

3. Deaf Education and signed language situation in Ghana and Nigeria

Six Decades after Andrew Foster

EMMA ASONYE AND MARY EDWARD

Abstract

Education for Deaf people in Ghana and Nigeria were pioneered by the late Dr Andrew Foster, an African-American Deaf graduate of Gallaudet University in the late 1950's. Beginning in 1957 in Ghana, and its subsequent expansion to other African countries including Nigeria, Foster led the establishment of 31 schools for Deaf people in 13 African countries (Kiyaga & Moores, 2003). In this chapter, we discuss the current state of education for Deaf people in Ghana and Nigeria, signed language use, the documentation of indigenous signed language, and Deaf livelihoods. We argue that creating an enabling environment for Deaf education, introducing national policies and laws that support Deaf education and signed language use will improve the standards for Deaf education in Ghana and Nigeria. Further, we suggest that signed language documentation and early detection of hearing loss will influence positive advancement of Deaf education and signed language in the countries.

Introduction

Deaf education in most African nations falls below the standard achieved in many developing countries (The Borgen Project, n.d.). Most Deaf students lag behind on the academic ladder as compared to their hearing counterparts. There are fewer provisions made by nations to recognize and improve education for Deaf people as

compared to mainstream education. In Ghana for instance majority of Deaf students attend state boarding institutions from primary to senior high schools and therefore have few opportunities to interact and study in the same environment with their hearing counterparts. Research has reported that low performance of Deaf students and their inability to access higher education are caused by certain factors hinders the progress of Deaf education (Asonye, Emma-Asonye, & Edward, 2018; Magongwa, 2010; Ajavon, 2006). The failure of government and institutions to monitor and improve education for Deaf people begins from the initial rejection of signed language as a full-fledged human language.

The histories of most Deaf Communities in Africa were not recorded prior to the arrival of the colonial masters and the missionaries. There are myths and stories of Deaf people located in different communities that were accepted on varied levels; some were accepted and incorporated as members of the communities in which they dwelt, and others were just seen as slaves working for royalty and still others were just entertainers (Miles, 2004). In most recorded world histories about Deaf people and persons with physical and mental disabilities, there was the prevalence of regarding them as less human and as such not being able to contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of societies and nations (Lang, 2010; Plann, 1997).

The story of rejection and discrimination has been part of the lives of people with disabilities. Across the African continent, disability is marked with inability and people who suffer different forms of disabilities are rejected, scorned or seen as lesser human beings. Worldwide, hard of hearing is believed to affect several millions of the total world population (Stevens et al., 2011; Mathers, Smith & Concha, 2000). Across the globe, there is a very large number of people who experience from mild to severe hearing loss. The language of members of Deaf communities is signed language and the acceptability of signed language as full-fledged human language met opposition as educationists and policy makers met in Milan in 1880 to discuss the fate of education for Deaf individuals and signed

language (Lane, 1984). After the Milan Conference, signed language use was banned, and most European Deaf institutions used speech to teach Deaf people (Vermeerbergen, 2006).

Whereas signed language use was halted in many European countries after the Milan Conference, Miles records that Deaf people in several African nations occupied substantial positions and used signed languages for communication (Miles, 2004). For instance, Deaf people in Adamorobe in Ghana used signed language for communication as early as the 18th century (Okyerere & Addo, 1994). In America, the education for Deaf individuals was done through signed language and the first school for Deaf people begun in the 19th century by Thomas Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc (Baynton, 1996). In the late 19th century, a group of reformers introduced oralism (or lip-reading) in American Deaf schools and this was carried through the 20th century (Baynton, 1996). In the late 1950s, Andrew Foster arrived in Ghana and this caused a change in educating Deaf peoples in many African nations through his efforts in establishing schools for Deaf people across several nations of Africa. Currently, signed languages are used in many nations of the world as the preferred language of instruction for Deaf students.

According to Kiyaga and Moores (2003), some Deaf people in Africa were hidden and seen as social misfits and cursed. In many societies, Deaf people have come together in organized groups and developed their own manual forms of communication (signed languages) and these manual forms were shared with other hearing members of the communities. These manual forms of communication were not documented and some of them have become extinct because the people that used such sign languages moved to different communities or have died. An example is the Martha's Vineyard signed language that was used in Massachusetts in America that is now extinct (Groce, 1989). There were also varied gestural resources that were used in Northern and Western Africa as documented by Miles (2004). One community-based signed language is the Adamorobe Sign Language (AdaSL) which is believed to have been the first recorded gestural communication in Sub-

Saharan Africa (Miles, 2004; Okyere & Addo, 1994). This signed language is given a precise date of 1733 as the time it emerged, however, Okyere and Addo did not back their claim with substantial evidence. There is no document that also cites the official beginning of this signed language in Adamorobe, Ghana.

