

## **Mouthing Variation in Kufr Qassem Deaf Community: The Impact of Social Dynamics**

Deaf signers are typically multilingual as they are, in most cases, exposed to a sign language and a spoken and/or written languages used by the wider hearing community. One outcome of this contact is known as mouthing – the silent articulations of lexical items that co-occur with signs (Johnston et al., 2016). For example, mouthing the English word /cat/ while signing the British Sign Language sign for “cat”. Studies to date have focused on the mouthing when one sign language is in contact with one spoken language. For instance, the mouthing patterns of signers of ISL show a strong influence from Hebrew (Meir & Sandler, 2007). One of the few studies investigating a complex language contact situation where more than one sign and more than one spoken languages are in contact is Quinto-Pozos’ study (2002), in which he found mouthing interference when bilingual signers of American Sign Language (ASL) and Mexican Sign Language (LSM) used Spanish mouthing with ASL signs (typically associated with English mouthing) and English mouthing with LSM signs (typically associated with Spanish mouthing). In this study we focus on a unique language contact situation in the deaf community of Kufr Qassem, where a number of signed and spoken languages are in contact. Recent changes in social dynamics in Kufr Qassem have resulted in increased exposure to ISL, as well as Colloquial Palestinian Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic (i.e., Arabic diglossia), and Hebrew, such as in the deaf educational system. We investigate how these changing social dynamics have influenced mouthing variation across generations of signers in Kufr Qassem by looking at the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations of deaf signers.

In the first of two studies, six KQSL monolinguals of the first and second generations, and six KQSL/ISL bilinguals of the third generation performed a narrative retelling task. Results show significant increase in mouthing across generations, from 8% (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>) to 41% (3<sup>rd</sup>). As part of a second study, twelve bilinguals performed a “spot the difference” task in three language conditions: with another bilingual, with a KQSL monolingual, and with a ISL monolingual. Results showed that mouthing patterns are predicted by interactional partner and the sign language used. Bilinguals were less likely to mouth when using KQSL lexical signs (36%) or when communicating with a KQSL monolingual (44%) compared to when using ISL (65%), communicating with an ISL monolingual (58%), or communicating with another bilingual (51%). Furthermore, bilinguals showed a high preference for Palestinian Arabic mouthing with almost non-existent use of MSA mouthing.

We conclude that the increasing mouthing frequency is not only a result of the increasing systematic contact with Arabic and Hebrew, but also with ISL, in which mouthing is more frequent. Most importantly, we conclude that the changing social dynamics in the deaf community of Kufr Qassem affect mouthing variation across generations.

**References:**

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