Promotion of sign language research by the African Deaf community: The cases in West and Central French-speaking Africa
Sanogo Yédé Adama (Côte d’Ivoire)
Kamei Nobutaka (Japan)

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  (Kamei Nobutaka)

- Part 2: Promoting Deaf communities’ linguistic rights in West Africa: What role for Deaf persons in Sign Language research field?
  (Sanogo Yédé Adama)

Part 1: General situation of sign language and research
Kamei Nobutaka (Japan)

- KAMEI Nobutaka
  - Cultural anthropologist; a hearing researcher
  - 1996: First visit to Africa (Yaoundé, Cameroon)
  - Fieldwork on minorities in African contexts (hunting-gathering people in the forests, children and school education, people with disabilities…)
  - 1997: Fieldwork in Deaf communities in Cameroon and other countries in West and Central Africa


Purposes of Part 1

- 1) To show the impact of ASL in Africa and its background;
- 2) To propose the definition of a sign language used in West and Central French-speaking Africa;
- 3) and to show the examples of SL dictionaries we edited with Deaf counterparts.
Influence of ASL

French-speaking Africa

22 countries use French as their official language.

Founder of the Christian Mission for the Deaf

Dr. Andrew J. Foster (1925-1987)
A Deaf African-American
"Father of Deaf Education in Africa"

31 deaf schools in 13 countries

First school: Accra (Ghana) in 1957

Foster’s schools in French speaking Africa

- Foster founded 31 schools for the deaf.
- 25 schools were founded in French-speaking areas. (80%)

Network of CMD schools

- The network of CMD schools covered almost all the major cities in West and Central Africa:
  - Accra (Ghana); Ibadan (Nigeria);
  - Abidjan (Côte d’Ivoire); Ouagadougou (BF);
  - Cotonou (Benin); Lomé (Togo); Dakar (Senegal);
  - N’Djamena (Chad); Bangui (Central African Rep.);
  - Kinshasa (DR Congo); Libreville (Gabon) etc.
French and ASL-like signs in the classrooms

Written French

ASL-like signs

A classroom in 1970’s in Lomé, Togo

(Photo by CMD)

Training course for young teachers by Foster

161 trainees came from 19 countries.

Many trainees were deaf.

(Photo by Ahoe Abou)

161 trainees from where?

French-speaking countries

CMD trainees’ countries

(Kamei 2006)

School education managed by Deaf people

- Founder: Andrew Foster (Deaf pastor)
- Instructors: Deaf teachers from Benin
- Trainees: Many Deaf and hearing students from 19 countries (including most of French-speaking Africa)
- >> These trainees became teachers of deaf children in their homelands.
- [Important!] Most of these educational activities were conducted by African Deaf educators after the independence of African countries in 1960’s.

After the diffusion of ASL

- The vocabulary of ASL widely and rapidly spread among urban Deaf communities in these areas.
- The Deaf communities adopted the grammar, spelling and mouthing of spoken and written French.
- The Deaf communities also added rich signs created among them in their everyday life.

Contact language between ASL and French

USA

French

Africa

France

English

Language contact

American Sign Language

Pidginization Creolization

French Sign Language

(Kamei 2006)
Not as a dialect of ASL

- In the discussions for many years, we, Kamei, the researcher, and African Deaf counterparts, started to recognize this language:
- not as a dialect of ASL,
- but as a new independent language created by African Deaf communities.

We named this language

- *Langue des Signes d'Afrique Francophone (LSAF)* is a generic term for sign languages used in Deaf communities in French-speaking West and Central Africa with (1) loan signs from ASL and (2) an influence of spoken/written French (= Creole sign languages made of ASL and French in Africa).
- >> It is important to describe this sign language, not only for academic purposes, but also for educational uses.

Variations of LSAF

- I already visited Deaf communities in seven French-speaking African countries. We can observe the common sign language (LSAF) across the borders.
- However, we can find minor variations among their vocabulary.
- This is the reason why we often call them with the name of dialects:
  - LSAF-CI (= dialect in Côte d'Ivoire)
  - LSAF-Cam (= dialect in Cameroun) etc.

After Foster’s death...

- 1987: Foster died in the air crash in Rwanda.
- CMD adopted the policy to cut down the financial support for these schools. African educators, had to accept their situation, sometimes in trouble.
- Some schools were nationalized by the governments, others were continued as private schools,
- Some schools were taken over by hearing educators, others were continued by Deaf educators,
- Some schools developed, others were already closed because of wars or financial troubles...

Various patterns of the empowerment

- CMD started private schools mainly conducted by Deaf educators. After the death of Foster,
  - [Deaf-led education] (for example, Nigeria)
  - [hearing-led education] (for example, Burkina Faso)
  - [government-led education] (for example, CI)
  - [private-sector-led education] (for example, Cameroon)
- >> Toward the comparative research of African Deaf history (to be continued...)

Editing dictionary in Cameroon 2007-2008

- As a research project of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Japan (TUFS), the first dictionary project of LSAF started in 2007.
- Created the first DVD movie dictionary in 2008 with the collaborations of the Deaf community in Cameroon.
Around 3,300 movie clips (7 hours 40 min.)

- Dictionary (2,600 words)
- Lessons (450 phrases)
- Conversation (110 ph.)
- Grammar (150 ph.)
- Natural dialogues (2 sessions)

Research training in Côte d’Ivoire since 2009
- Since 2008, started to promote the idea of the second dictionary project of LSAF in Côte d’Ivoire.
- 2009: We started the research training with Deaf counterparts in Abidjan.
- 2012: the first dictionary was published.
- >> M. Yêdé will show the process in the Part 2
- >> More field research, more dictionaries by Deaf Africans!

Summary of Part 1
- ASL has been widely spread in West and Central Africa.
- This is not the result of the colonization. This is the result of missionary activities mainly conducted by Deaf Africans after the independence of Africa.
- African Deaf communities created a new sign language with borrowing ASL vocabulary, spoken/written French and original signs in Africa (=LSAF).
- It is necessary to describe this new African sign language for academic and educational purposes, mainly by African Deaf people themselves.

>> Part 2 by Sanogo Yêdé Adama

Future perspectives
- We hope to respect the common basic characteristics of LSAF that is widely used in French-speaking Africa.
- At the same time, we hope to respect the variations of the dialects of LSAF in African countries.
- This is the reason why we would like to promote autonomous research by local Deaf people;
- And to share the results each other on the African Continent.

Conclusion
Sanogo Yêdé Adama (Côte d’Ivoire)
Kamei Nobutaka (Japan)
Future projects

- We are promoting the ideas
- 1) to set up the Research Institute for LSAF;
- 2) to have training courses for Deaf and hearing researchers;
- 3) and to organize LSAF International Conference to create the network of collaborators,
- in order to move forward together to realize autonomous and united research collaborations among Deaf Africans.

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  - SL interpreters;
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