Understanding Ghanaian sign language(s): history, linguistics, and ideology
Hadjah, T.M.

6.

LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES AND THE COMPLEXITY OF GSL USAGE IN THE DEAF COMMUNITY

Globally, the use of sign languages among deaf communities has garnered attention from linguists, highlighting the significance of locally evolved sign languages alongside foreign-based signing systems. In the context of Ghana, several sign languages have emerged, including GSL, AdaSL and Nanabin SL. However, despite the existence of these sign languages, a full linguistic nature of the national sign language and its relationship with other locally evolved sign languages and foreign-based signing systems remains unclear (see Chapter 2). This chapter aims to investigate the language ideologies surrounding the usage of GSL in the urban deaf community of Ghana and shed light on the linguistic perspective of this complex linguistic landscape.

The research findings in other chapters highlight the diverse ways in which signers in the deaf community label and name sign languages. Multiple labels may be used for the same sign language, and the prevalence of these variations within the community remains largely unexplored. More generally, existing literature on this topic is limited, as most discussions focus on officially recognized labels such as GSL and ASL. Researchers, such as Hou and de Vos (2022), have proposed different labels and classifications for sign languages used in deaf communities worldwide. The choice of labels can be influenced by various factors, including the linguistic structure of the language, demographic characteristics, researcher's ideology, methodology, language age, and more. This diversity in labels reflects the complexity of categorizing sign languages. It is important to note that labels given to sign languages can overlap and vary among different signing communities. Green (2014) demonstrated how a particular signing variety may be labelled differently by researchers and signers from different communities. For instance, what one researcher identifies as a "Local sign" may be labelled the same way by village signers but considered a natural sign with broader social functions and usage by signers in the urban deaf community (Green, 2014). The extent to which these classifications benefit the signing community, and their appropriateness remains uncertain.

Within the Ghanaian deaf community diverse signing system lacks clearly defined descriptions, often leading to interchangeable use of terms such as GSL and ASL. Furthermore, the presence of two varieties of GSL, as presented in Chapter 2, adds further complexity to the understanding of the national sign language's form and usage in the deaf community at large. This chapter explore language ideologies within this context, building upon the background established in Chapter 1, which

motivate the need to investigate the diverse ideologies and attitudes of participants in the urban deaf community.

The intricate nature of the signing system can be attributed in part to the historical development of deaf education in Ghana (see Chapter 3). However, this chapter aims to determine the extent to which language ideology also contributes to this complexity. It is essential to note that the diverse views discovered in informal settings outside formal research settings prompted the inclusion of this chapter. The primary objective is to examine signers' understanding of the national sign language in comparison to ASL and to gain insights from a linguistic perspective.

Within Ghana's multilingual society, sign languages are often considered minority languages, and some individuals may even question their status as languages due to their visual gestural nature (Kyle & Allsop, 1997:22; Kusters et al. 2020a,b). While Ghana does not have a designated national language, Akan is occasionally regarded as such due to its widespread usage as a lingua franca. English, as the official language, is used for instructional purposes in educational settings, including schools for the deaf. In this context, GSL serves as the national sign language in the country, and it is employed for deaf education. Although sign language linguistic research is gradually progressing in Ghana, studies on language ideologies related to sign languages have been relatively neglected.

Recently, the teaching of GSL in universities, primarily for hearing students, has gained momentum to ensure accessibility for the deaf minority group and to promote GSL as the primary means of communication. However, the structure of GSL remains incompletely described, and individual teachers continue to teach sign language based on their personal language ideologies. While anecdotal reports suggest the introduction of some form of ASL, this is not surprising given the limited understanding of GSL and the diverse signing system prevalent in the urban deaf community. Similar to hearing individuals, deaf signers also possess their language ideologies, which, as Woolard (2020) suggests, can shape perceptions of language nature and linguistic norms. Therefore, exploring language ideology data in this chapter is expected to contribute to a better understanding and reconstruction of the nature of GSL.

Garrett (2010) emphasizes the crucial role of language ideologies in language development, survival, or death, particularly in multilingual communities where languages may be in competition or face threats. Accordingly, this chapter delves into the language ideologies of deaf signers in Ghana, whose primary language is GSL, aiming to shed light on the significance of language ideologies in shaping the usage and perception of GSL within the deaf community.

This chapter provides an exploration of language ideology within deaf communities. It begins with a background of studies on language ideology in Ghana (Section 6.1), and research questions (Section 6.2). The methodology for data acquisition is described (in Section 3), followed by the presentation of results

(Section 6.4). Finally, a detailed discussion of the results (Section 6.5) and concluding remarks are provided (Section 6.6).

6.1   Studies on Language Ideology in Ghana

In this section, I delve into a literature review of language ideology research in Ghana. This review aims to provide an understanding of language ideologies in the Ghanaian context and highlight the major findings that have emerged from this field of study. Additionally, I will explore the specific aspects of language ideology among spoken language users in Ghana and the unique perspectives and insights gained from studying language ideologies among deaf signers. Finally, I will discuss the future directions and potential exploration areas within this dynamic research field. By examining the studies on language ideologies in Ghana, we can deepen our understanding of how language shapes social dynamics and cultural practices within this multilingual society.

6.1.1   Language ideology among hearing people

Early scholars in this field examined the perception that African languages were inferior to European languages, resulting in the marginalization of African languages in social, cultural, and political contexts. Studies on language ideology in reveal a prevalent negative attitude among Ghanaians toward the use and study of Ghanaian languages, with a preference for English Ghana (e.g., Dako & Quarcoo, 2017; Duah & Mensah, 2017; Guerini, 2008; Kwofie, 2001; Owu-Ewie & Edu-Buandoh, 2014; Saah, 1986; Twumasi, 2021). This preference for English is driven by the belief that it is the only language in Ghana that can provide socio-economic benefits, such as improved academic performance, access to higher education, and better employment opportunities. Similar attitudes have been observed in other African countries, where indigenous languages are often discriminated against in favour of former colonial languages (Magwa, 2015; Ramachandran & Rauh, 2016).

One significant area of study in language ideology is the relationship between language and identity. Dako and Quarcoo's (2017) study explored how language choice and attitudes reflect social identity among Ghanaians. They found that English was perceived as a prestigious language, while local languages were considered inferior, leading to a preference for English. The official status of English in Ghana further reinforces its importance, gradually eroding the competence of Ghanaian mother tongues for some individuals. This can be observed through excessive borrowing and code-switching when using local languages (Dako & Quarcoo, 2017). However, it is important to note that despite the perceived prestige of English, Ghanaians still hold value for their indigenous languages and prefer to maintain their use, particularly in informal interactions, as they are seen as

more appropriate for expressing Ghanaian culture and values (Dako & Quarcoo, 2017; Guerini, 2008; Obeng, 1997).

Another aspect of language ideology in Ghana relates to Ghanaian English, a variety distinct from standard British English, which has led to three ideological positions among Ghanaians (Ahulu, 1994; Simo Bobda, 2000). Some argue that Ghanaian English should not be considered a separate language variety and label it as mere errors in English. Others believe that Ghanaian English has been nativised and should be accepted as the standard variety known as Ghanaian English. Lastly, some reject the use of English as a foreign language and advocate for using indigenous languages instead (Ahulu, 1994).

A similar attitude is observed towards Ghanaian Pidgin English, a language variety without a standard orthography that is not officially recognised as a Ghanaian language (Adika, 2012; Huber, 2013). Ghanaian Pidgin English emerged from contact situations between British merchants and Ghanaian traders, blending English and several Ghanaian languages (Suglo, 2012). However, its usage is often associated with low prestige. Despite this, it continues to thrive among males in urban areas and competes with other Ghanaian languages by expanding its domain of usage (Adika, 2012; Huber, 2013; Suglo, 2012). Attitudes towards pidgin vary, with some individuals considering it fashionable to use, while others view it as a hindrance to English proficiency (Adika, 2012; Suglo, 2012).

According to several scholars (Adika, 2012; Huber, 2013; Suglo, 2012), Ghanaian Pidgin English can be categorised into two main varieties: an educated variety known as mesolectal or acrolectal pidgin and an uneducated variety known as basilectal pidgin. The educated variety is predominantly used by students and members of the elite in society, while the uneducated variety is more commonly used by individuals with lower levels of education as a means of communication. The attitude of Ghanaians towards pidgin can be attributed to the fact that it is considered a hybrid or non-standard variety of English (Suglo, 2012).

Language ideology also plays a role in education. Owu-Ewie and Edu-Buandoh (2014) examined how language ideologies influence language policies in schools. They found that English was the dominant language of instruction in secondary schools, leading to the marginalization of local languages and a lack of resources for their development. This perpetuates linguistic inequality and reinforces existing power structures. Guerini (2008) discovered a negative attitude among faculty members in tertiary institutions towards the use of indigenous languages as a subject of study. Similarly, the study by Owu-Ewie and Edu-Buandoh (2014) revealed that the use and study of African languages in education are stigmatized, even by local scholars. Students studying Ghanaian indigenous languages in secondary education often face stereotyping and humiliation from their peers, and some parents discourage their children from learning these languages because they believe proficiency in English is the measure of literacy (Obeng, 1997). In some

cases, weak academic performance or English proficiency is associated with predominant use of indigenous languages (Amissah et al., 2001; Andoh-Kumi, 1997 as cited in Owu-Ewie and Edu-Buandoh, 2014:1). Ghanaians express a negative attitude toward the frequent use of indigenous languages, particularly in formal educational settings, as they believe these languages may not be suitable for discussing technical subjects (Guerini, 2008). These attitudes reflect how Ghanaians perceive their languages and their preference for the appropriate language for education.

Indigenous languages in Ghana play a crucial role in religion, interpersonal communication, mutual comprehension, solidarity and cultural identity (Morris, 1998; Saah 1986; Sadat & Ibrahim, 2022). In educational settings, even during English classes, teachers may opt to code-switch to indigenous languages to ensure students' comprehension or emphasise specific subject matter (Sadat & Ibrahim, 2022). Morris (1998) also note that Ghanaians have special connection to the indigenous languages. This is particularly evident in local business interactions and extends beyond white-collar job settings. According to Morris (1998) Ghanaians have a profound sense of their language being an integral part of their identity, fostering a unique and deeply cherished connection. Consequently, safeguarding the language is not only about its preservation but also entails the preservation of the people and their cultural identities.

In the realm of national politics, dating back to the period of independence, the use of indigenous languages has served as a means to capture the attention of citizens, thereby establishing a candidate's competence as a capable leader and representative of the people (Ansah, 2017; Apronti, 1972; Saah, 1986). For example, political figures often resort to local languages (e.g., Akan, pidgin) when conveying their messages to the masses. They recognise that their success in elections largely hinges on their ability to connect with people through indigenous languages. Consequently, they conduct their campaigns primarily in local dialects. In some instances, politicians try to learn additional local languages to ensure effective communication with various segments of the public during political visits.

In conclusion, research on language ideology in Ghana highlights the prevailing negative attitudes towards indigenous languages in favour of English. This preference for English is driven by perceived socio-economic benefits and the higher status assigned to the language. However, there is still recognition and value placed on indigenous languages for informal interactions and the expression of Ghanaian culture and values. The existence of Ghanaian English and Ghanaian Pidgin English adds complexity to language attitudes in the country, with varied ideological positions held by Ghanaians. These attitudes also extend to the education system, where English dominates as the language of instruction, marginalising local languages and perpetuating linguistic inequality. The attitudes towards indigenous languages in education reflect the belief that English proficiency is crucial for

academic success and social advancement. Yet indigenous languages serve as custodians of cultural heritage, nurturing a feeling of identity and fostering national unity.

6.1.2   Language ideology among deaf signers

The literature review on language ideology among deaf signers provides insights into the perception and attitudes towards different sign languages within the Ghanaian context. While previous research has extensively explored language ideology among hearing people, there needs to be more attention given to sign languages. For a review on available work regarding the perception and attitude towards sign languages in Ghana, see Chapter 1 (Subsection 1.4.3).

In West Africa, a notable inclination exists towards foreign sign languages, such as ASL, at the expense of locally developed sign languages, as Nyst (2010) and Schmaling (2003) observed. This preference arises from the perception that locally evolved sign language has not received significant attention in deaf education and needs to be systematically developed to serve various communicative situations. Notably, this kind of language ideology is not confined solely to deaf communities; it extends to hearing individuals who may perceive their native communication forms as dialects while regarding foreign languages as true languages (Nyst 2010:418).

Contrasting views exist on locally evolved sign languages' status and vocabulary richness. Nyst (2010) suggests that locally evolved sign languages may be seen as having limited vocabulary. However, within the Adamorobe community, Kusters (2014a) found that AdaSL signers considered their language prestigious, expressive, and equivalent to any foreign language. While Nyst (2007) observed a higher status attributed to GSL in Adamorobe, Kusters (2014a) explained that this perspective needed to be more comprehensive and that AdaSL signers valued bilingualism in both GSL and AdaSL. Foreign encounters and the interest of outsiders in AdaSL may have gradually influenced the ideology of AdaSL signers to recognize its equivalence with GSL (Kusters, 2014a:153; 2015:173).

Language ideologies are known to be dynamic within a community, capable of evolving, changing, or even disappearing over time. From my perspective, the period between Nyst's (2007) observations and Kusters' (2014a) research is significant enough, allowing for varied encounters with foreigners, which might have influenced the language ideology of Deaf signers in Adamorobe. One observation that persists between Nyst's (2010:418) research and Kusters' (2014a) findings is that certain locally evolved signs were associated with mockery in contrast to GSL signs.

Parks (2014) notes that Ghana is part of the over 17 African and Asian countries where ASL is a primary sign language facilitated by educational

institutions, religious groups, international aid organisations, or international relationships. Parks (2014) presents her perspective on the international acquisition of ASL within the context of deaf communities. Her viewpoint is through analysing various factors and considerations that influence the adoption and use of ASL by deaf individuals globally.

One prominent aspect highlighted in Parks' (2014) perspective is the perceived significance of ASL competence as a gateway to full participation in the international deaf community. Deaf individuals participating in her study believe that proficiency in ASL enhances their ability to engage actively in global conversations and interactions within the Deaf World. ASL is seen as an instrument of empowerment and upward mobility. Concurrently, there exists a concern among some study participants regarding the potential repercussions of ASL on the vitality of their native sign languages. This apprehension underscores the complex interplay between ASL and local sign languages, wherein ASL's dominance raises questions about the preservation of linguistic diversity and cultural identity within specific deaf communities. (Parks, 2014).

The influence of international organisations, such as the World Federation of the Deaf, plays a significant role in shaping the discourse surrounding deaf human rights and local deaf heritage. These organisations impress on their network of deaf association members globally, thereby contributing to the construction and consolidation of international deaf identity (Parks, 2014). Parks therefore notes that deaf individuals grapple with the challenge of striking a balance between their desire for international engagement and their commitment to maintaining their unique cultural and linguistic identities.

Parks (2014) outlines three main responses exhibited by deaf communities when confronted with the presence of ASL in their respective countries, each of which compresses distinct attitudes and strategies for incorporating ASL into their linguistic and cultural landscapes.

a. Acceptance through Adoption: In certain countries (e.g., Grenada; St Vincent & the Grenadines), especially those without an established deaf community or cultural framework prior to the introduction of ASL, deaf individuals and communities wholeheartedly embrace ASL. This often occurs through the founding of deaf schools or missionary endeavours that actively promote ASL adoption. It's crucial to emphasise that while ASL is embraced, not all members within these communities may wholeheartedly endorse it. In such cases, communities may strive to distinguish their ASL variant by emphasising local signs that compress unique aspects of their culture. This differentiation establishes their national identity as distinct from other ASL-based signing in other countries.

b. Selective Adoption with Distinction: Unlike complete assimilation, some deaf communities (in Trinidad & Jamaica) incorporate ASL for specific purposes while deliberately setting it apart from their native sign languages employed in other contexts. While welcoming ASL for particular functions, they maintain a distinct status for their local sign languages. This approach allows them to function in a bilingual capacity, leveraging ASL for international communication while preserving their indigenous sign language as an exclusive representation of their cultural heritage and values.

c. Mixing and rejection: The third situation predominantly rejects the significance of ASL in shaping contemporary deaf identity construction, especially when ASL and the local sign language lack clear boundaries within the community. This often leads to the fusion of the two sign languages to the extent that distinctions are drawn between "old sign" (employed by individuals not exposed to ASL at a young age) and "new signs" (comprising a blend of ASL and local sign variations). According to Parks (2014), in this situation (e.g., in Ecuador & Dominican Republic) deaf leaders actively participate in a language purification initiative to reduce ASL influence on their national sign language. This endeavour involves eliminating undesirable ASL signs, reclaiming traditional signs, and creating new signs authentically reflecting their culture.

In Parks' (2014:216) study, a noteworthy finding emerged as some signers conveyed the belief that the choice of sign language is of secondary importance, emphasising instead the act of signing itself. This observation sheds light on the preference of deaf individuals for flexible and barrier-free communication, underscoring a desire to transcend linguistic confines and prioritise effective interaction.

In her concluding remarks, Parks (2014: 217) emphasises the significance of ongoing research to assess the global prevalence of ASL adoption due to its extensive influence across continents. She notes that such investigations can greatly enhance our comprehension of the diverse strategies employed by deaf individuals in shaping their deaf identity and delineating symbolic boundaries, spanning various levels from personal expression to global systems.

6.1.3 Summary and concluding remarks on language ideological studies in Ghana

In the previous section, the review explores language ideology in Ghana, particularly focusing on attitudes towards indigenous languages and English. It highlights the marginalisation of African languages (as well as Ghanaian varieties of English, including Ghanaian English & Ghanaian Pidgin English) due the colonial history and the preference for English driven by socio-economic benefits. Studies

reveal a prevalent negative attitude towards indigenous languages, although local languages are valued especially for informal interactions. In education, English dominates as the language of instruction, marginalising local languages and perpetuating linguistic inequality. The review identified that negative attitudes towards indigenous languages reflect the belief that English proficiency is essential for academic success and social advancement. Positive attitudes toward indigenous languages were primarily associated with cultural identity, values, and fostering a sense of solidarity.

In a later section, the literature review provides insights into the language ideology among deaf signers in Ghana, specifically examining their perceptions and attitudes towards different sign languages. The review underscores the importance of studying sign languages within the Ghanaian context. The findings reveal that deaf AdaSL signers in Ghana view their as " HARD," which they consider a positive and unique aspect of their identity. In contrast, GSL is described as "SOFT" in comparison. AdaSL signers highly value their language, considering it more pleasant and expressive than GSL and Akan, without diminishing the importance of GSL. This urban community tends to shift between signing systems, including adopting a more English-like style, probably driven by the desire for English literacy skills and socioeconomic advancement. Opinions on the status and vocabulary richness of locally evolved sign languages vary, but AdaSL signers in Adamorobe perceive their language as prestigious and on par with foreign languages. However, it is important to note that deaf signers outside of Adamorobe may hold different perspectives on AdaSL and other signing varieties. More importantly these observations highlight the complex and diverse language ideologies among deaf signers in Ghana.

However, language ideology research among signers in Ghana is still limited, reflecting the broader gap in studies on language ideologies of sign languages worldwide (Kusters, 2014a). This scarcity of research on African sign languages further intensifies the knowledge gap. Apart from Kusters' (2014a) work, which focused on the language ideology of AdaSL users, there has been a lack of in-depth studies on the language ideologies of deaf signers in the urban deaf community in Ghana.

6.2   Research Question

In this chapter, I aimed to explore the language ideology of deaf signers in the urban deaf community in Ghana by incorporating language ideological themes from the existing literature. Kusters (2014a:141) proposes three essential themes for studying language ideologies in village sign languages: the perception of the language's structure, function, and status; the relationship between the sign language and the spoken language within the community; and the relationship between the

village sign language and urban or national sign languages. The works of Nyst (2012; 2007) and Kusters (2014a; 2019) provide insights into these themes regarding AdaSL in Ghana. Additionally, Burns et al. (2001:190) offer themes for language ideological studies, including investigating attitudes toward a language or language variety, exploring stereotypes, and examining language usage.

