

**How Pinocchio Becomes a Real
Boy: The Journey from Invented
to Regularized Language—
The Case of Fingerspelling**

James W. Van Manen

“The real act of
discovery consists not
in finding new lands but
in seeing with new
eyes.”

— Marcel Proust

I am a Conlang Wrangler

- I wrote an 175 page unpublished manuscript about 10 years ago that contains an invented sign language called Worldfirst
- I did conlang and con-culture, and con-world work to write the story
- You have revived my interest in reworking my manuscript and fleshing out “my” first con-lang: Worldfirst

From Con to Nat

- How do we use created language?
- The Case of American Sign Language
Fingerspelling

- Friar Melcor de Yebra. *Refugim Infirmorum* 1593

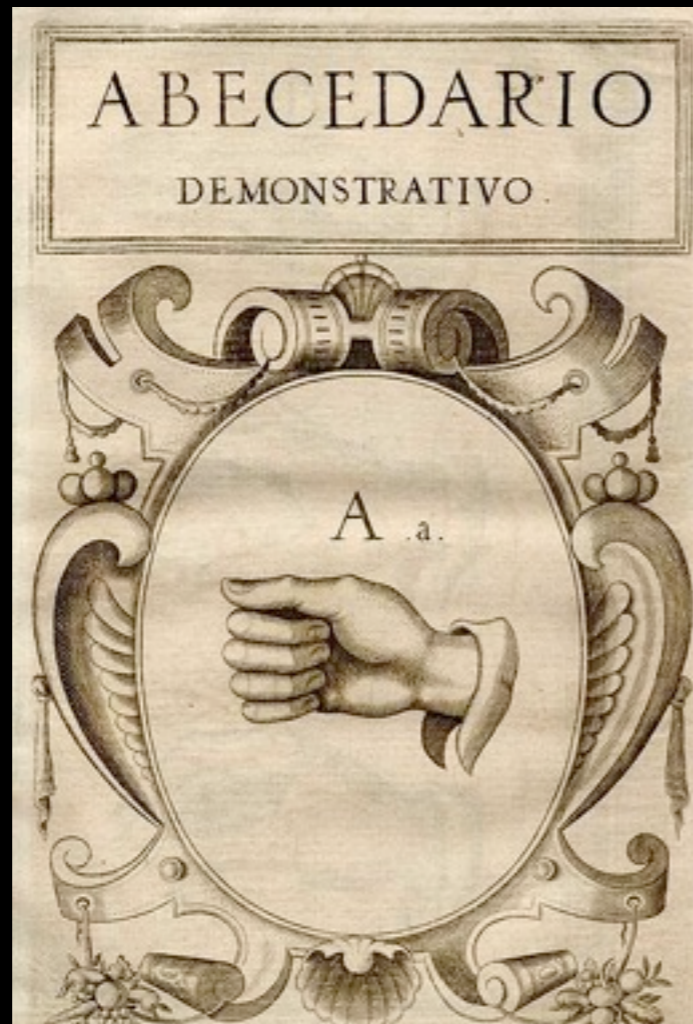


A Ma no ser conocido, y en nada se
tenido, porque te sea mas prove
cho para entrar en el cielo, que se
alabado, y reputado de los hombres.

