What's in a Place Name in Tibetan Sign Language? Iconicity and the Use of Signed Toponyms among Deaf Signers in Lhasa

7. What's in a Place Name in Tibetan Sign Language? Iconicity and the Use of Signed Toponyms among Deaf Signers in Lhasa

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Abstract

Based on four months of anthropological fieldwork with TSL signers, analysis of video recordings and the co-production of video-based TSL language materials, this article offers the first description and analysis of a selection of toponyms, or place names, in the Tibetan Sign Language (TSL). TSL is a recently emerging deaf community sign language used by about 150 to 200 Tibetan signers mainly in Lhasa, the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).

The article demonstrates that the TSL place name system is driven by a high degree of iconicity, that is, resemblances and similarities between the linguistic signs of place names and their referents. Going beyond the simple and singular conception of iconicity as a 'form-meaning resemblance', this article argues that iconicity involves mental mappings and is mediated by social, political and cultural processes (cf. Taub 2012; Thompson et al. 2012; Nonaka 2015). For example, mappings between aspects of embodied experiences and visually perceived features of people, objects and places are discussed. As are more abstract ways, such as when highly valued or religiously worshipped people, items and places are placed higher in the signing space and/or on signers' bodies.

By comparison with the surrounding languages, only few influences from Tibetan written and spoken place names on TSL place names exist, the main one being their multi-syllabic prosody. There are no calques from Tibetan place names or signs derived from fingerspelling. This is related to low levels of literacy and lack of circulation of Tibetan-language-based software among deaf Tibetans. It also relates to wider language shift to Chinese, prompted in the place name domain by almost exclusive use of Chinese place names for Tibetan places in day-to-day administration and online-map apps.

The article is comparative and highlights not just aspects of the written and spoken language environment and its place names, but also offers first insights into the toponymic system of the Lhasa variety of Chinese Sign Language (LhCSL). This language is in use by Tibetan signers under the age of 30, due to their attendance in the local government deaf school (which uses Chinese, sign supported Chinese and CSL). No influence on TSL place names from the LhCSL toponymic system are evidenced, but there is increasing code-switching to LhCSL place names among TSL-dominant signers, when they interact

with LhCSL dominant signers.

7.1. Introduction

Place names and acts of naming are informed by social and political processes and change over time. Historians, anthropologists and linguists have been curious about the creation, forms, meanings and use of place names in a particular location, language or social group. With this very first description and analysis of a selection of place names in the Tibetan Sign Language (TSL) this article addresses a scientific desideratum in the regional studies of Tibet and the Himalayas (e.g. Ramble 1995; Sørensen and Hazod 2005), as well as contributing to the study of place names in social and linguistic anthropology (e.g. Boas 1934; Basso 1996; Cumbe 2016; Koch and Hercus 2009; Kroskrity 2016; Thornton 1997) and in sign linguistics (e.g. de Vos 2014; Nonaka 2015; Revilla 2009; Stamp et al. 2014; Peng and Clouse 1977).

TSL is used by a small group of about 150−200 deaf Tibetans in Lhasa as their dominant language. TSL signers are generally over the age of 30 and often did not attend any formal schooling. TSL is a young sign language (about twenty years old), and as such it is an interesting case that can be added to the literature on emerging sign languages. Unlike in larger, long established national sign languages, in TSL many signs are still in formation and/or may co-exist with other variants. This article focuses on TSL and place names for Tibetan locations as used by deaf Tibetans and is not primarily concerned with the place names for Tibetan locations that exist in LhCSL.[1] The first government deaf school was established in Lhasa in the year 2000. Signers younger than 30, who attended the school, tend to use a local, Lhasa variant of Chinese Sign Language (*Zhongguo Shouyu* Ch., CSL), here called LhCSL. Hearing members of Tibetan society are mostly unaware of these sign languages, but wider gestural repertoires are actively used to facilitate communication between some deaf and some hearing Tibetans (Hofer 2018; 2019b).

The findings presented here are based on four months of ethnographic and linguistic fieldwork in Lhasa (between 2016 and 2017) and draw on the in-depth contextual historical and socio-linguistic knowledge and experience of the author, who has been working in the region for over fifteen years, with two years of on-site living in Central Tibet. The research involved stimulating, recording and documenting discussions about TSL place names with deaf users, investigating their etymology and observing actual use of place names in natural conversations. It also engaged with the creation of content for a TSL app for smart phones, which involved the recording of over 40 place names. My analysis of these materials and a comparison of the TSL-signed place names with systems of signed place names in other sign languages as well as with written Tibetan place names shows that iconicity plays a crucial role in the lexical derivation of TSL place names. Influences from the written and spoken forms of place names, on the other hand, are only minor.

The questions that this article explors are: What are common features of the sign forms of place names in TSL and how do they relate to aspects of the environment, the experience of Tibetans and their history? What role does iconicity play in these relationships? What are local etymologies of TSL place names? What variations of place names exist and how

are new TSL signs created when there is no established toponym?

7.2. Place Names Across Languages

Spoken and signed languages feature a variety of structures and patterns of place names and varying trends towards incorporating elements from other languages. Instead of a full overview of all patterns in signed place names, I will selectively review extant work and examples from other sign languages, which allow the reader to better situate the system of TSL place names that will be discussed below.

Anthropologist and linguist Angela Nonaka's systematic study of place names in the Bhan Kor Sign Language (BKSL), a small sign language used in north-eastern Thailand (2015), serves as an important starting point for this brief review. Figure 7-1 summarizes her observations on common toponymic features found in the three national sign languages Auslan (Australian Sign language), ASL (American Sign Language) and Thai Sign Language.

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1. **Robust place name vocabularies** for both domestic and international locations
2. **Orthographically influenced signs**, i.e. ones that are either initialized (made using one or more letters of the manual alphabet), or fingerspelled entirely
   (Example a. the Initialized sign C for Canberra in Australian Sign Language; example b. Initialized sign W for Washington, DC in ASL; example c. Initialized sign T for *Tak* in Thai Sign Language)
3. Predominantly **mono-lexemic** toponymic onomastic systems
4. At least some **"descriptive"** signs (Supalla 1990; 1992), i.e. ones etymologically derived from something (physical, habitual, idiosyncratic, historical, etc.) distinctive or famous about the place. Example a. AUSTRALIA, in both Australian and Thai sign languages, depicts a 'hopping' movement reminiscent of a kangaroo, an animal species unique to the country; example b. CALIFORNIA, also includes the sign for GOLD, relating to the California Gold Rush

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Figure 7-1   Table of key toponymic features of larger sign languages (Nonaka 2015: 67)

By comparison Nonaka writes that BKSL place names depart in almost every respect from those features: BKSL has a small place name repertoire and literally no influences from written or spoken languages. The BKSL place names tend to be fairly long and descriptive. For example, the nearest district town to where BKSL is used, *Phon Sawan* ('little hill heaven'), is signed MID-CHEST PHOTOGRAPH MID-CHEST THERE in BKSL in reference to all Thai citizens having to register for a national identification card at their local district capital. For this, they have to provide a black and white headshot picture of the person, depicted from the mid-chest upward (2015: 77). The Thai capital Bangkok, in Thai known as *Khrungthep* ('city of angels'), has the canonical form in BKSL of DRIVE/ GO WORK (earn)-MONEY WAY OVER THERE, referencing a situation in which over the years, numerous Ban Khorians have gone to the national capital to work and earn money (Nonaka 2015: 77−78): women working as live-in maids (leading to a female version of

the place name incorporating WASHING CLOTHES) and men working in construction (leading to a male version of the place name incorporating LAYING BRICKS). Throughout the work, Nonaka also discusses the extent of influences from Thai Sign Language, which is increasingly affecting the BKSL place name system. This reflects a wider trend in which many smaller, sometimes ethnic or village sign languages become endangered (Nonaka 2004, 2014; Zeshan and Dikyuva 2013).

While BKSL gravitates towards the use of long and descriptive place names, in TSL, except in the spontaneous creation of new signs, signers rely on relatively short and iconic representations of places. While within morphology and etymology of place names we find few commonalities, there are shared socio-linguistic features of TSL and BKSL signers that may influence both place name systems. This concerns especially the lack of basic literacy (cf. Nonaka 2015; Hofer 2017). Both BKSL and TSL only have few orthographically derived place names and place names seem to be less influenced by written and spoken place names of surrounding languages (cf. de Vos and Pfau 2015).

Israeli Sign Language (ISL) place names have been considered in detail by Revilla (2009), who studied 92 place names in this well-established national sign language. Revilla points out that the two largest classes of semantic content in ISL place names are environmental and historical, followed by a smaller class with etymologies based on people (i.e. personal names) and "other" place names (2009: 108). While the reference to the environment and in some cases history is also common in TSL, the 'go-to' aspects of the environment are rather different. ISL place names feature aspects of the environment, which are also present within the respective written names, and to some extent are loan translations. For example, NAHARIYA, a place where the Ga'aton River runs through the city, and gave the city its Hebrew name from the word *nahar* 'river' (Revilla 2009: 111). The ISL sign preserves the same meaning by using the handshape and movement of the sign NAHAR 'river', but the sign moves downward vertically rather than forward horizontally away from the signer to differentiate it from this generic term NAHAR 'river'. We can assume this influence on ISL from the written names to be related to the comparatively high level of education and literacy among deaf ISL users. The sign for the modern city of Tel Aviv is the one in Revilla's study that relates specifically to the category of "dress" and it is signed as "MASK" (2009: 115, 116) in reference to the masks worn during the Purim festival, when Jewish people traditionally dressed up in costumes during a parade held in Tel Aviv.[2] Contrastingly, in TSL there exist many place names referencing dress of a particular region or place. Unlike the ISL sign for Tel Aviv, TSL signs tend to reference ordinary traditional (historical or contemporary) dress (hats, jewelry or clothes) worn more than just once a year during a parade.

Chinese Sign Language (CSL) needs to be mentioned here, as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) is a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and government organizations consider and promote a standardized form of CSL as the "national language of all deaf people in China." CSL features regional varieties (Huang and Gu 2014; Lin 2006; Lin et al. 2009; Yang 2015). A supposedly "standard CSL" is mainly advanced through the national system of deaf schools (known as 'Special Schools'), even in regions where ethnic languages other than Chinese are used and policies are in place that support hearing children of ethnic

minorities learning and using ethnic languages within the education system (cf. Hofer and Sagli 2017; Hofer 2020).

With regard to CSL place names, there is no comprehensive English-language linguistic study. Yau and He (1987) are accessible only in Chinese and not online. *The Complete Collection of Place Names of China and Other Counties in Chinese Sign Language* (China Association for the Deaf 2011) is also in Chinese, but in contrast to Yau and He (1987) provides several hundred photos of CSL place names of many major cities and regions of China. Henceforth called *The Complete Collection*, is a handbook for deaf Chinese CSL signers but there is no comprehensive linguistic analysis or discussion. Neither work in fact helps us to understand CSL place names for Tibetan locations and areas within China. Yau and He (1987) make no mention of Tibetan place names and 23 out of 25 toponyms for places in the TAR listed in *The Complete Collection*, are loaned from TSL.[3] Based on this literature, this leaves us with just two CSL toponyms for Tibetan places.

