MAT Medicine Anthropology Theory

SPECIAL SECTION

Normative Language and Judgements of Cognition

A Methodological Reflection on Difficult Sign Language Interactions

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Received: 2 July 2024; Accepted: 19 May 2025; Published: 15 June 2025

Abstract.

In this article, I investigate the case of a deaf woman, Silivia, who lived in western Uganda. Silivia did not use standardised sign language and was commonly considered to be 'mad.' However, some of her interlocutors disagreed, arguing that perceptions of madness arose because those around Silivia did not invest enough in attempting to communicate with her. I use experiential and analytical reflection on the methodological challenges of working with Silivia to explore what difficult moments tell us about how communication and everyday assessments of cognitive function are mutually implicated for deaf people in Uganda. Adopting a theoretical approach that understands languaging as a collective or distributed process, I argue that comprehensibility is not something that is determined by the qualities of a person's expression, but rather something that *happens* to and through communication, mediated through social and environmental constraints. These include normative linguistic ideologies and frames of comprehensibility that may encode ableist expectations (for example, that 'good' communication is quick and efficient). In this context, I argue, interpretative difficulties that arise in the use of less conventionalised forms of visual languaging make some deaf people particularly subject to stigmatisation.

Keywords

Deaf, Sign Language, Uganda, Madness, Cognition.

Medicine Anthropology Theory 12 (2): 1–28; ISSN 2405-691X; https://doi.org/10.17157/mat.12.2.9670
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Introduction

This special section addresses methodological, ethical, and theoretical concerns that emerge when researchers work with people whose 'voices'—both literal and metaphorical—are difficult to identify or comprehend. I investigate the case of one of my research participants, Silivia, a deaf[1] woman living in Rubuga,[2] western Uganda, who did not use Ugandan Sign Language (UgSL) (or any other highly conventionalised sign language) and was commonly considered to be 'mad'. However, not everyone agreed; some of Silivia's interlocutors thought that others considered her mad simply because they did not recognise her form(s) of communication. Through examining my engagements with Silivia, including my methodological approach, I suggest that Silivia's interlocutors' judgments of her cognitive status were heavily influenced by experiential difficulties communicating with her, in part due to a pervasive association in Uganda between communicative skill, social personhood, and cognitive ability (see Whyte 1998; Zoanni 2020; Hanson 2022, 24–7). In this context, I argue, interpretative difficulties that arise in the use of less conventionalised forms of visual languaging make some deaf people particularly subject to stigmatisation.

This article is based on research conducted between 2016 and 2019 into how Uganda's unique system of disabled people's organisations (DPOs) (see Modern 2025) impacts social and economic life for disabled people living in and around a market in Rubuga. The market was the base for a disabled women's organisation called Tusobora, the seven core members of which all ran stalls in the market. Of the core members, five lived with mobility impairments and used wheelchairs, while the remaining two were deaf. Deaf people were unusually well integrated in the group (compared to other Ugandan DPOs), and the five hearing core members all knew at least some UgSL, with two being close to fluent.[3] The market acted as a gathering place for the wider deaf community of Rubuga because of this core of signers among the stallholders (see Modern 2024a). The wider membership of Tusobora included people living with a broader range of impairments, but there were no members who were included because they were considered to be 'mad', or due to other cognitive differences.[4] Nevertheless, people who were considered 'mad' frequented the market, including some who were present every day, carrying

[1] In Europe and the USA many deaf people capitalise 'D' for people who are 'culturally Deaf' to present themselves as a minoritised language and cultural community, not a subset of disabled people. This practice is relatively rare in Uganda, where resources are often mediated through 'disability' coded channels, and was never expressed by my interlocutors. I therefore do not capitalise 'D' for deaf. Similarly, I do not capitalise 'M' for mad, as my interlocutors were not engaged in reclaiming the term.

[2] I use pseudonyms for people and places throughout this article.

[3] I document the unique history that led to the integration of deaf people in Tusobora in Modern 2024a.

[4] One member lived with physical impairment, learning differences, and periodic mental distress, but most people considered her membership of Tusobora to be based solely on her physical impairment (see Modern 2021, 173; Modern 2025, 9).

out menial jobs to earn a small income, begging, or—as in Silivia's case—simply hanging out.

Being labelled 'mad' or 'slow' is reportedly a common experience for deaf Ugandans. 'Kibubu', one of the common terms for deaf people in the spoken language of Silivia's town (Runyoro), implies stupidity and/or madness as well as deafness, via a stereotypical onomatopoeic representation of deaf people's speech as meaningless ('bubububu'). ('Kibubu' also has cognates with the same implications in other Bantu languages of the region.) Tyler Zoanni, an anthropologist working on disability in Uganda, notes a similar assumption of cognitive impairment regarding Ugandans with cerebral palsy whose speech is affected (Zoanni 2020).

Connections between linguistic performance and assessments of cognition have been noted in many places globally (Wilce 2004; Wolf-Meyer 2020).[5] In Uganda, dominant political imaginations position appropriate speech as a social obligation, making the connection particularly salient (Hanson 2022, 23; Brisset-Foucault 2019). In a study of expectations about 'social competence,' Susan Reynolds Whyte writes, 'Mental ability is essentially social; it is manifested in receptivity and conversation' (Whyte 1998, 171). Not being able to contribute to what Whyte calls the 'social conversation' of life can prevent someone being recognised as a social actor—even if this inability arises from failure to accommodate the ways a person can access semiosis. Deaf people after all, are frequently highly eloquent in sign languages; however, in the Ugandan oralist environment this is not usually recognised by hearing people, leading to the pervasive public perception that deaf people are stupid.[6] During my research, deaf people who vocalised in ways that appeared incomprehensible to hearing people (whether alongside signing or not) were the most likely to be considered 'mad' as well as 'stupid', particularly if their vocalisations were markedly loud. Such interjections were interpreted as breaches of the appropriate sociality Whyte describes.

