Football Crazy? Place-names and football club-names in British Sign Language

Rachel Sutton-Spence and Richard Coates
University of Bristol and University of the West of England

This paper addresses the linguistic and cultural implications of football club-names in one of Britain's indigenous minority languages, British Sign Language (BSL), and their relationship to signed place-names. We find a complex interrelationship between place-names and club-names that could not be predicted from English, including the discovery that some widespread place-names in BSL appear to be based upon the name of a football club in the relevant town.

To the best of our knowledge, there has never been a systematic study of British football club naming in BSL; indeed, there has been only one on linguistic aspects of (British) football club naming in the English language.[1] The present article combines analysis of place-names and football club-names in BSL because in BSL there are types of connection between them that do not occur in British spoken languages (specifically English and Scots). We confine our analysis to the clubs which were in the top four tiers of English and Scottish football in the years 2009-2010. In English, the overwhelming majority of clubs are named after a town or a major suburb or sector of a town (occasionally more than one: Brighton and Hove Albion). Of the very few English exceptions, some are named after places in the broader sense (Port Vale, Queens Park Rangers, Millwall and arguably Notts County) and the single other exception was formerly named after a place but has lost its place-name element ((Woolwich) Arsenal). There are a few Scottish exceptions (e.g. Heart of Midlothian, indirectly named after a novel by Sir Walter Scott, despite its geographical appropriateness for an Edinburgh club; Hibernian; Queen of the South). Many, but not all, such club-names have a second element

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[1] R. Coates, 'A typology of football club names in the British Isles', in M. G. Arcamone *et al.*, eds, *Papers from the 22nd International Congress of Onomastic Sciences, Pisa, 2005*, vol. 2 (Pisa, 2008), pp. 557-67.

such as *United*, *City*, *Athletic*, *Thistle* or *Albion*, which Coates refers to, for want of a better term, as a "clubonymic element".[2]

   Things are interestingly different in BSL. In addition to the "normal" type that we have just identified, we find that:

- Some clubs are named from their nicknames
- Some clubs are named from their badges or other visual images associated with the club such as their team strip (specifically their shirt design)
- Some towns are named after their clubs

Evidence
The evidence here comes from discussions about football club-names (hereafter simply *club-names*) with seven members of the British Deaf community (five men and two women), five of whom signed to camera the signs they use as club-names.[3] As this is only a small study, from which we hope to create a summary overview of the language patterns we see in BSL club-names, a sample balanced for regional and other social variables is not necessary. However, it is well-known that BSL shows strong regional variation, and regional signs are seen for club-names, so we consulted informants from different parts of the country. Three of our informants came from the north-west of England, two from Glasgow, and one from south-west England. In addition, we conducted one in-depth interview with a Deaf female football fan who grew up in London, and who is also an experienced sign language researcher, with a useful metalinguistic awareness of her use of BSL. Although it is usual to collect sign language material from Deaf community members, many hearing signers also follow football closely (especially hearing people who grew up with signing Deaf parents), so we have also included information shared with us by one male hearing football aficionado and

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[2] *Ibid.*, p. 558.
[3] We would like to thank Carolyn Nabarro for her help in filming four of these conversations. We are also grateful to Clark Denmark for modelling the signs in the illustrations in the rest of this paper.

academic, Martin Atherton, who has published on the history of Deaf football teams.[4]

   We asked each of our main informants to tell us their signs for the clubs in the English Premier League, and to offer us any alternative signs if they knew them. Additionally, three signers (one of the Glaswegians, the London football fan and Martin Atherton) gave us information on signed club-names in other divisions including the Scottish ones. There was considerable variation in signed club-names even among the eight people we worked with and we suspect there are probably many other signs that will be used in BSL to refer to these football clubs. Also, we have not explored local club nicknames to any great extent.[5] However, we are confident that the patterns we have observed from the information we have gathered will simply be reinforced and expanded upon by further, more extensive study.

A note on typographical conventions
In our discussion of BSL linguistic resources generally and of club-names in particular, the following notation conventions will be used:

- BSL SIGN gloss: in small caps, e.g. ARSENAL (linked by a caret where two signs are used for one name as a compound e.g. RED^TEAM, and linked by a hyphen where two words are needed to gloss a single sign, e.g. HORIZONTAL-HOOPS); notice that although we have used the word *gloss* here, the capitalized material should be understood as representing the form of the BSL sign itself

- -a-b-c-: fingerspelled English, or any use of the British manual alphabet where each letter from an English word is represented by a manual configuration representing that letter

- *English word* or *name used in English*: cited in italics

- 'Gloss' for a word or element: between single inverted commas

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[4] M. Atherton, D. Russell and G. H. Turner, *Deaf United: A History of Football in the British Deaf Community* (Coleford, 2000).
[5] A book on club nicknames is forthcoming: Shaun Tyas, *The Dictionary of Football Club Nicknames in Britain and Ireland* (Donington, 2012/3).

