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The Netherlands

Personal experience narratives in three West African sign languages: the influence of time-depth, community size and social interaction

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Citation
Dias Da Silva Morgado Pereira, M. (2024, February 27). *Personal experience narratives in three West African sign languages: the influence of time-depth, community size and social interaction*. *LOT dissertation series*. LOT, Amsterdam. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3719763

Version:	Publisher's Version
License:	Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden
Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3719763

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Stellingen behorende bij het proefschrift “Personal experience narratives in three West African sign languages: The influence of time-depth, community size and social interaction” door Marta Morgado

1. Narratives in village and young sign languages in West Africa follow a universal structure with a beginning, middle and end, where signers begin their stories by addressing the audience as narrators, then tell them as characters, and at the end return to their role as narrators.

2. Signers interacting more frequently present well-structured narratives. Frequent social interactions over time are important to develop the ability to tell enhanced story climaxes, as seen in AdaSL.

3. More experienced signers make their stories compelling by frequently changing signing perspectives and roles, reconstructing dialogues and detailing emotional aspects in their stories.

4. Structural differences in narratives told by male and female signers in urban Guinea Bissau reveal a gender imbalance in the frequency of social interactions between deaf peers.

5. Language elicitation methods are more successful when designed to avoid unfamiliar materials that could affect the naturalness of the signer’ expressions. A simple question aimed at the people’s interest was able to elicit rich naturalistic data, in a way that sometimes structured elicitation tasks cannot.

6. Languages do not follow a (rigid?) developmental cline. They are all different in the way they serve their purpose to the people who use them, like family, village and school-based sign languages. However, there are clear differences within a community where underprivileged groups, like the deaf women in Bissau, do not have equal access to the language and consequently to knowledge.

7. Storytelling is a crucial bonding act for all peoples and an important way of preserving language and culture. Deaf people and their sign languages are especially reliant on these sharing moments but do not always have shared spaces to do so.

8. Social interaction is confirmed as a crucial factor in developing linguistic skills. This has consequences for deaf people in the global north, where institutional policies are driving them away from each other.

9. Deaf people are everywhere, especially where sign language is being researched, so let us talk about sign language THROUGH sign language at all times. #NoTalkTISLR