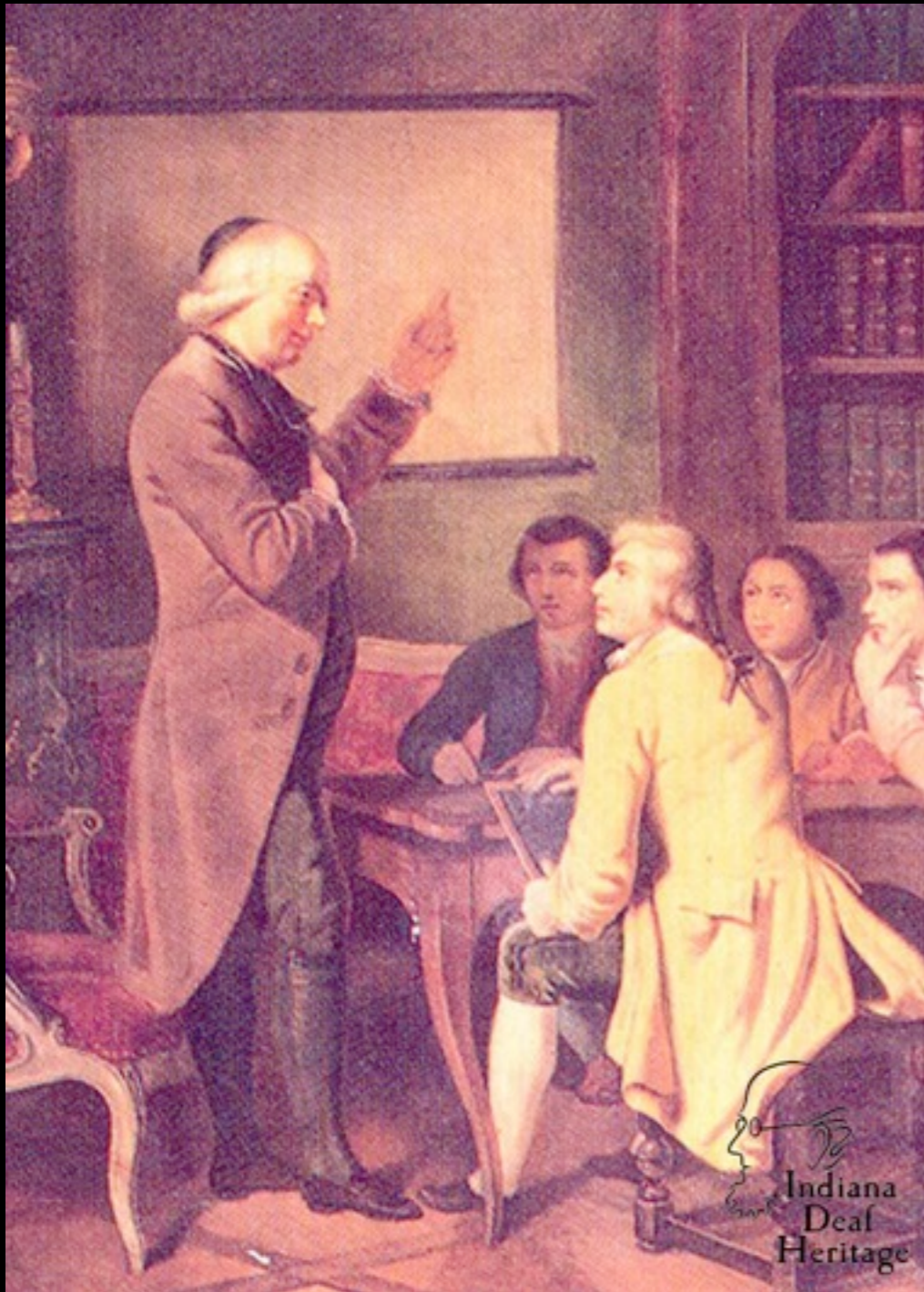


History

- In 1620, 27 years later, Juan Pablo Bonet detailed the use of a manual alphabet for education and didn't give Yebra credit for creating the system



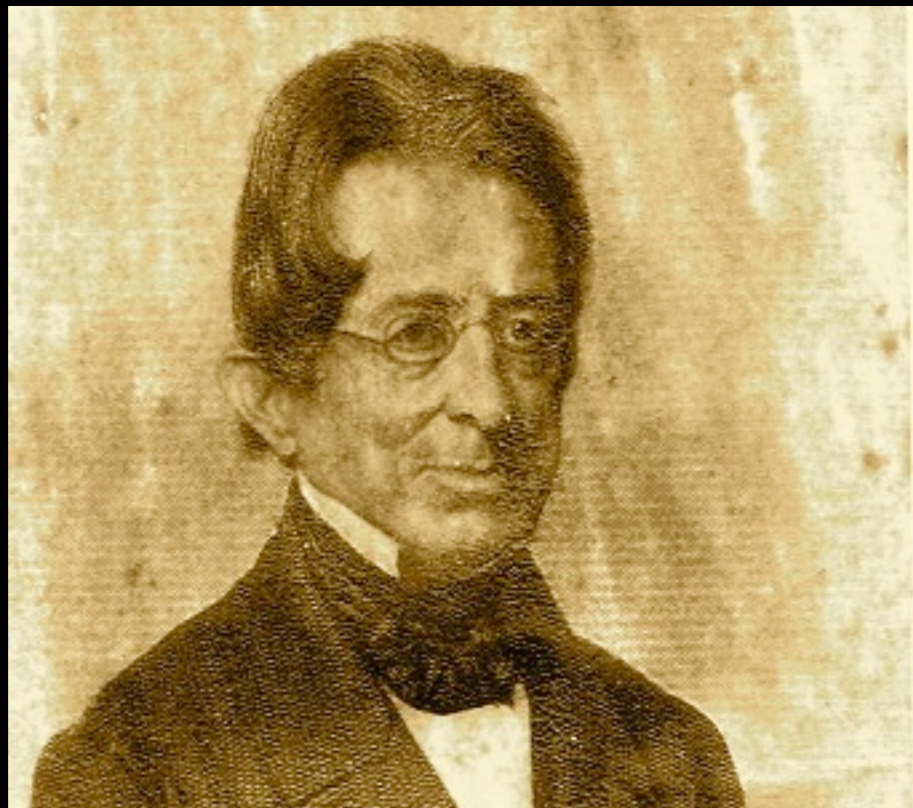
Spain to France



- Charles-Michel de l'Épée found Bonet's book and learned some signs from two Deaf twins in Paris and founded the French School for the Deaf in 1760

