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Understanding Ghanaian sign language(s): history, linguistics, and ideology

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5.

IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES, JUDGMENTS AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC PROFILES OF BODY-BASE AND SPACE-BASE SASS

Language serves as a fundamental element of human communication and identity formation. Sociolinguistics examines the dynamic interactions between language and society, focusing on the social and cultural factors that shape language usage. Among these factors, language ideologies significantly influence how individuals perceive and employ language in their daily lives. This chapter presents an exploratory study that investigates the relationship between ideological influences and sociolinguistic profiles within the context use of SASS. According to Nyst (2007), SASS are signs that fully or partially have elements that indicate an entity's size and/or shape.

Language ideologies encompass beliefs and attitudes regarding language use and structure shaped by cultural, social, and political influences. These ideologies impact individuals' perceptions and utilisation of language in diverse contexts, reflecting broader social and cultural values and norms. Language ideologies can influence how people evaluate and perceive different types of SASS. For instance, in certain linguistic communities, using specific adjectives (e.g., SASS) for animate entities may be regarded as impolite or disrespectful, whereas in other languages, it may be a common and accepted aspect of everyday language use (Saitz and Cervenka, 1972:7). Saitz and Cervenka (1972) provide an example of using the distance between the hand and the ground as a means to convey the size of an entity. They explain that in the United States, the gesture can be articulated with the hand palm facing downwards to indicate the height of a child, but in Colombia that would not be acceptable to use that for a human being but appropriate to indicate the size of an animal (Saitz & Cervenka, 1972:7). It seems that individuals' judgments and perceptions of a particular feature can be influenced by individuals' language, cultural beliefs, attitudes or sociolinguistic profiles.

In the United States, a variety of ASL is known as Black ASL, predominantly used by African-American signers (McCaskill et al., 2011). Black ASL differs from the ASL used in the white deaf community, often called White ASL (McCaskill et al., 2011). Researchers have identified several distinctive features that set Black ASL apart. For instance, Black ASL frequently employs two-handed variants, non-lowered variants, increased signing space, enhanced phrasal repetition, integration of African American English lexical items and phrases, and retains general lexical variations. Based on these characteristics, Black signers demonstrate unique language preferences and perceptions (McCaskill et al., 2011:64ff). For example, some signers may favour White ASL as a means of asserting an educational background (McCaskill et al., 2011:72). In contrast, others

may prefer Black ASL for its expressiveness in nonmanual marking, which resonates with Black communication styles (McCaskill et al., 2011).

These findings by McCaskill et al. (2011) illustrate the presence of sociolinguistic markers that could influence language choices within the same linguistic framework. In this chapter, I aim to investigate whether body-based or space-based SASS in the GSL carries any social connotations. This exploration seeks to determine if specific linguistic markers are associated with social meanings in GSL. The extent to which SASS in GSL bear such sociolinguistic markers remains unexplored, and this chapter intends to address this knowledge gap.

In the previous chapter 4, the descriptive analysis of SASS usage in Ghana could not demonstrate variations based on the signer's social context and identity. Therefore, this chapter addresses a significant study area at the intersection of SASS production, ideology, and social factors. The primary motivation for this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the sociolinguistic aspects of body-based and space-based SASS usage in GSL. Specifically, I focus on body-based and space-based size and space specifiers to explore their distribution and variation among signers.

The research in this chapter aims to address the following questions: (1) Sociolinguistic Understanding of SASS Preference: The first objective is to investigate how social factors such as age, gender, educational attainment and socioeconomic status influence signers' preferences for specific body-based and space-based SASS forms. By exploring whether signers associate themselves with particular SASS forms based on their social identity or group membership, this study seeks to uncover potential barriers to effective communication and improve intergroup communication within GSL. (2) Ideological Influence on Language Judgments: The second goal is to understand how signers' ideologies regarding SASS impact their language judgments. By examining how personal beliefs, attitudes, and cultural norms shape the perception of SASS forms, this research aims to illuminate the complex relationship between language and culture, within the GSL community. (3) Uncovering Linguistic Prejudice and Bias: The third objective is to identify any linguistic prejudice and bias in the GSL community related to body-based and space-based SASS. It is possible that certain SASS forms may be stigmatised due to historical, social, or political reasons. Recognising and comprehending these biases will promote SASS diversity and inclusivity in language planning and education initiatives.

Ultimately, the research seeks to provide an understanding of the variation in GSL, focusing on body-based and space-based SASS usage, and the factors that govern this variation. By examining SASS's sociolinguistic profiles and ideologies among signers, this study aims to contribute to the intricate dynamics of language use, ideology, and social perception within the GSL community.

This chapter first presents a brief literature review on language ideology (Section 5.1). Then describes the research question and approach employed for the study in Section 5.2. Subsequently, the results are presented in two sections: Subsection 5.3.1 examines the judgment and perception of SASS, while Subsection 5.3.2 focuses on sociolinguistic profiles and how they interacted with signers' SASS production. The chapter ends with a discussion in Section 5.4 and a concluding section in Section 5.5.

5.1 Exploring Language Ideologies: Definition and Approaches

Language ideology, a concept explored by various disciplines such as social psychology, anthropology, and linguistics, offers insights into the ways language is perceived, valued, and used within a community. Despite the dynamic nature of sign languages, the role of language ideology in understanding their usage and structure has often been overlooked.

This section aims to address this gap by examining the definition of language ideologies (Subsection 5.1.1), and the approaches employed in the literature (Subsection 5.1.2).

5.1.1 Language ideologies

Language ideology refers to individuals' ideas and beliefs about their language. It is acquired within society and encompasses individual or group attitudes, beliefs, and values towards language and its usage (Blackledge 2005:32). Language ideologies are not limited to the views of the privileged in society but are diverse and shape linguistic evaluations and communicative activities (Kroskrity, 2004). This concept is essential in understanding variations in language practices, beliefs about language status and prestige, and constructing linguistic evaluations. Kroskrity, therefore, defines language ideology as a “ubiquitous set of diverse beliefs, however implicit or explicit they may be, used by speakers of all types as models for constructing linguistic evaluations and engaging in a communicative activity.” (2004: 497). He explains that language ideology also provides us with variations in view and language practice and beliefs on language status and prestige.

In the field of Deaf and sign language studies, language ideology is defined similarly, incorporating not only ideas and beliefs but also emotions and practices (Kusters et al., 2022: 282-283). Language ideology encompasses various aspects, including perceptions of superiority and inferiority among languages, suitability of language use, language acquisition, and language contact in multilingual settings (Kroskrity, 2004). Woolard (1998) also highlights the intersection of language and human beings in social contexts as the core of language ideology. According to Woolard (1998:3), “representations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world are what we mean by

‘language ideology’”. Woolard (1998) provides two different perspectives on language ideology research. The first is about a shared belief system about a language, while the second is an implicit interpretation by language users within a particular context. Language ideologies have the potential to shape both the structure of sign languages and language practices (Woolard, 2020). For instance, research conducted in Ghana revealed that signers' ideologies about the socio-economic benefits of English language proficiency influenced their language usage and appreciation (Gillen et al., 2020). This influence extends to all language users, including hearing signers, emphasizing the importance of language ideological studies for language stability, development, and policymaking (Abudu, 2019; Calton, 2020; Krausneker, 2015). It is important to note that language users may not always be aware of their own language ideologies (Calton, 2020). Therefore, selecting appropriate methodologies is crucial in eliciting and understanding language ideology. In the subsequent subsection, we explore various methodologies employed to study language ideology within Deaf communities. By examining language ideologies and their impact on language structure, usage, and practices, researchers can gain insights into the complexities of sign language communities and contribute to language stability, policy development, and the overall understanding of language dynamics. The following subsection explores different methodologies employed to elicit language ideology within deaf communities.

5.1.2 Previous methods used in the field.

Studies focusing on language ideologies within sign language communities have seen a rise in recent years (e.g., Burns et al., 2001; Hill, 2011, 2012, 2015; Krausneker, 2015; Kusters, 2014a; Kusters & Sahasrabudhe, 2018; Kusters et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2022; Reagan, 2011). In the field of Deaf and sign language studies, researchers have used various methods for data elicitation, including interviewing, video-based data collection, focus group discussions, discourse analysis, ethnography, and autoethnography (Kusters et al., 2022). Among these methods, interviews and group discussions have emerged as the most prominent.