Proper names in signed languages

Before we embark on a full analysis of the club-names, we need to establish the linguistic resources available to Deaf people for the creation of proper names. Most BSL users are bilingual in English and BSL, and the relations between the two languages can be quite complex in ways that are relevant to the matter in prospect. Some of the categorization of the linguistic resources for club-names is similar to that which has been described in some depth in relation to personal name signs.[6] However, there has been far less research published on signed place-names[7] and its application to signed club-names is completely novel.

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[6] See for example for BSL: L. Day and R. Sutton-Spence, 'British Sign name customs', *Sign Language Studies* 11.1 (2010), pp. 22-54; for Quebec Sign Language: J. Desrosiers and C. Dubuisson, 'Names in Quebec Sign Language and what they tell us about Quebec Deaf culture', in I. Ahlgren, B. Bergman and M. Brennan, eds, *Perspectives on Sign Language Usage. Papers from the Fifth International Symposium on Sign Language Research*, vol. 2 (Durham, 1994), pp. 249-60; for Swedish Sign Language: T. Hedberg, 'Sign names in Swedish Sign Language: their formation and use', in C. J. Erting, R. C. Johnson, D. L. Smith and B. C. Snider, eds, *The Deaf Way: Perspectives from the International Conference on Deaf Culture* (Washington, D.C., 1994), pp. 416-24; for New Zealand Sign Language: R. McKee and D. McKee, 'Sign names and identity in New Zealand Sign Language', in M. Metzger, ed., *Bilingualism and Identity in Deaf Communities.* (Washington, D. C., 2000), pp. 3-40; for Estonian Sign Language: L. Paales, 'On the system of person-denoting signs in Estonian Sign Language. Estonian personal name signs', *Sign Language Studies* 10.3 (2010), pp. 317-35; for American Sign Language: S. J. Supalla, *The Book of Sign Names* (Berkeley, 1992); for Flemish Sign Language: K. Van Mulders, 'Sign names in Flemish Sign Language', *Deaf Worlds* 21.1 (2005), pp. 49-78; and for Chinese Sign Language: Yau Shunchiu and He Jingxian, 'How do Deaf children get their name signs during their first month in school?', in W. Edmondson and F. Karlsson, eds, *SLR '87 Papers from The Fourth International Symposium on Sign Language Research, Lappeenranta, Finland, July 1987* (Hamburg, 1990), pp. 243-54.

[7] Although see R. Sutton-Spence and B. Woll, *The Linguistics of British Sign Language: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1999), and L. Paales, 'On the system of place name signs in Estonian Sign Language', *Journal of Ethnology and Folklore* 4.2 (2011), pp. 31-54.

The BSL lexicon

We can describe the range of signs used in BSL as either "native" or "non-native".[8] Non-native signs have come from other signed and spoken languages, the most extensive donor in BSL being English. Native signs have been formed within BSL, although some signs are more fully lexicalized than others. Established signs are recognized as items within the language's vocabulary. These signs are often used with mouth patterns derived from the equivalent spoken English word (*mouthings*). Because BSL is a visual language, signers often produce clear visual representations of referents and many established signs are clearly iconic, as there is some link between the visual form of the referent and the visual form of its sign. However, the vocabulary is often metonymic in some way (that is, the literal referent of the sign is representative of, or associated in some way, with the actually intended referent, as *Downing Street* or *No. 10* may be used to mean 'the Prime Minister's office' or even 'the British government'). This may affect the clarity of the link between referent and the sign where the metonymic relationship is apparently obscure. We will see in this paper how all these characteristics of sign language are used to create sign names for football clubs.