In comparison with CSL place names (Hofer 2019a), LhCSL has few iconic place names of Tibetan locations. Only Lhasa, the Potala Palace (a major landmark in the city), and one sign variety for Tibet (*Xizang* C.) are iconic. For example, in LhCSL one signs *POTALA* by outlining the skyline of the roofs of the palace building and at elevation (on top of a hill in Lhasa), by placing the sign in the upper frontal signing space (see Figure 7-16). All other place names in LhCSL that I have recorded feature an orthography-based system of place names. In this system, signers tend to fingerspell the first letter of the Pinyin transcription of the Chinese characters of a written Tibetan place name. As the characters for Tibetan locations are in many cases the transcriptions of an originally written Tibetan name (which tends to be multi-syllabic), the bulk of the resulting LhCSL place names for Tibetan locations, using the initials of each syllable, also often end up with an orthographically-derived two letter LhCSL place name. For example, as in the signs *PEN PO* and *ZA YÜ* (*Cháyú* C., Figure 7-2). Only few examples exist where the Chinese meaning or homophones of a written place name feature in LhCSL place names, for example, as in the sign *BA YI* for *Ba Yi*.

The mainly orthographically derived LhCSL place name system therefore allows for a wide range and easy creation of new place names, provided one knows the Chinese characters and/or their Pinyin spelling of the place names, as well fingerspelling. This system

Figure 7-2 An orthographically-derived place name in LhCSL, *ZA YÜ*

is becoming more widespread among many deaf Tibetan signers in Lhasa, even if they may otherwise be illiterate. This surprising finding, can be explained mainly by the now widespread use of online maps, where all place names are in Chinese rather than Tibetan language. Virtually all deaf Tibetans are avid users of smart phones and map apps. Character recognition software further enables them to figure out basic Chinese characters, for example of place names; a comparable application for the Tibetan script does not yet exist (Tibetans generally do not know how to transcribe Tibetan into roman characters). With the ongoing social and political, as well as technical developments, we can expect increasing influences from the indefinitely expandable orthographic system of LhCSL place names.

Looking at purely socio-linguistic – rather than formal linguistic aspects – of place names in the context of regional lexical variation and change in British Sign Language (BSL), a study by Stamp *et al.* (2014) investigated variation of BSL place names (alongside colors, countries, and numbers). They found that age, school location and language background were significant predictors of the use of lexical variation in all four lexical domains, with younger signers using a more levelled variety, that is that the variation has been reduced.

For place names of UK cities, the authors found that signers from outside the city or region used a different sign from those who live there – in other words, the endonym and the exonym did not match (Stamp et al. 2014). The large data sets that corpus linguists are able to gather and use in the case of BSL, would be difficult to gather in a politically-sensitive place such as Lhasa and Tibet. Nevertheless, the future study of TSL and LhCSL place names should consider the topic of variation, not just of age, school location and language background, but also take into account the location of speakers.

The place name systems of sign languages reviewed here feature different tendencies as well as some commonalities. National sign languages tend to have robust repertoires of place names; signers have less need to create new signs and/or the ones they use feature lesser regional varieties, as in the case of BSL. They also often feature aspects of the surrounding spoken or written languages, such a letter-initialized place names (cf. Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999). Younger sign languages with fewer signers often lack these features (cf. de Vos and Pfau 2015). Illiteracy of users of such languages has tended to be a constraining factor on loans or loan-blends of surrounding written place names. However, as the above example of the widening use of the LhCSL orthography-based system of places names among otherwise largely illiterate deaf Tibetans demonstrates, such constraints may be circumvented by signers' use of a new app and online map technologies, as well as various social and political forces.

Given the diversity of place name systems in sign languages and the so far complete lack of any description of TSL place names, this article contributes the first description of TSL place names and their use, in particular highlighting the significant role of various kinds of iconicity in the lexical derivation of TSL place names. However, before we turn to the place names themselves and these processes, some definitions of relevant terminology and debates related to iconicity in sign linguistics are required.

7.3. Iconicity and Place Names

A simple definition of iconicity is 'a relationship of resemblance or similarity between the two aspects of a sign: its form and its meaning' (Meir and Tkachman 2018). As such, iconicity has often been seen in contrast to the far more common, so-called arbitrary nature of signs. Since de Saussure's "doctrine of arbitrariness" (1983[1916]) this has led many linguists to think of arbitrariness as *the* defining principle of the phenomenon of language; i.e. language as a system of abstraction without direct resemblance between form and meaning.

That said, not least due to the pervasive use of metaphor in which iconicity plays a key role, linguists now know otherwise and acknowledge that iconicity is a key organizing principle of languages, in particular, of sign languages due to the visuo-gestural modality of the language (Taub 2001; 2012). As Taub shows in her review of the state of the art in sign linguistics research on iconicity (2012), one needs to get away from a simple understanding of 'iconicity as form-meaning resemblances' and the idea that the relationship between form and meaning is somehow self-evident, transparent, or universal. Linguists have examined such assumptions and found that iconically-derived signed forms cannot in fact, most of the time, be correctly guessed by signers themselves, or others in their social group, let alone people outside of it. Taub writes: "Iconicity is not an objective relationship between image and referents. Rather, it is a relationship between our mental models of images and referents" (2012: 390, see also Taub 2001). These mental models, Taub holds, are partially motivated by experiences common to all humans, and partially by experiences particular to specific cultures and societies, calling for a definition of iconicity that takes culture and the culturally-informed processes of conceptualizations into account (2012: 390).

Taking resemblance as a human-defined, interactional property based on humans' ability to create conceptual mappings, allows us to think of linguistic iconicity as various kinds of *mappings* between phonetic forms (sound sequence, handshape or movement, temporal patterns) and mental images associated with referents. Thinking in terms of "mappings" in the plural appears to have become more prominent in discussing iconicity in sign linguistics and related fields (cf. Thompson et al. 2012). Thompson *et al.* for example make this point, when they write that "the lexicons of sign languages encode iconicity at different levels" (2012: 1443). They name, for example, the "sensorimotor properties of objects and actions, spatial locations and spatial relationships, temporal dynamics of events," as well as "more abstract aspects of experience, such as signs for cognitive experiences, which are frequently located at the head" (Thompson et al. 2012). Similarly, other authors have begun to study the different ways in which iconicity is encoded in the lexicon, i.e. researching how mental mappings between phonetic form and some mental image associated with the referent are created. Taub suggests two associations in iconic signs: 1. the perceived similarity between the phonetic form and the mental image, and 2. the association between the mental image and the denoted concept (2012: 396−400). For each of these associations, she offers several sub-categories, which I will engage with in my analysis.

The materials presented below also speak to the broader literature on the relationship between so-called "gestures" and "lexical signs" (Kendon 2004, 2013; Taub 2012: 393−396;

Wilcox 2004), in particular within the context of recently emerging sign languages with fewer signers (de Vos and Nyst 2018). It seems that place names in recently emerging sign languages, such as TSL, with just one generation of signers, offer particularly rich case-studies to explore iconicity and its role in lexical derivation.

7.4. Background: Tibet and Tibetan Sign Language

Lhasa is the nominal capital of the TAR, located in the South West of the PRC (see map in Figure 7-3). After the Tibetan regions were occupied by People's Liberation Army troops of the Chinese Communist Party in 1950/1951, they were divided into five provinces of the PRC. The Central and western regions were re-named in 1965 and have since then been administered as the "Tibet Autonomous Region," or TAR, the autonomy being largely in name.

While most Tibetans within the TAR use Tibetan as their day-to-day language, there has been a steady decline in the use of Tibetan language as a medium of instruction in schools and in work units and administration in Lhasa (despite Tibetan being an official language alongside Putungua, cf. Tournadre 2002; 2003). The rural areas of the TAR and across Tibetan areas of China are also now following this pattern, not least as primary school-aged children have little choice but to attend further-away boarding schools (Leibold and Chen 2014). This falls within and follows the long-standing emphasis on Han Chinese languages and cultures within the Chinese state "civilizing project" of ethnic minorities (Harrell 1995). Such broader nation building efforts towards controlling ethnic minorities also extend to the language and education policies of their deaf and blind members (Hofer and Sagli 2017).

Lhasa is the largest city of the TAR, with an official count of 600,000 residents, although the true number is likely to be much higher. Based on available statistical information
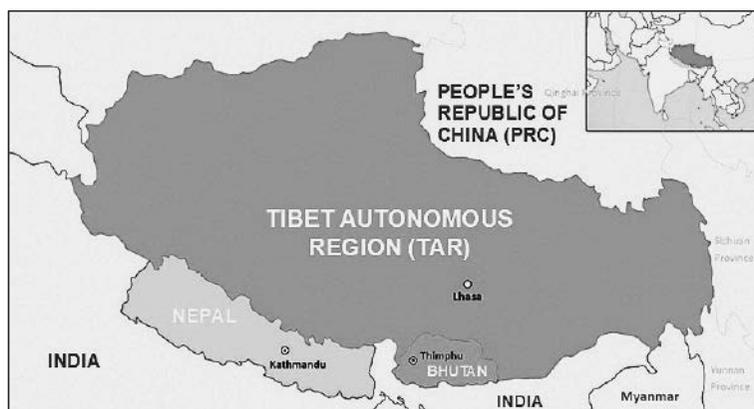

Figure 7-3   Map of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), with the capital Lhasa, also the field site for this research paper. The TAR is located in the south western part of the People's Republic of China, here shown with neighboring countries.

for 2016, approximately 50,000 people in the TAR are estimated to be deaf, with approximately 3000 inhabitants of Lhasa, being of Tibetan ethnicity and deaf. TSL —now registered as "lsn" (an abbreviation for Lhasa Sign Language) in *Ethnologue* 2019 (Eberhard et al. 2019)—is an emerging and, at the same time, endangered sign language (Hofer 2017). It is slightly unusual because it formed entirely outside of a deaf school context, yet without qualifying it as a "shared sign language," a "village sign language" or a "rural sign language" (Zeshan and de Vos 2012; de Vos and Nyst 2018). The language is not known by the majority of deaf Tibetans, who instead communicate in multiple other ways, including lip-reading and gesture, as well as a phenomenon locally referred to as *rangchung lagda*, that I translate as "spontaneous sign" (Hofer 2018; 2020).

The medium of state-education at the local deaf boarding school (established in 2000) is spoken Chinese and a cross between a form of sign-supported Chinese and CSL. CSL is sometimes used in the classroom, and outside of formal teaching time it is the main sign language used between deaf students and between deaf teachers and deaf students, mainly in the form of LhCSL.[4] Contact between the graduates of this deaf school and those slightly older TSL-dominant Tibetans who have not gone to this school, has steadily increased since 2012. Then students graduated and began to meet and work with the slightly older deaf Tibetans in the city, who had not been to the school. A form of code-switching has been occurring, locally known as "Goat-sheep-mixed-sign" (Hofer 2020), reflecting broader changes and the decreased use of Tibetan language in education and public life.

7.5. Research Methods

The research findings presented here are part of a larger and ongoing anthropological project studying the dynamics of language, ethnic politics and Tibetan deaf socialities in Lhasa. The main methods employed are participant observation, video recordings and note-taking of "informal" signed interactions as well as video recordings of "formal" interactions, including linguistic autobiography interviews and the recording of content for a TSL app that I was involved in.