Kusters (2014a) conducted an extensive study on the language ideology of a local sign language (i.e., AdaSL) within Adamorobe village in Ghana. She employed participant observation and informal interactions to elicit the ideology of both signers and gesturers. The advantage of Kusters being a deaf researcher was evident in integrating into the deaf community, although eliciting ideology from gesturers posed a challenge (Kusters, 2014a, 2012). Other researchers, such as Gillen et al. (2020) and Hill (2011, 2012), have employed alternative approaches. Hill (2012), for instance, investigated attitudes towards American Sign Language (ASL) by asking participants to rate and classify signs from various signing varieties in video clips. Kusters et al. (2022) recommended using videos in interviews or

group discussions as a new and emerging trend for eliciting signers' ideologies. Hill's (2011) PhD thesis presents an in-depth methodological approach to language ideology in sign language studies, where he investigated ASL varieties among the American Deaf community, considering factors such as generation, race, and stage of sign language acquisition. He utilized interviews and questionnaires to elicit language ideologies from diverse signers. Similarly, Raicevic Bajic et al. (2021) adopted interviews and questionnaires to investigate ideology towards Serbian Sign Language and Deaf Education.

Focus group discussions have also been employed in sign language studies (e.g., Gillen et al., 2020; Kusters & Sahasrabudhe, 2018). Gillen et al. (2020:192) utilized focus group discussions to investigate sign language ideologies and literacy among Deaf Ghanaians, considering it a successful tool for data collection. On the other hand, Kusters and Sahasrabudhe (2018) conducted large group discussions (involving 30-100 members) to elicit language ideologies of deaf signers in Mumbai regarding gestures and signs. However, Kusters et al. (2022) note that using a large number of participants in group discussions may limit in-depth insights into individual attitudes.

It is important to acknowledge that in investigating language ideology, research methods can involve both direct and indirect approaches (Kircher & Zipp, 2022). The direct approach explicitly elicits participants' views through interviews or group discussions, but it may inhibit individuals from expressing their deeply ingrained language ideologies due to the observer's paradox. To address this, scholars often employ an indirect approach to complement the direct method (Hill, 2010). The indirect approach avoids immediate questions about language ideology and instead triggers subconscious views using linguistic items. However, it is worth noting that the indirect approach may involve fewer participants and can be time-consuming to set up (Hill, 2011).

This brief literature review presented the concept of language ideology within sign language (SL) communities and highlighted the importance of studying language ideologies in understanding language usage and structure. The review also surveyed previous research methods used to elicit language ideologies in deaf communities, including interviewing, group discussions, video-based data collection, and focus group discussions. The direct and indirect approaches to studying language ideology were discussed, highlighting the advantages and limitations of each method. Interviews and group discussions emerged as commonly used methods, while video-based data collection and focus group discussions have also proven effective in eliciting language ideologies. The choice of research method depends on the research objectives and the specific context under study. It is important to consider the advantages and limitations of each approach to ensure comprehensive insights into participants' language ideologies.

The next subsection (5.2) focuses on the research method for this chapter, fed by previous studies conducted in Ghana that explore language ideologies. These studies shed light on the unique context of Ghana and provide understandings into how language ideologies shape language usage and appreciation among users. By examining language ideologies in a specific cultural and linguistic context, we can better understand the complex interplay between language, ideology, and social dynamics in the Ghanaian context.

5.2 Research Method

This section introduces the research questions that are explored in the study. The first research question focuses on the interaction between sociolinguistic factors (gender, age, and education) and the Ghanaian signing community's body-base and space-base SASS production. It aims to understand the impact of these factors on the complexity and usage of SASS. The second research question examines the perceptions and associations of body-base and space-base SASS in the Ghanaian signing community, exploring how these vary based on sociolinguistic factors. The study aims to uncover patterns, correlations, and trends through surveys, interviews, and observations. The findings will contribute to understanding the sociolinguistic dynamics and cultural significance of SASS in Ghana, benefiting inclusive language practices and supporting the linguistic heritage of the deaf community.

In this chapter, the same group of 20 deaf participants who participated in the SASS production study in Chapter 4 were also used for the judgment experiment conducted in this study. Regarding social profiles, only the social variables of gender, age, and educational attainment were correlated with the distribution of SASS types in production during data analysis. To collect the data, the participants were asked to provide information about their background, which included gender, age, and education, before they were engaged in the SASS elicitation (see Chapter 4 section 4.2.2). To analyse the data, I employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The data were analysed for differences based on the social variables of gender, age, and education. These three social variables have been noted by some researchers (Eckert 1997; Hadjah 2016; Holmes 2001) to be vital in all sociolinguistic analyses. Kroskrity (2004) shows that the social profiles of language users can create multiple language ideologies.

In the judgment experiment, deaf participants were requested to provide their perspectives on questions regarding a SASS sign performed on the body versus one produced in space. This task involved a questionnaire and video stimuli. Each video stimulus comprised two video clips: in one clip, the model exhibited a noun, followed by a body-based SASS (e.g., Figure 131A), while the other displayed a space-based SASS following a noun (e.g., Figure 131B).

Although the video samples for this task featured my research assistant as the model, the participants were unaware. To ensure objectivity, the model's face was intentionally blurred, ensuring that participants' responses were not influenced by their knowledge of the model. Except for one participant, none questioned whether the model in the videos was my assistant.

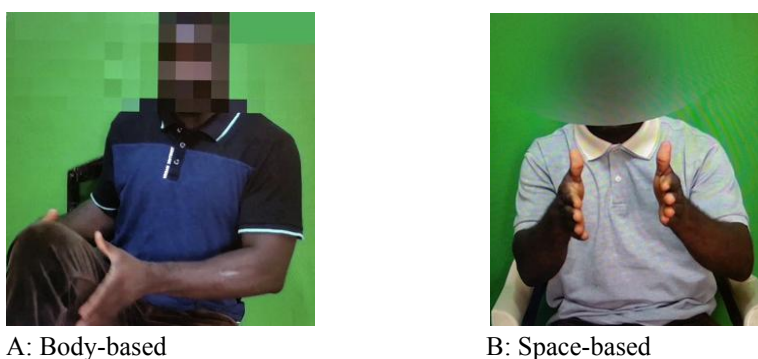


Figure 131: Example of SASS for snake

The selection of SASS and their corresponding referents for the task was collaborative, involving discussions with my deaf assistant. Additionally, our choices were informed by observations from previous studies involving participants in SASS elicitation and insights gathered from relevant literature on SASS. For instance, based on the work of Nyst and Tano (2018), we included the SASS that 'delimited the body part waist,' even though it had not been observed among GSL signers. The task's primary objective was to explore signers' perceptions of different types of SASS; hence, this particular aspect of using a waist SASS was not a cause for concern. To ensure accuracy and iconicity, my deaf assistant and I ensured that each selected SASS for both body- and space-based categories accurately represented the referent.

In the body-based SASS category, we selected SASS that delimited various body parts, such as the index finger, fist handshape, upper leg (thigh), arm, bundle fingers plus thumb, and the waist. On the other hand, for the space-based SASS, we created distance using one or two hands. The one-hand SASS involved creating distance between finger(s) and the thumb, while the two-hand SASS created distance using the index finger or entire hand. We also incorporated movement in the form of tracing, to indicate the referent's extent.

The referent entities used in the task, including beans, egg, pepper, snake, tomato, tree, and yam, were carefully chosen based on their common presence in the environment and their suitability for iconic depiction using the selected body-based or space-based SASS. We drew from relevant literature (e.g., Nyst & Tano 2018; Nyst, 2018, 2016a, 2007) and our fieldwork experience to ensure the

appropriateness of these referents. Table 42 summarises the SASS used in the judgment task, along with their corresponding referents:

Table 42: SASS and their corresponding referents used in the judgment task.

