UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Deaf People, Modernity, and a Contentious Effort to Unify Arab Sign Languages

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
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in

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by

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2010

The Dissertation of Kinda Al-Fityani is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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University of California, San Diego

2010

DEDICATION

To Mom and Bob, for believing in me.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABSL:	Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language
AFOOD:	Arab Federation of the Organs of the Deaf, sometimes also referred to as Arab Federation for the Organs of the Deaf and Arab Federation of Organizations Working with the Deaf
ALECSO:	Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization
AODP:	Arab Organization of Disabled People
ASL:	American Sign Language
ArSL:	Arabic Sign Language
Auslan:	Australian Sign Language
CAMSA:	Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs
HLID:	Holy Land Institute for the Deaf
KSL:	Kuwaiti Sign Language
LAS:	League of Arab States
LIU:	Jordanian Sign Language, *Lughat al-Ishara al-Urduniyah*
LSE:	Spanish Sign Language, *Lengua de Signos Espanola*
LSF:	French Sign Language, *Langue des Signes Francaise*
LSM:	Mexican Sign Language, *Lenguaje de Signos Mexicano*
LSL:	Libyan Sign Language
MSA:	Modern Standard Arabic
NS:	Japanese Sign Language, *Nihon Shuwa*
NZSL:	New Zealand Sign Language

PSL:	New Zealand Sign Language
SCFA:	Supreme Council for Family Affairs (Qatar)
SEE:	Signed Exact English
UN-ESCWA:	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
WASLI:	World Association of Sign Language Interpreters
WFD:	World Federation of the Deaf

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During his acceptance speech for an award at the Country Music Association Awards this year, Brad Paisley recalled the words of a childhood friend: “If you see a turtle on a fencepost, it had help getting up there.” I too feel like a turtle on a fencepost as my graduate career comes to an end. From this vantage point, I am only able to enjoy the view by recognizing all those who supported me to the top.

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Chapter 3, in part, is a reprint of the material as it appears in "Arab Sign Languages: A Lexical Comparison" (2007) *Center for Research in Language Technical Reports, 19(1), 3-13* and in "Sign Language Geography in the Arab World" (2010) in D. Brentari (Ed.), *Sign Languages: A Cambridge Language Survey* Cambridge University Press. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of these articles. Carol Padden is co-author of the latter article.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Deaf People, Modernity, and a Contentious Effort to Unify Arab Sign Languages

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

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Professor Carol Padden, Chair

This dissertation examines a project to unify sign languages across twenty-two Arab countries. Proponents of the project, mainly pan-Arab governmental bodies with the support of members of the staff at the Al Jazeera satellite network, have framed the project as a human rights effort to advance the welfare of deaf Arab people. They have urged its institutionalization in schools for deaf children and have promoted it as the official language of deaf Arab people. The project is controversial and has a number of shortcomings.

First, from a lexicostatistical analysis of five natural sign languages found in the region: Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, and Palestine, the author finds that they are unlikely to be descendants of a common ancestor. As such, attempting to unify them

would be unsound by scholarly linguistics standards. Second, there are cultural, political, and social objections to the project that have been raised by deaf Arab people who are resistant to the unification effort. They say they cannot understand the unified sign language nor can they find a purpose or utility in the language, which they believe threatens to diminish and eventually obliterate their natural sign languages.

This dissertation reviews arguments held by those supporting and opposing the project. Both sides claim a vision of modernity in which progress is perceived as a continuation of a past that is consistent with their present practices and beliefs. For proponents supporting the unification project, progress is tied to pan-Arab nationalism and the unifying Arabic language. Those opposing the project define progress as gaining more autonomy through official recognition of their natural sign languages and by transforming disparaging concepts of deafness. The unified sign language project may fail in achieving its goal of wide acceptance by deaf Arab people throughout the Arab region. Its potential demise can be attributed to its architects' lack of understanding of the deep complexity of human languages, including sign languages, as well as a lack of appreciation for informal, local practices and knowledge that are required for the project's success.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation examines a project to unify sign languages across twenty-two Arab countries. Proponents of the project, mainly pan-Arab governmental bodies with the support of members of the staff at the Al Jazeera satellite network, have framed the scheme as a human rights effort to advance the welfare of deaf Arab people. The role of the governmental bodies is to urge the unified sign language's institutionalization in schools for deaf children. Al Jazeera's role is complementary, to use the power of televised media to promote the unified sign language more broadly as the official language of deaf Arab people. I uncover the controversial elements of the project by outlining several of its shortcomings.

First, using lexicostatistical analysis of five natural sign languages in the region: Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, and Palestine, I find from the degree of similarity and difference in their vocabulary that these languages are unlikely to be descendants of a common ancestor. As such, attempting to unify them would be unsound by scholarly linguistics standards. Language unification efforts are more likely to be successful between closely related languages.

Second, political, cultural, and social implications of the project are examined using insights from those deaf Arab people who are resistant to the unification effort. They neither understand the unified sign language nor can they find utility in the language, which they believe threatens to diminish and eventually obliterate their natural sign languages. Deaf Arab people's views challenge the proponents' interpretation of international conventions on human rights.

In this dissertation, I review different conceptions of modernity held by those supporting and opposing the project. Both sides, I argue, perceive progress as a continuation of a past that is consistent with their ideologies. For proponents supporting the unification project, progress is tied to pan-Arab nationalism and the unifying Arabic language. Those opposing the project define progress as gaining more autonomy in their lives through official recognition of their natural sign languages and by transforming disparaging conceptions of deafness. This conflict in defining modernization, as either joining the broader Arab culture, or respecting deaf people's languages, is likely to impede the project's success as far as broadening the unified sign language's use in deaf Arab communities. I conclude by cautioning that the unified project is likely to fail in achieving its goal of acceptance by deaf Arab people. Its potential demise can be attributed to its architects' lack of understanding and appreciation of the complexity of human languages as well as of informal, local practices and knowledge that underpin the survival of the project.

The unification project has not been previously chronicled in a comprehensive manner. In Chapter 2, I provide an initial account of the conceptualization and design of a unified Arabic Sign Language, or ArSL, which took place in various meetings and conferences over the past three decades. I piece together a narrative of a sign language planning case by drawing on fragments of information from newspaper articles, conference proceedings and reports, organization websites, surveys, sign language dictionaries, and personal communication with deaf Arab people among other sources. I identify the different parties and individuals working on the project, their motivations for

pursuing and goals of the project, and instruments they used as they began to develop and disseminate ArSL. Of note is the unique voting mechanism upon which ArSL signs are determined. As I outline in this chapter, the poor state of education and low literacy rates of deaf people in Egypt and especially in Jordan drove the desire for reform. This chapter provides background material for the lengthier ideological discussions in later chapters.

Chapter 3 challenges the belief that sign languages of the Arab region are similar enough that they can be unified. I suggest that the assumption is based on equating the nature of Arab sign languages with the different dialects of spoken Arabic. Whereas differing Arab dialects are members of the same language family, I argue that sign languages in the Arab region are very local and regional in character such that a common parent language is unlikely. I provide support for this by exploring the degree of similarity between Jordanian Sign Language (LIU) vocabulary and four other sign language vocabularies in the region. I find that some of the sign languages compared might be related because there is a larger degree of similarity compared to other sign languages, but the degree of similarity is not great enough to conclude that they are dialects of the same language. If they were sign language dialects at one point, they have since greatly diverged. As such, I show that the geography of sign languages in the Arab region does not map directly onto that of spoken languages and that geographic proximity, in this region at least, does not predict similarity.

A key point I make in this chapter is that the higher rates of genetic deafness in the Arab region suggests that sign languages in the area develop principally in familial environments as opposed to educational systems as is the case in the West. The relative

recency of educational systems for deaf people in the Arab world has led to initial efforts to standardize sign languages at the national level, following a pattern observed elsewhere in the world where external institutions like schools or other forms of governmental support allow a language to develop standard forms. The recent appearance of schools in the Arab world seems to have led to a creolization or pidginization process for sign languages within national boundaries, comparable to the creolization and standardization that has been underway since the nineteenth century in the West when schools were first founded in these countries.

In Chapter 4, I delve into the motivations for the development of ArSL by relying on assertions made by proponents. What emerges from these statements is a common belief that local sign languages are deficient in vocabulary and in need of replacement with a language that more closely parallels Arabic in order to improve the education of deaf Arab people and integrate them into society. I argue that although ArSL is presented as a tool for empowerment to advance education and human rights, it is in fact a vision of progress that is deeply rooted in Arab history and tradition, including their sacred language. I examine the place of the Arabic language in hearing speakers' lives to demonstrate a basis for proponents' desire to model a manual language after it. This language ideology conforms to German Enlightenment thought that values a language that is continuous with the past. This is in stark contrast to the dominant, Western, "acultural" theory of modernity that would modernize language by making it "pure" and no longer associated to the past. I go on to defend the method by which proponents sought to address pressing issues concerning marginalized deaf people within an

alternative, “cultural” theory of modernity.

The defense of ArSL on the ideological grounds noted in Chapter 4 is unfortunately overshadowed by the magnitude of the project’s potential flaws. In Chapter 5, I present views expressed through public channels as well to me in private conversations by some deaf Arab people. They too see the need for reforming their education and improving their place in society but they find that ArSL’s imposition in education and in the media an oppressive act. I analyze the reasons for their dissatisfaction by providing linguistic, cultural, social, and political observations as to why ArSL may well turn out to be a poorly conceived and ill-designed product that stifles existing natural languages and deaf cultures. I outline how proponents misread international conventions and failed to arrive at the conclusion that their actions constitute a violation of human rights according to these conventions. Several deaf Arab people argue the reform would be more successful if there were support and institutionalization of natural sign languages. Here, I argue that deaf people look to history and tradition as they construct modernity, but through a lens that makes their sign languages at the heart of their modern selves. Their goal is to redefine public conceptions of deafness in order to gain more autonomy in their lives.

In Chapter 6, I conclude the dissertation by recapitulating a narrative of the ArSL project that I had weaved in earlier chapters and by predicting the project’s demise. Two indicators point towards this possible fate: the project’s oversimplification of the complex realities of language, society, and culture such that it renders ArSL lifeless and its disregard of informal processes such as local knowledge of natural sign languages. A

more successful reform effort would be one that documents, studies, disseminates, and institutionalizes existing natural sign languages and respects the local cultures from which they develop. Such an approach would modernize deaf people's lives by protecting their human rights and empowering them.

Chapter 2: Towards a Unified Pan-Arab Sign Language

Introduction

Every evening at 1800 Doha local time, the Qatari-based Al Jazeera satellite channel features a special one-hour newscast of world events. What distinguishes this news segment from others is the superimposed box featuring sign language interpretation of the newscaster's spoken Arabic. A screenshot depicts this in Figure 1. Meant to provide access to satellite news media for deaf Arab people, this on-screen sign language interpretation differs from the deaf access model of closed-captioning found in the U.S. and other Western countries. Closed-captioning transcribes the spoken words on-screen by displaying written text via a decoder. The scrolling-text at the bottom of the Al Jazeera screen, however, features breaking headlines of the day, or a news ticker, and should not be mistaken for closed-captioning. The low education and literacy rates among deaf Arab people make closed-captioning unsuitable, and Al Jazeera's on-screen sign language interpretation would be more accessible, according to its proponents. Considering that Al Jazeera's broadcast in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) has an audience that spans all Arab countries and beyond,[1] the deaf-access newscast also implies that deaf Arab people

[1] Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), both written and spoken, is taught in schools of all Arab countries. It is also the official language of Arab governments and used in Arab print and broadcast media. While there are several spoken dialects in the region, MSA is understood by literate Arab people and those who follow television news stations, for example. This diglossic situation and the high-status of MSA in Arab society are discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 5.

throughout understand the televised sign language. What then is the sign language being used? [2]

Figure 1. Screenshot of Al Jazeera deaf-access hour

Al Jazeera began offering on-screen sign language interpretation in 2002, on the heels of the release of the unified Arabic Sign Language (ArSL) dictionary in 2001. The publication also commemorated the birth of the artificial language, which was also the

[2] There are 22 Arab countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (League of Arab States, 2006).

first pan-Arab sign language. ArSL's development presented Al Jazeera an unprecedented opportunity, at least in theory, to provide deaf Arab people everywhere access to its news programming. The network staffed three sign language interpreters that remain a team to this day: Mohammad Al-BinAli, director of the team, Sameer Semreen, and Naji Zakarneh.[3] All three acquired certification in ArSL by the League of Arab States (LAS), [4] perform their on-screen duties in ArSL, and actively develop, promote, and spread the language. These interpreters would become leaders in their quest to provide deaf people improved access to education, media, conferences, and other spheres. Although their experience with ArSL could not have spanned more than a year or two before joining Al Jazeera between 2002-2003, they had already devoted much of their adult lives in the service of deaf people. They had interpreted for other networks—Al-BinAli on Qatari television since 1994 (Al Jazeera, 2008a) and Semreen (Al Jazeera, 2008c) and Zakarneh on Jordanian television since 1991 (Al Jazeera, 2008b). They also authored sign language dictionaries unrelated to ArSL—Semreen and Zakarneh on one for Jordan, Semreen on a second one for Oman, and Zakarneh on a third one for Palestine.

The brief biographies on Al Jazeera interpreters indicate that there were other sign languages in the Arab region before the introduction of ArSL, at least in Jordan, Palestine, and Oman. What then prompted the development of ArSL, and how was it

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[3] Naji Zakarneh also goes by the surname Suleiman. It is not uncommon for Arab people, especially among peasantry, to use their fathers' first name as a surname instead of the family name. This might explain Naji's differing surnames.

[4] League of Arab States (LAS) is a regional organization that encourages cooperation between the 22 Arab member countries.

developed? While there is a wealth of information on the history and nature of spoken and written MSA, more plainly known as Arabic by its speakers, material on sign language or languages in the Arab region is scarce. This chapter provides an initial exploration on the conceptualization and development of the sign language used on Al Jazeera. The descriptions provided here are drawn mostly from newspaper articles, but also from conference proceedings and reports, organization websites, surveys, sign language dictionaries, and personal communication with deaf Arab people among other sources. The chronology sheds light on an otherwise obscure sign language planning case by piecing together fragments of information to reveal a larger account and, for English-speaking audiences, by translating the mainly Arabic sources.[5]

What follows is an account of ArSL's conceptualization in 1980 by the Arab Federation of the Organs of the Deaf (AFOOD).[6] It would take another two decades for any serious effort on the ArSL project to transpire. In the meantime, AFOOD devised a smaller scale pan-Arab project to unify the manual alphabet, an endeavor whose success I then question. Regardless, the ArSL project was resuscitated by 1999. The scale of this language planning project necessitated the collaboration of many more parties such as Al

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[5] It is not within the scope of this chapter, or this dissertation as a whole, to review and present the demography and socioeconomic status of deaf Arab people. While limited, I direct interested readers to the 2008 Global Survey Report by the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) Interim Regional Secretariat for the Arab Region (http://www.wfdeaf.org/projects.html) for statistics on deaf Arab people such as their numbers and employment rates.

[6] This organization is sometimes referred to as the Arab Federation for the Organs of the Deaf and Arab Federation of Organizations Working with the Deaf. The term "organ," meaning a department or organization that performs a special function, may be archaic in English but it transliterates well from Arabic.

Jazeera, the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs (CAMSA), and Qatar's Supreme Council for Family Affairs (SCFA) among others. They released two dictionary installments with a third one underway, as well as organized several related training workshops. A grammar guidebook and an Islamic dictionary are among ancillary projects they undertook. Over a decade, these parties embarked on a mission to develop and disseminate ArSL through various avenues with the goal of improving the lives of deaf Arab people.

Conceptualization of a Unified Arabic Sign Language

Although it is difficult to pinpoint a particular moment wherein the concept of ArSL originated, it was a project endeavored by AFOOD and mentioned in several of its meetings' minutes. AFOOD, established in 1972 and headquartered since in Damascus, Syria, played an integral role in the early development of ArSL ("Arab Federation," n.d.). It is funded by its member countries, which send their hearing specialists, educators of deaf people, government officials for special needs, and others to increase cooperation between its members on matters relating to their deaf citizens. AFOOD's objective is to coordinate the efforts of medical, educational, and social work organizations that attend to deaf people throughout the Arab region. It does so jointly with national organizations operating within the various Arab states as well as with specialized international bodies. To attain all this, AFOOD engages in various projects relating to deaf Arab people: it encourages and supports research and training programs, organizes seminars and symposia, arranges the exchange of expertise between countries, works to merge programs for deaf people in different parts of the region, and participates in international

events. AFOOD's efforts to consolidate programs for deaf people across the Arab region are aligned with its initiative to bring together their sign languages through ArSL. ArSL is mentioned in the minutes of a meeting that was held on April 1980 at AFOOD's Second Scientific Symposium in Damascus ("Recommendations of the Second Scientific Symposium," 1980a). Several recommendations were set forth, including the pursuit of a signed Arabic language that is based on "sound scientific principles" ("Recommendations of the Second Scientific Symposium," 1980b, para. 35) by studying other sign languages.[7] The minutes continued to describe the future signed Arabic language as containing basic vocabulary for the education of deaf Arab children. It would also provide means for deaf Arab people to understand each other across national boundaries and for them to access television media to increase their awareness of current events. Also set forth is the recommendation to study the manual alphabet system used in various Arab countries in order to enumerate and standardize them. Although AFOOD recognized then that manual alphabet systems might already be present in Arab countries, it made no similar recognition of possible existing sign languages.

This would change by November 1993, at AFOOD's Fifth Scientific Symposium in Damascus ("Recommendations of the Fifth Scientific Symposium," 1993). Included in the meeting's minutes is the assertion that every Arab country should document the sign language used within it and release a dictionary based upon it. According to the minutes, this would allow AFOOD to prepare for the unification of these languages to create a single one, stemming from the languages that deaf Arab people use. The symposium

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[7] Translated from Arabic. All translations are my own.

highlighted the need for serious research on sign languages as independent languages by studying their grammar and other characteristics. This would keep AFOOD up to date on sign language linguistics. The minutes noted that deaf people should not be forced to use any artificial language, and that they are to participate in all stages of this unification effort as it would be of importance to them. These recommendations reflect that AFOOD a) believed that sign languages used in Arab countries differ, b) were aware that sign languages are more than just vocabulary and include grammar, c) thought of sign languages as independent languages and not as auxiliary forms of spoken languages, d) recognized the difference between natural and artificial languages, and e) anticipated possible opposition to the unification project and cautioned against using force by imposing ArSL. All five points would be disregarded or contested by various individuals and groups including those developing and supporting ArSL, as will be examined throughout this dissertation.

Curiously, whilst decisions made by AFOOD would affect all Arab countries, representatives from only eight out of 22 Arab countries were present at the Second Symposium: Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. Unreported in the minutes is the participation of deaf Arab people, if any. In fact, participation of deaf people in AFOOD's conferences and symposia was rare, according to minutes of AFOOD's Sixth Scientific Symposium in October 1997 in Alexandria ("Recommendations of the Sixth Scientific Symposium," 1997):

> The scarcity of deaf participation among the Arab delegations in the symposium was observed. This is in contrast to the recommendations made at AFOOD's previous conferences and symposia, and prompts the

> symposium to ascertain the necessity of greater participation and involvement of deaf people. This would allow deaf people to assume a leadership role in matters that concern them. They would decide what programs are most suitable for them, in terms of methods regarding their upbringing, education, and learning. It would also increase deaf people's awareness of their potential, capabilities, and creative talents.[8] (para. 7)

Despite repeated calls, deaf people had not played a significant role in AFOOD's activities thus far. This had not deterred AFOOD from embarking on a large-scale planning project involving sign languages without considerable input from deaf Arab people. This raises a question on the extent to which the unification project is an aspiration of deaf Arab communities. Ironically, AFOOD was emphatic about its desire to empower deaf Arab people through self-determination.

Unifying sign languages of deaf Arab people was one of AFOOD's larger goals. Of its smaller activities is the creation of a signed numeral system and a manual alphabet. Of the former, information is scarce. As for the manual alphabet, the effort produced mixed results, at best, although AFOOD cites both the numeral and the alphabet creations as successes ("Arab Federation," n.d.; Muslat, 2002). AFOOD's smaller-scale unification project of the manual alphabet is presented and examined next, before exploring AFOOD's later and larger sign language unification project.

The Arabic Manual Alphabet System

As aspired at the Second Symposium in 1980, AFOOD assigned "a team of experts and specialists with the cooperation of hearing and deaf people" ("Arab Federation," n.d.) to arrive at a unified Arabic manual alphabet. The standardized manual

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[8] Translated from Arabic.

alphabet was introduced at the Congress of Amman in 1986 (Roumanos, 1999). The process of arriving at this alphabet is unclear although a cursory look at it indicates that every signed letter corresponds to one in the Arabic alphabet and sometimes iconic of its written form. For example, a written letter in Arabic that has three dots would be represented with three fingers. Additional signs were developed to correspond to the diacritics used in Arabic writing. Also, this manual alphabet made use of one hand only, as is the case with American Sign Language (ASL). Once the manual alphabet was established, AFOOD then disseminated it among schools for deaf children throughout the Arab region. A deaf Lebanese man, Hisham Suleiman, reported in a televised interview that while signs differed throughout the Arab region, the manual alphabet system was the same (Al Arabiya News Channel, 2004).[9] Perhaps AFOOD's creation caught on in Lebanon and elsewhere. However, that is at least not the case in Egypt and Jordan, as examined next.

Manual alphabet systems in Egypt

From Egypt, the Asdaa' Association reported that the Arabic manual alphabet was developed as a step towards fulfilling AFOOD's repeated appeal for the unification of sign languages in Arab countries (Asdaa' Association for Serving the Hearing Impaired,

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[9] A transcript of this aired report is available as of September 8, 2009 on Al Arabiya's website at http://www.alarabiya.net/programs/2004/06/14/4307.html. Interestingly, Hisham Suleiman created "Hisham's Directory for the Deaf and Mute," a sign language guide in CD format with an accompanying book (Al Arabiya News Channel, 2004). The directory is meant to assist deaf people in Lebanon and in the Arab region by allowing them to communicate with each other through the same signs. That is, he advocated the use of a unified sign language in the Arab region. He worked ambitiously for eight months on this project, which contains 1,000 signs, 150 signed sentences, and 10 signed conversations.

2006).[10] It also supports Hisham Suleiman's claim that several schools for deaf children within Arab Gulf countries as well as Syria and Jordan among others have adopted AFOOD's manual alphabet. However, it had yet to take off in Egypt. In fact, four other manual alphabet systems were in use in Egypt as of 2006, according to Asdaa'.

The first is a cued speech system that is used for teaching speech to deaf children. This cued speech system is often the Egyptian deaf child's first exposure to a manual alphabet, where each signed letter is meant to assist the child in producing the sound it represents in Arabic. When students are unable to produce the sounds, the system is used in order to train the child in lip-reading. Speech therapists and teachers of deaf students do not agree on the signs for some of the letters, which results in variance among deaf Egyptian people. Yet, Asdaa' revealed that it continues to be widely used in deaf communities. The second manual alphabet system was issued by the Department of Special Education within Egypt's Ministry of Education. Like AFOOD's manual alphabet, this system manually represents the written Arabic alphabet where, for example, a letter with two dots would be represented with two fingers. Unlike AFOOD's system, this manual alphabet made use of both hands, as is the case with British Sign Language. Despite being embedded in the curriculum, this system is not used among the Egyptian deaf community, Asdaa' said, for its lack of fluidity. Still seeking an effort to improve the educational standard of deaf children, the ministry sought a third system, which was a

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[10] Asdaa' Association describes itself as a civil association of deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals that collaborate with sign language experts in order to better integrate deaf people into Egyptian society (Asdaa' Association for Serving the Hearing Impaired, 2008).

modified version of AFOOD's manual alphabet system. Again, this system did not catch on. The fourth manual alphabet system is a hybrid between the cued speech and AFOOD's manual alphabet.

Asdaa' pointed out that all these systems, while necessary to integrate deaf people into society, originate outside the deaf community; deaf Egyptians' variance and inconsistency in the use of manual alphabets is a reflection of the systems' unnaturalness. Yet, the ASL alphabet also originated outside the deaf community but is widely and consistently used by ASL signers (Padden & Clark, 2003). As I argue in the next section on the situation in Jordan, the manual alphabet is relevant to the deaf community only inasmuch as a substantial number of them, especially older models, are literate in the spoken and written language that the manual alphabet is meant to represent. The variance and inconsistency in the use of manual alphabets in Egypt is likely not due to their unnaturalness but to their uselessness among largely illiterate deaf populations.

The manual alphabet system in Jordan

The Egyptian deaf community's rejection of AFOOD's manual alphabet system is likely not uncommon. Although Asdaa' cited its adoption in other Arab countries, AFOOD's manual alphabet seems to be unpopular in Jordan as well. Indeed, Hendriks (2008) finds that "extensive use of fingerspelling, as attested in ASL for example, is absent in LIU [Jordanian Sign Language]" (p. 14).[11] She continues

> LIU does not use lexicalized fingerspelling and there are no indigenous initialized signs or sign names, as is common in ASL. Instead, most sign names are descriptive and based on physical characteristics like a scar or

[11] LIU stands for *Lughat al-Ishara al-Urduniyah*, or Jordanian Sign Language.

a certain haircut. (p. 15-16)

In an earlier publication, Hendriks (2004) found that of the 50 different handshapes that occur in LIU, none of them are similar to those in AFOOD's manual alphabet. This is in stark contrast to the situation of ASL, for instance, where handshapes of the manual alphabet are dominantly featured (Padden & Clark, 2003).

I experienced first-hand the unpopularity of AFOOD's manual alphabet. During a personal visit to a deaf public school in Rousaifah, Jordan in 2006, I noticed that posters of this manual alphabet were displayed in its halls.[12] I studied one for a few minutes to learn how to fingerspell my first name. Later that day, I observed a math class for the fifth grade, the final grade level offered at this school. Excited to have a visitor, students cornered me after the class session and asked me for my name. When I demonstrated my newly acquired skill with the Arabic manual alphabet, they would shrug, shake their head, and express their incomprehension. I pointed to one of the posters in the hall to indicate "It's right there!" The students insisted I speak my name for them to lip-read and to write it on the blackboard instead. Personal communication (M. Nabeel, August 28, 2006) with their teacher, the only deaf teacher at that school and recently hired, revealed that this alphabet is rarely used or understood. This may be understandable among older generations of deaf Jordanian people who attended schools prior to 1986, when the manual alphabet had yet to be introduced, and others who are unschooled. What then is the percentage of schooled, deaf Jordanian people?

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[12] Rousaifah is one of the poorest towns on the outskirts of Amman, Jordan and is mostly inhabited by Palestinian refugees.

A 2006 survey (IT Deaf Center, 2007) funded by the Greater Amman Municipality polled a sample of 1,056 deaf residents in Jordan's capital city. 59% of respondents were male and the average age of the sample group was between 20-30 years of age. The survey found that 99% of respondents dropped out of school, 55% of them at the primary school level. Until 2006, public schools for the deaf in Jordan terminate at the sixth grade level (Hendriks, 2008), after which a deaf child has the option to be mainstreamed at a hearing school without an interpreter, attend a private school for deaf children and pay fees, or drop out. Even after 2006, the larger of these private schools only opened classes up to ninth grade.

Hendriks' (2008) calculation of the education levels of deaf children in Jordan is even bleaker than that of the 2006 survey. This may be due to the fact that the survey was limited to those residing in the capital Amman, where people are likely to be more educated than the general population. Hendriks calculates that about 50% of deaf children in Jordan receive primary education, noting that this figure likely doubled from 1991. Older generations of deaf people are then illiterate on a much wider scale. As for secondary education, Hendriks estimates that only 0.2% of deaf children receive it, half of them attending mainstream schools with little support systems indicating that even at private schools, the number of deaf children attaining secondary education is paltry (approximately 70 students between two private schools). Such data reflect the low literacy rate among deaf Jordanian people.

The unpopularity of the manual alphabet among schooled deaf Jordanians may also be accounted not by taking into consideration their illiteracy but their teachers'

illiteracy in sign language. Indeed, most teachers start teaching with no knowledge of sign language and have no access to courses to learn it (Hendriks, 2008). In the summer of 2006, I met with the director of the Holy Land Institute for the Deaf (HLID), one of two private schools for deaf people in Jordan. Brother Andrew de Carpentier shared that they were in the process of developing LIU training materials (personal communication, August 14, 2007). These would be incorporated in a program that trains teachers in LIU over several levels, with testing between levels to ensure competence. He shared that this training program for teachers of deaf children would be the first of its kind for LIU. In the meantime, such teachers do not receive any training in sign language, even though his school was one of very few in the region that had been advocating sign language use over oralism for decades. Oralism, or the philosophy and tradition of teaching deaf children through speech instead of signs, was strictly enforced in public schools for deaf children in Jordan and at Al-Raja school, the other private school for deaf people in Jordan (Hendriks, 2008). Currently, teachers use Total Communication. Total Communication is a popular educational philosophy that replaced oralism. In theory, Total Communication makes use of all means of communication at one's disposal to communicate with a deaf student such as sign language, spoken and written language, fingerspelling and so on (Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996). In practice, this usually meant that teachers would accompany speech with a certain amount of signs. Hendriks (2008) states that Total Communication has resulted in teachers having their individual ways of signing, that this variance leads to limited communication between deaf students and their teachers, and that "this affects the level of education provided and achieved" (p. 13).

My observations at two deaf schools in Jordan left me with an even bleaker impression of teachers' signing and communication skills than what Hendriks described. It was not so much as variance in signing as lack of signing and understanding of deaf people that I witnessed. At the school in Rousaifah, a teacher escorted me from the principal's office to the playground, where some students were taking a break. Along the way, we descended stairs. A deaf student ahead of us was busy signing to her friend, slowing traffic. The teacher, in spoken Arabic, asked the student to move aside. When the student did not comply, no doubt because she was deaf and her back was turned towards us, the teacher pushed her down the stairs. Thankfully, the student was not physically injured. The teacher was unapologetic, and I was left unimpressed with, if not aghast at, her understanding of and communication with deaf people.

Later that day and in a classroom at the same school, I watched a teacher talk to deaf students, sometimes with her back turned towards them as she wrote on the blackboard, making it impossible for them to even lip-read. In another classroom, I saw children seated, two to a chair, playing with each other while an adult sat facing them. No instruction was taking place. When I inquired about the odd situation, I was told that first and second graders were often grouped together in one room because teachers were scarce. The adult present was not a teacher but merely a supervisor. Valuable time that could be spent on education is often forfeited, I learned. At Al-Raja, I observed a 12th grade classroom where the teacher talked and pointed to words on the blackboard more

frequently than she signed. It struck me as a wonder that these children would learn anything at all! They clearly attended school, but were they receiving any schooling?[13]

Yet, these deaf children do communicate with each other in sign language. Where do they learn it if not at school where oralism was practiced until more recently and communication between teachers and students is limited? I argue that sign language learning takes place in the social domain and is to a large extent independent of schooling. It is learned from deaf adults in the family and/or community and older deaf children at school. Why don't they learn the manual alphabet through these social channels as well? They have little use for it. AFOOD's manual alphabet was distributed to schools within an academic setting for the purpose of literacy in Arabic, a language in which deaf Jordanian people are largely illiterate especially as half of them receive no schooling at all. It would also be futile to use the manual alphabet with older, deaf role models who attended schools prior to the manual alphabet's introduction.[14] In Chapter 3, I advance the argument that sign languages in the Arab region likely develop around social institutions such as the family, tribe, and community as opposed to educational

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[13] The poor education levels of deaf Arab students are not unique to Jordan. A deaf man, Mohammed, shared his experience at a school for deaf students in Saudi Arabia: "One of the teachers would sleep in class when we were in high school. The students were more than happy to take the opportunity to play as they pleased. During examinations, the students would memorize the questions and answers that the teacher would provide them. They graduated from high school, and they wouldn't know how to read and write. Moreover, most teachers don't know sign language, so they took to writing their lectures on the blackboard. Students would copy this as if they were drawings." (Abdel Azziz, 2008, para. 5; translated from Arabic).

