

Lexical Overlap in Young Sign Languages from Guatemala

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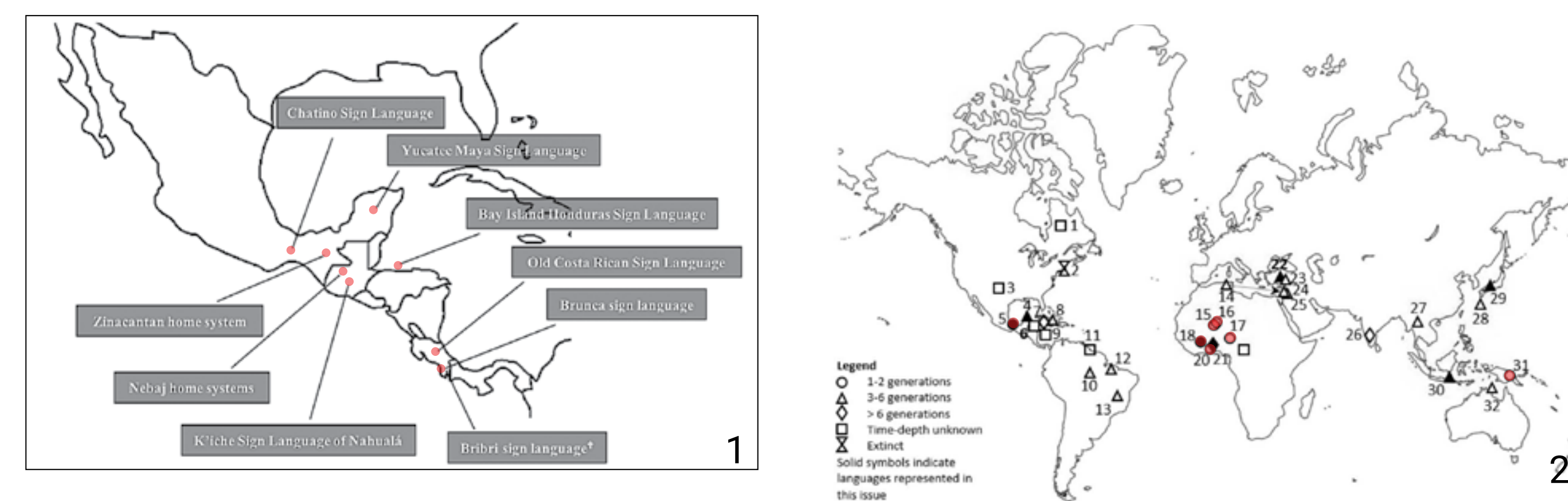
Where are young and emerging sign languages and why do they matter?

characteristics of young sign languages

- shorter time depth than established spoken/sign languages: 1-2 generations of users, <50 years in use
- used by subsets of linguistic community who know a deaf person

why do they matter?

- relationship between language age, language use, and dispersed social networks and properties of languages including the structure of the grammar and lexicon