The non-native lexicon in BSL can be realized through the use of loan-translations, or the manual alphabet, or elements of both in the same sign. In loan-translation, BSL translates any transparent etymological meaning of English names, word by word, or morpheme by morpheme, using BSL signs. These processes are so common that signers, who are usually bilingual, often don't even notice them. They are common for personal names, place-names, shop- and business names, and names of television programmes. They are also used as jokes in language play, relying on the bilingual skills of the conversational partners. Some signers dislike the indiscriminate use of loan-translations, especially the originally jocular "mis-translations" that have now become more widespread, such as FEED^BACK made up of signs referring to eating (FEED) and the rear part of something (BACK) rather than the BSL sign FEEDBACK, or JACKET POTATO (in which the sign JACKET is the one used in the sense of 'coat' rather than one for 'skin (of a potato)'). These examples are theoretically interesting because they break Meir's double

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[8] See, for example, T. Johnston and A. Schembri, *Australian Sign Language (Auslan): An Introduction to Sign Language Linguistics* (Cambridge, 2007).

mapping constraint,[9] according to which the metonymic choices behind the form of an iconic sign block its capacity for meaning extension. However, loan-translations are widespread and it appears that signers will accept "inappropriate" loan translations in many naming instances where there is no apparent necessity for the name to preserve faithfully the meaning of the original English word. This is a natural consequence of the inherent senselessness of all names, as argued for fully elsewhere.[10]

Loan translations may be full or partial. Full loan translations for transparent proper names include NEW^CASTLE *(Newcastle)*, BOOT[11] *(Boots the Chemist)* and PIZZA HUT *(Pizza Hut)* but they also occur for common nouns, especially in compound signs like GOD^MOTHER, GOLD^FISH and BLACK^BIRD. Partial loan translations might translate only part of the source name or use manual letters for the other part. These may be for single words (for example LAMP for *Lampeter*) or collocations such as BLUE-p- *(Blue Peter)* and ORANGE-j- *(orange juice)*.

In most instances, the loan translation appears medium-independent, unless there is some sort of disparity or clash between the appearance of the written and spoken forms, in which case the written form usually wins out over the spoken form. For example, signs may be the translation of an orthographically similar but more common word. Thus *Priory Road* may be signed PRIORITY ROAD and *mange-tout* may be signed MAN GET-OUT. However, sometimes loan translation is based on a form visually similar to the spoken English word. McKee and McKee use the term *phonetic analogue* for these signs representing English words or names which are visually similar to the target spoken English words or names.[12] Thus, when a name with a particular lip-pattern looks similar to another word, the sign for that word is used, creating what might be considered to be the signed equivalents of near-homonyms. In relation to personal names, McKee and McKee give as an example RABBIT used as a sign name for *Robert*. This may be seen in place-names including PISTOL,

[9] I. Meir, 'Iconicity, linguistic structure and the "Double-Mapping Constraint"', *Language* 86.4 (2010), pp. 865-96.
[10] R. Coates, 'Properhood', *Language* 82.2 (2006), pp. 356-82.
[11] Note that the inflection remains untranslated. In our discussions here we ignore some minor issues in the translation where not directly relevant to the point in question.
[12] McKee and McKee, 'Sign names and identity in NZSL'.

TABLET and PRIEST for *Bristol*, *Dublin* and *Preston*. The resemblance of *priest* to the actual etymological source of the first element in *Preston* (Lancashire) is of course coincidental from the synchronic point of view.

Since so many club-names are based on place-names in BSL, just as they are in English, it is worth providing a list of examples of loan translations here, all used in signed conversations and observed by one of us (RSS) over the years. These processes are not confined to place-names and personal names but are also seen in names for shops and businesses. We add examples of these, too, to illustrate the general application of this process.

Where the written English form can be analysed (whether historically accurately or not), the elements can be replaced in BSL by the semantically appropriate lexical sign:

- MOTHER^WELL, SAND^WELL, READING, GREEN^LAND, ICE^LAND, KING^CROSS, RED^HILL, JERSEY
- APPLE, NEXT, TOP SHOP, GAP, RIVER ISLAND, ABBEY, HOME^BASE, WAIT^ROSE

Alternatively, the sign may consist of the BSL equivalent of a *semantic* relative of an English word (whether appropriate to the name or not), usually a near-synonym (HURRY for 'haste'), or the BSL equivalent of a *phonological* relative of an English word (ARROW):

- HURRY *(Hastings)*, NUN^EAT *(Nuneaton)*, ISLAND WEIGHT *(Isle of Wight)*, ARROW PARK *(Harrow Park)*
- SUPERMAN^DRUG *(Superdrug)*, SELFISH *(Selfridges)*, BARBEQUE *(B&Q)*, CURRY *(Currys)*, POUND^STRETCHer, WHITE^ROSE *(Waitrose)*

Abbreviation (usually by apocope or final truncation) of the written (or spoken) English place-name may be used, with any conspicuous (apparent) English element translated into BSL:

- CLAP*(ham)*, FULL*(ham)*, HAMMER*(smith)*

Aphesis (or fore-clipping) is less common, but can be seen in FRIDGES *(Selfridges)*. In these "abbreviated" signs, the accompanying mouthing is usually of the whole English word.