[14] This is in contrast to the situation in the U.S. where the manual alphabet was introduced at the same time as French Sign Language in 1817 when Laurent Clerc helped establish the country's first school for deaf children (Padden & Clark, 2003).

institutions as in the U.S. and some parts of Western Europe. Further research on the practice of AFOOD's manual alphabet in other Arab countries may reveal interesting trends. If AFOOD's attempt in unifying the manual alphabet among Arab countries is not a success story, how does its later attempt at unifying entire sign languages fare?

First Installment of the ArSL Dictionary

The ArSL dictionary underwent two installments so far with a third one in the works. Other related projects include a grammar guidebook and an Islamic dictionary. Although there were interruptions in ArSL's development time and again, the weight of new parties backing the project has kept it extant. The following sub-sections detail organizations and individuals working on the project at different stages, the processes involved in compiling sign entries, the contents of the publications, reasons supporters give for the importance of the project, and other activities such as training workshops that worked to spread the dictionary's use. It also indicates the intended use of the dictionary in the fields of education, media, and sign language interpreting.

Due to lack of funds, AFOOD's unification project was put on hold until the General Secretariat of the LAS adopted it ("Arab Federation," n.d.). The project was presented to CAMSA, a division within the LAS, who then agreed to implement the project along with ALECSO. Interestingly, several Arab countries had not yet developed their own sign language dictionaries, including Egypt and Iraq (World Federation of the Deaf, 2008). These dictionaries, after all, had been set as pre-requisites by AFOOD, upon which the ArSL dictionary would be based. Instead, an International Signs (Gestuno)

dictionary with 1,470 terms was translated into Arabic to prepare for the workshop.[15] These terms were used as a reference point for the development of the ArSL dictionary.

Activity on the project took off in 1999 when the first related workshop was held in Dubai. A team was formed to work on the dictionary consisting of "specialists" ("Arab Federation," n.d., para. 10) and deputies of education ministries. Two further workshops were held in Egypt and Tunisia (Al-Kayed, 2005), where the signs were reviewed by "a group of Arab experts in this field and most of them were educated deaf people who are keen about unifying the sign language" ("Arab Federation," n.d., para. 11).[16] Were there deaf people who were not keen on unifying the sign language? There is a sense that certain deaf groups were excluded, including the uneducated, which in Jordan, as we learned earlier, would constitute a large proportion of the deaf population. This puts into question the issue of representation, in light of AFOOD's earlier assertion that deaf people would participate in all stages of the unification project. This issue of representation will be revisited in later chapters.

Those who did represent within the "group of Arab experts" approved the signs that were so far collected. Workshop attendees agreed on unifying 400 signs. Another 900 signs were added at the second workshop held in Damascus in 2000. The final count for the number of signs in the dictionary varies from 1,000 to 1,300 (Al-Kayed, 2005; "Arab Federation," n.d.).[17] Signs covered basic terms on the topic of family, religion, food,

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[15] A brief discussion on International Signs is provided in Chapter 4.

[16] Translated from Arabic.

[17] My own count of entries from an online version of the dictionary (http://www.menasy.com/index.html) was closer to 1,200.

sports, clothes, colors, directions and so on. It remains unclear to me how these signs were agreed upon. However, the process for deciding on signs was revealed in sources regarding the dictionary's second installment. Perhaps this process was also applied here. These signs formed the first part of the ArSL dictionary, published in 2001 by ALECSO (Menasy, n.d.). ALECSO, AFOOD, and LAS circulated the dictionary to ministries of education and other relevant organizations in the Arab region (El-Turk, 2007b).

A special workshop in Bahrain was held later in 2001 to familiarize and train sign language interpreters and teachers of deaf children on the unified signs ("Arab Federation," n.d.). At this workshop, AFOOD declared the theme of Deaf Week in 2002 to be under the banner of "The Signed Dictionary and Its Place in Human Accessibility" in order to start implementing the ArSL dictionary.[18] This banner asserts that the ArSL dictionary is key to opening doors of opportunities for deaf Arab people and enrobes the ArSL project in human rights rhetoric. Then Vice President of AFOOD, Dr. Zaid Abdulla Al-Muslat, wrote a newspaper article to commemorate this week (Muslat, 2002). He called for several measures to increase efforts in distributing and implementing the ArSL dictionary including:

A. making available the dictionary in public libraries, bookstores, on the internet and in CD format,
B. providing training workshops for all those who wish to implement the dictionary, especially teachers, interpreters, parents, specialists and friends of deaf people,

[18] Deaf Week was established by the AFOOD as a yearly event in which Arab countries raise awareness on issues concerning deaf people, their families and those who work to serve them (Muslat, 2002).

C. starting work on the second part of the dictionary and unifying the signs necessary for key terms in the fields of education, training, employment and other general sciences,

D. encouraging deaf people and others who worked on the first edition to continue working on future ones, and also getting others involved from educated deaf people and specialized interpreters in Arab countries,

E. performing and methodically implementing these signs in all Arab countries in schools and institutions and television programs,

F. and developing a committee or council within the LAS to confer diplomas to certified sign interpreters in Arab countries; each country may also work to establish a national program that prepares specialists to attain certification from the Federation; and that this committee or council meet at least once a year and that certificate seekers pay dues as specified by the Federation.

There are several implicit assertions being made here. Al-Muslat gave the impression that not enough deaf people were involved in the project so far. Again, there is also some indication that certain deaf people, those who were considered uneducated, were excluded. He also contradicted himself when stating that training workshops would be voluntary for those who would like to use ArSL among teachers and interpreters but advocated ArSL's systematic implementation in schools for the deaf and in the media across Arab countries. The training workshops he called for would be available for parents and friends of deaf people, but what about deaf people? How would they learn ArSL? Indeed, while interpreters and teachers would later attend training workshops in

ArSL, there is no equivalent training for deaf people. Al-Muslat and other supporters and developers of ArSL might defend this exclusion of deaf people by explaining that deaf Arab people already know ArSL. This is not true, as they are as new to the dictionary as anyone else, and the dictionary was not based on any one sign language. There continues to be a sense that deaf people were excluded from partaking in a project that affected their own affairs. In this case, the teaching of ArSL would be the domain of hearing people. The irony here is that interpreters were being trained in a language that their deaf clients did not know.

Al-Muslat's suggested measures, the training workshop in ArSL for interpreters and teachers held in Bahrain, and the notability of pan-Arab organizations involved in the development and dissemination of ArSL signal the intended magnitude of the project. The drive to disseminate ArSL widely and to make it accessible via multiple channels, as well as the urgency in Al-Muslat's tone indicate that the project was gathering momentum among its proponents. ArSL would penetrate every aspect of deaf Arab people's lives as teachers, interpreters, and the media would be trained and certified to use it. This plan would be a major overhaul in services for deaf people in Arab countries where sign language training for teachers is rare, sign language interpreter certification is non-existent, and media access for deaf people is minimal.

Second Installment of the ArSL Dictionary

A second installment of the unified ArSL dictionary was released in early 2007 in Doha, Qatar (Al-Raya, 2007). Newspaper coverage of the dictionary's inauguration ceremony indicated that the second issue of the dictionary contained between

1600-2000+ new signs (Al-Kayed, 2005, 2006; Al-Raya, 2007; El-Turk, 2007b; El-Turk, 2008).[19] Signs from the first issue were not included.[20] The dictionary incorporated a section with 78 signs for continents, countries, and cities (Supreme Council for Family Affairs, 2007). It also presented charts for the Arabic manual alphabet and numerals. Entries range from action verbs, adjectives, body parts, medical terms, political concepts, and so on. The dictionary provided translation for each sign in three languages—Arabic, English, and French—and contained indices in each language (El-Turk, 2008). After the dictionary's inauguration, 5,000 print copies as well as 3,000 DVD copies of the dictionary were to be distributed to all Arab countries. The Qatari government covered the printing and distributing expenses (Al-Kayed, 2006).

Qatar had adopted this project two years earlier, in December 2005, when its SCFA, helmed by its president Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Misnad, called for the continued development of the ArSL dictionary (El-Turk, 2008). In cooperation with AFOOD, ALESCO, and LAS, they hosted a 10-day workshop that brought together delegates from 18 Arab countries (El-Turk, 2008; Supreme Council for Family Affairs, 2007). The Arab countries that did not have a presence at this workshop are Comoros, Mauritania, Morocco, and Somalia. It is unclear why they did not

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[19] My own count of indexed entries from an online document of the second installment of the dictionary (http://www.scfa.gov.qa/training_certificates/download/13) is closer to 1,500 terms, including continents, countries, and cities.

[20] I, however, did notice that the entry for "France" appears in both issues and are different. It would be interesting to study what signs were revised in the second issue and why these revisions might have taken place. The second issue of the dictionary does not point out that any revisions were made from the first issue.

participate, although economic concerns might have be a factor in attending for the economically impoverished Comoros, Mauritania, and Somalia.

There were 151 delegates in all at the workshop, with some countries having as little as one delegate such as Djibouti, Iraq, and Bahrain, and some having much more such as Saudi Arabia with 33 and Qatar, the host country, with 42 (Supreme Council for Family Affairs, 2007). Based on the names of the delegates, I counted approximately 52 females, or 34% of the delegates.[21] Each delegate was mentioned in the dictionary's preface with a short description of their position such as "government official," "teacher for the deaf," "sign language interpreter," "sign language expert," and "administrator of a deaf club/organization/school." One designation was "participant" with no further explanation. I recognize two men from the Jordanian delegation that were listed as "participants," both deaf. We cannot assume that all those labeled as "participants" are deaf. However, we can at least safely assume that all sign language interpreters were hearing, and there were 22 of them. In other words, at least 14% of the delegates were hearing. However, the percentage of hearing delegates is probably much higher considering the rarity of deaf teachers and deaf school administrators. Even administrators of deaf clubs can be hearing. Al-BinAli, for example, is the General Secretary of the Qatari Cultural and Social Center for the Deaf.

Not included as delegates are the workshop organizers, some who play a ceremonial role such as the Secretary General of the SCFA and others who play a more

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[21] I could not precisely determine the number of female delegates, as some Arabic names are gender neutral.

integral role in the development of the unified dictionary such as the Technical Committee. The Technical Committee consisted of six people as follows (Supreme Council for Family Affairs, 2007):

1. Sameer Semreen: Principal Project Expert/Technical Committee Head
2. Mohammad Al-BinAli: Sign Language Expert/Technical Committee Deputy
3. Naji Zakarneh: Sign Language Expert/Head of Photography and Expressions
4. Zaidoon Al-Jbouri: Project Computer Expert
5. Samiyyeh Al-Mutawa': Technical Committee Secretary
6. Mozah Al-Qatari: Sign Language Expert

At least three of these committee members are hearing, who are also Al Jazeera interpreters. Prior to the workshop, the Technical Committee had compiled a list of words in Arabic that they found to be in wide use among deaf people (Al-Raya, 2007).[22] The goal of the workshop was to find a corresponding sign for each word through a voting mechanism, as described next.

A written Arabic word from the compiled list is displayed on a screen in front of the delegates (Al-Kayed, 2005). The Technical Committee then asks the delegates to suggest signs for the written word. The suggested signs are then displayed for the delegates on stage so that they may vote on which one they favor. If only one sign is suggested, it became the signed entry for the Arabic word in the unified dictionary. If more than one sign is suggested, the one with the most votes made its way to the

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[22] I could not find more details on the research methodology for this word-list compilation.

dictionary. In the event that the voting results are equally divided among signs, and this may occur as some delegates may abstain from voting, or in the event that no signs are suggested, the Technical Committee convened to decide on a sign after the voting session. The next day, they shared these signs with the delegates, but these signs were not re-negotiated with the delegates. The Technical Committee's decision is final. This process was repeated for each Arabic word in the compiled list.

Of note is that each delegate has one vote. This would show bias towards Saudi and Qatari preferences as they comprised half the voting population. In addition, the Technical Committee, while not considered part of the voting population, played a critical role in the decision-making process. Once the signs had been decided, they were photographed in a studio (Al-Raya, 2007). This photography session involved Zakarneh verifying that the captured still frames captured conveyed the signs well to include facial expressions and body movements. Computer graphics such as arrows were added to indicate the movement of the signs, if any, before these signs re incorporated in the unified dictionary. Each sign entry was accompanied by an Arabic, English, and French translation.

Several recommendations were made at the workshop regarding the circulation and use of the second edition the unified dictionary. Semreen articulated,

> Since this was a project by LAS, ALESCO, AFOOD, and CAMSA, we expect that it will be circulated to all Arab countries and organizations working in this field [of services for deaf people]. We also expect that they abide by using the unified dictionary as a tool for communicating in a unified manner with deaf Arabs. After completing this second issue of the dictionary, we now have a rich Arabic sign language and a stable foundation for deaf Arabs and those who work with them. Together, they

> can work to elevate the position of deaf people by spreading the unified sign language among themselves and by using it as a unified language in all media outlets, and especially satellite channels.
>
> The need has become urgent for work on a grammar for ArSL by a team of Arab experts, to incorporate ArSL programs in Arab universities and institutes, and to ascertain that ArSL courses are offered at Arab universities as is any other foreign language.[23] (El-Turk, 2007b, paras. 30-31)

Others reiterated the need for LAS, ALECSO, and AFOOD to circulate the unified dictionary in both its editions to all Arab countries so that their ministries of education in Arab would implement it and make it mandatory in school curricula (Al-Kayed, 2006). They were also asked to circulate it among the media so that they may recognize it as the language of deaf Arab people. Training workshops on the unified dictionary in both its editions would be held for those who work with deaf people. These training workshops would be the responsibility of the Technical Committee, AFOOD, and individual Arab countries. Proponents made clear their desire to spread ArSL, a sign language they deemed praiseworthy, widely so as to make it the primary mode of communication with and among deaf people.

It did not take long for words to be met with action. A few months after the workshop in Doha, a 10-day training workshop was held in Jenin, Palestine (Samoudi, 2006). Al Jazeera coordinated the event in cooperation with the Jenin Charitable Society and Al-Hanan School for the Deaf. The workshop sought to equip teachers of deaf people with basic skills that were necessary for deaf people's education by teaching them sign language. Two of the workshop instructors were Semreen and Zakarneh. Al Jazeera's

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[23] Translated from Arabic.

presence at the 2005 Doha conference was not explicitly announced; its three sign language interpreters who were also on the Technical Committee had presented themselves at the conference as individuals, not corporate employees. Al Jazeera's role in the development of ArSL, besides providing a media platform for its display, was described at the workshop in Jenin. There, Semreen explained that Al Jazeera's wider activities are not limited to broadcast but also to addressing the needs of society. The sign language broadcast Al Jazeera offers, he said, came about from the network's consideration of the deaf population and its needs. In their quest to provide "the most modern methods in communicating with deaf people" (Samoudi, 2006, para. 3),[24] Al Jazeera would continue to broadcast in this unified language, pursue the language's continual development, and hold sign language training workshops in Palestine. Similar training workshops have also been organized based on teaching ArSL in several other Arab countries (Al-Bayan, 2007; Al Jazeera, 2007).

As recommended at the 2005 Doha workshop, Arab media exhibited an increased interest in ArSL. A conference on ways the media could better accommodate special needs in January 2007 in Doha, Qatar stressed the necessity for television stations to adopt ArSL (El-Turk, 2007a). Another workshop later that year in Dubai called for the media to design television cartoon programs in ArSL (Al-Bayan, 2007). There is indication that some television broadcast stations heeded these calls. A 2008 survey conducted by the World Federation of the Deaf on the human rights of deaf Arab people revealed that Kuwait, Palestine, Tunisia, and United Arab Emirates provided television

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[24] Translated from Arabic.

broadcast in ArSL as well as in the national sign language (World Federation of the Deaf, 2008).[25] In Qatar and Iraq, only ArSL was used on public television. Four other countries responded to the survey question, stating that only their national sign languages were used on television: Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Yemen. Taking into consideration that some Arab countries did not participate in the survey or this particular survey question, the adoption of ArSL by television stations may be even more widespread than the survey conveys.

Further Developments of the ArSL Dictionary

Al Jazeera's interest in deaf people also extends to hosting deaf related programs. In November 2007, it aired a panel discussion on the topics of the challenges of communicating with deaf people and methods to develop sign language and integrate deaf people (Al Jazeera, 2007). Among the invited panelists was Ibrahim Jaafar, the director of the Development and Social Policies Department and the Technical Secretariat of CAMSA. He shared that although the unified Arabic sign language dictionary was near completion, there are still efforts to further develop it. He discussed contributions by some Arab institutes in various Arab countries, CAMSA, and ALECSO to place a "precise grammar to develop ArSL" (Al Jazeera, 2007, para. 36).[26] Semreen had voiced

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[25] The World Federation of the Deaf "is an international, non-governmental central organization of national associations of Deaf people" (World Federation of the Deaf, 2007, para. 9) that has consultative status in the UN. It also "co-operates closely with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and has representatives on the Panel of Experts on the UN Standard Rules for the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities" (ibid, para. 10).

[26] Translated from Arabic.

the need for work on a grammar for ArSL at the inauguration of the second installment of the dictionary. Jaffar added that there are also plans towards a third edition of the unified dictionary as well as a project to incorporate words from the Koran in ArSL, on which Zakarneh would be working. In October 2009, the director of the Qatari Cultural and Social Center for the Deaf revealed that the Islamic dictionary would be released soon and that it was a continuation of the two-part unified Arabic Sign Language dictionary (Teesha, 2009), although no further details were provided.

As for efforts to develop a grammar, they were revealed in detail in January 2009 at a three-day workshop held by Qatar's SCFA (El-Turk, 2009). Other Arab institutes, CAMSA, and ALECSO did not contribute to this effort, contrary to Jaafar's anticipation. This workshop was set-up to familiarize deaf Qatari people and other participants including "experts" (Al-Arab, 2009b, para. 1) in the field of sign language with a grammar guidebook that was being prepared for publication. The participants were also asked for their feedback on a draft of this grammar guidebook, which would be incorporated into the final version to be released in March 2009 (El-Turk, 2009). This guidebook is intended for teachers of deaf students and others who work with deaf people to deepen their understanding of the structure of sign language (Al-Raya, 2009). It would possibly even be introduced as a compulsory textbook for a diploma in Special Education at Qatar University (El-Turk, 2009).

At the workshop, Al-BinAli, the co-author of the guidebook along with Semreen, explained the process that led-up to the development of the draft copy. He said that they had heard that sign languages had grammar but they did not know what the meant and so

they set out to discover the grammar of ArSL. Two years of research was put into the development of the grammar guidebook, with the sponsorship of the SCFA (Talay, 2009). They first had to get a grasp on sign language grammar in general, in order to understand if it differs from spoken language grammar, and if there are universal grammars for sign languages before understanding the grammar of ArSL. Since Arab libraries had a dearth of material in the field of sign language, with only two resources that they could draw from, they gathered materials from American and European resources that were plentiful. These materials were translated from English and French to Arabic. Al-BinAli and Semreen then examined and analyzed the materials collected from American and European sources before beginning observation on deaf Qatari people in signed conversation. Attention was paid to "how they structured their sentences and their use of exclamations, pronouns, and such" (Talay, 2009, para. 8).[27] Deaf people were not informed that they were being observed so as to save them from the embarrassment of being put under scrutiny. The authors' conclusions from the research and observation, said Al-BinAli, confirmed what they already knew about sign language grammar. These conclusions were then summarized and presented in the grammar guidebook as a "systematic and scientific foundation" (Al-Arab, 2009b, para. 3) for ArSL[28]

The guidebook, he detailed, contained four chapters (Talay, 2009).[29] The first two chapters covered theory and bridged between sign language and the Koran. The latter two

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[27] Translated from Arabic.

[28] Translated from Arabic.

[29] As I was unable to attain a copy of this grammar guidebook, my understanding of its content is limited to Al-BinAli's description of it at the workshop.

chapters were the core of the work that relied heavily on their experience as sign language experts. It contained information on the grammar of ArSL and its structure. For example, sign language should be rule-governed such that the signing hand has to be flexible and not too close to the face (Al-Arab, 2009c). Any slight movement of the hand may affect the meaning, and the signer should be passionate. Also, some words that are in spoken language are eliminated from sign language and replaced by body movements and/or facial expressions, such that eyes may speak without words. These chapters also focus on addressing common questions asked by those who work with deaf people and even those who do not such as why deaf people's educational levels are low, if spoken language is the point of reference for sign language, and why deaf people organize their sentences differently. It also discusses issues concerning interpreting for deaf people such as if an interpreter has to be related to a deaf person or if anyone who knows sign language be an interpreter (Talay, 2009). Semreen noted that the guidebook did not add a new language, but is the grammar of the language that is already present (Al-Arab, 2009a). He followed this with the contradictory statement that derivatives/inflections were added.[30] Semreen felt that it may take time for deaf people to accept these derivatives even though it would be useful to them and would enrich them, as is the goal,

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[30] Semreen used the Arabic word *ishtiqaq* that could either refer to derivatives, inflections, or both. Operating on different morphological principles than in English, Arabic does not have clear-cut boundaries between derivations and inflections (Ryding, 2008). Inflecting an Arabic word from singular to plural or from past to present tense involves the prior step of varying vowels or adding pronoun endings or suffixes to an Arabic root word to create a derivative. It is likely that both derivations and inflections were added to the grammar guidebook.

indicating that these derivatives/inflections are based on MSA and not on natural sign languages already used by deaf Arab people.

Of note is the title of this guidebook: "The Qatari Arabic Unified Sign Language." When asked to explain why it was "Qatari," Al-BinAli provided a vague explanation: "We said 'Qatari' because deaf people in Qatar, to be honest, are more important than others, with my respect to all" (Talay, 2009, para. 8).[31] That the Qatari SCFA was supporting the project, input from other Arab countries was not sought for the development of this guidebook and that research observations were only made on Qatari deaf people only might more clearly explain the "Qatari" designation. Yet, Al-BinAli adds that "Arabic" was in the title because they had noticed through previous conferences, meetings, and interaction with other deaf Arab people that although the signs differed, the grammars across sign languages are the same.

While this last assertion was not based on systematic research, several workshop speakers reiterated their desire for this grammar guidebook to be distributed to other Arab countries to benefit deaf Arab people everywhere. Mohammad Abdel Rahman Al-Sayid, SCFA's director of the Department of Special Needs, expressed his wish to see this grammar guidebook added to all Arab libraries (Talay, 2009). From the same department, program specialist Noor Mohammad Al-Masouri reported the intention to incorporate the guidebook in the curricula of special education schools within Qatar, and that it would be spread to other Arab countries as well so that its benefits are enjoyed by a wider segment of deaf people in the Arab region. Although deaf people from other Arab countries had no

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[31] Translated from Arabic.

input regarding the grammar guidebook, it seems that it would become the de facto grammar of ArSL. After all, Al-BinAli and Semreen were instrumental players in the development of both ArSL and the grammar guidebook, both ArSL and the grammar guidebook would be used by Al Jazeera interpreters during the daily deaf access hour, and there were few if any alternative grammar guidelines to turn to for Arab interpreters, teachers and others working with deaf Arab people.

As Jaafar indicated, further developments on the unified dictionary are in the works. Developers of ArSL took the opportunity to discuss the third installment of the unified dictionary at The Second International Conference on Information and Communication Technology & Accessibility in Hammamet, Tunisia in May 2009 (G3ICT, 2009). This conference focused on increasing access of technologies for disabled Arab people, including providing a web platform for the continued development of ArSL. Dr. Mohammed Jemni, who presided over the conference and is the head of the Research Laboratory of Technologies of Information and Communication (UTIC) at the University of Tunis, explained that the web platform would speed-up the development of ArSL and make participation possible from anywhere in the Arab region.[32]

Hend Al-Showaier, a speaker at this meeting, shared the process by which the next installment of the dictionary would take place (personal communication, May 31, 2009). As with the second edition, a list of words written in Arabic would be provided by ArSL organizers. Signs would be recommended for each word and a voting process

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[32] UTIC stands for *Unité de recherche en Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication*.

would determine which sign would become the official entry in the ArSL dictionary. However, as it would be an online setting, changes to the procedure would be necessary. Each of the 22 Arab countries would be asked to find three sign language experts to decide on a sign for each written word, upload a video of the sign to the website, and vote among the signs presented by other Arab countries. The words are not presented all at once. A list of seven or so words is presented at a time. Then the experts are given a seven-day deadline to upload a video for each signed word followed by a two-day deadline for voting. The sign with the most votes becomes the official entry in the unified dictionary. This process is repeated until signs were chosen for every Arabic word on the list for the third edition. While the use of the term "expert" has been vague in the past, a "sign language expert" in this phase of development is defined as a person who is fluent in ArSL, whether deaf or hearing. In other words, there would be a maximum of 66 ArSL signers deciding the signs third stage of the unified dictionary. So although the web platform provides access from anywhere in the Arab region, there would be 66 people participating in the third installment of the ArSL dictionary. Efforts to develop ArSL are ongoing at the time of writing.

One highlighted innovation at the Tunisia conference enhanced deaf Arab people's accessibility by way of technology is an avatar for cell phone use. They elucidated (G3ICT, 2009):

> While text messaging has worked very well for deaf persons to enhance their communications via mobile phones, it obviously does not work when deaf persons are illiterate. The University of Tunis Research Unit UTIC has developed "websign" a solution to convert text messages into Arabic Sign Language played by a programmed avatar. The application resides on

> the server of the wireless service provider which allows the avatar to be played on low cost mobile phones. The application uses the Arab sign language dictionary adopted by the Arab League. The same programmed avatar based sign language user interface may be used in a number of other devices or system interfaces… Dr. Mohamed Jemni, who oversaw this development at UTIC showed…the live demonstration on two cell phones, one sending a text message, the other one receiving it as a sequence of avatar animations translated by an application residing on the mobile phone operator. (paras. 13-16)

To work, at least one person has to be literate to type in the text, and there does not seem to be any consideration for grammar of ArSL in the avatar's translation. The technology worked one-way as it does not capture signs and convert them to text. Whether deaf people make use of such innovative technology in the future may be a measure of their understanding, acceptance, and use of ArSL, especially in light of the situation that there are no parallel efforts for innovations that make use of local or national sign languages in the Arab region.

Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of how a pan-Arab sign language, ArSL, was conceived in the 1980s and how it developed since. CAMSA had intended to base ArSL on dictionaries of existing sign languages in Arab countries. That was not the case in eventuality, and the unification of these sign languages was instead based on a voting mechanism of deciding on signs suggested by participating parties. The assumption here is that the sign languages of the region are similar enough that they can be unified, whether through dictionaries or through suggested signs found within at least one of the region's sign languages. The next chapter will explore the relationship between sign languages of the region by studying the degree of lexical similarity of four of them.

Chapter 3: Reality of Sign Languages in the Arab Region

Introduction

While proponents of ArSL are aware of the existence of natural sign languages in the Arab region, they have not given them particular attention in the process of ArSL's development. What do we know about these natural sign languages? This chapter explores the geography of sign languages in Arab countries, by discussing a number of sign languages used by Arab deaf communities. Some are designated as nation-state sign languages and are used in the instruction of deaf students in their educational systems. Others vary between institutions within the same nation and others yet are community-based. The adoption of ArSL by Arab countries potentially threatens the future of local sign languages. If ArSL were to substitute for any of these sign languages, it could potentially take on a colonial face and delimit the expression of the community's identity, as is further discussed in Chapter 5.

CAMSA's rationalization for the creation of the new ArSL is "to meet the needs of integration of deaf persons into society" (Council of Arab Ministers, 2004). One way to achieve that goal according to CAMSA is to provide deaf people in the Arab region with a comparable language situation that exists for hearing people. What then is the language situation of hearing Arabs?

Diglossia in the Arab region

The Arab region is characterized by pervasive "diglossia," a language situation in which a highly codified written and spoken language, in this case Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), coexists with offshoot and non-standard, regional dialects, also known as

colloquial Arabic. MSA is a direct descendant of Classical Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, which is revered by many Arabic speakers as sacred. It is this proximity to sacred text that elevates MSA to a position of prestige and makes it resistant to change. Meanwhile, Arabic dialects continue to evolve such that they become incomprehensible to Arabs of different regions. Hock and Joseph (1996) note:

> In principle, prestige languages in such diglossic situations are very conservative, resisting the normal linguistic changes which affect the vernacular (p. 340)

and

> The conservative character of standard languages, if left unchecked, will over the centuries bring about an increasing differentiation between standard and vernacular, such that the standard language ceases to be intelligible to vernacular speakers without special schooling. (pp. 338-339)

Schooling is indeed how Arabs come to know MSA as it is the mother tongue of no one. It is taught in schools at all stages in Arab countries. Knowledge of MSA is necessary as it is the official literary standard of Arab countries and used in all aspects of government business as well as in news media such as newspapers and television newscasts. Unschooled Arabs are much less familiar with MSA and would struggle in accessing information on world events or in conducting transactions with the government, a not-so-infrequent occurrence in highly bureaucratic Arab countries. This renders dialects or vernaculars as sub-standard so much so that they rarely exist in a written form.[33]

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[33] Written forms of Arabic dialects are used by some poets and authors seeking to challenge MSA's status quo. They are also used by trendy Arab youth when cell-phone texting and instant messaging.

So while more than two hundred million inhabitants of twenty-two countries across the Middle East and North Africa speak Arabic (LAS, 2006), should a Yemeni and a Tunisian meet, it is unlikely that their Arabic would be intelligible to the other. Of the Arabic dialects, the Egyptian dialect is most widely understood by Arabs,[34] since Arab cinema and other entertainment media is largely Egyptian-based and typically uses Egyptian actors. If a Yemeni and a Tunisian meet, they can resort to the dialect of movie stars to understand each other or they could use MSA. It is commonly said that the Arabic language is what unites the different members of the Arab community, despite the different geographies and cultural traditions that can be found throughout the region (Suleiman, 2003). Hock and Joseph (1996) state:

> [T]he idea that there should be a standard seems to permeate all human languages, presumably because it is useful to have a form of speech that makes it possible to communicate across different linguistic and social groups and even across time. And no matter what the society, standard languages enjoy the highest prestige. (p. 341)

What with the role that standard Arabic plays in unifying and even identifying Arabs and the general high position held by standard languages, it is not surprising that CAMSA and

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[34] Dialects of spoken Arabic can be divided into two main classes: the Eastern dialects of Egypt, Sudan, and the Middle East and the Western dialects of the remaining North African nations (Mayfield Tomokyo et al., 2003). The vowel and stress systems are what differentiate these two classes. The dialects may be further subdivided into Gulf, Levantine, Egyptian/Sudanese, and Maghrebi. The Gulf dialect is used by inhabitants of southern Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. The Levantine dialect is used by Arabs living in the north of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria. The Maghrebi dialect is that of Arabs in the remaining North African states. Other dialects also exist such as that shared in Yemen and Somalia.

other parties would advocate as a human right that deaf Arabs be given the opportunity to communicate in a standard sign language.

Does diglossia exist in Arab deaf communities?

Yet, the language situation of hearing Arabs does not necessarily parallel that of deaf Arabs. Studies of sign languages in other areas of the world show that they do not map entirely onto the geography of spoken languages. Sign languages in English-speaking countries such as the United States and Canada on the one hand, and Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom on the other, have distinct histories. The roots of the sign language used in the United States and Canada, American Sign Language (ASL), are found in varieties existing in the United States in the mid-19th century and French Sign Language (LSF) (Lane et al., 1996). McKee and Kennedy (2000) describe Australian Sign Language (Auslan), British Sign Language (BSL), and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) as dialects of a single parent language, BANZSL (British, Australian, and New Zealand Sign Language). Using a lexicostatistical analysis of random vocabularies, they conclude that the three languages belong to the same family tree but are dissimilar enough to qualify as dialects. In other research, Mexican Sign Language (LSM) and Spanish Sign Language (LSE) are described as distinct languages despite a common spoken language shared between the two respective countries (Currie et al., 2002).