While these themes provided by Kusters (2014a) and Burns et al. (2001) appear similar, Kusters specifically focuses on sign languages used in a small community context. In this study, I attempt to bridge the literature gap by applying these themes to signers in the urban deaf community in Ghana. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How do signers perceive their language and other signing varieties used in Ghana?
2. What are signers' attitudes toward the use of their language compared to other signing varieties used in Ghana?

Guided by the aforementioned research questions, this chapter employs the following methodology to investigate the language ideologies and the use of GSL within the Ghanaian deaf community.

6.3   Fieldwork and data collection method

The fieldwork and data collection methods employed in this chapter involved a variety of approaches among deaf Ghanaians. A deaf field assistant[110] was trained and worked under my supervision to engage with deaf participants for formal data collection, including interviews and administering questionnaires. The data was primarily gathered in the Greater Accra and Eastern Region of Ghana, which were selected for their convenience, historical significance in deaf education and associations, and their cosmopolitan nature, providing a representative sample of GSL deaf signers.

This chapter encompassed two main studies to explore the language attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of deaf signers in Ghana. Study 1 involved the administration of a questionnaire, while Study 2 consisted of focus group discussions on sign languages in the country. The participants who took part in Study 1 were the same individuals who participated in the study conducted in Chapter 4. The selection of participants for both Study 1 and Study 2 is elaborated upon in the subsequent subsections. These participants represented a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences, contributing to an understanding of the topic at hand.

The fieldwork and data collection methods employed in this chapter proved instrumental in gathering valuable insights. The questionnaire utilized in Study 1

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[110] Alexander Okyere

enabled the exploration of language attitudes, perceptions, and usage, while the focus group discussions conducted in Study 2 provided a platform for in-depth conversations on sign languages in Ghana. By engaging a wide range of participants with varying backgrounds and experiences, this research aimed to capture a comprehensive understanding of the language dynamics within the deaf community in Ghana.

In addition to the methods mentioned earlier, I also utilized observation and informal data elicitation, which were presented in the discussions section (section 5) of the chapter. These methods complemented the formal data collection approaches and provided additional insights into the participants' language attitudes and behaviours. In the following subsection, I will outline the specific methods employed to ensure an understanding of the research topic.

6.3.1   Observation and informal elicitation

During the fieldwork conducted for this book, I made several observations and engaged in informal discussions, some of which were also documented on camera. However, I encountered the observer's paradox, wherein participants may modify their behaviour or language use due to the presence of a camera or an observer. To mitigate this effect, I employed the assistance of a deaf field assistant, which helped in reducing the observer's paradox. For instance, one signer refrained from using body-based signing varieties in a formal setting when the camera was recording. However, in informal settings, away from the camera, the signer freely used body-based signing. To gain deeper insights into participants' language ideology and to clarify certain aspects, I conducted unstructured interviews during informal conversations outside the formal camera recordings. In some instances, these informal interviews were also recorded for reference.

One significant outcome of these informal interviews was the discovery of an 'informal variety of GSL' used among deaf signers in the urban deaf community. This finding prompted further exploration of the LOCAL in Chapter 2 of this book and Section 6.4.2.2 (second Focus Group Discussion in Study II) of this chapter, based on the information provided by one participant, J. Amoah.

Overall, my longstanding involvement with the deaf community in Ghana, both formally and informally, and the use of observation and informal elicitation methods have enriched my understanding of the language ideologies and dynamics within the deaf community.

6.3.2   STUDY I: Questionnaire

The questionnaire employed in this study consisted of approximately 50 questions that covered various topics related to language attitude, perception, and use. The

focus was primarily on GSL and its relationship with ASL and Signed English. The questions were grouped into five major following themes,

1. Language background: Participants were asked about their linguistic background and experiences.
2. Thoughts about language contact: Participants were encouraged to share their thoughts on language contact situations they had encountered.
3. Thoughts about language status: The participants' perspectives on the status of their language were explored.
4. Thoughts about language usage: Participants were invited to express their views on the usage of their language in various contexts.
5. Language ideology about gesture: The participants' beliefs and attitudes regarding gesture as a communication mode were examined.

These questions aimed to uncover participants' ideologies related to GSL and the influence of ASL. Detailed of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix F.

A total of 20 participants were involved. The sample was balanced in terms of gender, and there was a fair distribution of age and education among the signers, as presented in Table 43. All participants were competent users of GSL, and 13 also indicated familiarity with ASL. Most participants reported acquiring sign language at an early age in deaf schools, although one participant learned it at home from a deaf parent, and another learned it from friends at the GNAD office and not through formal education.

Table 43: Participants' characteristics

SOCIAL VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Gender		
Male signers	10	50
Female signers	10	50
TOTAL	**20**	**100**
Age group		
Young	1	5
Younger Adult	12	60
Older Adult	6	30
Senior Adult	1	5
TOTAL	**20**	**100**
Education[111]		

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[111] Note that in Ghana there are deaf basic schools all over the country and only one deaf second cycle school (Mampong Senior High/Technical School (SHS) for the Deaf,) in the country. For tertiary education, all the deaf students join mainstream institutions where they are sometimes assisted with sign language interpretations.

No formal education	1	5
Basic Education	8	40
Second Cycle Education	4	20
Tertiary education	7	35
TOTAL	**20**	**100**

The participants were categorized into four age groups: young (15-24), younger adult (25-44), older adult (45-64), and senior adult (above 64). They exhibited a range of education levels, from no formal education to those who attended tertiary education. Their occupations varied based on their education and training, with self-employment being the most common (e.g., wood choppers, cobblers, farmers, traders, caterers, hairdressers). Additionally, three participants were students, two were teachers, and one was a GNAD official. Some participants had also gained international exposure through business trips (e.g., to Togo), Deaf sports events (e.g., in Cote d'Ivoire), conferences (e.g., in the UK, Nigeria, and Cote d'Ivoire), or educational opportunities (e.g., in the United States).

Overall, the questionnaire aimed to capture participants' thoughts on various aspects such as their awareness of sign languages, experiences with language contact, perceptions of language status, sociocultural views on sign languages and deafness, and language usage patterns. To accommodate the diverse literacy levels of the participants, some of whom were educated while others were not, a deaf assistant provided support in filling out the questionnaire. Participants who were able to read had the option to read the questions themselves, but the questions were also signed by the assistant. Participants replied in sign language, and the assistant wrote down the responses. This entire process was also recorded on camera, allowing cross-checking between the written responses and the participants' communication in sign language.

6.3.3   STUDY II: Focus group discussions (1st & 2nd)

Two separate focus group discussions were conducted with distinct groups of participants. The selection of participants for the first focus group discussions was based on their availability and the diversity of ideas they exhibited in their responses to the language awareness section of the questionnaire. Table 44 provides an overview of the participants' characteristics in the first focus group discussions. The focus group discussions were facilitated by my deaf research assistant, who followed a predetermined set of topics related to sign language ideology.

Table 44:Participants' characteristics under 1st focus group discussions.

SOCIAL VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Gender		

Male signers	3	50
Female signers	3	50
TOTAL	**6**	**100**
Age group		
Young	1	17
Younger Adult	2	33
Older Adult	3	50
TOTAL	6	100
Education		
Basic Education	3	50
Second Cycle Education	2	33
Tertiary education	1	17
TOTAL	6	100

A second focus group discussion involved a different set of participants, prompted by the objective of gathering information on LOCAL signs. The main focus of this discussion revolved around the existence of LOCAL and its associated language ideologies. In this case, I took on the role of chairing the discussion, as the concept of LOCAL was relatively new to me then. Although I found the notion intriguing and valuable, I struggled to clearly articulate what aspects I was interested in exploring to my research assistant.

The second focus group discussion comprised five more mature participants: three older adults and two senior adults. Among them, three individuals (two males and one female) resided in Akuapem Mampong, a town in the Eastern Region of Ghana. In contrast, the other two deaf participants (male and female) hailed from a small town called Apirede[112]. These participants were selected based on their status as role models in education and within the deaf community. Additionally, their backgrounds indicated significant formal and informal educational interactions with uneducated deaf individuals in the country. Thus, it was believed that their perspectives would provide insights into the existence of LOCAL in Ghana and the language ideologies associated with it.

Before the focus group discussions took place, participants were unaware of the specific topic of discussion. This approach aimed to foster a spontaneous conversation, mirroring how interactions typically occur within the deaf community. Members would gather at a designated deaf hub and engage in conversations naturally.

In summary, two separate focus group discussions were conducted during the data collection process. The participants for each focus group discussion were selected based on different criteria and objectives. Overall, the insights and perspectives gained from these methods serve as crucial groundwork for the

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[112] Sometimes spelt Apiredi.

subsequent section, presenting the findings and results obtained from the data collected during the fieldwork and discussions.

6.4 Results

6.4.1 STUDY I: Result from the questionnaire

The questionnaire administered in this study generated a wealth of diverse perspectives. The participants' viewpoints, captured through their responses, provide perspectives into various aspects of sign language use. The findings are presented across four key topics: language background, perception of language contact, perception of ASL and GSL in Ghana, and thoughts about language usage. By examining the questionnaire responses within these four topics, this study aims to unravel the intricate web of language attitudes, perceptions, and experiences among deaf signers in Ghana. The subsequent sections will present the detailed findings, providing an understanding of the participants' viewpoints on these crucial aspects of sign language use in Ghana.

Language background

In the section on language background, participants were asked three main questions that provided insights into their awareness of linguistic diversity, cultural perspectives, and personal experiences related to sign languages and ideology. These questions covered the number of sign languages worldwide, sign languages used in Ghana, and individual sign language preferences.

Out of the 20 participants, 17 (85%) reported using GSL, while 3 (15%) mentioned using ASL. Among the 17 participants who stated they use GSL, 4 (24%) identified as bilinguals, using ASL, International Sign, or a locally evolved sign language referred to as GESTURE (Note: GESTURE is capitalized to differentiate it from the term "gesture" used by linguists and the hearing community).

Participants also exhibited varying levels of language awareness. For example, 3 (15%) believed that the world revolves around two or three sign languages: ASL, GSL, and GESTURE. Signers' perceptions influenced their attitudes towards sign language and their interactions with it. Additionally, participants expressed diverse views on the sign languages existing in Ghana. The majority (55%) believed there is more than one sign language in Ghana, suggesting the presence of two or three sign languages, including ASL, GSL, ENGLISH (SL), and GESTURE. On the contrary, the minority (40%) held the belief that only one sign language is used in Ghana. They referred to it as either GSL or ENGLISH. However, one participant noted the complexity of the situation regarding sign languages in Ghana and expressed uncertainty about the exact number of sign languages used in the country.

Interestingly, participants used different terminologies to refer to ASL, such as "AMERICA," "WHITE," "FOREIGN," or simply finger spelling A-S-L (see Figure 146). Similarly, GSL was referred to using terms like "GHANA," (see Figure 147) with or without "SL" (GHANA SL) and fingerspelling G-S-L. The study also explored participants' signs for ENGLISH (SL) and GESTURE, depicted in Figure 148 and Figure 149, respectively. In this Chapter section 6.5.1, a detailed discussion is provided on the various terminologies used by signers to refer to the different signing varieties present in Ghana.
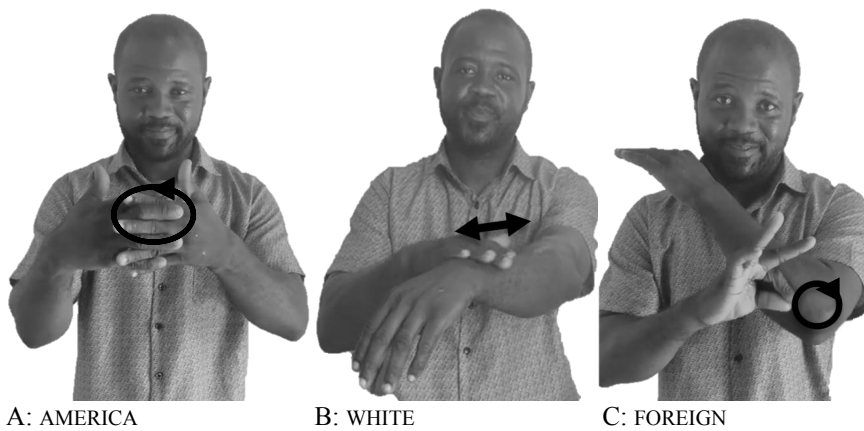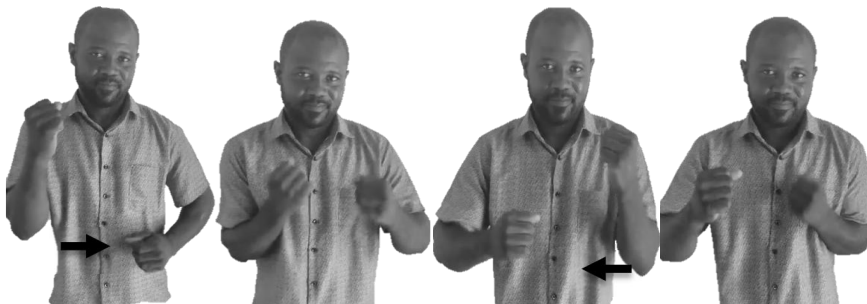

A: AMERICA   B: WHITE   C: FOREIGN

Figure 146: Various form/signs to refer to ASL

Figure 147: GHANA

Figure 148: ENGLISH

Initial movement   Final movement

Figure 149: GESTURE

Perception on language contact

In this section of the questionnaire (Question 4-10), participants were asked a series of seven questions that focused on language use, media engagement, linguistic resources, communication preferences, and cultural identity within the context of sign languages. The purpose of these questions was to gain insights into the dynamics of language choices, cultural interactions, and ideological perspectives within the deaf community.

Among the findings, it was observed that the majority of participants (80%) perceived it as important for deaf individuals to continuously learn new signs from foreigners, particularly from deaf white people. This shared ideology seemed to be

rooted in the belief that sign language is primarily for deaf individuals, while spoken language is for their hearing counterparts. This viewpoint was echoed by a participant with tertiary education, who expressed this sentiment as a general suggestion and viewpoint (in comment 1).

1) I SUGGEST THAT WE SHOULD USE SIGN IN ANY LANGUAGE. GSL OR ASL WHEN WE MEET PERSON, NOT ENGLISH, BUT WHEN WRITE, USE ENGLISH, NOT SIGN
'I suggest we use any sign from any sign language, either ASL or GSL. We should also not use Signed English when signing but only when writing'

The participants' understanding of sign language being primarily for deaf individuals did not necessarily imply a desire to become bilingual or multilingual. Instead, it seemed to be more focused on linguistic borrowing. Only two participants disagreed with the idea of learning new signs from foreigners, particularly from WHITE individuals. Two other participants did not provide any comment on the subject matter.

In general, the majority of participants (16 out of 20) expressed a strong sense of pride in using their sign language (GSL) in public places. However, four participants indicated that they occasionally felt less proud of their minority language. Interestingly, most of these participants were females with a tertiary education.

In addition to their perception and language awareness, not all participants had exposure to international language contact with deaf signers through electronic media. Eight participants (40%) reported that they do not use social media to engage with deaf Americans or foreigners. This group included both uneducated[113] individuals and tertiary students. The presence of tertiary students in this category suggests that one's level of education does not necessarily correlate with engaging in international language contact through electronic media.

Perception of ASL and GSL in Ghana

In this section, the questionnaire included two categories of questions: language status (questions 11-21) and sociocultural views (questions 22-46). The language status questions aimed to explore beliefs and perceptions regarding sign languages, including comparisons between GSL and ASL, language authenticity and development, language prestige and social respect, as well as the linguistic complexity and expressiveness of sign languages. On the other hand, the sociocultural view questions delved into various perspectives related to deafness,

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[113] Their socio-economic background (2 cobblers & 1 woodchopper) was observed to be a factor hindering them from accessing devices for social media contact.

sign language education, language choice, and educational practices within the deaf community. These perspectives encompassed beliefs about language preservation, cultural authenticity, societal norms, identity, access to education, and the influence of cultural and linguistic ideologies on the experiences of deaf individuals in Ghana.

Generally, the participants had the impression that knowledge of ASL offers numerous socio-economic benefits. For instance, 16 out of 20 participants believed that deaf Ghanaians who know ASL are always successful in life. However, when asked whether it is important for Deaf Ghanaians to use ASL among themselves in daily interactions, only 11 participants (55%) agreed. The remaining participants either disagreed (20%) or did not provide a comment (25%).

Nevertheless, when participants were questioned about the motivational factors that encourage deaf Ghanaians to learn ASL, all of them (100%) described ASL as a superstratum or superstrate language that could provide socio-economic benefits to its users and fill the lexical gap in GSL. Some participants described ASL as "SOFT" as a reason for learning it, while others provided strong emotional comments. Below, I present some of their statements (examples 2-5) along with my interpretations when necessary.

2) WHY LIKE LEARN ASL? BECAUSE ASL SOFT AND SLOW. ASL SEE WISH LIKE.
   'Why would one like to learn ASL? It's because ASL is soft and slow. The signs are so appealing to the eye that you just want to learn them'
3) LEARN NOT CHEAT COMMUNICATION, NOT STUPID. MUST KNOW DIFFERENT SIGN LANGUAGE TO KNOW THEIR WAYS.
   'The Deaf must not communicate with lowly (less prestigious) signs, we need to learn ASL'.
4) WHITE TEACHES HOW SIGN WAY BECOME BRIGHT.
   'White foreigners can teach us a standard sign language that can make us successful'.
5) YES, WANT TO LEARN ALL SIGN SO WHEN TRAVEL TO TOGO KNOW HOW TO COMMUNICATE.

In this section, a series of questions were designed to gather insights on various aspects related to GSL and ASL. These included exploring language prestige, societal attitudes towards GSL and ASL, language discrimination, and the impact of language choice on perceptions of education and intelligence within the deaf community.

In question 16, it was found that eleven participants expressed the view that the use of GSL does not generate the same level of respect as using ASL, which may be seen as a symbol of education. However, despite this observation, signers still hold a certain level of respect for GSL. For example, in question 18, participants were asked about their perception of the authenticity and legitimacy of GSL as the

primary sign language used by deaf people in Ghana. A significant majority of the participants (16 out of 20) considered GSL to be their native language.

Question 41 of the survey revealed that approximately 6 respondents (30%) expressed reservations about the suitability of GSL for university education, primarily citing its limited vocabulary as a concern. Among those who shared this perception (45% of the general comments section), there was a consensus on the importance of sign language education and development. Specifically, they advocated for addressing lexical gaps in GSL and incorporating elements from other sign languages such as ASL, fingerspelling, and Signed English. Here are a few representative comments (examples 6-10) from the general comments section:

6) I THINK GHANA MUST DEVELOP SL, MUST LEARN FROM ASL, AND HELP IMPROVE
    'I believe that for GSL to develop, we must learn some new signs from ASL'
7) SL MUST IMPROVE; GSL AND ASL MIX
    'For GSL to improve, it must adopt loan signs from ASL'
8) HELP TEACH SIGN LANGUAGE ALPHABET. SO NOT WRITE. MAKE COMMUNICATION EASY.
    'Fingerspelling must be taught so that there would be no need to write on paper for communication'.
9) NEED LEARN DICTIONARY WAY, NEED LEARN, IMPROVE.
    'The Deaf must educate themselves with more vocabulary from sign language dictionaries'
10) DEAF STUDENTS MUST LEARN SL; SOME SIGNS NOT PERFECT, MUST ALL PERFECT
    'Some students use unstandardised signs (variety of LOCAL), they must all learn the formal/standardise signs (i.e., ENGLISH OR BROKEN)'.

The majority of participants (14 out of 20) expressed support for using Signed English in educational settings. However, it is important to note that signers may have different perceptions of Signed English. Some may view it as a distinct language, while others may associate it with ASL or GSL. Consequently, not all participants equally supported its use for daily interaction among Deaf individuals outside of the classroom.

A minority group of participants (6 out of 20) believed that using Signed English for everyday communication was a good idea. This group considered GSL to have lexical gaps and believed that incorporating foreign elements would contribute to the development of the language and its users. On the other hand, the majority (11 out of 20) disagreed with the idea of using Signed English for everyday communication. They expressed that it could be boring and lead to delayed communication or circumlocution (i.e., BORING), making it difficult to understand.

