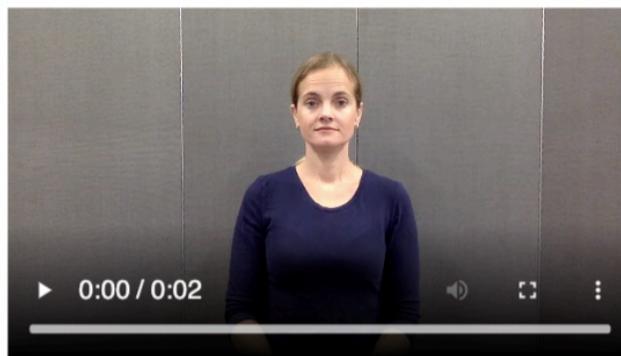
# Survey Task 1: Variant preference



Sign 1



Sign 2



Which sign do you use more often?

Sign 1

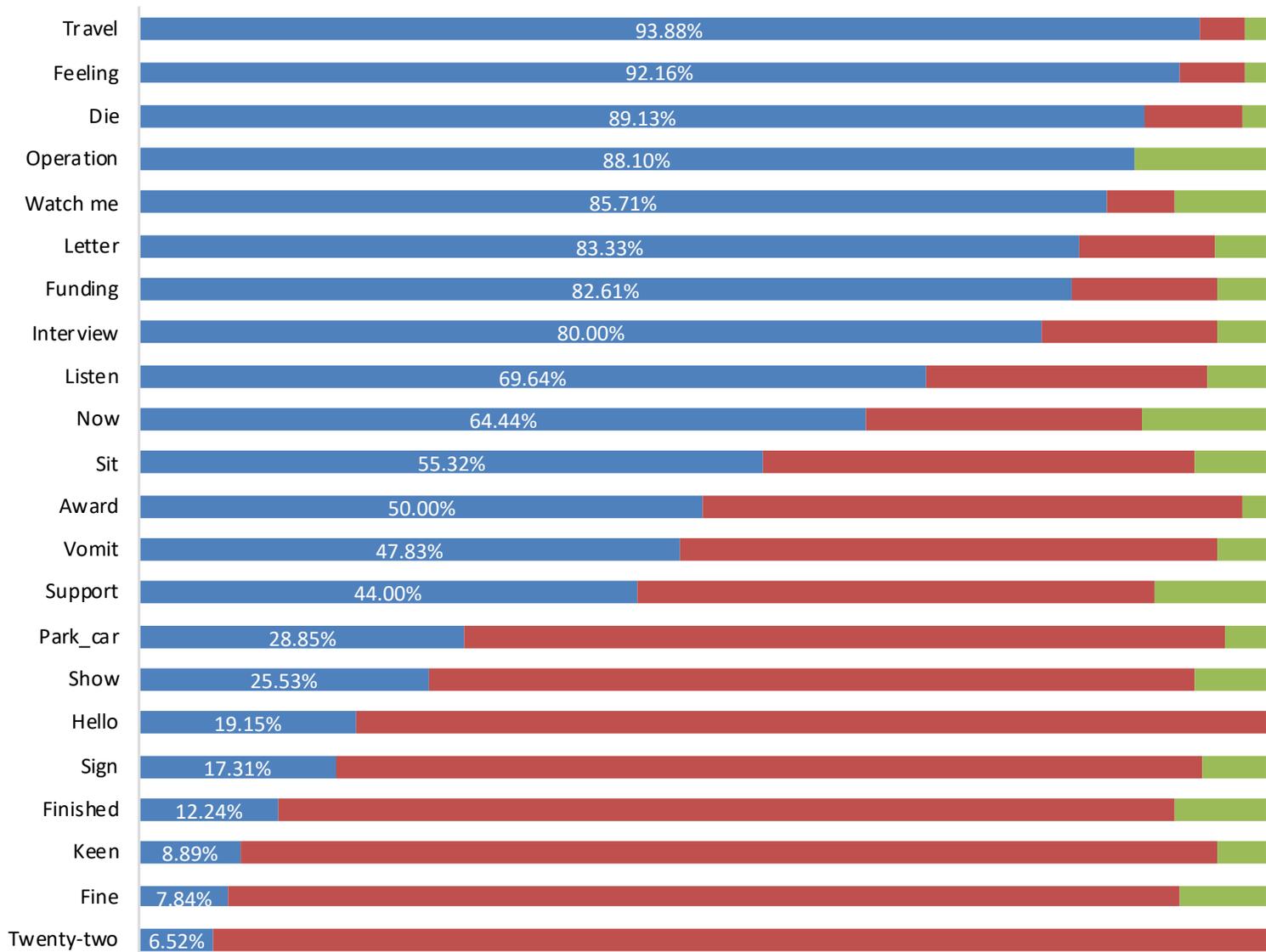
I use another sign

Sign 2

This sign means:

### Sign Pairs

ASL preferred (%)    NZSL preferred (%)    Other preferred (%)

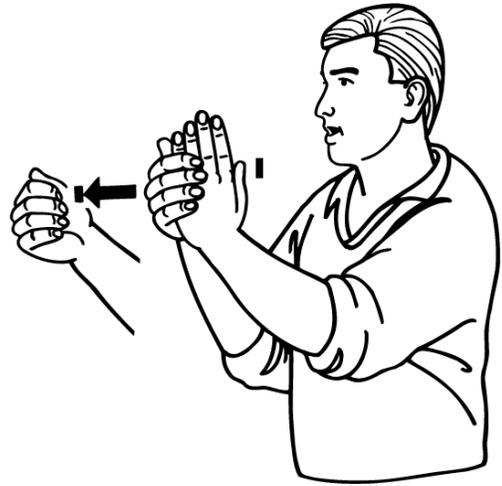
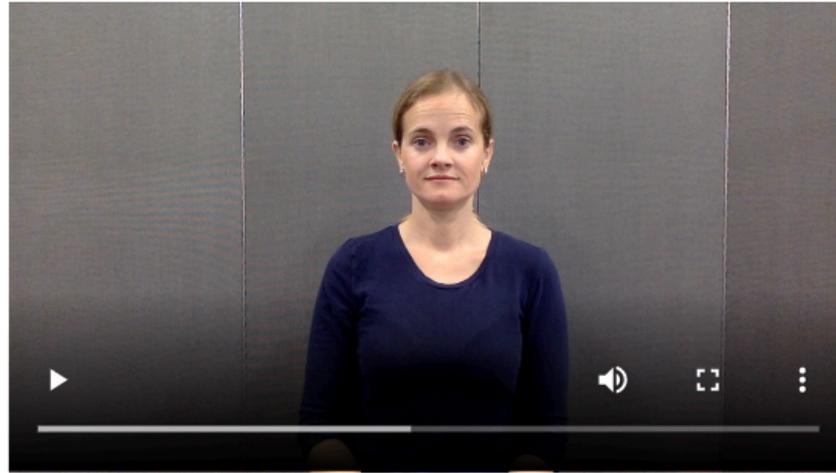


ASL sign is preferred in 52% of the 22 sign pairs

# This shows

- Pairs of 'ASL' and NZSL signs for the same concept
  - Many 'ASL' signs have almost replaced older NZ signs - now used by most people
  - Some 'pairs' are in the process of changing – both signs are used

## Survey Task 2: Sign origin awareness



Where did this sign come from?

NZSL (New Zealand)

BSL (UK) or Auslan (Australia)

TC (Total Communication)

Other sign language (which one?)

ASL (America)