With respect to Arab sign languages, Abdel-Fattah (2005) suggests that the presence of a standard Arabic spoken language has led to the expectation that there should be a shared common sign language. In fact, as will be noted later in this chapter,

there is a commonly held belief among some hearing and deaf Arabs that while there may be differences between sign languages of the Arab region, they are largely similar. But Abdel-Fattah (2005) notes that effort to standardize sign languages within individual Arab countries are underway despite the fact that there may be almost as many sign languages as there are Arabic countries. In fact, as this chapter will explore, there may be several sign language varieties even within one Arab country. Abdel-Fattah observes that although spoken Arabic is diglossic, sign languages in the Arab region are not. Unlike in spoken Arabic, one standard form of Arabic sign language does not exist, even though there are currently efforts to develop a standard variety.

This chapter seeks to test this common belief that sign languages of the Arab region are closely related. It explores the geography of sign languages of Arab countries by examining relationships among vocabularies of selected sign languages in the region. The method used is lexicostatistics, which compares similarity of vocabulary across sign languages to determine the type and extent of a language relationship between two or more languages, or as might be the case, that no such relationship exists. First, however, I will examine the current distribution of sign language communities in the region.

Sign Language Communities in the Arab Region

At least three ongoing circumstances affect the distribution of sign languages in the broader Middle East region. First, as Walsh et al. (2006) describe below, certain marriage traditions are common in the region:

> The unique demographic history of the Middle East has led to many [endogamous] communities. For more than 5,000 years and continuing to the present, the eastern shores of the Mediterranean have seen immigration

> of people from a wide variety of cultures. Villages were often established by a few extended families and, despite their geographic proximity, remained demographically isolated. For centuries, marriages have been arranged within extended families in these villages, leading to high levels of consanguinity and consequently high frequencies of recessive traits. (p. 203)

The common practice of endogamy has resulted in a high incidence of genetic deafness in this region compared to exogamic societies where deafness is more likely the result of disease than of genetic inheritance. Shahin et al. (2002) report that while approximately one in one thousand infants worldwide are born with hearing loss, communities with high levels of consanguinity have especially high frequencies of inherited childhood deafness. They state: "prelingual hereditary hearing impairment occurs in the Palestinian population at a frequency of approximately 1.7 per 1,000 and is higher in some villages" (ibid., p. 284). This means that in Palestine, the frequency of deafness is 70% higher than the global average.

From the few reports of sign languages in such communities, they are not confined in usage to places where deaf people are brought together by social institutions, such as schools for the deaf or local clubs for the deaf, instead they are also used within family and community settings. As Groce (1985) illustrates in her history of nineteenth-century Martha's Vineyard where there was a high incidence of recessive deafness, sign languages are likely to flourish in such communities as deaf people and hearing people use signed communication on a regular basis. Kisch (2004) describes the case of the Al-Sayyid Bedouin community in the Negev, where consanguineous marriage is common and frequencies of hearing loss is high at 3% of the population due to genetically

recessive traits of profound prelingual neurosensory deafness. Sandler, Meir, Padden, and Aronoff (2005) also write of this community:

> Members of the community generally recognize the sign language as a second language of the village. Hearing people there routinely assess their own proficiency, praising those with greater facility in the language… One result of [recessive deafness] is that there is a proportionately large number of deaf individuals distributed throughout the community. This means that hearing members of the community have regular contact with deaf members and that, consequently, signing is not restricted to deaf people. (p. 2662)

Recently, Lanesman and Meir (2007) have begun to describe a minority sign language in Israel used by Jewish emigrants from Algeria whose families once lived in an insular Jewish community within the old trading city of Ghardaia. Following a pattern common to the region, members of the community married within extended families, and deaf individuals began to populate the Jewish community (Cabot Briggs & Guede, 1964).

Second, cultural and social circumstances in the Middle East provide somewhat more opportunity to learn sign languages from birth. With higher incidence of genetic deafness, sign languages are able to survive across generations within a family, compared to other regions of the world where genetic deafness is less frequent. Where deafness is a result of disease, a deaf person's chances of learning a sign language are more dependent on not only having access to organizations or institutions for deaf people but to ones that support the use of sign language in education as opposed to the more popular oral method. Indeed, sign languages have often been threatened with extinction since a resolution was passed at the 1880 World Congress of the Deaf in Milan on the education of deaf people, supporting "the incontestable superiority of speech over signs" (Lane et

al., 1996, p. 61). Sign languages were then barred from usage across educational institutions for deaf people in Europe and the United States. In the United States, this situation abated in the 1970s but not in favor of ASL. Total Communication, or using "all means available to communicate" which typically resulted in signing and speaking at the same time, became the dominant philosophy of deaf education. While deaf activists since have made important strides, with colleges and universities recognizing the legitimacy of ASL, educational policies at the school district are generally hostile to it. For example, standardized tests continue to be in English, a second language for deaf people, making it difficult for them to access higher education. In communities with a high incidence of genetic deafness, however, sign language survival is not dependent on formal institutional policies. As with spoken languages, sign languages that are passed on from one generation to the next would be valued as essential to family well-being, lending them stability outside political realms.

Third, cultural, social, political, and economic circumstances lead sign languages in the region to be more likely to be isolated from one another. Across the Arab region, marriage customs give preferential treatment for partners from the same locale, as they are more likely to share a common dialect and customs. Moreover, political factors of immigration regulations within Arab countries make it difficult for nationals of one region to travel to another. For these reasons, a Jordanian woman is more likely to marry a man from the Levant region (eastern countries of the Middle East) as opposed to one from a Gulf state. This is because she would need a visa to travel to Dubai, for example, but not one to travel to Damascus or Beirut. Moreover, proximity of Damascus and

Beirut to Jordan makes it more economically feasible for a Jordanian woman to meet a man from these cities as opposed to meeting an Emirati man. Inasmuch as cultural, social, political, and economic factors restrict such contact, sign languages in the Arab region would arise within boundaries that possibly isolate them and allow them to develop independently from each other. Research on sign languages in the Arab region may reveal interesting findings on the geographic distribution of sign languages that are used on a daily familial and tribal social basis as opposed to those found in a more state formalized, institutional basis.

Some sources indicate that several dialects of a sign language may exist even within one Arab country, indicating the more local nature of sign language development in Arab deaf communities that is not necessarily institutionally based. Asdaa' (2006) put forth an Egyptian sign language guidebook that notes that the sign language used by deaf children at school to communicate with each other differs from that used by deaf adults at deaf clubs and organizations. Personal communication with the primary researcher of the dictionary, Sami Gamil (July 21, 2009), revealed that the sign language used in the publication was based on the variety that exists in Alexandria, which he suspects may be different than that used in Cairo. Further research is needed to test the relationship between the sign languages of the two cities.

An on-line dictionary (http://ile-signes.usj.edu.lb:8080/lsl/) developed by The Learning Center for the Deaf based in Beirut, Lebanon provided several instances in which more than one sign was given to one concept. Each sign was further identified by the region within Lebanon where it is used. Professor Roumanos (personal

communication, September 6, 2007) provides several reasons for the variance in signs used within different regions of Lebanon. First, geographic factors play a role in the isolation of deaf cultural groups from each other such that the people living in the mountainous regions of Lebanon would have little contact with those who live in the valleys or on the coast. Second, special education for deaf people in Lebanon was only established recently in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. This education took place in centers for the deaf that were scattered throughout the country. These centers developed their own signs, where a national standard did not exist. Third, the brutal civil war in Lebanon that took place between 1975-1990 further isolated these young cultural institutes and impoverished them of resources, as in-fighting was largely based on tribal/ religious/political divisions. This led to the estrangement of communities within Lebanon as each town would adhere to one faction or another. In some areas, such as Beirut, where several factions existed within one city, factional alliance was determined by neighborhood. This division and deep isolation further created differences between the signs used in different regions of Lebanon. Roumanos explains why despite these divisions, many signs remain similar. First, some signs are iconic or indexic such as those that refer to body parts or verbs such as SLEEP and EAT. Second, new infrastructure in post-civil war Lebanon such as roads and telecommunication lines has increased communication and contact between different deaf educational centers. Once isolated deaf groups learned from each other's signs and adopted new ones into their own vocabulary. Third, shared vocabulary naturally emerged between these deaf communities as a unified and peacetime Lebanon offered a new socio-cultural environment. Fourth, a

standard Lebanese Sign Language is being taught in schools, which is based on a dictionary that was published in 2006. Roumanos expects that the regional varieties of sign languages used in Lebanon will become increasingly similar and less distinct as the standard spreads within educational institutions.

In regards to the sign language situation in Jordan, Hendriks (2008) notes that there are several dialects used in Jordan. In a lexical comparison study between deaf signers from the city of Salt and a deaf signer from Amman,[35] she notes that there was between 73-74% lexical similarity. If one were to use Crowley's (1992) standard for distinguishing between languages and dialects, a standard that this chapter will elaborate on and utilize later, the varieties of sign languages used in Salt and Amman would be classified as distinct languages, not even dialects.[36]

In her presentation titled "Unification of Arabic Sign Languages" at the 15th World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf in Madrid, Hend Al-Showaier (2007) notes that there are more than one sign language used in Palestine. The sign language used in Gaza is heavily influenced by Egyptian Sign Language. This is not surprising considering the proximity of Gaza to the Egyptian Sinai and it's isolation from the rest of Palestine, both geographically and militarily imposed by Israel. The level of

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[35] Salt and Amman are only 30 kilometers apart.

[36] However, Hendriks (2008) argues that these figures indicate that Crowley's standard that is used for lexical comparisons of spoken languages is too strict to be used on sign languages. She suggests a more flexible standard where dialects are those that share 60% lexical similarity or more. It is according to her suggested standard that she classifies the sign languages used in Salt and Jordan as dialects. My rebuttal is provided later in this chapter.

contact between the Egyptian and Gazan communities varies depending on the political climate of the moment and the border-crossing limitations imposed by the Israeli and Egyptian governments. Contact is large enough such that Egyptians and Gazans share customs that are not found elsewhere in the region. This may be exemplified by the headscarf wearing habits of Gazan and Egyptian women where the cloth is tied at the nape instead of under the chin, as is the custom in the West Bank. Israeli authorities have had a consistent policy of isolating human crossings between Gaza and the West Bank, arguably to weaken and divide the Palestinian nation. As in Lebanon, political factors play a role in how sign languages develop in Palestine. Al-Showaier also points out that West Bank cities that neighbor Jordan have been influenced by Jordanian Sign Language, and those in the north are heavily influenced by Israeli Sign Language (*see* Alawni, 2006).

The examples above of the sign language situation in Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine indicate their very local and regional character that does not map on to national boundaries, let alone a pan-Arab one. Yet, these examples are largely observations made by specific persons and linguistic research is much needed to verify them. In the absence of such research, many Arabs, hearing and deaf alike, continue to hold the widespread belief that spoken languages map on to sign languages. Hendriks (2008) writes:

> The fact that hardly any research has been done into either the historical background of or the variation between the sign languages in the Middle East has resulted in the mistaken idea that there is, or at least should be, one standard Arabic Sign Language for deaf people in the Arab world. (p. 26)

Moulton, Andrews and Smith (1996) refer to an Arabic Sign Language, indicating that while there is some variation in vocabulary used in the signs of deaf people in Syria and Jordan, the sign languages used in these countries are variants of a single language. They write, "Adult deaf users of Arabic Sign Language tell us that they note differences in sign vocabulary between Arab countries but these differences do not prevent or hinder communication to any significant extent" (p. 173). The authors attribute this intelligibility to very little variation in syntax such that "the meaning of new/unfamiliar/unique signs is conveyed by syntactic or contextual cues" (p. 173).[37] They do not cite any research to back-up these claims, and it seems that these assertions are largely speculative and anecdotal as well. This chapter seeks to provide preliminary answers as to the possibility that sign languages in the Arab region are related to each other and whether they may be descendant of one parent language, an "Arabic Sign Language."[38]

Lexicostatistical Analyses of Sign Languages

Past studies on sign languages of the world have attempted to establish relationships between them. The methodology of comparative lexicostatistics is used to develop hypotheses on possible historical relationships among spoken languages (Crowley, 1992). This is done through a quantitative study of cognates among the

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[37] Mutual intelligibility does not indicate common linguistic roots, as will be touched on later in this chapter.

[38] The research investigated in this chapter examines only lexical relatedness of specific sign languages. Studies on other linguistic features such as grammatical structures of sign language varieties in the region should also be explored in order to make more definitive conclusions.

vocabularies of the languages under study. Cognates are defined as vocabulary from two different languages that are homogeneous enough to be considered as having similar linguistic derivation or roots. A comparison among spoken languages involves identifying similarities in syllable and segmental structure; in sign languages, cognate similarity is based on comparing handshapes, movements, locations, and orientations of the hand in vocabulary of two different sign languages. These hand descriptors are called parameters and are compared in vocabularies across sign languages to determine degree of similarity.

Many spoken language linguists use basic 200-word lists as the basis of their lexicostatistical research as opposed to longer lists, as a convenient and representative way of subgrouping languages. The higher the lexicostatistical percentage among spoken languages' cognates, the closer the historical relationship among the languages as it points to a more recent split from a common parent language (Black & Kruskal, 1997). Within the lexicostatistical methodology, Crowley (1992) defines languages to be dialects if they share 81-100% of cognates in core vocabularies.[39] They are considered as from the same language family if they share 36-81% of cognates, and families of a "stock" if they share 12-36% of cognates. By "stock," lexicostatisticians do not identify the languages as descending from one common ancestor language. Instead, the term recognizes that languages within a region can have opportunity for contact with one another. Greenberg (1957) provides four causes of lexical resemblances across languages, only two of which

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[39] The percentages used in lexicostatistics for establishing historical relationship are benchmarks that are largely agreed upon by scholars in the field and are not based on mathematical significance tests. Whether such computations are possible and informative could be subject of further study.

are historically related: those are genetic relationship and borrowing. The other two are shared symbolism, where vocabularies share similar motivations either iconic or indexic, and finally, by chance.

Review of literature

Woodward (1978) is one of the first sign linguists to conduct lexicostatistical research on sign languages. He compared the lexicon of French Sign Language (LSF) from a sign language dictionary with ASL, where one set of signs were elicited from an older deaf man and another set from younger ASL signers. He began with a list of 200 core words from the Swadesh list, a common tool among anthropologists for eliciting a basic vocabulary, but excluded numerals, pronouns and body parts because they are indexical and highly iconic. With 77 words remaining on his list that had counterparts in the LSF dictionary, he found 61% cognates for both sets of comparisons of LSF with the older deaf man and with the younger signers. Substituting the modified core vocabulary list for all 872 available signs in the LSF dictionary, he found that cognates dropped slightly to between 57.3-58% for both sets of ASL signs. Woodward concludes that contrary to popular belief that ASL descended from LSF, it is more likely that some number of sign language varieties existed in the United States before contact with LSF was made, after which a creolization process took place leading to what is now ASL.

Woodward (1991) also carried out lexicostatistical analyses of several sign language varieties found in Costa Rica. With results ranging from between 7-42% cognates, he concluded that there are at least four distinct sign languages in Costa Rica. In a third study, he compared the vocabularies of sign language varieties in India,

Pakistan, and Nepal with results ranging from 62-71% cognates (Woodward, 1993). He finds that these varieties are separate languages but belong to the same language family. When comparing Modern Standard Thai Sign Language and ASL, Woodward found that the vocabularies share 57% cognates, which reflects recent long-term contact between American deaf educators and deaf Thai Sign Language users (Woodward, 1996). Unfortunately, in these studies Woodward does not identify how many or which parameters are taken into account when determining cognates.

Using Woodward's modified core vocabulary list of 100 concepts, McKee et al. (2000) examine the lexicon of three historically related sign languages: New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), Australian Sign Language (Auslan), and British Sign Language (BSL). The researchers then compared vocabulary from these sign languages with those from ASL. The vocabularies used for analysis were drawn from dictionaries and CD-ROMs of the respective sign languages. They identify signs as cognates if all phonemic parameters (handshape, location, movement, and orientation of the palm) are *identical* or if one parameter is different. Vocabulary that falls in the latter category is designated *related-but-different*, that is, similar enough to have a common origin. They found that between 79-87% of the vocabularies of Auslan, BSL, and NZSL are cognates, which would designate them as dialects of a parent language. The researchers were not surprised by a high degree of similarity, as both Auslan and NZSL have colonial origins in common, when deaf educators and other immigrants brought BSL to Australia and New Zealand from the United Kingdom. Moreover, there has been frequent contact between deaf people from Australia and New Zealand. This is in contrast to ASL, which has no

historical linkage with these three sign languages. As expected, the researchers found that only 26-32% of ASL vocabulary was identical or similar to those from Auslan, BSL, and NZSL, confirming that ASL is unrelated to the other three. This, as we know, is in contrast to the geography of the spoken language of the respective countries, English.

McKee et al. acknowledge that some linguists criticize the method of using a selection of "core vocabularies" as a basis for comparing vocabularies. Because such vocabulary often consist of high frequency words, this method may overestimate the similarities among the sign languages in the sense that such words are likely to persist as languages change over time. Instead random vocabularies should be used for comparative purposes. After altering Woodward's methodology to double the vocabulary being compared and to include more random vocabulary as opposed to core vocabulary from the Swadesh list, McKee et al. found that the number of cognates between NZSL and each of Auslan and BSL dropped dramatically to 65.5% and 62.5% respectively. As expected, cognates between NZSL and ASL remained low at 33.5%. The researchers reason that the slightly higher rate of commonality between NZSL and Auslan than that between NZSL and BSL is related to geographical proximity and to educational policies in which the New Zealand Department of Education adopted the Australian Total Communication Signed System in 1979, which continued to be used until the early 1990s. Their first analysis supported the conclusion that NZSL was a dialect of Auslan and BSL because it fell within the lexicostatistical range of 81-100%, but after altering the vocabulary set, the conclusion was weakened somewhat, suggesting instead that

NZSL belongs to the same language family as Auslan and BSL with significant divergence having occurred between them.

McKee et al. (2000) do another level of analysis where they examine only those cognates that differ on one parameter. They find that these *related-but-different* cognates most likely differ on the parameter of handshape, followed by movement, with changes to location and orientation much less frequent. They briefly note that these results tentatively indicate that when languages diverge, handshape is the most common parameter to undergo change.

Currie, Meier, and Walters (2002) counted cognates in their lexicostatistical comparison of LSM with LSF, Spanish Sign Language (LSE), and Japanese Sign Language (JSL). LSM is compared with LSF as there is reason to believe they are historically related. A deaf French educator came to Mexico in 1866 when he first learned of a deaf school being established there. Consequently, some believe LSF may be a source of borrowing for sign language(s) in Mexico. With Spanish being a shared spoken language in Mexico and Spain, LSM and LSE may have a basis for similarity. Finally, because they have no known historical relationship, the comparison of LSM and JSL is used as a control to approximate the possible degree of similarity between two unrelated sign languages.

Data for the analysis was retrieved from videotaped elicitations. Word lists ranged from 89 signs for the LSM-LSE comparison to 112 for the LSM-LSF comparison and 166 for LSM-JSL. Signs from different vocabularies were designated as cognates if they shared two out of three parameters. Unlike McKee et al. 2002, Currie et al. (2002)

exclude the fourth parameter of orientation. They report 38% cognates for LSM-LSF, 33% cognates for LSM-LSE, and 23% for LSM-JSL. While there is history of contact between LSM and LSF, it is clear that their historical development is non-genetic. They attribute the similarity between LSM-LSF to borrowing. Their findings also do not support similarity between LSM and LSE even though they exist in communities that share a spoken language, Spanish. Finally, the LSM-JSL comparison provides a base level of the degree of similarity between any two sign languages that may have shared iconicity. They argue that the visual-gestural modality of sign languages and their capacity for iconic representations support at the very least, a minimal level of similarity among unrelated sign languages.

As can be gathered from the above review of past lexicostatistical research on sign languages, scholars differ in their methods from the number and nature of vocabularies compared, to their definitions of cognates, to their interpretations of what constitutes belonging to a family. Nevertheless, results are instrumental indicators for language planning of these sign languages. McKee et al. (2000) demonstrate how their results have implications for the use of sign language in professional and educational services for the deaf in New Zealand. Whereas it is common practice to bring sign language interpreters from United Kingdom and Australia to satisfy the supply gap in New Zealand, their results indicate that such practice may need to be reconsidered. Knowledge of Auslan or BSL does not translate as knowledge of NZSL, contrary to anecdotal evidence from the deaf community. This is also relevant to the educational sphere, where resources from United Kingdom and Australia are at times imported to

schools for the deaf in New Zealand. Given the drive towards a unified pan-Arabic sign language, research on sign language vocabularies is needed to establish the kind of relationships that exist between sign languages of the Arab region. Such research would allow us to explore language and social issues of the region, of which little is known.

Lexicostatistical Analyses of Sign Languages in the Arab Region

Genetic relationships among major sign languages in the United States, Western Europe, and the British colonies are mapped onto the history of deaf education in these regions, but relationships among sign languages of the Arab region may follow an entirely different pattern given that schooling for deaf children was introduced much later in the region. Perhaps one of the earliest mentions of deaf education in an Arab countries may be found in Hyde's (1978) book on education in modern Egypt, where he observes:

> [In Alexandria, Egypt] a pioneer school for the deaf was visited. The headmistress had trained with a specialist in 1942 and had started the school as a private venture, relying on charitable sources. Later it was taken over by the Ministry of Education, the three teachers having received in-training. In this particular school there were 305 children being taught in 29 classes (23 primary and 6 preparatory) by 34 teachers, all with hearing. All are specially trained, some in Cairo but others on a month's course, held locally. Boarding facilities are provided only for little children and those who come from afar. The Ministry supplies everything, including facilities for carpentry and needlework. No special reading books are available but children in the sixth primary class reach the fourth-year standard. Microphones and loud speakers are provided and the children are taught to lip-read with the aid of mirrors. After they leave school they mostly take craft jobs found by their parents." (pp. 198-199)

If we can assume that the deaf school was indeed a pioneer school and that it was established shortly after the headmistress received training in 1942, this deaf institution would be older than either the pioneer ones in Lebanon, established in 1957 (Holy Land

Institute for the Deaf, 2004), in Jordan established in 1964 (ibid), and in Saudi Arabia also established in 1964 (Al-Muslat, 1994). Although the deaf school in Alexandria seems to be an oral school, the large numbers of deaf students and the fact that younger ones are boarded would lead us to believe that sign language was being used at least among the deaf children. The Holy Land Institute for the Deaf in Salt, Jordan being a rare exception, most schools for the deaf in the region emphasize oral methods of communication, preferring it to sign language. The proliferation of schools for the deaf in Egypt (Hyde, 1978) and in Saudi Arabia (Al-Muslat, 1994) did not take place until the 1970s, perhaps reflective of a wider trend in the Arab region. Given the youth of such institutions for deaf people and their continued advocacy of oral methods for communication,[40] we would expect sign language development in the region to exhibit a different geography from that in Europe and North America.

The following section explores similarities and differences among sign languages of the Arab region through the method of lexicostatistics. The vocabularies being compared are of: Jordanian Sign Language (LIU), Kuwaiti Sign Language (KSL), Libyan Sign Language (LSL), and Palestinian Sign Language (PSL). LIU will also be compared with Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language (ABSL),[41] a sign language used by a community

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[40] The youth of institutions for the deaf in the Arab region is less surprising when taking into consideration the youth of Arab countries. In Saudi Arabia, for example, education for any of its citizens did not become a reality until King Abdulaziz unified the kingdom in 1932 (Al-Muslat, 1994). As for education in the region prior to the establishment of individual Arab nation-states, it did exist under Ottoman rule and the British and French mandates. There was also European Christian missionary schools. Whether any form of deaf education took place under these systems is yet to be investigated.

[41] ABSL is used in the Al-Sayyid community in the Negev Desert in Israel.

of deaf and hearing Bedouins in southern Israel. Hearing members of this community speak Arabic. Finally, as a baseline, LIU will be compared with ASL with the expectation that percentage of synonyms will be low due to no known historic relationship between the two.[42] However, as there are Jordanian professionals working with deaf people who have studied in the United States as well as a few deaf Jordanians who have studied at Gallaudet University, there may be lexical borrowings from ASL to LIU. A three-way study will also be preformed between LIU-PSL-ABSL in order to examine the extent to which their vocabularies may have come from a common ancestor.

Hypothesis statements

I hypothesize that:

1. LIU and PSL will have the highest lexical similarity of any comparison in this study. LIU and PSL will have some degree of relationship because of a history of contact between the two regions, Jordan and Palestine, and due to a shared, regional Levantine culture. Members of the Jordanian deaf community have informed me of Jordanian parents who sent their deaf children to schools for the deaf in Palestine because those schools advocated the oral method of communication. Also, language contact may have resulted from migration between the regions, which was fluid prior to the establishment

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[42] I refer to concepts that do not share historical roots but have similar meanings as "synonyms," even though they are from different languages, for practical labeling purposes. Previous studies reviewed in this chapter erroneously used the term "cognate" when comparing the vocabularies of two sign languages known to have no historical relationships but wished to carry out lexicostatistical methods on them to arrive at data that would determine a baseline. The term "cognate" refers only to vocabulary from two different languages that are homogeneous enough to be considered as having similar linguistic derivation or roots (Crowley, 1992).

of the state of Israel. During the 1948 and 1967 wars, the deportation of Palestinians to Jordan numbered in the hundreds of thousands. It can be expected that many deaf people were among those deported. With Israeli restriction of Palestinian movement within Palestine and across the border with Jordan, migration may take the form of relocation due to marriage. Marriage between inhabitants of Palestine and Jordan is common, with over 70% of Jordan's inhabitants being of Palestinian origin.

2. Lexical similarity between LIU and each of KSL and LSL will be lower than that of LIU and PSL. This is because there is less contact between the regions due to difficulty of mobility between the nations, as well as different familial and tribal traditions that make intermarriage much less common. In Kuwait, for example, polygamy is a much more common practice than it is in Jordan. A Jordanian woman is not likely to accept entering a marriage union with a Kuwaiti man, knowing that there is a possibility she may not be his only wife. Also in Kuwait, segregation between men and women, even within members of a nuclear family, is common, a custom to which Jordanians may find difficult to adapt. The political isolation of Libya has made minimal their contact with other Arab nations. That Libyan spoken dialect of Arabic is markedly different from that of Jordanians is another reason for weak ties between the two nations.

3. Lexical similarity between LIU and ABSL is minimal. This is because the Al-Sayyid community is a closed Bedouin one with little or no contact with neighboring communities. Members of the Al-Sayyid community do not commonly marry members outside their group.

4. ASL will have the least lexical similarity with LIU. This is because there is no known historical relationship between the two.

5. The 3-way analysis between LIU, PSL, and ABSL will reveal very little lexical similarity. The isolated community of Al-Sayyid has had little contact with deaf people from the West Bank. It is believed that ABSL developed independent of any other sign languages (Sandler et al., 2005). There is some speculation that the Al-Sayyid community signs a form of Egyptian sign language since their ancestors once lived in the Sinai. Further research is needed to compare Egyptian Sign Language with ABSL to test this.

Based on the degree of lexical similarity with LIU, this study also attempts to classify LIU, PSL, KSL, LSL and ABSL as either distinct sign languages or dialects of a parent language. It also presents which parameter is most likely to be different in *related-but-different* cognates.

Methodology

Vocabulary used for comparison was drawn from published dictionaries of the respective sign languages,[43] with the exception of ABSL where the vocabulary was elicited through an interview with a deaf member of the Al-Sayyid community on video.[44] All vocabulary in the LIU dictionary and each of the other four dictionaries were used for the comparisons. The reason for such an extensive comparison was that using a

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[43] Even though this chapter has previously discussed possible varieties within one country, sign language dictionaries are used for reasons that are discussed later in this chapter.

[44] Dictionaries used for this study are: Hamzeh and Taffal (1993) for LIU, Palestine Red Crescent Society (2000) for PSL, Kuwaiti Sign Language Dictionary (1995) for KSL, Suwayd (1992) for LSL, Tennant and Gluszak Brown (1998) for ASL.

modified core list or randomly selected vocabularies would have resulted in a smaller set of comparison vocabulary from the Kuwaiti and Libyan dictionaries, or a lack of comparison vocabulary as was the case with the Palestinian dictionary which was targeted towards high school and university students in the math and sciences, or more focused on local references such as names of organizations and royalty as is the case with the Jordanian dictionary. Although not random, the vocabulary compared were selected without bias. Iconic signs were not eliminated, as iconicity may be highly subjective. This may overestimate the relationship between the sign languages, since iconic similarity does not necessitate historical relatedness.

Individual signs of different languages were compared based on four phonemic parameters (handshape, movement, location, and orientation of the palm), following McKee et al.'s (2000) criteria. Non-manual differences such as facial markers were not included in the comparison. In the case of multiple entries for the same concept, signs most similar to their LIU counterpart were compared. Also following McKee et al., I set aside cognates/synonyms that differed on one parameter only and noted which parameter was different. McKee et al. analyzed cognates to determine which parameters are likely to change. These results may illuminate a pattern that sheds light on the nature of sign language diversity in the region.

Under the lexicostatistical standard, languages are defined as dialects if they share 81-100% of cognates (Crowley, 1992). They are judged to be of the same language family if they share 36-81% of cognates, and "families of stock" if they share 12-36% of cognates.

Following McKee et al. (200), two signs from different sign languages were termed *identical* if they shared all four parameters, as in Figure 2.[45] They were termed *related* if they differed on only one of four parameters, as in Figures 3 and 4.[46] They were termed *different* if they differed on two or more parameters as in Figures 5, 6 and 7.

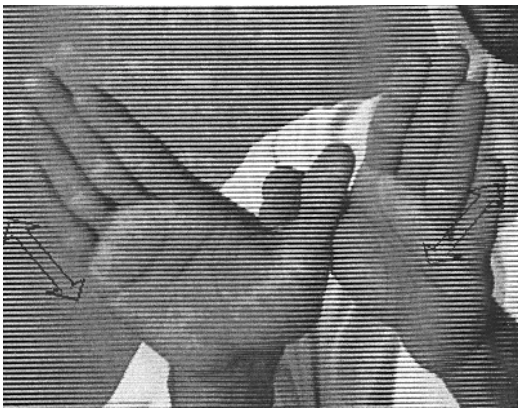
LIU PSL

Figure 2. KORAN—The LIU sign is identical to its PSL cognate (4 shared parameters).

[45] The LIU sign for KORAN shows an arrow pointing upwards on the left, below the chin. The PSL sign for KORAN shows an arrow moving towards the forehead.

[46] The LIU sign for ELEPHANT has a D-handshape. The LSL sign for ELEPHANT has a flattened O-handshape.

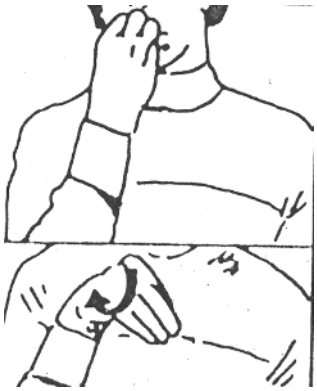
LIU



KSL

Figure 3. BUTTERFLY—The LIU sign is related to its KSL cognate (3 shared parameters; orientation differs).

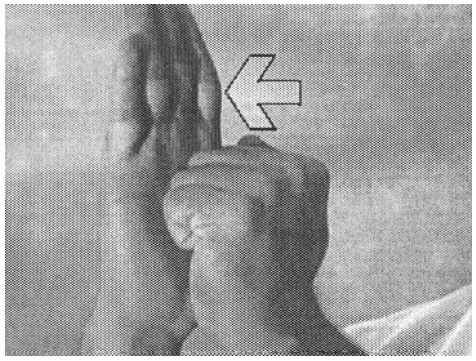
LIU



LSL

FIGURE 4. ELEPHANT—The LIU sign is related to its LSL cognate (3 shared parameters; handshape differs).