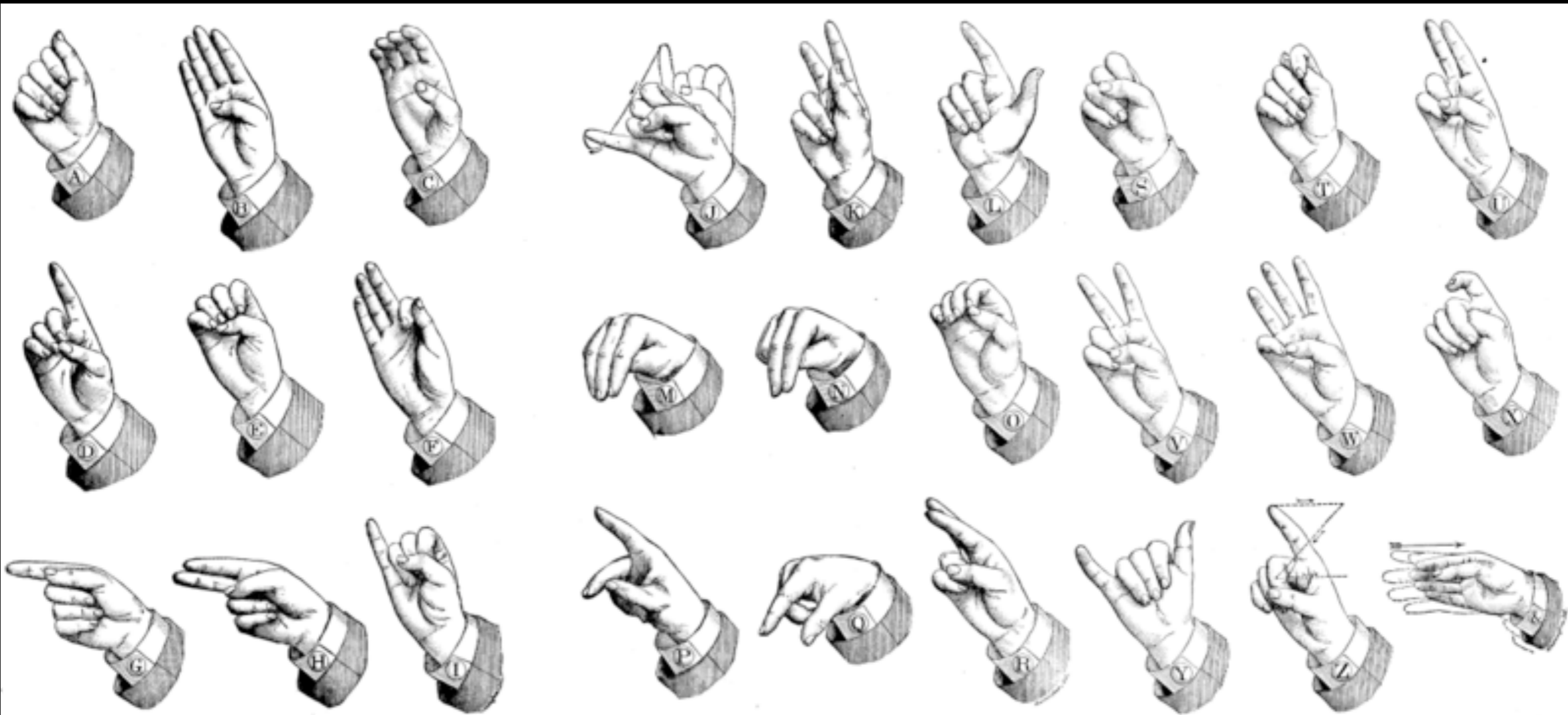
France to the USA

- Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc (Deaf) founded the American School for the Deaf in 1817 using Clerc's knowledge of French Sign Language (including the one handed alphabet)



Fingerspelling Engraving

1886



Gordon, American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb, 1886

1910



A Simple Question?

- If it has been through 4 countries and has been used as a component of languages for over 400 years, what can we guess about it?

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IT WILL CHANGE!!!

- Friar Melcor de Yebra. *Refugim Infirmorum* 1593



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When it comes to what
Deaf people actually do
when they fingerspell--
it is like this...

Here it is in a Metaphor:

Native ASL users don't
use the same set of
tools that they teach
hearing people to use

Users of ASL are not
doing this on purpose,
but it is hard on new
learners



This is what
they use...



This is What You Get



Words for Letters

- Languages have words for letters
- Non-linguists have been brainwashed (inculcated) to believe the words they use ARE letters
- This is not true
- W is a great example--two words except in Texas...

Sign = Word

- Fingerspelling is like Speechspelling
 - Speechspelling: the act of saying the words for each alphabetic letter (spelling out loud)
- Each symbol in the alphabet has a corresponding sign in ASL-- or that is what we once thought

My Ah-ha!

- Why was this system so hard for non natives? I learned it as a baby
- To find out I decided to do something revolutionary as it pertains to fingerspelling
- I assumed nothing and watched what native fingerspellers did when they fingerspell

EVER

DEAF PARENTS

HEARING PARENTS

DEAF TEACHERS

Dr. David Geeslin

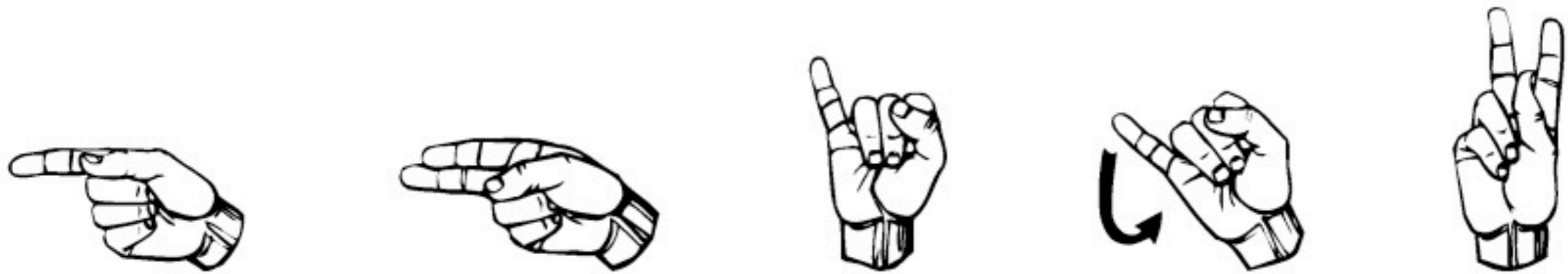
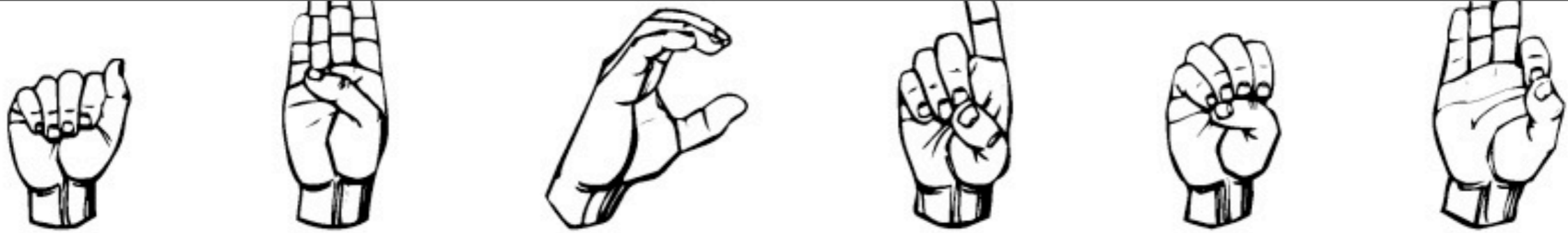
Superintendent, Indiana School for the Deaf