Communication and cognition in the market

The market in which I worked was an exceptional space, due to the presence of the signing community around Tusobora. Visual language was common and widely understood there, and as a result it was rare for deaf people to be considered stupid or mad. When it did occur, the perpetrators were outsiders who were unfamiliar with the linguistic repertoire of the space, such as travelling salespeople

[5] Wilce argues that, for psychiatrists, the biomedical category schizophrenia (often considered paradigmatic of 'madness') is interpreted as 'human linguistic gifts run amok' (Wilce 2004, 416).
[6] Some deaf Ugandans, especially those who became deaf after learning to speak, are also eloquent in spoken languages; however, the distinct sound of deaf voices triggers such strong associations with incompetence for Ugandan hearing people that it sometimes leads them to dismiss easily comprehensible deaf speech (Modern 2024a, 10).

or customers. The space of the market was consequently welcoming to most deaf people. However, deaf stallholders and other deaf regulars in the market expressed strong aversion to Silivia's communication, telling her to go away when she visited and complaining that her signing DISTURBED them. They were just as likely as their hearing neighbours to call Silivia MAD. While deaf Ugandans reject the term 'kibubu' because of its generalised implication that communicating differently from the majority means they are stupid or mad, they nevertheless considered *Silivia's* communication style to indicate cognitive impairment. Their reactions to her were markedly similar to those of prejudiced hearing people towards them (see Modern 2014, 66 for an example of a hearing salesperson reacting with disgust to a deaf customer's speech, and Modern 2024a, 10 for a hearing customer dismissing a deaf stallholder's communication).

'Wild' speech, which Zoanni (2020) describes as 'a proliferation of uncontrollable and unbidden voices', is considered a key sign of madness in Uganda, as it is in many other locations (see Zoanni 2020, 7; Orley 1970, 34; Whyte 1998; see also Rogers 2016). Silivia's signing, although in the visual rather than the oral mode, may have triggered this stereotype in her deaf interlocutors. The sign that stallholders used about Silivia's communication, DISTURB, is a common term in UgSL, with equivalents in Ugandan spoken languages, referring to a range of activities from playful teasing to malicious harassment. In this case, the aspect of its meaning highlighted was something like 'causing confusion'. The stallholders were asserting that they could not understand Silivia. Although she was signing, they perceived her signs as aberrant and incomprehensible.

Confusion was also my own first reaction to engaging with Silivia. I had studied UgSL intensively for six months before starting fieldwork, reaching a level at which I could easily converse with deaf Ugandans. This enabled me to work with most deaf participants without significant methodological difficulty. (I was not fluent and did need an interpreter in some situations, but most of the time I interacted with deaf interlocutors without an interpreter.) However, when I first met Silivia, in the central market of Rubuga,[7] she did not respond to my questions, which I expressed as usual in UgSL. Instead, she copied them, repeating back to me even simple queries such as 'what is your name?' She clearly recognised my actions as communication, and she seemed familiar with the physical elements of sign language—manual movements, facial expressions, and the use of space—but she produced very few spontaneous signs, instead echoing mine. The experience was profoundly disorienting: Silivia appeared eager and able to communicate, so why was she not responding to questions? Could she understand me or not?

[7] The market I was based in was located on the outskirts of Rubuga. Although I visited the central market frequently, I did not conduct long-term participant observation there.

As I continued engaging with her, I came to understand more about Silivia's communication style. She used a restricted number of UgSL signs, particularly those referencing events that were important to her, for example frequently repeating the signs TWINS, CHILDREN, BIRTH, and DIE, to reference the loss of her children at birth many years earlier. As well as these UgSL signs, she also used signs that were not standard UgSL, employed mime more frequently than most of the deaf people I worked with, did not closely follow UgSL grammatical conventions, and regularly used communicative methods that were not formally part of UgSL, such as vocalisation. Silivia's vocalisation was not comprehensible to me or the other hearing people around her as spoken language but served purposes such as attracting attention (although it was often disapproving). She also continued repeating what others signed to her, though less frequently than she had in our first encounter.

Silivia's communication closely resembled what E. Mara Green, a linguistic anthropologist specialising in the sign languages of Nepal, calls NATURAL-SIGN. This is a loosely conventionalised sign language used by deaf people in Nepal who do not have strong links to Nepali Sign Language-using deaf others and who communicate mostly with hearing family and neighbours. NATURAL-SIGN is 'characterised by a limited but conventional [sign] vocabulary widely shared by both deaf and hearing people', combined with expressive visual modes such as pantomime (Green 2017, 329–34). The expressive elements make use of indexical affordances of the visual mode, using shape, space, and the signer's own body to reference objects or actions immanent in a world that is common to signer and receiver (see Green 2022, 25; Green 2017; Kusters 2017, 286; Modern 2024, 9–10). A section of an interview with Silivia is shown in Transcript 1, below, to demonstrate the similarity.

Silivia's deaf peers were themselves familiar with the techniques used in NATURAL-SIGN, which they used when communicating with the majority hearing people around them, including hearing customers. They used the sign phrase TRY+ to describe how they did this (see Modern 2024, 10–2). The phenomenon some deaf Ugandans call LOCAL SIGN also appears to be formally similar to Nepali NATURAL-SIGN (see Beckmann 2020, 64; Beckmann 2022, 438), although there has been no thorough linguistic assessment of it and it is unclear where the boundaries are drawn between TRY+ and LOCAL SIGN. I use TRY+ when referring specifically to the market practices, as this was the language preferred by my interlocutors, but LOCAL SIGN for the broader phenomenon.[8] The market traders who chased Silivia away when she visited used TRY+ themselves every day. So, what were they

[8] I suspect whether less conventionalised signing is labelled TRY+ or LOCAL SIGN depends mostly on who is producing it and where they are located at the time: i.e., it indexes the signer's wider linguistic resources (can they also use UgSL?) and their rurality or urbanity.

objecting to in her communication? My research suggests two interconnected potential answers, one relating to Silivia's position in the linguistic ecology of Rubuga, while the other arises from specific elements of the experience of communicating with her.

Like most deaf Ugandans, Silivia was born to a hearing family which did not have any deaf contacts (see Lule and Wallin 2010). She attended a local private primary school for disabled children (with her fees paid by a small NGO) that used a form of signed English in its teaching. The signs used there were not from UgSL, and there was no grammatical content to teachers' signing; they simply signed the key words from an English sentence, leaving deaf students with no way to link them together conceptually. Deaf alumni unanimously reported that the teachers' signing was so poor it was almost incomprehensible to them.

Most deaf pupils from the school had subsequently encountered UgSL, either through a course in the language run in Rubuga by the Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD) in the 2000s (which was also how Tusobora's hearing signers had learned the language), through skills training with UNAD in Kampala, or via peer transmission from other deaf people. The deaf community centred on the market had clear normative expectations about language use, which prioritised UgSL, especially for conversations between deaf peers (see Modern 2024; also Kusters et al. 2020 on normative linguistic ideologies in deaf communities). Silivia, however, did not appear to have attempted to learn UgSL. Given that she had previously socialised with other deaf people at school but had not followed the usual pattern of acquiring UgSL, Silivia's position in the deaf community was anomalous. She did not communicate as the deaf community's dominant linguistic ideologies suggested she should, marking her out as different.