TYPE OF SASS		REFERENTS
SPACE-BASED	BODY-BASED	
Index & thumb (See fig. 2A)	Index (See fig. 2B)	Beans
Index & thumb (See fig. 6A)	Buddle fingers (See fig. 6B)	Egg
Index & thumb (See fig. 7A)	Index (See fig. 7B)	Pepper
Flat hands (See fig. 8A)	Thigh (See fig. 8B)	Snake
Index fingers (See fig. 9A)	Fist (See fig. 9B)	Tomato
Curved hands (See fig. 10A)	Waist (See fig. 10B)	Tree
Curved hands (See fig. 11A)	Arm (See fig. 11B)	Yam

Participants in the judgment experiment were asked to respond to the following seven questions based on their usage of body-based and space-based SASS:

1. Which of the signers do you think grew up in the village?
2. Which of the signers do you think is not from Ghana?
3. Which signer do you think would be the oldest?
4. Which signer do you think is well educated?
5. Which of the signers do you think could easily be understood by a larger group of deaf people?
6. Which signers would be easy to communicate with if you met them?
7. Which signers do you think got a better (academic) result in a deaf school?

The answers provided by participants to these questions were used to assess the language ideologies associated with the usage of body-based and space-based SASS among deaf individuals in Ghana. For instance, in analysing the results, questions 1 and 2 were employed to ascertain which type of SASS (i.e., body-based, or space-based) could be considered indigenous to Ghana, and if there were any differences between the two types in that respect. Questions 1 and 4 were used to determine to what extent there were differences in prestige associated with the different SASS types.

We gained insights into the reasoning and thought processes behind their decision-making by requesting participants to explain their choices. The format of the questions required participants to indicate their choice by selecting either "Signer 1" or "Signer 2" on the questionnaire and explaining their selection. This approach allowed for the collection of qualitative data alongside the quantitative responses. This qualitative data provided a deeper understanding of participants' language ideologies and perspectives on SASS usage. The approach, therefore, enriches the analysis and interpretation of the results, offering nuanced insights into participants' beliefs, attitudes, and cultural influences.

To facilitate participants in providing thorough explanations, the following options were provided on the question paper:

- a. Because the signer used a body part sign (body-based SASS).
- b. Because the signer used space SASS (space-based SASS).
- c. Because the signer used ASL.
- d. Because the signer used natural signs [i.e., GESTURES].
- e. Because the signer used GSL¹⁰⁵.

These prompts encouraged participants to engage in reflective thinking and articulate their rationale for choosing a specific SASS type. This process of reflection and explanation prompted participants to consider their language ideologies, cultural background, and personal experiences that influenced their decision. Consequently, the responses provided a richer understanding of the complex factors that shape individuals' language choices and ideologies. Analytically, providing options and prompts helped standardise the answers and make them more comparable and interpretable. Clearly defining the choices as "Signer 1" or "Signer 2" and requesting participants to explain their selection facilitated consistency in the data collection process. This standardisation increased the reliability and validity of the study's findings, allowing for more accurate comparisons and generalisations. Including options such as ASL, GSL, and natural signs acknowledged the potential influence of different sign languages and signing systems on participants' judgments. This allowed for exploring participants' familiarity, preferences, and perceptions associated with specific sign languages or signing systems, thereby contributing to an analysis of language ideologies. By providing these options on the question paper, I ensured participants had a structured framework to express their thoughts and reasoning. In summary, including options and prompts for participants' explanations or selections in the study was important to

¹⁰⁵ Please note that at this stage of the study, the full extent of diversity within GSL was not yet apparent to me. Consequently, labels like "ENGLISH" and "BROKEN" were not initially employed during our questioning; however, participants introduced and used these terms in addition to "GHANA" to reference GSL.

capture qualitative insights, standardise responses, and encourage reflective thinking. This approach enabled me to gain deeper insights into participants' language ideologies and preferences, fostering a better understanding of the research topic.

The judgment task was conducted as an interview, with my research assistant serving as the interviewer. The decision to use a deaf interviewer fostered a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for participants, ensuring they could communicate freely and comfortably using sign language. By having a deaf interviewer, who shares a common linguistic and cultural background with the participants, it was anticipated that the participants would feel more at ease and be able to express themselves fully. This approach aimed to create a conducive environment that would encourage participants to share their experiences, perspectives, and insights without any barriers or limitations imposed by a hearing interviewer. This approach allowed participants to respond to certain questions in an open-ended manner, providing more in-depth insights. For instance, when participants were asked to indicate either "Signer 1" or "Signer 2," some participants responded with statements like "both Signer 1 and Signer 2" or "I have not seen this SASS sign before." This open-ended format enabled the study to uncover additional aspects of participants' language ideologies.

In analyzing the data, I began by transcribing the interviews with the 20 deaf participants to ensure accurate representation. The data was then organized systematically, keeping individual responses separate for each question. I used thematic coding to identify recurring themes, patterns, and trends related to the study's objectives, categorizing them into meaningful themes. I also assigned numerical values to participants' responses and integrated the data into an MS Excel sheet for an overview and to explore relationships between variables.

This data-gathering approach allowed for examining explicit and implicit data, providing a more nuanced understanding of signers' ideologies on SASS. Combining different approaches to the data collection contributed to a deeper understanding and explanation of participants' language ideologies. Therefore, this chapter's findings are presented in the order described in this research method, ensuring a structured and organised presentation of the results.

5.3 Results

The following section presents the results of our study, focusing on the perceptions of SASS among deaf signers. In Section 2.1, I delve into the participants' assessments and perspectives regarding the use of SASS, aiming to gain insight into their perceptions of its appropriateness and effectiveness in various contexts. This section analyses their judgments, shedding light on the ideological dimensions surrounding SASS usage within the Ghanaian signing community.

Moving forward, in Section 5.3.2, I delve into the correlations between SASS and sociolinguistic profiles. By examining the relationship between SASS usage and sociolinguistic factors such as gender, age, and education, I aim to uncover any potential associations or influences. This section explores whether and to what extent these factors shape individuals' preferences and practices regarding SASS.

By analyzing the results from both sections, I aim to provide insights into the perceptions, judgments, and sociolinguistic factors that shape the usage and understanding of SASS among deaf signers in Ghana.

5.3.1 Judgments and Perception of SASS

This section presents the findings from the judgment experiment conducted to investigate the perceptions of deaf signers (n=20) regarding body-based and space-based SASS. This experiment aimed to examine how these signers perceived and evaluated the application of 14 SASS¹⁰⁶ in response to specific questions.

The judgment experiment involved asking the signers questions about using SASS and asking them to provide their views and preferences. The participants were specifically instructed to consider the application of body-based and space-based SASS and to articulate their opinions in response to the provided questions.

The following subsections present the results of the judgment experiment, focusing on how the signers perceived and evaluated the use of body-based and space-based SASS.

Question A: Which signers do you think grew up in the village?



A: Space-based SASS

vs



B: Body-base SASS

Figure 132: SASS signs to depict BEANS

Among 16 participants, which accounted for the majority (80%), the prevailing perception was that the body-based SASS (Figure 132B) were associated with

¹⁰⁶ Both the body-based and space-based SASS consisted of seven distinct signs each.

individuals from rural or village backgrounds. Conversely, a smaller group of three participants (15%) believed using space-based SASS (Figure 132A) was associated with villagers. However, it is important to note that one participant (5%) expressed uncertainty regarding this association.

Participants who attributed the body-based SASS to village signers provided insightful comments (e.g., 1a & b) below. These comments shed light on the underlying reasons for their perceptions and interpretations.

1)

- A. VILLAGE USE THIS SASS: index_tip BECAUSE NOT HAVE GHANA.
'Uneducated deaf members use this body-based SASS (i.e., index_tip) because they do not know GSL'
- B. ILLITERATE USE THIS SASS: index_tip UNDERSTAND COMMUNICATION
'Uneducated deaf members use the body-based SASS (i.e., index_tip) to facilitate communication'

The participants' perceptions regarding the body-based SASS revealed distinct associations. While some participants linked it to villagers, others connected it to the concept of iconicity and locally evolved signs in Ghana. These implicit ideologies suggest that body-based SASS represents iconicity and the incorporation of locally developed signs within the Ghanaian signing community.

During the study, participants provided descriptions of the body-based SASS sign using various terms such as "NATURAL" (Figure 133), "VILLAGE" (Figure 134), or "ILLITERATE" (Figure 135) signs.¹⁰⁷ Those who described the body-based SASS sign as NATURAL, VILLAGE or ILLITERATE considered it as part of GESTURE (a local evolved sign), and those who said it was GSL referred to it as GHANA (i.e., ENGLISH or BROKEN) or FOREIGN¹⁰⁸ (i.e., ASL). Interestingly, some participants acknowledged that the body- and space-based SASS signs are part of GSL. However, they perceived the body-based SASS primarily used by villagers or individuals deemed uneducated (unschooled) signers.