Overall, these findings reflect the diverse perspectives and attitudes within the Deaf community in Ghana regarding the use of GSL, ASL and signed English in different contexts.

Thoughts about the domain of language usage

The language usage section of the questionnaire aimed to explore the specific contexts or domains where GSL and ASL were predominantly used within the Deaf community. This investigation covered various settings including homes, schools, workplaces, Deaf churches, television programs, ceremonies, GNAD meetings, conferences, and daily interactions in outdoor environments. The results revealed a notable pattern, although the search for distinct domains of usage between ASL and GSL did not yield conclusive findings.

The lack of success in identifying specific domains of usage can be attributed to the participants' varying understanding of ASL, GSL, and other sign language varieties used in Ghana. The questionnaire's classification of sign languages may have introduced unfamiliar or misunderstood terms for the participants, leading to biased responses. For instance, participants who considered GSL to be the same as ASL might have been misled by a question asking about contexts where GSL is used independently from ASL.

One participant provided an interesting perspective in the general comments section, suggesting that GSL incorporates ASL and locally evolved signs. She stated, " IN MY VIEW, I SEE GSL NOT SAME, SO MUST HOME GESTURE INVOLVED IN THE SIGN" This participant's view highlights variations and the integration of LOCAL signs (GESTURE) into the language.

Despite the challenges in classification, the following summary was derived from the responses. The largest group of participants (40%) indicated that ASL is rarely used at home, at friends' houses, and when interpretation is provided. In the workplace, ASL usage was reported as infrequent by 50% of participants. However, most stated that ASL is often used during church services, television programs, sports events, and outdoor interactions. In educational settings, opinions were divided, with one group stating that ASL is not used in Deaf schools and another group reporting its frequent usage. Most participants considered ASL sometimes used during general ceremonies, GNAD gatherings, and conferences.

In contrast, most participants indicated that GSL is often used in almost every context. However, there was a division within the majority regarding sign language interpretation. Some participants believed that sign language interpreters do not use GSL, while others stated that interpreters often use it. Most rated GSL as frequently used during church services (60%) and sports events (50%). Approximately 45% of participants noted its frequent usage during GNAD meetings,

conferences, television programs, outdoor activities, and at home. Additionally, 40% of participants in the majority reported that GSL is often used in their schools and homes, while a majority (40%) stated that it is sometimes used in the workplace.

6.4.2 STUDY II: Result from focus group discussions

In this section, I will present the results obtained from the two focus group discussions conducted, focusing on the specific questions that were discussed during these sessions. The findings from the first focus group discussions will be presented in subsection 4.2.1, while the results from the second focus group discussions will be outlined in subsection 4.2.2.

1st Focus Group Discussion

Language usage

During the focus group discussions, participants refrained from explicitly mentioning the specific names of sign languages and instead preferred to refer to their language as SIGN or DEAF SIGN. This preference was observed across the participants, indicating a shared understanding and identification with the language as a means of communication for the Deaf community. When participants were asked about what language they refer to by articulating SIGN or DEAF SIGN, one participant stood out in his response. A deaf man (D8a) in his 50s with a second cycle education, described it as a language primarily relying on hand movements. His comment received support from others, further emphasizing the pride they felt perceiving it as their own language as deaf individuals. They suggested that SIGN or DEAF SIGN is for deaf individual and no need to differentiate between different sign languages used by deaf people actively.

However, within the discussion context, participants later acknowledged the existence of different sign languages used in Ghana. They made a distinction between "GESTURE" and "SIGN" (see Figure 150). This recognition suggests that while they may not proactively distinguish between sign languages used by deaf individuals in general, they were aware of the presence of distinct signing varieties within their local context.

A   B
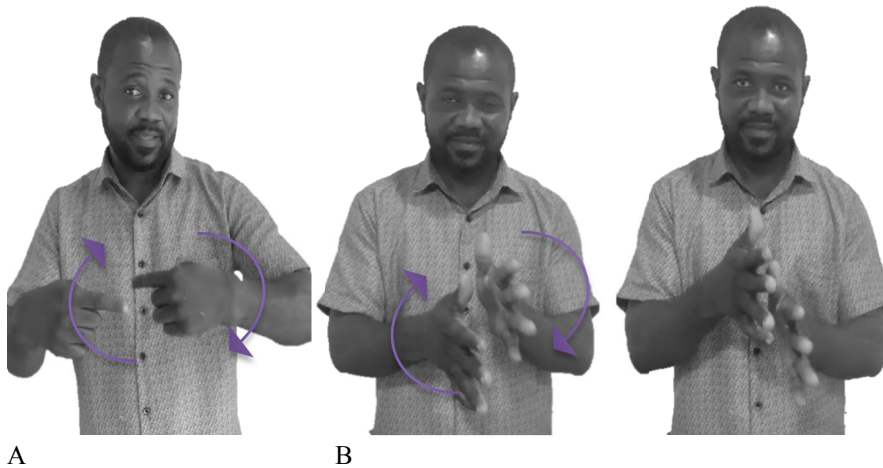
Figure 150: SIGN

Based on my fieldwork observations and the examples shared by participants, it became evident that they distinguished between two forms of signing: the LOCAL also referred to as GESTURE, and the ENGLISH also referred to as SIGN. GESTURE was associated with locally evolved signing practices, while SIGN was perceived as a foreign sign language (i.e., GSL/ASL). Participants attributed the usage of GESTURE to uneducated deaf individuals, whereas the SIGN was associated with educated deaf individuals. This distinction in language usage reflected a societal perception of different prestige levels attached to each form.

One participant (D8a) explicitly highlighted that GESTURE comprised locally evolved signs, whereas SIGN was seen as an imported sign language. Another participant, D1a, emphasised that he became familiar with GESTURE during his childhood through domestic activities, indicating a strong domestic association with this form of signing.

Interestingly, when participants were asked if they used GESTURE, they unanimously articulated with a resounding NO. This attitude towards GESTURE reflected a perceived low prestige among signers, leading to a reluctance to be associated with it. Participants provided examples, such as signs for MOTHER, FATHER, and WATER, to demonstrate the phonological differences between GESTURE and SIGN (see Figure 151 for an illustration). In terms of syntax, participants explained that GESTURE involved more indexing in space or visually indicating the referent in the environment. This indexing method was believed by them to enhance transparency and reduce ambiguity in meaning.

A: MOTHER (GESTURE)   B: MOTHER (SIGN-1/-2) [GSL App]
Figure 151: Distinction between GESTURE (LOCAL) and SIGN (ENGLISH)

The discussions further revealed that participants had varying levels of familiarity and competence in SIGN. One participant (D6a), mentioned that her primary language was GSL with some ASL lexicon mixed in. She reported that her interactions with other deaf individuals predominantly occurred in GSL and ASL. However, if her interlocutor did not understand her, she would occasionally code-switch to GESTURE for better comprehension.

In sum, the result of this subsection shed light on the distinction between GESTURE and SIGN, highlighting the participants' societal attitudes, cultural associations, and language competencies.

Everyday interaction

11) EVERYWHERE I USE ASL, ALWAYS ASL. BUT HEARING AND
    ILLITERATE, I MIX ASL WITH LOCAL. BUT MOSTLY, USE ASL.
    'I use ASL everywhere I go. I only use a mixture of ASL and locally evolved sign language when I meet hearing signers or uneducated deaf signers. But generally, I use ASL.'

During the discussions on everyday interactions, one participant (D8a) expressed a general observation that educated deaf individuals typically preferred to use ASL rather than the LOCAL (see Figure 152) or BROKEN (see Figure 153). However, participants mentioned that when it came to identifying local things, such as food, they might resort to using LOCAL if a specific sign did not exist in ASL.

It was highlighted that the default language used by participants in their daily interactions was the GSL/ASL. However, if they encountered an uneducated interlocutor, they would code-switch to what they referred to as the LOCAL or BROKEN signing system. The use of these terms indicated a distinction in signing style based on the literacy level of the person with whom they were communicating.
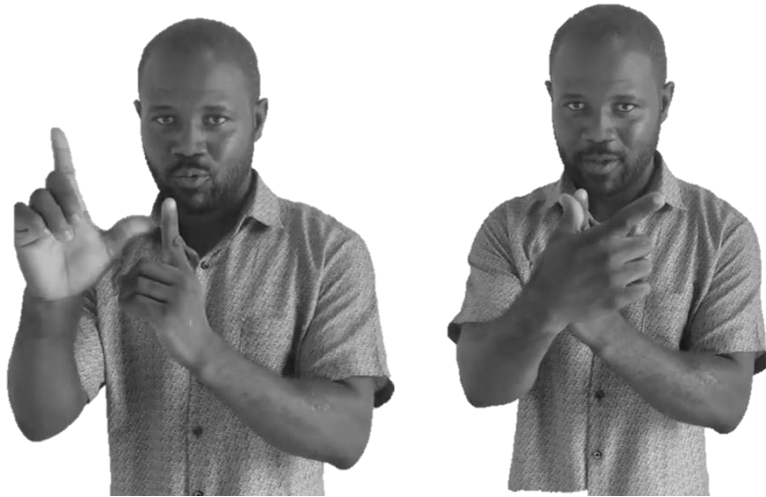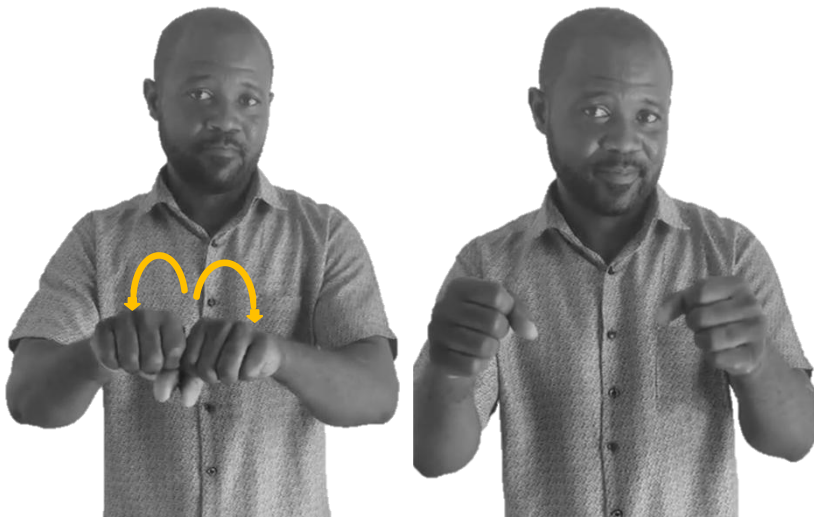
Figure 152: LOCAL

Figure 153: BROKEN

In an informal discussion, I asked one participant (D8a) why he does not use the LOCAL considering his rich knowledge of the variant. His response led to the following comment (12) below,

12) MANY PEOPLE LIKE ENGLISH, THAT WHY USE IT. IF YOU MET COMMUNICATE LOCAL, CAN USE, WELL COMMUNICATE WITH YOU. I RESPECT LOCAL SL
'Majority of deaf members like ENGLISH (Signed English), that is why I also use it. But if you approach me with communication in LOCAL, I can as well communicate with you. I respect the LOCAL too'

According to signer D8a, LOCAL which involves indexing the referent and searching for them nearby, can be time-consuming. He finds it very inappropriate to do that in a conversation and degrade such a practice. Shows the negative attitude towards the local language and his preference for ENGLISH.

Participants also introduced the term " BROKEN " to describe a signing style that falls somewhere between SIGN and GESTURE. Through further investigation, it became evident that BROKEN represents a mixture of ENGLISH and LOCAL.[114] Participants explained that BROKEN (SL) is sometimes used to facilitate communication in social settings involving deaf individuals with varying educational backgrounds. For example, participant D3a, an older adult with a first cycle of education, mentioned that family members often find it more convenient to use GESTURE.

One common understanding among the participants was that code-switching from GESTURE (LOCAL) to SIGN (ENGLISH) is influenced by the interlocutors' background and their proficiency in SIGN (ENGLISH). Participant D5a, an older adult with secondary education, expressed this view (e.g., 13), stating that;

13) WHEN SIGN SPONTANEOUS, SIGN LANGUAGE WAY. IF KNOW PERSON ILLITERATE, USE BROKEN. CAN SWITCH.
'By default, the deaf use their natural sign language (GSL), however if the interlocutor has no formal education, pidgin sign language is used. Codeswitching is commonly practiced'

It is worth noting that the participants frequently used the terms SPONTANEOUS (see Figure 154) or DEAF(– POSS) (see Figure 155) to refer to any of the signing systems, including GSL or ASL, excluding Signed English. In other words, participant D5a's statement implied that the deaf community does not typically default to using Signed English in their interactions.

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[114] Note that this kind of mixture is not only related to lexeme, but the entire grammar as understood by signers.

Figure 154: SPONTANEOUS

Figure 155: DEAF (− POSS)
[This signing variety is denoted with a possessive marker in parentheses (− POSS) due to its optional use with the sign DEAF. Signers may refer to this signing variant as either DEAF or DEAF− POSS. Including the possessive marker highlights that this signing variant is distinctively associated with the deaf community, symbolising the "deaf way" or a sense of belonging among deaf individuals (i.e., "deaf belong")]

When comparing their sign language communication between deaf and hearing interlocutors, participants noted that a combination of SIGN and GESTURE could be used when conversing with Deaf individuals. However, hearing interlocutors would solely rely on SIGN, albeit with less rapid hand movements. Participants, such as D6a (a young female with tertiary education) and D3a (an older

male with a first cycle of education), highlighted that interactions with hearing interlocutors were not as "SPONTANEOUS" as those with deaf signers. This suggests they might employ their version of Signed English in such situations. Participants also emphasised that they would not stereotype individuals who use SIGN or GESTURE since effective communication in Ghana often requires familiarity with both varieties.

Nevertheless, GESTURE was associated with low prestige and evoked negative attitudes and resentment among the participants. For instance, when asked if she used GESTURE, participant D6a expressed displeasure with the following comment (e.g., 14):

14) HOW COME I DEAF WOULD GESTURE
     'Why would someone with my reputation, use the LOCAL.

This sentiment conveyed her offense at the notion of using or being associated with GESTURE as an educated Deaf person. However, participants acknowledged that GESTURE might be known by all members of the deaf community, and they stated that they could code-switch between ENGLISH and GESTURE when necessary.

When asked about settings where GESTURE might be provoked, participants unanimously agreed that trade negotiations at the market were common situations. They shared examples of GESTURE signs used in market transactions, causing laughter among the group. For instance, when representing the cost of an item or numerical values, they mentioned that it often involved mouthing and unconventional phonological locations such as using toes (see Figure 156 below).

Figure 156: Using the toes for numerical values in GESTURE

<u>GSL vs ASL</u>

Most participants (67%) agreed that GSL and ASL are different languages. However, there was a minority group that did not affirm this distinction, and among them was signer D3a (a male, older adult with a first cycle of education). D3a made a comment (15) to highlight the historical connection between GSL and ASL, suggesting that there have been some diachronic changes over time.

15) IN PAST, GSL ASL SAME; AS-TIME-WENT-ON, NOW DIFFERENT. AS-TIME-WENT-ON, CHANGED
'Historically, GSL was known as ASL. Over time, the two languages are now distinct due to changes'

When asked to provide an example of these changes, D3a could not easily recall one, but he expressed the difference between the two languages through another comment by stating that ASL SOFT, GSL HARD 'ASL is "soft" and GSL is "hard"'. D3a's response generated laughter among the participants, although the exact reason for their amusement was unclear. However, I believe their laughter was not solely due to the description of ASL being "soft" and GSL being "hard," but rather because D3a could not recall an example and provided an intriguing response. This incident caught my attention as a researcher, and I later discuss it (in Subsection 6.5.1.16). In Figure 157 and Figure 158 below, I provide visual representations of the signs used by the signers to convey the concepts of "HARD" and "SOFT."

A: HARD – 1   B: HARD – 2
Figure 157: HARD

Figure 158: SOFT

After numerous examples highlighting the differences between GSL and ASL, even those who initially disagreed eventually came to an agreement and provided additional examples of variant signs (such as BYE, IF, HAVE) that exist in both languages. Some participants also shared syntactic examples to demonstrate the distinctions between the two languages. One notable example was the expression "you are a talkative," which showed how it could be conveyed in both GSL and ASL. In GSL, this information is expressed using a simple sign, while a sequence of signs is made in ASL. They considered it a good example of the difference between GSL and ASL. The signers who initially claimed that both languages were different acknowledged the historical connection and some lexical similarities between GSL and ASL, as expressed in example (16) below.

16) DIFFERENT LANGUAGES. BOTH SAME. SOMETIMES DIFFERENT, 30% DIFFERENT
    'GSL and ASL are different languages. They could sometimes be considered as the same language. The difference between them could be 30%'

Their response to the question of whether ASL was better than GSL also evoked an emotional reaction. With the exception of one participant, all of them swiftly and passionately responded with a resounding "NO". This response highlighted their solidarity with their own language and a sense of distinction between GSL and ASL. Several positive remarks about GSL in comparison to ASL were shared. For example, GHANA PROUD 'I am proud of GSL'; GHANA BETTER 'GSL is better'; GHANA HARD 'GSL is hard'.

Notably, Signer D3a, who initially did not support the notion that GSL was better than ASL, later came to accept this viewpoint after hearing the arguments

made by other participants. In fact, he (D3) concluded with a patriotic statement in support of GSL, as illustrated in example (17) below.

17) DEAF AND GHANAIAN, MY SIGN LANGUAGE BETTER THAN ASL

   'I am a deaf Ghanaian; my sign language is better than ASL'

Initially, D3 expressed his belief that ASL has a rich vocabulary, a claim that was also supported by other deaf members. However, they emphasized that richness in vocabulary alone does not make ASL a better language than GSL. It was in this context that a female participant asserted that GSL is better and described it as " HARD." She further explained that GSL effectively meets the environmental needs of deaf people in Ghana, including expressing various Ghanaian foods.

During a heated discussion, participants also acknowledged the prevailing attitude in Ghana that looks down upon the use of GSL in education. This attitude often influences individuals to learn ASL to pursue higher education. However, they argued that such reasoning inadequately justifies labelling GSL as inferior. Since sign languages are considered essential for deaf individuals, all participants stressed the importance of interpreters and deaf people learning any sign language they encounter. They explained that within the deaf community, this approach fosters positive interactions on both local and international levels. Their perspective highlights their interest in learning ASL and recognises the educational benefits of such endeavours. Consequently, signers hold ASL in high regard, but they maintain that this prestige given to ASL should not be used to compare it as superior to GSL. By consciously making this comparison, they are ready to refute any claims of inferiority regarding their own language. Some of the comments made by participants to support this viewpoint are presented in example (18) below. It is evident that signers demonstrate solidarity for GSL while acknowledging the prestige associated with ASL, revealing their explicit and implicit ideology.

18)
   a. CAN'T SAY AMERICA BETTER THAN GHANA. EVERYBODY; EVERY COUNTRY HAVE SIGN LANGUAGE, ALL IMPORTANT
      'I can't say ASL is better than GSL. Every individual or nation have their sign language which is equally important to the language users'
   b. BORN IN GHANA, GHANA SIGN USED GROWING-UP
      'I was born in Ghana, and GSL is the language I used from birth'

   <u>ENGLISH (i.e., GHANA/GSL) vs LOCAL (i.e., GESTURE)</u>

On participants' perception of GHANA/ GSL vis-a-vis GESTURE, there was a general consensus among the signers that they are distinct. Signers associate GESTURE with uneducated signers, while GHANA/ GSL is linked to educated signers. A signer

provided a comment (see e.g., 19) to clarify the differentiation between GHANA/GSL and GESTURE:

19) EDUCATED HAVE SAME SIGN, ILLITERATE SIGN DIFFERENT. USE GESTURE.
'The educated Deaf members have a shared sign language (ENGLISH), which is different from what is used by uneducated Deaf members. The uneducated members use LOCAL'.

According to our participant (D8a), GESTURE exhibits diversity. With examples, he further explained that the lexemes and syntax used by uneducated signers differ and involve more indexing.