Education for Deaf persons was not prioritized, and most African governments did not have educational plans for people with disabilities prior to the 1950s. Deaf education in sub-Saharan Africa began as “part of the European missionary movement of the 19th century” (Kiyaga & Moores, 2003, p. 19) and as such most Deaf people above 60 years in sub-Saharan Africa were not educated as in the case of Deaf adults in Adamorobe described in this volume (see Edward & Akanlig-Pare). Educating deaf and hard of hearing children in most parts of the world was tied to evangelizing. In colonial times, institutions were established to cater for Deaf education but were only accessible to the children of the rich and the powerful which was just a minute representation of Deaf people. Kiyaga and Moores (2003) were of the view that only few affluent African families in urban locations could afford to send their deaf and hard of hearing children to such schools and the majority of Africans lived in poor rural areas.

From all indications, after independence from colonial powers, most leaders of African nations did not prioritize education for Deaf people. Educating hearing people was considered proper and fit since they were perceived to be the ones who would contribute to the growth and development of the communities. This rejection was not just assigned to deaf or hard of hearing persons, people with disabilities were denied education and the few who could access education could not climb to higher educational levels. Deaf education in Africa has been contextualized in eradicating hearing loss, poverty reduction, prevention of rejection and stigmatization of deaf people, and the acceptance and integration of deaf people in societies (Asonye, et al. 2018; Edward, 2018a).

In Africa, the onset of Deaf education is mostly attributed to the missionary work of Rev. Dr. Andrew Foster, a Deaf African American

(Kiyaga & Moores, 2003). Dr. Foster's missionary drive led him to explore many nations in Africa, teaching Deaf people the message of the gospel. He also established schools to teach signed language to the "languageless" Deaf people with whom he came into contact. The goal was to evangelize to Deaf people in a language they understand. However, this goal led him to the establishment of many Deaf schools across Africa. He introduced the concept of "total communication" in signed language "which embraced both American and indigenous signs" (Kiyaga & Moores, 2003, p. 18). As the first black graduate of the Gallaudet University, he desired to impact the continent of Africa with the knowledge he had acquired after he found out that Deaf education on the continent was below average (Gallaudet University, 2014). Dr. Foster's impact on education for Deaf Africans is seen in the legacy he left; 31 schools for Deaf people across Africa (Kiyaga & Moores, 2003). The first destination of Dr. Foster was Ghana, in West Africa where he established his first school in Osu (Accra) which was later moved to Mampong (Eastern Region). There are varied opinions about the impact of Dr. Foster in Africa; yet, his impact has been positive because it was through his efforts that Deaf education became a priority to some African government.

The problems facing Deaf education in Africa are varied and include lack of trained teachers/personnel, lack of facilities, abandonment of students by some parents and guardians, and inadequate resources to fund institutions for Deaf people (see Ajavon, 2006). Though, signed languages across Africa have remained the languages of people who are deaf, these languages are hardly recognized in Africa as national languages. Currently, only four African countries have given legal recognition to their signed language as national languages (World Federation of the Deaf, 2016a).

Signed languages are however used at some official gatherings as the language for interpreting and for Deaf education. Language policy makers have ignored the need to include signed languages as part of the official languages of many nations of Africa. Deaf

education in many African nations has not reached the level that allows deaf and hearing persons to compete for the same job opportunities.

In this chapter, we present information on Deaf education and signed language situation in Ghana and Nigeria focusing on the progress and the failures of Deaf education and signed language situation in Ghana and Nigeria after the initial work of Dr. Andrew Forster. Further, we argue for developmental changes that will improve Deaf education and signed languages used in these two nations. The rationale for documenting Deaf education and signed languages situation in both countries is to generate literature to compare the uniqueness and commonalities of progress and challenges both countries face for shared knowledge of experiences and to foster potential future cooperation of programs relating to Deaf education and signed languages situation among both countries. We adopted a qualitative and quantitative mixed method analysis of past and present published articles, books, video interviews and the authors own knowledge and experiences with Deaf education and signed language situations in Ghana and Nigeria.

Deaf Education in Ghana and Nigeria

Prior to the 1950's, there were no government recognized mode of Deaf education for Deaf people in Ghana and Nigeria. Indigenous African sign languages were hardly recognized and considered as natural languages. Foster started Deaf education by introducing a form of manual signed language and signed English originating from America which later became known as American Sign Language[1]. His approach embraced indigenous African and American signs (Kiyaga & Moores, 2003). Through the influence of Foster, Deaf education has been given recognition in Ghana and Nigeria and governments of both nations have taken over the schools he established. Most research on Deaf education (or special education) in Ghana and Nigeria focused on the history of Deaf education and the challenges faced by the students and the challenges of

the educational system (Ajavon, 2006; Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015; Avoke, 2001; Eleweke, 2002; Ajavon, 2003; Eleweke, Agboola & Guteng, 2015).

Presently Ghana has about 20 institutions (both private and public) that offer either deaf only or inclusive education and Nigeria has over 100 public and private schools that offer both deaf only and inclusive education (43 of which are in Lagos alone). The total population of Ghana is about 30 million[2] and an estimated 110,625 Deaf people in Ghana representing 0.4% of population. It is not yet clear the population of Deaf people in Nigeria because of lack of thorough documentation, but it has been suggested that Deaf people make up about 23.75% of the country's population (Treat, 2016).

Despite the increased number of public and private schools, Deaf education in both countries remain one of the least developed on the African continent with minimal inclusive education for Deaf students at the basic level in Ghana and Nigeria. The emphasis for inclusive education in Ghana begun in 1994 (Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015) but its implementation is still minimal. Additionally, in both countries, signed language is yet to receive legal recognition.