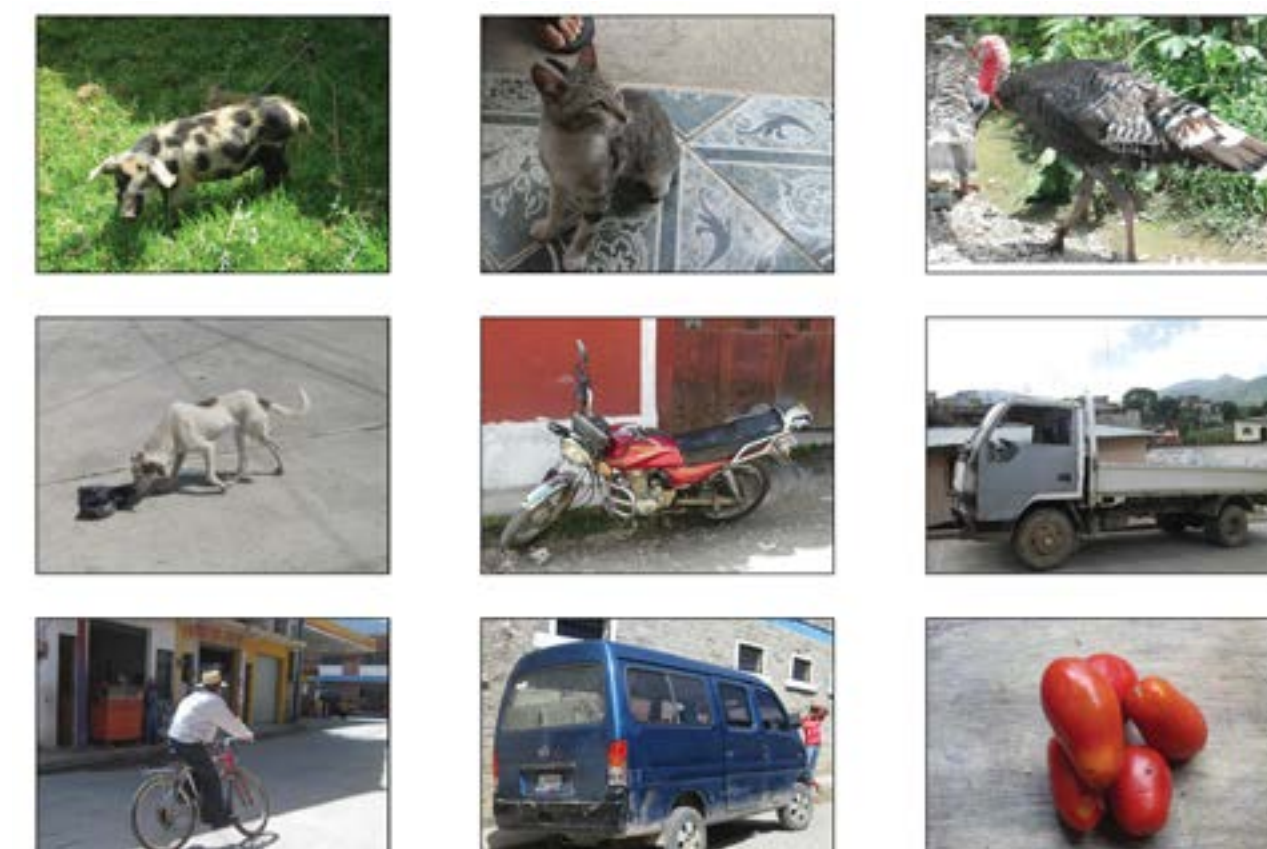
The current study

location



Field site: Nebaj, Guatemala
Population: 100,000+ (municipio)
Spoken Languages: Ixil, Spanish

stimuli



elicitation task with over 60 photos of familiar items from categories including: people; food; animals; vehicles

participants



deaf child signers (N=9)
(ages 7;4 - 13;7)
communication partners (N= each other, relatives, friends)