I have engaged with a key group of 25 deaf Tibetans, several of them active in the Tibet Deaf Association (TDA) and some in the TSL language documentation efforts over many years. As stated above, the main fieldwork so far took place in Lhasa in 2016 and 2017, but I have had contact and friendships with several research participants since 2007, and others since a two-week pilot study in 2014. Since 2016 and in addition I have been involved in the collaborative creation of TSL language materials, including the recording of short videos for an online TSL app. In this last capacity, I was given access to formal recordings as well as being able to observe and record discussions while the recordings were made. Some of these are also captured on video, some by taking notes and through photographs. My findings are also informed by insights gained from studying TSL, which began in 2007 and accelerated during the fieldwork in 2016 and 2017.[5]

Although I have many video recordings as well as photographs, I cannot draw on these images for publication for reasons of anonymity of my research participants and the political sensitivities of Lhasa and Tibet as a research site. In this article I therefore use images of

TSL place names found in the *Standard Tibetan Sign Language Dictionary* (TDA 2011). I follow the sequence of the place names in that work, as it reflects in and of itself a salient classification of place names not only for those involved in the dictionary making-process, but one that I found was still relevant to many deaf Tibetans I work with and who are involved in new iterations of TSL language materials and documentation. While not shared by everyone, the sequence and patterning of the place names within the broader context, highlights common perceptions and orderings by deaf Tibetans of their surroundings, the land and its places.

The *Standard Tibetan Sign Language Dictionary* (from now on abbreviated to *Standard TSL Dictionary*), is a topic-based record of the citation forms of approximately 1,400 TSL signs in total, each with tri-lingual glosses in Tibetan, Chinese and English. It was a co-production: members of the TDA (three of whom I have also engaged with during research, not least discussing the process of the dictionary creation), Chinese and international consultants working together over several years leading up to the final publication of the dictionary 2011, by the official, government licensed, Minorities Press in Lhasa. The *Standard TSL Dictionary* contains overall 50 Tibet-related toponyms with just under half of these naming religious sites in and around Lhasa. In addition there are 20 fully conventionalized TSL signs for foreign counties and other parts of the PRC, which will not be discussed here, as they show considerable international influences.

When discussing sign variations or signs of place names not included in the *Standard TSL Dictionary*, and/or those newly created where no established TSL sign exists I provide photos of myself signing these place names. However, the signed forms are those used by my research participants' and which I had recorded by either photo or video. The discussion of place names is further enhanced by including at least some etymological information and analysis of the etymological explanations I was given by TSL-dominant signers in Lhasa.[6]

7.6. Tibet: Land of the *Tsampa* Eaters

Although there are many traditional terms for Tibet, including "Snowland" (*gang chen jong*), *Bö* and *Bö yul* are by far the most common terms in many of the Tibetic languages– to refer to the place of Tibet,[7] regardless of the variations in meaning those terms have implied politically, geographically, linguistically and socially. Classical and Lhasa Tibetan dictionaries translate *bö* as "Tibet" and *bö yul* as "Tibet," "Tibetan region," or "Tibetan land." In TSL the place names and concepts closest in meaning and use to the terms *bö* and *bö yul*, are the signs BÖ and BÖ YUL (cf. Hofer 2019b). However, both of these signs are absent from the place name section in the *Standard TSL Dictionary*. Instead the 'politically-correct' signs for "Tibetan person" and "Tibetan ethnic group" (*bö pa*, *bö rig*), with which the sign for "Tibet" (*bö*) is identical, and the "Tibet Autonomous Region" (TAR, *bö jong*) are present.

Signed Forms
To produce BÖ PA, or "Tibetan" (i.e. the person and the adjective, Figure 7-4a and 7-4b)

one uses both hands: the signer's non-dominant hand forms a shape reminiscent of a bowl while the four fingers of the dominant hand carry out the action as if preparing a fist-sized ball made from *tsampa* and tea, known in Tibetan as *pak* (cf. Figure 7-5).

Figure 7-4a and 7-4b   The TSL sign BÖ PA for "Tibetan" (the person and the adjective), which is identical with the sign BÖ, or "Tibet." 4a: Cited from *Tibetan Sign Language Textbook* (TDPF and HI 2002) and 4b: Cited from *Standard TSL Dictionary* (TDA 2011: 339)

Figure 7-5   A Tibetan forming tsampa dough balls, or *pak*. Courtesy of High Peaks Pure Earth

The sign BÖ PA is most likely derived from the lexical sign PAK and its gestural counterpart, in which one adds to the movement of forming the dough ball of *pak* the sign ZÉ, or "to eat" (Figure 7-6).

Figure 7-6   The TSL sign PAK ZÉ, or "eating *pak*" in the *Standard TSL Dictionary* (TDA 2011: 37)

The sign BÖ ("Tibet") is identical with the sign BÖ PA, but it is not listed as a separate entry in the *Standard TSL Dictionary*. Instead, the *Standard TSL Dictionary* lists the sign for the "Tibet Autonomous Region," BÖ JONG (*bö jong,* "Tibet," TDA 2011: 342), which it glosses with *bö jong* in Tibetan, with *Xizang* in Chinese and Tibet in English.

BÖ JONG (*bö jong,* "Tibet," itself short for *bö rang kyong jong*), denotes the "Tibet Autonomous Region," a region which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) formally established in 1965, with the nominal administrative capital of Lhasa. BÖ JONG is signed by compounding BÖ ("Tibetan" and "Tibet") with JONG, which is a movement of the palm of the dominant hand, facing downwards, and making a part-elliptic movement to refer to "region/country" (Figure 7-7).
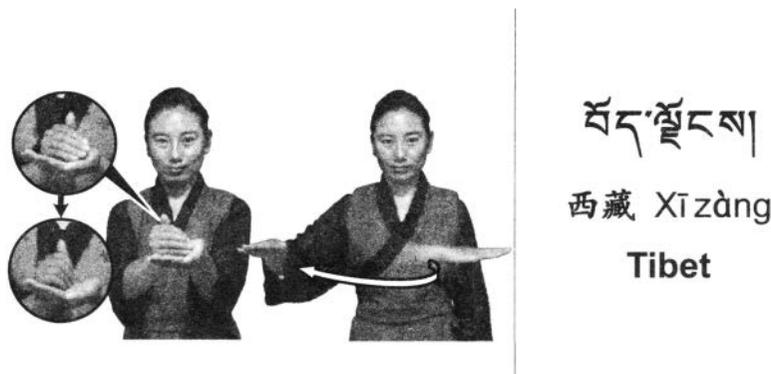

Figure 7-7   BÖ JONG in the *Standard TSL Dictionary* (TDA 2011: 341)

I have also seen the hand movement of the latter part of BÖ JONG ending in a "summarizing" gesture, in which case the sign may acquire the meaning of "all Tibetans" or "the Tibetan nation."

All official organization and work unit names in Lhasa and across the TAR (for example, the "TAR Disabled People's Federation" (*bö jong wang po gyön chen nyam drel tsok pa*), include the term *bö jong* for TAR. This is also the case when these names are signed in TSL, and BÖ JONG is used in this context. If abbreviated in TSL, BÖ may also be used alone when signing these organizations' names.

The crucial omission of the signs BÖ and BÖ YUL from the *Standard TSL Dictionary* can easily be explained by the currently unwelcome meaning of the broad term *bö,* and its equivalent sign BÖ, which need to be avoided in officially published and therefore censored publications. In this case, the *Standard TSL Dictionary* is published by the Tibet Minority Press, a subordinate entity of the state publishing house Xinhua. BÖ like *bö* (the written and spoken term), may refer to *all* places traditionally inhabited by Tibetans on the Tibetan plateau, which in the conception of many Tibetans, includes Utsang (Central and Western Tibet), Kham and Amdo (in Eastern Tibet), and even Tibetans living in what is now Nepal or India, i.e. all Tibetans in the entire region of "Tibet." The concept thus encompasses Tibetan lands and Tibetan people (cf. Barnett 1999; Shakya 1993). The fact that the term

"Tibetan" and "Tibet" were used by the 13th and 14th Dalai Lama's Lhasa-based governments adds to the PRC's reluctance to have this term in circulation, given that it is incompatible in historical and political terms with the PRC's definitions and political status of Tibet.

From the official state perspective, it is only legitimate to refer to Tibetans as an ethnic group (and the sign for that is duly found in the *Standard TSL Dictionary*, Figure 7-4a, 7-4b, glossed as "Tibetan" or "Tibetan ethnicity"), or by talking about "Tibet" in the correct geo-political and administrative terms, i.e. as one of the five provinces (or, using specific names, various smaller "autonomous" Tibetan prefectures or counties) where Tibetans live. Only one of the five state provinces with Tibetan populations can now be referred to as the "Tibet Autonomous Region" or TAR, in Chinese as *Xizang*. To render that term, BÖ JONG is found in the *Standard TSL Dictionary* as discussed above and depicted in Figure 7-7.

I already mentioned that the TSL sign BÖ is identical with the sign BÖ PA (see Figure 7-4a and 7-4b) and I will therefore not offer a separate image. That said, the sign BÖ YUL (*bö yul*, "Tibet," "Tibetan region" or "Tibetan land") is a compound sign in which to BÖ, an alternative sign for "land" or "region" is added, different from the one used in BÖ JONG (Figure 7-7). Here BÖ is followed by the sign YUL instead, in which both hands with flat palms move at first slightly downwards and then outwards. In Lhasa I have recorded this sign on video many times. The sign form is shown in Figure 7-8, and I gloss it as BÖ YUL.

Figure 7-8   The TSL sign BÖ YUL, meaning "Tibet," "Tibetan land" or "Tibetan region"

Signed Forms and Iconicity

Drawing on Thompson *et al.* (2012) and Taub's (2012) suggestions to think about iconicity in the plural and as mental *mappings* between phonetic forms (sound sequence, handshape or movement, temporal pattern) and mental images associated with referents, how then does the place name BÖ and BÖ PA ("Tibet" and "Tibetan") and their derivative signs BÖ JONG and BÖ YUL encode iconicity? BÖ references Tibetans' experience of the "sensorimotor properties of the object and actions" (Thompson et al. 2012) associated with *pak*, or *tsampa* dough balls. In addition or alternatively, it renders mental maps of people around them and the visual impression of them handling the food. In broader terms, following Taub, it seems that the forming of *pak*, and the associated sign forms of BÖ and BÖ PA, reference a "part of a whole" (2012: 399): an aspect of Tibetan food comes to stand for the people and the land of Tibet.

During the 1950s a pro-Tibetan newspaper in Kalimpong, India used the term "tsampa eaters" (Shakya 1993) to refer to all Tibetans, regardless of their differences when they were calling for a united resistance against Chinese Communists in the late 1940s and early

1950s. We can thus see that the metaphor of *tsampa*, both in this historical use and in contemporary TSL, plays a key role in ongoing efforts of self-definition and self-identification of Tibetans.

Etymology and Lexical Derivation

The sign forms of BÖ and PAK are also used as co-speech gestures of hearing Tibetans while speaking about "eating *pak*" (i.e. *tsampa* dough balls) and in *rangchung lagda* or "spontaneous sign," a common form of communication between hearing and deaf Tibetans (cf. Hofer 2018). Due to the cultural resonance of *pak* (and by extension *tsampa*), and since most Tibetans have embodied memory and knowledge of forming *pak* regularly, this gesture - following Kendon - can be considered a "quotable gesture" (2004).[8] The "quotable gesture" of forming *pak*, and the lexical sign PAK are used widely among deaf Tibetan signers in rural areas of Central Tibet, when they have *not* come into contact with the more formalized TSL. Many TSL signers refer to this form of sign language as RANG JUNG LAGDA (*rang jung lagda*, or "spontaneous sign"). In RANG JUNG LAGDA the meaning of the gesture equivalent to PAK is used for *pak* and *tsampa* where it can stand for both, the "food" *pak*, as well as for "Tibet" and "Tibetan," the place and the people.