Additionally, a fingerspelled abbreviation of the English written form may be used for elements that cannot readily be translated, usually just the first letter (-f- for *ford*):

- -m-KEY *(Milton Keynes)*, BLACK-h- *(Blackheath)*, -b-HILL *(Bexhill)*, -c-WALL *(Cornwall)*, -c-WELL *(Camberwell)*, CAT-f- *(Catford)* -c-BRIDGE *(Cambridge)*, -b-CROSS *(Brent Cross)*, BED-f- *(Bedford)*, -m-STONE *(Maidstone)*

- -w-ROSE *(Waitrose)*, -p-MANAGER [sic] *(Pret a Manger)*

Fingerspelling and the manual alphabet
Some uses of the manual alphabet have become a part of the core lexicon and do not rely on the signer's knowledge of English. Others are subject to the signer's knowledge of English and their use varies greatly between signers. However, the manual alphabet is used for many different elements of the language in different ways, including for whole proper names for people, places, and businesses (e.g. PRINCE -p-h-i-l-i-p-, -b-o-l-t-o-n-, -l-l-o-y-d-s- BANK) and it is used extensively in club-names, as we will see.

Fingerspelling is also used in initialisms (e.g. -b-d-a- for *British Deaf Association*, -b-s-l- for *British Sign Language* or -b-b-c-) and other types of abbreviation (e.g. -a-b-t- ABOUT, -e-d-h- EDINBURGH, -g-d- GATES-HEAD). Single manual letter signs usually repeat the initial letter of the English word (such geminates include -m-m- MOTHER, -t-t- TUESDAY, -g-g- GINGER) however some single manual letter signs have additional movement (e.g. MILLION uses the letter -m- moving forwards in the sign space). Finally, as we demonstrated in the examples above, manual letters may be used with a non-derived sign to complete the representation of the English word (e.g. -p-MOUTH = PORTSMOUTH).

Natural signs rarely use more than two hand configurations, whereas a fingerspelled sign may be made up of several different hand configura-tions (representing each letter of the word), so to fit BSL patterning more

closely, loan fingerspellings are usually abbreviated to two letters.[13] These may be used for signs in many semantic groups (seen in signs such as -d-g- *doing*, -c-h- *chapter* and -p-j- *project*) but are especially common in naming, and all the following examples are drawn from place-names, as these relate most closely to club-names under investigation here. Patterns of abbreviation vary, but common processes in BSL include:

- First and last letters (e.g. -b-l- from *Bristol*, -h-x- *Halifax*, -g-d- *Gateshead*, -s-d- *Sunderland*)
- First and second letters (e.g. -a-b- from *Aberdeen*, -i-l- *Ilford*, -o-x- *Oxford*, -t-h- *Thetford*)
- First letters from each perceived morpheme of the loan word (e.g. -g-w- *Gatwick,* -h-g- *Harrogate*, -m-c- *Manchester*, -n-w- *Norwich*, -w-c- *Worcester*)

BSL club-names
Bearing these linguistic resources in mind, and especially their apparent widespread use in place-names, we can now turn to the sign names for football clubs. It should be noted that a club that has one English club-name can have several different signed names. Metonymic visually-motivated 'native' signs, with no relationship to English, only made up a small proportion of the signs we were given for club-names. Non-native signs (albeit altered in some interesting ways) were more common.

Native-origin signs
In the native BSL signs the club may be named in BSL for an attribute of the club; thus it is named metonymically from the club. One highly visual attribute linked to a club is its strip and this may be used as the name for the club:

- RED^TEAM *(Liverpool)*, HORIZONTAL-HOOPS *(Celtic)*, VERTICAL-STRIPES (*St Mirren*, also used for *Argentina*)

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[13] R. Sutton-Spence, The role of the manual alphabet and fingerspelling in British Sign Language, unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Bristol, 1994).

When questioned about the colour of the strip, our key informant agreed that many teams play in a red strip but assured us that only Liverpool was ever referred to as the 'red team', perhaps because of their club nickname *The Reds*. No other colour was directly involved in the signed naming of a club. Patterns on a shirt need to be fairly unusual to function as an identifying metonym for club-name signs. Thus the relatively unusual horizontal stripes of Celtic serve to identify the club and perhaps contrast with the vertical stripes of the not too far distant St Mirren, from Paisley.