The second possible explanation came into view for me through my own affective response to Silivia's use of repetition. The dramatically increased levels of uncertainty I experienced about meaning in our conversations (how much was she understanding? Were her repetitions communicative or not?) required intense and tiring cognitive engagement. Psychological research has commonly pathologised repetitions like those Silivia signed, calling the phenomenon 'echolalia' and interpreting it as meaningless repetition that prevents effective communication. However, recent literature challenges its pathologisation, pointing to previously unrecognised functions including signalling engagement, expressing non-understanding, emotional regulation, and neurodivergence-specific styles of learning, among others (Pruccoli et al. 2021; Akhtar and Jaswal 2019; Yang 2023). These authors argue that echolalia can be a feature of non-normative communication, rather than a 'problem' getting in the way of communication.

Notably, although Green (2014) does not comment on this feature, her NATURAL-SIGN transcripts also feature NATURAL-SIGNers repeating others' utterances, including questions, sometimes multiple times. In some cases, it seems repetition of a question is used to signal incomprehension, and it can also function as a response or to express inability to reply combined with a desire to continue engaging (Green 2014, 115–8). Discourse analysts working with autistic people have described similar phenomena—the use of 'mitigated echolalia', in which someone repeats an utterance with subtle differences, for example in intonation or tempo, to communicate responses or attitudes to another's utterance in the context of language processing difficulties (Yang 2023; Sterponi and Shankey 2014). Is it plausible that some of the challenges and creative solutions that emerge when using less conventionalised visual languaging are related to those used by people experiencing other types of intersubjective language difficulties? Alternatively, could Silivia have been dealing with other kinds of language processing issues, beyond those that could have arisen from relative language deprivation? Following this line of thought, rather than indicating a lack of language, Siliva's repetitions may be taken to demonstrate that she is an engaged linguistic partner, creatively working at clarifying meaning through the resources available to her.

Having said this, it is important to note that I do not mean to dismiss Silivia's interlocutors' views out of hand. Silivia's communication styles were not the only reason she was considered mad. MAD and its cognates in other languages used in Uganda are broad terms with conceptually fuzzy edges, which commonly cover people living with a range of cognitive and communication differences, including those related to learning, sociality, emotion, and reasoning. In everyday life, people do not generally make a distinction between what might elsewhere be called intellectual disability and mental ill health (Modern 2021, 173–8; Zoanni 2020).[9] However, despite this ambiguity, there is a clear 'core' to the stereotypes of madness, cohering around the image of the 'wild madman' who wanders around shouting nonsense, throwing rocks and filth, and wearing rags (Whyte 1998, 164; Orley 1970, 43). Silivia displayed some behaviours that evoked this stereotype: wearing torn clothes and frequently changing her residence (including sometimes sleeping rough in the market), which was interpreted as cognitive (in this case, emotional-intentional) vacillation or disorientation (see Whyte 1998, 156) (Modern 2021, 78, 237).[10]

It was, however, Silivia's communication, rather than these other factors, that her social interlocutors—including her deaf peers—noted as particularly troubling. It is

[9] My interlocutors described a scale of increasing divergence from the norm, with 'slow learners' at the lower end, people described as 'zonto' [an idiot, an offensive term] in the middle, and 'abararu' [mad people] at the top (Modern 2021, 174). The difference was of degree, not kind.

[10] Whyte (1998) notes 'fixity of heart and thought' or 'steadfastness' as core social competences in Bunyole, eastern Uganda, an area socially and linguistically similar to Silivia's home district.

vital to understand why, especially given that the deaf stallholders were personally familiar with forms of less conventionalised visual language resembling Silivia's and could have attributed the difficulties communicating with her to the modality rather than her (individualised) competence. Their responses were not determined by the difficulty of the communication, but arose from complex interactions between affective and conceptual positionings.

In this article, I investigate what it was that made some features of Silivia's communication intolerable to her peers, in the specific contexts in which they interacted. To do this, I set aside diagnosis, focusing not on whether Silivia was 'really mad' or not. Instead, basing my analysis on conceptions of language and cognition that foreground co-creation of meaning, I consider what everyday judgments about the link between communication and cognition tell us about the specific risks for people using less conventionalised forms of languaging. I draw from theoretical work on the collective and space-based nature of the 'semiotic repertoire' (Pennycook 2017; Kusters 2021), 'distributed' models of languaging and 'ecologically extended cognition' (Cowley 2009), and 'facilitated subjectivity' (Wolf-Meyer 2020), as well as Block and Kasnitz's description of 'speech disability justice' (Block and Kasnitz 2012). Friedner and Block argue that considering deaf and autistic people's experiences of communication alongside each other is fruitful, pointing particularly to variability in communication and the importance of setting and space to successful languaging of various types (Friedner and Block 2017, 288–90), themes that are central to my argument here.

This approach has methodological implications. It requires different questions—questions about what and how 'we' are communicating rather than individualised assessments of whether someone has capacity to communicate in the abstract. It also requires a suspension of judgment about appropriate forms of communication and a willingness, and ability, to adopt flexible languaging practices. Although I stumbled into this approach, drawing primarily on my knowledge of the difficulties of less conventionalised visual language, I have deepened it in the analytical process, as I reflect on my engagements with Silivia. Paralleling 'Mad Studies' approaches, I reject prior assumptions of the meaninglessness of language in interactions with people living with divergent forms of cognition and/or using markedly atypical communication (see Rogers 2016; Bruce 2021).[11]

In what follows, I use a discussion of the subjective experience of this way of working with Silivia to highlight the role of temporality in communication. I draw out ableist expectations in dominant language ideologies, including the sign language ideologies of the market's deaf community, that 'good' communication is (at least

[11] Dismissal of people's voices on the basis that they were 'mad' was common in the market during my fieldwork (Modern 2021, 179) and had a major impact on the life chances of some of my interlocutors, including Silivia. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for pushing me to elaborate on this point and pointing me to relevant research.

relatively) ‘quick’ and ‘efficient’ (Henner and Robinson 2023, 26). I suggest that these play an important role in making it more likely that people using non-normative forms of languaging will be considered cognitively impaired.