The lexical sign derives from the widely-experienced handling of *pak* and *tsampa* among Tibetans in Lhasa in this particular way. The quotable gesture was noticed during the initial phases of development and formation of TSL during the early 2000s in Lhasa. Then deaf people began to interact more often using sign language, and began to engage in the "TSL project," a collaboration and cooperation to document existing signs and to formalize TSL. It involved group of deaf Tibetans (who eventually formed the TDA) and the international NGO, Handicap International (Hofer 2017) and started in the year 2000.

When I asked TSL signers and members of the *Standard TSL Dictionary* editorial team how the sign BÖ/ BÖ PA for "Tibet" and "Tibetan" related to the gesture of eating *pak*, they unanimously referred to the pivotal role of *tsampa* eating among Tibetans throughout their history. Some also went on to point out the unique way *tsampa* is prepared and eaten among Central Tibetans in the form of *pak*, yet asserted that the sign refers to a Tibetan from any of the Tibetan regions.

Variations

While the morpheme ʙö in the TSL signs of BÖ, BÖ PA, BÖ JONG and BÖ YUL seems to have been stable over time, there are minor variations.[9] All TSL textbooks and language resources that I consulted and that have been published since 2004 show ʙö in almost exactly the same form; this is also the case in how people I have engaged with have been signing it. The only common variation between different publications relates to the location of the sign in front of the signers' body – either at abdomen (2004) or at chest height (2011). Based on my fieldwork and research to date, I would suggest that this inconsistency has no semantic implications, but rather reflected the photographer's choice. In everyday use, in any case, the location of the sign is in the frontal signing space, in the lower position at about abdomen height.[10] The main variation of the sign ʙö that I did observe and document on video, is the direction in which the fingers of signers' dominant hand is moving, i.e. in

which direction the hand "replicates" the forming of *pak*. I have found both clockwise or anti-clockwise movements employed, just as in daily life when Tibetans form *pak*: some do it clockwise, others anti-clockwise.

7.7. LHA SA: Tibet's "Sacred Place"

TSL LHA SA is formed by compounding the morphemes вö (*bö*/*bö pa* "Tibet"/"Tibetan," Figure 7-4a, 7-4b and 7-5) and LHA (Figure 7-9).

Figure 7-9   TSL sign LHA SA in the *Standard TSL Dictionary* (TDA 2011: 341)

Signed Form

вö as the first part of the compound is followed by LHA, a movement of the palms of both hands touching, in the area in front of one's chest and/or the lower part of the face, in a "prayer gesture." The manual features of the sign tend to be accompanied by either a reverent bending forwards of the upper body and/or of the head, as well as an upward eye-gaze. Like the multiple aforementioned grammatical functions and uses of the morpheme вö, in the signs for "Tibet," "Tibetan" and "*pak*" in TSL, LHA also has a broad spectrum of meanings and uses. Similar to the written and spoken Tibetan equivalent *lha*, LHA can denote "deity, god and goddess, divinity, divine, sacred, holy, Buddha."[11]

LHA as a free morpheme plays a crucial role in naming Tibetan Buddhist deities in TSL, as well as the different religions (*chö*), for instance Christianity is signed JISHU LHA (*ye shu chö lug*). Notable in the context of place names is that LHA also comes to mean "monastery, temple, shrine," an abbreviation of LHA KHANG. In this case, LHA takes on the meaning of LHA KHANG (*lha khang*, "temple") or GONPA (*gon pa*, "monastery") and is used as the latter part of almost all TSL compounded signs for temples, monasteries, nunneries, and shrines (prominently represented in the place names section of the *Standard TSL Dictionary*).

Iconicity

Each of the two parts of the TSL sign LHA SA, i.e. the individual morphemes вö and LHA,

are iconic. As discussed, the morpheme BÖ on its own resembles the preparation of *pak*, the *tsampa* dough balls; LHA a prayer gesture, the signers at the same time taking on a demure, slightly forward-bent body posture as well as an upward eye-gaze. LHA thus references and resembles the "quotable gesture" of folded hands in front of the chest, for prayer and also is still commonly used to greet and pay respect to revered people and especially (Buddhist) teachers. This hand-gesture can also be described as the folded-palms gesture, but with thumbs tucked in between the folded, slightly cupped hands. This "prayer gesture" is also prominently produced when Tibetans prostrate (*chag tsel*) and pay respect to the *lha* (gods, Buddhas, deities) or revered Buddhist teachers. LHA then, like BÖ references both: the bodily experience of paying respect and praying in various places, as well as seeing others do so. Compared to the sign BÖ, LHA has a long and often visually-depicted history, deeply connected to Buddhist religious art and iconography.

Beyond the strong iconicity of each morpheme, the compounded sign LHA SA bears little resemblance to visual features the city of Lhasa. For instance, it does not pick up on the position of the city at the valley floor surrounded by mountains, or, say, the outline and high position of any important monuments, as the sign *LHA SA* does in LhCSL. Rather, in an embodied manner, the sign LHA SA expresses a body posture that is pervasively enacted by all Tibetans when on pilgrimage to Lhasa and by local Tibetan residents visiting the city's many temples and monasteries.

Etymology and Morphology

The etymology of LHA SA may be closely related to the historical role of Lhasa as a center for pilgrimage and Lhasa featuring so many LHA (Buddhist statues) and LHA KHANG (places that house such statues, i.e. temples and monasteries). While Lhasa acted and continued to be the administrative capital of variously constituted central Tibetan areas,[12] Lhasa has played an exceptional role in the religious lives of Tibetans for centuries and from all regions of Tibet. During the formation of the Tibetan empire and the foundation of Buddhism in Tibet, the first Buddhist temples were established here – among them the Jokhang and the Ramoche (Figure 7-14 and 7-15), each housing important Buddha statues (Warner 2008). For centuries pilgrims from all over the Tibetan plateau and neighboring Himalayan regions arrived in Lhasa to pay their respects to the extraordinary number of *lha*, or deities, in the form of statues, inside the *lha khang*, temples and monasteries constructed and re-constructed over time.

The Tibetan term *Lhasa* quite literally refers to this heritage, with dictionaries translating it as "sacred place," "holy earth," or "place of the *lha*" ("place of the gods").[13] We have seen that in TSL, LHA SA is a sequence of signing the morphemes BÖ and LHA. Like *Lha sa*, LHA SA is a two-syllable compound, but its syllabic order is reversed and *sa* ("place") is implied. If translated to English, we might say LHA SA - BÖ and LHA – means "Tibetan holy place." It is open to debate, whether in the signed toponym LHA SA, BÖ and LHA are adjectives defining the implied place SA (*sa*, "place"), or whether BÖ defines LHA.

One highly competent TSL signer who had been involved in the making of various TSL dictionaries and was a research participant, explained that other signs had been in circulation when the various signs and gestures were discussed for Lhasa in order to decide

on one entry for the *Standard TSL Dictionary*. Among the compound signs considered at the time, this person showed me one in which they pointed upwards first, followed by pointing downwards. In this TSL variant of Lhasa, one would literally point to the *lha*, the "gods," which in Tibetan cosmology are in the upper levels and the sky, and to *sa*, the "earth," on the ground. Another variant, he explained, had been to sign LHA and SA, the morpheme LHA followed by TSL fingerspelling of the Tibetan letter *-sa-* for "place."

These alternative signs were efforts by members of the TSL project to align aspects of the TSL lexicon with the prosody or even the meaning of written Tibetan and spoken Lhasa Tibetan. However, these signs were not at all in use during my research in natural conversations and are not recorded in any of the dictionaries or language materials that the TSL project produced, evidence in other words that they did not "catch on." They appear never to have been widely in use, and are certainly not in use today. The only time I saw these TSL variants for Lhasa was in a conversation specifically discussing the etymology of the TSL sign LHA SA.

Influences from Tibetan

Beyond the iconicity of each syllabic compound in the sign LHA SA, the sign also shows influences from the meaning and form of the written and spoken term *Lha sa*. LHA SA is a two-syllable sign and the meaning of *lha* in *Lha sa* and the LHA of LHA SA are at least partly congruent. However, it is not a true congruence of meaning, as the discussion about the alternative signs for Lhasa with one research participant highlighted. The alternative signs of pointing upwards (where the *lha* are thought to reside) and then downwards, to the earth (*sa*), as a way to sign LHA and SA, or signing first LHA (holy, sacred, gods) and then SA ("ground," "earth" and "place"), would have been calques, or loan translation from spoken Lhasa and written classical Tibetan.

I was not able to gain further explanation about why these calqued variants were so swiftly rejected and/or fell out of use. It could be that they were newly created, potentially a sort of thought experiment at the time by literate Tibetans, and were simply not accepted by the larger group. Or perhaps because of the ambiguity that these more directly calqued signs introduced: they could simply mean up and down, or upper realms and lower realms of the gods etc. It seems to me that the Tibetan who showed me the more abstract calqued variants for Lhasa, and said that the regular sign LHA SA was preferred, did not like the calqued signs for their lack of iconic motivation. A desire for iconic motivation in TSL place names is particularly evident in the toponyms for the other six prefectures of the TAR and their administrative capitals, which I will now address.

7.8. TSL Toponyms for Prefectures and Towns in Central Tibet

In 2011, the year of publication of the *Standard TSL Dictionary*, the TAR was administered via seven prefectures: Lhasa, Shigatse, Chamdo, Nyingtri (also spelled as Nyingchi), Nagchu, Ngari, and Lhoka (by Tibetans often referred to as Shannan, the Chinese name).[14] Five of these were named and signed in reference to an aspect of either historical or contemporary regional dress (Shigatse, Chamdo, Nyingtri, Ngari, and Lhoka). In the case of the sixth –

Nagchu – the reference instead relates to an aspect of how humans respond to the cold and windy climate in this prefecture at great altitude (Figure 7-10, 7-11, and 7-12). The sign for Lhasa, has already been discussed above.

Figure 7-10   SHIGATSE in the *Standard TSL Dictionary* (TDA 2011: 341)

Figure 7-11   TAR Prefectures in TSL in the *Standard TSL Dictionary* (TDA 2011: 342-343)

Signed Forms and Iconicity

The TSL sign SHIGATSE is a bi-syllabic sign, in which the index fingers of both hands draw the outline of a traditional headdress, moving from up to down and in a sign space

above the signer's head. This references the impressive head attire that was worn traditionally by women of higher classes in the Shigatse area. The tri-syllabic Tibetan place name *Shi ga tse* does not correspond with the syllabic nature of the sign SHIGATSE. While it is often difficult to define clear segments of signs, it is particularly hard to do so for this sign, whether the movement outlining the headdress is one or two distinct movements. Nevertheless, we can safely say that the prosody of *Shi ga tse* does not map onto the segments of the sign SHIGATSE. The type of iconicity here is one that is outside of signers' own sensorimotor memory, but mainly derived from the visual perception of historic, often black and white, photographs or film productions showing women from the region, wearing these impressive headdresses.

TSL sign CHAM DO, like the Tibetan toponym *Cham do*, is a compound of two syllables. The first part of the sign form is a close circular movement around the signer's head, which resembles (the usually black or red-colored) threads that men from this region plait into their long hair and which hangs down on either side of their face. The second part of the sign is the movement of the same hand diagonally across the chest, depicting the thick, sometimes richly-decorated sashes of their *chuba*, or Tibetan traditional dress. This references contemporary dress of men from the Chamdo area, as often seen on Lhasa streets either of people from Chamdo who settled there or when they visit the capital. It thus references the visual impressions of signers of contemporary male dress. While in Shigatse, a woman's historical head dress stood as "a part of the whole" (cf. Taub 2012: 399), here a Chamdo man's dress stands "as part of the whole" for the region of Chamdo.