The logo on the club badge or shield can also serve as a metonymic sign, as with Arsenal, Chelsea and Swansea City. The gun on the Arsenal logo (which appears on the left breast of the shirt) motivates a sign with the index finger and thumb configured to show the stylized form of a gun articulated on the left-hand-side of the chest[14] (See Figure 1). The location of this sign shows that it is related to the badge and is different from signs created by translation of the nickname *The Gunners* (GUN signs in this case referring to large artillery or to rifles). The widespread sign CHELSEA is motivated by the long tongue of the lion on the club badge, and the swan on the Swansea badge motivates the sign for the football club Swansea City. Our informant explained that traditionally the *swan* in the place-name motivated the sign for the club and that the letters -s-w- were used for the city of Swansea, but remarked that signers outside Swansea now use the swan-motivated sign for the city name as well.[15]

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[14] Note that this is true for right-handed signers. Left-handed signers will usually locate the sign on the right-hand-side of the chest. This is not remarked upon by signers, for whom the visual accuracy of the location of the sign is less important than the simple fact that the dominant signing hand contacts the contralateral side of the chest.

[15] We are aware that this is not the actual etymology of *Swansea*: see H. W. Owen and R. Morgan, *Dictionary of the Place-Names of Wales* (Llandysul, 2007), p. 448.

Figure 1 – ARSENAL, showing the shape of the gun on the badge on the shirt

We found one example of an historical event motivating a sign for a club:

- GLASSES *(Preston North End)*

Martin Atherton explained that this sign is motivated by the historical event of the FA Cup final in 1922, at which the Preston North End goalkeeper wore glasses. (Preston lost.)

In other signs, the club is named in BSL for an attribute of the place named; thus, it is named metonymically from the *place*, as is typical, but the place itself is metonymically named:

- *Chesterfield* – TWISTED-SPIRE
- *Doncaster Rovers* – JOCKEY'S-SASH (after the racecourse at Doncaster)
- *Southend United* – FUNFAIR

One interesting case is Sheffield for which the BSL place-name and one of the two club-names are both motivated by the notion of a knife. The nickname of Sheffield United is *The Blades* so this may explain the origin of the sign. Certainly, all informants were clear that KNIFE could only be used to refer to Sheffield United (the name of Sheffield Wednesday is signed using the manual letters -s-w-). However, discussion with our main informant confirmed our impression that the city of Sheffield is named in BSL as KNIFE from the occurrence of the word *Sheffield* seen on so many table-knives. The use of the sign KNIFE or BLADE for the team is most likely to be driven by the same fact that led to Sheffield United's

English nickname—that Sheffield is famous for its manufacture of steel blades.

We should also note a range of signs for clubs for which we have been unable to identify the origin. We assume that they were once metonymic but their origins are no longer obvious. Some signers may be able to come up with an explanation but for now we do not know what motivates certain clearly native signs we have seen for Chelsea, Sunderland, Everton, Liverpool, Stoke City, Tottenham Hotspur, Aston Villa and Arsenal. All these clubs have other less opaque signed names that do have a clear origin which we have discussed elsewhere in this paper.

In none of the metonymic, native BSL club-names did clubonymic elements emerge.

Non-native origin signs

Translation of the written form of the English name into one or more semantically equivalent BSL signs is seen in club-names, just as it is in place-names. Indeed, this is often because the club-name is also the place-name, as it is in English. For the translations, as with the native metonymic signs, there were rarely any clubonymic elements.

We found relatively few full and exact loan translations but two examples (one shown in Figure 2) are: BLACK^BURN,[16] READING

Figure 2 – BLACKBURN made up of the two signs BLACK and BURN

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[16] This meaning of BURN is 'consume by fire' rather than 'stream', so the loan translation faithfully represents one sense of the English word *burn*, albeit not the historic sense in the word *Blackburn*.