Signers generally observed that GESTURE can be iconic in form, but there are variations, and some signs are also arbitrary. When expressing aspects of their language ideology regarding GESTURE, they mentioned that some signs can be humorous, provoking laughter among educated members of the deaf community. They also noted that GESTURE exhibits regional and religious influences. For instance, participants mentioned that signers from the northern part of Ghana use signs different from those used in the south. Additionally, Deaf Muslims have their own unique signs that they use among themselves. Signer D8a described the variant used by Muslims as "HARD," "DIFFERENT," and "FAR," indicating that understanding these signs can be challenging for non-Muslims. The participants provided examples of the GESTURE used by Muslims. Participants explained that deaf individuals are exposed to these variations in school, mainly during their secondary education (SHS), and sometimes the signs are standardized. Signer D3a expressed support for the use of GESTURE in deaf schools with the following comment (e.g., 20):

20) SCHOOL, WE LEARN GESTURE, UNDERSTAND FAST
'In school, we learn the LOCAL, and it helps with transparent communication'.

Signers also noted that GESTURE follows the syntax of the Akan language and is often supported by voicing or imitating the mouthing of Akan pronunciation. Note that this is not a general statement of GESTURE but reflects the perspective of certain participants within an Akan community. In light of the above contact-induced features, Table 45 below summarises notable features identified by participants to differentiate between (formal) GSL and GESTURE (LOCAL). By examining 12 features, including Domain of usage, Sentence length, Phonological LOC, Handshape, Mouthing, Word order, Modal verbs, Initialisation, Fingerspelling, Vocabulary, Variation, and Indexing, the table illustrates the distinctions between the two varieties.

Table 45: Notable Features Distinguishing LOCAL from ENGLISH.

	ENGLISH	**LOCAL**
Domain of usage	More formal setting	Casual, everyday interaction (Informal setting)
Sentence complexity	Complex sentences	Simple sentences
Phonological LOC.	Use of conventional LOC. (More precise & consistent)	Use of unconventional LOC. (Less consistent or varied)
Handshape	Stern and fix (Standardized & conventional)	Lax and unfix. (More spontaneous or varied)
Mouthing	English mouthing (Minimal or absent)	Vernacular mouthing (Frequent use)
Contact English (e.g., word order)	More structured and rigid	Less strict or flexible
Modal verbs	Frequent use of modal verbs	Limited use or omission
Initialisation	More frequent	Limited use or omission
Fingerspelling	More common or frequent	Limited use or omission
Vocabulary	More vocabulary (Formal registers and technical terms)	More vocabulary (Informal, colloquial vocabulary)
Variation	Less variation within signs	Greater variation within signs
Indexing	Less indexing and specific	More indexing and context-dependent

Deaf GESTURE vs hearing gesture

To explore the distinction between deaf GESTURE and hearing gesture, the signers were asked if the GESTURE used by deaf individuals were the same as those used by their hearing counterparts within the same society. While the term " GESTURE " was not clearly defined by the signers and could potentially lead to confusion, their responses shed light on the topic. Except for one participant (D3a Male; older adult with 1st cycle Edu.), all other participants quickly acknowledged that deaf GESTURE and hearing gestures differed.

Initially, signer D3a believed that they were the same, providing examples of gestures that are commonly used in interactions between deaf and hearing individuals. He mentioned examples such as "FATHER," "MOTHER," and "PLAY-FOOTBALL." However, other participants who argued that they were different presented counterexamples that were not found to be used by the hearing community. One compelling point that convinced signer D3a that deaf GESTURE was distinct from hearing gesture was the realization that the hearing community could not understand several lexical signs used in GESTURE. This observation highlighted

the linguistic complexity and uniqueness of deaf GESTURE, which differed from the gestures employed by hearing individuals. The participants recognized that deaf GESTURE encompassed a broader range of signs and had its own specific lexicon that was not readily understood by those outside the deaf community. This distinction between deaf GESTURE and hearing gesture emphasized the richness and depth of the sign language system, reinforcing the notion that it was a distinct and independent language even though they could share some history or similarity.

2nd Focus Group Discussion

The existence of a locally evolved GSL (i.e., LOCAL)

During the discussion, significant communication among participants was conducted using LOCAL. It seemed as though they understood that the purpose of the meeting was to use LOCAL exclusively. This misunderstanding, however, was fortunate as it provided an opportunity to observe the members' familiarity with LOCAL. At times, I found myself lost due to my unfamiliarity with the LOCAL signs and had to ask for clarification on certain signs. Another important observation was that within the group, the term " LOCAL " or " GESTURE " was used to refer to a variant of GSL. In contrast, ENGLISH was simply referred to as sign language or GSL/GHANA.

I was unsuccessful when I attempted to elicit their explicit language ideology regarding LOCAL. Instead of providing direct responses, they shared numerous stories and engaged in role-plays using various LOCAL signs when questioned. For example, when I asked whether two deaf couples would prefer to use LOCAL or ENGLISH at home, this prompted them to act out scenarios or give examples of the interactions they might have with each other at home. In a direct response to the question, one participant (Signer 2: female; food vendor @ deaf School) mentioned using ENGLISH with her deaf husband at home (see Figure 159). Generally, they all agreed that they would primarily use ENGLISH, with NATURAL (LOCAL) signs incorporated, depending on the education level of their interlocutor.

| GESTURE | NO | GHANA | SIGN | ENGLISH |

'I don't use GESTURE: I use Ghanaian Sign Language; thus, Signed English'.
Figure 159: Expressing inclination/habit for ENGLISH.

Most of the role-plays and examples focused on domestic settings or interpersonal communication between two deaf individuals. They highlighted that in romantic or sexual relationships, deaf individuals might initially communicate using GESTURE (LOCAL) but eventually switch to GHANA (ENGLISH). This suggests that LOCAL can serve as a means of solidarity among deaf members. They also provided numerous role-plays where deaf individuals engaging in intimate relationships would use GESTURE (LOCAL). In other words, LOCAL can be used for secrecy. One participant (Signer 1: male; sign language tutor; teacher; linguist) further noted that in-group association could lead to the development of signs for concealing information. The discussions and examples provided insight into LOCAL within the GSL landscape and the domains where LOCAL are predominantly employed.
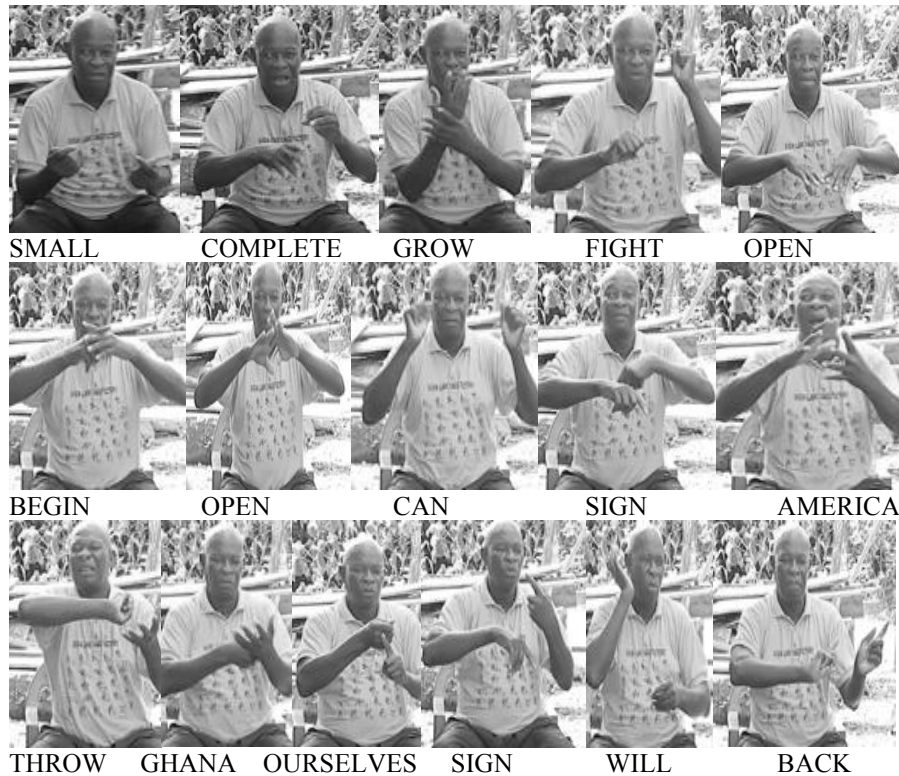
On the issue of GESTURE (i.e., LOCAL) acquisition and nature

I asked the participants whether deaf individuals learn GESTURE (i.e., LOCAL) from hearing people. One participant (Signer 3: male; retired teacher; church leader) responded with a YES, but not everyone agreed. Another participant (Signer 2) mentioned that GESTURE is sometimes learned in school. She also explained that ENGLISH can be used at home for similar purposes as GESTURE. This ideology suggests that GESTURE is a fully developed natural language and not just a rudimentary form of signing used primarily by those with no formal education. However, not everyone agreed with her perspective. Signer 3 expressed that GESTURE is initially accepted in deaf schools (SHS), but as users become educated, they are encouraged to sign using GHANA (ENGLISH). He believes that individuals with no formal education use GESTURE, but if they become aware of GHANA, they abandon GESTURE and choose not to use it anymore. Nevertheless, Signer 2 emphasised that the use of GESTURE by deaf individuals does not imply that they lack intelligence.

Regarding the nature of LOCAL, Signer 2 explained that it incorporates pointing signs (indexing) during conversations. She further elaborated that indexing was also used to teach LOCAL signs within a domestic setting. Her explanations suggest that many local signs for food items are created within domestic environments and shared among deaf individuals.

Signer 1 stated that there is no pure GESTURE used by uneducated deaf individuals. He believes that GESTURE is mixed with ENGLISH. To him, sign language is the default language used by educated deaf individuals. Signer 3 explained that this situation arose because, after the introduction of ASL in Ghana, deaf people did not prioritise the development of their sign language specifically for Deaf education. Instead, they preferred to use ASL. Figure 160 illustrates how Signer 3 expressed his views.

AMERICA	HABIT	SIGN	HABIT	GHANA	SL
LATE	GNAD	TRY	RESEARCH		GHANA
SIGN	PRINT	GHANA-SIGN	SMALL	THEMSELVES	SIGN
SMALL	CONT.	WHY-EXCLAM		THINK	FOCUS
ON	DEAF	SCHOOH	SERIOUS Neg	WHY-EXCLAM	BEGIN

| SMALL | COMPLETE | GROW | FIGHT | OPEN |

| BEGIN | OPEN | CAN | SIGN | AMERICA |

| THROW | GHANA | OURSELVES | SIGN | WILL | BACK |

'The use of ASL has been a habit. GSL is late with its development. GNAD undertook small-scale research and published a preliminary dictionary [GNAD, 2001: containing 810 signs (T.M.H)] but was not adequate. I think it is so because their focus was not seriously on deaf education. That is a pity. Gradually we can advocate for the development of GSL so that ASL would be abandoned and GSL restored.'

Figure 160: Expressing views on why deaf members are inclined to use ASL and the need to develop GSL.

The previous comment suggests that deaf individuals in the broader deaf society primarily use ASL due to its historical introduction as a suitable language for Deaf education. Signer 3 perceives ASL as the same as the sign language used by the deaf people in Ghana. He mentioned that GSL did not exist in the past, and they were not aware of sign language (GHANA, WE DIDN'T KNOW SL. NO!). According to him, their exposure to sign language only occurred through Deaf education initiated by an American, Andrew Foster. On the other hand, Signer 1 shared the view that the sign language they use is a combination of the language introduced by Andrew Foster (i.e., ASL) and NATURAL signs for local items that do not exist in America.

This ideology among the elite within deaf communities fosters their desire to learn more ASL signs and incorporate them into their own vernaculars. As expressed by Signer 1 in example (21) below:

21) PEOPLE FEEL EDUCATED, MUST COPY ASL

'Some signers assume that because they are educated, they must adopt ASL.'
Signer 1, with his linguistic knowledge as a GSL teacher, highlighted that GSL is distinct from ASL, noting the excessive use of initialisation in GSL compared to ASL. Similar to the views expressed in figure 16, Signer 1 also emphasized the need for deaf individuals to focus on the uniqueness of GSL and develop their language. This comment appears to advocate for the extensive use of initialisation to differentiate GSL from ASL.

Signers also acknowledged the existence of variation in GESTURE usage. They expressed concerns that some signs are considered "GOOD" while others are not. They suggested that the signs considered good should be incorporated into the (formal) GSL to expand its lexicon. The exact meaning of "GOOD" signs was not clear, but it can be assumed that they refer to GESTURE or GESTURE signs that conform to conventional phonology (e.g., handshape and location). They also assumed that a "GOOD" sign, according to the upper-class members, would be a sign that does not provoke laughter. As mentioned by Signer 1, newcomers who use GESTURE in Deaf schools (SHS) are often mocked by their seniors. According to his explanation, the seniors in the school perceive their own signs and status as belonging to the upper class (educated), and any sign different from what they use is considered inferior or not "GOOD."

The discussion among participants revealed differing views on GESTURE, with some considering it a fully-fledged language and others viewing it as rudimentary. The acquisition of GESTURE varied, with some learning it from hearing people or in school, while others emphasised its development within domestic settings. The introduction of ASL for Deaf education influenced the language landscape, with some perceiving it as synonymous with sign language in Ghana, while others emphasised the need to preserve and develop GSL. The desire to learn and incorporate ASL signs among the educated members highlighted a sense of prestige. The existence of variations in GESTURE and the distinction between "GOOD" and "not good" signs raised questions about standardisation and lexicon expansion in ENGLISH. The next section will further analyse these findings and discuss language labelling, ideologies, diversity, and language development within the deaf community in Ghana.

6.5 Discussion

The discussion section provides an overview of key aspects related to GSL landscape. It covers topics such as language naming/labelling (Section 6.5.1); GSL usage patterns, prestige and influences (Section 6.5.2); the relationship between foreign-based and locally evolved sign language (Section 6.5.3). The discussion in this section aims to contribute to understanding GSL and its sociolinguistic dynamics within the deaf community in Ghana.

6.5.1 Language naming/ labelling sign languages

In the following subsection, I present 16 general labels signers use to name or describe sign languages based on their perspectives or ideology. One of the labels serves as a generic name (SIGN); ten of these labels are specifically for sign language naming (BROKEN, LOCAL, NATURAL, C-O-D-E, GESTURE, ILLITERATE, VILLAGE, ENGLISH, ASL/AMERICA & GSL/GHANA) while five labels describe particular signing styles (i.e., PRETEND, SPONTANEOUS, DEAF (-POSS), INITIALIZATION, HARD/SOFT). Figure 161 illustrates the various labels signers give to different signing forms that can be called GSL within the deaf community. It is important to note that not everyone is on the same page on these labels, but they generally represent the prevailing ideology within the community.
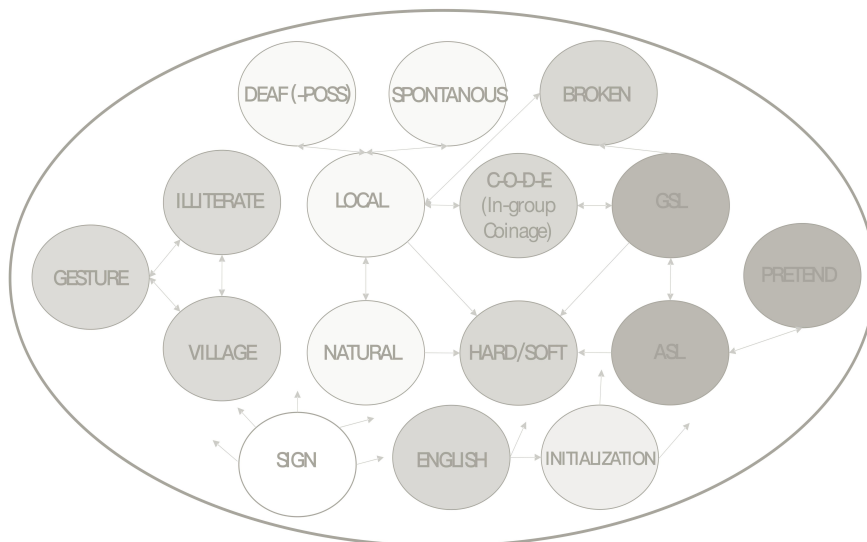

Figure 161: Folk categorisation of SIGN forms within the deaf community

These labels are not necessarily explicit folk classification of sign languages in Ghana, nor are they dependent on linguistic criteria. Rather, they reflect signers'

perspectives and their everyday interactions with other members of the deaf community. Some labels may overlap in meaning or serve as synonyms, and there may be variations in their usage based on context, personal preference, inclination, and individual signing repertoire, which may not have been fully captured. Figure 161 above uses colours and arrows [→] to depict labels with overlapping meanings or relationships.

Based on my interviews and observations, my semantic analysis of the 16 labels provides insights into how signers conceptualise and describe different sign languages within their community. These labels contribute to the rich tapestry of language naming and reflect the complex dynamics and ideologies surrounding sign language variation and identification.

It is worth noting that these labels are not based on linguistic or ethnographic criteria but rather on the lived experiences and perspectives of signers within the Deaf community. The list of labels provided may sometimes overlap in meaning, and additional variations and nuances may not be explicitly captured.

SIGN

The sign is articulated using two hands, either employing a double articulation with the index finger (see Figure 162A) or using extended fingers (see Figure 162B) in a circular motion with the arms alternately moving towards the body.

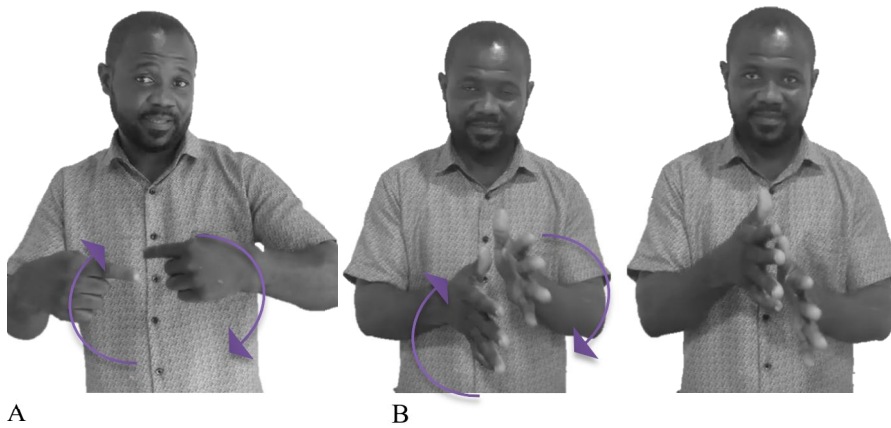

A   B

Figure 162: SIGN (Figure 150 repeated here as Figure 162)

The label SIGN is a generic term, all-embracing the signing varieties of deaf people in Ghana, including GSL and ASL. Signers use two variants of the term SIGN (i.e., Figure 162). However, this chapter does not explore whether signers distinguish between these labels. It is important to note that the term SIGN specifically refers to signing varieties used by deaf signers and does not include gestures used by hearing speakers. However, if gestures from the hearing community have been integrated into the sign language used by deaf individuals, they may be considered part of the SIGN repertoire.

The SIGN label recognises sign language as a distinct and independent linguistic system. It acknowledges the linguistic creativity and expressive power of signers in Ghana, with their own signing varieties to communicate among themselves through visual-manual communication.

While SIGN encompasses various signing varieties, including GSL and ASL, it also acknowledges the potential existence of local variations or dialects within the broader category of sign language. Overall, the use of the label SIGN reflects the understanding and appreciation of sign language as a rich and complex linguistic system, distinct from spoken languages and essential for effective communication and cultural expression among deaf individuals in Ghana.

G-S-L or GHANA

During informal conversations, signers often use the terms GHANA or finger spell G-S-L to refer to GSL. The sign for GHANA can be articulated with a G-handshape moving slightly upward, striking the open palm of the nondominant hand with the slightly curved back of the G-handshape (see Figure 163). Remarkably, apart from the handshape, the parameters of the sign emulate the articulation of the sign for NEW. This symbolic choice is rooted in the historical context of Ghana, as the term "Ghana" emerged as a new name for the region after gaining independence from British rule.