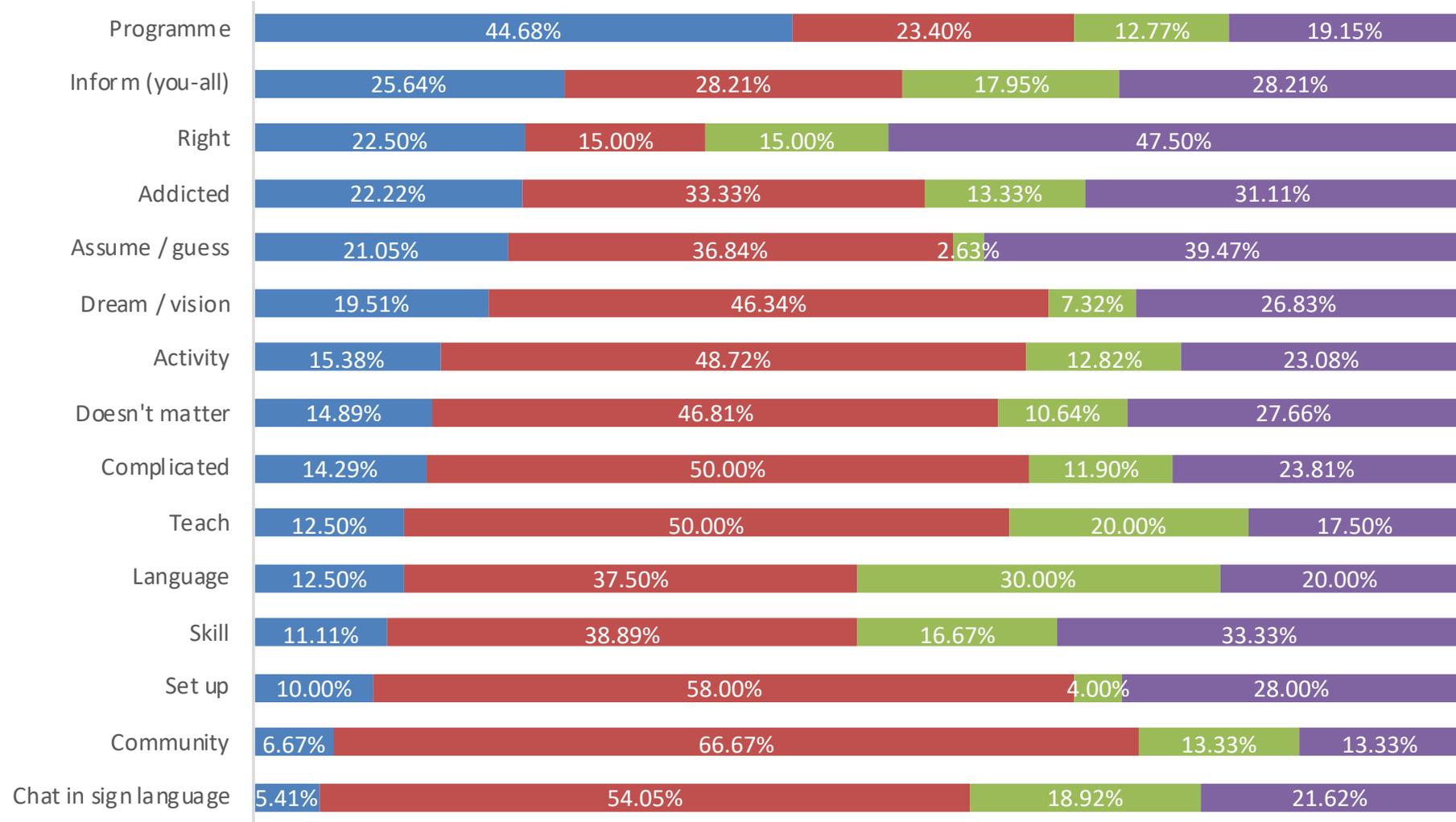
Don't know

→ Next

# Sign Origins

Awareness of ASL origin

ASL NZSL Other Don't know



# This shows

- Most Deaf people are not conscious (aware) of where signs originally come from
  - even signs with ASL letter handshapes – P, L, C, S
  - (this is similar for hearing people speaking English)
  - Deaf people mostly identify ASL signs as ‘NZSL’
- Overseas signs are ‘naturalized’ into NZSL quickly

# 3. Attitudes to global influence in NZSL

Interviews with 28 Deaf people

## Idea 1: Borrowing & change helps NZSL grow

“NZSL can adapt to new signs, for example from ASL or BSL - we could benefit from them. I think it's good to see all languages mingling”

## Idea 2: International influence on NZSL styles

“I’ve noticed that the signing style has changed - after seeing international signers, deaf people tend to adopt their signing style here. Some use one-handed fingerspelling more”

## Idea 3: Global signs are cool

“I see a few [ASL] signs like FINE and WANT that other people [my age] have started using ...I like International Sign”

“I’ll see my friends using some cool sign that I like, and I add it to my vocabulary. For instance, the ASL sign ‘NO’ that my friends use to say ‘no’ to each other. I thought it was a nice sign to use”

## Idea 4: Keep it in the family

“We should be careful with adopting new signs and make sure they feel right in NZSL.

Auslan signs are fine because Auslan and NZSL are in same family.

**I want to preserve NZSL identity but at the same time, if there is no sign in NZSL, it'd be alright to borrow from other sign languages”**

## Idea 5: “Preserve” NZSL, keep it separate

**“It’s better to maintain NZSL as is today rather than borrowing signs from overseas which could be more confusing. I’d rather see us create new signs than borrow from overseas”**

## Idea 6: Learning ASL gives access to wider Deaf world & information

“ASL is on the same level as English, where everyone knows that language. ASL is the language that is crucial to have when meeting international deaf people ... I think it’s a great idea for deaf children to learn ASL, because it’s more common worldwide”

18 yr old who has travelled. Deaf family

“I want to expand my knowledge about the world beyond what’s available here in NZ. I would pick ASL (to learn) because of the vast resources available. ASL literature has plenty of information about deaf culture and deaf identity, etc – like English. I don’t see any negative side to learning ASL. Teaching ASL to deaf children will help them be exposed to more information out there”

Person age 35-40. Deaf family

# Conclusions

- NZSL is in a 'third wave' of lexical change: early signs > TC/Auslan signs > global
- ASL influence through globalization:
  - online communication, travel, global Deaf identity & networks
- New styles & signs are borrowed when NZSL is used in new media & contexts
- Attitudes to global influence in NZSL are mixed:
  - 'preserve' v. 'adapt & grow'
  - 'local identity' v. 'wider world'

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