Andrew Foster arrived in Africa in 1957 during a time when Deaf education was unheard of in most of Sub-Saharan Africa. There were however 12 Deaf schools in North Africa and South Africa. The passion to establish Deaf education in Africa led Andrew Forster to start work as soon as he arrived. In 1957, he established the first Deaf school in Ghana in Osu, Accra. This school which was originally named Ghana Mission School for the Deaf started in one classroom that was borrowed from the Presbyterian Church. The Ghana Mission School for the Deaf was later moved to Mampong-Akuapem in the Eastern Region. In 1960, Andrew Forster arrived in Nigeria to teach deaf and hard of hearing children using signed language. Prior to his arrival in Nigeria, Deaf education was starting to gain strength by the efforts of some indigenous special education trained individuals (Adelogbe, 1974; Eleweke, Agboola & Guteng, 2015), but the teaching method was oralism, as it was the case

earlier in the Americas and Europe. Unlike Ghana which had no history of Deaf education prior to the arrival of Andrew Forster, indigenous Nigerians were already teaching Deaf students with speech.

Deaf education in Ghana

Dr. Andrew Foster established a total of 9 Deaf schools in Ghana (Kiyaga & Moores, 2003). Currently there are about 20 institutions that offer either Deaf only or inclusive education in Ghana. This number is made up of 17 public/private schools for the Deaf and two private inclusive Schools[3]. The language of Deaf education in all the institutions is GSL. Although there are at least one public basic institution for Deaf people in 16 [4] regions in Ghana, Deaf education has still not reached the desired target as many deaf and hard of hearing children in many rural locations in Ghana are either not educated or do not have access to Deaf institutions. We are of the view that there are not enough schools to serve all the cities and villages in Ghana. Those who are privileged to access education have difficulties competing with their hearing counterparts in the national examinations. The number of institutions serving the estimated 110,625 Deaf people in Ghana is small (GNAD, 2019).

Table 1

Deaf Schools in Ghana

Schools	Location	Deaf/ Inclusive
1. Secondary Technical for the Deaf	Mampong, Akuapem	Deaf
2. Demonstration School for the Deaf	Mampong, Akuapem	Deaf
3. Tetteh-Ocloo State School for the Deaf	Accra, Adjei Kojo	Deaf
4. Ashanti School for The Deaf	Jamasi, Kumasi	Deaf
5. Savelugu School for the Deaf	Savelugu	Deaf
6. Koforidua School for the Deaf	Koforidua	Deaf
7. Bechem School for Deaf	Bechem	Deaf
8. Gbeogo School for the Deaf	Tongo	Deaf
9. Cape Coast School for the Deaf	Cape Coast	Deaf
10. Sekondi School for The Deaf	Inchaban	Deaf
11. Wa School for the Deaf	Wa	Deaf
12. Obuasi School for the Deaf	Koforidua	Deaf
13. Volta Region School for the Deaf	Hohoe	Deaf
14. Kibi school for the Deaf	Kibi	Deaf
15. House of Grace School for Deaf	Krokrobite, Accra	Deaf
16. Akatsi Demonstration School, Deaf Unit	Akatsi	Deaf
17. Salvation Army School for The Deaf	Agona Swedru	Deaf
18. Multikids Inclusive Academy	Accra	Inclusive
19. St. John's Integrated Senior High School	Navarongo	Inclusive

From our encounter with Deaf students across Ghana, one thing that stood out was the fact that most Deaf students could not access higher education. This was mainly attributed to the low performance of students and lack of interest in education. Some of the students had knowledge of the educational options available to them and others did not. We were also privileged to encounter very intelligent Deaf students with excellent track records from the

basic school even to the University. Conversations with some of these students reveal that language is very critical to education. A Deaf graduate of a University in Ghana revealed that early access to language is very important to academic development among students. Signed language use in institutions that serve Deaf students is critical to their academic development.

Currently, Ghana does not have a recognized official signed language policy. In June 2006, Ghana passed the Persons with Disability Act, 2006 (Act 715) with the “hope that it will improve the life of persons with disability (PWDs) to enable them be part of mainstream society” (Asante & Sasu, 2015, p 62), but this has been a mirage as the act failed to account for the recognition of Ghanaian Sign Language as the official language for Deaf persons in Ghana. Although certain educational institutions have started teaching GSL as a subject to mainstream students (in Universities and Colleges), there is still more to be done as more Deaf students still face the challenge of joining mainstream schools without interpreters.

Again, access to education and inadequate facilities are some of the factors that have been reported to hinder Deaf education in Ghana. From our research, facilities at the Deaf institutions are inadequate to serve the numbers of students. There are usually over 30 students in one classroom and this makes it difficult for teacher-student relationships to thrive. In the age of technological advancement, most Deaf institutions in Ghana do not have computers and other basic items needed for teaching and learning. For instance, the Mampong Demonstration School for the Deaf (DEMOMODEAF) was reported by Citi News to be thriving on “benevolence of individuals and corporate institutions” (Citifmonline, 2016). From basic amenities to feeding grants, to uncompleted projects, DEMOMODEAF just like many other government institutions for Deaf students in Ghana have been neglected by government. Therefore, comparing the number of schools established by Andrew Forster alone (9) and the total numbers of institutions serving deaf and hard of hearing students (19) in Ghana, we are of the view that education for Deaf people has seen little

improvement in over 50 years. We recommend more inclusive institutions to complement the numbers and also the training of more signed language interpreters to work in the inclusive education units in Ghana.

