

A LEXICAL COMPARISON OF SOUTH AFRICAN SIGN LANGUAGE AND POTENTIAL LEXIFIER LANGUAGES

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THESIS

ENGLISH ABSTRACT: South Africa's history of segregation was a large contributing factor for lexical variation in South African Sign Language (SASL) to come about. Foreign sign languages certainly had a presence in the history of deaf education; however, the degree of influence foreign sign languages has on SASL today is what this study has aimed to determine. There have been very limited studies on the presence of loan signs in SASL and none have included extensive variation. This study investigates signs from 20 different schools for the deaf and compares them with signs from six other sign languages and the Paget Gorman Sign System (PGSS). A list of lemmas was created that included the commonly used list of lemmas from Woodward (2003). The signs were elicited from informants and documented based on their phonological properties: handshape, movement, location, and orientation. SASL lexical variety was documented. Sign types were identified by comparing the different signs for a lemma with each other; signs that differed in more than one phonological parameter were classified as different sign types. These sign types were then compared with counterparts in six potential lexifier sign languages, American Sign Language (ASL), British Sign Language (BSL), Irish Sign Language (ISL), German Sign Language (DGS), Flemish Sign Language (VGT), and Dutch Sign Language (NGT) and PGSS. Signs that are heavily influenced by iconic devices were removed from the final comparison. Loan signs were identified on the basis of phonological similarity. The results showed the highest percentage of borrowings from BSL at 15.9%, followed by ASL with 12.6% and VGT at 11.7%. The results indicated that 65.4% of the sign types were influenced to some degree by foreign sign languages or PGSS. There is a substratum of signs that did not match with any of the potential lexifier languages or PGSS and their origins are uncertain; they possibly emerged naturally or were borrowed from a language that was not included in this study.

AFRIKAANSE OPSOMMING: Die geskiedenis van segregasie in Suid-Afrika was 'n groot bydraende faktor tot die leksikale variasie in Suid-Afrikaanse Gebaretaal (SAGT). Buitelandse gebaretaal het beslis 'n teenwoordigheid gehad deur die verloop van dowe onderwys; die invloed wat vreemde gebaretaal op SAGT vandag het, is egter waarop hierdie studie fokus. Daar is beperkte studies oor leen-gebare in SAGT, en nie een van hulle het die uitgebreide variasie inherent in SAGT ingesluit nie. Hierdie studie ondersoek gebare van 20 verskillende skole vir dowes en vergelyk dit met gebare uit ses ander gebaretaal asook die Paget Gorman Sign System (PGSS). 'n Lys van lemmas is opgestel wat die algemeen gebruikte lys uit Woodward (2003) bevat. Die gebare is vanuit informante ontlok en gedokumenteer op grond van die volgende fonologiese eienskappe: handvorm, beweging, ligging en oriëntasie. SAGT leksikale variasie is gedokumenteer. Gebare tipes is geïdentifiseer deur die verskillende gebare vir 'n lemma met mekaar te vergelyk; gebare wat met meer as een fonologiese parameter verskil het, is as verskillende gebare klassifiseer. Hierdie gebare tipes is vervolgens vergelyk met eweknieë in ses gebaretaal, Amerikaanse Gebaretaal (ASL), Britse Gebaretaal (BSL), Ierse Gebaretaal (ISL), Duitse Gebaretaal (DGS), Vlaamse Gebaretaal (VGT), en Nederlandse Gebaretaal (NGT) en PGSS. Gebare wat sterk beïnvloed is deur ikoniese stelsels, is uit die finale vergelyking verwyder. Leen-gebare is op grond van fonologiese ooreenkomstes geïdentifiseer. Die resultate toon dat die hoogste persentasie lenings vanaf BSL is met 15,9%, gevolg deur ASL met 12,6% en VGT met 11,7%. Die resultate het aangedui dat 65,4% van die gebare wel tot 'n mate beïnvloed is deur vreemde gebaretaal of PGSS. Daar is 'n substraat van gebare wat nie ooreenstem met enige van die moontlike gebaretaal of PGSS nie, en die oorsprong daarvan is onseker; hulle het moontlik natuurlik na vore gekom of is geleen uit 'n taal wat nie by hierdie studie ingesluit is nie.

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