Methodological approach

Less conventionalised visual language interactions ‘take work’ and are characterised by a ‘mixture of ease and difficulty, understanding and not-understanding’ (Green 2015, 72; Green 2014, 127; Moriarty and Kusters 2021). Effort, creativity, and repetition are needed for them to be successful—for example serially re-channelling an expression until it is understood (Kusters 2017). Deaf people’s repeated, lifelong encounters with semiotic barriers often foster the ability to communicate in this flexible, modality-crossing way (Crasborn and Hiddinga 2015); Deaf Studies scholars H-Dirksen Bauman and Joseph Murray describe it as a form of ‘Deaf Gain,’ the advantages accruing to deaf individuals and/or wider society due to the existence of deaf people (Bauman and Murray 2014, xxvi). Green (2022) also notes that familiarity—both personal and contextual—is an important part of comprehension in this type of communication. The shared gestural vocabulary at the core of NATURAL-SIGN indexes items and actions from a wide range of everyday domains, including ‘kinship, places and events, and agricultural and household activities’ (Green 2022, 22).

As a foreign researcher, despite relatively long-term immersion in parts of Silivia’s social context, my experience with the range of referents was limited, especially because I had predominantly spent time in urban areas where common rural activities did not take place, while Silivia spent much of her time in a village in Rubuga’s rural periphery and had been raised entirely in a rural setting. In addition, being hearing, I did not have the benefit of the positionality-based ‘Deaf Gain’ of intermodal translanguaging aptitude, and I found using TRY+ more difficult than UgSL. Finally, I also had a relatively shallow history of using visual forms of language. I attended my first sign language class, in British Sign Language, in 2015, and I began work with Silivia in 2018. Because of these factors, I employed a deaf consultant, Betty Najjemba, as an interpreter to help me interview Silivia. Betty was recommended to me by UNAD based on her experience as a deaf outreach worker in rural areas of Uganda. She had previously worked with signers who did not know UgSL in many different regions of Uganda, including the west, where Rubuga is located. We planned that Betty and I would conduct the interview with me signing in UgSL (not quite fluently) and Silivia communicating through any means she chose, with Betty acting as an intermediary, re-signing or rechannelling any utterances Silivia or I found difficult.

This approach has also been used by others. Most documented examples of deaf interpreters are from countries in the (post-)industrialised global north (for example Boudreault 2005; Forestal 2014; Snoddon 2023; Snoddon 2024), but the role is common in an unpaid form in many deaf communities around the world, including Uganda (Adam, Carty and Stone 2011). In her 2020 PhD thesis, Beckmann notes UgSL-using deaf people spontaneously helping her communication with deaf Ugandans who used LOCAL SIGN (Beckmann 2020, 64). Betty had performed the role of deaf interpreter previously, though never in a paid capacity.[12]

From my previous encounters with Silivia, I knew she spent time in many places, including her stepmother's house, the village home she shared with her partner (a disabled man who was also one of my research participants), and the two main markets in Rubuga, sometimes sleeping overnight in all these locations. Betty and I decided to approach her at her marital home, because this seemed to be where she was most comfortable and where there were the least distractions, making it conducive for an extended conversation. During the interview, Silivia sat on a small mat on the floor in the clearing between Silivia's partner's home and his father and stepmother's home and Betty and I sat on low stools, facing her (see figure 1). We used two video cameras facing in opposite directions to record the interaction, to ensure we could capture facial expressions as well as hand and body movements of all participants. Line drawings of two sequential stills from camera 2 can be seen in Figure 1, showing the arrangement of the participants. After the interview, I gave the two video recordings to Betty, who rewatched them and produced a rough English gloss of the interaction. I then also rewatched them and sent her questions to clarify sections I still found difficult. The analysis in this article is based on my notes and memories from interviews and other interactions, the video recording, Betty's transcript and explanations, and the context of my broader research with deaf and hearing people in Rubuga.

Following the interview, I asked Betty what she thought about Silivia's communication and what it could tell us about her cognitive state. She told me she did not believe Silivia was mad, and that those who thought she was had simply not invested enough in trying to understand her. Betty explicitly categorised Silivia's treatment by other deaf people as an example of deaf Ugandan's common experience of being interpreted as mad due to communication differences.

[12] Betty also contributed to ethics processes. I produced an 'easy read' version of all consent materials, using pictures alongside simple language. Betty and I went through these materials with Silivia several times, explaining in multiple ways and asking questions to probe her understanding. Although language and experiential restrictions remained, we were satisfied that Silivia's understanding of the project was not substantially dissimilar to many other participants, and she demonstrated clear enthusiasm to take part. I also went through the consent procedure with Silivia's natal and marital families.

The Interview

A transcript of part of an interview between Silivia, Betty, and me is below. I have adapted the glossing conventions developed by Green to represent standardised and LOCAL/NATURAL signs alongside each other (Green 2014, 175). I give a relatively ‘close’ transcription, including detailed descriptions of non-standard forms to draw attention to the material features of the utterances (see Edwards 2024, 8–9). The transcript should not be taken as a ‘raw’ presentation of our interaction, as producing it entailed interpretative decisions, and there are substantial elements of signed communication that are difficult to capture in static media such as writing (Rosenthal 2009, 604; see also Fagan Robinson 2019).

Key to glossing conventions:

CAPS REGULAR	signed utterance (UgSL or LOCAL/NATURAL)
CAPS BOLD	UgSL signs
[brackets]	[overlap in two or more adjoining turns]
(regular)	description of co-accompanying movements or signs
(?)	indicates that I am unsure about my gloss of preceding sign
PRO-#(-Name)	pronominal indexical; # specifies person, name given for 2nd and 3rd person
PT	point (excluding pronominals)
CAPS-loc/dir	lower-case describes direction or location of sign or point
Q	local/natural sign that functions as WH-questions

Transcript 1:

1	Julia: **PRO-2-Silivia VOCATIONAL Pro-2-Silivia** STUDY **WHAT? TAILORING** y/n **PRO-2-Silivia**	Silivia, what did you study in vocational school? Tailoring?
2	Silivia: **TAILORING**	Tailoring.
3	y/n Julia: **CARPENTRY PRO-2-Silivia**	Did you do carpentry?
4	Silivia: **CARPENTRY PRO-1**	I did carpentry.
5	Betty: Q	Which?
6	Silivia: (not looking at Betty) **CARPENTRY PRO-1** [turns to look at Betty] **TAILORING PRO-1 TAILORING PRO-1**	I did carpentry. I did tailoring. I did tailoring.
7	Betty: KNOW **PRO-2-Silivia**	Do you know how to…
8	[Silivia: KNOW (nods)	[Yes I know
9	Betty: **TAILORING**]	…do tailoring?]