¹⁰⁷ These labels (NATURAL, VILLAGE, ILLITERATE) are regarded as part of the signing varieties that exist in Ghana. It is possible that each signer had different understanding of the terms. But generally, it connotes the idea of the sign being iconic, Ghanaian or the fact that it is used by someone who does not know the standard variety of GSL.

¹⁰⁸ FOREIGN signs are considered ASL, or sign language used in other countries.

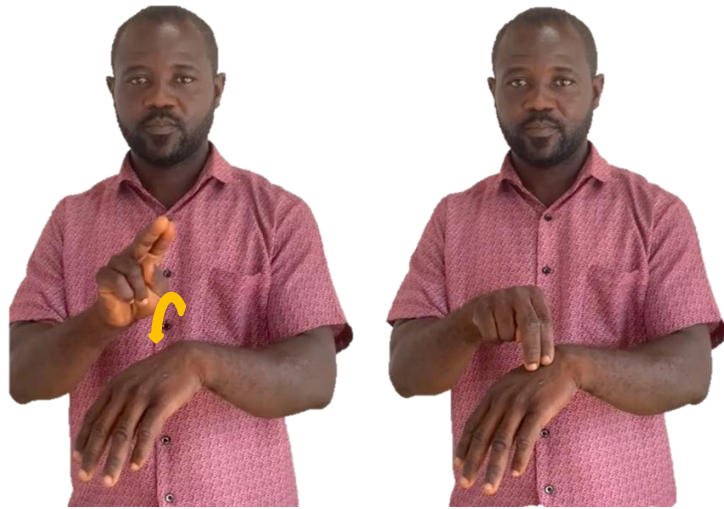


Figure 133: NATURAL



Figure 134: VILLAGE

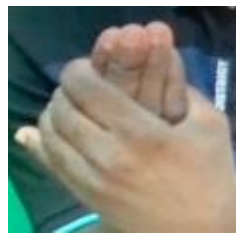


Figure 135: ILLITERATE

Question B: Which of the signer do you think is not from Ghana?



vs



A: Space-based SASS

B: Body-based SASS

Figure 136: SASS signs to depict an EGG.

The data indicate that 14 participants, constituting the majority (70%), associated the space-based SASS (Figure 136A) with individuals not from Ghana. A minority group of 10% believed that the body-based SASS (Figure 136B) signer was not from Ghana, while another 10% perceived both SASS users as Ghanaians. One participant (5%) expressed uncertainty, and another individual (5%) considered both signers non-Ghanaians.

Interestingly, the participants who believed that both types of SASS are used in Ghana, made distinctions between them. According to their perception, the space-based SASS was seen as ASL or FOREIGN, while the body-based SASS was viewed as a NATURAL sign. This suggests that within the deaf community in Ghana, there is a recognition of the presence of ASL and locally evolved sign language, each associated with different types of SASS.

Most participants who perceived the space-based SASS (Figure 136A) as foreign expressed that it was unfamiliar, and they believed that many Ghanaians might not use it. Some participants also mentioned that white people use space-based SASS. These comments shed light on the participants' perspectives and highlight their awareness of the cultural associations and perceived usage patterns of the different types of SASS. The comments below (see, e.g., 2), among others, provide further insight into the participants' perceptions and opinions on this matter.

2)

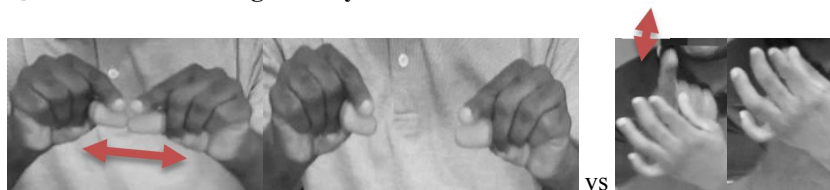
- A. SASS: *curved_index+thumb* NOT COMMON IN GHANA. IT USE SPACE, OTHER SASS: *bundle_fingers* GSL
'This space base SASS (i.e., *curved_index+thumb*) is not common in Ghana, it uses space. The other body based SASS (i.e., *bundle_fingers*) is a GSL sign'
- B. WHITE PEOPLE USE SASS: *curved_index+thumb*; IT ASL OR FOREIGN
'White foreigners use this space based SASS (i.e., *curved_index+thumb*). It is an ASL sign'
- C. FOREIGNERS USE SASS: *curved_index+thumb*, SASS: *bundle_fingers* GSL
'Foreigners use this space based SASS (i.e., *curved_index+thumb*). This body based SASS (i.e., *bundle_fingers*) is a GSL sign'
- D. SASS: *curved_index+thumb* ASL, SASS: *bundle_fingers* GSL
'This space based SASS (i.e., *curved_index+thumb*) is an ASL sign. The body based SASS (i.e., *bundle_fingers*) is a GSL sign'
- E. GHANAIAANS DON'T USE THAT SASS: *curved_index+thumb* ASL; OTHER SASS: *bundle_fingers* GSL
'Ghanaians do not use this spaced based SASS (i.e., *curved_index+thumb*), it is an ASL sign. The other body based SASS (i.e., *bundle_fingers*) is a GSL sign'

Additional explanations provided by participants shed further light on their perceptions of the space-based SASS (Figure 136A). Some participants noted that space-based SASS could be appropriate for packaged referents, such as tomato paste in a sachet. However, if the same handshape was used to represent an egg (as in question B above), it was perceived as not being Ghanaian. This distinction suggests that the specific referent being depicted can influence the appropriateness of space-based SASS.

In contrast, some participants from the minority group (30%) acknowledged the association of space-based SASS with ASL or a foreign sign language. However, they hesitated to conclude that the signer who used it was a foreigner based solely on that fact. It is worth noting that the model's complexion may have influenced the participants' stance since the concept of "foreigner" is commonly associated with a white person rather than a person of black ethnicity, like the model. Importantly, it should be recognised that labelling a sign as foreign or associated with ASL does not necessarily imply discouragement of its use or absence within the Ghanaian deaf community.

These additional perspectives highlight the nuanced understanding of participants regarding the usage and cultural connotations of space-based SASS. The participants' explanations demonstrate the complexities involved in evaluating the origins and associations of specific sign forms within the Ghanaian signing context.

Question C: Which signer do you think would be the oldest?



A: Space-based SASS

B: Body-based SASS

Figure 137: SASS signs to depict PEPPER.

A significant proportion of the participants, specifically 65% of the total sample size of 20, attributed the usage of space-based SASS (Figure 137A) to older individuals. This perception stemmed from their belief that space-based SASS, being foreign (such as ASL), was used in the past when deaf people in Ghana used ASL. As an example (3), one participant expressed this view by stating,

- 3) I USE SEE SASS: index+thumb_extention WHEN YOUNG, BUT NO MORE USE
'I used to see this space-based SASS (i.e., index+thumb_extention) when I was young, but it is no more used'

According to the majority, contemporary deaf individuals in Ghana primarily use body-based SASS (Figure 137B) for referring to pepper. Some participants acknowledged the space-based SASS as part of GSL and perceived it as natural or iconic, while others considered it ASL or foreign. Interestingly, one participant mentioned that space-based SASS was used in the past because, during that time, deaf individuals did not know how to sign; thus relied on NATURAL signs. Another participant noted that both signs are used in Ghana, but the body-based SASS is more prevalent among the younger deaf signers.

In contrast, a portion of the minority group (25%) believed that the user of body-based SASS was the oldest. They claimed to have witnessed its use among deaf individuals but stated that it is no longer currently used. They considered body-based SASS a natural sign or part of GSL while perceiving space-based SASS as foreign. One participant (5%) was uncertain about who could be viewed as the oldest but emphasised that the space-based SASS was unfamiliar to him, whereas the body-based SASS was known as part of GSL. Another participant (5%) suggested that both users could be old, acknowledging the existence of sign variation and considering both signs as natural and part of GSL.

These diverse perspectives highlight the participants' perceptions regarding the age associations of body-based and space-based SASS. Their explanations reflect the belief that the usage of these signs has changed over time within the deaf community in Ghana, with body-based SASS being more commonly used among the younger generation.

Question D: Which signer do you think is well educated?



vs



A: Space-based SASS

B: Body-based SASS

Figure 138: SASS signs to depict SNAKE.