In the TSL sign NYINGTRI (also referred to as "Nyingchi," and until the late 1990s mainly known in Tibetan as Kongpo), is mono-syllabic. The signer crosses both index fingers on the side of their head, by the ears, and simultaneously turns that side of their head towards their interlocutor. This sign form references a hat traditionally worn by some women in a part of this region, which has two tufts that cross over by the ear.

TSL NGA RI, like Tibetan *Nga ri*, is a bi-syllabic compound sign. The first part is a handshape in which four fingers loosely cover the forehead from above and move in a wriggling motion, followed by the second part in which the same hand rests in front of the throat – four fingers together and thumb apart, forming a collar of sorts. The sign resembles the kind of jewelry that had traditionally been worn in the Burang area of *Nga ri*.

In TSL NAG CHU (Tibetan *Nagchu*) is produced by the signer cupping their dominant hand slightly to cover their mouth with it, while moving the head left and right (see Figure 7-11, bottom left). Variants exist in which this latter movement to left and right is not made. This sign, so I was told several times by TSL signers involved in the making of the dictionary, references the comportment of people in this high-altitude place, where due to pervasive winds and cold, they are seen to cover their mouth. That said, the meaning or possible iconic reference of the movement of the head and hand could not be clarified in these conversations. This sign is noteworthy in its references of an aspect of human behavior in relation to the environment.

Last, TSL LHO KA, like the written form of *Lho kha*, are both bi-syllabic compounds. In the TSL sign, the index and middle finger of the dominant hand first move horizontally across the top of the chest, and then down- and outwards in a slightly diagonal motion, in

reference to the local dress of men, a thick woolen jacket with typically positioned metal or cloth buttons, which here serve as stopping points in the sign. The sign has two distinct movements: the first from the collar of the jacket along the rim of its front flap, to its upper button; and the second movement, from that button down along the rim of the flap to the lower button. This movement replicates the bi-syllabic nature of the written and spoken place name *Lho ka*. When the sign is accompanied by speech or mouthing, the syllables of the spoken word (both Tibetan *Lho kha* and Chinese *Shan nan*) are timed to coincide with the two elements of the sign.
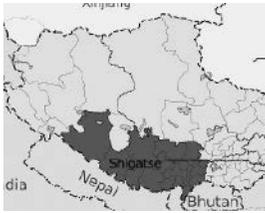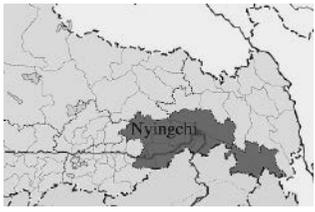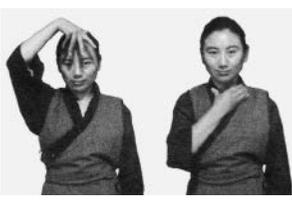

Figure 7-12   Resemblances between TSL signs for TAR prefectures with clothes and outfits of the regions. Maps to the right show the locations of the prefectures within the TAR. (Maps were created by Keith on earth for google maps and downloaded in March 2019)

In contrast to TSL place names for Tibet and Lhasa, which reference both embodied memory and practice as well as visual perception of other's actions (see above), the TSL signs for remaining prefectures of the TAR, reference just the latter category of visual perception and visual, rather than embodied, mappings. TSL signers in the main have never themselves worn any of the dress (including head wear) that the TSL signs visually depict, but they have seen them either worn by contemporary Tibetans in or from these regions, or based on visual impression from viewing old photographs (mainly in the case of Shigatse). Nonetheless, the principle identified by Taub, of "a part standing for the whole" is common here, where a particular dress or headdress worn by either men or women, comes to stand for a people in general, and those people again, come to stand for a particular region (2012: 399). There would have been other ways to iconically depict something that stands out in these prefectures. *Ngari*, for instance, is the location of Mount Kailash, a highly significant Buddhist pilgrimage spot. The particular mental mappings discussed above for the regions of Central Tibet are mainly of the inhabitants and their particular attire (head or otherwise), or about their responses to their environment, rather than mapping aspects of the environment as such. This is in contrast to many ISL place names reported by Revilla (2009), where features of the environment are referenced. Thus the TSL examples above make clear that the academic study and understanding of iconicity needs to consider cultural perceptions and processes. And as such, iconicity becomes far less obvious, "universal," and transparent.

Etymology and Relationship of TSL Place Names to Tibetan
None of the TSL signs discussed in this section show semantic influences from the literal meaning of the respective written or spoken Tibetan place names. For example, *Nag chu* meaning "black water," could easily be signed as a calque in TSL by signing CHU (*chu*, "water") and NAG PO (*nag po*, "black"), but it is not. However, the prosody of some of the place names in TSL, such as CHAM DO, NGA RI, LHO KHA and NAG CHU are bi-syllabic and as such maybe influenced by the equally bi-syllabic nature of the written and spoken place names. The influences from Tibetan place names are therefore minor, and instead the key motivations for TSL place names of the TAR prefectures are iconic: either visually iconic, such as in a mental mapping of visual perceptions of outfits or headgear of men or women living in these places, or of the environment and people nexus.

Five out of seven TSL signs for prefectures, reference clothing and one references human responses to the environment. The pattern of referencing every day or festive clothing, not least headdress, is also found in toponyms for the administrative units below prefectures, such as counties. For example, TSL for Penpo, PEN PO imitates a specific headscarf in reference to the typical (white) head scarf traditionally worn in this agricultural region north of Lhasa (TDA 2011: 344), while the TSL signs for Chushur and Dagtse Counties (TDA 2011: 345) located east of Lhasa by the Kyichu River,[15] reference the river and a bridge over the river as landmark features.

7.9. Places in Lhasa

The *Standard TSL Dictionary* features fifteen place names from within Lhasa, of which nine are for temples and monasteries. The section begins with the sign for the Chinese administrative term for "Lhasa City" (*Chen guan chu* lit. "urban gateway"), followed by the signs for three key monuments in Lhasa: the *Jokhang*, the *Potala* Palace and the *Ramoche* Temple. These three religious sites, and all other subsequent signs for temples and Buddhist monasteries as well as for the Lhasa mosque (six in total), use the morpheme LHA ("holy," "sacred," "temple," etc.) in the meaning of LHA KHANG or GONPA, preceded by a sign that relates to something about the respective place of worship itself or what people do there. Only the *Ramoche* is an exception, as LHA is preceded by the Tibetan letter -ra- in TSL fingerspelling, and as such is a letter-initial place name. The dictionary's section on Lhasa place names also features signs for two important circumambulation routes in Lhasa as well as for two parks. There are no other secular place names listed.

The *Jokhang* is for Lhasa, if not Tibet, the holiest temple. Originally built during the reign the thirty-third king of Tibet, Songtsen Gampo (*c.* 609‒50), it is associated with the era when Buddhism became first established in Tibet. The inner sanctum houses the much loved Jowo Buddha statue, also referred to by Tibetans as the "Precious Lord" (*jo bo rin po che*, see Warner 2008). Lhasa Tibetans also call the temple *Tsuglakhang* (or "The Academy"). Together with *Horyuji* in Japan, the *Jokhang* building is the oldest timber construction in the world.

The sign JO KHANG in the *Standard TSL Dictionary* has two parts, like its written equivalent (Figure 7-13).

Figure 7-13   TSL for the Jokhang temple in Lhasa in the *Standard TSL Dictionary* (TDA 2011: 346)

The first part of the sign consists of the non-dominant hand with palm facing to the side (in what is effectively the one-handed version of the "prayer gesture" and of the TSL morpheme LHA remaining stable at the center), while the dominant hand with its index finger stretched out and pointing downwards, moves around it in a clockwise motion. This sign is equivalent with the sign form of the TSL sign KORA, for Tibetan *kora* ("circle,"

"circum-ambulation"), which references Tibetans walking around a holy site in clockwise direction as well as that physical circuit on which they circum-ambulate. Note that here the motion is around the non-dominant hand, which effectively references the "temple." The second part of the sign is the free morpheme LHA (same as in LHA SA), but here it takes on the meaning of LHA KHANG (*la khang*, "temple"). JO KHANG hence consists of the two morphemes KORA and LHA. In practice and in more recent video-based language documentation, I have witnessed the sign JO KHANG also being signed starting instead with LHA ("temple"), followed by KORA ("circum-ambulation"). Either way, these place names clearly reference the *Bharkhor*, a route around the *Jokhang* in central Lhasa, which Tibetans circumambulate often daily, or at least on special occasions and as part of religious worship.

The morpheme KORA is a circulating movement of the dominant hand in a clockwise direction, without the one-handed version of the "prayer gesture" or morpheme LHA. It features in the TSL signs for Barkor (*Bar kor*) and Lingkor (*Ling kor*), the main two circum-ambulatory routes in Lhasa, discussed below.

The second most important temple in Lhasa, is the *Ramoche* (*Ra mo che*). Its foundation also took place in the imperial period of Tibetan history and the first spread of Buddhism. In TSL, the sign RA MOCHE stands out as one of only two place names in the dictionary (the other being *A mdo*, the Eastern Tibetan region) to incorporate the handshape of a Tibetan letter, in this case -*ra*-. To sign RA MOCHE, one first signs RA in Tibetan manual alphabet, followed by morpheme LHA (Figure 7-14).

ར་མོ་ཆེ་
གཙུག་ལག་ཁང་།
小昭寺
Xiǎozhāosì
Ramoche Temple

Figure 7-14   The sign RA MOCHE in the *Standard TSL Dictionary* (TDA 2011: 347)

Using initial letters of places is common in the formation of lexical signs in many sign languages (see Figure 7-1), as is fingerspelling places when one does not know an established lexical place name (cf. Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999: 216−240). When not knowing a place in TSL, it is generally rare for deaf Tibetan signers to resort to Tibetan fingerspelling due to low literacy rates among Tibetan users of TSL. Hence, TSL RA MOCHE is but one of two letter-initialized place names, forming an exception to the iconicity paradigm that underlies most, if not all, TSL place names.

The Potala is a 17ᵗʰ century palace on top of Potala Hill in Lhasa, which until 1959 served as the Dalai Lama's winter residence as well as the location of the Tibetan government. It also houses many Buddhist shrines and temples. The TSL sign PO TALA (Figure 7-15) first features the morpheme ʟʜᴀ for LHA KHANG ("temple"), followed by the dominant hand moving outwards from the prayer gesture, with the palm of the hand facing up and resting at the end of the movement in an honorific index (that is palm upwards and all fingers together, hand slightly cupped).

ཕོ་ཏ་ལ།

布达拉宫

Bùdálāgōng

Potala Palace

Figure 7-15   The sign PO TALA in the *Standard TSL Dictionary* (TDA 2011: 347)

During the transition between the two segments, and during the latter part of the sign, the signer's head position changes and features an upward eye gaze, towards a final resting position in which the eyes gaze is directed to the outward-pointing honorific index. This second part of the sign features a unique spatial iconicity among the TSL place names, as it indicates nothing about the building itself or what people do there, but instead references the high, physical position of the Potala Palace on top of a hill. By virtue of containing ʟʜᴀ and featuring reverent body postures and eye-gaze, PO TALA clearly denotes this building as a religious site, which is not the case in the LhCSL sign *POTALA*.