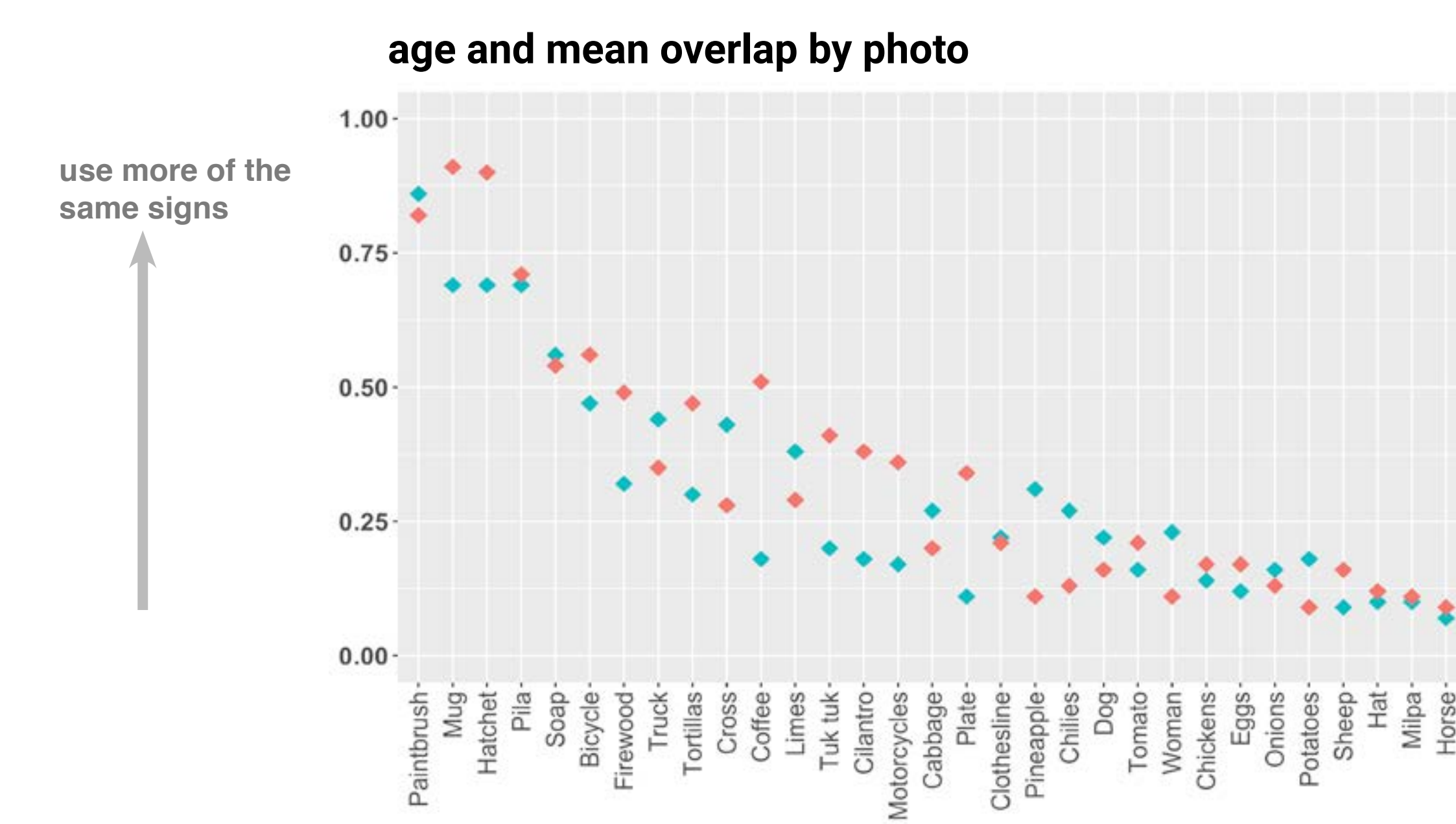
What factors are associated with higher rates of lexical overlap?