Deaf education in Nigeria

In this sub-section, we want to highlight some of the observations made in the course of our visits to Schools for the Deaf in Nigeria since 2014. After the era of Dr. Andrew Foster, the need for more Deaf schools in Nigeria continued to rise and the Federal Government continued to establish more schools across the country. To date, 119 Deaf schools have been documented by Save the Deaf and Endangered Languages Initiative (S-DELI) in an online directory[5] and more are yet to be documented. The reason for this large number of schools, we believe, is partly because of the Deaf population in the country, which has continuously been on the increase (Asonye, 2017b; Asonye, et al, 2018).

In addition to looking at signed language status in the country in general, our studies have been focused on signed language status and function in the education of deaf and hard of hearing children in the country. Signed language in Deaf education and acquisition planning is a key component of a nation's language planning and policy (Hult & Compton, 2012), while the use of indigenous [signed] languages as a medium of instruction in early childhood education has been an effective means of educating and developing the [deaf] child intellectually (Kioko, 2015). Yet, a critical look at the National Policy on Special Needs Education (NPSNE) shows that it has no provision for Indigenous Nigerian Sign Language (INSL) in Deaf education at any level of education (see NPSNE, 2015). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the gross population of teachers teaching deaf and hard of hearing children are not fluent signers. Asonye (2017a) estimates the ratio of teachers in Deaf schools in Lagos with Special Education training to those without the training to be 1:10; the ratio of teachers who can sign to those that cannot sign (but

teach Deaf students) to be 1:10. This is reported in the NPSNE (2015) as follows:

It is the general-purpose teachers that seem to be dominating the field of Special Needs Education. Graduates of Special Education in Nigeria face the challenge of relevance on graduation because the curriculum in place is not skill-relevant after school life. (p. 4)

The non-signing teachers in Deaf schools are usually helped by the signing teachers who end up doubling as signed language interpreters. Thus, giving the signing teachers double work of teaching and interpreting at the same time. This tedious task reveals that the importance of signed language to Deaf education is hardly understood. Many teachers of deaf students and the Education Sign Language Interpreters we have met in the course of our research believe that the federal government, after Foster's time, "adopted" ASL as a language of instruction in Deaf schools, but ironically, the use of signed language for Deaf education is hardly mentioned in the National Policy on Special Needs Education, rather it is mentioned as part of the Total Communication method of teaching, which includes "aural, oral, lip reading, and sign (sic) language interpretation" (NPSNE, 2015: 15). It is worth noting that the drafting of the NPSNE document included professionals from all other disciplines except linguistics.

Many have also referred to the "adopted" ASL[6] as Nigerian Sign Language. This "adopted" ASL is made up of the structure of written English with a mixture of basic ASL vocabulary and derived local signs. This is no different from what happens in some other West African countries where Andrew Foster established Deaf schools, including Ghana. Some researchers believe that GSL is largely made up of ASL vocabulary (Kusters, 2015).

Another aspect of Deaf education worthy of discussion in this chapter concerns the classroom. From what we know of the classroom setting for Deaf students, a typical classroom is set up in a way to provide maximum visual learning ability and less distraction (Trussell, 2008; Guardino & Antia, 2012). One of the ways

in which this is made possible for deaf students is by having fewer students in a class (say between 6 and 12), enough to have a horseshoe or C-shape seating arrangement to enable a direct visual access to the teacher and the teaching tools. On the contrary, a typical classroom in Nigerian Deaf schools falls between 25 and 50 students per class, with some up to 100 students per classroom in a regular classroom format (Asonye, 2018; Asonye, Emma-Asonye & Okoro forthcoming). Table 2 below shows students' population in relation to teachers' population in five Deaf schools in Lagos in 2017.

Table 2

Showing Data from 5 Schools in Lagos Nigeria

S/N	School	Type	Students Population		Teachers Population		
			Deaf	Hearing	Other Disabilities	Deaf	Interpreting
1.	School A	Mainstream/ Junior Sec	34	1888	-	2	1
2.	School B	Mainstream/ Junior Sec	30	1290	-	1	2
3.	School C	Mainstream/ Inclusive/ Secondary	32	-	2	1	3
4.	School D	Mainstream/ Inclusive/ Junior Sec	59	-	2	2	2
5.	School E	Mainstream/ Primary	32	206	-	1	1

Asonye, Emma-Asonye & Okoro (2017)

Table 2 represents a major desideratum of a key factor in Deaf education. From our surveys and outreaches, we realized that most Deaf students appear to struggle with learning and a great number have been diagnosed with eye defects during the free medical/

community services organized by S-DELI in Deaf schools across the country. These eye problems and learning difficulties could have been triggered by the distance between the students and the teacher or interpreter, as studies have suggested that deaf people have higher risks of developing ophthalmic (visual) problems than their hearing counterparts (Abou-Elhamd, ElToukhy, & Al-Wadaani, 2014; Guy, Nicholson, Pannu, Holden, 2003; Ostadimoghaddam et al, 2015). It is possible that many students strain their eyes to watch the teacher or interpreter when the class size is too large, and the arrangement makes it difficult to see the teacher or interpreter without hindrance. The interpretation of the lessons from speech to signs could also cause some information to be missed.

