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

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Stellingen behorende bij het proefschrift
Understanding Ghanaian Sign Language(s): History, Linguistics, and Ideology
door
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1. The term Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) encompasses various signing forms, including ENGLISH, BROKEN, and LOCAL, reflecting the linguistic diversity within the Ghanaian deaf community. The distribution of use of these signing varieties is driven by variation in prestige, as such aligning models of triglossia for spoken languages in African contexts (cf. Batibo 2005) ¹.
2. The often overlooked history of oralism in Ghana, such as the government initiation of oralism leading to the proliferation of several deaf schools and the potential development and use of local signing or school-lects, has significantly impacted the development of GSL and the signing landscape in the country. This has contributed to the diversity observed within GSL, with variations emerging in different educational settings and regions.
3. GSL (i.e., ENGLISH) exhibits unique linguistic features, particularly in its phonological handshape parameters, which differentiate it from American Sign Language (ASL) signs, despite their historical relationship. This distinctiveness is notably evident in the overuse of initialisation.
4. The development and evolution of GSL are intricately influenced by the gestural environment within deaf communities. From its emergence to ongoing usage, GSL adapts and incorporates elements from its gestural context directly and indirectly from other locally evolved signs. This process shapes GSL's lexicon, grammar, and discourse patterns.
5. In urban deaf communities in Ghana, signs that resemble gestures and are phonologically located at the lower half of the body may elicit laughter.
6. Recognising and documenting the linguistic diversities within deaf communities is not just a matter of academic interest. It is a crucial step towards empowering deaf individuals and fostering inclusivity in African societies.
7. There is an undocumented sign language in Apirede township, located within the Eastern Region of Ghana, and more sign languages likely exist in the country.
8. Colonial rule in Africa has not only shaped language attitudes and ideologies within speech communities but also in signing communities in Ghana.
9. Promoting research on LGBTQ+ themes in Ghana can help advance LGBTQ+ rights, combat discrimination, and foster safer, more supportive social environments.

¹ Batibo, H. M. (2005). Language decline and death in Africa: Causes, consequences and challenges. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters LTD.