Figure 163: GHANA (Figure 147 repeated here as Figure 163)

This terminology (GHANA) is commonly employed to describe the national sign language used by deaf Ghanaians in the urban deaf community. GSL is primarily taught and propagated through Deaf schools, which gives it a strong association with educational settings. However, GSL faces challenges due to its inherent variation, making it difficult for deaf individuals to establish a unified definition. According to the perspectives shared by the participants, deaf Ghanaians view the label GSL or GHANA as a simple and inclusive term representing the language used by Deaf individuals in Ghana, regardless of its specific nuances or variations. This ideology aligns with Oppong's definition of GSL as "[t]he visual-gestural mode of communication used by individual Ghanaians who are deaf or hard of hearing" (Oppong, 2006:21). Signers appear to imply that if deaf Ghanaians use this signing variety, it is sufficient to label it as GSL.

The use of GHANA or finger spelling G-S-L reflects a common shorthand or colloquial way of referring to the national sign language. It signifies a sense of

ownership and identification among deaf Ghanaians, emphasizing their language as an integral part of their cultural and linguistic identity.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that language ideologies and perceptions can vary within a linguistic community. While some individuals may view GSL as a comprehensive term encompassing all variations and dialects used by deaf Ghanaians, others may recognize the need to further explore and define the specific linguistic features and regional variations of GSL. Recognizing and valuing these different perspectives can contribute to an insightful understanding of GSL as a dynamic and evolving sign language.

Furthermore, it is crucial to involve deaf community members, linguists, educators, and researchers in discussions surrounding GSL. Their insights and collaboration can provide a deeper understanding of GSL's linguistic structure, sociocultural significance, and potential standardization efforts. By including diverse perspectives, it is possible to foster a more inclusive and accurate representation of GSL and ensure that it meets the needs and aspirations of the deaf community in Ghana.

A.S.L., AMERICA, WHITE or FOREIGN

Within the Deaf community, there are various ways in which signers refer to ASL. They may use terms such as AMERICA, WHITE, FOREIGN or may simply finger spell A-S-L. The sign AMERICA (see Figure 164A) is articulated by interlocking both open hands (four fingers spread), slightly curving the fingers, and moving them in an outward circle from right to left. The sign for WHITE here (see Figure 164B) does not denote colour; rather, it signifies the fair complexion of a person's skin. Signers aptly use this sign due to its connection with the diverse complexions found within the American population. To articulate WHITE, one employs the four fingers in a non-spread position, rubbing it back and forth on the forearm of the non-dominant hand. Similarly, the sign for FOREIGN (see Figure 164C) involves the use of the F-handshape, rubbing it in a circular motion outside the nondominant hand near the elbow. These signs, such as AMERICA and FOREIGN, seem to have been potentially borrowed from ASL, showcasing the linguistic influence and exchange between ASL and GSL.
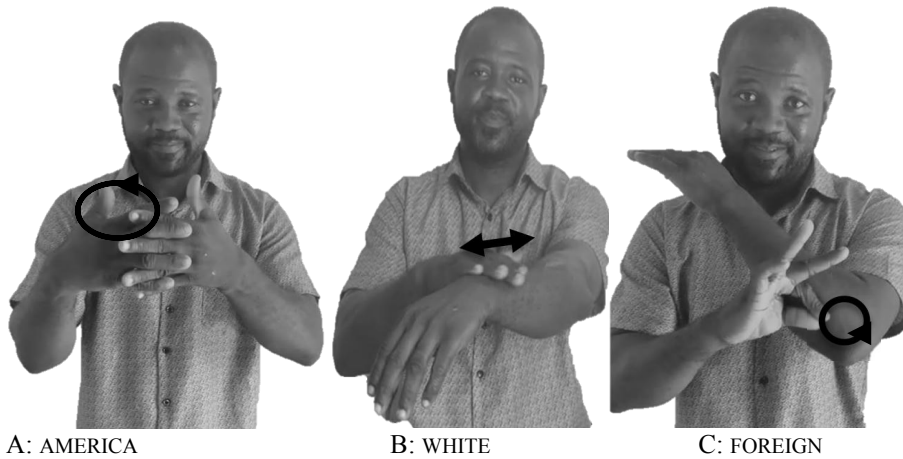
A: AMERICA   B: WHITE   C: FOREIGN

Figure 164: Various signs to refer to ASL (Figure 146 repeated here as Figure 164)

It is important to note that some signers do not make a clear distinction between ASL and GSL. Consequently, many deaf individuals perceive GSL to be the same as ASL. Therefore, when signers indicate the use of A-S-L, they often imply the use of GSL. However, when there is a need to differentiate between the two signing varieties (i.e., ASL & GSL), signers may intentionally use the labels "AMERICA, WHITE or FOREIGN" to highlight the foreign origin of ASL. The choice of these labels demonstrates the linguistic ideology of disassociating GSL from ASL. The lack of a clear distinction between ASL and GSL among some signers indicates a perception of GSL as being equivalent to ASL. This understanding may stem from limited exposure to ASL and GSL linguistics.
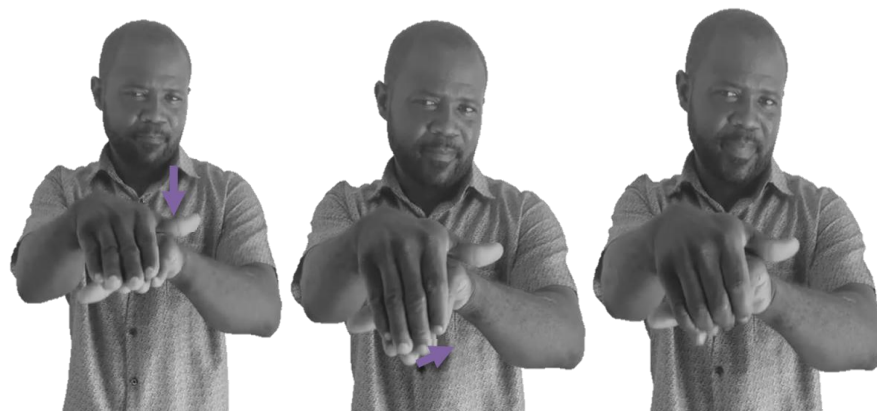
PRETEND

Figure 165: PRETEND

The label PRETEND (see Figure 165) is given to the formal use of ASL or ENGLISH. It is used as a description of the signing variety, which is considered not to be the vernacular of the signer. In other words, during a formal setting or in the event of observers' paradox, Deaf signers are inclined to use PRETEND SL. Thus, consciously avoid a particular signing variety that is native or accustomed to them, in favour of the PRETEND, considered to be prestigious.

The motivation for the label PRETEND in relation to sign languages can be understood based on the description provided. It describes a signing variety that is not considered the vernacular or native language of the signer. The motivation behind using the label PRETEND seems to stem from the context of formal settings or the presence of observers. In such situations, deaf signers consciously choose to use this "Pretend" sign language instead of their native or accustomed signing variety. This choice is motivated by a perception that the "Pretend" sign language is considered prestigious or more socially valued in those formal contexts. By using the "Pretend" sign language, signers aim to conform to the expectations of the setting and to present a more polished or professional image of their signing abilities.

In summary, the motivation for the label PRETEND appears to be rooted in the desire to project a specific image and conform to the perceived norms and expectations of formal settings, where a prestigious signing variety is preferred.

ENGLISH

The sign for ENGLISH (see Figure 166), likely borrowed from ASL, involves grasping the outer edge of the closed nondominant hand at the wrist with the curved active hand and moving both hands back and forth. While the sign, ENGLISH can denote either the country England or the English language, in this context, signers employ it to specifically describe a signing variety that adheres to the syntax or word order of the English language.

Figure 166: ENGLISH (Figure 148 repeated here as Figure 166)

Signers who use this variety believe it to be well-suited for certain contexts, such as formal interviews and educational settings, where it aligns with the linguistic expectations of the dominant spoken language. It provides a familiar framework for communication between Deaf and hearing individuals, particularly when the hearing individuals are more familiar with English. Participants perceived ENGLISH as a communication option commonly used by deaf individuals when interacting with hearing signers. However, there were mixed attitudes towards this signing variety among participants.

Some signers hold a negative view of ENGLISH and find it "boring", primarily due to its grammar: perceived circumlocution and time-consuming nature. They believe ENGLISH involves unnecessary elaboration and communication. For instance, one signer expressed their frustration with ENGLISH in a statement (22) below:

22) ENGLISH KEEP EYE BUSY, MAKE DIFFICULT TO FOLLOW. SOMETIMES MAKE WANT SLEEP.
   'One need to observe a lot when using Signed English. It creates sleepy eyes. It is sometimes difficult to understand.'

The signer believed that ENGLISH lead to longer and more complex expressions that may be perceived as unnecessary or cumbersome. The criticism of ENGLISH as time-consuming and potentially causing drowsiness suggests a desire for more concise and streamlined communication. This language ideology surrounding ENGLISH highlights the tension between adhering to the syntax of a

spoken language and the desire for efficient and streamlined signing practices within the deaf community. While some signers value the familiarity and compatibility with the dominant spoken language, others prioritize linguistic efficiency and prefer sign varieties that use a more concise and agglutinative morphology. It is important to note that language ideologies are not static and can vary among individuals and communities.

INITIALISATION

Signers do not have a specific label for the signing variety known as "initialisation," but they are familiar with its characteristics and can provide examples to describe this system of signing. The label used by signers focuses on the use of initialised signs, where the manual alphabet handshape is incorporated for every sign during articulation. Typically, the handshape represents the initial letter of the corresponding English word or shares a similar concept.

In contrast to Signed English, signers in this study perceive initialisation as a separate form of signing system. This suggests that they distinguish between the two and recognize initialisation as a unique linguistic feature within the Ghanaian deaf community. In Ghana, this system of signing is predominantly used by young elite individuals within the deaf community. The preference for initialisation among young elite individuals may be influenced by various factors, such as exposure to educational settings or the desire to align with certain linguistic norms and practices. However, it is important to note that older deaf members expressed concerns about the increasing use of initialisation among young people. This observation aligns with Saah's (1986) findings among hearing Ghanaians, where the older generation tends to critique the language development of the younger generation, considering their linguistic form as the original norm. The older generation's tendency to criticize the linguistic practices of the younger generation is a common occurrence. This can be attributed to a perceived deviation from what is considered the traditional or original norm of the language. However, it is important to recognize that language is dynamic, and linguistic forms evolve and change over time. Different signing varieties, including initialisation, contribute to the linguistic diversity and creativity within the deaf community.

LOCAL

In articulating LOCAL (Figure 167), the tip of the thumb in an L-handshape on the active hand makes contact with the tip of the index finger on the nondominant hand. As this contact is maintained, the active hand is moved in an anticlockwise arc position. This sign, which involves initialization, appears to have originated from the phonological location used in signs for localities such as cities, towns, or villages.
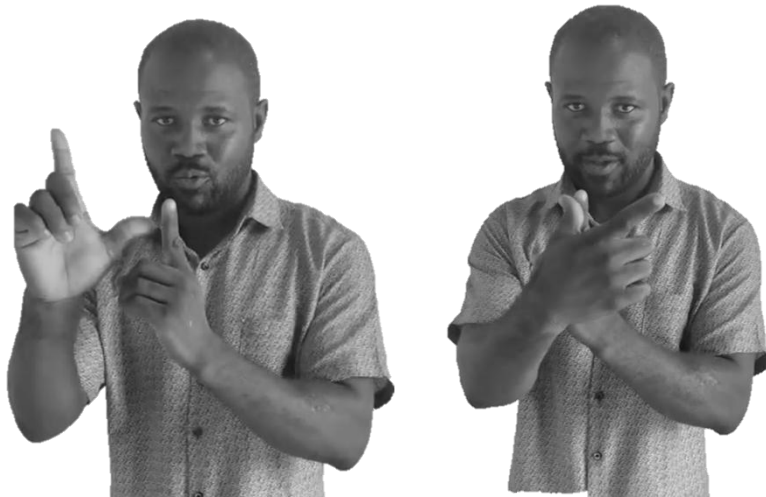
Figure 167: LOCAL (Figure 152 repeated here as Figure 167)

The term LOCAL within the language ideology of the deaf community evokes the concept of a signing variety that is regarded as purely vernacular or indigenous in nature. Researchers, such as Edward and Akanlig-Pare (2021) and Nyst (2010), have also used the term "local SL" to describe sign languages that have emerged within specific Ghanaian deaf communities, such as AdaSL and Nanabin SL. According to Nyst (2010), sign languages labelled as "local" tend to have lower prestige in comparison to sign languages influenced by foreign languages. The ideological understanding of the term LOCAL by deaf signers aligns with the perspective expressed by Nyst (2010). The perception of LOCAL signs as having lower prestige can be attributed to sociolinguistic factors and the historical dominance of foreign-based sign languages in educational and institutional settings. This disparity in prestige may influence the attitudes and perceptions of deaf signers towards their own local signing variety.

Deaf signers use this term to describe signing varieties that have evolved within specific Ghanaian deaf communities. LOCAL signs are considered to have distinct linguistic features and cultural influences that reflect the unique experiences and heritage of the community. The alignment between the ideological meaning expressed by deaf signers and Nyst's (2010) findings suggests a shared understanding of the term LOCAL within the Ghanaian deaf community. The term carries connotations of authenticity, cultural relevance, and a connection to the local deaf community's experiences and identity. It signifies a sense of pride in their indigenous signing variety while acknowledging its position in relation to other sign languages.

The language ideology surrounding the LOCAL signing variety sheds light on the complex dynamics of language status and prestige within the deaf community.

It highlights the significance of recognizing and valuing locally developed sign languages as important linguistic resources that contribute to the cultural heritage and identity of the community. By understanding and appreciating the unique characteristics of local sign languages, efforts can be made to promote their recognition, documentation, and preservation alongside other sign languages in Ghana and beyond.

NATURAL

The sign NATURAL (see Figure 168) is articulated using an N-handshape of the active hand, with a subtle arching motion, placing the tips of the index and middle fingers on the back of the nondominant hand. It appears to have been borrowed from the ASL signs for "nature" or "natural" (Riekehof, 1978).
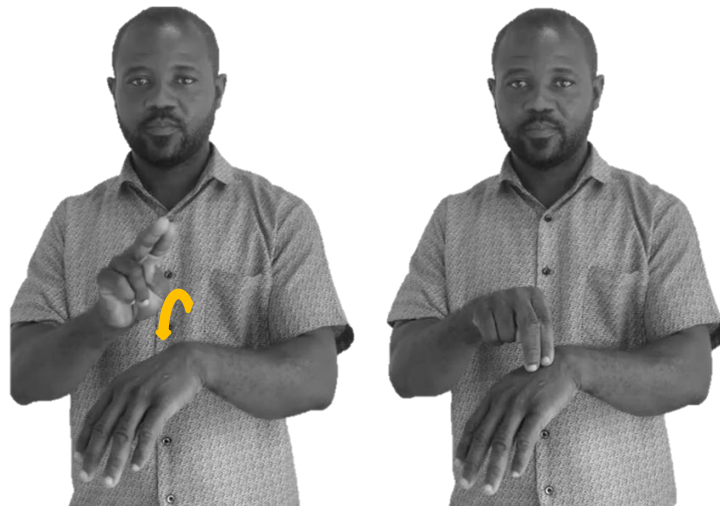

Figure 168: NATURAL (Figure 133 repeated here as Figure 168)

The language ideology surrounding the signing variety referred to as NATURAL highlights its connection to both the lexicon and syntax of a signing variety. Signers perceive it as a language that possesses iconicity, where signs may carry inherent meanings that relate to their referents. This notion of NATURAL sign language is not associated with any negative connotations, and it is applicable to both educated and uneducated members of the deaf community.

The term NATURAL signifies a linguistic system considered inherent, intuitive, and closely tied to the cultural context of its users. It is often associated with signers from rural settings, suggesting that their signing variety is deeply rooted in their local experiences and cultural practices. This association with rural signers reflects the belief that their signing variety is closer to a "natural" form of

communication, less influenced by external factors or formal education. The use of term NATURAL has also been used by signers in Nepal to represent a specific variety of sign language (Green, 2014). Green defines it as "a limited repertoire of signs shared by Deaf and hearing people" (2014:1). In their context, NATURAL is distinguished from both foreign sign languages and the national sign language of Nepal, Nepali Sign Language. A similar understanding can be attributed to Ghanaian signers' use of this terminology.

The language ideology surrounding the NATURAL signing variety underscores the significance of iconicity, cultural embeddedness, and accessibility in communication. It recognises the value of intuitively meaningful signs and is culturally relevant to the users. By acknowledging and appreciating the unique characteristics of NATURAL, a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of diverse signing varieties can be fostered within the deaf community.

BROKEN

The sign denoted as BROKEN (Figure 169) appears to have been adopted from the ASL sign for "BREAK" (Riekehof, 1978:126). Articulated with two hands in an S-handshape, they touch each other at the side of the index and thumb, with palms facing down. An outward twist movement follows, effectively simulating the action of breaking something, iconic to snapping a stick within the hands.
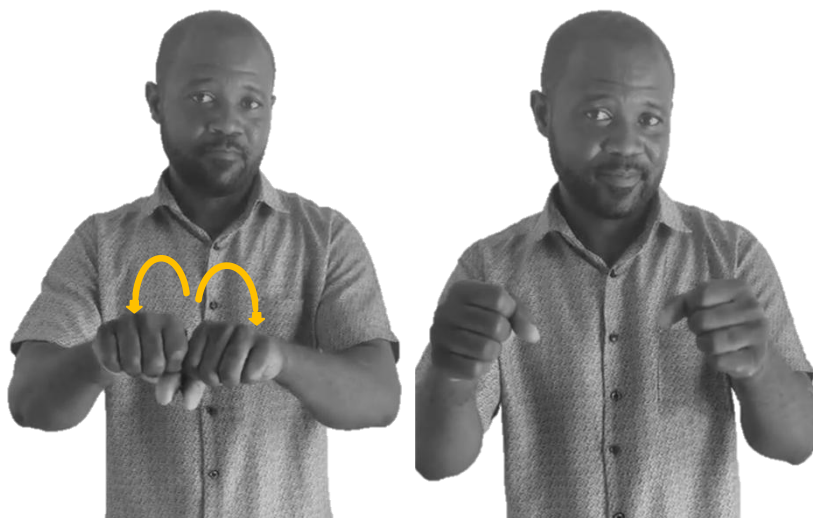

Figure 169: BROKEN (Figure 153 repeated here as Figure 169)

The term BROKEN within the language ideology of the signing variety signifies a unique morpho-syntax. Signers use the sign BROKEN to indicate that the language,

similar to Ghanaian Pidgin English, has a simplified morpho-syntax. It is worth noting that among speakers of the hearing community, the term 'Broken' is also used to refer to Ghanaian Pidgin English. However, when deaf signers use the sign BROKEN, they refer to one of their signing systems and not the language used by the hearing community. Further exploration and study are needed to establish if the BROKEN language used by the deaf shares any linguistic features with the "Broken" language used in the speech community.

Many signers appreciate the use of BROKEN in communication as it seems to be a compromised version that combines elements of the locally evolved signing system and the foreign-based signing system in Ghana. It serves as a bridge between the two systems, offering a more accessible and simplified form of communication.

In informal discussions, I have observed signers use the sign BROKEN as a stand-alone sign to signal a directive, indicating that one should use BROKEN. According to one participant's explanation, in such instances, the sign may convey a message of "Please be straightforward, avoid circumlocution". The use of the term highlights the dynamic nature of sign languages and their ability to adapt and evolve based on the needs and interactions of the deaf community. It signifies a signing variety that may have undergone simplification in its morpho-syntax, potentially facilitating communication and bridging gaps between different signing systems. The appreciation of BROKEN as a communication tool demonstrates the recognition of its value in enabling more efficient and direct expression of ideas.

It is important to note that while the term BROKEN may suggest a simplified form, it does not imply inferiority or lack of linguistic richness. Signers who use BROKEN signs have developed a linguistic system that meets their communication needs, incorporating elements from both local and foreign signing systems.