Furthermore, Table 2 shows the extent Deaf students are possibly marginalized in mainstream and inclusive schools. The National Policy on Special Needs Education supports inclusive education system, the type of system that leaves Deaf students highly marginalized. This is obvious in the discrepancy of deaf-hearing students' population in Schools A, B, and E (1:56, 1:43 and 1:6 respectively). A typical Deaf mainstream or inclusive school in Lagos and the Federal Capital Territory is like a regular hearing school with a Deaf unit or classroom (sometimes with students with other disabilities). The schools have an unarguable unequal distribution of students and teachers to the obvious disadvantage of the deaf students.

We found that the students with other disabilities including autism and intellectual disabilities share classes with the Deaf students. These students do not have any Individual Education Plan or specialists to attend to them, which is the right of such students in other countries, especially in the United States (Hult & Compton, 2012). In those mainstream or inclusive schools, Deaf students and students with other disabilities are identified with a different school uniform. We also observed, in many of the schools we visited, most Deaf units/classrooms were in dilapidated state.

Lack of parental involvement in the education of their deaf students seems to be another huge predicament we observed in

Nigerian Deaf schools (Asonye, 2017a). In all the Deaf schools we have visited across the country, we have attempted to have a parents' sensitization forum. We understand that this lack of interest may not be peculiar to parents of deaf and hard of hearing children in Nigeria as a similar study by Martinez, Conroy and Cerreto (2012) reveal that parents in the United States complained of not being carried along adequately in the education policy of their children and young adults with disabilities. Reasons school staff often claim to be too busy to adequately attend to the individual concerns of Deaf students and their parents include the fact that school staff often decide the times and days for parents-teachers' meetings without considering parents' schedules. Ironically, many parents of Deaf students in the schools we have visited seem to be comfortable even though they are not involved in the education of their children.

Signed Languages in Ghana and Nigeria

Ghana and Nigeria are both former colonies of Great Britain and English is one of the official languages for both nations. One of the similarities between Ghana and Nigeria is multilingualism; with Ghana having between 45-80 languages (Bodomo, Anderson, & Dzahene-Quarshie, 2009) and Nigeria has over 500 identified spoken languages and dialects (Blench, 2012). Many of these languages are yet to be documented, not including the signed language varieties that exist, which are often mentioned with little or no details by researchers who have come across them. Again, both Ghana and Nigeria are multicultural nations and Deaf people are hardly recognized as a cultural or linguistic group. As a linguistic and cultural minority, Deaf people are regarded as people with special needs rather than a linguistic or cultural group. Currently, there are a few detailed linguistic research works on indigenous signed languages in Ghana and Nigeria (Asonye, 2016; Asonye et al., 2018; Edward, 2015a; Edward 2015b; Nyst, 2007).

Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) and Nigerian Sign Language (NSL) are used in Ghana and Nigeria for educating Deaf people. In Ghana,

both deaf and hearing users of the signed language refer to the signed language as GSL. On the other hand, in Nigeria it is not uncommon to see Deaf people and many other users of NSL refer to the signed language as American Sign Language (ASL). Both GSL and NSL are products of Andrew Foster's Deaf education in Ghana and Nigeria. Foster's approach to signed language education in the nations where he established schools was embracing both American and indigenous signs (Kiyaga & Moores, 2003). Although both GSL and NSL have been influenced by ASL in their emergence, we do not accept that GSL and NSL are dialects of ASL. These two signed languages have developed over time and have attained diverse unique statuses that distinguish them from ASL. Currently both GSL and NSL have not been given recognition as national languages. Along with GSL and NSL, there are several indigenous signed languages used in Ghana and Nigeria.

The signed language variety used in Nigerian Deaf schools, which we refer to as School Sign (see Asonye et al., 2018) could best be described as sharing common vocabulary with ASL but having the structure of English. The reason for this situation has been identified as partly because the School Sign is the sustained offshoot of the signing system introduced by Andrew Foster and partly because most hearing (signing) teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students are neither native signers nor were they trained in any of the indigenous Nigerian Sign Language variety (see Asonye, 2017). In addition, many Nigerian (deaf and hearing) signers use *simultaneous communication* as a preferred method of communication, thereby signing in English word order. *Simultaneous communication* is a method of communication involving signing and speaking simultaneously. In most cases, what is signed is the signed version of what is spoken, as many people think of signed language to be the signed rendition of English language (Schembri, 2010). This method of communication commonly seen among Deaf individuals in Nigeria often poses a great challenge for researchers in studying and documenting Deaf signers because the syntax of the

simultaneous communication is different from the syntax of the signed language used outside of school.