LhCSL *POTALA* is signed by outlining the skyline of the maze of roofs of the buildings of the Potala Palace, while doing so in a higher location in the signing space in front of the signer (Figure 7-16). This LhCSL sign features visual iconicity in the sense of a unique feature of the buildings, as well as the aforementioned spatial iconicity, placing the linguistic sign in a higher signing place, just as the referent is located in a high position.

Figure 7-16   LhCSL sign *POTALA*, outlining the skyline of the building and at elevation

The LhCSL sign form *POTALA* makes no reference to the religious nature of the building and the reverence that most Tibetans tend to show towards the building and its former inhabitants, including the current, 14th Dalai Lama. An exception to this is perhaps that LhCSL *POTALA* is also signed in a higher location, and thus follows the pattern of things revered in Tibet tending to be symbolically or physically elevated and/or put in higher places.

While TSL POTALA seems to emphasize the religious significance of the building with its use of the morpheme LHA as well as its non-manual features, LhCSL *POTALA* does not do this. This is somewhat counter-intuitive, as the LhCSL place name *POTALA* also first formed among Tibetans, who share many cultural references with those whose first sign language is TSL. Yet this does not seem to be the case. This further underlines how important it is to understand mental mappings and processes with a good degree of specificity and contextual knowledge about a given place and its people, and not to make broad assumptions about "culture"-specific mappings and processes of iconicity. Group "specific" mappings may be related to several factors: that LhCSL signers are under thirty years old; that the significance of Buddhist religion and observance (and hence its use as a reference) has decreased among this younger population. It is also possible that the sign was initially coined by Chinese deaf users (like the CSL sign for Tibet), for instance in the Lhasa Deaf School, and that the LhCSL sign may represent an outsider view of the building, highlighting its outer appearance, rather than the lived and embodied experience of the place shared by many Tibetans.

Likely due to the immense visual presence of the *Potala* Palace and its symbolic value in Tibetans' perceptions, neither the TSL nor the LhCSL sign is influenced by the meaning or the prosody of the written or spoken Tibetan word Potala (*Po ta la*), or written and spoken Chinese (*Bu da la gong*, Ch.).

There are other temples and monasteries listed in the *Standard TSL Dictionary* among the place names of Lhasa, and these three (as well as others outside Lhasa, not discussed here but analyzed) support the iconicity paradigm for place names of temples and monasteries in TSL. Their common denominator is that they feature in the first part of a compound something about either the type of Buddha worshipped there (e.g. Drapshi Monastery), a physical feature of the building (e.g. Drepung) or an activity that is particularly pronounced, as we have seen with the Jokhang. Adding to the latter, Sera Monastery, which in TSL is signed by pointing to one's nose in reference to the common practice of children having black soot put on their noses at this temple. This is thought to ward off negative influences and spirit interferences, especially in children.

Four further place names in Lhasa are worth mentioning: two circuits and two parks. The Barkor in Lhasa, or "middle circuit," is located around the outer wall of the *Jokhang* Temple, while the Lingkhor, or "outer circuit," encircles much of "old Lhasa" including the *Potala* Palace. Many Tibetans walk one or both of these circumambulatory routes every morning and/or on special festivities and occasions.

The TSL place name BAR KOR effectively follows the pattern of spoken Lhasa Tibetan, where the *Barkor* is often called *Bar kor lam,* or "Barkhor street." BAR KOR LAM starts with the morpheme KORA, followed by LAM (*lam*, "street," Figure 7-17). In LING KHOR

the rotating index fingers points up and outwards the hand movement drawing a slightly larger circle, and is then followed by morpheme LHA (Figure 7-18).

Figure 7-17   The sign BAR KOR in the *Standard TSL Dictionary* (TDA 2011: 349)

Figure 7-18   The sign LING KOR in the *Standard TSL Dictionary* (TDA 2011: 350)

As Tibetans circumambulate around many of their religious sites, it could be argued that the sign JO KHANG – "doing kora around a holy site" – is ambiguous and broad in that it could mean any holy site. However, the context of this being the principal circum-ambulation route in Lhasa, and the direct reference to Lhasa, makes the meaning of the TSL sign clear. It may also be aided by the use of the non-dominant hand in "half" the "prayer gesture" and TSL morpheme LHA – which as we have seen is absent when KORA is signed in BAR KOR LAM. Interestingly, even though Tibetans walk or prostrate around mountains on pilgrimage, none of the recorded, standard TSL signs for various sacred mountains show this circulatory hand movement. The morpheme KORA is also used as a verb and means *kora gyab* (or "doing circuits"). The two parks listed in the dictionary both follow the pattern of being compound signs: the first syllable referencing something about the respective place, followed by the sign "green/park."

When observing the actual use of these established TSL place names among TSL signers in Lhasa, they tended to add final deictic specifiers in the sense of "HERE," "THERE" or "WAY OVER THERE." These should be considered "true" directional and absolute points (Levinson 2003), indexing actual locations in Lhasa as well as maybe relative distance. If they referred to places further away, signers would use a vertical plane of signing space as an imaginary map of the country and point to the relevant areas area – a common feature in other sign languages (cf. Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999).

Before we conclude the description of TSL place names, let us turn briefly to the creation of new place names.

7.10. Creating New Place Names Where There Is No Established TSL Sign

As fingerspelling is not a viable option for most Tibetan signers to indicate a place that they do not yet know or have no signs for in TSL, what do TSL signers do? How do they create new place names or refer to places?

Not unlike what Nonaka found among Bhan Khor Sign Language users, it is becoming increasingly rare for TSL signers to create and sign a new TSL-based place name where there does not yet exist a conventionalized and established sign. Instead, they use several different strategies. Among the more common ones are the following: to give a lengthy description of the area and place one is talking about and checking back for understanding. To write down and/or voice the Chinese (sometimes Tibetan) written or spoken place name, using, for example, paper or a mobile phone using a Chinese keyboard and search functions. To take, download, show or send a photograph or website of the place referred to, such as a photo of the front of a building, a familiar street scene nearby. To borrow or code-switch to a sign from LhCSL, where place names tend to be mostly orthographically derived, and occurs when a TSL-dominant signer is in contact with a LhCSL-dominant signer. To draw on an aspect of the place or finally, to send online map-links or map screen shots. All of these strategies take more time than signing an established sign, and are often resorted to in communication with hearing interlocutors as well (except the strategy of signing a lengthy description). The least common strategies to communicate a new place name, is through creation of a new place name using TSL and/or to write down a place name in Tibetan.

Nevertheless, on several occasions I did witness and document the process of TSL-dominant signers having to come up with "new" TSL place names and these are interesting examples of how TSL is still evolving. Furthermore, it is an exciting opportunity to examine the role of iconicity in the lexical derivation of newly created TSL place names. The examples offered below were recorded in early 2016, as part of the video recording of several hundred TSL signs for a new TSL smart phone app. The group headed by the TDA leadership was very keen to expand the existing but limited place name repertoire documented and listed in the print TSL dictionaries thus far. After becoming involved with this initiative, I could witness the considerations of TSL signers in finding and/or making up new TSL toponyms for the app. I will discuss and analyze here the options and approaches that were discussed and employed in the creation of two new TSL toponyms, namely those for Chagpori Hill and Meru Gonpa in Lhasa.

Chagpori Hill is a prominent place in Lhasa, located opposite the Potala Palace. Among educated Tibetans and especially Tibetan medical doctors, it is best known for the Chagpori Tibetan Medical College, which used to be located at the hill's summit, between the college's establishment under the 5th Dalai Lama in 1696 and its destruction in March 1959 (Hofer and Larsen 2014). The literal meaning of Chagpori (*Chag po ri*) is "Iron Hill." Yet this history and the meaning of the spoken term was not known to most of my deaf interlocutors. Various different options were discussed among the app project members for signing this place: by far most common was the fairly long descriptive term PO TALA KHA TRÖ PAR GYAB SA, i.e. "the picture taking place opposite the Potala" (*Po ta la kha trö'i par gyap sa*), even if the exact nature of this description varied (Figure 7-19).

Figure 7-19   The TSL descriptive sign of PO TALA KHA TRÖ PAR GYAB SA, for Chagpori Hill in Lhasa

This descriptive place name starts with the TSL sign PO TALA, followed by the signs KHA TRÖ (*kha trö,* "opposite") and PAR GYAB (*par*, "photograph," *gyab* "take"), and then ending with SA, derived from fingerspelling the Tibetan letter –*sa,* which also means "place" in Tibetan. What deaf Tibetans inferred through this sign is what they can see when passing Chagpori Hill today. On the lower, northern part of the hill is a concrete platform offering a prime spot for viewing and photographing the Potala Palace. Many tourists can be seen taking photos from that platform. Even the TSL app team went to exactly this place to film the TSL sign PO TALA "in-situ."[16)]

This descriptive sign PO TALA KHA TRÖ PAR GYAB SA encodes deaf Lhasa Tibetans'

visual perception of their environment and renders this visual mapping in a linguistic sign. It depicts "Chagpori Hill" from "the outside" and not from a first-person viewpoint. This type of iconicity thus belongs to the afore-mentioned category of visual perception of objects or of others' actions, rather than the embodied experience of sensorimotor properties of objects and actions often depicted in the first-person viewpoint. It is interesting that this touristic viewing-platform, rather than other prominent features of the hill such as its large TV antenna or the historical existence of Chagpori Medical College, were what these TSL signers alighted upon.

Another strategy for signing Chagpori Hill, was suggested by one participant who also happened to be the only fully literate Tibetan in the group in conversation with me. She and I had together played around with various signs and thought that signing in some way CHAG (*chag*, "iron") and RI (*ri*, "hill, mountain") would make a good sign for Chagpori Hill – picking up on the literal meaning of *Chag po ri*. She also briefly considered combining TSL CHAG (*chag*, "iron") with CSL for *SHAN* (mountain, *shan*, Ch.), but abandoned this because she wanted as much as possible only "Tibetan" in the TSL app. While experimenting with these other options for the sign, we became conscious of a desire to create a tri-partite sign that replicated the tri-syllabic nature of the Tibetan term. This is a common occurrence as evidenced, for instance, in the BSL sign VEGETABLE, which has a three-part action replicating the syllables of the English word. One of our options thus included doubling RI (*ri*, "Mountain"), as in CHAG RI RI, to accommodate this urge. However, even without the additional syllable, we considered this calqued sign from Tibetan to be an effective and more practical version than the lengthy, descriptive sign offered by others.

After these various versions were shared and discussed in the group, it was decided to wait for one of the most experienced signers, who was a respected TSL teacher but illiterate in Tibetan. The group wanted this respected colleague to take the final decision as to which sign would be recorded and entered into the TSL app. On arriving at the meeting, this person was asked how they would sign Chagpori, and they spontaneously signed the lengthy description mentioned above, then also endorsing it. Thus the version PO TALA KHA TRÖ PAR GYAB SA became the lexical item that was ultimately filmed to be part of the TSL app. It is likely that this sign, should it be widely and often used, would eventually contract or perhaps be changed to a simpler sign, as has already happened with other TSL signs and is commonly reported in other sign languages as well.