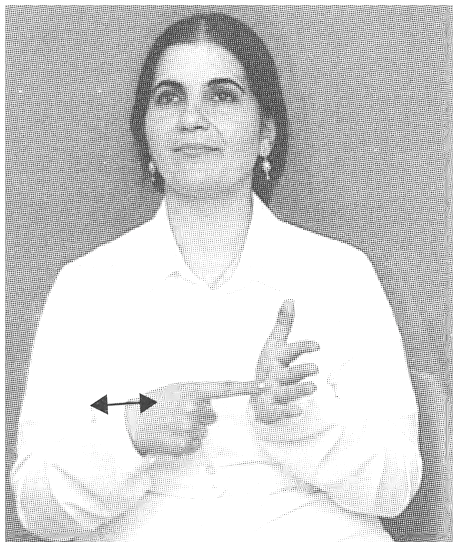
LIU



KSL

Figure 5. HOUSE—The LIU sign is different to its KSL cognate (2 shared parameters; movement and orientation differ).

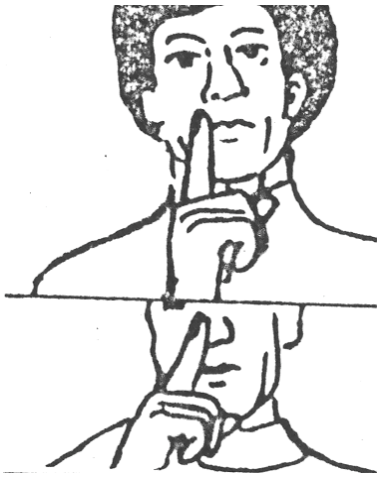
LIU



PSL

Figure 6. UNIVERSITY—The LIU sign is different to its PSL cognate (1 shared parameter; handshape, movement, and orientation differ).

LIU



LSL

Figure 7. WHO—The LIU sign is different to its LSL cognate (0 shared parameters).

Results

As Table 1 illustrates, between 165-410 vocabulary items were used for the different comparisons, depending on the available vocabulary for the languages. The numbers of vocabulary items are similar to past comparative research on sign languages.

Table 1. Number of vocabulary used for comparison among LIU and PSL, KSL, LSL and ABSL

	PSL	**KSL**	**LSL**	**ABSL**	**ASL**
Total signs	167	183	267	165	410

Figure 8 shows that the sign languages being compared in this study probably are not dialects, despite the presence of a common spoken language, Arabic. As predicted, LIU-PSL had the highest number of identical and related cognates at 58%, reflecting their geographic proximity (*see* Appendix A). Next in number of similar cognates is LIU-KSL with 40% (*see* Appendix B), then LIU-LSL with 34% cognates (*see* Appendix C), and finally LIU-ABSL was the lowest with 24% cognates (*see* Appendix D). This last result is striking given that the two languages exist in neighboring countries, yet they are quite dissimilar when compared to LIU and PSL and LIU and KSL. LIU-ASL shared 17% identical and related synonyms (*see* Appendix E), which will be used as a baseline for completely unrelated sign languages.

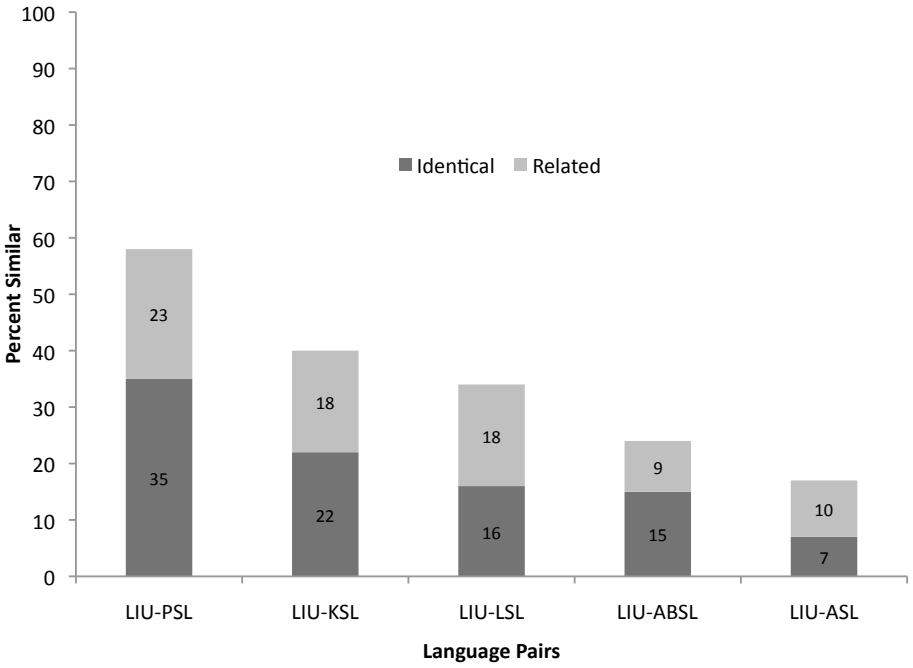


Figure 8. Cognates between LIU and PSL, KSL, LSL & ABSL; Synonyms between LIU & ASL

The parameters in which *related-but-different* cognates differed are presented in Table 2. Table 2 indicates that the parameter that is most likely to differ is movement, followed by handshape, orientation, and location (*see* Appendices F, G, H, I, & J).

Table 2. Basis of difference in signs related to LIU from PSL, KSL, LSL, ABSL, and ASL (number of instances)

LIU	Handshape	Location	Movement	Orientation
PSL	**7**	**5**	**17**	**9**
KSL	**8**	**2**	**14**	**9**
LSL	**20**	**4**	**26**	**5**
ABSL	**1**	**0**	**10**	**3**
ASL	**13**	**11**	**15**	**2**
Total	**49**	**22**	**82**	**28**

The three-way study compared 54 similar vocabularies across LIU, PSL and ABSL (*see* Appendix K). Three were identical: SUMMER, FASTING, and ELECTRICITY. All three can be arguable iconic signs. Two were similar: FARMER and MONEY and both differed on the *orientation* parameter. This results in 9% lexical similarity shared across the three sign languages.

Discussion

From the data illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 8, we conclude that LIU-PSL and LIU-KSL are related but likely not dialects of the same language, as their cognates lie within the 36-81% range. As for LIU-LSL, LIU-ABSL, and LIU-ASL, they are most likely not related since they share only 12-36% of cognates, or synonyms in the LIU-ASL case. These results demonstrate first and foremost that the geography of sign languages in this region does not map onto that of spoken languages. Although ABSL, KSL, LIU, LSL, and PSL are languages existing in Arabic-speaking communities, they are distinct sign languages. Furthermore, geographic proximity does not always predict similarity; LIU and PSL are separated by the Israel/Jordan border, as is ABSL and LIU, but in the first case, the languages are more similar than in the latter case. Clearly there are cultural and economic factors in play that influence the mobility of communities of signers within this region, which in turn influences how much contact sign languages have with each other. On the whole, these results contradict anecdotes that sign languages of the Arab region are mostly similar or are dialects of a common sign language. Instead, the results suggest that at least with respect to the sign languages in this study, they do not share common origins, or if they did at one time, they have since diverged greatly.

As expected and demonstrated in Figure 8, LIU and PSL share the most cognates of any two languages examined in this study. This is not unexpected as the Palestinian and Jordanian communities are tightly knit in terms of custom and marriage traditions. When we juxtapose the results of lexicostatistical studies of sign languages around the world, as we do below in Figure 9, it can be seen that LIU-PSL are as lexically similar to

each other as are ASL-LSF. Woodward (1978) concludes that ASL and LSF do not share roots, but that sign language varieties existed in the U.S. before any contact with LSF was made, after which a creolization process took place. Perhaps the same could be said of LIU-PSL, where they do not share roots but similarities develop through contact.

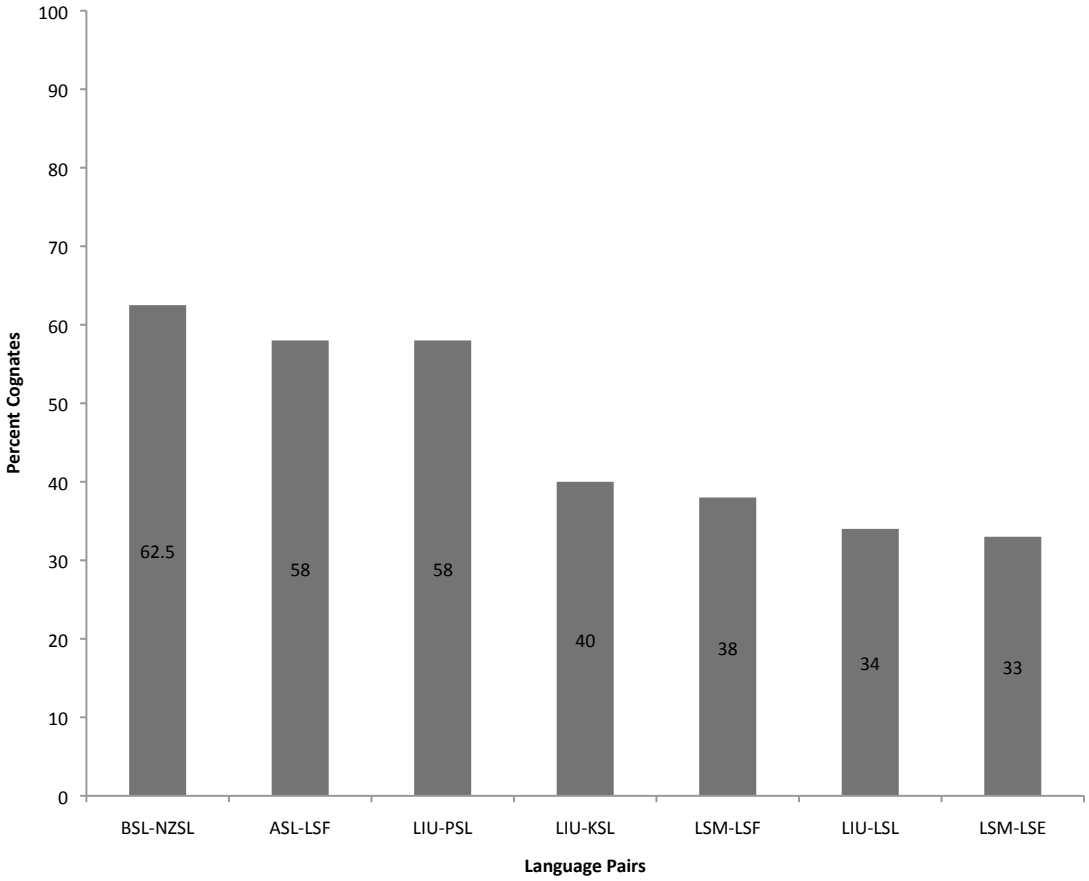


Figure 9. Vocabulary similarities between pairs of sign languages

Returning to sign languages of the Arab region, we find from our study that KSL and LSL have a lower number of cognates with LIU. Lexical similarity between LIU-KSL and LIU-LSL lie within the same range as LSM-LSF and LSM-LSE. Currie et al.

(2002) note that while LSM and LSF have come into contact, their historical development is non-genetic. They also note that while Spanish is a common spoken language between Mexico and Spain, their sign languages are unrelated due to little opportunity for contact. While KSL and LSL may have come into contact with LIU, they are probably not historically related. Also, that they share a similar spoken language may account for a degree of lexical similarity, as is the case with LSM-LSE.

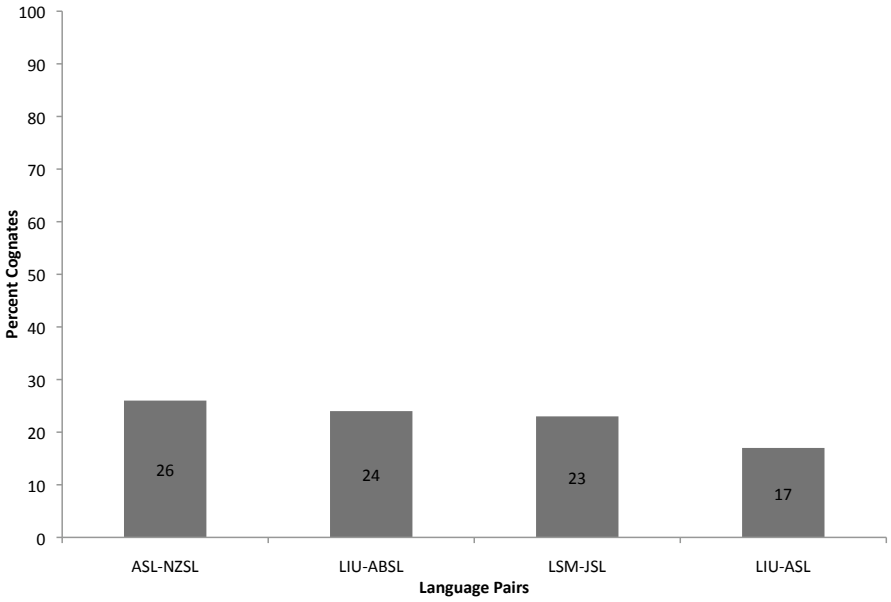


Figure 10. Base level similarities between unrelated sign languages

Finally, LIU and ABSL share the fewest cognates of all the sign languages studied. This confirms ethnographic reports that signers in the Al-Sayyid Bedouin

community have little or only sporadic contact with signers in Jordan and other Arab countries. Only 24% of their signs were cognates with LIU of total vocabularies compared. Figure 10 shows that LIU-ABSL are within the same range of similarity as are ASL-NZSL and LSM-JSL, the latter being considered by Currie et al. (2002) as a base level of similarity that can be expected between any two unrelated sign languages. . This degree of difference falls just below the baseline of 26-32% that McKee at al. 2000 give for ASL-NZSL. In fact, LIU-KSL and LIU-LSL at 40% and 34% cognates are not significantly higher than that base level. This suggest two things: 1) LIU, KSL, and LSL are probably unrelated historically, 2) the slightly raised level of similarity may be due to the fact that these sign languages exist within the Arab region where there are many common emblematic gestures. It is indeed said that speech, gesture, and culture are so intimately related to Arabs that to tie an Arab's back while they are speaking is tantamount to tying their tongue (Barakat, 1973). It is not unlikely then to surmise that deaf Arab communities with little or no contact with each other can still have similar signs due to a shared gestural repertoire.

Least similar are LIU-ASL with 17% similar synonyms. This is a lower rate than the 24% shared by LIU-ABSL. While these results fall within the unrelated category, the slightly higher base level for ABSL than for ASL may due to the fact that LIU and ABSL share the same culture. Sharing a similar cultural stock may account for higher lexical base levels among sign languages. It should also be noted that the difference might also be due to the discrepancy in vocabularies compared. In the LIU-ASL comparison, more

than twice the vocabulary was available than with LIU-ABSL. Possibly if a larger vocabulary were compared, the degree of similarity would drop even further.

The three-way comparison, LIU-PSL-ABSL, found only 9% lexical similarity between them. This low figure may be attributed to both iconicity and chance, both non-genetic characteristics of similarities between signs. Campbell and Poser (2008) note that 5-6% of basic vocabulary may be shared by sheer accident. The preliminary results of the three-way study indicate that it is unlikely that the three sign languages split from a common ancestor.

We cannot claim that LIU, PSL, and KSL share similar origins that have diverged, but if they did, the parameter that seems most susceptible to change is *movement*. This is unlike the results of the McKee at al. (2000) study, which shows that *handshape* is the primary divergent parameter. It is unclear yet what these results indicate, but they do point to differing patterns of sign language development.

Why lexical comparisons from dictionaries?

Deeper language comparisons such as those that judge similarity of not just vocabulary but also morphology and sentence structure are likely to provide a more accurate measure of the degree of similarity among sign languages. A more extensive comparison may also take into account regional variations where similar vocabularies between two languages might exist in one region of a country but in not another. However, lexical comparisons remain useful, as they provide a basis by which initial evaluations can be made before proceeding to delve deeper into the vocabulary and grammar of any two comparison languages. When compared side-by-side with lexical

studies of other languages, rough boundaries for sign language geographies on a global scale can be drawn that would not otherwise be possible.

For similar reasons, dictionary entries are used instead of live elicitations. While live elicitations are superior in making available three-dimensional and temporal aspects of individual signs, they nonetheless have inherent limitations. The selection of representative signers can be problematic for an investigator, because signers and their vocabularies will vary depending on age, gender, region, and other individual factors such as fluency and competence. Since dictionaries (at least those that are developed within a community) are meant to be consensus points resolving disagreement within a language community, their use for lexical comparisons seems appropriate. Studies that work with very large sets of vocabulary than a representative set, as was the case with lexicostatistical studies described in this paper, will necessarily involve more time and funding. These may be difficult to obtain for sign language researchers working in different parts of the world. Finally, the current trend toward CD-ROM storage of sign language dictionaries would eliminate some limitations of lexical comparisons in the future, and most certainly benefit studies of sign language geography around the globe.

On iconicity

Figures 2 and 4 depict signs that are arguably iconic. In Figure 2, the signs represent a closed book that is kissed and then held to the forehead in reverence. Only one book would be revered as such in Muslim communities, which are prevalent in the Arab region—the Koran. In Figure 4, the signs represent the lengthy trunk that stands out as the most characteristic feature of an elephant. A question is then raised regarding the

overestimation of similarities between sign languages due to iconicity. That is to say, two languages that have no shared histories may come across as related due to the characteristic features of the object itself and the shared cultural aspects between these languages' communities.

Figure 5 and Figure 11 represent another example of iconicity that may or may not be shared. In LIU and PSL, HOUSE is represented by placing a roof over an enclosed object. In KSL and LSL, it is represented by knocking on a door. Does this indicate that KSL and LIU are more related to each other than they are to LIU and PSL? That would be difficult to argue, considering the geographical distance between Kuwait and Libya. There are also no known ties linking the deaf communities of these two countries.

PSL

LSL

Figure 11. HOUSE in PSL and LSL

Iconicity in language, of which cultural institutions play a mediating role (Taub, 2001), may explain why there is a belief among Arabs that their sign languages are highly related. When members of these different sign language communities come into contact, they may understand the meanings behind each other's signs due to iconic features. However, they themselves may have different sign representation of the same concepts. The implications of iconicity to the study outlined in this chapter is that, if anything, sign languages compared may be even less related than is indicated.

Response to Hendriks

Hendriks (2008) critiques a version of this chapter that appeared as a technical report (*see* Al-Fityani, 2007). Here, I will address some of her concerns with my earlier work. First, she finds problematic the use of two-dimensional dictionary depictions of signs over live, video elicitations. She writes, "Most of the differences between PSL and LIU are due to movement parameter, which is the parameter that would be obscured when looking at only pictures of signs" (p. 36). While this may be very well true, I have addressed this limitation in the section "Why lexical comparisons from dictionaries?" above and have even listed an advantage that dictionaries would have over live elicitations.

Second, Hendriks finds problematic my elimination of iconic signs: "Al-Fityani did not try to eliminate iconic signs. This would make distant languages seem more similar but would have less effect on closely related sign languages" (p. 36). I have addressed the issue of iconicity above in the section "On iconicity." I will add here that

the conclusions of my study, that the sign languages examined are not likely to have a common ancestor or be dialects of the same language, remain valid when considering her point. That is, even with including iconic signs, these sign languages appear to be unrelated. Were they to be related, including iconic signs would have no significant effect, as she states.

Third, Hendriks suggests using less strict lexicostatistical standards such that 60%+ lexical similarity would indicate that the sign languages were dialects of the same language, 30-60% would indicate that they were of the same language family, and below 30% would indicate that they were unrelated. Her argument for this new suggested standard is that, unlike spoken languages, sign languages can have a lot of lexical variation and can still be mutually intelligible. While some linguists do hold that two speech forms that are mutually intelligible are dialects of the same language, others find this definition problematic and would reject mutual intelligibility as an indication of common linguistic roots. Hock and Joseph (1996) put it aptly when they discuss how Scots and American speakers find difficulty communicating with each other in their own native varieties of English:

> [A] justification for considering Scots and American English to be different varieties of the same language might be that, given enough time (and good will), speakers of the two varieties of English can achieve mutual intelligibility. But this argument doesn't get us very far, for with an even greater amount of time (and good will), a greater effort, and the right choice of words, French and English might likewise become mutually intelligible. (p. 325)

Indeed, how is mutual intelligibility determined? Might intelligibility be related to guesswork based on context or through lip-reading or through gestures? It is not unusual

for deaf people from different countries, upon meeting each other at conferences for example, to abandon signs from their own languages and resort to gestures that they would use with hearing people. Might intelligibility be due to shared cultural references such as putting ones hands to ones ears and then crossing one over the other at the waist indicating that it is time for Islamic prayer? Hock and Joseph add that cultural, social, and political factors play a considerable role in people's perceptions of what is mutually intelligible. They go as much to say these factors overrule the mutual-intelligibility test. I argue that signing deaf Arab people from different countries overestimate their mutual intelligibility due to cultural, social, and political factors in that they are encouraged to believe that, as Arabs, they surely must understand each other. It remains that lexical variation is considerable between various sign languages of the Arab region. I suggest further studies on mutual intelligibility between deaf Arabs of different sign languages before revising the traditional lexicostatistical standard for classifying languages and dialects.

Conclusion

Given the tradition of endogamy in the Arab region, which leads to high rates of genetic deafness, most likely there has been a long history of sign languages in the region. As the results of this study show, many of these sign languages are likely to be distinct languages, not dialects, and are unrelated historically. Similarities in their vocabularies may be attributed to sharing similar cultural values and gestural repertoires. These results follow from the historical pattern of sign languages in the Arab region, which develop largely in familial institutions as opposed to educational ones as is the

Western pattern. Indeed, organized educational systems in the Arab region are relatively young. With cultural, social, political, and economic circumstances restricting contact among communities, numerous sign languages may develop within families and tribes. Our results show quite clearly that the geography of sign languages in the Arab region does not map onto that of spoken MSA.

The recent trend toward standardization of sign languages on a national basis in Jordan, Kuwait and Libya drawing from their schools suggests that a creolization or pidginization is now actively in place, where children from different families and tribes are converging and beginning to share a common sign language. The history of sign languages in this region presents a geography of sign languages unlike the situation in the West, where creolization and standardization has been underway since the nineteenth century. The Arab region situation can, however, be paralleled to Woodward's 1991 findings on sign languages used in Costa Rica, where he found several distinct languages among the numerous indigenous pueblos.

There is at least one implication of these findings in terms of a project to unify sign languages of the Arab region. The underlying assumption that sign languages of the region are similar enough to be unified may in fact be erroneous. It may be risky to engineer a unified sign language in the Arab region, given the difficulty of standardizing languages that are historically unrelated. Despite the shortcomings of the quantitative research laid out in this chapter, the onus remains on parties who maintain similarity between sign languages to prove that they are historically related before continuing any project to unify them.

Further research could examine more deeply the patterns of mobility among deaf people in the region, particularly gender differences in the region. Such research could investigate how social and cultural traditions of gender segregation and restriction of mobility of women limit the possibility of convergence of languages. This would differ from spoken Arabic where both genders have similar access to the spoken word through broadcast media to which deaf people have little to no access. Research may also take into account other linguistic features, such as grammar, to investigate further the nature and relationship of sign languages in the Arab region. A more ambitious research project should include other sign languages from the region that have recently documented their language in dictionary form such as in Lebanon and Yemen.

Finally, a key question in lexicostatistics of sign languages is whether two unrelated sign languages will turn out to have more vocabulary in common than any two unrelated spoken languages. The results of this comparison of five different sign languages in the Arab region show that two geographically distant sign languages can have a somewhat higher base level of similarity when compared to two unrelated spoken languages. These results suggest that there is something inherent in the visual-gestural modality of sign languages that predispose their vocabulary to similarity. At the same time, the iconicity of tokens in the visual-gestural modality can be misleading in the sense that a casual observer might believe two sign languages are more similar than they really are. In this study, I show that while there are some similar signs among sign languages in the Arab region, the languages in fact have quite large vocabularies *not* in common. Finally, I believe that lexicostatistical analyses of sign languages are valuable

as means of addressing two important observations about sign languages: that two unrelated sign languages can have similar vocabulary, and conversely, that two sign languages in the same region can have *dis*similar vocabulary. In doing so, they can shed light on the history of sign languages in a region, but more broadly, they can address the remarkable history of sign language creation and development time and time again, all around the world.

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Chapter 4: ArSL as Empowerment

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I offered some cautionary notes regarding efforts to unify sign languages of the Arab region that are historically unrelated. The reality on the ground is that such efforts are already under way. Over the span of three decades, what began as a proposal to improve the lives of deaf Arab people became materialized in the form of a dictionary of ArSL with multiple installments, trained teachers, and certified sign language interpreters. Use of ArSL has been expanded to satellite media and other innovative technology such as avatar texting for cell phones. It has the backing of pan-Arab governmental organizations, leaders in the field of deaf education and rehabilitation, and deaf individuals from numerous Arab countries from Tunisia to Djibuoti to Iraq. Determined proponents of ArSL are now seeking its systematic adoption in curricula of schools for deaf children across the Arab region as well as its recognition as a foreign language at Arab universities. It is an impressively massive effort.

This effort is not, by definition, language planning since that would entail making changes to an existing language. Yet, by any ideal of language planning, such as Rubin and Jernudd's (1971), this effort matches those of other language planning efforts:

> *deliberate* language change; that is, changes in the systems of language code or speaking or both that are planned by organizations that are established for such purposes or given a mandate to fulfill such purposes. As such, language planning is focused on problem-solving and is characterized by the formation and evaluation of alternatives for solving language problems to find the best (or optimal, most efficient) decision." (ibid, p. xvi)

Rubin and Jernudd emphasize the deliberate nature of language planning to differentiate

it from natural language change, in which languages evolve over time to meet societal needs without intervention. Language planning requires a body whose task is to "correct" a problem efficiently. To do so, systematic choices must be implemented where alternatives are proposed and examined before selecting the optimal language situation. Indeed, the very act of planning a language infers that a language can exist in one of many forms (Fasold, 1984). Language planners work to choose one form over possible alternatives, arguing that a perceived communication problem or need can be resolved through the chosen form. How did ArSL developers design ArSL?

This chapter reviews the purported communication problems that ArSL developers sought to resolve. It then addresses the choices they made from among other alternatives to reach the optimal solution that is ArSL. Two themes emerge in this pursuit of a unified Arabic sign language: education and human rights. Here, ArSL is designed to protect and promote deaf people's rights by providing them with a language choice that parallels that of their hearing peers in opening doors of opportunity. As Semreen put it, by leading them out of solitary confinement and into an open, peopled world (Al-Raya, 2007), the ArSL project can be understood as a modernization effort that will empower deaf Arab people.

Designing ArSL for Education

The first manifestation of the modern view behind the ArSL project can be found in the assertions that it will be or is based on sound scientific principles. Such assertions have been made time and again in the process of its development. Their rhetoric seeks to legitimize the project as progressive, thus desirable. In this section, I assess some of the

choices ArSL developers made among other alternatives. Five points will be considered here: 1) the creation of an artificial sign language, 2) the desire to base this sign language on MSA, 3) the participants involved in the development of ArSL, 4) the process by which signs were chosen, and 5) the form of ArSL in terms of some of its linguistic features.

Creation of an artificial sign language and its basis on Modern Standard Arabic

In order to examine the first two points, which are related, regarding why an artificial sign language was created and why it was based on MSA, it would be informative to understand the communication problems ArSL developers sought to resolve. In 1980, CAMSA proposed a signed Arabic language for the education of deaf Arab children ("Recommendations of the Second Scientific Symposium," 1980b). This language, they said, would allow deaf Arab people to communicate with each other across national boundaries and to access television media. These justifications have remained persistently cited reasons for the development of ArSL since its inception. My observations at schools for deaf children in Jordan confirms their woeful situation, as do the government statistics of education levels of deaf Jordanians. The situation in other Arab countries may be even more dire. For instance, although Egypt has 113 deaf schools distributed throughout the country, the illiteracy rate of the Egyptian deaf population is 97% (World Federation of the Deaf, 2008). This is despite the fact that deaf Egyptian children spend 14 years (K-12) in school. The illiteracy rate of deaf children is slightly

lower in Morocco at 95%. This exists despite the fact that Morocco has 56 schools for deaf children. In both countries, deaf citizens have no access to higher education.

Statistics such as these underline the necessity of an overhaul in educational philosophies and practices of schools for deaf children in the Arab region. What are these educational approaches? In Jordan and Egypt, the educational approach used is "Total Communication," borrowed from a philosophy espoused in the United States in the 1970s, defined here as "all forms of communications are used. This includes natural gestures, sign language, manually-coded spoken languages, sign systems, mime, audition and speech" (ibid, p. 66). In Morocco, it is "Total Communication" and oralism, or speech. In response to a World Federation of the Deaf survey on the method of communication used at schools for the deaf, ten out of 13 Arab countries reported they used "Total Communication." Seven countries also reported oralism\. Arab teachers' knowledge of a sign language is likely to be very limited, as they do not receive any formal training in it.

In an interview with an Arabic newspaper in 2009, Tarek Al-Rayes, a deaf education specialist in Saudi Arabia, remarked on the inadequacy of existing teaching methods and emphasized the urgent need for reform. He criticized the current instructional methods used to teach deaf Arab children and described them as regrettably poor compared to those in European countries (Saber, 2009). He pointed out that Arab institutions for deaf people still engage in older methods of teaching used in the 1960s and 1970s that have since been proven ineffective. In the West, he said, new methods have been adopted, and similar improvements should also be made in Arab countries for

the purpose of easier transmission of information to deaf people. Among his recommendations was one to retool sign languages used in the region so that they included enough vocabulary to cover "all existing terminology"[47] (Saber, 2009, para. 3). In his estimation, current sign languages have a shortage in vocabulary that must be ameliorated if they are to be associated with a learned culture. He then said that he hoped, one day, to see Arab countries where deaf people are doctors, engineers, and pilots.

Although he does not say so explicitly, Al-Rayes blames oralism and Total Communication as examples of poor instructional methods in schools for deaf Arab children. Oralism has a long and checkered history in Europe, following a resolution at the World Congress of the Deaf in Milan in 1880 requiring it as the only method for teaching deaf children.[48] Total Communication become popular in the U.S. in the 1970s as a pedagogical approach to replace oralism by encouraging more use of other forms of communication to address an individual child's needs, including (though not always) sign language (Lane et al., 1996; Marschark & Spencer, 2005). However, this approach has failed to "significantly increase the levels of literacy or spoken language achievements by deaf children" (Marschark & Spencer, 2005, p. 12) because it did not address specifically how to teach basic skills such as reading and mathematics to young deaf children. Since the 1980s, deaf rights activists in the U.S. have fought for full recognition of ASL in schools and universities. Today, natural sign languages have become the basis for

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[47] Translated from Arabic.

[48] Chapter 3 discusses this Congress in more detail.

instruction and communication in many schools in the US and Europe (Mahshie, 1995; Padden, 2003).

In line with educational reform in the Western world, ArSL developers favor a manual mode of communication over speech/aural ones in educational settings. However, they have elected not to promote the natural sign languages of the Arab region, though CAMSA acknowledged these languages exist. Instead, they opted to create an artificial composite sign language believing that natural sign languages of the region had inadequate resources for conveying information needed for a modern society (Saber, 2009). What is meant by Al-Rayes' reference to the need for a sign language to refer to "all existing terminology"? What does Al-Rayes mean by "all existing terminology'? His point of comparison is with MSA. In essence, he wishes to expand the current sign languages so they match MSA in breadth of vocabulary. His statement that sign languages must be enriched in order to be associated with a culture reflects his belief that users of natural sign languages lack culture—at least Arabic culture—but if exposed to a language situation that parallels that of mainstream society, they could gain culture and, by consequence, respectable employment opportunities.