Ghana's Adamorobe Sign Language (AdaSL) is an indigenous village signed language that is used by both deaf and hearing signers in Adamorobe (Eastern Region). This signed language has been given detailed description by Nyst (2007) and Edward (2021). Other sociolinguistic and anthropological research include works by Kusters (2012, 2014), Edward (2018a; 2018b; 2015b) and Edward and Akanlig-pare (in this issue). Linguistically, AdaSL is unique and different from GSL and the other indigenous signed languages that are used in Ghana. Believed to have existed as early as the 18th century (Okwere & Addo, 1994), AdaSL origin is also tied to the presence of genetic deaf and hard of hearing in Adamorobe. Nanabin Sign Language (NanaSL) emerged in a Deaf family in Ekumfi in the Central Region of Ghana (Nyst, 2010). NanaSL is home signed language believed to be used by four generations of Deaf signers in Ekumfi. Nyst (2010) identified some similarities in AdaSL and NanaSL which are motivated by iconicity (form-meaning mapping between the linguistic sign and the referent). A recent discovery of another indigenous signed language in Nigeria has been made by Save the Deaf and Endangered Languages Initiative (S-DELI). Magajin Gari Sign Language (MGSL) used in Kaduna North is an indigenous signed language believed to have been used by the Deaf community in Magajingari. Research on MGSL is still ongoing and at the moment, we know that there are no young signers (Asonye & Akpan, forthcoming) and all deaf and hard of hearing children are currently using NSL which is the signed language for deaf education in Nigeria.

Blench and Warren (2003) have recorded a few words and discourse of Bura Sign Language, a village signed language used by a group of Deaf people in Northeast of Nigeria. However, the most detailed work on any indigenous Nigerian signed language variety was by Schmalings' (1997; 2000; 2003) on *Magana Hannu* (Hausa Sign Language). Schmalings studied the signed language variety used in the Deaf Community of Kano State, Nigeria. One of the most

important aspects of her work is her description of how the indigenous Hausa Sign Language variety used in that community was dramatically being displaced by the Signed English after the establishment of Schools for the Deaf in Kano State. Native Deaf signers, most of whom were fluent in Magana Hannu, became bilingual after going to school. The younger Deaf individuals that learned signed language in school, without prior contact with the indigenous signed language signed only in English word order, while other Deaf individuals (young and old) with little or no formal education were only fluent in the Magana Hannu (Schmaling, 2003). This resulted into a kind of chaotic linguistic environment that must have affected other aspects of Deaf life in that community.

Indigenous Ghanaian signed languages like AdaSL and MGSL face endangerment as many of the young signers are gradually shifting into the urban signed languages, which are considered prestigious because of its association with education (Asonye et al, 2020, Asonye & Akpan forthcoming; Edward, 2018a; 2018b; 2015b; Nyst, 2007). Educated Deaf Ghanaian signers from rural communities with village or home signed languages are met with pressure from teachers and other deaf or hard of hearing children at the educational settings to level their signed languages to make room for GSL. There is much leveling among Deaf students in boarding institutions as compared to Deaf people who reside in villages and cities. The situation of indigenous signed languages in Nigeria as described by Asonye, et al., (2018) and Asonye, et al., (2017) suggests a situation of linguistic threat and marginalization by the presence of foreign system(s) in the country, which has continued to impact negatively on signed language development and Deaf education in the country. The study of signed language is still an area of very little or no interest by indigenous linguists and Deaf scholars in Nigeria (Asonye & Emma-Asonye, 2013; Asonye, 2017b). As a result, the most common description of Nigerian Sign Language by foreign authors is its description as a dialect of American Sign Language.

The linguistic situation described by Schmaling in all her works about Magana Hannu and the Deaf community in Kano Nigeria may

not have been different from the situation in Kaduna State. In our first documentation exercise of Indigenous Nigerian Sign Languages (INSL), we[7] observed that Magajin Gari community, Kaduna North was made up of three groups of Deaf signers – those who sign only in English word order (which they learned in school), those who sign in English word order and the indigenous Sign Language (the bilinguals), and those who sign only in the indigenous sign language (with little or no education).

Documentation of Indigenous Sign Languages in Ghana and Nigeria

All over the world, linguists engage in language documentation activities to preserve the linguistic and cultural heritage of a community. Often, these languages and cultures are threatened by other majority languages and cultures. Several factors have been identified as threatening “the ethnolinguistic vitality” of signed languages across the world, which include, minimal population of users of a language, weak and unfavorable policies, disruption on intergenerational transfer, and of course absence of documentation (Johnson, 2004; Wilcox, Krausneker & Armstrong, 2012).

Over the past 20+ years that language documentation activities have increased (Seyfeddinipur, 2016), many spoken (and signed) languages have been documented, developed and preserved. However, many more African languages seemed to be threatened the more by much of the factors mentioned above. It is our view that one of the greatest challenges facing signed languages in Africa is the gross ignorance of both hearing and deaf people about the nature and status of signed language (See Asonye et al., 2018).