10	P116: **TAILORING** KNOW	I know tailoring.
11	Betty: CARPENTRY (non-standard version of sign, moving just one hand with the other flat to represent the wood)	What about carpentry?...
12	[Betty: Q	[…Which?
13	Silivia: PRO-1 Q (one-handed version)]	I which] (? unsure of this translation)
14	Silivia: (looks down at skirt and picks it up with left hand, straightens it out, runs right extended index down it towards other hand, Looks up at Betty)	(Shows Betty how to do sewing)
15	Betty: (nods)	(nods)
16	Silivia: (nods)	(nods)
17	Betty: KNOW	(you) know
18	Silivia: KNOW (nods), (thumbs up (with pinky finger extended))	(I) know (thumbs up)
19	Julia: **TAILORING** (nods)	Tailoring, yes.
20	[B: **YES**	[Yes
21	Silivia: **TAILORING**]	Tailoring]
22	Silivia: **YES** PT-dir-school (looks down at skirt again, repeats gesture of running index finger along skirt but in the other direction away from other hand) **TAILORING** KNOW (thumbs up, puts index finger to skirt again in a different place moves it away from hand) **TAILORING** KNOW (thumbs up, gestures towards school with whole hand)	Yes. I learned tailoring at school. I know tailoring.
23	Betty: (thumbs up)	Ok.
24	Silivia: (picks up material of skirt with both hands and shakes it) CLOTHES (using a slightly non-standard sign combining elements of CLOTHES and WEAR) **TAILORING** PT-dir-school (both thumbs up). PT-dir-own-home HAVE (nonstandard form with hand still extended towards home instead of against the body, but with the cupped handshape) (mimes sewing on skirt) (frowns) HAVE-NONE	I learned how to tailor clothes in school. At my home I don't have a needle and thread.
25	Julia: (nods)	(nods)
26	Silivia: (frowning, runs hands up both legs to indicate trousers, then moves them sharply apart to indicate being ripped) PT-dir-own-home KEEP-dir-own-home PT-dir-own-home (gestures with right index finger above extended left arm then moves the finger round and under the arm) (places both hands in front	I have ripped trousers that I keep in my house but I don't have a needle and thread or material.

	of her palms extended and downwards and moves them out repeatedly as though smoothing something) HAVE-NONE	
27	[Julia: (nods) (turns to Betty)	[(nods)
27	Betty: (turns to Julia)]	]
28	Julia: **NEEDLE**	She's talking about a needle.
29	Betty: (nods) **NEEDLE**	Yes, a needle…
30	[Betty: HAVE-NONE	[…she doesn't have one.
31	Julia: **NONE]**	She has none]
32	Silivia: **NONE**	I have none.
33	Betty: (gestures for Julia's attention) fingerspells-M **MATERIALS** (mouthing 'materia')	She's talking about materials (for sewing).
34	Julia: (does not recognise sign)	(does not recognise sign)
35	Betty: **MATERIALS** (mouthing 'mate') fingerspells-M-A-T-E-R- (slowly)	Materials.
36	[Julia: **YES** (nods) fingerspells-M-A-T-E-R-I-A-L-S (quickly)	[Yes, materials…
37	Betty: FOR(?) (non-standard sign, right index finger held upright to right of head moves swiftly down while mouthing 'fff')]	…For…]
38	[Betty: **TAILORING NEEDLE** HAVE-NOT	[…sewing. She doesn't have them.
39	Julia: (nods) fingerspells-O-K]	Yes, ok.]
40	Silivia: (gestures for Julia's attention) (runs right index down skirt, then picks up a section that has holes in it and points at them) **TAILORING** (moves skirt to reveal another area with holes) **TAILORING** (moves shirt up to reveal an area with holes) **TAILORING** PT-dir-school KNOW (nods, thumbs up)	My clothes have holes in them, yet I learned how to sew at school.

As figure 1 shows, during the interview we formed a rough circle, an arrangement common for conversations between deaf people because it maximises visibility for all participants (Friedner 2016, 191; Kusters 2015, 88–89). It also allowed for an intense bodily engagement, in which all three participants adopted mutually responsive practices (Canagarajah 2013; Moriarty and Kusters 2021), building towards the interpersonal 'familiarity' (Green 2022), or 'attunement' (Wilce 2004, 419) that enables comprehension. Deaf scholars Erin Moriarty and Annelies Kusters describe the 'calibration' that occurs at the beginning of engagements

between deaf people who use different sign languages thus: engaging in 'rapid, immersive and informal language learning, acquiring (bits of) new sign languages, new mouthings and finger spelling alphabets, and including them in their language practices' (Moriarty and Kusters 2021, 287). This process featured in our interaction: for example, lines 5 and 11–2 of Transcript 1 demonstrate Betty replacing my UgSL question signs with a generic WH-question gesture used widely in markets or other busy or noisy places, which I also adopted subsequently.

However, spatial reference played a larger role in calibration for us than in Moriarty and Kusters' descriptions. Sign languages commonly use spatial demarcations for reference, particularly for pronouns; signed stories often begin with the narrator explicitly assigning spatial areas to the story's participants, with pronouns subsequently produced by pointing to the relevant area. In our conversation, this technique was extended to substitute inanimate nouns, which, in UgSL, would usually be represented by distinct signs rather than indexes. Transcript 1 shows, for example, that rather than adopting a sign for 'vocational school' from either Silivia's vocabulary or the UgSL I used in my initial question, we converged on a technique that made explicit use of the physical setting and our joint knowledge of it, referring to the school by pointing in the direction of its buildings.[13] (Silivia introduces this technique at line 22 in the transcript; Julia and Betty adopted it for subsequent queries that fall after the section transcribed here.)

The two sequential stills in figure 1 are drawn from a section of the interview discussing Silivia's educational history. Frustrated when Betty and I could not understand her description of which class at school she had been in when an event happened, Silivia drew a series of boxes in the dirt on the ground between us with her forefinger, relating her narration to divisions in the physical space between us. The two images show Betty taking up and extending Silivia's technique, writing 'P1', 'P2', 'P3' etc. on the ground to clarify the assignment of spatial areas to grades. 'P1' is the most common way to refer to the first class of primary school in Uganda. Silivia had learned basic reading and writing at school, and one of her neighbours told us that they regularly communicated with her by writing in the dirt. As the conversation continued, Silivia pointed to the written labels to locate her comments in historical time (see the second still in figure 1, in which Silivia points to 'P2' while looking at Julia, who signs to confirm her understanding of the connection). Through these techniques, the space between and around us became increasingly suffused with references. As Betty's, Silivia's, and my communication came more into sync through this process, it enabled more

[13] Spatial nouns also appear to be more common in sign languages that develop in relatively small isolated communities (such as 'shared sign languages' and forms of 'homesign') than in national languages, likely because these languages tend to be used in situations where participants share a high level of local knowledge, so, for example, pointing in the direction of a person's home or favourite chair can act as a reference to them (see, for example Goldin-Meadow 2012; Kusters 2015).

sophisticated forms of abstract reference in time and space, including sequencing events.