Al-Rayes is not alone in thinking that sign languages of the Arab region are lacking and in need of improvement. Supporters and developers of ArSL have often defended the importance of the project as a means of offering deaf Arab people improved quality of life and opportunities through a language that parallels MSA. In a statement released in advance of a press conference in Qatar in 2005, the Technical Committee of the ArSL's second dictionary installment stated that over 1,000 signs were selected from

different sign languages in order to "represent the words of the spoken language" (Al-Kayed, 2005, para. 15).[49] However, even this increase in vocabulary is not enough, they observed, because "ArSL is in need of a lot more signs in order that [ArSL] may be consistent with the spoken Arabic language" (ibid.).[50]

Several proponents of ArSL reiterated the need for a manual MSA for pedagogic purposes. Her Highness Sheikha Mozah of Qatar praised those who worked on unifying sign language for deaf Arab people "by means of sign communication which is the alternative to the spoken word through manual symbols which express and reveal feelings and senses and touch the heart and conscience" (Supreme Council for Family Affairs, 2007, p. D). She defended the goal of ArSL as a method that would allow deaf children to fully access MSA. Knowledge of MSA is key for learning. At the grammar guidebook workshop in 2009, Mozah Al-Qatari, the director of Qatari Cultural and Social Center for the Deaf for Women, praised the guidebook for its usefulness for deaf people, teachers, and specialists (Al-Raya, 2009). The existence of such a book could end many problems facing deaf people, in terms of linguistic enrichment and promoting communication between deaf and hearing people.

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[51] Translated from Arabic.

he thought, would assist those working with deaf people to better understand how deaf people think.

An artificial sign language by design would avoid these shortcomings by more closely following MSA, the respected language of mainstream society. Indeed, providing deaf Arab people with a language that maps directly on to the dominant spoken Arabic is reiterated time and again as most desirable by its proponents. It would allow deaf people to interact with mainstream society. Deaf people deal with hearing people on a regular basis, whether with family members, at work, or to receive services. While hearing children may learn the sign language of their parents, it is unlikely that grocers at the market or colleagues at work will be familiar with any signs.

ArSL proponents' decision to create an artificial sign language as a pedagogic tool has many predecessors. Reagan (1986) reviewed past attempts at developing artificial sign languages by comparing them to attempts at developing artificial spoken languages. Artificial spoken languages are often proposed to encourage "cross-cultural communication and a spirit of internationalism" (ibid, p. 219). The best example of such an effort, Esperanto, was developed as a means of fostering peace and international understanding. But creating artificial sign languages seem to derive from a different motivation which Reagan describes as: "a means to promote in deaf school children the acquisition of and competence in the dominant spoken language of a society" (ibid). Examples of this are the manual systems for English such as Signing Exact English.[52]

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[52] Manual codes are discussed in more detail later in this chapter and in Chapter 5.

Reagan considered the possibility that artificial sign languages could serve a role in developing countries where educators and policy makers face immense linguistic diversity and limited resources. This would make Arab countries prime candidates for an artificial sign language. In Chapter 3, I discussed the high degree of linguistic diversity in the Arab region, even within a single country. It would seem logical that Arab countries could pool together resources by assembling their Arab educators and policy makers. After all, Arab countries share MSA as a language, and they desire a parallel language situation for deaf people so that they may be able to communicate together across national boundaries and access pan-Arab television media.

Laitin (1992) explained that identifying a common language within a defined territory or language rationalization is often a desirable goal for government officials of multi-lingual nations. Drawing on Max Weber's work on how nation states modernize through standardization of calendars, weights, measures, and currency, Laitin explored how language uniformity in the legal system and in education allows for more effective administration and rule as it eliminates the redundant work of translation, streamlines official notices and records, and generally improves communication. Laitin cited France, Spain, Japan, and several African countries as formerly multi-lingual nations that have successfully implemented language rationalization policies. However, the ArSL project is unlike the examples Laitin discusses because it is a language rationalization effort that crosses political nation-state boundaries. The specified territory in the ArSL case is an enormous cultural pan-Arab "nation." Officials of pan-Arab organizations such as ALECSO, CAMSA, and LAS argue that by specifying ArSL as a common language

among deaf Arab people, they can avoid redundancy in training workshops and materials for interpreters and teachers and in television broadcasts for deaf people. The key implication of language rationalization pointed out by Laitin is that citizens would be able to enjoy a wide range of mobility opportunities within the specified territory if they were competent in a single language. ArSL can empower deaf people by increasing their opportunities for higher education and employment. It can also empower them by allowing them to mobilize politically in large numbers to voice their concerns and needs in sign language. The larger the group and the more legitimate they appear to mainstream society, the wider their reach and the greater their influence.

Participants involved on the ArSL project

Interestingly, not all Arab countries have participated in the development of ArSL. This brings us to the third point: the roster of participants involved in the development of ArSL. Some individual Arab countries did not send representatives to the workshops of the first and second installments of the dictionary, despite the fact that all Arab countries are members of the LAS and other pan-Arab governmental bodies that have backed the project. The invitation to attend the workshops was not closed off to any particular country. In fact, and especially in relation to the second installment of the ArSL dictionary, participation was open to all. Those attending the second workshop included teachers of deaf students, sign language interpreters, hearing specialists, administrators of schools for deaf children, government officials for special needs, and deputies of education ministries, as well as deaf individuals. The presence of government officials and deputies is significant as governments have “the power to legislate and the ability to

foster incentive structures (and disincentive structures) to enforce planning decisions" (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, p. 5). In other words, language planning decisions are most likely to be implemented with the authority and influence of policy makers, whose participation on this project was very prominent.

One obvious absence in these workshops is sign linguists who are familiar with sign languages and deaf communities of the area. However, it appears that the lack of participation of linguists in the ArSL project is not intentional. Rather, such expertise is scarce, if at all present, in the Arab region. Two previous cases of artificial manual codes, Signing Exact English and Gestuno (International Sign), likewise were developed without the participation of linguists, so their absence in the case of ArSL is typical.

Work on Signing Exact English started in 1969 with a working committee of five people that was eventually reduced to four after a political split in the group occurred (Gustason, 1990).[53] The original five individuals consisted of three deaf teachers of deaf children and two educational interpreters for deaf children. One of the deaf teachers, Gerilee Gustason, wrote on the committee's attempt to gain advice from linguists:

> In an attempt to make the development of new signs linguistically sound, a panel of linguists was convened with the assistance of the University of Redlands in California. This panel included Dr. William Stokoe, a pioneer researcher on American Sign Language (ASL). Information was sought in an open session concerning how to define the morphology of a signed word and the extent to which English words could and should be broken up to best represent their English morphemes… It must be kept in mind that at this time research on ASL had only just begun, and very little information was available yet on its grammar, morphology, structure, or principles. Accordingly, it probably should not be surprising that the

[53] Signed Exact English was called Seeing Essential English before David Anthony, the creator of the concept, split from the group to work on his own (Gustason, 1990).

> outcome of this panel discussion was a consensus among linguists that they could not really provide helpful advice on developing an English sign system and that the developers needed to "go by gut feelings." (ibid, p. 110)

Just as scant information was available on the grammar, morphology, and structure of the sign language used in the U.S. in 1969, little is known about the grammar of sign languages used in the Arab region. If there were any sign linguists familiar with signed languages of the region, their body of knowledge would be comparatively limited. To inform the project and especially the grammar guidebook, Semreen and Al-BinAli consulted the few available materials on sign languages of the Arab region and American and European references on the grammars of other sign languages. Reference to this material appears to make the development of ArSL more enlightened than just a "go by gut feelings" endeavor.

As for Gestuno, it was commissioned by the World Federation of the Deaf to provide deaf people a manual vocabulary to draw from when they meet at international conferences and other events (Rubino, 1975). The Unification of Signs Commission consisted of five people until one member passed away (Schein & Stewart, 1995). All five were deaf leaders, one each from Denmark, Great Britain, Italy, Russia, and United States. They worked on the dictionary over a period of two years by consulting dictionaries of national sign languages such as the Swedish and Finnish ones as well as depending on their own knowledge of their countries' national sign languages. In 1975, they revealed the final and revised version of the Gestuno dictionary. Both Signing Exact English and Gestuno were developed by a small and closed group of people with minimal

input from others outside the group. In comparison, organizers of ArSL have made its development much more open and participatory. Various parties who worked with deaf people as well as deaf people themselves were given the opportunity to lend their expertise and experience to the development of ArSL. They also had the opportunity to be involved in a project that concerned and affected them. Indeed, organizers of the ArSL project ambitiously assembled concerned parties of over 150 people from 18 countries for the second installment of the ArSL dictionary.

Process of selecting ArSL signs

This leads us to the fourth point with regard to the choices of the ArSL developers: the process by which participants decided on signs to be incorporated in the dictionary. CAMSA had originally intended for ArSL to be based on dictionaries of sign languages used within each Arab country. Instead, workshop participants decided they themselves should propose signs then vote on them. This is probably because at the time of the development workshops, several Arab countries including Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, had yet to publish a dictionary on their national sign language. Some countries such as Egypt and Iraq have no sign language dictionaries. Still, their representatives would be able to voice an opinion and partake in the process of developing ArSL by attending the workshop. This is unlike the development of Gestuno, a process which although meant to be international in spirit, was based on only a few European sign languages. Asian, African, and South American sign languages were conspicuously absent. In a way, the choice made by ArSL developers to decide on signs through suggestion and then voting by participants may be more democratic than the alternative

of depending solely on available published material or just one sign language of the region and expanding it.

Linguistic features of ArSL

Lastly, while participants suggested and voted on signs, the signs that made their way into the ArSL dictionary have some basic principles in common, for example, there are no initialized signs in ArSL. Initialized signs are signs that incorporate the manual alphabet of (usually) the first letter in the spoken word to which it corresponds. ASL, among other sign languages, depend on initialized signs for productive vocabulary growth. Because signs with this feature are deliberately linked to their spoken word translation, they often develop in school contexts. It may be possible that none were suggested for ArSL because none exist in the natural sign languages of the region. The low literacy levels among deaf people and the likelihood that their sign languages develop outside the domains of educational institutions and within social ones may explain the lack of signs that depend on the spelling of the spoken Arabic word. Avoiding initialized signs was one decision that was consciously made by the Gestuno Unification of Signs Commission (Magarotto, 1975). This is understandable considering that Gestuno was not meant to be based on any one spoken language. ArSL, on the other hand, is meant to be based on MSA, which may be why the authors of the grammar guidebook are considering the addition of initialized signs in future editions (Saber, 2009).

Interestingly, while ArSL was meant to be based on MSA, a preliminary review of the ArSL dictionary reveals that it is not entirely Arabic word-based. Some signs in ArSL correspond to concepts that do not necessarily match a specific word in Arabic. For

example, the ArSL dictionary entry “dry battery” (dry cell battery) consists of two words in Arabic—“dry” and “battery”—but there is one ArSL sign for the concept as a whole as opposed to two signs, one that corresponds to each Arabic word. Also, the concept “good-bye” appears twice in the dictionary, as there are two different phrases in Arabic that express it. However, the signs for the two entries are the same. A third example is the word *ta’liq* in Arabic that has multiple meanings—“to hang something,” “to temporarily suspend something,” and “to comment on a news event”—but these concepts each have signs as opposed to forcing one sign to correspond to the Arabic word. These examples indicate that ArSL is not exclusively Arabic word-based. Thorough research of the ArSL dictionary is required to confirm this assessment, but if it stands, then ArSL developers may have ended up creating an artificial sign language vocabulary that has many elements that are not MSA.

However, there is some indication that ArSL is continuously undergoing change in order to more closely parallel MSA. Along with the suggestion to add initialized signs, derivations/inflections have also been added to the grammar guidebook (Al-Arab, 2009a). Grammatical inflections in spoken English include the suffixes “s” for plural and “ing” for present continuous verbs; such inflections exist in Arabic as well. Adding such inflections to signs signal a shift in how ArSL signs match up to MSA words, as its proponents intended.

Creating an artificial sign language that is based on MSA would provide deaf people with a language situation paralleling that of the mainstream, hearing population. It would also work to improve literacy rates among deaf school children by creating

linguistic correspondence between the ArSL sign and written MSA. The open, inclusive format of participation in the development process as well as the voting mechanism ensured that parties of various backgrounds had a chance to contribute their expertise and experience to a product that concerned them. The actual form that ArSL took shows rudimentary structure, although it may not entirely be a sign-to-word system as its proponents planned. There is evidence that it is headed in the intended direction. In addition to improving education for deaf Arab children, ArSL was publicized on the international stage as a tool for the promotion and protection of deaf Arab people's human rights.

ArSL as a Human Right

Disabled people have enjoyed substantial positive attention since the start of the 21st century. The international community, through the United Nations and its specialized bodies, have worked on drafting and adopting a convention that would promote and protect the rights and dignity of persons with disability. Arab governments and pan-Arab organizations have actively sought measures to confirm their support of the principles of this convention, with most Arab countries agreeing to sign the convention. Among the convention's articles are those that endorse the use of sign language to facilitate deaf people's learning. Here, Arab parties advocated ArSL as a communicative and social means to advance the lives of deaf Arab people. In the following section, I detail Arab activities in empowering disabled people through their support of the role of ArSL as a human rights tool.

In 2001, the United Nations General Assembly was asked by Mexico to establish an Ad Hoc Committee to draft an international and comprehensive convention that promotes and protects the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities (United Nations Enable, n.d.c). In anticipation of this convention and "with a view to keeping abreast of international developments relating to disability" (Administration of the Technical Secretariat of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, 2004, para. 1), a conference was organized by LAS, the Arab Organization of Disabled People (AODP), and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) in Beirut, Lebanon in October 2002 titled "Disability Conditions in the Arab World: Towards an Arab Decade on Disability" (United Nations Enable, n.d.a). Along with CAMSA, conference members in attendance were ministry officials, diplomatic representatives, experts as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations for disabled people. Over 60% of participants were disabled (Administration of the Technical Secretariat, 2004). Together, they declared the years 2004-2013 as the Arab Decade of Disabled Persons.[54] Several themes were laid out that would mark this decade in promoting the rights and equal opportunities for disabled people including legislation, health care, education, employment, and media and social consciousness-raising. Designation of this decade would provide the Arab region with a "framework to promote cooperation and action to ensure that Arab persons with disabilities would be more fully

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[54] Some sources cite the Arab Decade of Disabled Persons to be the years 2003-2012 (United Nations Enable, n.d.a; Kabbara, 2003). Similar "Decades" focusing on improving the affairs of disabled persons have been established for the African region as well as for Asia and the Pacific.

integrated into society and could take charge of their lives" (United Nations Enable, n.d.a, para. 1). For the next ten years, Arab countries aspired to work together to empower disabled persons by increasing their access to services and facilitate their self-reliance through improved education and employment opportunities.

Concerning deaf people in particular, the conference set two concrete goals to be implemented during the Arab Decade of Disabled Persons (Kabbara, 2003). First and in order to guarantee equal opportunities in education, the conference encouraged the continuation of the unification of signs within the science curricula in order to facilitate teaching deaf students. At this point in time, the first installment of the ArSL dictionary was released, but more terms were needed to facilitate learning such that signs were needed to correspond to scientific concepts. Such sign entries are indeed found in the second installment of the dictionary such as "antibiotic," "blood circulation," and "vitamin". Second, the conference called for the use of sign language in visual media to guarantee deaf people's access to information (Kabbara, 2003). This would be a means to raise deaf people's social consciousness such that they would become informed citizens and able to participate in society by representing themselves and making their viewpoints known and taken into consideration. Al Jazeera had just voluntarily launched its sign interpreted broadcast in ArSL, and other stations were encouraged to follow suit as well.

The conference also stressed the need for Arab countries to participate in the discussions on the drafting of the UN convention relating to disabled persons. This was reasserted at an Arab summit held in Bahrain in March 2003 (United Nations Enable, 2003). The Manama Declaration called on Arab States

> to sign the international convention on disability and to adhere to the concept of the rights of disabled persons as an inseparable part of human rights and the notion that no discussion or decision relating to disability must take place without the participation of those primarily concerned (Administration of the Technical Secretariat of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, 2004, para. 13).

Arab countries were adamant about partaking in an international effort concerning the welfare of disabled people, and with 60% of participants being disabled at the conference in Beirut, they were already establishing the secured place of disabled people in discussions that concerned them. Starting in 2002, the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee materialized, held several sessions for its regional representatives to discuss the wording of the convention. Civil society organizations, national human rights institutions, and inter-governmental organizations were invited to attend these sessions and were consulted. At the fourth session in 2004, CAMSA's Administration of the Technical Secretariat presented a summary of Arab countries' activities thus far. On issues relating to deaf people, they reported that the ArSL dictionary with 1500 signs had been published. They noted that new vocabulary would be added to the ArSL dictionary to cover "various aspects of life" (ibid., para. 8) in order to fully integrate deaf people into the community. They added that the dictionary had been adopted by all Arab States and is used by Arab satellite television broadcasting stations.[55] The General Secretariat of

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[55] The extent to which Arab States and Arab satellite stations have adopted the ArSL dictionary requires further research. Al Jazeera remains the major player in broadcasting ArSL with some national television stations leaving the choice to the interpreter, such as in Saudi Arabia. In the Saudi instance, some interpreters use a mix of ArSL with the local sign language as they are not fluent in ArSL (personal communication, H. Al-Showaier, January 27, 2009).

CAMSA also organized several workshops to train sign-language interpreters. These were all measures for the promotion and protection of deaf Arab people's human rights.

After eight sessions on 13 December 2006, the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee announced it had a final draft of the convention ready (United Nations Enable, n.d.d). The General Assembly then adopted it by consensus and named it the "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol". The negotiation process leading up to the adoption of the convention was the quickest of any convention in United Nations history. It also set a record for the unprecedented levels of participation of civil society organizations. As of 30 March 2007, countries could sign the convention at the UN Headquarters in New York. To date, 16 Arab countries have signed the "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities".[56] That this convention is a legally binding treaty on its signatories makes its contents influential and important, as the international community holds member countries accountable for their actions, or lack thereof, through pressure.

The following sections from the convention paid specific attention to deaf people and their sign languages (United Nations Enable, n.d.c):

- Article 9: Accessibility
    - Paragraph 2 (e). To provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public; (p. 9)
- Article 21: Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information

[56] Arab countries that have yet to sign the convention are Djibouti, Iraq, Kuwait, Mauritania, Palestine and Somalia (United Nations Enable, n.d.b).

    - (e). Recognizing and promoting the use of sign languages. (p. 15)

- Article 24: Education

    - Paragraph 3 (b). Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community; (p. 17)

    - Paragraph 3 (c). Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular of children, who are blind, deaf or deaf-blind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual and in environments which maximize academic and social development. (p. 17)

    - Paragraph 4. In order to help ensure the realization of this right, State Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education. Such training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, educational techniques, and materials to support persons with disabilities. (p.17)

Arab signatories to the convention can proudly boast that with their assiduous efforts in advancing ArSL they are able meet the convention's stipulations of recognizing and promoting a sign language in education and other walks of life. They would also be able to provide confirmation of their commitment through certification for ArSL interpreters and ArSL training for teachers of deaf children. This would mark a significant change from the contemporary situation where teachers and interpreters are largely ill equipped to perform their duties, as the next section in this chapter examines. Teachers and interpreters who used to struggle to convey concepts to students could now rely on ArSL to fulfill the language gap that existed before. In advocating ArSL, Semreen expressed his frustration as an interpreter lacking adequate methods of communicating with deaf Arab

people (Al-Raya, 2009). He said that many Arabic words have no counterpart in signs, which leads an interpreter feeling discouraged that they are so constrained in relaying information to deaf people. ArSL would allow Arab countries to abandon ineffective communicative practices with deaf people and replace them with a new, fresh, and promising approach.

Among the manifold advantages of improved education and literacy and increased access is the sense of agency and dignity that it endows (Refell & McKee, 2009). Particularly notable about the convention is that it celebrated a "paradigm shift" in attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities (United Nations Enable, n.d.c). Persons with disabilities were no longer pitied objects in need of charity, protection, and medical treatment. They would instead be regarded as proud subjects with equal rights, capable of making free and informed decisions, in control of their own lives, and would become active members of society. To ArSL proponents, this transition from regarding deaf people as welfare cases to equal, contributing citizens is a progressive step that allows them to keep pace with international efforts to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities.

ArSL, Pan-Arab Nationalism, and Modernization

ArSL was presented on the international stage as a human rights tool. It would improve deaf Arab people’s levels of education, provide them with increased opportunities, and allow them to integrate with society. These advantages were highlighted at the inauguration ceremony of the second installment of the ArSL

dictionary by one of the keynote speakers, Secretary-General of the LAS Amr Moussa.[57] A transcript of Moussa's speech serves as an introduction to the second installment of the ArSL dictionary, wherein he articulated the benefits of a pan-Arab sign language for deaf people:

> The League of Arab States has always given considerable attention to sign language and its enrichment. This effort is based on the conviction of the necessity of reaching a unified Arab sign language.
>
> While people in the Arab world have many different characteristics, and distinct accents, they share a distinguished historical and cultural heritage, with the Arabic language as its primary tool. If the Arab people are capable of communicating through one language then those amongst them who need to communicate through sign language should be entitled to share one sign language.
>
> This language should ensure their effective integration into all spheres of activities in the Arab world, their appreciation of Arab culture, and help develop their knowledge. This right has been affirmed by a number of Arab resolutions, especially "The Arab Decade for Disabled People 2004-2013," endorsed by the 16th Arab Summit in Tunisia in May 2004. This document addresses issues of concern to disabled people and individuals with special needs, including their education, rehabilitation, job opportunities, health and entertainment. It also stipulates that they are entitled to a dignified life and should be integrated into society. (Supreme Council of Family Affairs, 2007, p. F)

Moussa framed the ArSL project as a human rights effort that would allow deaf Arab people to integrate with mainstream society and provide improved opportunities in education, health, jobs, and even entertainment. Some of these advantages were explored earlier in this chapter, such as in the discussion on language rationalization. What Moussa

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[57] Moussa's presence is noteworthy. As the head of the LAS, he is an esteemed public figure and highly regarded by the Arab public. In 2001, Time magazine described him as "perhaps the most adored public servant in the Arab world" (Time, 2001). His support of ArSL lends enormous credibility to the project.

introduced in his comments is confirmation of the intricate relationship between Arab nationalism and MSA in that the shared language is a tool that unites Arab people in their historical and cultural heritage and through which they can appreciate this heritage. It is through the Arabic language that Arab people can know themselves. He intimates that as deaf Arab people do not have a shared sign language they are historically and culturally fragmented, unable to appreciate their culture, deprived of knowing their heritage and, in turn, of having an identity. The two defining characteristics of ArSL—its pan-Arab nature and its alignment with MSA—would provide salvation and bring about change and progress.

An understanding of the significance and place of the Arabic language to Arab society clarifies the desire for a unified sign language. In a discussion on diglossia in Chapter 3, I attributed MSA's position of prestige to its direct lineage from the Classical Arabic of the Qur'an. This Arabic was a dialect spoken by the tribe of Quraysh to which the prophet Mohammed belonged, but it was the language of one tribe among many in the Arabian Desert. How did it come to define a cultural nation as Moussa described it?[58]

Benedict Anderson (1983) traced a history beginning with the sacred language and written script of the Qur'an to the present-day expression of an Islamic nation. The thread through history could be envisioned as a shift from conceptions of antiquity

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[58] Suleiman (2003) differentiated between two types of nations: civic/political and ethnic/cultural. In the former, the state with a well-defined territory gives birth to a national consciousness and then a nation. The latter is characterized by notions of common descent, culture, and traditions such that national consciousness and a nation is formed before and is the basis of a politico-legal entity of a state. Here, Moussa referred to an Arab nation that is cultural and pan-Arab, although political Arab nationalism also exists within sovereign Arab states.

towards imaginings of community. Here, emphasis is put on the role of the Qur'an in uniting people of different tongues, because it was written and read in Arabic and was untranslatable. The medium of a scared language provides a space for imaging an entity, or community, of "like me" with others sharing similar beliefs and behaviors even when they were not close in proximity. Implicit in Anderson's writing is that pre-Islam, people speaking and writing Arabic lived in close proximity to each other but were unable to imagine "others" similar to them living outside of their physical presence. After all, the Arabian Desert was vast and uncompromising, making physical contact between members of different tribes irregular.

While the Anderson's description of the desert is acknowledged, imaginings of community were not absent in the region prior to Islamic sacred text. Albert Hourani (1983) noted that the Arabic language was a unifying force even before the rise of the Islamic dynasty. He wrote,

> That those who speak Arabic form a "nation", and that this nation should be independent and united, are beliefs, which only became articulate and acquired political strength during the [twentieth] century. As far back in history as we can see them, the Arabs have always been exceptionally conscious of their language and proud of it, and in pre-Islamic Arabia they possessed a kind of "racial" feeling, a sense that, beyond the conflicts of tribes and families, there was a unity which joined together all who spoke Arabic and could claim descent from the tribes of Arabia. (p. 260)

This consciousness of the language and appreciation of it drew "like me" boundaries encircling those with a Semitic linguistic background. This realm is distinct from and smaller than Anderson's notion of an Islamic community that is united by sacred text, as many of those within the Islamic nation do not speak Arabic, such as Persian people who

speak Farsi. To Hourani, the Arabic language is paradigmatic in mediating imaginings of Arab nationhood. Similar to the language situation in the Arab region today, there were several dialects among the pre-Islamic tribes in the Arabian peninsula. But through the oral tradition of poetry, there was a dialect that emerged as a *lingua franca*.

It is not known how or when this art of poetry started among the Arabs, but those poems that have been passed on to us today pre-date the birth of Islam by a century (Salloum, 2004). The complexity of this poetry, however, suggests a long history that produced a highly articulate language. Pre-Islamic bards could draw on a vast vocabulary, "for any object found in their barren and inhospitable land, the Arabs had countless names" (ibid., p. 102). It is said that while most languages have one word to describe an object, Arabic has hundreds such as "eight hundred words for 'sword,' five hundred for 'lion,' two hundred for 'snake,' and so on" (Chejne, 1965, p. 453). This language with its depository of synonyms was amenable to rhyming verses, and bards were found everywhere such that poetry was the expression of the people and not only the privileged few, as in other societies. Bards would specialize in one of several different genres of poetry, among them *fakhr* (pride), *ghazal* (love stanzas), *hija'* (satire reviling one's enemies), *madh* (praise), and *marthiya* (elegy). Salloum (2004) described how this poetry bonded tribes across the desert,

> In this poetic era, when a family produced a lyricist, all the surrounding tribes would be invited to a great feast. Dancing and singing would fill the encampment and men would congratulate each other on this joyous event. It was a time of endless joy for a poet satirized the tribe's enemies, defended the honour of the tribe and perpetuated their glorious deeds, thereby establishing their fame forever. (p. 102)

Poetry provided an opportunity not only for entertainment but also for social contact between tribes of the Arabian desert. Under happy circumstances, they would congregate to appreciate a form of performance that reflected their beliefs, values, and achievements. Anwar Chejne (1965) also explained how the Arabic language through the medium of oral poetry played an important role in forming the basis of an Arab nation,

> It was this poetry that seemed to occupy not only an important place among several tribes, but served as the *koiné* and factor of unity among them. That poetry was abundant and rich, and contained the artistic, intellectual and spiritual expression of the Arabs, and to which they owed their awareness of constituting a people. Its importance is attested by the fact that the pre-Islamic poet occupied an enviable position of influence among members of his tribes through the power of his highly rhythmical and forceful poetry. (p. 450)

Poetry was a unifying agent among the tribes, as they could identify themselves in it despite their differences, and the poets held influential positions in society. In the years prior to the introduction of Islam, seven of these esteemed poets had their odes, or *Mu'allaqat* ("Suspended Ones"), hung on the holy shrine of Mecca for all to enjoy at a yearly fair. The most celebrated of the seven is Imru' Al-Qais of the Banu Kinda tribe. Although he is better known for his passionate love stanzas, his verses also contained words of wisdom such as on one's conviction: "If a man cannot value the words of his tongue,/How can he treasure anything under the sun?" (Salloum, 2004, p. 103). The poets were able to emphasize and amplify those aspects of their customs that they deemed noble, that was reflective of their identity, and shaped the spirit of Arabness for future generations.

The aesthetic, intellectual, and nationalist appreciation of pre-Islamic poetry has not been relegated to a bygone era. This poetry is still taught in Arab high schools as a marker of the correct and beautiful expression of the Arabic language. It also set standards of proper conduct for Arab generations, as it encapsulates much of Arab tradition, past and present, in terms of extolling virtues of tribal and family honor, courage, pride, generosity, and so on. Arab poets have since sought to emulate pre-Islamic poetry. The intricate grammar, idioms, and the stylistic requirements of pre-Islamic poetry and present colloquialisms have ensured that their efforts in vain. If literary Arabic is so complex, why did it not branch out into several literary languages, as was the case with Latin?

The Qur'an preserved the unity of the Arabic language. The spread of Islam disseminated Arabic, a local dialect from the Arabian peninsula, such that it became and remains one of the world's most widely used languages. The Qur'an is held as the transcript of God's words and constitutes a miracle to Muslims. The sacred text cemented Arabic's supremacy, as it was a divine language, especially as Muslims believe that it is sacrilegious to translate the Qur'an into other languages. While a good Muslim does not need to understand Arabic to enter heaven in the afterlife, there are heavenly rewards in the reading and recitation of the Qur'an. But for non-Arabic speaking Muslims like Berber, Pashto, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Javanese, and Malay people, Arabic is a Latin "among whom the devout and the religious leaders are expected to know and be able to recite the text of the Qur'an in the original" (Chejne, 1965, p. 447). This is not so for literate Arab Muslims, who take pride in knowing and understanding the language of the

Qur'an and God.

Reverence for Arabic was not only by the pious Muslim. At the height of the Islamic Empire in the ninth and tenth centuries, Arabic literary output was substantial. The language became "the medium of intellectual expression" (ibid., p. 456) as scholars praised its "clarity, expressiveness, flexibility, richness and other endowments" (ibid.). It demonstrated great versatility for expressing religious and scientific concepts of the day. To be literate in Arabic was to be a cultured person who dedicated one's life to knowledge. As one 11th century Islamic scholar, Tha'labi, put it,

> When the Almighty ennobled and exalted the Arabic language…He decreed for its safeguarding and treasuring a select people…who befriended the notebooks, the bookcase, and the inkstand for its acquisition; and who extend themselves systemizing its rules, and dedicated their life to immortalizing its books. (as cited in Chejne, 1965, p. 457)

It was a period of cultural greatness, but it did not remain magnificent. The Arab people went through a dark period of intellectual and linguistic stagnation in the 16th century and deep decline by the end of the 18th century.

The Arab Awakening, or Renaissance, began in the 19th century and intellectuals agreed that in order to lift the Arab nation from their slump, they had to revive the Arabic language, as "it was the faithful register of Arab cultural achievement" (Chejne, 1965, p. 458). After all, Arabic represented a period of historical greatness and was a source of pride and wisdom. They found that nationalism and language went hand-in-hand,

> The language is the most precious treasure our forefathers left us. It lived with the ancestors and outlived them. It had to contend with difficulties and proved to be stronger than they were. Time mocked it but it did not exhaust itself. Events had overtaxed it, but it was not overcome. It is the

> soul of the Arabs. It puts on a shirt when their bodies are smitten. It spreads whenever their records fold up. Their very life was protected by it; and their traditions were preserved in it. It is the homeland, nationalism, life and the *esprit de corps*. (Al-Hakim, as cited in Chejne, 1965, p. 463)

Language as a cement for nationalism is not unique to Arab society. Language policies in Europe, Asia, and Africa have sought to unify multi-lingual countries, especially as nationalism can be seen as a response to efficient administration and, hence, modernization (Laitin, 1992; Fishman, 1971). Arab intellectuals were indeed confronted with the controversial task of making Arabic suitable for modern times. In order to keep up with modern science, they had to translate European texts, but the Arabic language had no parallel for modern concepts such as scientific and technical terms. Classical Arabic of pre-Islamic poetry and the Qur'an remained the foundation of linguistic expansion through derivation. Although foreign terms were also borrowed, the practice was frowned upon and restricted. Arab nationalists argued against borrowing to safeguard Arab people and their nationalism from linguistic and cultural imperialism. Thus, MSA evolved by conforming to classical Arabic in many ways and has become the standard language of Arab people across the Arab region.