An overwhelming majority of 16 participants, specifically 80% out of the total sample size of 20, perceived the usage of space-based SASS (Figure 138A) as characteristic of an educated individual. They perceived it as part of GSL and considered it a NATURAL sign. Two participants even mentioned that it could be seen as ASL, GSL, and NATURAL. They emphasised that space-based SASS is used in educational settings and is well-known among educated individuals within the deaf community. Additionally, one participant provided alternative SASS options (both space-based & body-based) for referring to a snake, demonstrating the presence of both variations in the signers' language repertoire.

Another participant explained that their judgment of space-based SASS being associated with an educated person was because the parameters used in the sign were phonologically conventionalised. Therefore, they considered the space-based SASS sign part of ASL or GSL while perceiving the body-based SASS (Figure 138B) sign as a NATURAL sign.

Among the minority group, 5% of participants believed that both signers could be educated, while the remaining 25% felt that the user of body-based SASS was educated. However, within this subgroup, there were conflicting views. Some participants claimed that the choice of body-based SASS was due to being part of GSL, while others believed it was ASL, and the space-based SASS was either GSL or ASL. Some participants considered the body-based SASS as iconic or a NATURAL sign, representing the LOCAL. One participant made an intriguing comment (see example 4 below), stating,

- 4) WHEN USE SASS: leg_delimited PEOPLE AFRAID AND RUN-AWAY.
 ‘When you use this body-based SASS (i.e., leg_delimited) people will disassociate themselves from you’

This statement reflects a perception ideology that certain locally evolved GSL signs can be humorous and provoke laughter. The majority links space-based SASS with educated individuals, perceiving it as part of GSL and NATURAL. At the same time, the minority expresses differing opinions, including views on body-based SASS being part of GSL or ASL and the presence of humorous connotations in locally evolved GSL signs. These varying perspectives provide insights into how participants perceive the educational background associated with the use of body-based and space-based SASS.

Question E: Which signer do you think could easily be understood by a larger group of deaf people?



A: Space-based SASS

vs



B: Body-based SASS

Figure 139: SASS signs to depict TOMATO.

An overwhelming majority of 19 participants (95%) expressed that body-based SASS (Figure 139B) could be easily understood by a larger group of deaf people when used. However, there were differing opinions regarding the specific sign language associated with it. Some participants considered it part of ASL, while others considered it part of GSL or a NATURAL sign.

Below (see, e.g., 5) are some of the comments by participants who highlighted this viewpoint.

- 5)

- A. PEOPLE KNOW TOMATOES SASS: fist, SASS: round AMERICA
'People are familiar with tomatoes as this body-based SASS (i.e., fist), while the space-based SASS (i.e., round) is part of ASL'
- B. PAST WHITE WAY DIFFICULT SASS: round WHEN SCHOOL LEARN WHEN PEOPLE TEACHER SEE SASS: fist PAST WHITE DIFFERENT SAY SASS: round DEAF COPY SASS: fist OTHER THEY UNDERSTAND
'In the past, there were ASL space-based SASS (i.e., round) and it was challenging. In deaf school, the teacher sees our body-base SASS (i.e., fist), and they acknowledge that ASL signs are different from what we do. When others copy or use our body-base SASS (i.e., fist), they understand better'

It is worth noting that some participants who do not perceive a distinction between GSL and ASL tend to refer to signs they are familiar with as ASL. Additionally, participants mentioned that using body-based SASS (Figure 139B) to describe tomatoes was a common practice among deaf individuals. They explained that they had never seen this space-based SASS (Figure 139A) used for tomatoes but speculated that it might be used if the referent is a canned tomato or a flat object. According to their perspective, the body-based SASS is preferred and widely used because it effectively conveys the visual aspects of shape and size.

In contrast, a minority of participants (5%), represented by a single individual, believed that a larger group of deaf people could easily understand the space-based SASS. This participant viewed the space-based SASS as ASL, and since all deaf members were familiar with ASL in Ghana, s/he considered it readily understood. However, s/he did acknowledge the body-based SASS as GSL. Still, due to people's preference for ASL in Ghana, he was influenced by the fact that all deaf members in Ghana could easily understand a sign associated with ASL.

These divergent views shed light on how participants perceive the ease of comprehension and preference among deaf individuals regarding body-based and space-based SASS. As observed the majority considered the body-based SASS (in Figure 139B) to be easily understood by a larger group, while the minority perceived the space-based SASS (in Figure 139A) to have broader comprehension due to its association with ASL.

Question F: Which signer do you think would be easy to communicate with if you met them?



vs



A: Space-based SASS

B: Body-based SASS

Figure 140: SASS signs to depict a TREE.

The majority of 16 participants (80%) believed that they would find it easy to communicate with someone using the space-based SASS (Figure 140A) if they were to meet them. Their reasoning was based on the perception that it is a common and iconic sign. While some participants considered it GSL, others mentioned it ASL. Interestingly, some participants indicated that it could be both ASL and GSL. One participant explained that deaf Ghanaians typically sign trees without specifying the size or shape, implying a preference for the space-based SASS in such contexts. However, many participants expressed unfamiliarity with the body-based SASS (Figure 140B) that incorporates the trunk element.

Participants acknowledged that space-based and body-based SASS signs might exist in Ghana, but they considered the body-based SASS more easily understood by them. Among the minority group, 15% expressed confidence in understanding the body-based SASS. On the other hand, one (5%) of the minority group was unsure of the answer but mentioned that s/he had never seen the space-based or body-based SASS used for the entity tree before. However, this participant stated that the space-based SASS is a sign associated with ASL.

These findings reflect the majority's perception that the space-based SASS is a common and easily understandable sign, potentially due to its iconic nature. Conversely, some participants expressed limited familiarity with the body-based SASS used for the entity tree, suggesting that it might not be as commonly used or recognised among the participants. The minority group showed a range of views, with some expressing confidence in understanding the body-based SASS and others being unsure or unfamiliar with both signs.

Question G: Which signer do you think got a better result in a deaf school?

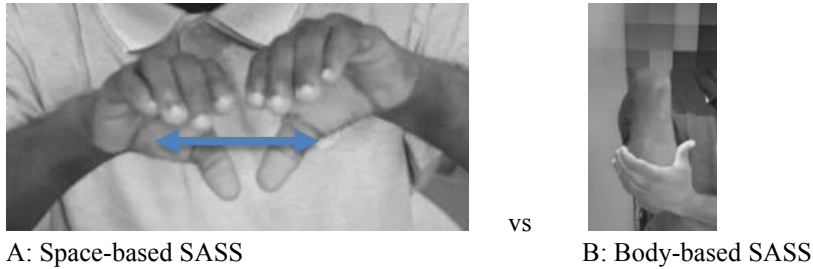


Figure 141: SASS signs to depict a YAM.

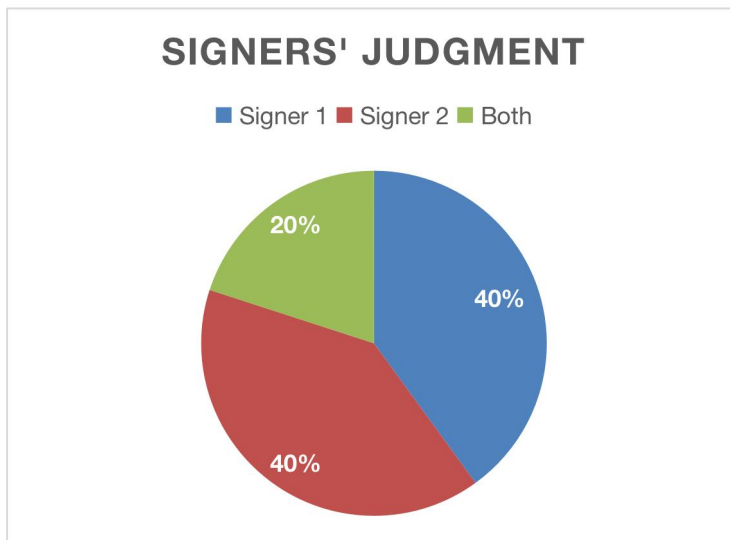


Figure 142: Signers' judgement on the SASS that indicates an assumed high academic performance.