There were many more partial translations, in each case a rendering of the first (apparent) element (see Figure 3 for an example). These signs are often geminated, at least in their citation forms, so that, for example, Sunderland is sometimes rendered as SUN^SUN (although we have not glossed them here as such, for ease of reading):

- SUN *(Sunderland)*, FULL *(Fulham)*, OLD *(Oldham Athletic)*, MIDDLE *(Middlesbrough)*, CHEST *(Chester City)*, BLACK (for both *Blackburn Rovers* and *Blackpool*), SWAN *(Swansea City)*

Figure 3 – FULHAM signed from partial loan translation as FULL

Sign renditions of *phonetic analogues,* representing spoken forms phonologically or orthographically related to all or part of the base name, as defined above, also arose:

- PRIEST *(Preston North End)*
- JOKE *(Stoke City)*
- PISTOL -c-i-t-y- and PISTOL -r- or PISTOL -r-o-v-e-r- *(Bristol City and Bristol Rovers)*

The case of -c-CHEESE (Chelsea) may be another instance of this category (i.e. most likely the consonant frame of non-RP /ˈtʃeʊsi/). These phonetic analogue signs tended not to be used by signers for whom this was their local team. Signers local to Preston use either GLASSES or NORTH^END. Bristol signers use -b-r- or GAS for Bristol Rovers and a sign that first touches the chest followed by -c- for Bristol City (probably motivated by

the nickname *The Robins*, a metonym from the shirt colour, indicating the robin red-breast).[17]

   Translation of club nicknames, or parts of them, into a semantically equivalent BSL sign denoting the club is also widespread. In these signs, the distinction between club-name and place-name is especially clear (see figures 4 and 5 for two examples):

- BIRD/ROBIN (*Swindon Town* – The Robins)[18]
- EAT (*Wigan Athletic* – The Pie Eaters)
- GAS (*Bristol Rovers* – The Gas)
- GUN (*Arsenal* – The Gunners – see comments above)
- HAMMER (*West Ham United* – The Hammers)
- HOT (*Tottenham Hotspur* – NB it is *hot* that is translated, not *spur* or the widespread abbreviation of the clubonymic element, *Spurs*)
- POSH (*Peterborough United* – The Posh)
- RAM (*Derby County* – The Rams)
- TOFFEE (*Everton* – The Toffees)

Figure 4 – *Tottenham Hotspur* (-t- HOT)

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[17] We have no reason to think that the sign plays on the English slang use of this club-name to mean 'female breasts'; see further below.

[18] Other red-shirted clubs, including Bristol City and Cheltenham Town, are also nicknamed *The Robins*, but in BSL only Swindon Town are known widely by this sign.

Figure 5 – *Wigan* (EAT)

Related to this group are those signs based on nicknames for the club's fans. It is interesting that the fans' nickname should be recruited to name the club, rather than the club's nickname, but some of this may be due to the ease of translation. For example, the widespread nickname for (Glasgow) Rangers is *(The) Gers*, which is non-translatable into BSL or any other language; the fans' nickname *The Blue Noses* is far more readily translated. We should note that some of these nicknames for club-names or fans were disliked by some informants as being too closely related to the English language. For example, one of our Glasgow informants disliked the sign referring to the nose (see below for a full explanation) for Rangers because of its link to the English nickname *The Blue Noses* and offered one that is etymologically obscure, but clearly unrelated to English, instead. However, other informants readily offered the nickname translation.

A sign in which the loosely bunched fingers are articulated at the nose, as it is used for Rangers as the *Blue Noses*, is potentially offensive, although the signers we talked to use this sign non-pejoratively.[19] The location of the sign clearly implies reference to a nose, although it is not the sign NOSE and makes no reference to a colour.

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[19] This sign is also used humorously and subversively to mean 'fuck knows', clearly based as a visual pun on the English dismissive expression. We need further research to know if this sense is the primary one, and if it is then that would suggest that the signed club-name has this offensive etymology. Perhaps the similarity between FUCK-KNOWS/NOSE and RANGERS understood as The Blue Noses is coincidental, or mediated by English usage. However, we must emphasize that none of our informants who used this sign to refer to Glasgow Rangers mentioned its alternative meaning.

Sometimes we have an allusion rather than a translation:

- CHEST -c- (*Bristol City* – also *The Robins* so, as we saw above, CHEST here alludes to the robin redbreast)
- BEAK (*Norwich City* – The Canaries)

In many cases where signs are driven in some way by the English club-name, signers did not translate the clubonymic element at all, using solely the place-name associated with the club. There were frequent exceptions, however, especially when a town has two well-known clubs and the clubonymic element is what distinguishes the club-names.