Today, despite Arabic's conservatism in adhering to an ancient form of the language, it is nonetheless regarded as a contemporary language that adjusts to evolving times, as God's words are eternal. It is a reservoir of knowledge and wisdom that is passed on from one generation to the next. It guides Arab people in conducting their daily business. It unites them and is the cornerstone of nationalism. As one Arab nationalist said, "Language is the model that represents the long standing nobility of the community.

It is the guide pointing to the extent of its civilization and progress" (Al-Jundi, as cited in Chejne, 1965, p. 463). Whether or not Arabic's pre-Islamic poetic splendor and its divinity are appreciated, these noble characteristics constitute tangible realities to its literate speakers today.

The esteemed place of the pre-Islamic poet, the beauty and rationality of the poems, and the role the poetic expression plays in unifying a people resonate in Johann Gottfried von Herder's eighteenth century work on German oral tradition. A German Enlightenment philosopher, Herder found that poetry and folk songs were highly immediate forms of expression that allowed people to make their inner thoughts and feelings best known and understood (Bauman & Briggs, 2003). To Herder, poetry was the language of feelings through which we know the world around us,

> The whole universe with its movements and forms is for the outward intuition of man…Thus, what flows in upon him from without, according as he feels it and impresses his own feeling upon it, forms the genius of his poetry in its original elements. (Herder, 1833 [1782], p.6)

Poetry, as the collective expression of the people and their soul, was a storehouse of their culture, their "teachings and history, law and morality, delight, joy and comfort" (as cited in Bauman & Briggs, 2003, p. 176). When this poetry is learned by the people, remembered, and passed on it becomes an oral tradition that serves as a basis for cultural continuity and the formation of a nation, an imagining of a "like me" entity, as Herder wrote,

> Has a nationality anything more precious than the language of its fathers? In this language dwell its whole world of tradition, history, religion and principles of life, its whole heart and soul. (as cited in Bauman & Briggs, 2003, p. 170)

Thus, Herder, like Arab nationalists, celebrated feelings and passion, valorized poetry and tradition as the spirit and cultural archive of the people, and located in language the foundation for national identity and cohesion.[59] This ideological standpoint makes language modern by revitalizing its connection with tradition and establishing its agency as a unifying force (Bauman & Briggs, 2003).

Contextualizing the role and place of Arabic for its speakers illuminates the drive behind the ArSL project; the desire for a sign language that maps on to and is a manual code for Arabic is unsurprising in light of the spoken language's value in Arab society. ArSL would not only facilitate reading and writing in Arabic and increase deaf Arab people's awareness of current events through access of pan-Arab news programming, but would enculturate deaf Arab people and allow them to be familiar with their heritage. Their progress is dependent on their knowledge of a language that is divine and replete with wisdom and knowledge. Their integration with mainstream society is established not only through improved opportunities that come with higher levels of education; they would also become constituents of the Arab nation by default of their knowledge of the Arabic language, albeit through a manual form of it. It is access to this Arabic, with all its glory, that Moussa and other ArSL proponents feel is a human right for deaf Arab people. In short, ArSL could be seen as a modernization project with an eye on the past.

Other Enlightenment thinkers such as Francis Bacon and John Locke would spurn

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[59] One major point of divergence between Herder's ideology of language and that of Arab nationalists is that Herder esteemed the vernacular of the common people. Arab nationalists, on the other hand, shun the vernacular as a bastardized form of the divine classical Arabic language.

the idea that a language so intricately connected with tradition, history, and society could also be modern and a medium for the pursuit of truth and progress. Like Herder, they sought to trace knowledge through thoughts, or what Locke called "ideas," and experiences. Unlike Herder, they found language as a social construction to be an indirect and inefficient medium for understanding the senses. It was deemed unreliable for conveying the sensory experience, as it is reflexive; a speaker's own character and social background stand in the way of obtaining scientific and rational information (Bauman & Briggs, 2003). As a remedy, language should be disassociated from social positions, interests, and history. A modern language, as they would have it, is a pure one that would allow the mind to connect more directly to nature. Locke (1849 [1690]) listed several ways words are abused by people, one of which is through stylistic speech:

> [I]f we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheats: and therefore, however laudable or allowable oratory may render them in harangues and popular address, they are certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided; and, where truth and knowledge are concerned, cannot but be thought a great fault either of the language or person that makes use of them. (p. 370)

Here, words ought to be anti-rhetorical, or neutral, plain, and simple. Thus, Locke frowned on poetry, which was an excess of language and was "simply referential redundancy" (Bauman & Briggs, 2003, p. 46), and advocated for its discontinued use in schools (Locke, 1892 [1693]). This contrasts greatly with Arab people's pride in their slew of synonyms, their ongoing study and emulation of ancient poetry, and their search

for wisdom and knowledge in oral tradition and a classical text, the Qur'an.

Tradition like poetry has no place in Lockean language ideology. Tradition, Locke explained, is constituted of a chain of testimonies in which every link is one step further removed from the experience, the event, the truth, or knowledge. As evidence, tradition made for weak proof. He wrote,

> The being and existence of the thing itself, is what I call "the original truth". A credible man vouching his knowledge of it, is a good proof: but if another equally credible, do witness it from his report, the testimony is weaker; and a third that attests from hearsay of an hearsay, is yet less considerable. So that in traditional truths, each remove weakens the force of the proof: and the more hands the tradition has successively passed through, the less strength and evidence does it receive from them. (Locke, 1849 [1690], p. 507)

Although contemporaries of the original voucher may or may not find credibility in his words, people reciting the oral tradition several hundred years later would take these words as unquestionably true because they withstood the test of time and were recited by several people since. Locke does not discard with history entirely and does find value in records of antiquity, but he is suspicious of oral tradition: "Passion, interest, inadvertency, mistake of his meaning, and a thousand odd reasons…may make one man quote another man's words or meaning wrong" (ibid, p. 508). To avoid the consequences of the misuse of language and to make it modern, Locke advocated a break with the past and tradition so as to purify language from its connections to society.

Locke is recognized for laying the foundation for the modern study of language, and his ideology of language has since been considered common sense and taken for granted (Bauman & Briggs, 2003). Of Locke's legacy is distrust in oral tradition as

history, which permeates the works of philosophers, historians, and other social scientists even in academic institutions today (Grele, 1998). This dominant ideology discredits Arab people's esteem of their language and its elevated place in their society's past and future. It would not view the development of the ArSL project that is based on a traditional language as a process towards modernization or as a progressive effort, and may even argue that rather than empowering and liberating deaf Arab people it oppresses them by tying them down with the bonds of tradition. Tradition, after all, is the antithesis of modernity.

Several contemporary authors writing on modernity would disagree with a conception of modernity that is universal (Bauman & Briggs, 2003; Gaonkar, 2001, Taylor, 1995). They cite modernity as a certain set of ideologies and practices that were conceived in the West during the Enlightenment era and that with Western colonialism and domination, these ideologies and practices were set as ideals that the rest of the world would be measured against and which they should strive to and would eventually attain (Bauman & Briggs, 2003; Gaonkar, 2001). Modernity, with its rational and liberating orientation, would allow traditional people the chance to improve their lives regardless of what culture they were from. Charles Taylor (1995) expands on this culture-neutral conception of modernity, which he calls "acultural,"

> An example of an acultural theory, indeed a paradigm case, would be one that conceives of modernity as the growth of reason, defined in various ways: as the growth of scientific consciousness, or the development of a secular outlook, or the rise of instrumental rationality, or an ever-clearer distinction between fact-finding and evaluation… modernity is conceived as a set of transformations that any and every culture can go through—and all will probably be forced to undergo. (p. 24)

In the case of Arab people and their regard of the Arabic language, an acultural theory of modernity foresees them becoming more rational in that they would embrace scientific reasoning. Over time, they would surely come to realize that tradition is constraining, that religious belief is founded on a leap in judgment, and they would modernize their language by breaking away from pre-Islamic poetry and the Qur'an.

These contemporary writers argue that an acultural theory of modernity is ethnocentric and advocate pluralizing the term such that there are several modernities. A "cultural theory" of modernity situates the Western modernity in context to its culture, such that transformations that took place in the West during and since the Enlightenment era can be understood as "the rise of a new culture" (Taylor, 1995, p. 24) that shed old customs and beliefs. Gaonkar (2001) suggested that alternative modernities may be explored not by understanding how societies "break with the past" (p. 11), for many if not most do not, but by asking with what attitude they question the present, for they all do question it.

Indeed, Gaonkar observed how the West spread its modernity all over the world "not only in terms of cultural forms, social practices, and institutional arrangements, but also as a form of discourse that interrogates the present" (p. 14), such that every culture considers itself modern and negotiates how to remain so in changing times. Gaonkar (2001) and Taylor (2001) explained how this process of negotiation seeks to accommodate recent innovations and take on new practices but remain continuous with the past. This is instead of wholly taking on Western forms of modernity, which would

too closely resemble imperialism. Through creative adaptation, different cultures draw on the resources of their own tradition to produce different modernities, since traditions vary from one culture to another. They creatively adapt not only to passively cope with changes but to actively "rise to meet [modernity], negotiate it, and appropriate it in their own fashion" (Gaonkar, 2001, p. 21).

I posit that the development of ArSL is in response to pan-Arab organizations' questioning of the present state of deaf Arab people. In a changing world where disabled people are increasingly recognized as equal citizens especially in Western societies, Arab health and educational governmental bodies grappled with how to improve the lives of those who have been traditionally cast aside if not oppressed in their own society. With regard to deaf people, the main difference between them and their hearing peers is a communicative one. The modern mode of communication with deaf people was decidedly manual, after oralism had failed to produce favorable results in the West and at home. But as to the language itself, Arab officials felt that Arabic reigned supreme in all its cultural and intellectual offerings and nothing short of modeling it manually would provide deaf Arab people equal citizenship. As such, the ArSL case is a site for studying how pan-Arab society culturally adapted to modernity by appropriating deaf rights in their own fashion, one that is continuous with the past and tradition.

Conclusion

This chapter presented several motivations for the development of ArSL. It would give deaf Arab people signs for concepts not found in their local sign languages and the ability to discuss and learn a wider range of subjects and improving their levels of

education. Higher levels of education would enhance Arab deaf people's quality of life by providing them with increased employment opportunities. ArSL would also empower them to mobilize politically, socially, and culturally in larger numbers across Arab countries. As active members of society, deaf Arab people would no longer be considered welfare cases and their dignity would be preserved. I also argue that ArSL would allow them to become Arab in the sense that they will know the Arabic language and unite with other Arab people by sharing this one common denominator. Knowledge of Arabic would also provide insight to their heritage and traditions, without which, they could not know the wisdom of their forefathers and the principles of life. ArSL is a move forward, a tool for empowerment, and a modern achievement. It is so in theory, at least, for we have yet to systematically observe and evaluate its use and outcomes. In practice, it is uncertain to what extent ArSL would be utilized, as there are organizations and individuals who have been actively campaigning to halt its development, use, and dissemination. The controversial nature of ArSL is addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: ArSL as Oppression

Introduction

Proponents and developers of ArSL have largely depicted their project as "a great success" for deaf people's rights. Secretary-General of the LAS Amr Moussa pronounced ArSL as an enterprise favorable to deaf people:

> Within the framework of implementing the "Arab Decade for Disabled People," the first edition of Arab sign language has already been accomplished. This well-received effort was considered a great success in enhancing communication using sign language for the disabled in the Arab world. (Supreme Council for Family Affairs, 2007, p. F)

But many deaf people, sign language interpreters, and educators would adamantly disagree. They have voiced criticism of the ideals of the ArSL project in their deaf communities, on online forums, in listservs for deaf Arab people, in newspaper opinion pieces, in conference presentations, and on local television programs.[60] They assert the opposite of the proponents, that deaf communities throughout the Arab region have not embraced, but in fact, have resisted their efforts to replace local sign languages with ArSL, indeed they have refused to support it. A man from Yemen described his reasons for this resistance in his country:

> I give you the good news, thanks be to God, that we do not use the unified dictionary, and we preserve the local signs in all regions. We do have a unified Yemeni Sign Language dictionary that is taught in schools for the deaf here in Yemen, but we do not use these [unified Yemeni] signs in our daily lives. The differences between signs from one part of our dear Yemen and another are slight, but how beautiful it is to recognize what region a person is from through their signs… As for Al Jazeera, it certainly

[60] Most of these channels require adequate literacy levels for participation, which may affect the extent to which many deaf Arab people are able to voice their views.

> has united a lot of Arab people and not just deaf people. But I don't think it's a good idea that its interpreters are forcing their signs on all deaf people on the pretense that deaf people understand the Al Jazeera channel. There is no use in monopolizing, for the result is very clear, and I will be greatly dismayed if deaf people stopped watching the channel because it does not respect their most basic rights.[61] (name withheld for privacy, personal communication, March 9, 2010)

Here, we get a glimpse at the extent of the diversity of signs within a single Arab country. The fact that there is a "unified Yemeni dictionary" indicates that there are regional variations within the country, and that efforts have been made to combine them into a national sign language. Instead of recognizing the variation as a detriment he expresses appreciation for this diversity, which he perceives as threatened by ArSL and the efforts of Al Jazeera interpreters to promote its use. Contrary to the exhortations of ArSL proponents, this Yemeni man has declared ArSL and its use on the Al Jazeera channel as not only unwanted, but explicitly, a violation of deaf people's "most basic rights."

From reports delivered after workshops and meetings, it is clear that resistance to ArSL is not acknowledged by developers of ArSL. While the topic of a pan-Arab sign language has been addressed on Al Jazeera news programming, opposition to the project is not mentioned. Perhaps this should be seen as anomalous because Al Jazeera prides itself in its ability to present "the view and the opposite view," in its pursuit of unconventional reportage in a region mired in censorship.[62] The absence of the opposite view on this particular subject leaves the impression that Al Jazeera is strongly a

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[61] Translated from written Arabic.

[62] "The view and the opposite view" is Al Jazeera's motto (Zayani & Sahraoui, 2007).

champion of disability rights, indeed a vanguard, in providing access to deaf Arab people. The criticisms of deaf people, as represented by the Yemeni view, stand in stark contrast.

This chapter sets out to present the basis of the opposition's view. It provides several reasons why the ArSL project has proven controversial. It demonstrates that while advocates of local sign languages likewise perceive a crisis in deaf education, they take issue with the choices policy makers have made to reach the resolution that is ArSL. Arguments against the project have largely fallen into two themes: education and human rights. Contrary to opening doors of opportunities, the project is seen as a forceful intervention in the lives of a minority group. However well-intentioned, the intervention stems from a general lack of understanding of sign language structure and the social and cultural role that sign languages play in deaf people's lives.

ArSL, Education, and Diglossia

In search of strategies to improve the lives of deaf Arab people, pan-Arab governmental organizations scrutinized education policies for deaf children. ArSL advocates recognized that methods of educating deaf children in the Arab region were dismal and in need of reform. In particular, they sought to put an end to speech-only forms of instruction, or oralism, and a popular, but dubiously-conceived method of combining speech and sign simultaneously, called "Total Communication," both of which have been found to have little or mixed impact on educational achievement Instead, they proposed replacing them with a focused approach that places sign language at the center of education. The dismal state of education for deaf children in the Arab region is uncontested; even for those who oppose the unification project, an overhaul in

educational philosophies is just as pressing. Jaber Al-Kandary, a deaf Kuwaiti man, took the issue of deaf education before the Kuwaiti Parliament. In a parliamentary session, he explained the woeful situation of deaf education in Kuwait:

> The curriculum in the school [for deaf children] is weak, and to this day, it differs from the curriculum of public education [for hearing children]. The signs used by teachers and interpreters in classrooms differ from one person to the next. No doubt, interpreters and teachers should have signing experience and certification in signing competence before they can teach and interpret for deaf people. The reason deaf education is poor is because any person with a university degree could start teaching without any knowledge of sign language. No doubt, they need to be competent in sign language to be able to teach us…. When we ask anyone to visit our classrooms and to assess the teaching, they say "it is none of our business." The Ministry of Education is invested in K-12 public education, send inspectors to those classrooms, and the level of education of students there is high. But we have only one school [for deaf children] and the Ministry is not interested in us. Why? In education, we are at the bottom of the rung. We are Kuwaitis, and they should look after us. As for the unified Arabic Sign Language dictionary…they put signs of their own. This dictionary is not for our benefit. Our Kuwaiti Sign Language is available, and we have a five CD set dictionary with its signs. The World Federation of the Deaf says that the Kuwaiti signs should be used in our classrooms.[63] (Al-Kandary, 2009)

Al-Kandary attributed the low levels of education among deaf Kuwaiti children to the weak curricula, benign and active neglect by education officials, and especially the poor signing skills of teachers and interpreters who are offered and are given a post with no prior knowledge of sign language. Like ArSL proponents, Al-Kandary strongly supports the use of sign language in deaf education. The contested issue is which signs should be used. Al-Kandary rejects the ArSL dictionary with signs that are unfamiliar to him (and

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[63] Translated from the spoken Arabic of Al-Kandary's sign language interpreter.

other deaf Kuwaitis) and argues instead that the Kuwaiti Sign Language was already well documented and should be the basis for deaf education in his country.

Al-Kandary did not elaborate why he objects to ArSL in his statement to Parliament, but several shortcomings that have been cited by various parties which are likely to have formed the basis of Al-Kandary's testimony. Aligning with the structure of the previous chapter, five points will be discussed in this section: 1) the creation of an artificial sign language, 2) ArSL's basis in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), 3) the form of ArSL signs in terms of linguistic features, 4) which groups of individuals did and did not participate in ArSL's development, and 5) the process by which signs were chosen.

Creation of an artificial sign language

Pan-Arab organizations seeking to address the deaf education crisis devised an artificial sign language as one possible fix. They deemed the regional natural sign languages of the region to be deficient, especially as they lacked the expansive vocabulary of MSA. This disparaging perspective on sign languages has many precedents. Because they appear so different from spoken languages, sign languages are often ignorantly considered inferior modes of communication compared to spoken languages. This viewpoint dates at least to the World Congress of the Deaf in Milan in 1880, which issued a declaration describing sign language as a "primitive and fundamentally flawed method of encoding spoken language" (Lane, 2004, p. 120). Since 1960s, research by linguists studying natural sign languages have demonstrated that sign languages are bona fide languages exhibiting rules and structures that are characteristic of human languages though they differ in modality. As natural languages, sign languages are

not meant to stand in for a spoken language, though they are often re-engineered them for this purpose. In recent years, sign languages of deaf communities have gained more recognition and a number have been given official status as minority languages by the governments of Arab countries such as Algeria, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates.

The rhetoric that ArSL developers use to promote the project threatens the legitimacy of these minority languages. As ArSL seeks to expand its reach, it also expands the impression that local sign languages are inefficient in expressing emotions and thoughts, lacking in grammatical standards, and have a limited vocabulary for technical and modern needs. Research on the grammar of Jordanian Sign Language (*see* Hendricks, 2004) and some preliminary descriptions of the sign language used in Alexandria, Egypt (*see* Asdaa', 2006) confirm, not surprisingly, that they as do sign languages elsewhere in the world have rules and structures. This research has demonstrated that, like well-researched sign languages used in the West, sign languages of the Middle East are full-fledged languages that meet the needs of their community of users. It allows them to describe and perform their daily activities, express their relationships, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, and is a medium for their spiritual and intellectual concerns (Halliday, 2007). As Haugen (2003) wrote, "the history of languages demonstrates convincingly that there is no such thing as an inherently handicapped language" (p. 415).

However, when languages are taken out of their environment, they "will appear somewhat imperfect and inadequate" (Halliday, 2007, p. 244). This is because, in their

natural contexts, they have "just enough" resources to refer to the culture and materials of their everyday lives. When contexts change in the natural history of a language, they adjust and add structure and vocabulary for the new environments. Indeed, all languages have the means of change for the very reason that they develop and exist for their circumstances. Arab intellectuals had to contend with this very issue during the Arab Awakening in their desire to make their spoken language, indeed their whole society, more modern. They did so not by creating an artificial language but by building on Classical Arabic through derivation and borrowing. Lexical modernization can be undertaken naturally, with the consent of a language's speakers, to enrich the vocabulary of a language by closing the gap between the existing language and the conceptual worlds of "modern technology, thought, and knowledge" (Nahir, 2003, p. 433). Again, the need for lexical modernization is not in itself indicative of inherent deficiency in the language itself, but is a way for the language's users to rise and meet new demands.

The natural sign languages of the Arab region, as I argue in earlier chapters, are more like community sign languages in that they are largely developed outside the domain of educational institutions. If they do not have signs to correspond to technical or scientific terms, it is because such concepts are not central in their culture. In order to adapt for use in educational settings, community sign languages can benefit from lexical expansion. But the expansion can occur naturally as the demand arises, such as when a student or teacher coins a new sign or borrows a sign from another sign language and the

signs are adopted by other community members.[64] It can also be planned lexical modernization, as with MSA, through strategic sign formation or borrowing. At least one key issue here is whether the use of Al Jazeera, or more generally, the use of the television media and sign language interpreters, is the right vehicle for promoting lexical modernization in community sign languages of the Arab world. Judging from the testimonies of various opponents, it seems that questions can be raised about whether the ArSL effort can succeed in its present formation.

The extent to which any purposeful language planning activity is successful depends on its use and acceptance by the community of users (Christian, 1988). Attempts to revive the Irish language in Ireland have met with mixed success, despite making it an official language and instituting the study of Irish in schools. Many have argued that the slow revival of Irish is because there is little incentive or practical reasons to use Irish outside classrooms and in one's day-to-day life (Cooper, 1989). Ireland had already become an Anglophone country by then. This is in contrast to the successful language planning in Israel where Hebrew played a material role as a unifying vernacular for the heterogeneous Jewish population. Official recognition of ArSL by the LAS and enforcing its use in deaf education may end up, as in the case of Irish, unsuccessful for at least two reasons. First, there are few indications that any number of deaf people understand and

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[64] Reagan (2006) listed five ways lexical creation and expansion occur in natural sign languages: compounding of existing signs, morphological adaptation (changing movement in a verb to make a noun or combining classifier morphemes), inventing new signs (especially for technical concepts), giving an existing sign new meaning (semantic expansion), and borrowing (which can include borrowing from spoken languages such as lexicalized fingerspelling).

use ArSL. Second, deaf Arab people already use a sign language and have yet to be given a viable and compelling reason to learn ArSL, particularly as they do not view it as gaining social or economic capital.

The Prince Salman Center for Disability Research in Saudi Arabia conducted a study of deaf Saudi people and concluded that about 70% of ArSL televised interpretation was incomprehensible to participants (Al-Khattaf, 2007). The study found that participants relied heavily on other textual information on the screen to grasp the general gist of the programming. This resonates with a response given by M. Nabeel, a deaf Jordanian woman and university graduate, when I asked her if she understood the Al Jazeera interpreters (personal communication, August 28, 2006). While select individual signs were intelligible to her, overall she understood only a small percentage of ArSL, instead she relied on visual cues from on-location footage, text headlines, and tickers running across the bottom of the screen to fill in the gaps in comprehension. It would seem from personal reports and more empirically gathered data that ArSL does not fulfill its function as an access language for Nabeel or other Saudi deaf people. A hard-of-hearing Iraqi signer and a member of his local deaf community shared his frustration with me:

> Let me tell you… One morning, I was reading the newspaper and was shocked to read this one story. It was nothing at all like what I understood the Al Jazeera interpreter to have signed the night before! I'll tell you why. They only interpret a few signs like "shooting here and there" and you think you know what they are talking about: war. But which war? And what about that war?[65] (name withheld for privacy, personal communication, August 13, 2007).

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[65] In English spoken conversation.

ArSL to these deaf people is a foreign language, one that is largely unintelligible, even though much of its vocabulary is based on individual signs that exist in the region, but because it was formed by a committee of users of different sign languages, not necessarily signs in their own sign language.

This should not be surprising. If we were to create a new language for European Union members, for instance, by selecting random words from French, Greek, Swedish, and so on, we would not expect Europeans to understand a "composite" language. The argument that ArSL is not as extreme a case as it might be because sign languages of the Arab region are similar and share a large vocabulary remains to be substantiated and is discussed at great length in Chapter 3. It should be the task of sign linguists and the deaf communities themselves to determine which signs are in fact historically related and mutually intelligible to include in an artificial sign language, if one were to be created at all. The voting mechanism placed for the development of ArSL fails to establish, at the very least, intelligibility.

This issue is further exacerbated by the fact that ArSL already competes with existing sign languages, several of which have been documented in dictionaries such as in Lebanon, Sudan, Yemen and the sign languages that were examined in Chapter 3. As Al-Kandary presented to the Kuwaiti Parliament, if Kuwaiti Sign Language already has a dictionary, why develop an artificial one for use in classrooms? In assertive terms, an Emirati deaf man expressed strongly oppositional views:

> All deaf Arab people reject the unified dictionary, and we demand its immediate cessation. We do not understand these signs, and we want from

> interpreters and teachers of deaf people in United Arab Emirates to use Emirati Sign Language.
>
> Using the signs of the dictionary will not help us at all because it causes us confusion, as we do not understand the signs of the unified dictionary. Our progress will only come with the use of our local sign language. We have no communication issues with our deaf Arab brethren. Our problem is with hearing people who are incompetent in sign language. We, and all deaf Arab people, have not complained about the variance in signs, but we do complain about the weak education and the lack of knowledge of Emirati Sign Language by teachers of deaf people and interpreters.
>
> Why do interpreters and hearing people insist on forcing us to accept the unified dictionary despite us not understanding these weird signs? Sign language is our language and no one has the right to force us to learn the signs of Al Jazeera interpreters. Instead of forcing us to learn the signs of the unified dictionary, interpreters should learn Emirati Sign Language that we cherish and of which we are proud. Deaf Arab people stand united on one front and demand that immediate cessation of the unified dictionary and the prohibition of interpreters from interfering in sign languages.[66,67] (name withheld for privacy, personal communication, March 7, 2010)

He attributed the low levels of education to teachers' lack of knowledge of the local sign language and not an inherent deficiency in the language. As Al-Kandary noted in his speech to Parliament, the philosophy of deaf education in the Arab region has predominantly been oralism and Total Communication, modes of communication which are easier for teachers who do not have competence in sign language, Lacking

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[66] Translated from written Arabic.

[67] That all deaf Arab people stand united against ArSL is too strong a statement. A number of deaf people were present at the workshop for the second installment of the ArSL dictionary in Qatar in 2005. My estimate is that 60 deaf people were present from the roster of names that were identified as "participant" or "member of deaf club" as opposed to a professional position such as "education specialist," "sign language expert," or such (Supreme Council for Family Affairs, 2007). The views expressed in this chapter do, however, indicate that there is strong resistance to ArSL.

knowledge of and experience teaching in a local sign language, educators are unable to observe and assess the language's efficiency in the classrooms, thus their view that that local sign languages are unfit for education is baseless.

The Emirati man also rejected the assertion that ArSL is better suited for education. He found the unified signs confusing, unhelpful, and "weird." Abdullah Al-Ahmary, a deaf man from Saudi Arabia, would agree. Al-Ahmary explained that Saudi deaf people learn Saudi Sign Language in their youth and any attempt to change their language will "mess with their heads" (Al-Fityani & Al-Showaier, 2010).[68] The signs that were purportedly selected "based on sound scientific principles" are assailed as impractical and unwieldy by these two deaf men. Al-Kandary disagrees that ArSL offers an expanded vocabulary for use in education. In a recently televised panel discussion on a local Kuwaiti television program dedicated to disability issues, he complained that there were no scientific vocabulary in the ArSL dictionary (Khair Al-Kuwait Foundation, 2010). After examining the dictionary, he said anyone would find many vocabulary missing. Indeed, many of the vocabulary in the ArSL vocabulary already exist in local sign languages such as signs for family members, food, and sports. If ArSL's goal is to modernize Arab deaf people, it should provide them with vocabulary for concepts that do not already exist in their sign languages but that would be beneficial for their educational and intellectual growth.

Nor is ArSL regarded as a means to more social or economic capital. From the testimony of the Emirati man and anecdotal evidence in Chapter 3, deaf Arab people do

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[68] Translated from Saudi Sign Language.

not claim they have any great lack of communication with their peers in other countries. That deaf people can communicate with each other even though their sign languages are different is not unique to the Arab world. Meir and Sandler (2008) explain this phenomenon in a book about the unique properties of visual sign languages,

> [S]ign language is not an international language. How, then, do Deaf people communicate so successfully despite the differences in their languages? Perhaps they do not communicate using sign language at all, but rather resort to communication through gesture and pantomime? Or maybe when a Deaf person signs in his own language, other Deaf people are able to understand him even though they do not use his language (that is, sign languages can be mutually understood, as is the case, for example, with Norwegian and Danish.) The answer apparently lies in a combination of these factors. That is, under such circumstances, Deaf people use a special form of communication that includes elements common to sign languages in general as well as gestures and pantomime when necessary. (p. 272)

Meir and Sandler observe that in international settings, deaf people of different sign languages do not use their own sign language but fashion a combination of signs and gestures that they deem iconic enough to be understood by others or that are borrowed from each other's sign languages. Creating a sign language that can be used across nation-state boundaries is not necessarily a clear benefit because the problem it seeks to address is not perceived as urgent in the first place. Furthermore, if a hearing Arab person wishing to study at the Sorbonne would need to learn French, a deaf person from Morocco who wishes to attend a university or work in Saudi Arabia can learn Saudi Sign Language in order to understand the local interpreters. By the same token, there are a

good number of deaf Arab students enrolled at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. who have learned ASL.[69]

Writing about how language policies are often handed down by empires and modernizers, Wiley (1996) describes how language change can be promoted as a gain for some people, and at the detriment of others:

> The stated reasons for promoting language change often sound noble and frequently cite the greater good that will result from change. However, there is usually more at issue than just language, because decisions about language often lead to benefits for some and loss of privilege, status, and rights for others. (p. 104)

The perceptions of the Yemeni and Emirati men introduced earlier described the use of ArSL as interference by those outside the deaf community. A columnist for a Saudi newspaper, Saleh Al-Shihi (2008), devoted an article to sign language interpreting in Saudi Arabia:

> Interestingly, I learned that some sign language interpreters on television programs are not fluent, and there is no one to direct them or correct their mistakes!
>
> I know the topic may not mean much to many, but it is not the case for deaf people who are a large segment of the community.
>
> Most notable of the news I receive is that there are those who neglect to preserve Saudi Sign Language, the language that deaf people use to communicate among themselves and with others. Some people unknowingly work to dissolve this language and to replace it with others. More interestingly, hearing men and women who take courses to learn sign language so that they can communicate with deaf people find that

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[69] During the 1997-2001 period that I was enrolled at Gallaudet University, I met four students from Saudi Arabia, two from Sudan, one from Egypt, one from Jordan, and one from Lebanon.

> their signs differ from that of deaf people once they interact with them![70] (paras. 1-3)

Al-Shihi went on to express his surprise that interpreters were not regularly evaluated, and that the interpreting association is run by people who themselves are not proficient in sign language.