Figure 142 below depicts the distribution of signers' responses to the question. The findings reveal that 40% of the participants considered the space-based SASS (Figure 141A) iconic and capable of effectively conveying the intended description. Consequently, they perceived the user of the space-based SASS to have a high academic performance. This group also attributed the sign to GSL. In contrast, another 40% of participants regarded the body-based SASS (Figure 141B) as iconic and capable of conveying the description effectively, associating it with high academic performance. However, within this group, opinions diverged, with some identifying the body-based SASS as ASL while others considered it a GSL sign.

Conversely, 20% of participants agreed that both signs, the space-based and body-based SASS, could indicate an assumed high academic performance based on

the question. They recognised that these signs are employed by deaf individuals and classified them as both GSL and NATURAL. This distribution of responses provides insights into the participants' perceptions of academic performance associated with using different SASS signs. The findings indicate that the space- and body-based SASS signs were attributed with iconicity and the potential to convey descriptions effectively. Moreover, while some participants associated the body-based SASS with ASL, others viewed it as a GSL sign. The recognition that deaf individuals utilise both signs suggest their prevalence within the deaf community and their classification as GSL and NATURAL.

Summary

The primary objective of this investigation was to gain a deeper understanding of how signers perceive and assess the application of SASS. Most participants associated the body-based SASS with individuals from rural or village backgrounds, while a smaller group associated the space-based SASS with villagers. Some participants linked the body-based SASS to iconicity and locally evolved signs in Ghana, considering it representative of LOCAL or iconic gestures. Participants used terms like "NATURAL," "VILLAGE," or "ILLITERATE" to describe the body-based SASS signs.

Regarding which signer is not from Ghana, most participants associated the space-based SASS with individuals, not from Ghana. Some participants mentioned that the space-based SASS was unfamiliar and believed white people might use it. However, participants recognised both types of SASS within the Ghanaian signing community, associating the Space-based SASS with ASL or foreign sign languages. Regarding age associations, the majority associated the space-based SASS with older individuals, believing it was used when ASL was prevalent in Ghana. Some participants mentioned that contemporary deaf individuals in Ghana primarily use body-based SASS for referring to certain concepts. However, a minority group believed that the user of body-based SASS was the oldest, mentioning its past usage but considering it no longer in current use. Regarding educational background, most associated the space-based SASS with educated individuals, perceiving it as part of GSL or a natural sign. Some participants emphasised its usage in educational settings and among educated individuals in the deaf community. The minority group expressed differing opinions, including views on body-based SASS being part of GSL or ASL and perceiving humorous connotations of local signs.

When asked which signer could be easily understood by a larger group of deaf people, the majority believed that body-based SASS could be easily understood. A minority felt that space-based SASS could be easily understood due to its association with ASL. Some participants associated it with ASL, GSL, or a natural sign.

Regarding ease of communication, if they were to meet the signers, the majority believed it would be easy to communicate with someone using space-based SASS, perceiving it as common and iconic. Some participants considered it GSL or ASL. Participants acknowledged the existence of both types of SASS in Ghana but expressed limited familiarity with the body-based SASS used for the entity tree.

In terms of academic performance, participants attributed both space-based and body-based SASS to have potential to convey the description of an individual with high academic performance. Some associated body-based SASS with ASL, while others considered it a GSL sign. A group of participants recognised both signs as utilised by deaf individuals, classifying them as both GSL and natural.

Overall, the findings highlight participants' perspectives on the usage and associations of body-based and space-based SASS within the Ghanaian signing community, shedding light on factors that shape those perspectives such as rural or village associations, familiarity, educational background, comprehension, communication, and academic performance.

5.3.2 Exploring the Correlations: SASS and Sociolinguistic Profiles

This section investigates the potential associations between language usage and sociolinguistic profile, including age, gender, and education. Building upon the findings presented in Chapter 4 regarding the distribution of SASS, this study further explores the influence of social variables on signers' ideologies and SASS production. By integrating the outcomes of the preceding analysis with data pertaining to participants' language ideology, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of the interplay between social variables and signers' attitudes towards SASS.

As depicted in Figure 143, space-based SASS were prominently employed throughout the entire dataset by deaf participants. In the Animal Encounter narrative data, there were 135 instances of space-based SASS used, contrasted with 20 occurrences of body-based SASS. Similarly, within the Haptic task data, 584 occurrences of space-based SASS were elicited, while only 90 instances of body-based SASS were observed. An intriguing pattern emerged from the frequency distribution, as it presented a consistent ratio in both tasks—Animal Encounter narrative and Haptic task. Specifically, 87% of the SASS produced were space-based, while the remaining 13% were body-based. This pattern underscores signers' pronounced preference for utilizing space-based SASS consistently across tasks.

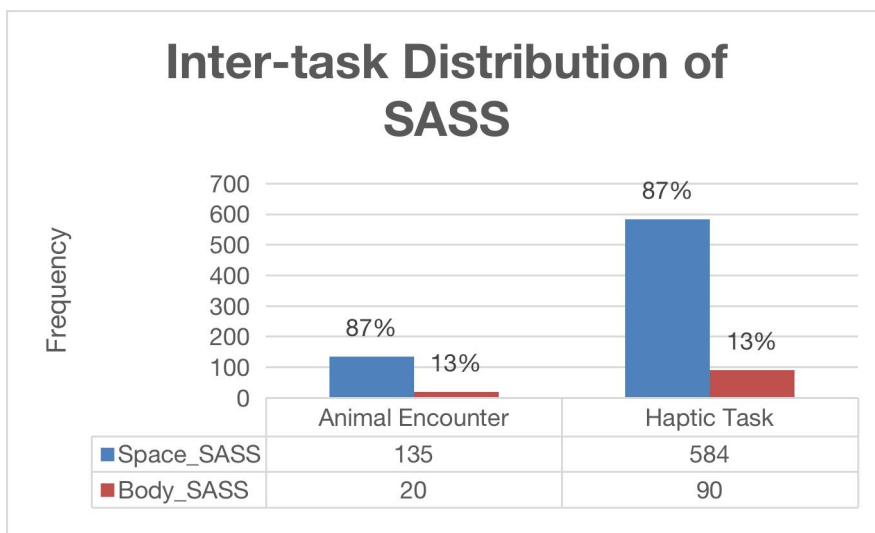


Figure 143: Distribution of body-based and space-based SASS in the data.

Through an analysis of participant data, the study concludes that the social variables of gender, age, and education do not significantly impact SASS production. In other words, no large difference was found between men and women across various age groups. Strikingly, a notable observation was that non-formally educated signer abstained from employing body-based SASS. This intriguing trend could potentially be linked to avoidance behaviors or hypercorrection arising from concerns about stigmatization. Below is the breakdown of SASS type distribution in terms of production and its correlation with gender, age and education as social variables. Consequently, I conclude that the social variables examined in this study do not substantially impact the SASS production among the participants.

Distribution of SASS types in production and Associated Social Variables

Whereas the previous sub-study used a judgement task to evaluate signers’ attitudes vis a vis space-based and body-based SASS signs, in this sub-study, I look at the relation between the distribution of SASS types and sociolinguistic characteristics. To this end, I will examine the distribution of space- and body-based SASS signs in the production task in Chapter 4 and see how this distribution squares with the sociolinguistic characteristics of the signers involved.

It was observed that females exhibited a higher usage of body-based SASS 61 (54%) compared to males 52 (46%). Conversely, males demonstrated a higher use of space-based SASS 393 (55%) than females 326 (45%). However, the percentage differences in the distribution of SASS based on gender were marginal, making it challenging to establish variation in SASS usage between genders.

Unique patterns emerge regarding the distribution of body- and space-based SASS among different age groups. Younger adults (age 25-44), comprising 12 individuals, exhibited a significantly higher usage of both body-based SASS (42%) and space-based SASS (41%) compared to other age groups. Conversely, senior adults (age 65 and above) comprising of one individual displayed lower usage of both body-based and space-based SASS compared to different age groups.

The analysis revealed the hierarchical distribution trajectory that SASS production was highest among younger adult, followed by one young people (age 15-24), six older adults (age 45-64), and one senior adults. Figure 144 depicts a graphical representation in the form of a bar chart, illustrating the distribution of body-based and space-based SASS across various age groups. Notably, due to an uneven distribution of participants across age and education group, result is given in percentages.