A photograph of Dr. David Geeslin, Superintendent of the Indiana School for the Deaf, speaking at a podium. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a blue button-down shirt. His arms are raised in a gesture of emphasis. Behind him is a large screen displaying a presentation with the word 'FAN' in large, bold, black letters. The screen also shows images of three men in suits and the text 'DEAF PA' and 'F TEACHERS'.

FAN

Dr. David Geeslin

Superintendent, Indiana School for the Deaf



The Problem

- **Allophones of Phonemes**
 - We assume there are 26 things to learn because there is a relationship between the modern Roman alphabet and their fingerspelled “counterparts”

No One Knows Yet...

- **We don't know how many allophones exist for each phoneme**
- **If we don't know what these are and don't know how many there are, we can't easily teach non-native users to see them...**

ASL Phonemes

E

PHONEME



**Mental
Construct**

Phonemes and Allophones

(E)
PHONEME



**Mental
Construct**

ALLOPHONES



Physical Constructs

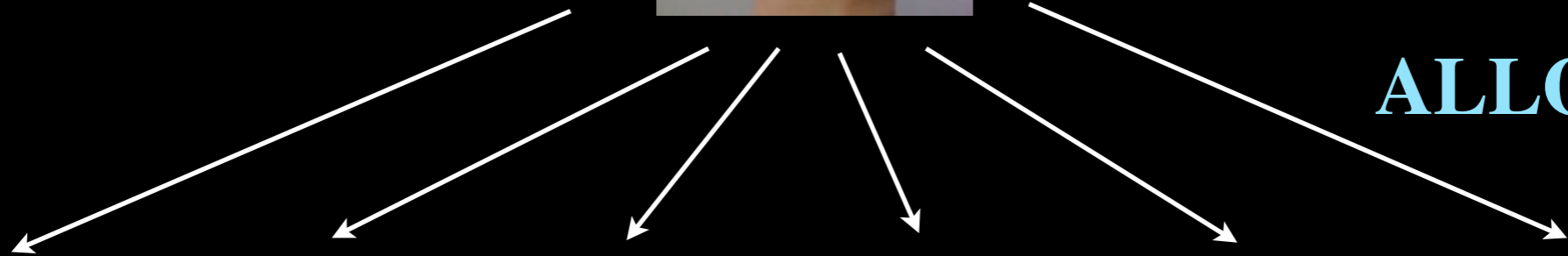


Phonemes and Allophones

(E)
PHONEME



ALLOPHONES

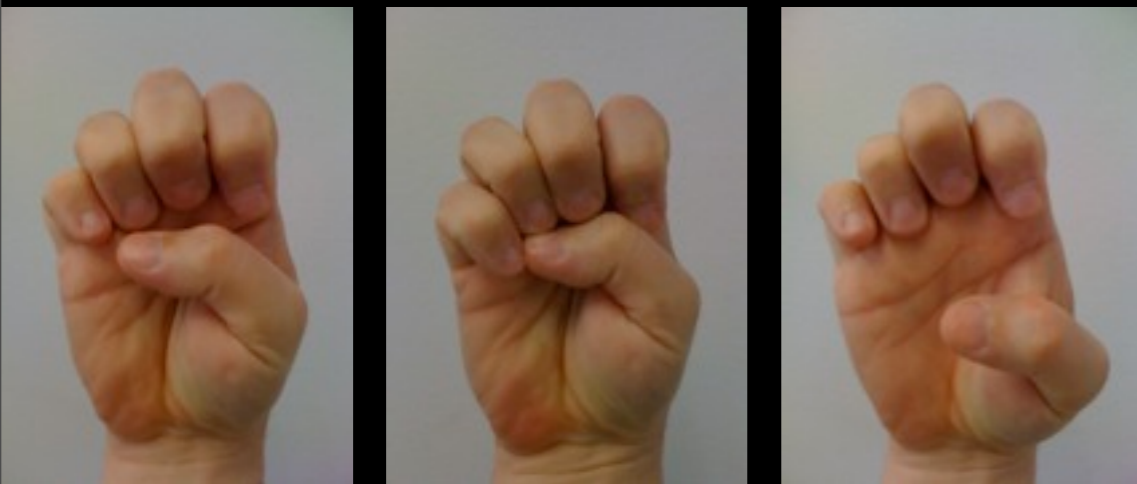


Phonemes and Allophones

(E)
PHONEME



ALLOPHONES



Bob Johnson 1995

Phonemes and Allophones

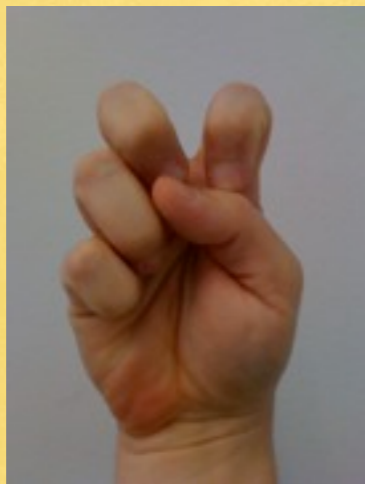
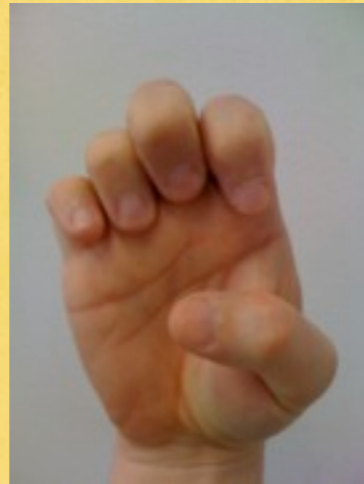
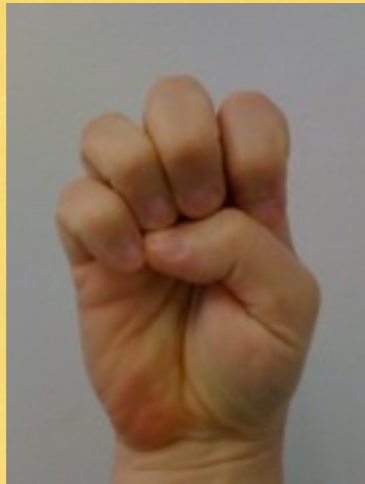
(E)
PHONEME

ALLOPHONES

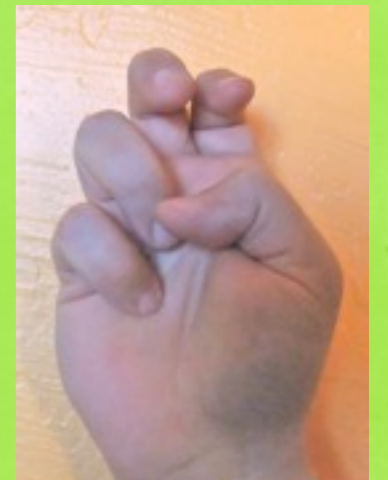