predictions

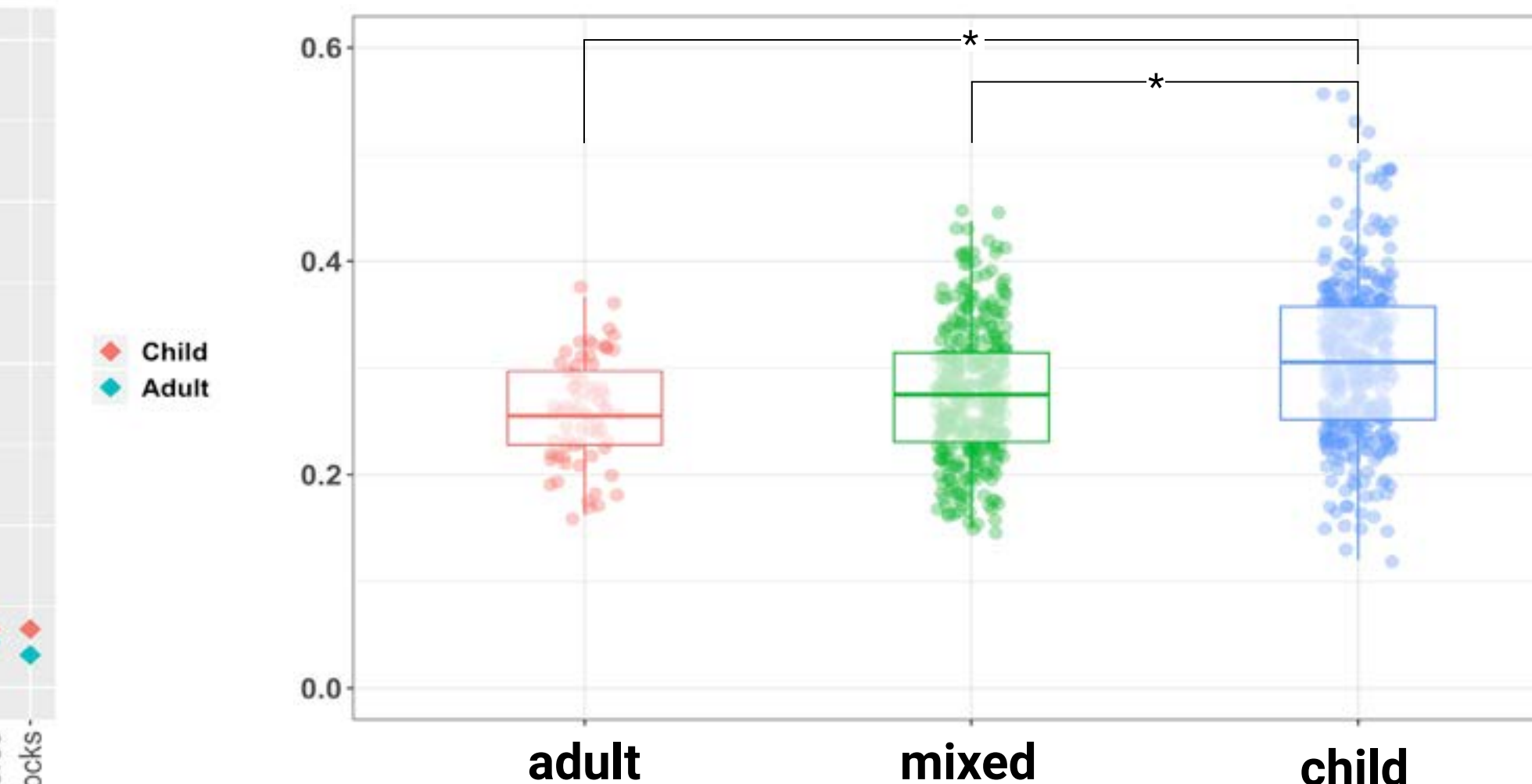
- signers from esoteric communities will have higher lexical overlap/lower variation than signers from exoteric communities (de Vos, 2011; Mudd et al., 2020)
- lexical overlap/variation rates may be related to amount of interaction, frequency of interaction, number of communication partners (Lev-Ari, S. & Shao, Z., 2017; Richie, et al., 2020)
- lexical overlap/variation rates may be related to shared experience, iconicity (Horton, 2018; Safar, 2019)