Fingerspelled forms of English words are commonly used. Examples of whole spellings for teams were widespread from our informants. Younger signers tend to use fingerspellings only where the name is short, for example for *Hull* (-h-u-l-l-) whereas older signers fingerspelled longer names in their entirety. These differences relate to the different education and language experiences of members of the Deaf community. Older people's education, especially in Northern England, often included extensive fingerspelling. Younger people's education did not include extensive fingerspelling and consequently they tend not to have the fingerspelling skills of the older generation.[20] From our informants we were given the following clubs, the place-names in whose names were fingerspelled in their entirety (the longer ones fingerspelled by the older signers):

- *Hull*, *Bolton*, *Stoke*, *Chelsea*, *Everton*, *Wigan*, *Bolton Wanderers*

The geminated first letter only of the base place-name was also used, both by younger and older signers. Where the sign produced potential homonyms (as with *Blackburn Rovers*, *Bolton Wanderers*, *Barnsley* and *Burnley*, all potentially signed -b-b-) an English mouthing would help to disambiguate the signing. We should note that for some signers, the team name is not the same as the town name. Thus a signer who used -b-b- for Blackburn Rovers and Burnley football clubs, could use the sign BLACK^BURN and BURN for the town names.

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[20] R. Sutton-Spence and B. Woll, 'Variation and recent change in British Sign Language', *Language Variation and Change* 2 (1990), pp. 313-30.

A selection of these includes the following, although there are a great many other examples:

- -a-a- *(Arsenal)*, -e-e- *(Everton)*, -b-b- *(Blackburn Rovers, Bolton Wanderers, Barnsley, Burnley)*, -n-n- *(Northampton Town)*

Some of the club-names used a manual letter that does not form part of the regular manual alphabet but is recognized as specifically used for initials. These signed letters are all one-handed, in contrast with their conventional manual letters, which are all two-handed. The sign denoting Ipswich Town uses a manual letter that transliterates the English written letter <i>, but with the thumb contacting the middle finger of the same hand rather than the normal sign of the index finger of one hand contacting the middle finger of the opposing hand. The normal manual letter -l- places the index finger on the palm of the opposing hand; in Liverpool's club-name, the manual letter corresponding to the English letter <l> as made by only one hand, with thumb and index finger extended in a capital <L>-shape. The normal manual letter -o- has the index finger of one hand contacting the ring finger of the opposing hand; in the sign name for Leyton Orient the English letter <l> is represented with the standard -l- but the English letter <o> is signed with the fingers bunched into an 'O'-shape circle on one hand:

- *Ipswich Town, Liverpool, Leyton Orient*

In a few cases, signers used the first syllable or a close approximation to a written form of the first syllable of the base place-name:

- -m-i-d-d- *(Middlesbrough)*, -c-o-v- *(Coventry City)*

In keeping with the linguistic processes described for place-names above, the first and last letters of the full base place-name were used for the club-name (as well as the place-name), as were the first and second letters, and the first and a medial letter of the full base place-name (usually the first letter of a written form of the second spoken syllable):

- -b-n- *(Bolton Wanderers)*, -s-d- *(Sunderland)*

- -c-h- *(Charlton Athletic)*, -a-b- *(Aberdeen)*, -p-r- *(Preston North End)*
- -n-c- *(Newcastle United)*, -l-c- *(Leicester City)*, -w-f- *(Watford)*, -s-d- *(Sunderland)*

We also find initialisms of the base place-name + the clubonymic element, sometimes with the base place-name rendered in one of the manners given above (as with -m-c-u- (*Manchester United*)). Some of these initialisms matched those used in English (*QPR* is regularly spoken in English, and *WBA*—see Figure 6—is regularly written even if other names such as *West Brom* or the full club-name *West Bromwich Albion* are more commonly spoken). The mouth pattern for the initialism was of the letters <q><p><r>, not of the words *Queens Park Rangers*, implying (correctly so far as we can judge) that the club is generally known by its written abbreviation. The mouth patterns for the other club-names, such as *Aston Villa* and *Bristol Rovers*, were of the words, not the letter-names—*Bristol Rovers* and *Aston Villa,* not /bi: ɑ:(r)/ or /ei vi:/

- -w-b-a- *(West Bromwich Albion)*, -q-p-r- *(Queens Park Rangers)*, -a-v- *(Aston Villa)*, -w-h-u- *(West Ham United)*, -b-r- *(Bristol Rovers)*, -m-c- *(Manchester City)*, -m-c-u- *(Manchester United)*

Figure 6: *West Bromwich Albion* fingerspelled -w-b-a-

The first letter of the base name and a translation into BSL of a transparent English second element was seen where the translation was possible:

- -p-MOUTH *(Portsmouth)*
- -n-CASTLE *(Newcastle United)*
- -w-HAM *(West Ham United)*

We note that this option for signers coexists with others, so -n-CASTLE *(Newcastle United)* co-exists with NEW^CASTLE and -n-c-, and -w-HAM *(West Ham United)* co-exists with -w-h-, -w-h-u- and -w-h-a-m-.

