“Promoting Deaf communities’ linguistic rights in West Africa: what role for Deaf persons in Sign Language research field?”

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INTRODUCTION OF THE LECTURER

Sanogo Yédê Adama
- Côte d’Ivoire
- Deaf
- Sign Language Trainer
- Former trainee of JICA and DPI training program for Persons with Disabilities in Africa (JICA TIC, 2008)
- Mainstreaming Disability Advisor
- Coordinator of the Action Plan for Sign Language promotion in Côte d’Ivoire

THE RESEARCH FIELD

1) Where are we working?
Our research field is located in French speaking West Africa. We work precisely in Côte d’Ivoire. But from 2013 to 2014, we had an experience in Burkina Faso, Togo and Niger.

OUTLINE

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2) The common issues of Deaf peoples in the research field

Deaf people in French speaking West Africa are usually facing many difficulties to access education, information, health care, vocational training and employment. In most of the countries of this region, there are no more than five (5) schools where Deaf people can apply. Till now, the main schools for the Deaf in those countries are the schools founded by Dr Andrews Foster since 1974. A very high rate of Deaf children don’t go to school. Many others Deaf young withdraw from school after primary school for lack of secondary schools where they can apply or accessibility services for them in ordinary existing schools.

In our research field Deaf people cannot really enjoy their rights to basic education.

3) Challenges of the research on sign language in this region

According to the report of World Federation of the Deaf on Deaf People and Human Rights around the world (Deaf People and Human Rights, by Ms Hilde Haualand and Mr Colin Allen for the World Federation of the Deaf and the Swedish National Association of the Deaf, 2009) without the implementation and existence of even one of the factors emphasised in the below illustration, Deaf people will not be able to fully enjoy their human rights.

Research on sign language in French speaking West Africa region will contribute to improve Deaf people accessibility to education, information, health, vocational training and employment. Unfortunately there are few research works on this field. The lack of research on sign language in this region can be quote among the factors of inaccessibility of Deaf people to education and vocational training.

Since 2009, we are trying to contribute to bring change.

WORKING METHODOLOGY AND KEY RESULTS

1) How are we working in Côte d'Ivoire?

2) Research work and results

2010 – 2012
Set up a basic communication lexicon of LSAF in Côte d'Ivoire
Result: Côte d'Ivoire has its first Sign Language Dictionary

2013-2014
Develop bilingual sign language learning tools
Result: Côte d'Ivoire has its first bilingual Sign Language learning manual
One of the most important results

Deaf people's SL team in Côte d'Ivoire has strategic knowledge to develop by itself sign language manuals and contribute to the development of sign language manuals in other countries.

We have to manage to do this work thanks to a Project of CBM (an international NGO) funded by European Union. This project promotes the rights of Deaf persons to access vocational training and employment.

On going research activities

Study of LSAF-CI's handshapes
- In addition to 26 letters of the alphabet and some numbers like 2, 3, 4, and 5, LSAF-CI use around 40 handshapes.

Set up a basic lexicon of LSAF-CI in the field of education
- This lexicon will allow us to improve sign language training resources and programs for schools' teachers.

What role for Deaf people in research field?

Usually Deaf people have two roles in research field

SIGN MODEL ONLY
- They often have a very low knowledge about the issue of sign language and research
- They don't acquire strategic knowledge and skills about promotion of sign language
- Research work cannot continue when the researcher will leave
- Deaf people cannot invest in advocacy to get social change by using the results of research

RESEARCH COLLABORATOR
- The researcher bring them lot of resources about the issue of sign language and the research to upgrade their knowledge
- They acquire strategic knowledge and skills about promotion of sign language
- Research work can continue when the researcher will leave
- Deaf people can invest in advocacy to get social change by using the result of research

CONCLUSION

According to Côte d'Ivoire's experience, we can conclude that the best way to contribute to social change in Deaf communities in French speaking West Africa region through the research work is to increase Deaf people's participation in the research on sign language. It means not only work with Deaf persons as sign models but also bring them strategic skills about the promotion of their linguistic rights, developing sign language tools, etc.

We think that one of the best practices for the searcher is to set up in Deaf community a local sign language research team led by Deaf people themselves. This practice contribute to empower Deaf people in their community. It is a sustainability matter regarding the impact that we pursue: all people around the world shall enjoy their linguistic rights without barriers.
Merci pour votre attention!

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