Chinese Language Influences on Tibetan Sign Language (TSL) Users in Lhasa: Cardinal Numbers and Days of the Week

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SUMMARY

Chinese and Chinese Sign Languages are increasingly incorporated into the Tibetan Sign Language (TSL) and into TSL-based interactions in Lhasa. This phenomenon is locally known as "goat-sheep-mixed-sign [language]". The sign for this practice [RA LUG LAGDA] is itself a code-blend of TSL and CSL: GOAT [RA] being the same in TSL and CSL, SHEEP [LUG] coming from CSL, SIGN [LAGDA] also being the same in both, and MIXED coming from TSL. Tibetans often voice or mouth in addition the Tibetan term "ra-[ma]-lug-lagda". Studying the phenomenon of the "goat-sheep-mixed-sign" complements research on the increasing influences from spoken and written Chinese on Tibetan languages and Tibetan society more broadly (Tournadre 2003:4). Two of the linguistic fields where Tibetan speakers regularly switch to Chinese, are cardinal numbers and days of the week. In these cases they use the Chinese terms as loan words without adaptation.

How do Chinese and CSL cardinal numbers and days of the week feature in the Tibetan Sign Language? This poster highlights influences in the two domains, showing unique dynamics:
1. in the morphology, phonology and use of TSL cardinal numbers signs among TSL signers in Lhasa
2. in the creation of code-blends for days of the week in TSL

METHODS

Ongoing anthropological and linguistic fieldwork with 25 deaf Tibetan signers in Lhasa documenting day-to-day discourse (Hofer) comparison with typological linguistic research on Chinese Sign Languages based on linguistic elicitation (Sagara).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Contribute to the emerging field of sign language contact and unimodal sign-bilingualism (Adam 2017) and highlight special features of signed code-blends as compared to code-blends in spoken languages.


Tibetan Sign Language (TSL) in Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) - Facts

native sign language of the Tibetan deaf people in Lhasa first mentioned and named as "Tibetan Sign Language" in 2000 suppported and promoted through the Tibet Deaf Association (TDA, est. 2004) emerged from "spontaneous sign" (a common Tibetan concept) and some linguistic and lay standardisation work by the TDA currently 50 to 200 Tibetan users in Lhasa mainly since 2012, this number is matched by roughly an equal number of deaf Tibetans who are dominant in Chinese Sign Languages (CSLs)