Figure 1: Drawings of two stills from camera 2, showing the arrangement of the interview participants. The figure on the left is Betty, in the centre is Silivia, and to the right is Julia. In the first picture Betty writes in the dirt with her finger. In the second, Silivia points to one of Betty's writings while Julia signs. The second camera is not shown in this image, but was located behind and to the left of Silivia, where it could capture Betty and Julia's facial expressions.

We extended our communicative engagement, both in the moment, with the interview lasting far longer than any other interviews I carried out with deaf participants, and subsequently, as Betty and I revisited the video. Dwelling with fugitive signification—the suspension of immediate judgments about what individualised members of the conversation 'meant' in the moment—enabled sophisticated co-construction of meaning, even though interpretation of the many references remained challenging for all parties, requiring a complex bodily

coordination of orientations, narrative structure, and semantics. As an example, my gloss of Silivia's utterance in line 40 of the partial transcript reads, 'My clothes have holes in them, yet I learned how to sew at school.' I interpret this statement as a complex expression of irony, referring back to Silivia's immediately preceding comment (line 26), about not having materials for sewing.[14] The word 'yet', which expresses the ironic connection between the ripped clothes and learning tailoring at school, does not correspond to a particular lexical element Silivia used; rather, it is my interpretation of her choices about juxtaposition and sequencing within line 40 and between lines 26 and line 40, which create a narrative arc from the comments about her clothes being ripped because she has no materials to fix them, to her skill in tailoring, learned at school.

I can envisage an argument that by interpreting sequencing of utterances as irony I'm 'reading into' Silivia's signing more than I would with someone whose expressions were more comprehensible to me, and that this invalidates the interpretation. As interactional linguistics and theories of distributed language point out, however, all communication involves co-created meaning (Cowley 2009). Irony is a particularly delicate co-created structure that always relies heavily on context. Linguists, psychologists, and anthropologists increasingly recognise that framings play a crucial role in emerging meaning. When participants are assumed to be incompetent, possible interpretations are likely to be dismissed; conversely, a theory of communication that assumes that embodied action and other forms of non-normative communication can convey meaning may facilitate emerging co-creation (Goodwin 1995; Muskett and Body 2013; Dindar, Lindblom and Kärnä 2017).

I argue that to dismiss the implications of juxtaposition and sequencing would be to reduce meaning-making to an individual competence: it would assume that the possible interpretation could not be valid because of an assumed incapability on Silivia's part (see Goodwin 2004, 154, Block and Kasnitz 2012, 199). Instead, I argue that doubts about interpretation point towards the more-than-usually precarious framework of our linguistic engagement. The emerging field of crip linguistics points out that while co-created meaning may be more intensive and prominent in disabled people's languaging, it is not unique to it (Henner and Robinson 2023). Misunderstanding is a possibility in all communication, but between some people, who are situated in particular ways within linguistic repertoires, we are forced to consider the question more than we typically do. By directing attention explicitly towards the role of attunement in communication, might this help us understand all communication better?

[14] Silivia did not contribute between lines 26 and 40, because the intervening expressions involve Betty explaining an unknown sign to Julia. Therefore, line 40 immediately follows on from line 26 in Betty's sequence of utterances.

Time, 'moral orientations', and judgements of competence

While the conversation between Betty, Silivia, and me remained deeply marked by periods of incomprehension on all sides, it was far more informative than any other encounter I had with Silivia. In fact, I learned more about Silivia's life and opinions than most of my other research participants knew, even though some had attended school with her, and all continued to interact with her regularly when she came to the market. Much of the difference between this interview and my other engagements with Silivia was due to Betty's more effective flexible visual communication. However, the deaf market stallholders who dismissed Silivia's communication were equally skilled as Betty; Lidia, the deaf stallholder who complained that Silivia's signing confused her, had even formerly held a rural outreach role with UNAD similar to Betty's. Why, then, did the interview tell me more about Silivia than their conversations with her in the market told them?

Here, the distinction is better explained through considering the motivations and constraints that participants have for conversing, in the context of a 'difficult' sign interaction. In a discussion of conversations at international conferences between deaf people who use different sign languages (which form one of the paradigmatic examples of less conventionalised visual communication in the sign linguistics canon), Green explains that for these conversations to work the participants must 'turn . . . toward' one another, creating a 'heightened relationship' involving unusual levels of attention and cognitive engagement. She describes the predisposition to perform this 'turning' as a 'moral orientation,' clarifying that it is 'moral in the sense of relational as well as moral in the sense of socially valued and expected' (Green 2015, 72). It is the social value and expectation placed on this kind of conversation that provides motivation for making the substantial effort needed to co-create meaning.

As Block and Kasnitz point out, timing plays a big role in this process (Block and Kasnitz 2012, 205). This is because it influences what kinds of motivations will work for various types of communication—including more quotidian motivations, as well as those that resemble Green's 'moral orientations.' Moral orientations towards challenging communication extend the amount of time interactors are willing to spend developing conversational attunement, but they are contextual (see Moriarty and Kusters 2021) and may have varying features, including differential strengths. Difficult sign interactions also vary, based both on users' different levels of skill and on the interactive frames that are available to the communicative collective (see Nyst, Sylla and Magassouba 2012, 263–4; Moriarty Harrelson 2019, 69). Transcript 1 depicts a section of an interview in which Silivia responds to one simple question: 'what did you study at vocational school?' It took

our communicative collective over 45 seconds (represented in lines 1–23) to pose the question in an understandable way and converge on a confirmed response—far longer than I would generally expect for such a simple question.[15] Stretching response time in this way required suspending conclusions, remaining with meanings just glimpsed for lengths of time that could feel uncomfortable, at least for those accustomed to faster communication.