Clubonymic elements
We observed above that no native signs were used to represent a clubonymic element directly. In the non-native sources, though, we do see some representation of selected elements. They survive in the initial-isms such as -w-b-a- and -q-p-r- and for clubs where the club-name rarely features in English without the clubonymic element, such as *Leyton Orient*. Some are fingerspelled in full by the older signers who spelled almost everything, such as -c-i-t-y-; some have an initial letter, such as -u- for *United* and are produced by signers of any age. Most of them arose because two clubs from the same town needed distinguishing, such as Bristol City and Rovers, or Manchester City and United, and are frequently used so in English as well. Where there were two clubs to distinguish, this often has implications for both parts of the sign and the sign recognized as the place-name was frequently dropped or modified: -b-r- for *Bristol Rovers* and CHEST -c- for *Bristol City*; KNIFE for *Sheffield United* and -s-w- for *Sheffield Wednesday*).

Place-name to club-name or club-name to place-name?
An exceptionally interesting category of data is provided by the following names:

PRESTON-NORTH-END, SWINDON, PETERBOROUGH-UNITED, DERBY-COUNTY, NORWICH-CITY, CHELSEA, WIGAN-ATHLETIC

In each of these cases, the name of the club, set out above, is used in BSL as the name of the town. Many signers who know nothing about football and are unaware of the football club's signed name will use the signs for these places that have clearly come from the football club. (In the case of the vertical stripes of the Argentina strip, this can also be the sign used to

refer to the country as a whole, even in conversation outside a footballing context.) As far as we know, among all the sources of place-names, there are no instances recorded in any other language of a town being named after its football club. Such a phenomenon shows the great importance of football in the social and cultural life of the British Deaf community, at least in the past, and is clear indication of its enduring heritage. It would be useful to know if similar processes occur in other national sign languages, as this will tell us more about historical and cultural resources behind the allocation of names.

Further questions
This has been a small, but very informative, first study of signed football club-names. We have seen that BSL draws upon the same essential linguistic resources that it does for place-names—making use of both native and non-native elements, creating metonymic signs particular to the world of football but also drawing on aspects of the clubs' English names in ways that would not be expected if one expected a faithful representation of the etymological meaning or form of the English word in the BSL sign. The broader impact of club-names on place-names is particularly significant. However, there are still many unanswered questions.

What signs are available for any one club? It is clear that there are a range of different signs even for a single club. For example, for Preston North End, we were offered two different metonymic signs (one relating to GLASSES and one to PRIEST) and one fingerspelled abbreviation -p-r-. Additionally, one signer said that *North End* never figured in her signed reference to the club whilst another showed us a sign that essentially blends the meaning of *north* and *end* by locating the hand-configuration used in END with the location used in NORTH. For Arsenal, we saw six signs from six different signers: -a-a-, an etymologically unclear sign that could translate as OIL, another etymologically obscure sign of a hand-shape in the form of a <V> tapping the temple, one sign denoting a large field gun, one sign denoting a rifle and one alluding to the gun on the badge logo. Despite this, signers were often familiar with several different signs and most people would recognize this last one (Figure 1) as the most nationally standard sign to use. Such a wide range of options for a single club-name suggests we should ask what the possible options are.

Once we know what the options are, we should also ask who uses the different signs. It is possible that some signs are related to the age of the signer, some are regional variants and some are distinguished as 'local' or 'not-local'. Perhaps we could construct isoglosses of signed club-names. We could also look for the more standard or widespread signs for each club-name, observing, perhaps, if there are any noticeable patterns of change. It is possible that in English usage an unambiguous place-name (e.g. *Grimsby*) is more likely to be used alone as a club-name outside a local context, whilst the clubonymic element or a variant of it (e.g. *Town*) is more likely to be used alone locally. This process could operate similarly in BSL.

It is also interesting to ask why such a sign is used. At a linguistic level, we have seen that some loan translations are blocked, for example, so there is no sign ROVER to translate the English word *Rovers*, but that does not explain why signers may sign NORTH-END (a complex sign that needed creativity and resourcefulness to come up with) for Preston, but do not sign ATHLETIC (a familiar lexical item in the core vocabulary of any signer) for Charlton.

At a cultural level, questions arise why a metonym may be selected over a non-native sign or vice versa, or why a particular metonym is chosen. In many cases, the apparently obscure origins of some signs could be investigated further.

It is certainly clear that there is considerably more to learn about club-names and place-names in BSL, and we offer this article as an inducement to further study.