ILLITERATE

ILLITERATE (see Figure 170) is articulated using an I-handshape, with the palm facing left, and a circular movement just in front of the forehead. The term ILLITERATE within the language ideology of the signing variety signifies a unique signing system distinct in both lexeme and syntax. As the name suggests, it is often associated with a signing variety that is not considered a language for the educated. Educated signers may not want to be associated with it, and there is a negative attitude towards this signing variety within the deaf community.

Figure 170: ILLITERATE (Figure 135 repeated here as Figure 170)

The ILLITERATE signing variety is predominantly used by signers with no formal education. It is characterized by the exclusive use of locally evolved signs, without incorporating elements from ASL or any other foreign-based signing system. The signs used in ILLITERATE signing have ad hoc and unconventional parameters, deviating from the established norms and conventions of school-based signing systems.

It is important to note that ILLITERATE primarily refers to the signing variety itself. However, it can also be used to describe an individual signer. In this context, the term does not necessarily imply that the individual cannot read or write. Rather, it is linked to the lack of formal education or schooling, specifically in GSL or other school-based signing systems. Signers labelled as ILLITERATE may have limited knowledge and proficiency in GSL due to their lack of formal education.

The negative attitude towards the ILLITERATE signing variety can be attributed to societal stigmas and biases associated with education and literacy. It is important to challenge these negative perceptions and recognise the value and significance of all signing varieties within the diverse deaf community. While ILLITERATE signing may not adhere to formal linguistic standards, it represents a unique linguistic expression and cultural identity for those who use it.

Understanding ILLITERATE signing variety can provide insights into the linguistic features, sociocultural context, and experiences of signers who rely on this form of communication. Promoting inclusivity and respect for all signing varieties is essential, acknowledging the diverse linguistic landscape within the deaf community and the contributions of individuals from various educational backgrounds.

GESTURE

The sign for GESTURE involves two hands in an S/A-handshape, with palms facing left and elbows slightly extended away from the body (see Figure 171). It is articulated with a swift and subtle movement, where the elbows either move sequentially or simultaneously towards the body. This sign appears to originate from the concept of portraying the instinctive and spontaneous reactions individuals exhibit when responding to stimuli. As such, it is regarded as an intuitive and innate.
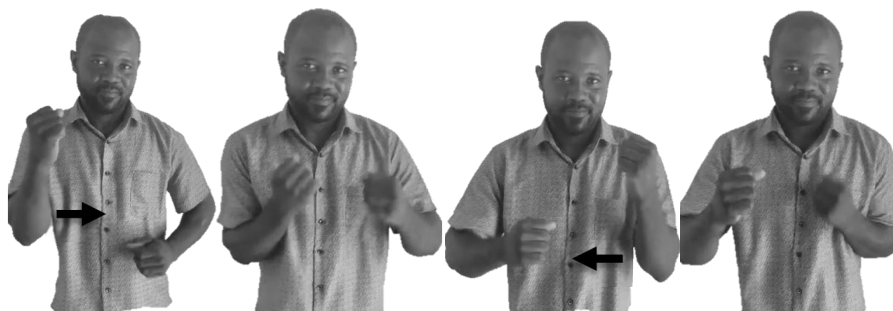
Initial movement   Final movement

Figure 171: GESTURE (Figure 149 repeated here as Figure 171)

GESTURE within the language ideology of the signing variety refers to a specific form of communication used by deaf individuals. It is important to note that GESTURE, as used by signers, differs from what is commonly understood as gestures by hearing people in mainstream society. While there may be some influence from hearing people's gestures, signers consider GESTURE to have unique characteristics and linguistic features.

It is worth mentioning that in the urban deaf society in Ghana, many individuals refer to village-based sign languages as GESTURE. This includes signers both within and outside of Adamorobe village and those in Nanabin village who also label their language as GESTURE. This perception of referring to various sign languages as GESTURE might be more prevalent among deaf individuals with limited exposure to sign language linguistics and formal linguistic education.

However, in the case of Adamorobe signers, their perspective differs. Due to the significant interest of researchers in studying AdaSL compared to other sign languages in Ghana, Adamorobe signers have received linguistic education and recognize their language as AdaSL rather than merely a GESTURE (Kusters, 2019). This distinction highlights the impact of ongoing research and contact with researchers on shaping their perception and understanding of their language.

Similarly, continuous interactions between researchers and signers in Nanabin village have sparked curiosity among the signers about their language and

the reasons for researchers' visits. It is possible that sustained engagement with researchers could lead to a shift in their perception, encouraging them to view their language as more than just a GESTURE and recognizing its linguistic richness and significance.

From the view of signers, while the term GESTURE may imply a lower prestige or the notion that the signing variety is not a fully developed language, it does not necessarily carry a negative connotation. Instead, it signifies that the form of communication being referred to does not meet the criteria of a conventional, fully-fledged language in the eyes of the signers.

VILLAGE

The sign VILLAGE (see Figure 172) is formed with two hands in a V-handshape, where the tips of the index and middle fingers touch, and the palm faces the side. The movement involves a downward motion, separating the contact between the fingers. While the sign for village is likely borrowed from ASL, in GSL, it has been initialized with a specific form.
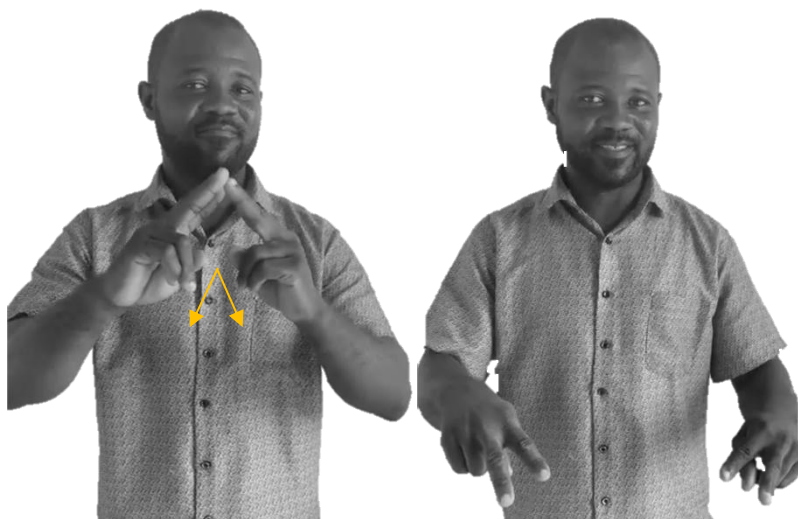

Figure 172: VILLAGE (Figure 134 repeated here as Figure 172)

VILLAGE within the language ideology of the signing variety refers to sign languages used by deaf individuals from rural areas, such as AdaSL and Nanabin SL. Some signers commonly associate these sign languages with the label VILLAGE. Deaf individuals residing in small cities or villages without formal education may also be labelled as using VILLAGE signing. For example, signers in the urban deaf

community could consider deaf signers in Apirede (a city in the Eastern Region) to use VILLAGE or GESTURE.[115]

In the urban deaf community, signers may also use the term VILLAGE to refer to certain signs or signing styles that are considered unconventional or do not conform to established phonological patterns. This use of the term carries a negative connotation and is seen as demeaning. Signers generally hold a negative attitude towards any sign or signing variety labelled as VILLAGE. It is important to recognise that the use of the term VILLAGE as a label for a signing variety or an individual's signing style reflects a linguistic and cultural bias. The term implies a perceived lack of sophistication or adherence to established linguistic norms. This attitude can be detrimental to the appreciation and recognition of the linguistic diversity and richness within the deaf community.

C-O-D-E

The signing variety referred to as ' C-O-D-E ' is fingerspelled, which is why I have included hyphens between each letter. According to the information gathered from participants, it appears to have a limited domain of usage primarily associated with the youth, particularly in the Mampong School for the Deaf. This C-O-D-E language is considered a form of Youth sign language and is mainly used for in-group identity, communication, and sometimes as a means of secrecy. Signers consider it as a locally developed system without established grammatical rules, resulting in idiosyncrasies and variations of signs.

According to one consultant (D6a) the use of C-O-D-E tends to diminish among deaf individuals who graduate from Mampong SHS. This may be due to the lack of a strong in-group presence outside of the school setting. While the signs may still remain with the language users, the bonding and motivation to use the C-O-D-E language decrease over time.

The distinction between GESTURE and C-O-D-E highlights the complexity of language naming and association. My consultant suggested that the origin and proponents of the signs could influence how the language is labelled or perceived. For instance, if LOCAL signs evolve and spread among students (seniors in the school), it may be considered C-O-D-E language. On the other hand, if it develops among newcomers in the school, it may be labelled as GESTURE. This understanding may contribute to the perception of GESTURE having low prestige, explaining why individuals, including the proponents themselves, avoid association with GESTURE as they progress through their education. This kind of ideology on GESTURE having low prestige is what I believe makes uneducated deaf signers shy away from GESTURE, as I experienced during my data collection for such sign (see Chapter 3). Based on

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[115] See chapter 2, on my encounter with signers in Apirede.

my understanding, GESTURE and C-O-D-E are considered part of LOCAL. However, it is possible that signers distinguish between GESTURE and C-O-D-E based on certain sociolinguistic aspects of the signs.

Some examples of the C-O-D-E signing provided by the consultants can be found in the GNAD (2001) dictionary under the content heading "Idiomatic Expression." For example, a sign was given which could subtly convey a desire to initiate a particular intimate interaction with the intended recipient (see Figure 173). This specific sign is captured in the GNAD (2001:97) dictionary, with the caption "FLIRT, HAVE CHILDREN BUT NOT MARRIED". Although the study did not extensively explore this C-O-D-E variant, it presents an interesting area for future research to understand further the signing situation in Ghana and the acknowledgement of the C-O-D-E label within the deaf community.

Figure 173: Promiscuity Code (GNAD, 2001:97)

SPONTANEOUS

The sign SPONTANEOUS (see Figure 174) is articulated by extending open fingers with palms facing sideways. Using both hands, positioned one slightly above the other in a neutral stance close to the body's side, the hands are then spontaneously wiggled from side to side.

Figure 174: SPONTANEOUS (Figure 154 repeated here as Figure 174)

The term SPONTANEOUS is used by signers to describe a signing variety that emphasises the natural and uninfluenced signing style of deaf individuals. It focuses on the syntax of the signing variety, highlighting the use of a 'true communication' strategy instead of adhering to the word order of another language, such as English. This signing style is observed when groups of deaf people engage in lively conversations using signing varieties like BROKEN or NATURAL.

During my research, two participants mentioned the term SPONTANEOUS in informal discussions after our formal interviews in different settings. One participant acknowledged it as a label/sign/name given to a signing variety among deaf Ghanaians, although they could not recall an equivalent English word. The second participant was the one who initially provided us with the label SPONTANEOUS. When I revisited the topic a year later to model the sign with my deaf research assistant, we contacted the participants. Interestingly, they initially showed signs of being oblivious to the term in sign (SPONTANEOUS) and with its English translation (spontaneous) shown to them. It took considerable effort and contextual cues to help their memories. The second participant who had given us the name a year ago could not recall the sign or its English translation. Initially, this made me hesitant to document the label SPONTANEOUS, as the participants themselves could not readily acknowledge it after a year. However, my deaf research assistant assured me that he had seen the label being used among the deaf community. Therefore, I concluded that the understanding of SPONTANEOUS as a signing variety could only be fully comprehended within the specific context. It became evident that one may need intense ethnographic research to uncover signers' ideologies on language naming in Ghana, as identifying and documenting these labels took deliberate effort.

Interestingly, the label SPONTANEOUS as a signing variety has also been used by signers in other countries, as documented in previous studies (Firth, 1966, as cited in Deuchar, 1977; Hofer, 2020:85ff). This suggests that the concept of SPONTANEOUS signing style extends beyond Ghana and is recognised by signers in different cultural and linguistic contexts.

DEAF (-POSS)[116]

To articulate the sign DEAF − POSS (see Figure 175), the index finger is employed to touch or point to the right side of the mouth and ear (or vice versa). Optionally, a possessive marker (i.e., − POSS) can be added, articulated with open hand, palm forward in a neutral position, indicating ownership or association with the deaf community.

Figure 175: DEAF − POSS (Figure 155 repeated here as Figure 175)

The label DEAF (− POSS) describes a signing variety emphasising syntax, particularly highlighting its deviation from the morpho-syntax of English or any other spoken language. The term DEAF (− POSS) conveys the notion of a signing variety with a unique syntax specific to deaf individuals. It suggests that signing varieties such as NATURAL or BROKEN can be categorised as DEAF (− POSS) based on their syntax. By associating the DEAF (− POSS) label with any signing variety, signers acknowledge the syntactic autonomy and creative expression that characterise deaf communication. The term implies that deaf individuals have developed their own inherent grammatical structures and syntactic patterns, forming a language distinct from spoken languages.

By using the label DEAF (− POSS), signers recognise and celebrate the linguistic diversity and independence of deaf individuals. It signifies the importance

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[116] In Figure 155, I also explain why the possessive marker (-POSS) is place in parenthesis.

of understanding and valuing sign languages as fully-fledged ones with distinct grammatical systems, separate from spoken ones.

HARD vs SOFT

There are two ways to sign HARD. In one method, the knuckle of a V-bent handshape by the index and middle fingers strikes the back of the nondominant hand (see Figure 176A). The second method involves articulating an S-handshape under the lower jaw and moving the hands forward into a neutral position but closer to the face (see Figure 176A). On the other hand, SOFT is signed using both hands with open, curved palms facing up. The hands are then slowly moved downward while extending the fingers and closing the hands repeatedly, simulating the action of gently squeezing something to assess its softness (see Figure 177).
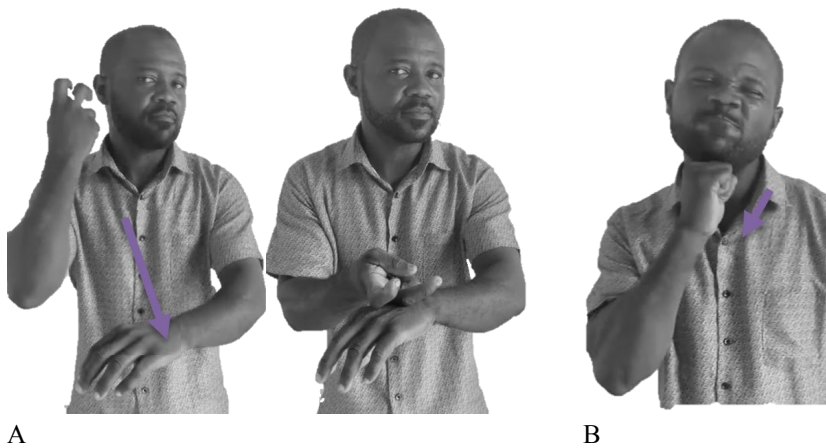
A   B

Figure 176: HARD (Figure 157 repeated here as Figure 176)

Figure 177: SOFT (Figure 158 repeated here as Figure 177)

The language ideology surrounding the signing variety described as HARD or SOFT in Ghana reveals interesting perspectives and attitudes among signers. The labels HARD and SOFT are used by signers to describe the characteristics of different sign languages, particularly locally evolved sign languages, and foreign sign languages.

My initial encounter with the description HARD for GSL[117] came from an informal discussion after a formal interview with a signer. During our encounter, the participant posited, LOCAL is hard ("TRUE WAY; THE LOCAL ILLITERATE SIGN; HARD"). HARD was used to convey that in the GSL landscape, LOCAL is not easy to understand. The above idea was prompted by a question about which sign language variety in Ghana was considered good or better. In addressing how HARD GSL can be, the participant noted that signers, even those familiar with GSL, found it challenging to comprehend when two uneducated individuals were signing. The difficulty in understanding was attributed to lexical variations.

The characterisation of GSL as HARD may be due to its unique features. For example, a signer provided two variants for RICE (see Figure 178 & Figure 179), exemplifying the lexical variations within LOCAL. Even though from my intuitive knowledge I assume that RICE -1 (see Figure 178) may be for uncooked rice while RICE -2 (Figure 179) for cooked rice, the presence of such variations led to GSL signers describing their language as HARD because non-users of these variants found it difficult to comprehend. The term HARD in this context implies that the language is unique and not easily understood by outsiders.

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[117] ENGLISH and LOCAL are considered a HARD language.

Figure 178: RICE – 1

Initial position   final position
Figure 179: RICE -2

In Adamorobe village, located in the Eastern Region of Ghana, deaf signers who use AdaSL also describe their language as HARD. According to Kusters (2014a:139), this perception among AdaSL signers "means that the language is unique and difficult to learn for outsiders, but "hard" also means clear, firm, and expressive." As such, the term HARD also carries positive implication of pride in its use. In comparison, GSL signers describe their language as HARD in contrast to AdaSL signers. Kusters (2014a:151) notes that AdaSL signers associate the "hard" language with pride in using it. On the contrary, this is not the case observed among GSL signers, who prefer a language they perceive as SOFT. They consider ASL to be SOFT and may choose it over GSL, which they describe as HARD. From the perspective of AdaSL signers, GSL[118] is seen as "soft" or "easy" (Kusters,

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[118] Note: AdaSL signers do not make a distinction between GSL, ASL and Signed English: They could also describe GSL as fingerspelling, English or American (Kusters, 2014:152).

2014a:151). The situation becomes more nuanced when considering that both AdaSL and GSL signers may be expressing similar sentiments. AdaSL signers might view GSL as another name for ASL and describing it as SOFT aligns with the perspective of GSL users. However, one practical distinction between the two groups lies in the fact that while AdaSL signers prefer to use the language they describe as HARD (AdaSL), GSL signers opt for a SOFT language (ASL). The nuanced differences in their descriptions highlight the complexity of language ideologies among different signing communities.

To further explore the perceptions of signers regarding the concept of a language being SOFT or HARD, I conducted additional investigations. Specifically, I reached out to five participants, three deaf friends, and my deaf research assistant through video calls and messaging to explore their understanding of a language being labelled as SOFT or HARD.

The feedback from participants and consultants revealed that HARD could be translated as 'solid,' 'difficult,' or 'not easy,' indicating ambiguity and complexity. In contrast, SOFT was associated with ease of comprehension and desirability among deaf individuals. One consultant who considered GSL to be HARD described it as "long" (in terms of circumlocution) with numerous rules resembling English grammar. To explain, she offered an illustration explaining that when articulating the question "What will you do?" in GSL, individual signs are employed for each English word (namely WHAT, WILL, YOU, & DO). In contrast, in ASL, she emphasized that the entire sentence can be conveyed with a single manual sign, such as DOING or YOU DOING (see Figure 180). According to her, ASL, being a SOFT language, uses BROKEN structure, making it simple and concise.
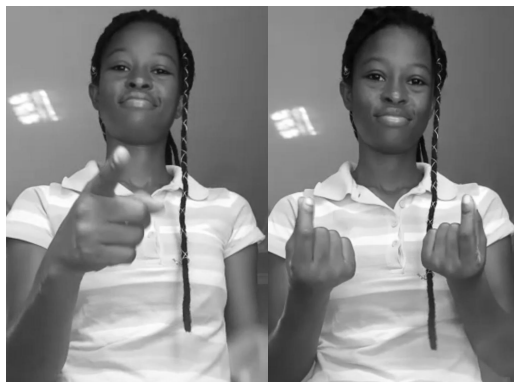
YOU   DOING[119]

Figure 180: Signer's view of how to sign 'What will you do?' in ASL

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[119] The sign involved tapping the thumb and the index finger in a neutral space with an upward orientation.

Another consultant mentioned that if a language is described as SOFT, it implies something desirable for deaf people. He concluded by saying, 'white people's signs are soft and different from Africa.' Other consultants stated that ASL is SOFT because it possesses flair (stylishness and originality) and is easily understood without ambiguity. Regarding the flair of ASL, one consultant mentioned that 'Deaf people perceive ASL as a beautiful, flexible language due to how the whites sign and fingerspell.' They specifically related this perception to handshape and facial expression. Signers may also describe the handshape of a sign as HARD or SOFT. For instance, one consultant remarked, 'our hands are HARD when signing, but with the whites, it is SOFT.'