After the question and answer were confirmed to be understood, Silivia went on to give us more information, linking her past studies to her current life conditions through her reflections on her ripped clothes (lines 24–40). While, as an anthropologist, this information was interesting and useful to me, it was not strictly what I was aiming to elicit, and it did not feature on the question schedule Betty and I were using. In other interactions I witnessed, I found that this was not unusual; Silivia frequently pushed conversations in her own direction, even when others were attempting to engage her in group communicative projects (Modern 2021, 196). This is an important consideration, because insights from my broader research with deaf and disabled people in Rubuga showed that communication that could be understood as irrelevant, a distraction, or simply taking 'too long' was not tolerated equally in all settings in which I conducted research.

In formal meetings, for example training sessions run by NGOs or government, types of visual communication that 'take work,' such as TRY+ were never used. This was because the meetings had strict schedules that excluded spending time on the experimental repetition or rechannelling necessary for them. Instead, these meetings either excluded deaf participants, or provided (often ineffective) simultaneous interpretation (Modern 2021, 138–41; Modern 2024b). Within the market where many of my participants worked, however, TRY+ was used between deaf stallholders and hearing customers or neighbours. Two factors made this possible. First, the temporality of the space was more relaxed: it was rare for more than one customer to attempt to buy from a stall at once, except on Friday market days, which meant stallholders could commit the time needed to the interaction. Second, stallholders and customers were motivated to communicate for the sake of the transaction, giving them a temporally- and spatially-limited pragmatic (rather than moral) orientation to commit the time needed for successful communication in less conventionalised modes. (For further discussion of these issues, see Modern 2021, 137; Modern 2024; Hoffman-Dilloway 2011 notes a blended

[15] I found that reference to non-present times and specific types of question ('which', 'how' etc.) were particularly challenging to communicate during our interaction. These difficulties may have been related to gaps in overlap between our collective's semiotic resources. The spatial techniques Silivia introduced addressed some problems, but they were not easily portable between settings and would therefore likely need re-establishment for any subsequent conversations, again entailing extended engagement time.

pragmatic and moral motivation animating improvised sign interactions at a Nepali burger outlet that used its employment of deaf people as a marketing tactic.)

A similar argument applies to Silivia's communicative settings. On the day of the interview, Betty and I had specifically come to Silivia's home to interview her, with the aim being to understand her life experiences, and we were also both being paid to do so. We were therefore happy to commit a substantial amount of time to co-creating meaning through various experimental methods. We were also deliberately oriented towards picking up and working with her techniques to facilitate communication. By contrast, when Silivia interacted with the deaf market stall holders, she did so in their workplace, during their workday, in an attempt at social interaction. Although the temporality and practical business focus of the market enabled conversations in TRY+ with customers, Silivia's conversation was unrelated to the stallholders' businesses, which meant there was no pragmatic motivation. In addition, even when there were no customers around, there was frequently other work to be done preparing and maintaining stock, and, in the economically precarious environment of the market, stallholders had to be constantly vigilant for thieves or possible customers. The complexity of communicating with Silivia meant that conversations with her required focus and effort, which did not mix easily with this work (Block and Kasnitz 2012, 204 notes the cognitive exhaustion that results from having to split attention between understanding difficult communication and other urgent demands). In these circumstances, deaf stallholders were not willing or able to put in the time needed for difficult conversation. They found Silivia distinctly annoying, frequently ordering her to go away.

Despite the constraints of the environment, this response is not entirely predetermined by the interactional difficulties of communication in less conventionalised language. Lidia and some of the other deaf stallholders in Kicweka market were highly invested in expanding the deaf community in Rubuga, and they sometimes did this through outreach to deaf people in surrounding villages who had not been exposed to UgSL, who were conceptualised as users of LOCAL SIGN. Like Betty, Lidia used TRY+ techniques to establish communication with them. Deaf people who were learning UgSL were also encouraged and mentored into the community (Modern 2021, 145–6; Modern 2024a, 17). Given this 'moral orientation' towards supporting LOCAL SIGN users, the challenges that emerged when communicating with Silivia could have been interpreted as evidence of the difficulty of communicating in less conventionalised visual communication, which might have triggered support rather than condemnation from the deaf stallholders. Instead, they were seen as pathological evidence of cognitive disfunction.

A positive 'moral orientation' towards conversing with Silivia was less likely because of her anomalous position within the local deaf community, in the context of locally dominant linguistic ideologies—'moral ideas about what strategies and semiotic resources are most appropriate in specific contexts and/or with/by whom' (Moriarty and Kusters 2021, 296). The deaf stallholders were all members of Rubuga's district level Deaf Union, which commonly held meetings in the market and promoted a normative model of deaf development that centred UgSL (Modern 2024a, 15–8). Gitte Beckmann, an anthropologist working with deaf people in northern Uganda, argues this model conceptualises UgSL as a modern 'developed' technology connected to national and international scales; LOCAL signing thus takes on an implication of 'backwardness' (Beckmann 2022; Moriarty Harrelson 2019, 67 also notes hierarchical distinctions between sign languages marked as 'national' and 'local' in Cambodia, reporting that users of one of the two 'national' scale sign languages in Cambodia considering deaf people who did not use this language 'stupid'). This linguistic ideology, subscribed to particularly strongly in the market space, positioned UgSL as the appropriate mode of communication between fellow deaf people (Modern 2024a, 19–20).

Communication between deaf and hearing people could validly take place through TRY+, and the TRY+ approach was valued for its ability to create broader communicative networks, but TRY+ was evidently considered appropriate only to some relationships, particularly those between deaf people and hearing others who were not well known to them. LOCAL SIGN also had a role in this schema. When Lidia and other deaf urbanites conducted outreach to deaf people in surrounding villages who had not been exposed to UgSL, like Betty, they used TRY+ techniques to establish communication, only later expecting the rural deaf people to learn UgSL.

Silivia, however, did not fit well into this normative framework. There is a temporal and spatial specificity to ideologies about the valid use of TRY+ or LOCAL SIGN between deaf people: they are a thing of the rural past. Deaf participants in my research almost unanimously narrativised their own life histories using this schema, describing an upward trajectory from the abjection of language deprivation at school to dramatic improvements associated with encountering UgSL. Moriarty Harrelson describes similar stereotypical narratives among the deaf community in Cambodia arguing that they are an outright misrepresentation of the language resources of her interlocutors' personal histories (Moriarty Harrelson 2019, 69–70). Lidia, who had been at school with Silivia, described Silivia's history as the opposite to the dominant narrative. Lidia claimed she had been able to converse with Silivia at school and they had even been friends, going together to fetch mangoes from Silivia's stepmother's home after class, but when, years later, she encountered her again, she felt Silivia's signing had deteriorated.