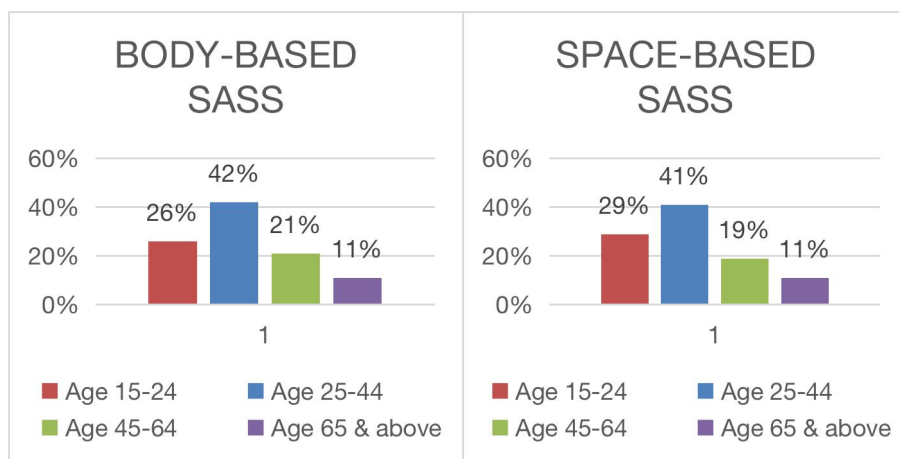


Figure 144: Distribution of SASS based on age groups.

Based on education, participants were classified into four categories: one individual with no formal education, eight participants with basic education, four participants with secondary education, and seven participants with tertiary education. The distribution of SASS based on participants' education level yielded intriguing results, potentially influenced by the language norms within the deaf community. The participant without formal education did not employ any body-based SASS. This finding is noteworthy since this type of SASS is conventionally associated with illiteracy. Surprisingly, the individual without formal education did not use it; however, this may be due to a conscious avoidance of signs with derogatory connotations within the deaf community. Conversely, all participants within other educational groups used body-based SASS, predominantly observed among those

with basic education, 8 SASS and secondary education, 8 SASS (42% each) and less used among those with tertiary education, 3 SASS (16%). Regarding space-based SASS, all educational groups demonstrated usage without significant differences (No Education = 19% (24 SASS), Basic Education = 29% (38 SASS), Secondary Education = 22% (29 SASS), Tertiary Education = 30% (39 SASS)). Figure 145 summarises the distribution of SASS based on participants' educational levels.

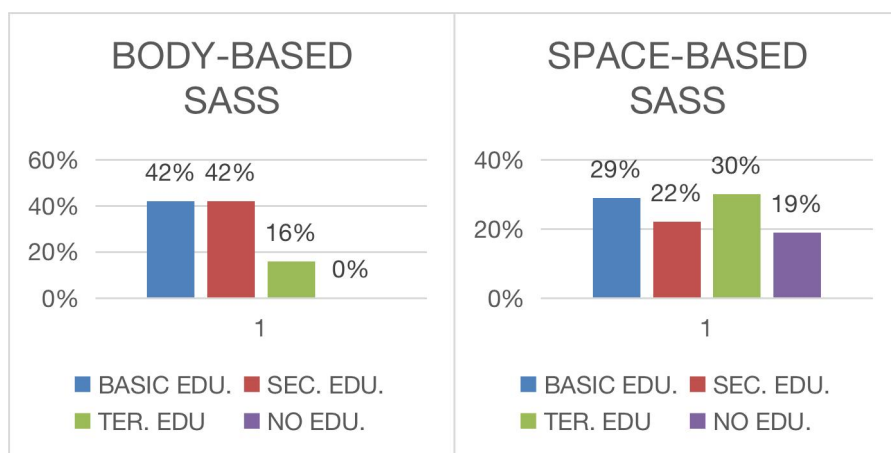


Figure 145: Distribution of SASS based on education.

Through an analysis of SASS distribution and its correlation with social factors, namely gender, age, and education, this study reveals interesting patterns and trends. While slight variations were observed, no significant differences were found, indicating that social factors do not substantially influence SASS usage among the participants.

Summary

This section demonstrated the potential associations between language usage and sociolinguistic profile, specifically focusing on age, gender, and education. Drawing upon the findings presented in Chapter 4 regarding the distribution of SASS, this study further explores the influence of social variables on SASS production.

The study concludes that the social variables of gender, age, and education do not significantly impact signers' SASS production. Specifically, no significant differences in SASS production were found between male and female participants, nor were there any significant age-related discrepancies. Furthermore, although participants with lower levels of education exhibited a slightly higher complexity in SASS production, this difference was not significant. Therefore, it can be inferred that the social variables examined in this study do not substantially influence the

production of SASS among the participants. It is important to note that comparisons were made based on average scores due to an uneven distribution of participants across age and education groups.

The language norms within the deaf community influence the distribution of SASS based on participants' education levels. Participants with no formal education did not employ any body-based SASS, which is conventionally associated with illiteracy. This finding is intriguing and suggests a conscious avoidance of signs with derogatory connotations in the deaf community.

Overall, these findings contribute to our understanding of the distribution of SASS in relation to gender, age, and education. Although some patterns and trends exist, the differences observed are not significant, indicating that social factors do not substantially influence SASS usage among the participants.

5.4 Discussion

Generally, the perceptions of signers regarding SASS in Ghana have not been reported in any academic work. The findings in this chapter, as revealed through the judgment experiment on SASS (i.e., body-based & space-based), address key ideological issues related to SASS usage in Ghana.

In brief, body-based SASS was perceived as indigenous or native to Ghana, serving as an appropriate iconic device. It was commonly linked to uneducated deaf individuals, villagers, the younger generation, and a local sign. In contrast, space-based SASS was generally regarded as foreign, yet acknowledged for its use within the Ghanaian signing community. It carried associations with prestige, ASL, white people/foreigners, educated individuals, and the older generation of signers.

Participants' perceptions suggested that body-based SASS was commonly used in everyday communication among the signing community in Ghana compared to space-based SASS. However, this perception did not align with the SASS elicitation results, which revealed a predominant usage of space-based SASS. As previously suggested, this discrepancy could be attributed to avoidance strategies or hypercorrection tendencies. This phenomenon was particularly evident in the case of the participant with no formal education. The uneven distribution of participants across educational levels, although a limitation, indicated that signers particularly stigmatized (e.g., uneducated) individuals might tend to avoid using this variant more frequently in an observer's paradox.

Nonetheless, the study offers perspectives into the ideology and attitudes prevailing in the urban deaf community. For instance, an interesting observation emerged when participants were asked about their personal preference for SASS. Despite agreeing that body-based SASS is widely used and easily comprehensible, the majority (80%) expressed a preference for space-based SASS as their personal choice. This preference could originate from various factors, including individual

language ideologies, perceptions of linguistic aesthetics, or the association of space-based SASS with prestige. The findings reveal that participants attributed assumed high academic performance to both variants. This assumption likely arises from the fact that both variants are used by all categories of students within a school setting. It would thus be biased for them to attribute superior academic performance to either variant. A comment from one of the participants further hints at the situation. She noted that within formal settings and interactions with their teachers, the space-based SASS associated with ASL might be employed in the classroom. However, outside the classroom, the deaf community tends to use body-based SASS on campus or among themselves. This observation underscores the nuanced dynamics of SASS usage within different contexts.

Foreign or local: Body-based SASS as marking Ghanaian identity of GSL

One significant finding is the distinction between body-based and space-based SASS in terms of their origin. Body-based SASS is regarded as indigenous to Ghana, reflecting its close association with local communities and the second generation of GSL signers. Conversely, space-based SASS is perceived as foreign, likely due to its perceived connection with ASL and its introduction through formal education. Furthermore, it is worth noting that participants' interpretations of body-based SASS varied. Some attributed it to GSL, while others particularly identify it as LOCAL, used by individuals in rural areas or signers with limited education.

On the other hand, participants who categorised it as GSL perceived it as part of the ENGLISH, BROKEN or even associated it with foreign sign languages such as ASL. This view indicates the participants' diverse understanding of 'GSL', highlighting the language's multifaceted perspectives within the Ghanaian signing community.¹⁰⁹ For instance, while some participants may consider GSL as another name for ASL, others may perceive it as a completely distinct language, with GSL as a vernacular and ASL as a foreign language. This perspective variation highlights the diverse understandings and interpretations of the relationship between GSL and ASL within the Ghanaian signing community.