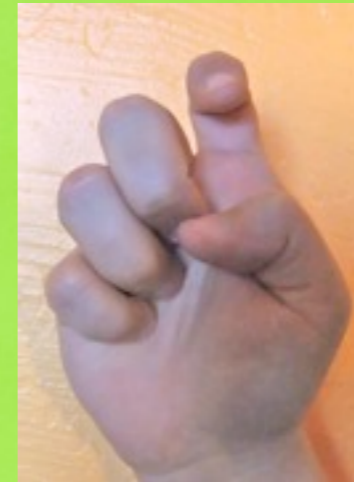


Allophones of E

previously known



newly discovered!



New Allophones of E

Medial E after M



Medial E after N



Medial E after V



Medial E after T



Final E after M



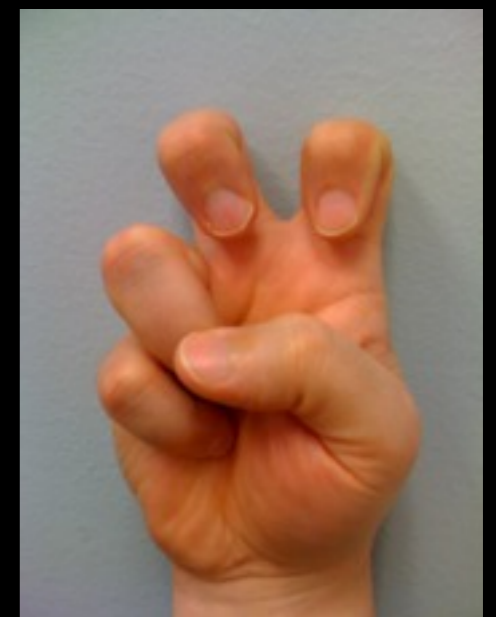
Final E after N



Final E after T



Final E after V



I can document these
allophones of phonemes
from films over 100 years old

I can document these
allophones of phonemes
from films over 100 years old



Then Things Get Odd

- New additions to the ASL alphabet ZZ, CH,
- Synomorphs

ZZ vs Z



ZZ

- A NEW SIGN IN ASL! ZZ
- Existed previously only in lexicalized fingerspelled signs like PIZZA and JAZZ
- This lexicalized form seems to have become productive in the language and can appear whenever 'zz' is needed

CH

- Seems ASL has decided it needs its own sign for CH
- ASL is visual so it can't be because CH it is one sound
- It may have something to do with the single mouth movement for two written things--a time saver to make one sign for it
- It may be simple assimilation

look at the CH



WILLIAM WILLARD

A man with glasses and a dark suit is speaking at a podium. He is gesturing with his hands. Behind him is a large presentation screen displaying text. The text on the screen includes "DEAF TEACHERS", "PARENTS", and "HEA". The man's name, "WILLIAM WILLARD", is overlaid at the top of the image in a large, black, sans-serif font, with the "L"s in "WILLIAM" and "WILLARD" highlighted in red.