findings

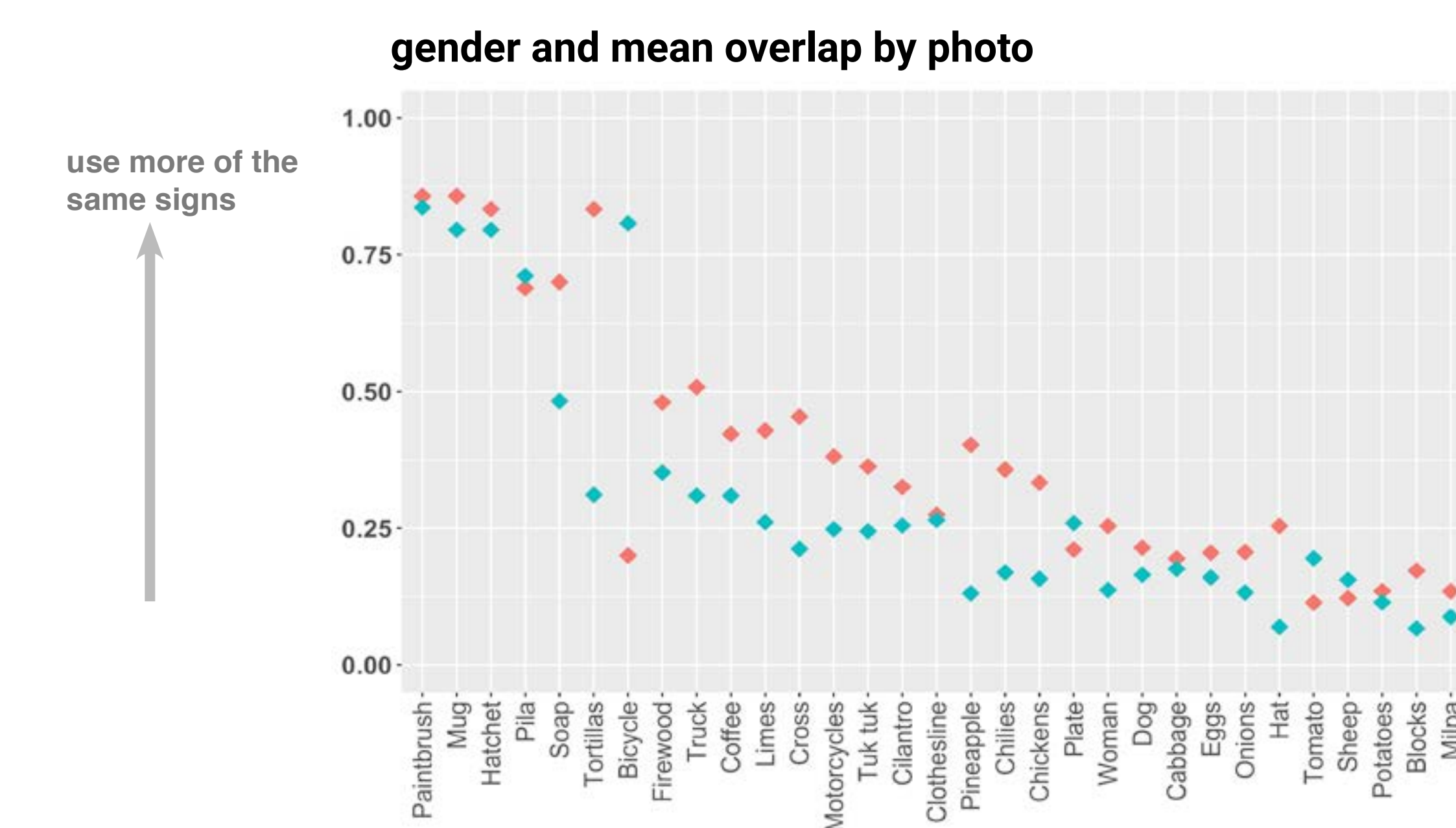
child signers have higher lexical overlap