Meru Gonpa (Meru Monastery) was another place for which there was no established TSL sign to easily fall back on, either among the TDA members involved in the app production, or in existing language materials. When filming for the TSL app at the monastery site, the sign model and team member came up with several different options. The first was morpheme LHA/LHA KHANG followed either by outward facing palms of both hands, moving outwards in steps, reminiscent of the many front windows and indicating the broad facade of this monastery. Or, doing the same action, but with the palms facing inwards. This option had come about after we have stood in front of the street-facing side of the building. The third possibility was LHA/LHA KHANG followed by the sign NGON MA (*ngön ma*, "before; earlier; in the past" or in the sense of "historic," and creating the meaning of "old or historic temple." This came up as we stood inside the inner-most building of the monastery's

courtyard (at that time under renovation with old and new building materials exposed and visible). A fourth option was LHA/LHA KHANG followed by LUK SÖL (*luk söl*, "tradition, custom"), and the fifth, LHA/LHA KHANG followed by NYING PA (*nying pa*), but in the sense of "outdated" or "falling apart." Of all of these, the sign LHA/LHA KHANG followed by outward facing palms of both hands showing the windows of this monastery facing the road, was declared the new "standard" and as such selected and recorded for use in the TSL app (Figure 7-20).

The TSL app had not materialized by the end of my last fieldwork trip to Lhasa in summer 2017. The signers involved in the discussions and who had helped settle on the above signs, still kept changing signs. Meru Gonpa, they referred to in conversation with me, both as the place in the new "standard" version (LHA followed by the palms of both hands facing outwards and showing the windows) as well as the version of GONPA NGONMA ("Historic Gonpa"), although the version had already been "fixed" for the app. This is of course not surprising and sign dictionaries or apps in many places would now try to include and accommodate several varieties for each entry, where they exist.

Figure 7-20   The "new" standard TSL sign MERU GON PA

Unlike the patterns of TSL place names for Lhasa and Tibetan locations, the so-far largely undocumented LhCSL toponyms (through briefly discussed in section 7.3 and Hofer 2019a), demonstrate strong links to spoken and written place names in *Putonghua*. Either this is in character form or in Pinyin. There are only three primarily iconic toponyms for Tibetan places (*Xizang* "Tibet Autonomous Region," Lhasa and the Potala). This system offers many more options for the easy creation of new signs than the TSL system, and, as will be discussed below, this will likely have a bearing on the use of TSL place names in Lhasa in the near future.

7.11. "China" and the People's Republic of China (PRC)

"China" in Tibetan is mostly referred to as *gya* or *gya nag* and "Chinese people" as *gya ri*. *Khrung guo* is the common term use for the "People's Republic of China," a Tibetan term phonetically derived from Chinese *Zhōng guó* (中国). The key morpheme that is used in all of the relevant TSL signs is GYA.

Signed Forms

GYA is a sign whereby the signer forms a shield in front of the forehead with their dominant hand, palm stretched out and facing down, the thumb slightly tucked under (Figure 7-21a). TSL GYA for *gya* and *gya nag* ("China" the noun, and "Chinese," the adjective) is thus made up of the mono-syllabic morpheme GYA. As with the morpheme BÖ for BÖ PA ("Tibetan"), i.e. the people, GYA is also used as an abbreviation for GYA MI (*gya mi*) or "Chinese," the people. A common variation in the sign form of GYA is that the thumb is prominently visible underneath the "shield," almost as if holding something between thumb and index finger (Figure 7-21b). The morpheme GYA in this variation is in its sign form similar to the ASL sign BOY.

Figure 7-21a and 7-21b   TSL standard form of GYA (left, TDA 2011: 339) and variant of GYA in use (right)

Etymology

Regarding the etymology and iconicity of GYA, I have been told by many TSL-dominant signers in Lhasa that this lexical sign has evolved from a more widely used gesture, which was reminiscent of the shields of the caps worn by "the Chinese" (GYA MI), when they first arrived in Tibet during and subsequent to the occupation of Central Tibet in 1951. They were initially mainly the soldiers of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and later followed by civilians wearing Mao caps. All TSL dictionaries and language materials that have been produced since 2002, show GYA with a stable sign form and no changes in the citation forms recorded. While Chinese civilians in urban Lhasa no longer wear Mao caps, caps with shields are still common in the army and among Public Security Bureau personnel there. In fact, during the period in which the current research was carried out (2014-2017), the military and police presence on the streets of Lhasa had increased and their personnel was a ubiquitous sight.

Iconicity

With regard to the iconicity of GYA, the mental maps created of the shields of certain caps, belong to the "part of a whole" type identified by Taub (2012). GYA connotes both a part of the caps worn by either by PLA soldiers and, more broadly, the (now historic) tendency of Chinese to wear Mao-caps. Thus the sign came to stand for the new type of head attire featuring a shield, which was not widely seen in Tibet prior to the 1950s. It became associated

with the "whole" of both a people and a country.

During the earlier discussion of the TSL place name for Tibet (see section 7.6.), we noted that BÖ/BÖ PA and BÖ JONG/BÖ YUL, all reference the staple food of Tibetans, *tsampa*, commonly eaten mixed up with tea or water, as *pak* or dough balls. Such ethnic autonyms can in some culturally, historically or socio-linguistically relevant manner be related to the names given, even in jest, to *other* ethnic groups and their places (like when the English call the French "frogs" or the Germans "krauts"). It is therefore interesting to note that the autonym given to Tibetans relates to a beloved food item deeply connected to Tibetan history and culture (cf. Shakya 1993), while the term given to China and Chinese is a more negative one, likely even related to military occupation and might.

Yet more abstract processes of mental mappings may also be in evidence. For example, suggested by the location of the sign GYA and the morpheme GYA on the head, i.e. the top of signers' bodies. In contrast BÖ and associated signs are all signed in the space in front of the signer, at about chest/abdomen height, and as such much lower down.

Anthropologists have noted cross-culturally how the body is used "to think with" about space, time and social hierarchies (Douglas 1970). In this context, a "verticality principle" specific to Tibetan societies and cosmologies has been identified, in which higher status deities and persons are thought to exist on the upper parts of a vertical axis, as compared to those lower down (e.g. Ramble 1995; Allen 1972). The location of GYA on the head, may be in line with such thinking, reflecting the common experience of Tibetans in the TAR that Chinese are "calling the shots," Tibetans lower down in the social and political hierarchy – be that in work units, in politics, as well as in all short- and long-term policy making for the region (Adams 1998; Yeh 2013).

China versus PRC

As in spoken and written Tibetan there are of course several terms for "China," not least to accommodate 'politically correct' speech. In spoken Lhasa Tibetan, one will commonly hear Tibetans loan the Chinese term "*nei di*" to talk about "inland China" and especially in writing one encounters *Khrung guo*, which is the Tibetan phonetic rendering of the Chinese term *Zhongguo*. *Khrung guo*, the official way to refer to the PRC and the historical "solution" of Chinese communists in an attempt to linguistically "unify" the nation. *Khrung guo* became used by early Tibetan translators of Communist terminology as a way to refer to a new type of "China." Instead of just *gya* or *gya nag*, which connoted a distinct and distant place and people to Tibetans. *Khrung guo* instead promised a term and a concept that implied Tibetans were an equal part of and located within the newly conceived entity of the PRC.

Like the written and spoken terms, TSL KHRUNG GUO is a compound (see Figure 7-22). Rendered by signing the morpheme GYA, followed by signing a flag, it is presumably a reference to the Chinese national flag, a key nationalist symbol of the PRC. The sign for flag is signed with both hands – the non-dominant one creating a "support" for the dominant arm, resting there on its elbow as a "flag pole" – with this arm's flat hand moving back and forth to imitate the movement of a flag.

Figure 7-22   The TSL KHRUNG GUO for "People's Republic of China"

While during the period of my fieldwork, display of the Chinese flag was not common within private people's houses in "inland China," in Tibet and in Lhasa the Chinese flag was ubiquitous. In fact, several times a year – for example October (National Day of the People's Republic of China) and for Tibetan New Year – old PRC flags are replaced by new flags, organized by the (powerful) local neighborhood committees. Private residents and shop owners are obliged to fly these flags in their shop windows and/or above their front doors and entrances.

The TSL sign KHRUNG GUO iconically references an aspect of Tibet's recent and current political history and occupation. There is therefore within TSL no truly 'politically correct' sign for "China" or the "PRC." By this I mean a sign that would truly show China *not* as a somehow distant and different entity from Tibet and Tibetans, instead of rendering Tibetans an integral part of it, as is in fact required by ruling political ideology. If signers wanted to use such a sign, they could, but they would need to resort to CSL/LhCSL, and use the sign *ZHŌNG GUÓ*. This is a compound sign, consisting of an iconic depiction of the character 中(*zhōng* Ch., meaning "middle"), the first character of *Zhōng guó* (中国), or "Peoples Republic of China." The sign is formed by the non-dominant hand with index and thumb creating a circle at the four outer strokes of the character, and the dominant hand, with its index finger, creating the long, vertical stroke in the middle of the character. This is followed by standard CSL GUÓ, which is not iconic of the shape of the character, but iconically making a circular movement of the dominant hand to denote a "nation." Tibetan signers have expressed various language ideologies (Kroskrity 2004) with regard to their preferences for the use of this term to me, including hesitation as the circular movement of the dominant hand also includes Tibetan areas and this inclusion remains contested (Hofer 2016). A further alternative and commonly used by CSL/LhCSL-users, are the standard (and international) signs for China, and an orthographically derived sign, *HAN ZU* (LhCSL) for *hàn zú* (Ch.), or "Chinese ethnic group."

To translate the names of official organization that contain the term "People's Republic of China" in Tibetan (for example the "China Disabled People's Federation"), TSL-dominant Tibetans tend to sign either just the second part (i.e. the "flag" part) of KHRUNG GUO (leaving out GYA) or the Chinese character based CSL sign ZHŌNG, followed by the TSL sign for the name of the organization.

7.12. Discussion and Conclusion

My research findings detailed above give a first in-depth description and analysis of TSL place names, their sign forms, and the role of iconicity in lexical derivation and etymology. They highlight the presence of minor semantic, morphological and prosodic influences from classical Tibetan and the spoken Lhasa variety of Tibetan, as well as virtually no influences from the CSL or LhCSL systems of place names. Rather the toponymic system of TSL is driven mainly by a high degree of iconicity, i.e. resemblances and similarities between the linguistic signs of TSL and their referents. Going beyond the simple and singular conception of iconicity as a 'form-meaning resemblance', this article has followed the lead of sign linguists and anthropologists in understanding iconicity as processes of mental mappings that are mediated by social, political and cultural contexts and ideas. There exists multiple ways in which the lexicon of TSL place names encodes iconicity.

Here I have focused on two major types of mental mappings or iconicities. One is where the sensorimotor properties of objects and actions have been experienced by signers first hand, and they have repeatedly embodied that experience. Based on that experience, they created a mental image that acts as a referent and is mapped onto and/or replicated in another image, which is the linguistic sign form. Its perspective is often that of the signer, a "1st person" view. A key example given here was the experience of most Tibetans handling *tsampa* dough balls (*pak*), which gave rise to both the "quotable gesture" and the lexical sign PAK, which is identical in sign form with the lexical sign BÖ, meaning "Tibet" and "Tibetan." *Tsampa* and BÖ are further connoted by positive meanings.

The second main type of mental mapping discussed is when signers have visually perceived the shape, location or qualities of objects or actions and have created a mental image or map of that perception. This then serves as referent for another mental map, which is again the linguistic sign and its sign form. Here the TSL place names for the prefectures of Central Tibet are a key example, as their sign forms resemble images of either headdress or clothes people wear (or have worn in the past) in that area, or a human response to the environment there, rather than a first-hand experience of wearing them or experiencing that environment. In both processes the pattern identified by Taub (2012: 399) of showing "a part of a whole," for something that is only a part of something to stand for something much bigger and the "whole."