Documentation of Indigenous Sign Languages in Ghana

GSL, the signed language of Deaf education, cannot be listed as an indigenous Ghanaian language since it has ASL influence through the works of Andrew Foster. In this section, we identify indigenous Ghanaian signed languages as those signed languages that emerged in local communities, villages and homes with large populations of

Deaf people. Therefore, we shall classify indigenous Ghanaian sign languages as rural signed languages whereas GSL is an urban signed language. Research works on indigenous Ghanaian signed languages began in the 1980's pioneered by medical and anthropological visits to Adamorobe to determine the cause of the genetic deaf and hard of hearing. Earlier research works on indigenous Ghanaian signed languages were done by foreign linguists like Frishberg (1987), Nyst (2007; 2010; 2012) and Kusters (2012; 2014). The linguistic documentation and study of signed languages in general by local linguists is a recent enterprise that began around 2010 when the linguistics of GSL was introduced as a subject by the University of Ghana's Department of Linguistics. Prior to that several colleges taught signed languages (in general) to students' specializing in special education without teaching the linguistics of the language.

Through the efforts of Nyst, we have a detailed description of AdaSL published as a PhD thesis. Her work involved an ethnographic study and she carried out several research trips to Adamorobe where she recorded over 40 hours of signed videos. This great step has led to several other researchers gaining interest in AdaSL and other home signed languages. Kusters and Edward have been involved in linguistics and sociolinguistic description of AdaSL (see Kusters 2012, 2014; Edward, 2015a; 2015b; 2018a; 2021). The documentation of AdaSL began with individual items, kinship terms, short conversations, and story retelling (Nyst, 2007; Edward, 2021). These items have led to several descriptive works on AdaSL. Further, Nyst has also documented portions of NanaSL which is also an indigenous Ghanaian home signed system used in Ekumfi in the central region of Ghana. There is the need to document indigenous Ghanaian signed languages like AdaSL as it stands the risk of language endangerment (Edward, 2015b; 2018b; Nyst, 2007).

Comparing the research on spoken languages and signed languages in Ghana, we are quick to admit that the ration is disproportional. However, we are also of the view that this disproportion is caused by the late entry of signed language into the linguistics domain in 1960. As of now, there is still ongoing

documentation works by both local and foreign linguists to document and describe some aspects of AdaSL. NanaSL on the other hand has not seen much interest in its documentation. We are of the view that aside AdaSL and NanaSL, there are probably several other indigenous signed languages used in Ghana that are yet to meet the attention of a linguist. The varied linguistics areas that have been covered in the documentation include phonology, semantics, morphology, and iconicity (Nyst, 2007; Edward, 2014; 2015a; 2021).

Documentation of Indigenous Nigerian Sign Languages (INSL)

In our efforts to document INSL, one of the steps we have taken is to answer some basic questions to clarify fundamental misconceptions we perceive people have about signed language in Nigeria, even Deaf signers and Sign Language Interpreters. These questions include: “What do we document?” “Why do we document?” “Who do we document?” (Asonye, 2018). The answers to these questions are not necessarily discussed in this work, however, the question, “What do we document?” seems to attempt to lay a distinction between what is generally used by many Nigerian Deaf and Sign Language Interpreters, which is most often a representation of the School Sign and what is signed among indigenous Deaf people of various communities who have little or no formal education. It also attempts to answer the question often asked by many hearing people including Sign Language Interpreters, which is born out of a fundamental misunderstanding about signed languages in Nigeria; often, we are being asked, “which signed language do you [people] document, since Nigeria is said to have over 500 languages?”

Nigeria is said to have over 500 spoken languages and dialects (Blench, 2012), although some indigenous linguists recently seem to doubt this claim. Many hearing people we have met appear to understand signed language as the signed version of spoken language, as such, if Nigeria has over 500 spoken languages, there should equally be over 500 signed languages. The question is, which

one do we document? Signed language data collected from Magajin Gari, Kaduna North is evidence that every language is a communal experience, a representation of the culture and identity of its owners/users (Wilcox and Wilcox, 2002). It is evident that the Deaf Community has developed a rich signing system to express their interpersonal and cultural ideologies, distinct from the spoken language. For instance, there is name sign for almost every item found in the environment and culture; there is also many signs and gestures used by Deaf people different from the hearing people's gestures.

Deaf lives and conflicting identities

Deaf people in Nigeria are considered a major minority group due to the high prevalence[8] of hearing disabilities in both children and adults (Asonye, 2017). In both Ghana and Nigeria, Deaf people, they make up both a linguistic and a cultural group, although we believe that they are more generally regarded as a disability group than a linguistic or cultural group. There is an estimated number of 110,625 Deaf people in Ghana (accessed from GNAD 31/08/2018) and this number forms about 0.4% of population of Ghana. The population of Deaf people in Nigeria has been a great point of interest to many scholars and authors, as speculations about Deaf population or rather population of people with hearing loss abound in literature and in the news (such as Treat, 2016; Muanya, 2016; Olawale, 2016), but none has been proven to represent a comprehensive data of Deaf population in Nigeria. This presents the reason we engage in the collection of Deaf demographic data with the intention of documenting a most comprehensive population of Deaf in Nigeria.

In America, and probably some other countries, Deaf people are often classified or characterized as Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HoH), or 'Deaf' (with the capital D) and 'deaf' (with a small d; Padden, 1989; Padden & Humphries, 1988), Deaf Native Signers and Deaf Non-native Signers (Morford & Carlson, 2011). But Deaf in sub-Saharan Africa are hardly classified or characterized in like manner for the following perceived reasons listed below.