Dr. David Geeslin

Superintendent, Indiana School for the Deaf

Synomorphs

- A sign simultaneously demonstrating the salient features of more than one fingerspelled sign
- Different from coarticulation because that a blend of sounds--this is two things actually both occurring at the same time
 - IB IC, ID, IE, IL, MI, NI, SI, A
 - about 40 so far (most related to I)

X

- Citation Form (Phoneme) X
- Commonly Used Forms (Common Allophone) SIDE X and FRONT X

D

Citation D



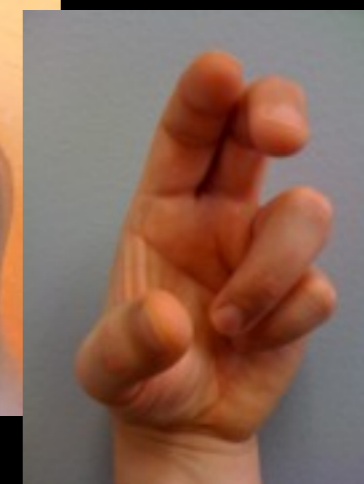
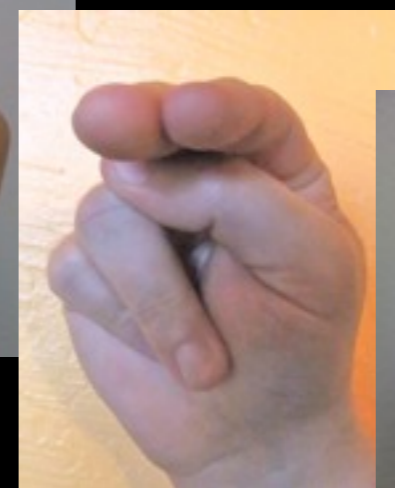
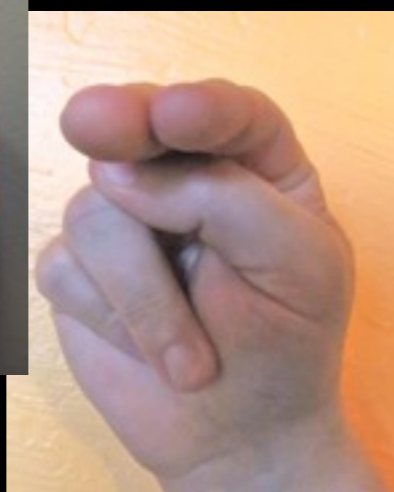
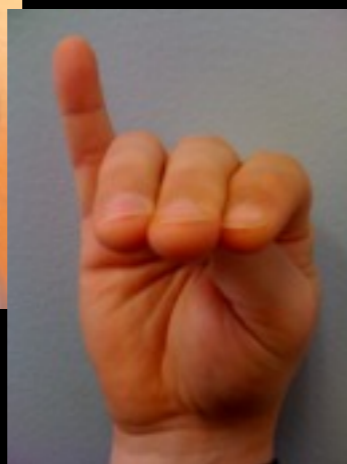
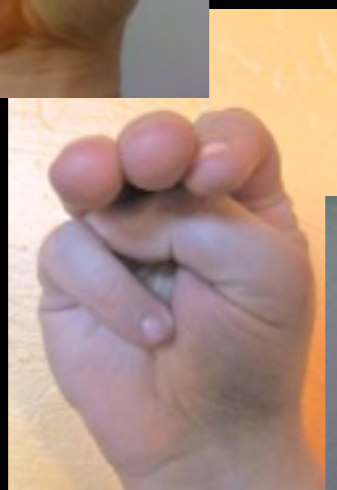
tim-D



tim-D

- tim-D = The allophone where only the thumb, index, and middle finger are used
- I believe it is more probable to see tim-D following signs where any or all of the I, M, R, or P fingers are already down
- tim-D occurs after L and after A

EMINENCE



M

Citation M



Mid M



High M



MI (synomorph)