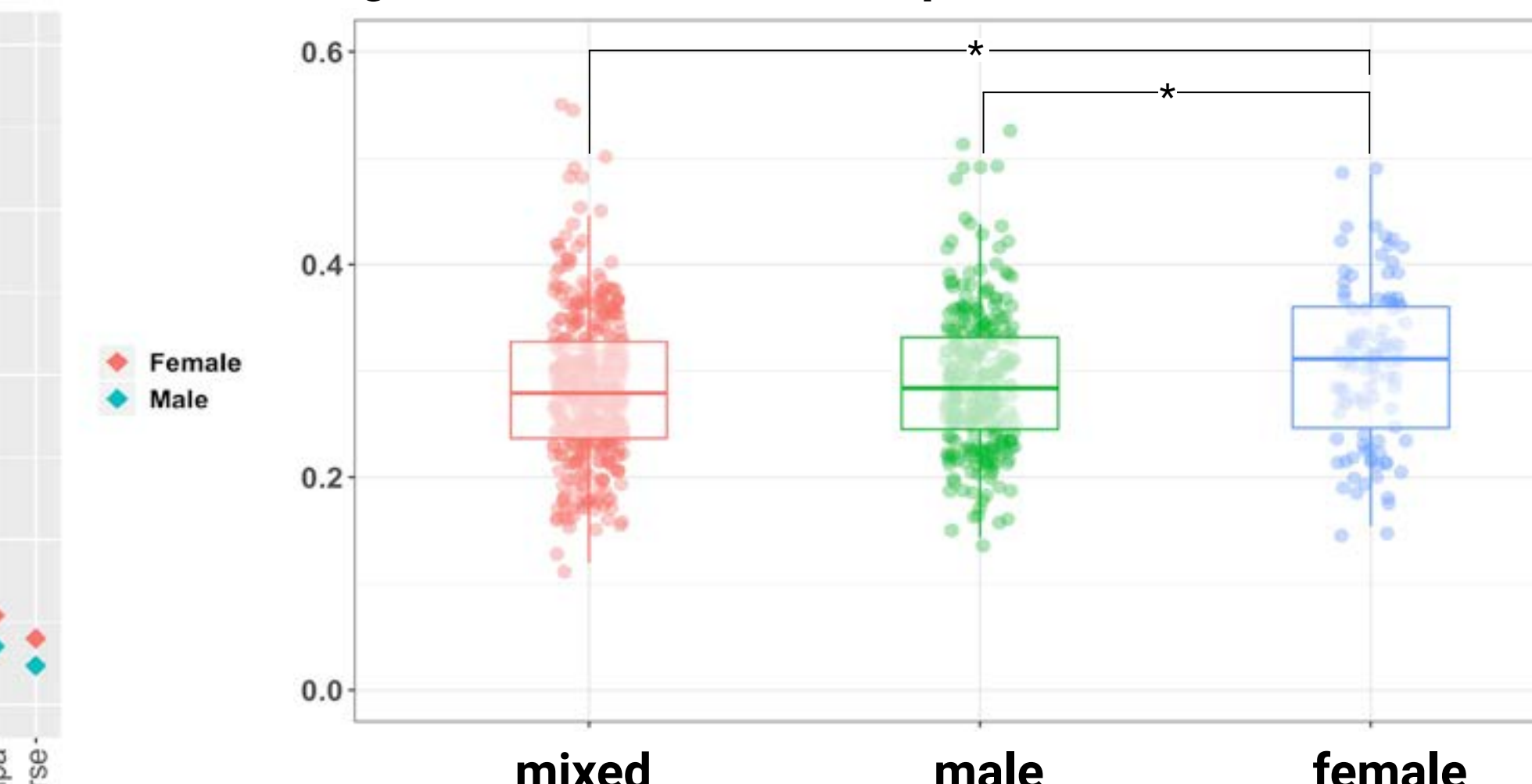
age and lexical overlap



female signers have higher lexical overlap



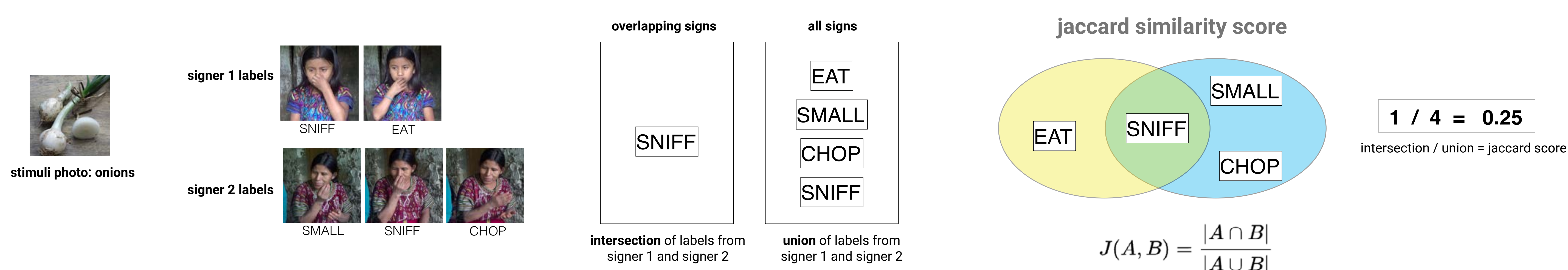
gender and lexical overlap



What is lexical overlap?

using the same sign for the same referent (can be considered an indicator of convergence or conventionalization)

measuring lexical overlap



future directions

- document social interactions of signers, quantitative measures of frequency, length of interactions
- evaluate overlap based on sign form versus iconic prototype (current coding)
- compare jaccard index with weighted measure (Lutzenberger et al., 2021)

references

[1] figure 1, p. 378, from: Le Guen, O. (2019). Emerging sign languages of Mesoamerica. *Sign Language Studies*, 19(3), 375-409.
[2] figure 1, p. 478, from: De Vos, C., & Nyst, V. (2018). The time depth and typology of rural sign languages. *Sign Language Studies*, 18(4), 477-487.
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