What do interpreters and teachers stand to gain from ArSL that they would not with a local sign language? There are two possible advantages: economic mobility and accredited sign language training. First, the existence of ArSL would allow teachers and interpreters to widen their job search options geographically. Indeed, two of the interpreters on Al Jazeera were originally LIU interpreters at the Jordanian national television station. Now they work for Al Jazeera, a prestigious and popular satellite network in the affluent country of Qatar. Learning and using ArSL can become a lucrative career option for some professions if a pan-Arab sign language is instituted as the official language of deaf Arab people in all Arab countries.

Second, resources are readily available to learn ArSL in the form of the its dictionary and workshops. Such resources are often lacking for local sign languages. As with any language, the best way to acquire competence is not only by studying through books and in classes but also by interacting with the users of the language. This is because people do not talk or sign like textbooks; language in conversation is more fluid and dynamic with nuances that cannot be captured in written text, CDs, or prepared lectures. Language has a surrounding culture and to understand jokes, idioms,

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[70] Translated from written Arabic.

colloquialisms, and the like requires regular interaction with a community of users. But this takes time, patience, and willingness to socialize with a community that is different from one's own. ArSL offers an absence of these constraints. In its present form, ArSL consists only of as many signs as are present in two dictionary installments. The language has yet to acquire nuances and a surrounding culture. If after learning ArSL, the teacher or interpreter finds they are unable to communicate with a deaf person, the onus is not on the teacher or interpreter to do a better job. They have received accredited training in the official language of deaf Arab people, according to LAS. In short, ArSL promises simplification of the job of teaching and interpreting.

Clearly, there are gains to be had with ArSL for teachers and interpreters. They do not stand to lose their own language, identity, culture, and rights. By and large, they are unattached to a local sign language. This is not the case for deaf Arab people. What lies between their exasperated statements is a somber tone of loss—the loss of a language that, as the Emirati deaf man put it, they cherish and of which they are proud. In "On Language Memoir," Alice Kaplan (1994) writes about changing her primary language from English to French, "there is no language change without emotional consequences. Principally: loss" (p. 31). She reiterates that losing one's language or replacing it with another is to lose a part of one's history, of one's culture, of one's being. She continues, "language is not a machine you can break and fix with the right technique, it is a function of the whole person, an expression of culture, desire, need… Inside our language is our history, personal and political" (p. 66). The intricate relationship between language, identity, culture, and history was discussed in Chapter 4 in the context of Arab people and

the Arabic language. Those who cherish MSA ought to be familiar with the personal and political place of language in its speakers' lives. Yet, when it comes to "fixing" the languages of deaf Arab people, they seem to forget this intricate relationship and its place of language in deaf people's lives.

Deaf Arab people are likewise Arabs and their lives are assumed to be embedded in the culture of the surrounding hearing population. That deaf people have a culture of their own, an identity, or a history other than Arab culture, identity, and history would be absurd, especially when considering the glory of all things Arab. Yet, all spoken languages and dialects have a surrounding culture. A Palestinian and a Moroccan may share Arab culture, identity, and history, but they also have much that is not shared. A Palestinian in Jerusalem has a history of ongoing occupation and resistance, jokes about people from a neighboring town, a vocabulary peppered with Hebrew words, knowledge of local historical sites, and an understanding of a Jerusalemite family's relationship to another Arab family in Bethlehem. A Moroccan would not share such knowledge. These are tangible realities, the fabric of our worlds, which cannot and should not be dismissed as irrelevant or nonexistent.

Likewise, deaf people who have a natural sign language share the culture of the mainstream society around them. They share similar customs, beliefs, and histories, yet there is much they do not share with mainstream society. Abdelrahaman Khalifa, former Secretary-General of the Sudanese National Association of the Deaf, wrote:

> I noticed that a large portion of teachers and interpreters in Sudan use the unified Arabic Sign Language in education. The associations for the care of deaf people also teach and distribute it in Sudan. I find this to be of

> great stupidity for there is no citizen that is proud of his country's culture and identity who would also be willing to see a part of its culture and identity obliterated by changing the language of future generations of deaf children.[71] (personal communication, April 2, 2008)

Khalifa argues that deaf people, unlike many hearing people, share a history of oppression in the subjugation of their sign languages. They have local histories such as the date when they gained the right to obtain driver's licenses within their respective countries.[72] Deaf people share an experience of isolation when hearing family members laugh at spoken jokes and frustration at popular movies that do not offer subtitles or captioning. They have their own local jokes about hearing people. Deaf people at the Holy Land Institute for the Deaf have signs to refer to their environment that are not shared by a deaf person in Egypt, for example, the name sign for the director of their institute or local sign for the bunk beds they sleep on in the dormitories. Deaf Egyptians have knowledge of the KFC franchise that is run by deaf people in Cairo. A deaf Yemeni person can tell which town another deaf national is from by their signs. Deaf Egyptians, Jordanians, and Yemenis each have knowledge of possible employment opportunities in their towns and the laws, or lack thereof, in their countries that protect their rights. Their realities are not only different from hearing people but from each other as well. They are able to express their identity, tell stories about their history, and signify their culture through their sign languages in such a way that they would be unable to in another.

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[71] Translated from written Arabic.

[72] To date, some Arab countries, such as Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen, do not allow their deaf citizens to drive (World Federation of the Deaf, 2008).

Gloria Anzaldua (1990) describes how people might find it difficult if not impossible to express their identities in another "foreign" language, particularly when the outsider language is oppressive to one's own culture. She gives the example of how non-Anglo people in the U.S. who live under the reigning tongue of English but who cannot identify with formal Castilian Spanish find no recourse but to develop their own language, Chicano—"a language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves" (p. 204). ArSL, developed by those who deem as primitive the natural sign language of deaf Arab people, delimits deaf Arab people's abilities to communicate in a manner that allows them to express their cultural realities.

ArSL's basis in Modern Standard Arabic

In response to issues of language oppression, proponents of ArSL counter that they are continually working on expanding ArSL so that it "may be consistent with the spoken Arabic language" (Al-Kayed, 2005, para. 15) and that in time, it will gradually provide a space for deaf people's cultural identity to grow, which brings us to the second point of this section: ArSL's relationship to MSA. The reality is that ArSL cannot parallel MSA, with its "eight hundred words for 'sword,' five hundred for 'lion,' two hundred for 'snake,' and so on" (Chejne, 1965, p. 453). A Saudi interpreter, Abdullah Al-Oufi, noted that ArSL provides only one sign for a concept even though a natural sign language of the region, as with any language, may have more than one word or sign to represent the concept (personal communication, June 9, 2009). Nor will ArSL have the same prestige as MSA, which has a long and celebrated history and is used by a few hundred million

speakers. Even if ArSL was meant only to stand in for some MSA, another challenge would be encountered in educational settings that would make ArSL unsuitable: the teachers' spoken Arabic is often not MSA, but a local dialect that is unaccounted for in the ArSL dictionary.

While the written Arabic word can be spoken in MSA and is used in formal situations such as conferences, parliamentary proceedings, and on telecast news, Arab people do not speak MSA in everyday casual conversations (Chiang, Diab, Habash, Rambow, & Shareef, 2006). The dominant spoken language of the region is not MSA, as MSA is not the native language of any one nation or community of Arab people. Instead, the dominant spoken language one of a number of regional dialects of Arabic that is not itself written. Yet many Arab people tend to confound the two: the spoken dialect they actually use with MSA represented in written form, and refer to them interchangeably as "Arabic." Although supporters and developers have promoted ArSL as allowing deaf people to gain access to spoken Arabic, so that they can pronounce Arabic better, and communicate better with mainstream society, in actuality, deaf people would not enjoy these benefits as ArSL was intended to parallel MSA and not the spoken dialect. Proponents of ArSL overlook this detail, an error with great pedagogical ramifications.

Classroom instruction for hearing children tends to be a mix of the local spoken dialect and MSA. Wahba (1996) described how MSA is formally learned through the use of a spoken dialect: "Modern Standard Arabic is learned through formal education (although the medium of instruction is generally the Colloquial dialect, even in the teaching of MSA), whereas Colloquial Arabic is acquired natively" (p. 120). Hock and

Joseph (1996) concur, stating that for Arab speakers MSA is a foreign and second language, learned in school. Pedagogically, the diglossic situation, where the standard written form coexists with spoken dialects, is challenging for hearing students. Hock and Joseph (1996) explain further:

> Diglossic situations may have an enormous impact on people's lives. In order to become literate, it is necessary in effect to learn a foreign language. But to make things even worse, the foreignness of that language is not even acknowledged. Students are expected to learn it without great difficulty, since it is "their language." And if they do not succeed very well they will be considered dunces for "not knowing their own language." (p. 341)

Hearing students in Arab classrooms must contend with their spoken language being different from the written standard, without acknowledgement of this difference. Use of ArSL is doubly challenging in classrooms where students are not only expected to learn the written standard but also to learn the spoken dialect of the teacher. Here, we come across a fundamental weakness in ArSL, which is that it more closely represents the written word than the spoken one, thus is of limited in use in formal situations where MSA is exclusively used, such as on Al Jazeera.

Take, for instance, the colloquial Arabic word "yalla" made of compounding two words: "ya," a preposition used to call out to someone, and "Allah," or God. Speakers of many Arab dialects use the word to mean several things such as "let's go," "hurry up," and "all right" among others. In Iraqi dialect, "yalla" can also mean "after that" (Clarity, Stowasser, & Wolfe, 1964), a meaning that is not found in the Levantine dialect. It may be that it is the versatility of the word that makes it popular in everyday conversation. The anthropologist Khuri (2007) observed that in Beirut, Lebanon, "The phrase "O God" (*yā*

Allāh/yalla) occurs so frequently in conversation that many people have forgotten its exact literal meaning. People say *yalla* in going, in coming, in sitting, in standing, in commencing with a task, in hurrying a person, or in dismissing a statement" (p. 100). "Yalla" has no parallel in MSA, and is not used wherever MSA is used. Accordingly, this word appears neither in the first or the second installment of the ArSL dictionary. Teachers would be, at least initially, unable to express "yalla" and many other colloquial vocabulary in ArSL, and it is against the grain of the pan-Arab ArSL to incorporate region-specific terminology. What complicates matters in the case of ArSL, then, is that it acknowledges only one of several spoken forms of Arabic, the formal and lesser-used MSA with its written form. ArSL's limitation as a proxy for MSA would pose an obstacle in integrating deaf Arab people into mainstream society because it would not give them access to popular culture where spoken dialects are ever present.

If in fact, ArSL is a proxy for MSA, then it should more appropriately be described as an auxiliary or manual code, but not itself a language.[73] Manual codes have been invented elsewhere by other nation states for dominant spoken languages, including the one mentioned in Chapter 4, Signed Exact English (SEE). A committee of individuals in the U.S. developed SEE for some of the same reasons that ArSL was developed—dissatisfaction with the educational achievement levels of deaf children (Gustason, 1990), and with the perceived limited capacity of natural sign languages. SEE borrowed ASL signs, added invented signs for copulas and auxiliary verbs that are present in English but

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[73] This makes ArSL a misnomer. It would be more appropriate to refer to it as Arabic Manual Code, Signed Exact Arabic, or similar nomenclature that does not designate it as an independent sign language.

not in ASL such as “is” and “are,” added English suffixes such as “ing” to verbs and the plural “s” to nouns, and re-arranged the order of signs to adhere to English word order (Lane et al., 1996). The aim was to improve deaf students’ English literacy by exposing them to forms resembling English as closely as possible. SEE, and other Manually Coded English systems, were quickly embraced by educators in the U.S. in the 1970s and 1980s, though there was no evidence that they were effective. After 40 or 50 years, these systems have contributed no significant improvement of English literacy levels of students.

A look at why they were unsuccessful may be informative for the ArSL case. First, if a teacher or parent without knowledge of ASL wanted to manually convey an English word that was not in the SEE vocabulary book, they would make one up (Gustason, 1990). This caused confusion at schools for deaf children as it was possible for different teachers to invent new signs in which resembled existing vocabulary in ASL and even meant something else in ASL. Second and more importantly, deaf signers are cognitively adapted to using gestural communication that is natural for the visual modality. SEE and other manual codes often do not exhibit forms and functions that are suited for natural language (Lane et al., 1996). For instance, it would take much less time to express a sentence in spoken English than if every word in that sentence were to be signed; signing every word (and all prefixes and suffices) in English would be excruciatingly slow. Natural, visual languages, on the other hand, present “multiple streams of information at the same time” (ibid, p. 263) such that facial expressions and the sign’s location, movement, and handshape may each convey pieces of information at

once. As such, natural sign languages have roughly the same timing organization as spoken English.

One might wonder how Al Jazeera interpreters are able to keep up with the spoken Arabic of the newscaster. Mostly they do not. The Iraqi deaf man introduced earlier in this chapter complained about how Al Jazeera interpreters seemed to convey selective parts of a news story. Unlike SEE and other Manually Coded English systems, ArSL does not follow the word order of the dominant spoken language (the developers of ArSL wanted the sign order to follow sign language more closely). This can be concluded from Al-BinAli's remarks during a workshop on the grammar guidebook that certain words in spoken language are eliminated from sign language and replaced by body movements and/or facial expressions, such that the eyes may speak without words (Al-Arab, 2009c). In this sense ArSL's design falls short of being a supposed ideal manual code for MSA. To sum-up, there is enough evidence that ArSL proponents have failed to design a manual communication system that would correspond to their purported goal of paralleling MSA.

Linguistic features of ArSL

At least initiallyn ArSL did not parallel MSA. Derivations/inflections were not present in the first edition, and have more recently been added to the grammar guidebook suggesting that ArSL, at least as it is used in Qatar and Al Jazeera, is transforming into becoming a manual code for MSA. Semreen indicated that it may take a while for deaf people to accept these derivatives/inflections, but it would be for their benefit to use them (Al-Arab, 2009a). Having signed forms for derivatives/inflections found in MSA would

assist deaf Arab people in reading and writing. However, since derivatives/inflections of spoken languages are generally foreign to natural sign languages,[74] opposition to them by deaf people can be expected. This opposition is likely to grow stronger the more distant ArSL is from natural sign languages of the region in its efforts to be more similar to MSA.

Although one would expect ArSL to have the same grammar as MSA if it were to be a manual code for it, this is not the case. The grammar of ArSL is rather unspecified until more recently in 2009 and only in Qatar. To define its grammar, its authors observed deaf people signing in ArSL in Qatar. How did these authors know how to structure a vocabulary with no community of users? By what set of principles did the Al Jazeera interpreters structure their sentences in ArSL as early as 2002, only a brief period after the creation of ArSL? Most likely they supplanted the vocabulary of a natural sign language that they already knew with ArSL vocabulary but kept the structure of the natural sign language intact. As a result, this process of supplanting local sign languages stands to create multiple ArSLs with some similar vocabulary but with different grammars. This would seem to defeat the purpose of creating a unified pan-Arab sign language.

The approach to ArSL's development was entirely vocabulary-centered, wherein workshop attendees voted on signs, making it a word list rather than a language. No discussion on the structure of ArSL was taken into consideration at the workshops or in

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[74] Sign languages as a rule have very few affixes compared to many spoken languages (Aronoff et al., 2005).

the dictionary installments. Chapter 4 listed one respect in which ArSL had at least one articulated principle, that there would be no initialized signs (signs which substitute the handshape for one corresponding to the first letter of the written word to which it corresponds). To what extent it was consciously decided to avoid such vocabulary is unknown. Now, however, the addition of initialized signs is being considered. This leads us to a core problem with the development of ArSL: the popular understanding of language among ArSL developers is that it primarily consists of a base of vocabulary and that the structure of the language will later follow in some indeterminate fashion. The trivialization of a language's structure is a grave error, for meaning is garnered not only from words or signs but from their organization and position within a sentence. Sandler and Lillo-Martin (2006) stated, "One of the foundational claims of generative syntax is that sentences are not simply strings of words, but are hierarchically structured in a rule-governed way" (p. 15). Linguistic aspects such as syntax were not taken into consideration by ArSL developers, rendering ArSL essentially a word-list. The utility of such a communication system for education is questionable.

Groups of individuals that did and did not participate and the process of selecting ArSL signs

ArSL's flawed construction from a linguistic standpoint is not surprising considering that linguists, especially sign linguists, were not involved in its development. This brings us to the fourth issue: groups of individuals who did and did not participate in ArSL's development. The following discussion unpacks the term "expert" that is often used by those working on the ArSL project to represent themselves. It puts into question

issues of representation of various groups partaking in ArSL development, specifically the near absent participation of national associations for and by deaf people as well as the absence of seasoned professionals in the field of sign language interpretation and sign language training.

In the Arab region and with respect to services for deaf people, the issue of political representation is a problematic one. Few sign language interpreters and teachers of deaf children, for instance, belong to an association or undergo sign language certification or training. Al-Rayes spoke of the need for sign language interpreting agencies in the Arab world to organize the work of interpreters (Saber, 2009). Instead of being a matter of personal diligence on behalf of interpreters, he believed that sign language interpretation should be professionalized such that a designated committee would ensure that interpreters were certified and maintained a professional code of ethics. Considering the very recent appearance schools for deaf people in the region (many only within the last half-century), there is little tradition of deaf communities and associations organized around these schools. As a result, many teachers of the deaf (a vast majority of which are hearing) are aware of, or have little knowledge about lives of deaf children and adults outside the school. Furthermore, if they are unable to communicate with deaf people, as is the normal case in many schools, what insight would they have on deaf people's needs and aspirations? The ArSL project seeks to improve communication and understanding between hearing and deaf people and to provide sign language training to teachers and interpreters, but until this goal is reached, teachers and interpreters in the field are unsystematically represented and their professionalism is blindly trusted. They

are often referred to as “experts,” even if they have no knowledge and training of deaf communities, language planning, or sign linguistics.

Developers complained of the acute shortage in the Arab region of expertise in and material on sign linguistics (Talay, 2009). This point is worth examining. There were several references to Arab “sign language experts” as being involved in the ArSL project, including four on the Technical Committee of the second installment. Why then was there an absence of their expertise and material on sign language in the Arab world? It appears from reading their materials that “sign language experts” refers to people who can communicate in a sign language but who have not received any formal training in its structure, as there are none to be had in the region yet. In such a case, such “experts” may not be able to advise on linguistic aspects. It seems that the title of “sign language expert” refers not to linguists, but to any person who signs.

The necessity of sign linguists on a project such as ArSL cannot be overstated. Their absence on a project would be regarded as a glaring omission by language planning scholars. Their input would have been of great value, as mentioned earlier. First, a sign linguist would have advised against unifying or standardizing sign languages that are historically unrelated or whose relationship can not be ascertained. Second, sign linguists would have learned from the failures of Manually Coded English systems and warned policy makers against modeling an artificial sign language after spoken languages since the latter are not adapted to the visual-gestural modality. Third, linguists would have considered the grammatical structure of the new language as opposed to focusing exclusively on its vocabulary in its development.

Linguistic input is also important for other aspects of a language planning project. Linguists can offer a realistic assessment regarding expectations about possible results, such as to address the question: "Would ArSL lead to improved educational levels among deaf children and increased integration of deaf people in mainstream society?" Next, linguists could help conceive of ways to adapt existing languages to best meet expectations such as to make "best use of natural linguistic and sociolinguistic tendencies" (Christian, 1988, p. 201). Finally, once ArSL is in use, linguists can determine whether the newly created language meets goals, and if not, how to restructure ArSL accordingly. Linguists can also offer insight on what choices to make in planning a language that would be well received by the community of users. Christian (1988) wrote on the situation when more than one language variety is present,

> In choosing a language to serve as the medium of instruction in early education, for example, it is important to assess the attitudes of the community toward the various choices. It is also important to determine the relationships among the varieties of language involved, to find out if, on purely formal grounds, one choice might be more accessible to speakers of other varieties. In both cases, a nonlinguist might not recognize the value of such information on structural and social dimensions. In addition, the methodology for compiling these data would be available from linguistics. (p. 201)

Research on the social, political, and economic context in which the new language will be implemented needs to be taken into consideration to ensure its acceptance and success. It is clear from reviewing the documents put forward by the ArSL planners that linguistic input, particularly about sign languages, is sorely missing, to the detriment of deaf Arab people whose language access and learning abilities are at stake here.

To their credit, the authors of the grammar guidebook admitted they had little knowledge of grammar of sign languages. In the two years while they were preparing their guidebook, they wrote that they gathered and studied materials on sign language grammars from European and American sources. But it appears that what they read had little influence on the content of the guidebook: they declared that they had known most of it already, as if to say that disciplinary training in linguistics is not needed. Al-BinAli later confessed at the grammar guidebook workshop that the latter two chapters of the guidebook relied largely on the authors' experiences as "sign language experts" and not on published research. They then presented a draft copy to other "experts" to review, including deaf Qatari consultants, who similarly had no background training in linguistics but were deemed "experts" by virtue of knowing a sign language.

For the third installment of the dictionary, "sign language expert" was defined as someone who was fluent in ArSL and not necessarily in a natural sign language, such as a newly trained sign language interpreter. They invited deaf people to participate in drafting the third installment of the dictionary, but they were individuals who already supported the project, and accepted using ArSL. It would be fair to ask as to whether these individuals are representative of their deaf communities.

As with the lack of training and certification in sign language for teachers and interpreters, several Arab countries do not have officially recognized national associations for their deaf citizens. Instead, they may have sports or social clubs or charitable organizations that cater to them such as the Kuwaiti Sports Club for the Deaf, the Charitable Organization of the Deaf in Iraq, and the Deaf and the Association of Parents

of Deaf Children in Mauritania. In an effort to collect information on deaf people in Arab countries, the World Federation of the Deaf sent survey questions to these and other such organizations (World Federation of the Deaf, 2008). It found that in most cases, deaf people did not head these organizations such as the Palestine Union of Deaf, the Bahrain Deaf Society, and the Association for Service to the Hearing Impaired in Egypt. Others had very few if any deaf board members; the Saudi Association for Hearing Impaired had one deaf out of nine board members and the Tunisian Association for Assistance to the Deaf had no deaf board members at all among twelve. With the issue of representation of deaf Arab communities questionable within even their own countries, it cannot be said that there was substantial representation of deaf people in the ArSL project, though it is true that some deaf Arab individuals, who tended to be more educated and in favor of ArSL, participated.

There are further concerns regarding representation. First, it is likely that those who oppose the sign language unification efforts would have no say in halting ArSL's development, as their votes would count only in the choice of a sign. Second, financial limitations may have prevented some deaf Arabs from attending workshops and conferences. Third, there is disproportionate representation from certain countries, with some countries not being represented at all. Egypt with a population that is 99 times larger than that of Qatar had seven times fewer votes at the workshop in Dubai with six

Egyptian representatives attending discussions regarding the dictionary's second installment whereas Qatar had 42 (Supreme Council for Family Affairs, 2007).[75]

Such questions reflect the contentious issue of representation on a large-scale project with implications affecting all deaf Arab people as it is adopted on a pan-Arab governmental scale. This leads to the fifth and last point. Considering the problematic issue of representation, the voting mechanism used for deciding on signs to include in the ArSL dictionary cannot be considered democratic. To the contrary, many deaf people see it as oligarchic in that it operates against their best interests. Their interests, particularly those that they have argued bear on their human rights, are examined next.

Human Rights

Several deaf Arab people quoted earlier in this chapter specifically referred to their human rights in protest of the ArSL project. They perceive ArSL as a threat to local sign languages and cultures which have been passed on and developed for generations. This is especially as large sums are spent on implementing ArSL in schools, on television, and in teacher and interpreter training without parallel efforts to promote research, preservation, and use of local sign languages. Those who oppose the ArSL project have also complained that activities used to advance ArSL have been carried out forcibly and without their consent.

These views are in stark contrast with the beliefs of ArSL proponents. The proponents argue in response that their activities comply with and fulfill the demands of

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[75] The population of Egypt is estimated at 81,713,520 and of Qatar at 824,789 (World Federation of the Deaf, 2008).

the UN "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities," but many individuals and groups accuse them of misinterpreting the Convention. Instead of recognizing and promoting the use of natural sign languages that reflect the identities of deaf communities, ArSL proponents instead promoted an artificial sign language that is understood by only a few people as the official language of Arab deaf people.

Concerned with developments in regards to the ArSL project and with similar projects elsewhere, WFD issued a public statement entitled "WFD Statement on the Unification of Sign Languages" (World Federation of the Deaf, 2007). The statement said that sign languages of countries that share a common spoken language "cannot be forced to become a single language" (ibid., para. 5) and that any attempt to do so would be "fruitless". Instead, languages should be allowed to change and expand naturally as social, industrial, technological, and other cultural changes occur. The statement went on to declare that:

> any forcible purification or unification of Sign Languages, conducted by governments, professionals working with Deaf People, and organizations for or of the Deaf, is a violation of the UN and UNESCO treaties, declarations and other policies, including the recent UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Deaf people in every country have the sole right to make changes, if necessary, in their own local, provincial and national Sign Languages in response to cultural changes. The control of the development of any Sign Language must be left to any social group where the particular Sign Language is exercised. (World Federation of the Deaf, 2007, para. 7)

This statement questioned the goals of the ArSL project, asserting that the presence of a unified spoken language was not grounds for unifying sign languages. It also explicitly said that the ArSL project was a threat to the human rights of deaf Arab people,

specifically, to their right to use their own language and practice their own culture. It warned governments, organizations, and professionals that unification projects run the risk of defying international conventions.

In making these strong statements, the WFD was likely referring to the resolution adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1992 titled "Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities," which states:

> Article 1.1 States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity. (Office of the United Nations, 1992, para. 12)

Article 1.1 protects the sign languages of deaf Arab people with which they identify. ArSL is native to no child or adult, thus does not qualify as a language. That ArSL's status is promoted as the official language of deaf Arab people threatens the survival of existing local sign languages with which deaf Arab people identify. This is in violation of Article 1.1.

Article 2.1 bestows deaf Arab people the right to use their local sign languages without discrimination:

> Article 2.1 Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities (hereinafter referred to as persons belonging to minorities) have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination. (ibid, para. 14)

Although ArSL is the mother tongue of no one, it is advocated as the language of deaf Arab people and is intended to be used for their instruction at the expense of instructing

them in their mother tongue, or in natural sign languages. Article 4.3 speaks to this concern:

> Article 4.3. States should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities may have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue. (ibid, para. 23)

It would seem, from a human rights perspective on language learning and use that the ArSL project is a breach of international convention. Another relevant statement of language rights, is the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) "Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity" of 2001, which reads:

> Article 5. All persons have therefore the right to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice, and particularly in their mother tongue; all persons are entitled to quality education and training that fully respect their cultural identity; and all persons have the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practices, subject to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. (United Nations Educational, 2001, para. 16)

Considering the intricate relationship between language and culture, respecting deaf Arab people's cultural identity entails respect for their natural sign languages as well. Markuu Jokinen (2000), current WFD president, explained why sign languages are often viewed differently when it comes to human rights: "sign languages are seldom seen as mother tongues/first languages of Deaf children, the children are not regarded as members of linguistic minorities" (p. 210). ArSL proponents regard sign language as a vehicle whose primary purpose is to transmit mainstream culture. This view disparages sign languages as independent languages on par with any other language. To defend the unified project potentially defies UN conventions.

When the WFD released their "Statement on the Unification of Sign Languages" in 2007, it did not single out the ArSL project, but in another statement two years later, the WFD specifically addressed ArSL: "WFD calls for the unification in process of sign languages in the Arab region to cease immediately" did (2009b, September). It admonished work on the ArSL project for violating the linguistic human and cultural rights of deaf Arab communities that use natural sign languages. It also requested the cessation of the unification project. The World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) followed with a strong statement supporting the WFD (World Association, 2009). It affirmed that deaf people, not interpreters, should be in charge of their sign languages including the distribution of sign language dictionaries and teaching materials.

These statements by WFD and WASLI were not well received by AFOOD, who denied that they were part of any hostile unification effort (World Federation of the Deaf, 2009). Instead they maintained that they fully appreciated the role natural sign languages played in transmitting deaf people's histories, culture, and traditions. They always intended for ArSL to be used alongside local sign languages and never to replace them.

These assertions and denials by AFOOD contradict observations and findings described in Chapters 2 and 4. Some of this debate was presented in WFD's "Open Letter with regard [sic] the unification project of Sign Languages in the Arab region" in 2009 (World Federation of the Deaf, 2009a).[76] In this letter, WFD noted that activities that promote ArSL "reflect persistent lack of understanding and appreciation of local/national sign languages" (ibid, para. 10) and that such "activities suggest directly and indirectly

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[76] I contributed to the drafting of this open letter, at the request of the WFD.

that local/national Sign Languages are backwards, complicated, weak and lacking" (ibid). It also cited the lack of parallel efforts that encourage the use of local/national sign languages which had the effect of denying deaf Arab people the right to engage in their own languages. It placed the blame of deaf Arab people's marginalization in society not on their sign languages but on the poor training of teachers and lack of interpreter training and certification in local sign languages. These alternative measures would provide deaf Arab people with an improved quality of life without infringing on their linguistic and cultural rights.

The Modern Deaf Arab Person

The rights that many deaf Arab people and U.N. organizations call for clash with pan-Arab government organizations' notions of linguistic and cultural rights. To AFOOD, ALECSO, CAMSA, and LAS, deaf Arab people's linguistic and cultural rights are best guaranteed by providing access to the Arabic language and its store of culture and history. ArSL modernizes deaf Arab people's lives while remaining continuous with the Arab past. In this vein, Pan-Arab nationalism is used as justification for proceeding with the unification project, a stance which is not unusual for sign languages around the world. Jokinen (2000) observed:

> Sign languages have been the victims of … nationalism when artificial sign systems have been created all over the world. Signs have been forcibly replaced or modified to represent spoken national languages. This kind of nationalism is unfortunately still very common, depriving Deaf children of the use and development of proper sign language. (p. 211)

AFOOD and other pan-Arab organizations view ArSL as an opportunity for liberation and advancement as deaf Arab people partake in the modern world. Yet, many deaf Arab people have different ideas about how to culturally adapt to modern times. I posit that they seek to modernize by also being continuous with the past. This past acknowledges their sign language and its place within their deaf community.

Deaf Arab voices expressed earlier in this chapter point towards natural sign languages, not a unified sign language, as the primary source for advancement. The Emirati man pronounced, "Our progress will only come with the use of our local sign language" (personal communication, March 7, 2010). Al-Kandary also advocated the use of a natural sign language for improving the education of deaf Kuwaitis. Thus progress does not lie with making changes to their languages per se but in changing the contexts in which their languages are used. Here, teachers and interpreters are asked to be proficient in local sign languages in order for deaf people to gain access and increased opportunities. By putting the onus on teachers and interpreters and their lack of sign language proficiency, deaf Arab people seek to gain control of their lives. It is this kind of control that Abdelrahman Khalifa, former Secretary-General of the Sudanese National Association of the Deaf aspires to when he says,

> Of course, deaf people are the original owners of sign languages, and they are the ones who need to be consulted in its regard. It would be a great injustice if Arabic sign languages were unified without deaf people's free desire and the injustice would be even greater if it were to be used for the education of deaf children because in this instance it would obliterate a part of a country's identity and erase a part of its national culture. Even if we needed a unified Arabic sign language that is rich and developed for conferences and Arab meetings, the Arab nation is filled with deaf people to work on such an effort. There are deaf people that have high intellectual

> abilities, cultural knowledge, complete competency in the local sign language, are of great creativity and imagination, who do not follow the whim of hearing people, and are only moved by their personal will and their belief in their message towards their deaf brethren. If hearing people had a role it should be limited to financial assistance without desire for fame or personal advantage. (personal communication, April 2, 2008)

Seizing claim to a definition of the deaf self is explored by Tom Humphries (1996) who studied the American situation. Humphries argued that signing deaf Americans had to distance themselves from definitions developed by hearing people that regarded deaf bodies as dysfunctional and strange. Instead, modern deaf Americans putting their sign languages and deaf cultures at the center of consciousness, and thus described themselves as complete. Also, to reduce the power differential between themselves and hearing people and in order to gain status equality, deaf Americans shifted the location of the problem of communication:

> There are several ways that Deaf people may attempt to gain control. One of these is to control the placement of "the problem." Gone is the old deaf self taking responsibility for communication failure or misunderstanding of purpose. The problem is not that the Deaf person is deaf (and, thus, having problematic communication, language, and psychological profiles). The problem instead is the hearing persons [sic] lack of ASL fluency, lack of understanding of Deaf culture, lack of experience with Deaf people, lack of knowledge of how hearing people oppress Deaf people, or lack of solutions that work for Deaf people. (ibid, p. 112)

Having control over language is one way the deaf American person became modern, as they ceased to be "the problem" in need of fixation.