Citation I

MI

Mid MI

High MI



N

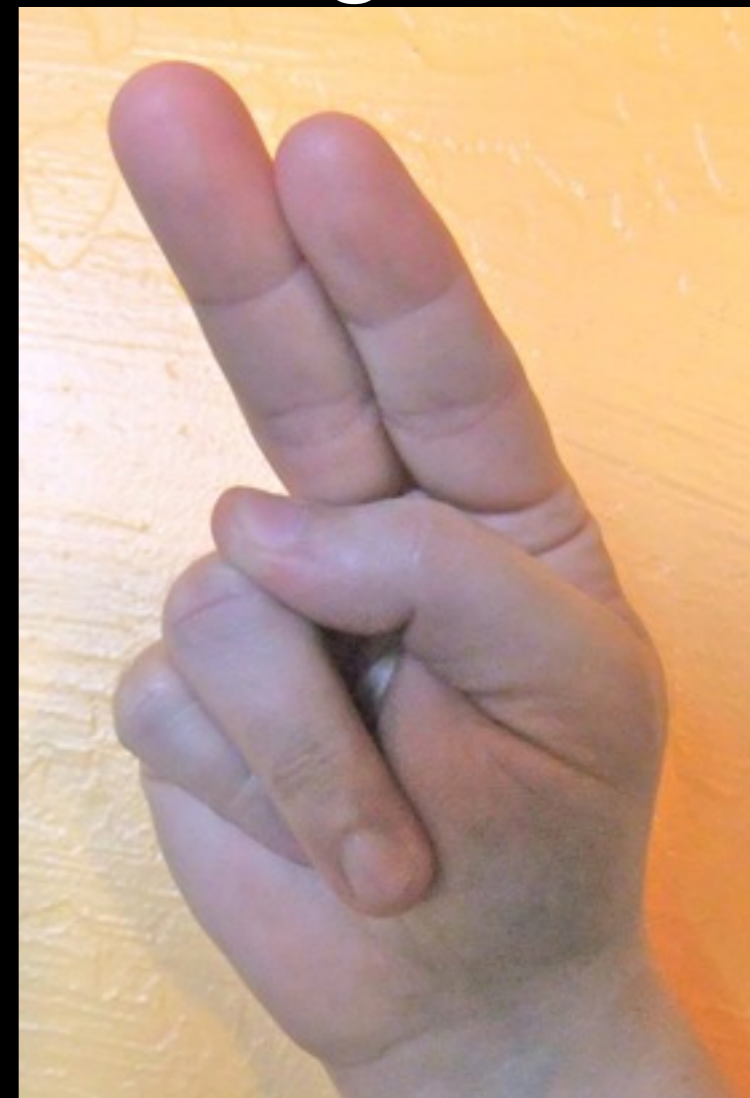
Citation N



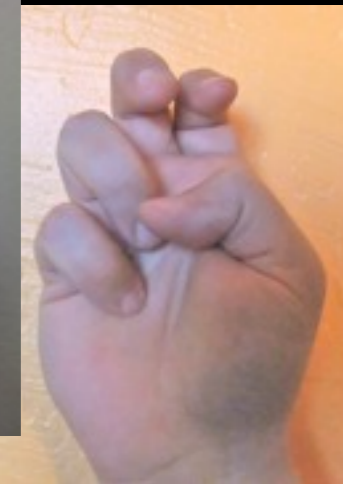
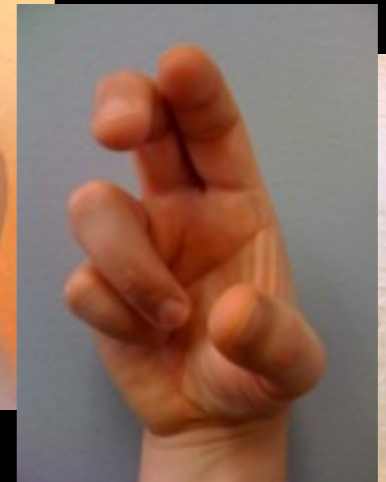
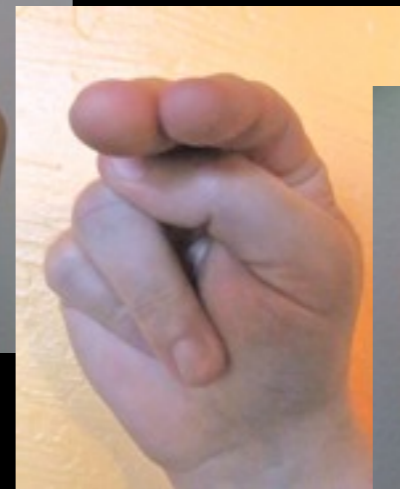
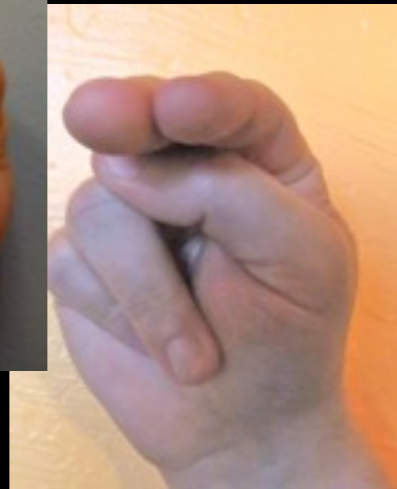
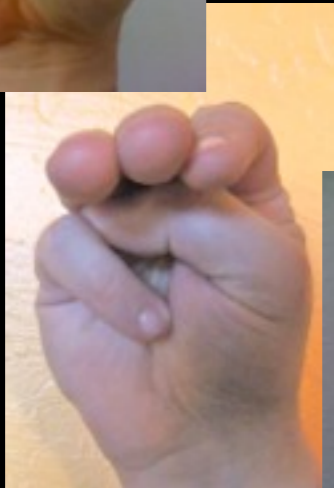
Mid N



High N



EMINENCE



C

Citation C



Side CI
synomorph



Wide Side C



C Front



CI Front
synomorph



Wide C Front



C2

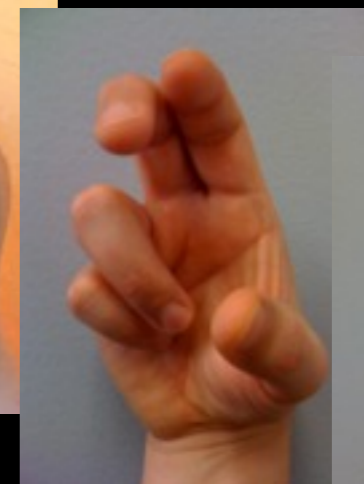
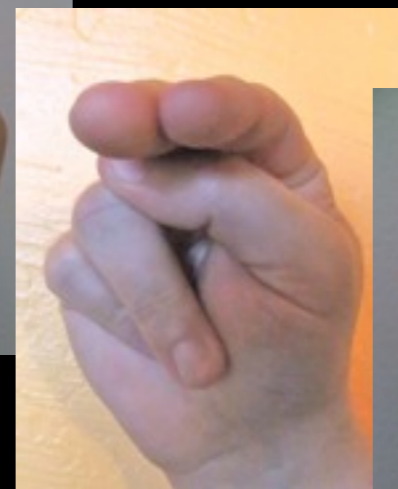
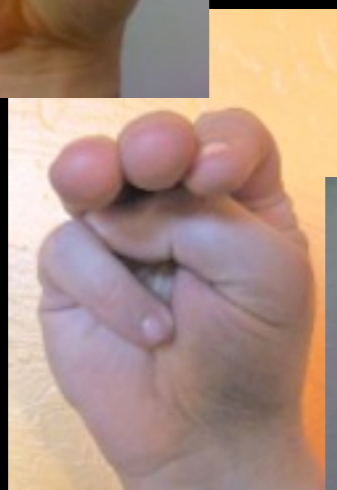




