

## Lexical comparison of Ghanaian Sign Language and Adamorobe Sign Language

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Typological research across different sign languages has revealed that sign languages differ from each other at various levels of linguistic description (e.g. Perniss et al. 2007). This paper aims to present preliminary findings on lexical comparison of Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) and Adamorobe Sign Language (AdaSL), two sign languages used in Ghana by different Deaf Communities. GSL is an urban sign language used by the larger Deaf Community and in education; AdaSL is a rural sign language used in Adamorobe village by both deaf and hearing signers (Nyst, 2007). The comparison presents similarities and differences between GSL and AdaSL on the lexical level with respect to iconicity.

The visual modality of sign languages offers a high potential for iconicity (resemblance relationships between form and meaning). Of particular interest is the understanding that iconicity is not monolithic but demonstrated through different devices and strategies that may be influenced by cultural factors and specific communicative contexts. Systematic patterns of iconicity have been exhibited by signers of urban and village sign languages (see Nyst 2012; de Vos & Pfau 2015), as well as in the gestures of hearing non-signers in those communities (Nyst 2016).

Three groups of participants were recruited for this study; 10 GSL signers, 10 AdaSL signers and 10 hearing non-signers (gesturers). Pictures of 50 selected household tools and objects were presented on a laptop screen and participants were asked to provide signs for the items in their sign language (signers) or gestures for the items (non-signers). The data is analyzed with respect to: (1) The iconic mapping present in the phonological parameters of handshape, movement, location, orientation; (2) The iconic base of signs in terms of the mapping between sign and referent.

Preliminary results show that lexical similarities in GSL and AdaSL are seen in: (1) a preference for an *instrument* strategy over a *handling* strategy (Padden et al. 2013); (2) a preference for 'figure-ground' representation (e.g. the sign for 'spoon' consisting of representation of the eating utensil and a bowl); (2) shared gestural resources available in the surrounding spoken languages. Lexical differences are motivated by typological differences between GSL and AdaSL: (1) use of a finger alphabet and initialised signs in GSL; (2) unique

phonological locations available to AdaSL including the legs and the back of the signer; (3) a preference for compounding as a morphological strategy in AdaSL.

An investigation of lexical iconicity in rural and urban sign languages with a focus on the similarities and differences provides insight into differential patterns of iconicity in the lexicon (Padden et al. 2013). Results will further be discussed with respect to cultural factors (urban and rural) and specific communicative context (deaf majority vs. deaf and hearing signers).

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