

Call for Submissions:
Special Thematic Issue on the Historical Linguistics of Signed Languages

The past two centuries of research on human language change have produced great insights into the extent, types, and mechanisms of language change. Theories and models of change within the field of historical linguistics, however, overwhelmingly derive solely from languages in the oral/aural modality. At the same time, for at least the last half century, linguists working on languages in gestural/visual and/or tactile modalities have made strides in exploring historical relationships among sign languages (Woodward 1978, 2000, 2011; McKee and Kennedy 2000; Yu et al. 2018; Abner et al. 2020; Reagan 2021; Power et al. 2020; Power 2022), Creolization and sign languages (Fisher 1978, 1996; Meier 1984, Kegl et al. 1999), the historical sociolinguistics and philology of signed languages (Lucas et al. 2001, McCaskill et al. 2011, Fischer 2015, Battison et al. 1975, Shaw and Delaporte 2014), the diachrony of specific sign languages (Supalla and Clark 2015, Wilkinson 2016, Wilcox and Occhino 2016), and language contact, both within and across modalities (Brentari and Padden 2001, Quinto-Pozos 2007, 2008, Battison 1978). Sign linguistics research has also proposed compelling generalizations of types of sign changes (Frishberg 1975, Radutzky 1989), and introduced a wealth of new data and insights on the emergence of new languages in homes, villages and communities (Polich 2005, Zeshan and de Vos 2012, Goldin-Meadow and Mylander 1990, Singleton et al. 1993, Hou 2016, Senghas and Coppola 2001, Wilcox 2009, Edwards and Brentari 2021, Sandler et al. 2011, Power 2020). Yet, in spite of the clear thematic and theoretical relevance of signed languages to the understanding of human language change, there has been strikingly little dialogue or cross-pollination between historical linguistics research on spoken languages and scholarship on the diachrony of signed languages. As a telling datum, *Diachronica* has not yet published a single research article dedicated to a sign language over its nearly 40 years. In the interest of starting to redress this gap and spurring greater consideration of signed language data in the development of theories of human language change, we invite submissions for a special thematic issue on the historical linguistics of signed languages. We invite papers that deal with change in languages in the gestural/visual (or tactile) modality and which, consistent with the journal's usual [submission guidelines](#), combine new insights of theoretical interest with rigorous analysis of data, and have a diachronic focus, rather than synchronically analyzed data from older languages. Topics may address a wide range of issues related to language change including, but not limited to:

- Processes of change in the context of emerging home or village sign languages
- The historical emergence and development of signed languages that have been linked to the establishment of schools for the deaf or other institutions
- Contact between signed languages or between signed and spoken/written languages
- Theoretical contributions to models of language families, cognacy, and linguistic relatedness in the context of sign languages
- Effects of language modality on processes of language change: e.g., effects of iconicity, effects of aspects of linguistics structure that are typical of a given language modality, etc.
- Language change at all linguistic levels within stable sign languages
- Comparative/Historical reconstruction of earlier stages of sign languages
- Sign etymologies

- Presentation of historically-oriented or comparative corpora for sign languages

Please submit papers online through the [Editorial Manager](#) system, with “thematic issue” as the article type. Articles may be up to 10,000 words, and shorter articles or discussion notes are accepted. Regular *Diachronica* submission instructions apply in other respects. For thematic review article suggestions, please contact the editor before submission. You are welcome to submit a presubmission inquiry.

Deadline for the thematic issue is May 1, 2023. (However, please note that submissions on the diachrony of signed languages are welcome at any time.)

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- Power, J. M. (2020). *The origins of Russian-Tajik Sign Language: Investigating the Historical Sources and Transmission of a Signed Language in Tajikistan*. Austin, TX: University of Texas at Austin dissertation.
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