C after N

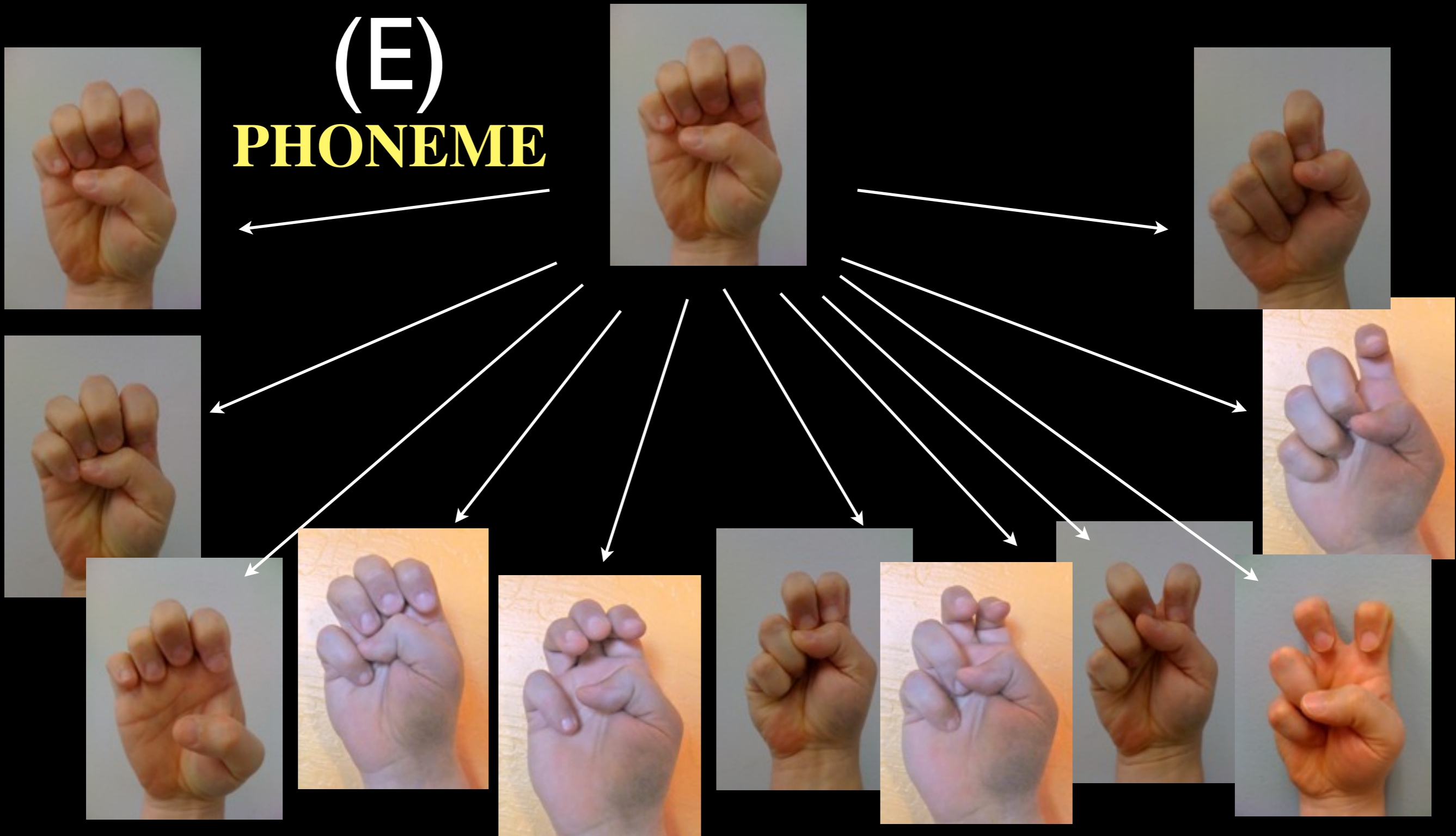


EMINENCE



Phonemes and Allophones

(E)
PHONEME



Recap

- ASL phonemes and allophones in Fingerspelling
- You saw that ASL uses more than 26 allophones to describe the written alphabet
- Synomorphs and synophones are not the same as coarticulation

Recap

- You were exposed to newly discovered signs in ASL! ZZ and CH
- You saw the newly discovered allophones for X: Side-X and Front-X
- You saw the fully described TIM-D

Implications for Conlangs

- Follow the phonetic system of a natlang or be able to be pronounced in a natlang
- Get exposure and become useful to the natlang--fill a gap in the language
- Words with unique meaning may make it
- Expect changes to happen over time

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