Lidia attributed this to a 'mental problem,' arguing that it showed Silivia's cognitive abilities had changed after she left school. Reinforcing this perception, deaf people in urban spaces were expected to have picked up UgSL, or at the least to be actively trying to do so (Modern 2024a, 17). Silivia lived sometimes in rural, sometimes in urban spaces, but she clearly did not fit the stereotype of the 'unreached' deaf person who did not know UgSL because they had never had contact with the deaf community. For her deaf interlocutors, this raised the question of why she had not learned UgSL.

Lidia's argument that Silivia's signing had declined after she left school is telling. By conceptualising the problem as an issue of skill, Lidia made communicative competence an individual matter—just a question of Silivia's failure to master a set of semiotic resources, and therefore an indicator of cognitive incapacity on her part. (Thinking of UgSL as a developmental technology may encourage this individualist approach to language.) But as Esther, a hearing wheelchair-user who also attended the school with Lidia and Silivia, pointed out, it was not unusual for deaf pupils to find communicating difficult, given the poor language input they received.[16] Taking relatively more time to communicate visually was standard at school, likely for Lidia as much as for Silivia. Afterwards, however, most deaf people acquired the more highly conventionalised—and therefore relatively 'quick' and 'efficient' (as Henner and Robinson (2023) put it)—UgSL. Silivia, however, had not attended the UgSL course run by UNAD in Rubuga, nor completed any further study with the organisation. Peer transmission of UgSL occurred primarily when deaf people spent intensive extended periods together, for example, working on the same stall in the market (Modern 2024a, 17), which Silivia also did not do—although it was unclear to me whether this was out of choice or because of other deaf people's hostility towards her.

The developmentalist conceptual route through visual languaging that Rubuga's deaf community considered standard for deaf people did not fit Silivia's experiences. Nor did it make any space for deaf people who also experienced difficulties with language acquisition (researchers looking at deaf communities elsewhere in the world have also noted exclusion for what are sometimes called DeafDisabled people, see Wright 2021; Ruiz-Williams et al. 2015; Kusters, De Meulder and O'Brien 2017). Ultimately, Lidia and other deaf stallholders' 'moral orientations' towards incorporating deaf people who did not (yet) use UgSL were not sufficient for them to commit the time needed to develop conversational attunement with Silivia. Some of this was contextual, arising from the constraints of the space in which she encountered them. Some came from the rigidity of

[16] Although the history of UgSL remains under studied, it seems to have emerged in deaf schools, as did many other sign languages worldwide (Lutalo-Kiingi and De Clerck 2015; Hou and Kusters 2019). Why a sign language did not emerge at the school in Rubuga is unclear, although it should be noted that it was a school for deaf and disabled children and the percentage of deaf students during Silivia's schooling was likely low.

developmentalist linguistic ideologies. And some also may have arisen from Silivia's signing triggering stereotypes about mad people 'talking wildly', so that when Silivia repeated others or seemed to be signing irrelevantly, others cut off their attempts at understanding (for another example of this phenomenon, see Modern 2021, 165–202).

Conclusion

In this article, I reflect on the methodological difficulty of working with a deaf participant who uses less conventionalised visual communication, analysing the difficult moments to explore what they tell us about how communication and everyday assessments of cognitive function are mutually implicated for deaf people in Uganda. I argue that, in situations where linguistic frameworks are only partially shared by communicative collectives, comprehensibility is not something that is determined by the qualities of a person's expression, but rather something that *happens* to and through communication. Due to repeated experiences of semiotic exclusion and modal barriers to communication, deaf people commonly develop an aptitude for flexible communication, which can facilitate conversations in forms of sign that are less conventionalised than most languages. However, these forms of sign require intense concentration, work, and time. Whether these resources, and the motivation to use them, will be available varies depending on situation, through a complex intersection between the aesthetic/affective dimensions of communication and ideologies about particular communicative modes.

This approach complicates the apparent obviousness of 'voice as material'—the presence of a sensorial interactive phenomenon of communication. I argue that a person's ability to produce experiences of successful communication with their interlocutors depends on (often implicit) prior definitions of what comprehensible communication is and feels like. Breaching these expectations can cut off attempts to engage. In the setting of western Uganda, using the more time- and concentration-intensive TRY+ or LOCAL SIGN modes in situations where UgSL would be expected is one factor that can cause this. Although some deaf people in this setting share the kinds of 'moral orientations' to communicating beyond formalised sign languages that have been described by sign linguists conducting research in 'cosmopolitan' international deaf settings (Green 2015, Moriarty and Kusters 2021), these orientations are strictly delimited to particular types of relationship and engagement.

In addition, 'excessive' repetition, which seems to be more likely to occur in less conventionalised visual communication interactions, can trigger stereotypes of

'madness', which suggest that the repetitive utterances are meaningless. As with 'taking too long' to communicate, this perception can act as a frame creating assumed communicative incompetence and cutting off attempts to engage. This suggests that deaf people whose main communication method is less conventionalised visual methods and deaf people with cognitive differences, for example neurodivergence, may be more vulnerable to being rendered situationally incomprehensible, even in places where visual language use is common and deaf people's communication in general is facilitated. In places like Uganda, where engaging in conversation is a sociopolitical imperative, the consequences can be severe, as they were for Silivia, who experienced social exclusion in all aspects of her life.

Authorship statement

I am the sole author of this article. I have not used any artificial intelligence software to write or edit this article.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Cambridge Social Anthropology Ethics Committee, the Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. All research participants gave informed consent, based on an iterative process involving multiple conversations conducted in different settings, in the presence and absence of relevant proxies. An Ethics Reference Group composed of researchers, representatives of Disabled People's Organisations, and NGOs reviewed informed consent decisions for each participant for whom capacity could be in question, based on anonymised summaries of consent processes.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Silivia, her family and friends, and all the rest of my interlocutors for generously sharing their lives with me. Betty Najjemba's interpretation made my engagement with Silivia possible, and she also provided insights into deaf people's experiences in rural Uganda. Robinah Alumbuya, director of a DPO for survivors and users of psychiatric services in Uganda, helped me develop my approach to working with participants who were considered to be mad and reviewed Easy Read versions of my consent materials. I thank her and the other

members of my Ethics Reference Group for assistance with informed consent decisions. Thanks to Mikal Woldu, Matt Birkinshaw, Ingrid Aguiar Schlindwein, Rich Thornton, and other members of the SOAS ECR writing group for helping me develop an earlier version of this paper. Kelly Fagan Robinson, Rosie Jones McVey, Catherine Dolan, and two anonymous reviewers also provided insightful feedback and suggestions.

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