It is important to note that the terms HARD and SOFT used to describe sign languages does not imply a judgment of their quality or inherent value. Instead, they reflect signers' perspectives on the characteristics and desirability of different languages within the cultural and linguistic context of the signers. GSL signers express concern about the challenges posed by their language being described as HARD, while AdaSL signers take pride in their language being perceived as HARD.

In conclusion, the language ideology surrounding the labelling of sign languages as HARD or SOFT in Ghana reveals distinct perspectives and attitudes among signers. While both GSL and AdaSL signers describe their languages as HARD, the connotations and implications associated with this label differ. The term HARD for GSL signers expresses concern, while for AdaSL signers, it signifies pride (Kusters, 2014a:155). Similarly, GSL signers perceive ASL as SOFT, emphasizing its desirability, simplicity, and stylistic qualities. These ideological distinctions shed light on the complex dynamics and perceptions of sign languages within the Ghanaian signing community.

6.5.2 GSL usage, prestige, and influences

The language ideologies within the Ghanaian deaf community play a crucial role in shaping the usage, prestige, and influences of GSL. These language ideologies encompass a wide range of attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions regarding sign language diversity in Ghana and the influence of external factors such as ASL, Signed English, and English. This discussion will explore several subtopics related to GSL usage, prestige, and influences within the Ghanaian deaf community.

Attitudes towards GSL in the Deaf Community

Attitudes towards GSL vary within the Ghanaian Deaf community, ranging from a sense of pride and solidarity to perceptions of low prestige. The language ideology surrounding the usage and prestige of GSL among signers in the urban deaf community in Ghana reveals an interesting dynamic. While GSL is seen as a language of solidarity, it is often associated with low prestige. Signers may employ

certain GSL signs to convey covert information on behalf of in-group members, a practice also observed among AdaSL users. Kusters (2014a:147; 2019:13-14) noted that young and adult signers proficient in both AdaSL and GSL might use GSL to conceal information from nearby interlocutors, passers-by, or observers. This use of codeswitching serves as an unconscious effort to create solidarity among interlocutors but may go unnoticed by monolinguals (Garrett, 2010).

GSL signers display a strong sense of connection to their locally evolved signing. Similar sentiments have been observed among hearing Ghanaians regarding their vernacular languages (Guerini, 2008; Owu-Ewie & Edu-Buandoh, 2014). Despite their interest in foreign languages for social and international benefits, Ghanaians still maintain a deep bond and respect for their indigenous languages when it comes to cultural interactions. This deep connection suggests that the local sign languages are unlikely to face language death. Additionally, the domain of language use serves as a determining factor in attitudes toward a particular language or language variety. Ghanaians tend to use vernaculars in more informal interactions, while foreign-based languages are preferred for formal engagements.

Signers residing in rural areas also exhibit a strong attachment to their local language. Kusters (2019) found that deaf youth in Adamorobe village, who were more proficient in GSL than AdaSL, expressed a special feeling when using their local language (AdaSL) due to the iconic nature of signs that resonate with their everyday experiences. Similarly, signers with knowledge of GSL varieties (ENGLISH, BROKEN & LOCAL) may engage in codeswitching or codemixing for solidarity.

Using unconventional phonological location and ad hoc referents (pointing with index finger) in the environment is a prominent practice in LOCAL. As such, some signers in the urban deaf community hold negative attitudes toward LOCAL, which may discourage it use. Another factor that negatively affects LOCAL is the close association of some sign variants with gestures used by hearing speakers. For instance, one participant (D8a) in an informal discussion highlighted why many signers prefer to use ENGLISH (see e.g., 23 below).

23) ASL FAST UNDERSTAND. SEARCHING THINGS ILLITERATE WAY. HOW? BETTER USE EASY AND FAST
'ASL [ENGLISH] is unambiguous. Searching for things to index is for LOCAL. Why would you use that strategy. It is better to use a conventional sign language'

According to his view, ENGLISH is unambiguous and offers a more efficient communication method than the LOCAL, which involves searching for referents nearby. He perceives this practice in LOCAL as demeaning and believes it is better to use a conventional sign language.

Language Choice in Formal and Informal Contexts

Language choice is a significant aspect of language ideologies within the Ghanaian Deaf community. We see how signers navigate between formal and informal contexts, and how some factors influence their language choices and the social dynamics involved. The findings suggest that signers consciously prefer to use only ENGLISH and BROKEN in the urban deaf community. However, signers may choose to use the LOCAL based on context. Signers perceive ENGLISH and BROKEN as easier to comprehend because it is more conventionalised.

Furthermore, the negative attitude towards LOCAL usage suggests a certain degree of stigma or lack of acceptance within the urban deaf community. This may stem from various factors, such as the association of LOCAL with ad hoc gestures used by hearing individuals or the perception that it is less efficient and less conventionalised compared to ENGLISH, BROKEN or other sign languages.

The preference for ENGLISH, also known as A-S-L, or AMERICA, among many deaf members can be attributed to its familiarity and acceptance within the community. The concept of signers recognising and engaging in the act of codeswitching between variants of GSL, based on their interlocutor or context, demonstrates a certain degree of adaptability and respect for the different language varieties.

The negative attitude towards LOCAL and the preference for ENGLISH or BROKEN in certain contexts highlight the complex language ideologies at play within the Ghanaian deaf community. While LOCAL may be seen as challenging or stigmatised, it still holds significance in specific social and communicative contexts. The conscious choice to use ENGLISH suggests a desire for clearer communication and conformity to established linguistic norms.

It is important to recognise and understand these language ideologies and attitudes towards GSL usage and prestige within the Ghanaian deaf community. Acknowledging the different perspectives and preferences can promote inclusivity and appreciation for the diversity of signing practices, whether ENGLISH, BROKEN, LOCAL, AdaSL, or other local sign languages.

The Inclusion of LOCAL Signs in Official Resources

During my fieldwork and discussions with various members of the deaf community in Ghana, I encountered an interesting language ideology surrounding the usage and prestige of GSL. One observation was made during a deaf meeting organised by GILLBT (Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation) on 23 March 2021, where deaf members were involved in a Bible translation project. Despite the presence of deaf individuals and the focus on GSL, the participants predominantly used ENGLISH with some basic English grammar. This choice of

language variety could be attributed to the perception of Bible translation as a formal engagement, where a standard variety is preferred to serve as a role model within the community. This observation aligns with the claim made by one of my consultants, J. Amoah, that even in deaf meetings, ASL (i.e., ENGLISH) is commonly used. He explained that deaf individuals tend to avoid LOCAL due to the fear of being stigmatised as uneducated or belonging to a rural background. In fact, the use of ENGLISH in deaf religious meetings and even in GNAD meetings is considered a prestigious code. On the other hand, LOCAL is often observed in more relaxed settings, such as at home, during deaf sports events, or at night when there are no conscious onlookers. LOCAL is typically learned among peers and used by deaf individuals who may not have received formal education.

Despite the negative attitude towards LOCAL, some of its signs found their way into the first GSL dictionary published by GNAD (2001). However, over time, not everyone within the deaf community expressed satisfaction with such inclusions. During a conversation in 2016 with the late Francis Boison, he pointed out that certain signs in the GNAD dictionary were incorrect. His explanation revealed that some pioneers had the intention of demonstrating the distinctiveness of GSL from ASL, and thus they included LOCAL signs in the dictionary. This revelation came as a surprise to me at the time, as I was unaware of the existence of other varieties of GSL. Through my ongoing research, I have come to realize that the signs considered incorrect were actually LOCAL signs that were included in the dictionary.

The presence of LOCAL signs in the dictionary can be attributed to certain factors. According to Mr. Boison (PC. 2016), some community members aimed to highlight the differences between GSL and ASL by promoting informal signs (i.e., LOCAL) used in deaf communities. Additionally, during interviews with participants like Alexander Okyere[120], it was revealed that the sign language dictionary committee would discuss and select signs based on their appropriateness, sometimes deliberately choosing an informal sign when multiple options were available. The dictionary attempted to capture variations, but due to the language ideology within the deaf community, some members may deny the existence or appropriateness of informal variants. The GNAD (2001) dictionary includes only a small number of instances (13 out of the 810 vocabulary index) where variations are depicted. This suggests that there was likely no consensus on a single appropriate sign to use. In cases where variants existed, both ENGLISH and LOCAL signs were included in the dictionary. For instance, in the GNAD (2001: 25) dictionary, the sign for ONION had two variants (see Figure 181). Based on my observations within the deaf community, Figure 181A is an example of ENGLISH (initialized), while Figure 181B is an example of LOCAL sign. It is important to note that due to the language

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[120] Alexander Okyere passed away on 7th September 2022. He served as the vice president for Mr. Boison at GNAD.

ideology prevalent in the Deaf community, some members may deny the existence of these informal variants. This could explain (late) Mr. Boison's assertion that some signs were considered "wrong," indicating that they were deemed inappropriate or not commonly used or seen among some educated members in the deaf community.
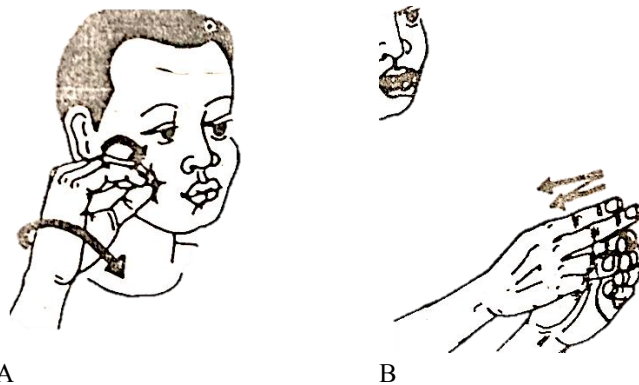

A   B

Figure 181: Onion GNAD (2001:25)

The Influence of ASL and Signed English on GSL

Language contact with ASL and Signed English has had a significant influence on the structure and evolution of GSL. The discussion on GSL usage and prestige reveals several important aspects of language ideology. For example, GSL is generally considered a form of ASL (Kusters, 2014a; Nyst, 2007; Oppong, 2007), leading some language users to adapt ASL learning materials to enhance their GSL signing skills. However, from an ideological perspective, the structure and evolution of GSL is influenced not only by language contact but also by gestural influence, language attitude, and prestige. Language ideology, whether explicit or implicit, plays a significant role in shaping language usage and linguistic structure (Patterson & West, 2018:251ff).

The language contact between GSL and ASL, primarily through deaf education, has resulted in contact-induced features such as mouthing, initialisation, and Signed English. In Deaf schools, foreign language contact continues to persist, driven by the perception that sign language syntax hinders the English writing skills of deaf students (Gadagbui, 1998). This ideology, originating from the early days of deaf education, still lingers among some deaf individuals and educators, thereby influencing the influence of English on sign language. Reports indicate the presence of Signed English in Deaf schools, with American Volunteers from the Peace Corps organization often introducing ASL elements into the classroom (Abudu, 2019; Nyst, 2010). Although volunteers receive some orientation in GSL (particularly ENGLISH

and BROKEN signs), the introduction of standard variants based on their ideology further reinforces the influence of ASL.

Furthermore, the historical and current sign language situation in the urban deaf community has led some signers to embrace ASL-based Signed English as part of the GSL. ENGLISH, BROKEN and LOCAL exist in deaf schools, with distinct domains of usage. ENGLISH, developed within the school setting as the language of instruction, contrasts with LOCAL, predominantly used outside the classroom. This educational context contributes to the decline and low prestige associated with GSL variants.

English's Prestige and its Influence on Ghanaian Languages

The attitude towards English reflects its historical and socio-economic significance in the broader Ghanaian context. As a foreign language, English holds a high prestige and status due to its association with colonial rule, government employment, and economic benefits. This attitude towards English parallels the role of ASL in Ghana, where its history and socio-economic advantages contribute to its perceived value.

During the colonial era, proficiency in English was highly valued, offering Ghanaians the opportunity to secure prestigious positions as government workers with lucrative salaries (Obeng, 1997:72). Ghanaian oral history also reveals that individuals with basic English skills were employed by colonial masters as interpreters. These historical circumstances have elevated English to a position of high prestige and status in Ghana, posing a threat to the use and vitality of Ghanaian languages, particularly in urban areas (Guerini, 2008; Owu-Ewie & Edu-Buandoh, 2014).

This inclination to prioritize English over local languages may have deep historical roots. According to Obeng (1997:73), Ghana has a history of punishing students for using Ghanaian languages on school premises. I vividly remember being subjected to wearing a large necklace made of empty snail shells as a form of punishment, aimed at humiliating and discouraging the use of vernacular languages in school. These practices likely contribute to the prevailing attitudes towards our local languages within the framework of formal education and language selection.

During the 1500s, Ghanaians began encountering English through various channels, including international travel, exposure, education, and intermarriage/cohabitation with British individuals (Simo Bobda, 2000). This early and prolonged exposure to the English language had a profound impact on Ghanaians, leading to the formation of a positive attitude towards English (Simo Bobda, 2000:186). Consequently, Ghanaians developed a distinct Received Pronunciation, setting them apart from other English-speaking countries in Africa.

The extensive contact with English during this period laid the foundation for a favourable perception of the language among Ghanaians. This positive attitude towards English continues to shape language practices and linguistic behaviours in Ghana, influencing the sociolinguistic landscape and the status of English as a prestigious language in the country.

Concluding remarks

In summary, language ideology greatly influences GSL usage and prestige. The contact between GSL and ASL, the presence of Signed English, and the historical and socio-economic significance of English all contribute to the language attitudes and linguistic structures observed in the deaf community and urban Ghanaian society. Understanding these ideological factors is crucial for comprehending the dynamics of GSL and its place within the linguistic landscape of Ghana.

6.5.3 The relationship between foreign-based sign language and locally evolved sign language: The sign language situation in Ghana

The language ideologies within the Ghanaian deaf community shed light on how signers perceive sign language and the various signing systems around them. These ideologies shape the way they describe and categorize different sign languages and variants. In this discussion, we will explore the signers' ideologies and language practices, proposing the existence of a pluridimensional continuum within the broader deaf community in Ghana.

Signers use different terms to describe ENGLISH and LOCAL signing systems. ENGLISH is often labelled as HARD, "English way", "Educated SL", or "Pretend SL". In contrast, LOCAL signing systems, including village sign languages, are described as GESTURE, "deaf (-POSS)", "local SL", "true signing," "right SL", or "spontaneous signing." To differentiate between ASL and GSL, signers use abbreviations such as A-S-L or G-S-L. ASL is referred to as SOFT, "foreign SL", "white", or "America". These terminologies reflect the signers' ideologies and their conceptualization of sign languages within their community.

I propose that there are multiple signing systems falling under the umbrella term GSL, forming a multidimensional continuum. Defining this pluridimensional continuum becomes essential, given the challenge of fully characterizing GSL. Willemyns (1987) was one of the first scholars to refine the theoretical concept of a continuum, transitioning from a unidimensional to a pluridimensional framework.

Willemyns (1987) explains that the unidimensional view of a continuum focuses solely on one aspect of communication, such as the distinction between a dialect and a standard code. Conversely, a pluridimensional continuum encompasses the entire range of codes available to language users, taking into account

communicative competency. According to Willemyns (1987:34), communicative competency should not be confined to a single code but should encompass the ability to switch between codes or variants based on the specific circumstances of the linguistic interaction. Willemyns argues that individuals with communicative competency within the pluridimensional continuum have mastered various codes within their language continuum. They can effortlessly switch between these codes when the context requires it. By using his concept of advanced communicative competency and the pluridimensional continuum, Willemyns (1987) introduces his theoretical model of language continuum and diglossia. This model proves valuable in explaining the sign language situation I have observed in Ghana.

The historical introduction of ASL and Signed English in 1957 for deaf education in Ghana resulted in the coexistence of foreign-based signing systems and locally evolved signs. ASL and Signed English gained prestige as languages used for academic and official purposes, serving as the language of instruction. Within the locally evolved signing systems, some codes were considered more prestigious than others. Signers viewed codes labelled as LOCAL or NATURAL as innovative, iconic, and suitable for filling lexical gaps in the foreign-based signing systems. Conversely, codes labelled as GESTURE, VILLAGE, or ILLITERATE had lower status and were not encouraged for use in formal setting.

Furthermore, within the educational context, the interaction between foreign base signing systems and locally developed signs has led to the emergence of additional signing varieties, such as BROKEN[121] and C-O-D-E, along with contact-induced features like initialization. The resulting national sign language in Ghana, known as GSL, encompasses all these signing varieties and contact-induced features, with ASL and Signed English serving as the external lexifiers.

It's worth noting that spoken languages have also played a role in the educational setting. Throughout history, deaf Ghanaians have been influenced to structure their signing either based on spoken language or a hybrid form that lies somewhere in between. From a linguistic perspective, I view the national sign language in Ghana as a pluridimensional continuum, encompassing a range of signing variations found within the broader deaf community. This continuum extends from educated signers to those who have not received formal education.

To visually represent my understanding of the evolution of the GSL landscape, I have included an infographic in Figure 182. The infographic visually portrays the linguistic influences that have contributed to the development of the GSL landscape throughout its history.

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[121] NB: Among speakers of the hearing community, "Broken" is another name for pidgin.
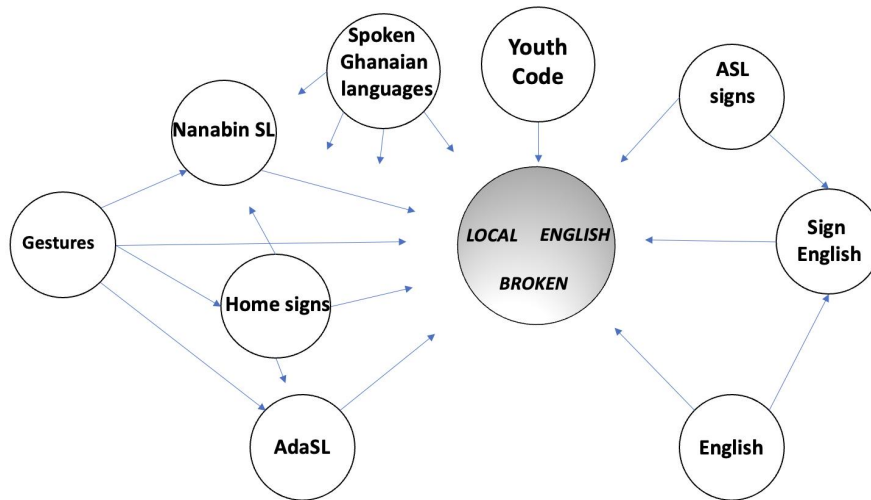
Figure 182: GSL and the sign language landscape in Ghana

The national sign language in Ghana can be understood as a hybrid of locally evolved signs and foreign-base signing systems, characterised by both a continuum and triglossia with a double overlapping diglossic situation. Although signers may not have specific linguistic terminology to describe their language situation, their ideologies reflect their understanding of the national sign language. Figure 182 above, GSL is depicted as the central national sign language, encompassing all known signing systems in Ghana. The arrows in the infographic represent the interrelation between the different signing systems and their influence on the national sign language.

While the various signing systems can be distinguished, the national sign language exists as a pluridimensional continuum. Three main codes within this pluridimensional continuum are ENGLISH, BROKEN and LOCAL. Even outside the continuum, signers using either of these codes (i.e., ENGLISH, BROKEN & LOCAL) are still considered as using GSL. It is worth noting that certain codes carry more prestige than others. A signer with communicative competence is described as having mastered all the signing codes within the continuum, making them competent native speakers (Willemyns, 1987). According to Willemyns (1987), individuals with communicative competence can adopt any available variants within the continuum, regardless of formal or informal settings. In other words, ENGLISH can have two versions: ENGLISH _1 for formal settings and ENGLISH_2 for informal settings. Similarly, LOCAL can have LOCAL_1 for formal settings and LOCAL_2 for informal settings. It is plausible to propose such a configuration for the Ghanaian context based on general observations, although further research is needed to solidify this conclusion. In my evaluation, I consider the BROKEN variant to play a

role that can be used in both formal and informal settings, acting as a bridging version between ENGLISH and LOCAL.