Chinese Sign Language (CSL) in Lhasa, TAR - Facts

First government "Special School", i.e. Deaf School of Lhasa (est. 2000)
Teachers use sign-supported Chinese and some CSL (a mixed form of special school teachers' CSL, Beijing and Shanghai CSL) TSL is not used in the school, except some lexical signs in the 8 hours of weekly Tibetan language instruction
Students amongst each other sign CSL
Currently 150 to 200 Tibetan users of CSL in Lhasa, numbers are increasing as four new Deaf schools were founded across the TAR.
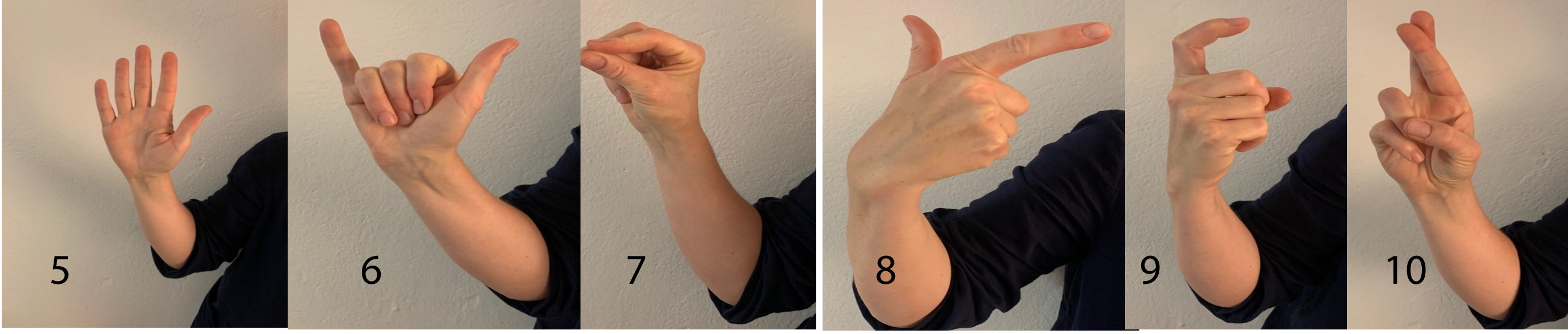
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1. Cardinal Numbers: TSL, CSL and Market Numbers are in Use in Lhasa
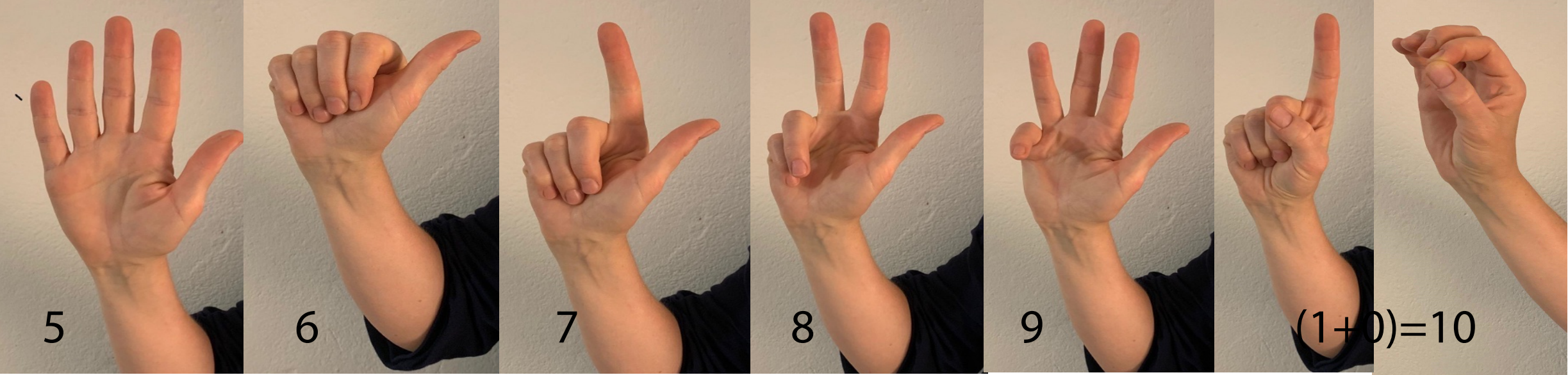
5 – 9 : counting, 10: digitally motivated

Lhasa market numbers

5: counting; 6 – 9: Chinese written numbers: 六七八九

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2. TSL Days of the Week: A Signed Code-Blend within a Complex Situation of Language Contact

TSL signs combine pointing gestures of Tibetan children's songs about days of the week, pointing to parts of the face, either due to perceived shape in relation to planets or due to the correlation between the name of the planets and parts of the face made via homophones, such as "migs" for "eye" which sounds like "mig" (mars) as in Za migmar for "Tuesday", even though they have a different spelling. To this are added Tibetan TSL numbers, although signers typically voice/mouth Chinese days of the week, telling e.g. Xinji Yi ("Day One"), instead of Tibetan day names, referring to planets.