Other forms of iconicity are also present in TSL place names. These include more abstract aspects of experience, such as signs for objects or experiences considered "high-status" (or that need to be highly valued or religiously worshipped), which are frequently located either in a higher signing space or along a vertical spectrum, with the highest status objects, people or deities, at the top and the lowest at the bottom. A notable example is found in part of the TSL sign POTALA. The signer here literally points to the high position of the building on a hill with Tibetan signers embodying a reverent body posture as well as eye gaze towards this highly-respected building. By the use of the morpheme LHA, the Potala in TSL is furthermore considered to be a LHA KHANG, the common term used for all Buddhist monasteries and temples. In contrast, as discussed, the LhCSL sign lacks this religious connotation, but it is also signed in a higher signing space, either due to the

physical high location of the Potala, or indeed for reasons of reverence. TSL GYA ("China") also might imply this vertical hierarchy, as a sign being at head height, but in this case would reference political and social hierarchies. A last tendency of iconicity in TSL toponyms has been discussed with certain longer and descriptive place names, and is especially prominent when there is a need to create signs for places for which no established TSL sign exists.

Taking together these different kinds of iconicity, iconicity is shown to be far from singular, universal or obvious to the outsider, and sometimes even to the insider. Rather is has become clearer how mental maps and images, and the *perception* of resemblances and similarities, are socially, linguistically, and politically mediated. They reflect Tibetan signers' changing logics of signification. It is noted that experience-near anthropological methods and work with naturally occurring conversations, are crucial in drawing out and illustrating such varied patterns within broader socio-political contexts.

The discussion presented has been comparative throughout, both with surrounding spoken and written place names and languages, as well as with sign languages in other parts of the world, a key reference point being the Lhasa variety of Chinese Sign Language. These wider and comparative considerations support the argument that TSL place names are determined to a high degree by iconicity. Also foregrounded was the socio-linguistic situation of deaf TSL signers, and how their relative lack of literacy in Tibetan has left its mark – for example in an almost complete absence of calques from Tibetan place names and only two signs that incorporate TSL fingerspelling of Tibetan letters into TSL place names.

Yet, it is perhaps by prosody of Tibetan that has had most influence on TSL place names, like on many other lexical domains in TSL. Many Tibetan toponyms are multi-syllabic, and there is a tendency in TSL place names to follow this pattern with regard to the numbers of segments. This type of iso-syllabicity, or iso-segmenticity, can partly be explained by the fact that Tibetan signers often will either voice or mouth the respective Tibetan place names alongside their signing. This, in turn, can partly be explained by a large majority of deaf signers in Tibet not being deaf for hereditary reasons and from birth, but rather having lost their hearing due to medical malpractice (inappropriate prescription and/or dosage of ototoxic antibiotics) during childhood, so usually after acquisition of at least some Tibetan speech and sometimes after attending regular school for some time.

When considering the future prospects of TSL place names, the broader political and language-related context needs to be considered together with the TSL place name system itself. Within the broad language ecology of Lhasa and the TAR, LhCSL is certainly gaining ground and is exerting increasing influence on all deaf signers in Lhasa. This is related on the one hand to the increasing influences of Chinese language in general in Lhasa (Tournadre 2003; Yeshe 2008) and on the other, the use of CSL and sign supported Chinese at the local deaf school from which LhCSL derives (Hofer and Sagli 2017; Hofer 2020). Among the graduates from the deaf school, the LhCSL toponymic system is exclusively used. This is based either in meaning or form on the written Chinese characters for Tibetan names (Hofer 2019a). Unification of CSL by official decrees, in particular the effect of the *State Plan on*

the Unification of Sign Language and Braille, has also meant that official support for TSL language documentation projects has almost completely been withdrawn (Hofer 2020).[17] The widespread use of written Chinese in all online maps and apps as well as social media, are additional influences on the increasing use of LhCSL place names in Lhasa among younger Tibetans. Yet, in TSL-only conversations among TSL-dominant signers, TSL place names were almost exclusively used and preferred up until the summer of 2017. Only when TSL and LhCSL-dominant signers interacted, were LhCSL place names regularly borrowed and code-switched to by TSL-dominant signers (Hofer 2019a; 2020).

Apart from the wider socio-political reasons, the increased code-switching to LhCSL place names, is I think related to two linguistic issues: The first is the overall small number of conventionalized TSL toponyms for places in Tibet. Within the total of just fifty, almost half of them name religious sites in and around Lhasa, leaving a dearth of secular place names. The second issue is that deaf Tibetan users of TSL and LhCSL alike lack literacy in Tibetan language to expand their place name repertoire relying on TSL fingerspelling. Both these issues combine to a situation where in practice it will be difficult to use only TSL when signing Tibetan place names.

The absence of a more abstract system of naming places, such as through a widely known Tibetan orthography-derived system, demonstrates how strongly the language is influenced by the social and political situation of deaf Tibetans in Lhasa. Only a handful of exceptional deaf Tibetans know the literal meaning of spoken or written place names, and/or their Tibetan spelling. But even the broader political situation, including the administrative context of Tibetan areas has been changing dramatically, with Tibetan names for places being phased out in much official cartography. Chinese language is used on all mapping devices available and currently is in use by Tibetans on their smartphones. In addition, many Tibetan place names in Lhasa have been changed to Chinese place names and these are now widely used among Tibetans and Chinese alike. Furthermore, sweeping administrative changes are taking place in the context of urbanization and the political control and administration of the TAR. These have entailed a major shift away from the use of Tibetan to wards the use of Chinese place names.

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Notes

1) Note that all deaf interlocutors during my fieldwork were Tibetans by ethnicity. Only one was Chinese and one of mixed Chinese and Tibetan heritage. Unless indicated otherwise, the reader should therefore assume that all deaf research participants referred to in this chapter, in relation to my research, were Tibetan. Furthermore, the term deaf is used as more inclusive instead of using "deaf," "Deaf" or "d/Deaf," previously used in Deaf Studies and related fields to denote physiological deafness, cultural identity or the often inherently mixed nature of audiological and socio-cultural conditions (Senghas and Monaghan 2002).

2) Meir and Sandler (2007: 186) add important deaf history to this choice of reference, as the Purim parade of the year 1936 seems to have been foundational for the Israel deaf community and the Purim festival itself of high importance to the survival of Jewish people.

3) In the introduction to *The Complete Collection*, the editors report a collaboration with the Lhasa-based Tibet Deaf Association (TDA) with the latter providing them with images of the relevant TSL Tibetan place names. Although the editors do not explain their reasons for endonyms over exonyms, it is likely a reflection of an international trend. It has been shown that deaf signers try to use endonyms for countries, cities and other sites, when they are used by outsiders (cf. Stamp et al. 2014).

4) CSL is far from standardized across even otherwise Sinitic language environments of the PRC (Yang 2015; Lin 2006; Lin et al. 2009). What I call here "Lhasa variety of CSL" will name the type of CSL that is used between deaf Tibetans at the Lhasa Deaf School and among the graduates of that school. Sign supported Chinese is a system of individual lexical signs being used in conjunction with speech, and hence their sequence follows Chinese syntax, rather than sign syntax.

5) I should add that I am not yet a fluent TSL signer and I am a late sign language learner, despite being born into a partly-deaf and partly-hearing family.

6) How did I render TSL place names and TSL conversations into written form? There is no agreed or widespread written form for sign languages in general, and this is the case for TSL as well. I will therefore follow one of the international conventions in sign linguistics of writing signed languages by capitalizing each lexical item. Whenever I refer to lexical TSL items that are found in dictionaries, in particular the *Standard TSL Dictionary* (2011), I will capitalize what would be the closest Tibetan translation of that sign. For example, TSL sign for *bö, bö jong, bö yul* ("Tibet," "Tibet Autonomous Region" and "Tibetan lands," all: *Xi zang*, Ch.) will be written as BÖ, BÖ JONG and BÖ YUL; by doing so, I do not imply a strict equivalence between the written and signed terms. To denote morphemes underlying a Tibetan sign term, I will use small caps, for example BÖ or LHA. In writing Tibetan and TSL concepts, I will use the THL phonetics converter of the Tibetan script. General Tibetan terms will also be written in phonetics, following the THL 2010 Online Tool for Phonetic Conversion, and are *italicised* (e.g. *tsampa, pak*). This is only done for TSL signs. For LhCSL signs I follow the same methods as for paraphrasing and translating my interlocutors who use TSL, as outlined above, just that capital letters for translations into Chinese will all be italicized and followed by (LhCSL) in brackets to clearly distinguish them from TSL. For Chinese, I use pinyin transliteration and indicate Chinese terms with the use of

"Ch." after them. Tibetan place names are also phonetical and italicized, with their syllables separated.

7) The Tibetic languages are a cluster of Tibeto-Burman languages descended from Old Tibetan, and spoken across a wide area of eastern Central Asia bordering the Indian subcontinent, including the Tibetan Plateau and the Himalayas in Baltistan, Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Tibetic languages according to Tournadre (2014) are spoken by some 6 million people.

8) While iconicity in sign languages is usually taken to refer to the shape or form of an object as it appears to an onlooker, there is also much iconicity derived from the restaging of a movement or handling an object, i.e. the embodied knowledge of a movement handling an object.

9) This article uses LOW CAPS for morphemes.

10) Note in some of the TSL dictionary items the sign BÖ is placed at chest height, but this is rarely the case in actual signed interactions.

11) THL Dictionary online, accessed April 29, 2019.

12) Lhasa is located on the banks of the Kyichu river, from where it is increasingly expanding outwards, covering the entire valley floor and reaching up towards the hill sides. While it had roughly 45,000 residents in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and three major monasteries with about 9,000 monks resident nearby, its population has soared in recent decades in particular, to at least 600,000 residents today. Size and number of actual inhabitants as well as ethnic mix are hard to estimate and are thought to be politically sensitive information. The speed at which Lhasa is expanding as well as becoming "administratively urbanized" is certainly astounding.

13) Earlier terms included *ra sa*, the history of which is discussed by Blondeau and Gyatso (2003).

14) Between July 2014 and May 2018, these prefectures and towns in the TAR (excepting Ngari) became "cities," starting with Chamdo and Shigatse in 2014, then Nyrintri and Shannan in 2016, and followed by Nagchu in 2018. This takes place within a framework that Friedmann (2005) calls China's "administrative urbanization," and is a strategy enthusiastically applied by the state to autonomous regions and the TAR in particular (Yeh 2013). For the TAR, the State authorities are using urbanization "not only as a shortcut to development and modernity, but also as a way to overcome ethnic autonomy" (Yeh 2013: 203).

15) Note again that as part of recent administrative renaming and special reordering, these two are no longer 'counties' in Lhasa prefecture, but "districts" within Lhasa City, or *Chenguan*.

16) The association with Chagpori Hill as a place to take photos of the Potala is not new. Many notable photographs of the Potala Palace taken during the first half of the 20th century by foreign visitors were taken from Chagpori Hill. While today they are taken from the tourist platform at the foot of the hill, these historical shots were usually taken from the top of the hill and the roof or terrace of the then still-standing Tibetan Medical College (cf. Hofer and Larsen 2014, see www.tibetalbum.org). However, the College no longer exists and the hill above today's tourist platform is entirely fenced off and is a military zone.

17) Prior to the announcement of the *State Plan* in 2016 in Lhasa and being aware of the small place name repertoire of TSL, the TDA had planned to increase the number of conventionalized place names listed not only in the TSL app but in other publications.

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