The study also reveals that social connotations and language ideology influence the choice of SASS. The choice of SASS is often influenced by the nature of the depicted referent. Body-based SASS is associated with villagers and is a common variant used in everyday communication. In contrast, space-based SASS is linked to educated individuals and carries prestige. Participants consciously opt for the prestigious variant in certain contexts, indicating the influence of social factors on their language choices. Interestingly, while participants recognise the prestige and common usage of the two SASS variants, they do not consider these factors

¹⁰⁹ This matter is further examined and discussed in Chapter 6 of the book, providing a more detailed analysis of the topic.

indicative of an assumed high academic performance. This situation suggests that signers have a nuanced understanding of language and do not solely rely on the choice of SASS to assess academic abilities.

The study also sheds light on the influence of education and generational factors on using SASS. Participants attribute the introduction of space-based SASS to formal education, particularly in deaf schools where ASL was historically prevalent. The shift to teaching GSL in present-day deaf schools has led to an increased usage of some body-based SASS, considered indigenous to Ghana. The history of deaf education in Ghana and the associated struggle over the appropriate language of instruction provide relevant context for the point discussed in this paragraph (For an exploration of this topic, see Subsection 2.4.1.3 & 2.4.2.3 of Chapter 2). As posited by Kusters et al. (2020:6) over time, oralist educational policies have ingrained negative perspectives towards sign languages within their framework. This finding highlights the dynamic nature of sign language practices and the impact of educational policies on language choices.

The study underscores the sociolinguistic complexities surrounding the perceptions and associations of body-based and space-based SASS in the Ghanaian signing community. It provides perspectives into the social, cultural, and educational factors that shape language ideologies and influence the choice of SASS variants. Understanding these dynamics is essential for promoting inclusive language practices and fostering a deeper appreciation of the rich linguistic heritage of Ghana's signing community.

While this study specifically focuses on the perceptions and usage of body-based and space-based SASS among signers, it is worth acknowledging that observations made regarding the usage of body-based SASS among gesturers can provide insightful implications for understanding the broader situation within the signing community. Although not presented in this study, exploring the usage patterns and factors influencing gesturers' use of body-based SASS can contribute to understanding SASS usage across different communication modalities.

Language ideology and body-based SASS

Drawing a parallel between language ideology and acceptability, I find that the authority and prestige of a standardized variety influence the perception and judgment of body-based SASS. This aligns with Garrett's (2010:7) explanation that people's positive or negative language ideologies towards a language variety are often influenced by the standardization process in other languages. The existence of a supposed standard language variety can affect judging other languages. In the context of sign language in Ghana, ASL can be regarded as the standardized variety, whereas other locally evolved sign languages in Ghana are typically seen as non-standardized. As Garrett (2010) explains, a standard variety gets authority and prestige via its use in dictionaries and educational settings, leading to devaluing

those supposed to be non-standardised. Similarly, in a sociolinguistic study, Lucas (2001: 190) mentioned that in language contact situations, the dominant majority language is typically viewed positively, while the non-dominant minority language is often seen in a negative light. These negative perceptions can originate from the more powerful language group and gradually affect the minority group, leading them to perceive their language as inferior or lacking compared to the dominant language (Lucas 2001: 190). This observation may provide an explanation for why a signer might consciously refrain from using a specific body-based SASS variant in a formal setting.

Additionally, the findings shed light on the perception of space-based SASS as having higher status due to its standardized phonological location. It is worth noting that certain body-based SASS with standardized phonological locations may not be associated with lower status. In fact, they may be lexicalized and included in GSL dictionaries (e.g., the sign for SMALL which is formed by delimiting the index finger). As Garrett (2010:10) highlights, positive or negative language attitudes can also be associated with specific aspects of a language or the language as a whole.

Negative attitudes towards a language can arise when individuals perceive it as having a limited vocabulary or lacking essential grammatical structures for effective communication in specific domains (Garrett, 2010). In the case of GSL, there has been a negative conceptualisation regarding the richness of its vocabulary. This perception may lead some signers to feel the need to adopt ASL as an alternative.

Observing negative attitudes towards GSL and the perception of its limited vocabulary highlights a significant sociolinguistic aspect within the signing community. When a language variety is devalued or considered inadequate in certain domains, individuals may seek alternatives perceived as more prestigious or better equipped for effective communication.

The notion that some signers need to adopt ASL suggests recognising its perceived advantages, such as a larger vocabulary or better-developed grammatical structures. This preference for ASL may be influenced by factors such as exposure to ASL through formal education, interactions with ASL users, or societal attitudes towards ASL as a more standardised and prestigious sign language.

It is important to note that individual preferences, language ideologies, and the sociolinguistic dynamics of the signing community influence the decision to adopt ASL or any other sign language. It does not imply that GSL or body-based SASS is inherently inferior or lacks communicative abilities. Language adoption and language shift are complex processes driven by various sociocultural, educational, and linguistic factors.

Further research exploring the motivations behind signers' adoption of ASL and the implications of language choice within the signing community would

contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics between different sign languages and their sociolinguistic status. It would also shed light on the sociocultural factors that shape language attitudes and preferences among signers.

In conclusion, the discussion provides insights into the observations made regarding the usage patterns of body-based SASS among signers, the perceived prestige and status associated with different SASS variants, and the factors influencing these perceptions. Additionally, it draws attention to the influence of language ideology, standardisation processes, and perceptions of vocabulary richness on attitudes towards different SASS variants and GSL. It highlights the need for further research to explore the contexts and formulate theories around these observations, especially concerning GSL signers.

5.5 Summary and Conclusion

The study examined the perceptions and associations of body-based and space-based SASS in the Ghanaian signing community. The findings shed light on various ideological issues related to SASS usage in Ghana.

The study found that body-based SASS was associated with Ghana and perceived as a feature of GSL. It is considered native to the local signing community. On the other hand, space-based SASS is seen as foreign and associated with educated individuals and prestige. Participants showed a preference for space-based SASS as their personal choice, potentially influenced by factors like language ideologies and perceptions of linguistic aesthetics. However, both variants were recognised for their potential to effectively convey complex information, indicating that neither variant was considered superior in academic capacity.

The study also revealed the influence of education and generational factors on SASS usage. Space-based SASS was attributed to formal education and its connection to ASL. The shift to embracing local signs in present-day deaf schools by teachers has led to increased use of body-based SASS, reflecting the impact of educational policies on language choices. The findings highlighted the sociolinguistic complexities surrounding the perceptions and associations of body-based and space-based SASS. They underscored the influence of social, cultural, and educational factors on language ideologies and the choice of SASS variants. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for promoting inclusive language practices and appreciating the linguistic heritage of Ghana's signing community. Additionally, I discussed observations regarding the usage of body-based SASS among gesturers, suggesting a higher use among younger adults compared to older and senior adults. It is speculated that language preferences and competencies could influence this pattern.

In conclusion, this chapter presents a judgement task whereby signers were asked to evaluate two signers. In each case, one of the signers gives a body-based

SASS sign to describe the size and shape of a referent, and the other a space-based SASS sign. Signers are asked about their impressions of each signer in relation to various social dimensions. The results show that signers associate body-based SASS signs with low prestige and locally evolved sign language, while space-based SASS is associated with high prestige and a foreign based sign language (ideally ASL). The judgment experiment provided perspectives into the ideological dimensions surrounding SASS usage in Ghana. The study shed light on nativeness, generational preferences, prestige associations, common use, personal choices, and the perception of academic performance associated with different SASS variants.

The data analysis also indicates that the social variables of gender, age, and education do not exhibit any large difference on signers' SASS production. This lack of significant impact may be attributed to the study's limitation of not achieving an even distribution of age and educational attainment among the 20 participants used. It is worth noting that despite a balanced representation of participants regarding gender, the study did not identify any significant impact of gender on SASS usage.

Overall, the results indicate that social factors such as gender, age, and education do not substantially impact SASS production among the participants. The findings also shed light on the perceptions and associations surrounding body-based and space-based SASS in Ghana. The study contributes to a better understanding of the ideological dimensions of SASS usage and highlights the importance of considering sociolinguistic factors in studying sign language variation and perception. Further research is, however, necessary to explore other potential factors that may impact SASS production and to gain a better understanding of the complexities involved.