Pointing gestures of Tibetan songs
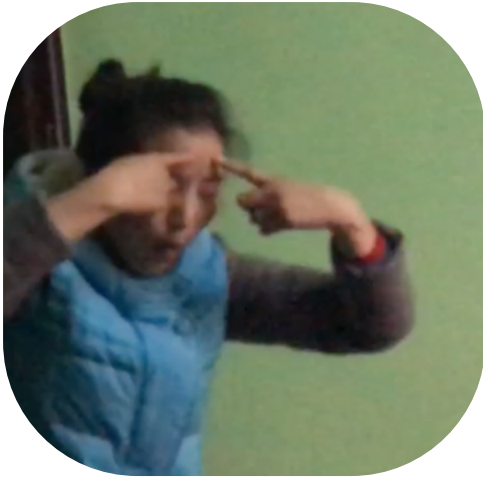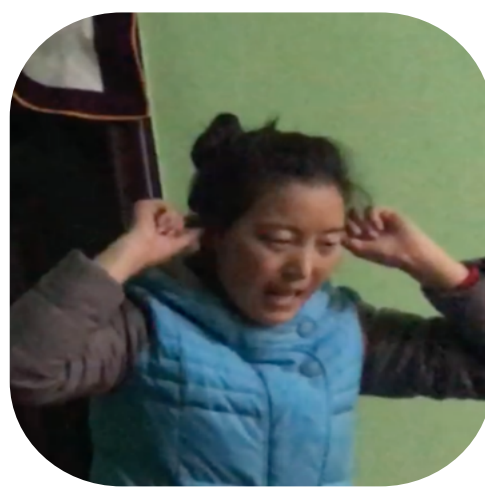

T: Za Dawa ("moon-day")	T: Za Migmar ("marsday")	T: Za Lhagpa ("mecury-day")	T: Za Purpu ("jupiter-day")	T: Za pasang ("venus-day")	T: Za Penpa ("saturn-day")	T: Za Nyima ("sun-day")
MONDAY	**TUESDAY**	**WEDNESDAY**	**THURSDAY**	**FRIDAY**	**SATURDAY**	**SUNDAY**
C: Xingqi yi ("Day 1")	C: Xīngqī èr ("Day 2")	C: Xīngqī san	C: Xīngqī sì	C: Xīngqī wǔ ("Day 5")	C: Xīngqī liù ("Day 6")	C: Xīngqī tiān ("Day 7")
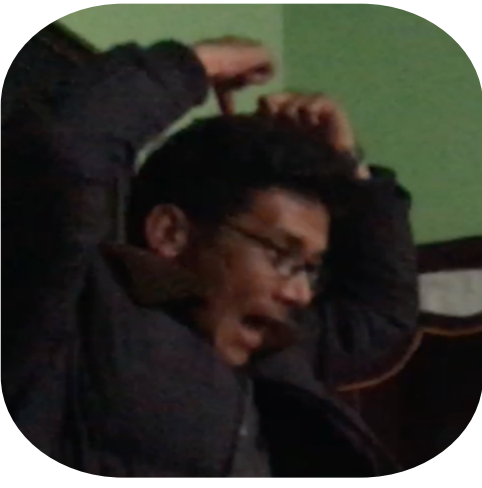
TSL days of the week

Why forehead point? Informants say: "forehead looks like a moon"

Why eye point? Informants: "Mig [eye], sounds like mig (mars)"

Why ear point? Informants: "Because ears are exposed to wind (lhag pa)." Lhagpa sounds like

Why nose point? Informants: "Shape of nose looks like jupiter"

Why mouth point? The mouth eats Tibetan food called "pak" (Tsampa dough balls). Pak sounds like initials

Why chin point? "Chin looks most like the shape of the planet saturn".

Why head point? The sun shines on the top of the head.

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3. Conclusion

1. Code-blends are a common feature of "goat-sheep-mixed-sign" in Lhasa, and the sign RA LUG LAGDA is itself a code-blend of TSL &CSL with Tibetan mouthing and/or voicing.

2. A common feature of the "goat-sheep-mixed-sign" is that signs show variable phonological, morphological, semantic and voiced influences from Tibetan and Chinese spoken, written and signed languages and wider gestural repertoires. In the days of the week signs in TSL the pointing of children's songs are combined with TSL numbers for the morphology of t he signs follows the logic of Chinese spoken and written for days of the week.

3. Code-bends in sign languages have fundamentally different possibilities from spoken code-blends. Study the phenomenon of signed code-blends cross-culturally.