Absence of early detection/early intervention program for deaf and hard of hearing children

The absence of early detection and early intervention programs for deaf and hard of hearing children in both Nigeria and Ghana cannot be overemphasized. Early detection gives room for early Deaf enculturation and early access to signed language, early access or exposure to signed language and prepares a deaf and hard of hearing child for the future and positive membership of the society (World Federation of the Deaf, 2016b). Besides, early detection, which takes place through a hearing screening process helps to categorize whether a person is hard of hearing or profoundly deaf. Therefore, it is hard to categorize Deaf people according to level of hearing loss in many places in Ghana and Nigeria. Some people believe that hearing aids *cure* hearing loss and as such almost every family with a deaf and hard of hearing child in Nigeria would want a hearing aid for their child whether the child is partially or profoundly deaf. Many deaf and hard of hearing children equally grow up longing to have a hearing aid without any knowledge of depth of their hearing loss. These people perceive that being deaf is a disability that can be cured with hearing aids.

Lack of identification of Deaf culture by deaf persons

From our standpoint as researchers in the Deaf community, this is rather one of the most complicated aspects of Deaf life in Nigeria. However, our approach to the understanding of Deaf culture is from the perspective that signed language is the cultural identity of Deaf people; the human right of a deaf and hard of hearing child (World Federation of the Deaf, 2016b; Murray, 2015). Issues relating to signed language status in Nigeria as discussed earlier in the sections seem to greatly impact a negative attitude by some Deaf individuals towards signed language. For instance, many Deaf people we have interviewed in our over four years study in Abuja, Lagos, and Imo States claimed they learnt signed language from friends and so are not fluent signers. Others, who also became deaf

as adults and learnt to sign in a more organized setting, still prefer the simultaneous use of signing and speech or total use of speech even among Deaf gatherings. From our perspectives, Nigerian Deaf Community has many Deaf individuals with some kind of double identity – living their lives in-between the deaf and hearing cultures. Besides, Deaf people in Nigeria are a hardworking set of people, working very hard to overcome the set of sociocultural stigmas that seem to affect their everyday life negatively. In Ghana, some Deaf people have created the impression that hearing loss is associated with poverty and stigmatization. These people refuse to join the wider Deaf association and other sub-groups that seek the development of deaf lives. Rather, they resort to use speech and lipreading to be identified with the hearing community.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have outlined the progress of Deaf education and signed languages in Ghana and Nigeria after the initial establishment of Andrew Foster’s deaf schools. We have outlined the failure of Deaf education and the problems with signed languages of education (GSL and NSL) and the indigenous signed languages as well. Finally, we looked briefly at Deaf lives and discussed the absence of early intervention programs in Ghana and Nigeria and the identity crises faced by many Deaf people across Ghana and Nigeria. It is our opinion that Deaf education in Ghana and Nigeria have not been given the needed support for progress. Whereas policy makers have made enormous efforts to bridge the gap between deaf students and hearing students, most of these policies remain in “the drawers” yet to be passed.

First, the general composition of Deaf education and the structure is not tailored to make Deaf students competitive to their hearing counterparts. From lack of teachers, lack of educational facilities, confusion as to which language to use and the general bureaucracy in government distributions, it seems that Deaf education in Ghana and Nigeria is scheduled for massive downfall. Further, the signed languages of education and indigenous signed

languages across Ghana and Nigeria have received little linguistic investigations as linguists across the two nations seem to focus more on spoken languages to the detriment of signed languages. The acceptance of indigenous signed languages will not only promote multilingualism among Deaf people, it will also aid in the documentation of these local signed languages that are moribund and those that are at the verge of endangerment. The acceptance of simultaneous communication in respect to teaching Deaf students with both speech and sign in some Nigerian classrooms as a preferred methodology of teaching is an opium of the people.

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[1] We are not aware if Andrew Foster used signed English in his teaching.

[2] This figure is from the 2010 population census held in Ghana. There is an estimated increase to 30.10 million in 2019. The next official census will be in 2020. Population of Deaf people accessed from Ghana National Association of Deaf (GNAD) on 31/08/2018.

[3] Thanks to Marco Nyarko and Seidu of Ghana National Association of the Deaf (GNAD) for confirming the names of the schools and providing additional names of other private institutions.

[4] Ghana had 10 administrative regions prior to 2018. Currently 6 new administrative regions have been created making a total of 16 administrative regions.

[5] The online school directory is designed to accommodate primary details of all Schools for the Deaf in Nigeria with a tracking record of their activities.

[6] The word is used in quotation marks to show it is quoted as it is generally said.

[7] The Documentation Team of Save the Deaf and Endangered Languages Initiative [S-DELI], an NGO documenting INSL.

[8] Our demographic data collection from several Deaf schools in Nigeria, for instance shows a continuous increase in the population of students admitted in each school over a period of 5 years. This data does not include those that are not in school. Furthermore, since little or no attention has been seriously paid to the causes of hearing loss, especially in children, we believe that occurrence is prevalent.