The understanding of the GSL situation aligns with Batibo's theory proposing that a triglossic structure that can be likened to a doubly overlapping diglossic framework, where two languages (High (H) & Low (L) varieties) intersect at two distinct levels, as depicted at both ends in Figure 184. In spoken languages in Ghana and Africa at large, it has been argued (by Agbozo and ResCue, 2020; Batibo, 2005; Yevudey & Agbozo, 2019) that there is an overlapping interplay between the ex-colonial language and the dominant language, as well as the minority language and the dominant language in a triglossic framework (see Section 1.1 of Chapter 1). These intersections give rise to intricate linguistic phenomena, including language conflicts, code-mixing/switching, borrowing, interference, and dual linguistic allegiances (Batibo, 2005: 27ff). This conceptualisation of triglossia as a doubly overlapping diglossic structure by Batibo (2005) remarkably encapsulates the dynamics of sign language within the GSL landscape. Building upon Batibo's language usage model in Africa, I propose a similar structure for the three signing varieties (ENGLISH, BROKEN, & LOCAL) identified in the GSL landscape (see Figure 183). In the realm of sign languages in Africa, the Ex-colonial language typically corresponds to a foreign-based sign language rooted in ASL or French Sign Language. In the Ghanaian context, this foreign-based sign language is identified as ENGLISH. BROKEN represents the Dominant indigenous language, while the Minority language is LOCAL.

H	Ex-colonial language (for official and technical medium)	
L	Dominant indigenous language (lingua franca)	H
	Minority language (language of limited communication)	L

Figure 184: Batibo's triglossic structure model of language use in Africa (Batibo, 2005:17&18)
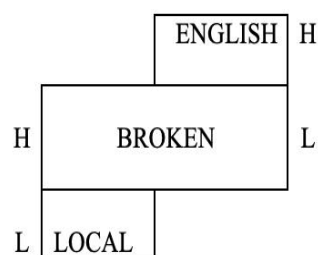

Figure 183: Proposed framework of triglossia and a doubly overlapping diglossia within the GSL landscape

Illustrating the application of the framework, let's examine the case of a female deaf graduate from a secondary deaf school. In her home environment, she might employ the LOCAL signing system when communicating with her deaf children, switch to the BROKEN variety when interacting with fellow deaf community members, and use ENGLISH in official settings, such as during a job

interview for a teaching position. Moreover, in dynamic situations involving both deaf and hearing signers or a mix of educated and semi-educated signers, the phenomenon of codeswitching or translanguaging may become apparent. The position of BROKEN within the framework introduces a double overlapping diglossia, embodying both high and low varieties in relation to ENGLISH and BROKEN. In specific contexts, such as the home environment, BROKEN may be regarded as a high variety employed for functions of elevated linguistic complexity. Conversely, in a classroom setting, BROKEN may assume the role of a low variety, tailored to facilitate simpler linguistic interactions.

In addition to the triglossia and a doubly overlapping diglossia within the GSL landscape, there is also significant interpersonal variation within the language. Signers in Ghana exhibit diverse language practices and ideologies, leading to variations in how GSL is used and perceived among individuals. Interpersonal variation in GSL can be observed in terms of signing styles, lexical choices, grammatical structures, and cultural influences. Signers may have their own unique signing styles, influenced by factors such as their age, education, regional background, exposure to different signing systems, and personal preferences. For example, certain signs may be more commonly used by older signers, while younger signers may introduce new signs influenced by contemporary culture or technological advancements. Or some signers may adhere more closely to the grammatical rules of English, while others may exhibit distinct grammatical features that have emerged within the local deaf community. This variation in grammar reflects the individual's language background, exposure, and the influence of other signing systems. Furthermore, cultural factors play a significant role in shaping GSL and its diversity. Cultural variations can manifest in the use of specific gestures, facial expressions, or body movements that convey nuanced meanings within the GSL context. It is essential to recognize and respect interpersonal variation in GSL as it contributes to the linguistic richness and diversity of the language.

Understanding the diversity within GSL and their appropriate usage in different contexts is crucial for effective communication within the Ghanaian deaf community. By acknowledging the complexities of GSL and its variants, we gain insights into the diverse linguistic landscape and the importance of studying language ideologies to promote inclusivity and appreciation for GSL landscape as a vital part of deaf cultural identity.

ENGLISH and LOCAL: Diglossia and Continuum

The concepts of diglossia and continuum are not new in the field of sign linguistics, as they have been observed and discussed in relation to ASL as well. Scholars such as Woodward (1972, 1973b), and Woodward and Markowicz (1975) have explored the diglossic and continuum aspects of ASL. Considering Ghana's historical

connection with ASL, it is plausible to assume that the ASL influence on GSL, which was imported into Ghana, still has traces in the ENGLISH, as discovered in Chapter 2. However, no link has been identified between LOCAL and ASL.

In the early stages of studying sign languages, researchers identified diglossia in several national sign languages, including British Sign Language, Danish Sign Language, and ASL, even in communities that were considered non-diglossic in terms of spoken languages (Deuchar, 1977; Hansen, 1975; Stokoe, 1969). Interestingly, Arabic Sign Languages, despite being within a diglossic speech community, are claimed not to exhibit diglossia (Abdel-Fattah, 2005). Abdel-Fattah (2005) suggests that factors such as the complexity and stability of the national language and the nature of formal education for deaf people contribute to the presence of diglossia. Formal education can introduce "superior and inferior language" varieties, with the superior variety being considered grammatical and associated with formal settings, while the inferior variety may be deemed improper or non-existent. These factors seem to account for the diglossic situation observed in the national sign language in Ghana.

In the context of GSL, ENGLISH is often associated with high prestige and is used for official purposes such as instruction, religion, and media. It aligns with the "grammatical English" associated with the High variety in diglossia (Firth, 1966 as cited in Deuchar, 1977: 348). On the other hand, similar to Firth's (1966) report, deaf Ghanaians also label the low variety of GSL as SPONTANEOUS and associate it with informal settings, such as private conversations among friends and dialogues among deaf children (Abdel-Fattah, 2005; Stokoe, 1969).

Through informal discussions with participants involved in deaf education, evidence suggests the existence of sign language diversity in all deaf schools (1st cycle education) across Ghana. The ENGLISH is used for official purposes, such as instructional language, while the BROKEN and LOCAL are used by students in unofficial contexts, such as communication in dormitories.

Consultations with teachers in deaf schools reveal that students from different regions in Ghana bring their own regional variants of GSL. For example, the BROKEN and LOCAL used by students in the Northern part of Ghana exhibits unique features, including initializations, iconicity, and specific morphological word formation processes. These signs reflect the Ghanaian environment, particularly the Northern region, and differ from some widely known iconic signs in GSL (GNAD, 2001). [122] For instance, Figure 185, illustrate the signs for BANKU and OKRO. Figure 185A and B represents the variant used by the students, while Figure 185C and D depicts the conventional signs found in the GNAD dictionary (GNAD, 2001).
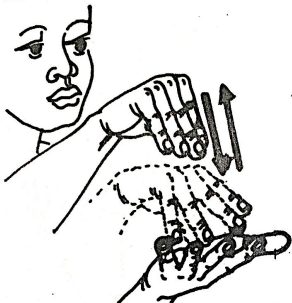
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[122] Note: This informal discussion was based on personal experience of my deaf consultant who got transferred to the North as a teacher for deaf students.
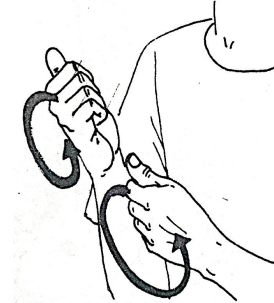
A: OKRO - 1   B: BANKU - 1

C: OKRO -2 (GNAD 2001:25)   D: BANKU -2 (GNAD 2001:29)

Figure 185: Lexical Variations in GSL

While the variant used by Northern students may be mutually intelligible with the one found in the dictionary, some signs may be ambiguous for interlocutors not familiar with the Northern culture.[123]

What intrigued me was the response I received regarding the students' attitude towards unfamiliar signs. Unlike in Mampong, where mocking is common, students in the North become ANGRY. This attitude stems from their efforts to advocate for their standard variant used in their community (school). They refer to

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[123] It is important to clarify that presenting the variant used in the northern part of Ghana is not intended to stigmatize or mock signers. Rather, it is a valuable linguistic discovery that merits mention for future research. To ensure transparency, I would like to provide the following comment to my readers, considering an engagement my deaf research assistant had with other colleagues. He shared on a deaf community WhatsApp page that "Northerners have their own special sign language, apart from our main sign language." However, his comment was met with disapproval. He received rebukes and was warned to "be very sensitive to comments that can create division." It is crucial to approach this topic with sensitivity and respect, recognizing the importance of promoting unity and understanding within the deaf community. The intention of presenting the linguistic variation in GSL is solely for academic purposes and should not contribute to any form of division or discrimination.

their variant as GSL or LOCAL. According to my consultant, the students express a strong preference for their variant of sign language and are resistant to adopting the conventionalized or formal register used by the teachers.[124] However, it is worth noting that younger children, around the age of five, are more open to learning some signs from the newly transferred teachers from other regions. This suggests that while there is a resistance to the teachers' variant among older students, there is a potential for linguistic influence and adaptation among younger learners.

It is likely that regional variations in sign language exist in most 1st cycle schools for the deaf throughout Ghana. However, as student progress to the 2nd cycle Senior High Schools for the Deaf in Mampong, these regional variants tend to be conventionalized into the de facto national sign language (GSL). Graduates from these schools then play a significant role in disseminating the conventionalized GSL across the country through their socioeconomic activities. Additionally, Deaf-led associations such as GNAD, Churches, and Sports also contribute to the propagation of the de facto national sign language (GSL) through their activities nationwide. This process of convergence and standardization of sign language variants at the second cycle level, along with the efforts of various deaf organizations, helps establish and promote a unified sign language system across Ghana.

LOCAL and BROKEN: Signing Dynamics

This section explores the prestige associated with different varieties of GSL and the linguistic dynamics within the deaf community. Specifically, the focus is on LOCAL, which is perceived to have low prestige and BROKEN with a higher prestige than LOCAL. The discussion also compares the attitudes towards BROKEN, highlighting the preferences and motivations of deaf individuals.

LOCAL is often associated with low prestige and uneducated members within the deaf community. The transmission of this variety primarily occurs through interactions between educated signers and uneducated deaf individuals. While uneducated adults may have a good command of LOCAL, they tend to avoid using it in conscious environments due to stigmatisation. The negative perception of LOCAL is exemplified by one participant's statement that some deaf signers view LOCAL signs as "ugly." The lack of awareness among signers regarding the GSL

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[124] In 2017, I encountered a similar comment from a hearing teacher in a Deaf school in the Central Region during an outreach program organized by the University of Ghana. This incident highlights that such attitudes are not exclusive to the northern part of Ghana and are not aimed at criticizing the hearing ability of teachers. Rather, they stem from a lack of familiarity with a specific sign variant among the students. It is important to acknowledge that these attitudes are related to linguistic differences and should not be misconstrued as judgments on the teachers' ability.

continuum and diglossic situation may be attributed to the low status and prestige associated with LOCAL. Some signers may even deny the existence of low-prestige sign language varieties, perceiving them as less worthy of recognition as a language.

In addition to ENGLISH, BROKEN holds a higher prestige within the deaf community. BROKEN is believed to have developed from both ENGLISH and LOCAL. Deaf Ghanaians prefer their BROKEN as it allows them to avoid English grammar, which is undesirable in deaf spaces. This preference aligns with the desire to distance themselves from English. Similarly, Woodward and Markowicz (1975) note that deaf Americans prefer ASL over their pidgin sign language due to their avoidance of English. In both contexts, signing varieties incorporating English elements are associated with higher status.

Woodward and Markowicz (1975) also observed that in America, pidgin sign language facilitates communication between hearing signers and deaf signers, often within a diglossic continuum. Deaf individuals would employ pidgin sign language to communicate with hearing signers. This sociolinguistic pattern may resonate with the practices among deaf Ghanaians, where ENGLISH or BROKEN is predominantly used for transparent communication when interacting with hearing signers.

The discussion highlights the prestige dynamics within the Ghanaian deaf community concerning LOCAL and BROKEN. LOCAL is often associated with low status, while BROKEN is viewed more favourably due to its avoidance of English elements. Understanding these variations and perceptions is vital for fostering inclusive language policies and promoting the development of GSL varieties that cater to the needs and preferences of the deaf community in Ghana.

Exemplifying individual signers within the GSL community

In this subsection, I examine the individual signers' representation within the complex linguistic landscape of GSL. I acknowledge the existence of multiple signing varieties within GSL, including ENGLISH, BROKEN and LOCAL signing. While there have been claims of ASL usage in Ghana (e.g., Edward & Akanlig-Pare, 2021), it should be noted that the ASL used in Ghana is not an exact replica of ASL as found in North America. Rather, it exhibits only lexical items similar to ASL with Ghanaian nativisation. Nonetheless, American visitors familiar with ASL may recognise certain aspects of signing among Ghanaian individuals.

To illustrate the diverse competencies and signing varieties among GSL signers, I present a continuum scale model (Figure 186) encompassing three prototypical signer profiles (A, B & C). This model highlights the varying linguistic repertoires and competencies of GSL signers.

	Signer - A	Signer - B	Signer - C
ENGLISH	LOW · AVERAGE · **HIGH**	LOW · **AVERAGE** · HIGH	**LOW** · AVERAGE · HIGH
BROKEN	LOW · **AVERAGE** · HIGH	LOW · **AVERAGE** · HIGH	LOW · **AVERAGE** · HIGH
LOCAL	**LOW** · AVERAGE · HIGH	LOW · **AVERAGE** · HIGH	LOW · AVERAGE · **HIGH**

Figure 186: A continuum scale model of GSL signer profiles

In this discussion, I explore the spectrum of competencies within the GSL community and the implications for communication between signers. At one end of the spectrum, we have a native signer (Signer A) who exhibits a high level of competency in ENGLISH, an average competency in BROKEN, and low knowledge of the LOCAL. On the other end, we have a signer (Signer C) who lacks knowledge of ENGLISH but possesses a high proficiency in LOCAL and an average understanding of BROKEN. Despite their differing competencies, signers A and C can still interact effectively due to their shared knowledge of BROKEN. From my experience within the community, Signer A may be considered educated, while Signer C may be deemed uneducated or unschooled. As such, Signer C's limited knowledge of the school base sign, i.e., ENGLISH, is usually due to language contact within the community.

Signer B exemplifies a semi-educated signer with a fair knowledge of all variants (ENGLISH, BROKEN & LOCAL) within the GSL community.[125] Such an individual (Signer B) can adeptly switch between the variants depending on the context. Thanks to their diverse signing knowledge, Signer B can communicate effectively with monolingual individuals not part of the GSL continuum, such as those using only LOCAL.

Due to language prestige in the community, most signers may strive to attain the competencies of Signer A, leading to a growing number of deaf individuals actively acquiring competence in ENGLISH and BROKEN lexicon. It is important to note that it is rare to find a signer with high competence in all the variants within the continuum, primarily due to language attitudes. Evidently, language attitude plays a significant role in language competency, as noted by Siti (2008), who found a correlation between learners' positive attitudes towards a language and their competency level. Most educated deaf signers can also be

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[125] Note: Signers who contributed lexical data on LOCAL for Chapter 3 falls under this category; signer B.

considered under Signer B category since ENGLISH, BROKEN and LOCAL are all found in deaf schools.

I suppose that the role of ENGLISH and LOCAL provides an opportunity for an intermediate signing variety, known as BROKEN. While not explicitly mentioned, Schmaling's work in northern Nigeria (2003:306-307) introduces the concept of an intermediate signing variety observed among students. This variety arises when students blend different accessible languages, such as ASL, English, and Hausa Sign Language. Willemyns' continuum theory (1987) suggests that such an intermediate variant may exist, combining features of both formal and informal languages. It may be used in contexts where the informal variant would be too casual or inappropriate. In Ghana, signers may be oblivious to the language continuum but recognise a diglossic situation made up of formal GSL (high variety) and informal GSL (low variety). A similar phenomenon was noted by Willemyns (1987) in West Flemish towns, albeit among hearing individuals. When considering signers' adoption of an intermediate signing variety, it is possible that the situation arises due to the devaluation of their local language, as observed among some deaf individuals in Nigeria (Schmaling, 2003). In the Ghanaian continuum, ENGLISH is not only in contact with LOCAL but also with other signing systems (e.g., AdaSL, NanaSL) and an intermediate variant (i.e., BROKEN).

In the signers' ideology, ENGLISH holds high prestige while LOCAL holds low prestige. BROKEN is a fluid option often preferred due to its communicative efficiency. However, as a general misconception, educated deaf individuals may hesitate to use it extensively to avoid potential distortion of their English language proficiency, as they may have been warned against it during schooling (Gadagbui, 1998). Similar cautionary attitudes have been observed among hearing Ghanaians regarding using Pidgin English (Quarcoo, 1994:335).

The representation of individual signers within the GSL continuum showcases the varied competencies and sign language diversity in Ghana. The continuum encompasses a range of signers, from those with high competence in ENGLISH to those with a strong command of LOCAL. The triglossia with a double overlapping diglossia for GSL further contribute to the linguistic complexity within the GSL landscape. Understanding and studying the individual signers' placement within this continuum is essential for research on the sociolinguistic dynamics of sign languages in the urban deaf community in Ghana.

6.6   Concluding remarks

The chapter reveals signers' categorization of signing forms within the deaf community, with 16 general labels representing different perspectives and ideologies. These labels (SIGN, PRETEND, SPONTANEOUS, DEAF (-POSS), INITIALISATION, HARD/SOFT, BROKEN, LOCAL, NATURAL, C-O-D-E, GESTURE,

ILLITERATE, VILLAGE, ENGLISH, ASL/AMERICA and GSL/GHANA) reflect the prevailing ideology but also highlight overlapping and differing opinions. From a linguistic viewpoint, the findings suggest that the sign language situation in the Ghanaian deaf community can be understood as a pluridimensional continuum encompassing triglossia with a double overlapping diglossic signing systems. Linguistic categorisations may differ from how deaf individuals perceive and label these signing forms.

The pluridimensional continuum spans from educated signers who have received formal education to those who have not. Within this continuum, the GSL landscape consists of three main varieties; ENGLISH, BROKEN and LOCAL, each influenced by different factors. Signers' attitudes towards their languages mirror those of hearing Ghanaians, with a shared perception of foreign languages, particularly English, as more prestigious than local languages. This shared ideology is believed to have historical roots. It is evident that the prestige associated with ASL and English impacts on the GSL landscape. The language choices of signers in formal and informal settings reflect their desire for transparent communication and social acceptance. However, the limited inclusion of LOCAL signs in official resources highlights the stigmatisation of the informal variety and the preference for ENGLISH.

Within the deaf community, ENGLISH is considered prestigious due to its perceived contribution to socioeconomic benefits. Similarly, signers often attribute prestige to ASL due to its perceived socio-economic benefits, although not necessarily for socio-cultural interaction. Signers commonly view ENGLISH as a superstratum or superstrate language capable of conferring socioeconomic advantages to its users while also bridging the lexical gaps in educational domains. On the other hand, LOCAL elicits both positive and negative attitudes. Proficiency in LOCAL is associated with cultural identity and solidarity but monolingual use can also be judged as inappropriate or lacking linguistic legitimacy. It is important to highlight that due to the low status attributed to certain LOCAL variants, some signers in Ghana may be unaware of their existence as a language variant or even choose to deny them. Reflecting the impact of prestige on language acceptance and identity.

Understanding the pluridimensional continuum of GSL landscape and the associated language ideologies towards its variants is crucial in effectively teaching and promoting GSL in the country. Language educators and policymakers must take into consideration the diverse perspectives and attitudes towards GSL varieties and ensure that they are addressed in sign language teaching approaches. In conclusion, this chapter contributes to our understanding of the complex sociolinguistic landscape of GSL in Ghana. It emphasises the importance of considering the role of language ideologies, the impact of prestige on language acceptance and a pluridimensional continuum encompassing triglossia with a double overlapping diglossia for GSL.