I argue that deaf Arab people are just beginning to be modern in this particular sense of the word. They are using their opposition to ArSL to redefine conceptions of deaf people. They are asserting that the problem is with interpreters and teachers not

knowing their local sign languages. They are also speaking out against hearing people's inability to imagine possible solutions that can work for deaf Arab people, instead they develop almost in isolation, an artificial and superficial sign system. They cite international conventions to defend their rights. But as Humphries noted, to be modern is to recognize one's voice and to make it heard. The extent to which deaf Arab people will enjoy their rights and participate in society as equal citizens, to be modern, depends on whether they can compel proponents of ArSL, their governments, and mainstream society to pay them the respect they deserve.

Conclusion

This chapter presents a perspective on the ArSL project that has received little media attention—opposition to the project. Many deaf Arab people view ArSL as a threat to their local sign languages, identities, cultures, and histories and not as salvation, as is promoted by its proponents. The grammatically bereft construction of ArSL, conceptually and linguistically, makes it, by definition, incapable of serving the purposes it aims to achieve. Furthermore, it is a flagrant violation of international convention.

One indication of resistance to ArSL may be garnered from the surge in the development and publication of national sign language dictionaries in recent years. Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia have each either produced a dictionary within the past 10 years or are in the process of developing one. Workshops are also being held in various Arab cities to train hearing people in local sign languages. While there may be several explanations for this rising phenomenon such as the recent availability of technology that would assist in the development of non-textual

representations, it may also be considered an act of preserving a language facing the threat of extinction. Documenting a language is common practice when communities feel a language shift will result in few remaining speakers or signers of one of their languages (Hinton, 2001). Their actions explains why a threat to the existence of natural sign languages ignites highly charged reactions from deaf communities. This chapter provides voice for these oppositional reactions in the hope that they will be heard.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The substandard educational situation of deaf people in the Arab region is in dire need of reform. Old teaching philosophies of oralism and Total Communication have proved inadequate. Arab policy makers and pan-Arab governmental organizations have sought to replace these teaching philosophies with those based on sign language, which has reportedly yielded more successful results in some Western countries. However, these decision makers have deemed local sign languages of the region to be inadequate for instructional use, in large part because they lacked the expansive vocabulary of the spoken and written standard language, MSA. These sign languages were also regarded as unsuitable because they vary from one another, that is, are not mutually intelligible and are not either structurally or lexically similar to MSA, which is used in the education of Arab children across 22 countries. Arab officials and professionals working with deaf Arab people saw these differences between local sign languages and MSA as problematic. How can they address the challenge of improving education for deaf children through sign language if local sign languages are deficient and dissimilar?

A pan-Arab unified sign language that paralleled MSA was their chosen remedy. The remedy addressed two perceived problems simultaneously. First, a unified sign language has the potential of improving deaf Arab people's literacy in MSA if it could be designed to be more similar to MSA. If such a goal could be achieved, deaf Arab people can integrate more easily with mainstream society, and increase their academic, economic, and social mobility. The remedy also has the potential of reducing demand for resources and avoids redundancy in training and certification materials for teachers and

interpreters by implementing standardized materials across LAS member countries. By consolidating efforts across Arab countries, a unified sign language would allow pan-Arab political and social groups greater impact in managing the affairs of deaf people.

The second perceived problem with a large number of local sign languages is that it conflicts with a common goal of enculturation of Arabs into Arab society, which is ideally achieved by promoting a common denominator of Arab society, the standard and divine language of Arabic. Without access to Arab heritage, traditions, customs, and religion, the proponents of the unified project saw deaf people as being placed in a situation where their human rights were violated. ArSL is creative adaptation that looks to the past to modernize, that is, it looks to the past of mainstream Arab society. ArSL would be deaf Arab people's salvation.

When AFOOD outlined its plan for a unification sign language project in 1993, it demonstrated it had some level of understanding as to the nature of sign languages. It acknowledged that there are several sign languages in the Arab region, that sign languages have grammars and are independent of spoken languages, and that the project's end product would be an artificial language that ought not to be forcibly imposed on deaf communities. Unfortunately, other individuals and groups working on the unified project later were not as well informed about these ideals and goals. They proceeded to operate under the mistaken assumption that the languages used by deaf people in the Arab region are actually quite similar and, as such, deaf Arab people would experience little difficulty understanding a unified version. Work on the project was heavily centered on vocabulary and did not include mention of the role of language structure. Although ArSL falls short

of being a language, the LAS is persisting in institutionalizing the unified sign language through education and media with no parallel efforts being made to support local sign languages. Many deaf Arab people, who do not wish to see their natural languages displaced, view their course of action as a threat.

Overall, though their efforts at modernization are laudable, they pursued them in ways that may condemn them to failure. Previous chapters examined several flaws in their project. First, it is risky to unify or standardize unrelated languages. As I conclude from my lexicostatistical analysis, many of the local sign languages in the Arab region are likely to be distinct languages and are unrelated historically. Second, languages play a social and cultural role in people's lives. It is through language that people are able to make meaning of their surroundings and express their identity, history, and culture in such a way that they cannot with a language developed absent a real context. Third, manual codes such as what ArSL is meant to become are not languages and cannot perform the full range of functions of a language. Although ArSL proponents sought to abandon the failed philosophy of Total Communication, they may ironically have recreated the philosophy by promoting a manual code. Fourth, ArSL developers seem unmindful of the diglossic situation of Arabic, which has deep implications for instruction. Even if deaf Arab people were to become literate in MSA, they would still be unable to participate in local society where dialects are ever present. Fifth, linguists can be useful advisors to language planning decisions, yet they were sorely missing from the ArSL project. Sixth, representation of groups in the project appears random and problematic, considering that professionalization of teachers, sign language interpreters

and leaders of national associations for deaf people are limited. Seventh, lexical modernization is best generated by building on a pre-existing language and not by creating an entirely new language from scratch. Eighth, the community of language users themselves must be acceptable to change in their language but more importantly, they must perceive *a need* for change. Many deaf Arab people do not perceive their language as deficient to start. Instead they have resisted learning ArSL because they do not understand it. The shortcomings of the ArSL project are enormous.

Many deaf Arab people and their organizations have denounced the ArSL project as a violation of human rights and have demanded its cessation. They consider ArSL an unnecessary fix for a language situation that was never broken in the first place. They have instead proposed that local sign languages be institutionalized in a way to promote training teachers, certifying interpreters, and providing access to televised media. I posit that they too seek to modernize by being continuous with the past in which their deaf culture remains deeply ingrained in their language. They are redefining what it means to be a deaf Arab person by rejecting the stigma of sign language, instead putting their local sign languages at the center.

The ArSL project provides an interesting window for how different groups in the region appropriate human rights language in such ways to advance their goals. All groups operate under respective conceptions of modernity. But what comes next? However well intentioned, the ArSL project has warning signs of failure. In *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, James Scott (1998) explores several social engineering projects undertaken by states, such as urban planning

in Brasilia and villagization in Tanazania, that have gone awry. These modern schemes, echoing the ArSL project, were meant to simplify complex, local social practices and replace them with centralized and standardized practices that would allow a state to administer to its subjects and their environments more conveniently. The difference with ArSL is that it is a multi-state project, and the cooperation of individual Arab governments is necessary. The LAS performs the quasi-state function in this case.
Scott identifies four elements shared by ill-conceived modernist designs that,can set the stage for their collapse. In the first, the state develops administrative tools for the express purpose of ordering society and/or nature. In the case of improving the welfare of deaf Arab people, this entailed creating an entirely new language. Ancillary tools in support of this endeavor were the dictionaries in print and CD form, training workshops for teachers and interpreters, and the institutionalization of ArSL in schools for deaf children and on television media. These tools provide the state with the means to engineer the project.

Second, the state has faith in what Scott terms “high-modernist ideology,” or confidence that society and nature can be planned according to rational, scientific design. We have seen proponents of the ArSL project refer to its “sound scientific principles,” the “experts” that participated on the project, and the conferences that selected which signs would be used for the new language according to a voting mechanism. This rhetoric and accompanying activities can be seen as outward displays of a “high-modernist ideology.” The ideology generates the political and financial support to embark on a large-scale project.

Third, there is a state that is willing to stand behind the projects and exert its influence to make the conceptualization of these projects a reality. While AFOOD had for many years discussed the development of a unified, sign language, it was not until LAS adopted the project that the actual work commenced. With the backing of the LAS and the Qatari government, ArSL grew from concept to actuality exemplified by its use on Al Jazeera.

Fourth, a civil society that is too weak to resist these plans or where popular opinion is overrun by the state enables dubious social engineering projects to take root. Deaf Arab people are poorly represented on boards of their national associations, if any even exist in their countries, and they are unable to make their opinions known or factored into the development of ArSL. Many interpreters, literally those who speak for deaf people in interpreting situations, have stood in support of the ArSL project instead of conveying deaf people's opposition. The ineffectual resistance by deaf Arab people enables the project's steady development and implementation.

These four elements together are not sufficient to doom a project to failure, but they set the stage for it. The problem, according to Scott, lies in the effort to simplify complex and obscure systems (such as the natural sign languages used by deaf Arab people) so as to allow states to manage and control them. The shallower and narrower the state's vision of complex reality, one that "ignores essential features of any real, functioning social order" (Scott, 1998, p. 6), the riskier the scheme. In Chapter 5 and earlier in this chapter, I point out several those essential features that were dismissed by the "high-modernist ideology" that found faith in an Arabic unified sign language. The

design of ArSL does not take into account the historical, political, and social roles that languages play in its users' lives, the complexity of natural languages beyond simply vocabulary, and more fundamentally, intelligibility by the intended community of users. In essence, the ArSL project simplified sign language so much that it stripped it of any life at all.

More important still, Scott indicates, the simplified reality and accompanying formal processes created by state officials depend on informal processes and local knowledge that officials not only do not recreate or recognize but may also suppress. For instance, what we have learned about the ArSL effort is that it should have incorporated knowledge about natural sign languages in its design, but it seems to have bypassed it entirely. Use of ArSL also relies on previous knowledge of a natural sign language in order to supplant that language's grammar onto ArSL to give it some structure, which it otherwise lacks. Moreover, though ArSL's vocabulary was extracted from local sign languages and, as such, ArSL's viability depends on local sign languages, yet the project's architects do not protect these natural languages. To the contrary, they are relegated to the margins as substandard, ineffective, and dispensable. For a communication system to work its intended community must embrace it; its success is parasitic on deaf people's use of it. This will not be the case so long as deaf Arab people's values, desires, and protests are ignored. The disregard of informal processes that underpin ArSL's functioning will account for its downfall.

To conclude, ArSL is not likely to become the language of deaf Arab people in their daily lives, in communicating across state borders, or in education. Instead, deaf

communities are much more likely to take from it only what they need, if anything, and incorporate it into their own local sign languages. The Iraqi man in Chapter 5 echoes this sentiment,

> None of my deaf friends sign ArSL, but they have borrowed some signs from it. I don't blame them. If they need a sign that they don't have, they should take it. But it doesn't mean their language is ArSL. It's still their [local] sign language. [77] (name withheld for privacy, personal communication, August 13, 2007).

ArSL signs are already trickling into existing sign languages, but they are not adopted en masse. The deaf community in Alexandria, Egypt might borrow one set of ArSL signs and the deaf community in Salt, Jordan will take yet another set, and, as such, their sign languages will remain distinct.

Where do we go from here? Humphries (1996) proposes that, at the juncture where deaf and hearing people are in conflict over solutions and struggle over control of the situation, attention should be paid to the cultural nature of their interactions. They should conceive of each other's positions by placing the problem not on the deaf person or on the hearing person but in the context of their different world views. This can be achieved through:

> acknowledgment of differences, deference to each other's need for autonomy; acknowledgment of a struggle to find a new balance of power after a long history of inequality; a new paradigm of control in cross-cultural relationships, especially in regard to language and communication; and, finally, the modern Deaf person's ability to see…that hearing people may be able to help them without couching the help in a defunct ideology of the strangeness of the Deaf person. (ibid, p. 114)

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[77] In English spoken conversation.

In order for deaf people to trust hearing people to have appropriate solutions, the latter's ideology that deaf people are "strange" —uncultured with primitive languages—must be abandoned. Pan-Arab governmental organizations and other Arab groups and individuals have yet to arrive at this realization. It is my hope that they will, and that local sign languages in the Arab region receive the respect they deserve and are recognized at the official level as the languages of deaf Arab people. Their documentation, study, dissemination, and institutionalization will not only fulfill deaf Arab people's human right to preserve and use their languages but also give them a voice to emancipate from oppressive systems. Educational systems have time and time again sought to improve deaf people's welfare without regard to their sign languages with unsuccessful results. The ArSL project does not look to be an exception. Resources and time are better spent not ignoring these sign languages but embracing them.

But why did Al Jazeera support this ArSL project in the first place? What is the Qatari government's stake in this? An Al Jazeera interpreter explained that the network sought to address the needs of society in order to provide "the most modern methods in communicating with deaf people" (Samoudi, 2006, para. 3).[78] In other words, Al Jazeera's ArSL broadcast is meant to be humanitarian and cutting-edge. To the vast majority of those who follow the network, they may have in fact succeeded. But this is not the case for the interpreted broadcast's intended audience, who have little to gain and potentially much to lose by the network's uninformed stance regarding deaf Arab people's realities and languages.

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[78] Translated from Arabic.

It would be interesting to survey how increasing use of technologies such as video-conferencing over the Internet have transformed communication between deaf people in Arab countries. Informal observations indicate that such technologies are increasingly popular because it is so amenable to signed communication. Is it possible that a naturally evolved, multi-state pidgin sign language might emerge in this convergence of technology and local society?

The development and use of ArSL should continue to be monitored. As a rare case of a multi-state modernization project, it may shed valuable information on what it takes to make a modernist project a success or a failure. This may prove to be especially relevant information in an increasingly globalized world. A pan-European pidgin sign language is now said to be developing and gaining currency due to the establishment of a European Union. The EU's attempts to organize social and academic groups across national boundaries has created more opportunity for deaf people in Europe to meet, although information on this is scant. These and other studies on language change and development in regions around the world may reaffirm what we already know about the role of language in mediating lives. But they may also reveal surprising instances of social change in which emerging new technologies play a new, as of yet unattested role, in unifying languages and people across national borders.

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Appendix A

Comparison of concepts found in both the LIU and PSL dictionaries

Similar (59)

ADAM
ALLAH
AMMAN
ANIMALS
ANNOUNCE
ASK-FOR-HELP
ARAB
ARMY
AVAILABLE
BEAST
BED
BOOK
CAPITAL
CENTER
CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS
CLEAN WATERS
CLUB
DANGEROUS
DEAD
DEFEAT
ELECTRICITY
FARMER
FASTING
FIRE
FLOAT
GARBAGE
GIANT
HAIR
HAPPY
HOUSE
KORAN
MIDDLE
MILITARY
NEGATIVE REACTION
NERVES
NUMBER
OIL
OPEN
OPEN
OUTER SPACE
POLICE
PROPHET MOHAMMED'S NOCTURNAL
PROTEST
QUESTION
RESIST
RIVER
SCIENCE
SMELL
SMITH
SQUARE
STOMACH
SUMMER
TEACHER
TELEVISION
TREE
WATER
WORRY
VALLEY (GHOR)
ZARQA

Related (38)

BEE
BIRTH OF THE PROPHET MOHAMMED
BOX
BUILDING
CAMEL
CANDLE
DEAF
DOCTOR
EXAMINE
FEAR
FREEDOM
GENERAL
HIDE
HISTORY
HOW MANY
IMPORTANT
LAW
LIFE
LIGHT
LUNGS
MONEY
NEIGHBOR
NERVOUS BREAKDOWN
NEW
PALESTINE
PETRA
PUSH
RECTANGLE
RED
SAND
SCHOOL
SKILL
SPRING
TRADE
TRIANGLE
UNIVERSE
WIRE
WORKER

Different (70)

ANSWER
ATTRACT
BEET
BETHLEHEM
BIRD'S NEST
BLIND

Comparison of concepts found in both the LIU and PSL dictionaries

Different (70)

BLOOD
BLOOD PRESSURE
BRAIN
CEMENT
CHURCH
CIVIL DEFENCE
COLOR
COTTON
CROWN
DATES
DRY
ELEPHANT
EVIL
FAMILIAR
FAMILY
FLOWER
FORGIVE
GAZA
HANDICAP
HOSPITAL
INDEPENDENCE
INFECTION
ISLAM
JERUSALEM
JIHAD
LION
LOVES-THE-LAND
MIRROR
MUSIC
ON
PARACHUTE
PATIENCE
PEARL
PREFER
PERMISSION
POLITE
PRAYER
PROOF
RAIN
RAINBOW
RESPIRATORY
SYSTEM
SAD
SALT
SCORPION
SHOES
SKIN
SKY
SMALL INTESTINES
SPECIAL
SPIDER
STAR
TAILOR
TECHNOLOGY
THERMOMETER
TRAINING
TRIP
UNITED
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNIVERSITY
VOICE
WELL-BEHAVED
WHISPER
WHO
YOUTH

Appendix B

Comparison of concepts found in both the LIU and KSL dictionaries

Similar (39)

ADDRESS
ALLAH
BEAST
BED
BIRD (large)
BOMB
BOOK
BULLDOZER
CANDLE
CAR
CHALK
COLOR
COMMAND
COW
DOCTOR
DOG
DRUM
DRY
FRIEND
FULL
GO
GOAT
GOLD
MONEY
MONKEY
OIL
PIECE
PROTECT
QUESTION
SPECIFY
SQUARE
STOP
SUMMER
SWIM
TELEVISION
THERMOMETER
TRADE
VICTORY
WATER

Related (33)

BANANA
BOX
BUTTERFLY
CIGARETTE
CORN
DATES
DEFEAT
DUST
EAGLE
FEELING
FISH
FLY
GLOVES
GRAPES
GUARD
INJECTION
LETTUCE
LIGHT
PETROL
PIANO
PLANE
PRAYER
PUSH
RECTANGLE
RIVER
SAND
SEPARATE
SIT
SOAP
SURGERY
TABLE
TRIANGLE
TYPING
WRITING

Different (110)

ACCOUNTANT
ANIMALS
ANSWER
APPLE
ARM
ARMY
BASKET
BATHE
BATHROOM
BELT
BIRD (small)
BIRTH
BLACK
BOAT
BOMBING
CAMEL
CAT
CHICKEN
CHILD
COME
COMPETE
COOPERATIVE
CRAWL
CURVE
DEATH
DESERT
DONKEY
DROWN
DUCK
ELEPHANT
EMPLOYEE
EMPTY
ENEMY
ENGINEERING
FACE
FAMILY
FAR
FARMER

Appendix C

Comparison of concepts found in both the LIU and LSL dictionaries

Similar (42)

ADDRESS
AUSTRALIA
BANANA
BEAR
BEAUTIFUL
BED
BILLIARD
CAR
CLEAN
COLOR
CUP
DEAF
DISAPPEAR
DOG
ENGLAND
FIRE
FIRST TIME
FLY (insect)
HOSPITAL
HUNGARY
INDIA
LISTEN
MAGIC
MEDICINE
MONEY
MONKEY
NEWSPAPER
OIL
PAKISTAN
PETROL
PIANO
PLAY
POOR/PAUPER
PRAY
SPOON
STOP
SUMMER
SURGERY
TAKE
THROW
TREE
TURTLE

Related (49)

ACCIDENT
ADOLESCENT
ANSWER
BIRD
BOXING
CAMEL
CHICKEN
CIGARETTE
COMPETITION
CROCODILE
DATES
DRINK
EARTHQUAKE
EGGS
ELEPHANT
EMPTY
FAST-RAMADAN
FRIEND
FULL
GRAPES
HANDICAPPED
HELP
ICECREAM
IMPORTANT
INJECTION
LAW
LOSE
MATCHES
MEAT
MEXICO
MILK
MOSQUITO
OLD
OUD
PEAR
PEPPER
PLUM
RABBIT
RACE
RED
SAME-THING
SHEEP
SMALL
SWIM
TABLE
TRUMPET
TURKEY
WARM
WRITE

Different (176)

A LOT
ABILITY
AFRICA
AFTER
ALGERIA
APPLE
ARAB
ARGENTINA
ARTIST
ASK
ATTACK
AUSTRIA
AVAILABLE
BAHRAIN
BELT
BETRAYAL
BLACK
BLOOD
BOMB
BOOK
BOSS

Comparison of concepts found in both the LIU and LSL dictionaries

Different (176)

BRAZIL
BREAD
BULGARIA
CANDLE
CENTER
CERTIFICATE
CHAIR
CHEESE
CHILD
CHINA
CHURCH
CINEMA
CLUB
COACH
COFFEE
COMMUNISM
COMPANY
COOPERATIVE
COW
CZECHOSLOVAKIA
DANGER
DEFENSE
DENMARK
DIFFICULT
DISCUSS
DOCTOR
DONKEY
DRY
EGYPT
EMPLOY
ENEMIES
EUROPE
FAMILY
FAR
FARM
FARMER
FILE
FINLAND
FISH
FLOWERS
FORK
FRANCE
FROG
GAZELLE
GERMANY
GO
GOAT
GOVERNMENT
GREECE
GROW
HAIR-STYLIST
HAPPY
HELLO
HOLLAND
HORSE
HOTEL
HOUSE
HUNGRY
ILL
INTELLIGENCE
IRAN
IRAQ
IRELAND
IRON
JAPAN
JORDAN
KNIFE
KORAN
KUWAIT
LEBANON
LEMON
LIBYA
LIE
LION
LOOK-FOR
LOSER
MAN
MIDDLE
MILITARY
MORNING
MOROCCO
MOUSE
NEW
OMAN
ON
ONION
ORANGE
OTHER
PAIN
PALESTINE
PARROT
PATIENCE
PIG
POETRY
POLAND
POLITE
PORTUGAL
POTATO
QATAR
RAIN
RECEIPT
RELAXATION
RELIGION
RESTAURANT
RIVER
ROMANIA
SAD
SALT
SAUDI ARABIA
SAVE (economize)
SCIENCE
SCORPION
SEA
SEPARATE
SHOE
SING
SIT
SLEEP

Comparison of concepts found in both the LIU and LSL dictionaries

Different (176)

SNAKE
SOCIAL SECURITY
SOCKS
SORRY
SPAIN
SPIDER
SPRING
SUDAN
SURPRISE
SWEDEN
SWITZERLAND
SYRIA
TASTE
TEA
TELEVISION
THEATER
THIN
THUNDER
TIGER
TODAY
TRAVEL
TUNISIA
UNDERSTAND
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNKNOWN
VOICE
WATER
WATERMELON
WHAT
WHO
WOLF
WOMAN
WORLD
WORRIED
WRESTLING
YEMEN
YUGOSLAVIA

Appendix D

Comparison of concepts found in both the LIU dictionary and ABSL elicited signs

Similar (25)

ACCIDENT
BEAUTIFUL
COTTON
DATES
DESTROY
ELECTRICITY
FACTORY
FASTING RAMADAN
FIRE
FLY (insect)
FULL
GAZELLE
KITCHEN
LOSE
MEDICINE
MILK
MONEY
NECESSARY
PASSPORT
POMEGRANATE
SEPARATE
SORRY
STORM
SUMMER
THROW

Related (14)

DEEP
DRY
ELEPHANT
FARMER
FUTURE
HANDICAPPED
HOPE
MIRROR
MORNING
PRAY
STREET
SURPRISE
TODAY
UNDERSTAND

Different (126)

A LOT
ADDRESS
AMMAN
ANIMAL
ANNOUNCE
ANSWER
APPLE
ARAB
ARMY
ASK
ATTACK
BATHROOM
BED
BLOOD
BREAD
BULLDOZER
BUTTER
CHEESE
CHURCH
CLEAN
COMPLAIN
CORN
COW
CUCUMBER
DANCE
DANGEROUS
DEAF
DEATH
DESERT
DIFFERENT
DISAPPEAR
DISCUSS
DOCTOR
EGYPT
EMPTY
EVIL/DEVIL
EXCELLENT
FAMILY
FAR
FARM
FEAR
FEELING
FREEDOM
FRIEND
FROG
FRUIT
GAZA
GENERAL (military)
GIANT
GIRAFFE
GOLD
GOVERNMENT
HAPPY
HELP
HIDE
HOSPITAL
HUMMUS
HUNGRY
IMPORTANT
ISRAEL
JERUSALEM
JOB
JORDAN
KING
KORAN
LAST
LAWYER
LEAVE
LEBANON
LIFE

Comparison of concepts found in both the LIU dictionary and ABSL elicited signs

Different (126)

LION
MONKEY
MUSIC
NEIGHBOR
NEW
NEWS
NUMBER
OLD
ONION
PAIN
PALESTINE
PEAS
PLAY
POLICE
POLITE
PROTECT
PROTEST
RAINBOW
RELIGION
REST
RIVER
SAD
SALAD
SALT
SAME
SAVE (economize)
SCHOOL
SEA
SEARCH
SICK
SNAKE
SOAP
SOLDIER
SPAGHETTI
SPIDER
SPRING
STOP
STORE
STRAWBERRY
SURGERY
SWIM
TEACHER
THERMOMETER
TRAVEL
TRIBE
TURTLE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNIVERSITY
VALLEY
WAIT
WATER
WATERMELON
WISH
WORLD
WORRY

Appendix E

Comparison of concepts found in both the LIU and ASL dictionaries

Similar (28)

ARMY
AUSTRALIA
BOAT
BOOK
BOX
BUTTERFLY
COCONUTS
COME-HERE
COMMAND
DEAF
DRINK
EGGS
FAR
FISH
ICE CREAM
PEARS
PILLS
PILOT
SCIENCE
SLEEP
SOLDIER
STAIRS
TEARS
THIRSTY
TREE
TURKEY (animal)
TYPE (verb)

Related (41)

ACCIDENT
ANNOUNCE
BINOCULARS
BLOOD
CONFRONT
DRESS
DRUMS
ELEGANT
ELEPHANT
EMBRACE
FACE
FEELINGS
FIRE
FLAG
FORK
FULL
GENERAL (military)
HAIR
HARD
HELLO
LOSE
MIRROR
MONKEY
MUSIC
ONION
PIANO
PLANE
PLATE
PLUMBER
PRESENT (available)
RACE
RAIN
ROAD
SCHOOL
SPOON
SUITCASE
SUMMER
SWALLOW
TORN
WIND
WRITING

Different (342)

A LOT
ABANDON
ABILITY
ACTOR
ADDRESS
AFRICA
AMMENDMENTS
ANIMAL
ANNIVERSARY
ANNOYANCE
ANSWER
APPLES
APPOINTMENT
APPROACH
ARRIVED
ARROGANT
ARTIST
ASLEEP
AUDIENCE
BANANAS
BAND-AID
BATHE
BATHROOM
BEAR
BEAUTIFUL
BED
BEHAVIOUR
BIRD
BIRTH
BLACK
BLIND
BODY
BOSS
BREAD
BREEZE
BUTTER
CABBAGE
CALMLY
CANADA
CANCELLED
CANDLES
CAPTAIN
CARROTS
CAT

Comparison of concepts found in both the LIU and ASL dictionaries

Different (342)

CELEBRATION
CENTER
CHAIR
CHEESE
CHERRIES
CHICKEN
CHIEF
CHILD
CHINA
CHRISTMAS
CHURCH
CIGARETTES
CLASS
CLEAN
CLOSE
COACH
COFFEE
COLOR
COMMISSION
COMPANY
COMPLAIN
COMPLETE
COMPREHEND
COMPUTER
CONFERENCE
CONFUSED
CORN
COW
CROWDED
DANCE
DANGEROUS
DARK
DEATH
DEFEAT
DEFENSE
DELICIOUS
DEPARTMENT
DESCRIBE
DIFFER
DIPLOMA
DISAPPEARANCE
DISAPPOINTMENT
DISCOVER
DISCUSS
DOG
DONATE
DOUBT
DROWN
DRY
DUCK
EAGLE
ECONOMIC
EFFORT
EGYPT
ELECTRIC
EMOTION
ENEMY
ENGINEERING
ENGLISH
EUROPE
EVIDENCE
EVIL
EXAMINE
EXCELLENT
EXHAUSTION
EXPERT
FAMILIAR
FAMILY
FARM
FASCINATING
FEAR
FILM
FLEXIBLE
FLOWERS
FOREST
FORGIVE
FOX
FRANCE
FRENCH FRIES
FRIEND
FROG
FROWN
FRUITS
GAIN
GARAGE
GENEROUS
GERMANY
GHOSTS
GIFT
GIRL
GO
GOAT
GOD
GOLD
GOVERNMENT
GRAPES
GRASS
GRAVE
GREEDY
GROW
GUARDS
GUESS
HAMBURGER
HAMMER
HAND
HAPPY
HARDSHIP
HASTY
HAT
HELICOPTER
HIDE
HIGH
HISTORY
HOLLAND
HONEST

Comparison of concepts found in both the LIU and ASL dictionaries

Different (342)

HOPE
HORSE
HOSPITAL
HOUSE
HOW MANY
HUG
HUMBLE
HUMIDITY
HUNGRY
ILL
IMAGINE
IMPORTANT
INDECISIVE
INDEPENDENCE
INDEPENDENT INDIA
ISRAEL
JAPAN
KITCHEN
LADDER
LAW
LEAVE
LEMON
LETTUCE
LIE
LIFE
LIGHT
LION
LIST
LOCK
MAGIC
MAN
MEAT
MEMBER
MERCY
MIDDLE
MILK
MISS
MISSING
MONEY
MOOSE
MORE
MOTOR
MOUSE
MOVIE
MUST
NATION
NEIGHBORS
NERVES
NERVOUS
NEW
NEWS
NEWSPAPERS
NUMBER
NURSE
OBLIGE
OCCASSIONALLY
OIL
OLD
ON
OPEN
ORANGES
OTHER
OWN
PAIL
PAIN
PATIENCE
PEACHES
PEPPERS
PERMISSION
PERSUADE
PHYSICIAN
PIECE
PIG
PINK
PLANTS
POETRY
POLICE
POTATOES
PRAY
PREFER
PRESSURE
PRETEND
PRIEST
PRINT
PROMISE
PROTECTION
PSYCHIATRIST
PULL
QUESTION
QUICKLY
RABBIT
READY
REAL
RECENT
RECEPTION
RED
RELATIVE
RELAX
RELIGION
REST
RESTAURANT
REWARD
ROOSTER
RUSSIA
SAD
SALT
SANDWHICH
SAUSAGES
SAVE
SAW
SEARCH
SENSITIVE
SEPARATE
SHARP
SHEEP
SHELTER
SHINY
SHIVER

Comparison of concepts found in both the LIU and ASL dictionaries

Different (342)

SHOCK
SHOES
SHOVEL
SHY
SIT
SKILL
SKINNY
SMELL
SNAKE
SOAP
SOCKS
SOMETIMES
SORRY
SOUL
SPAGHETTI
SPAIN
SPECIFY
SPIDER
SPORTS
SPRING
SQUIRREL
STAR
STATUE
SUGGEST
SUPERVISOR
SUPPORT
SURGERY
SWEATER
SWIMMING
TABLE
Take care, TALK
TEA
TEACHER
TELL
THEATRE
THERMOMETER
THIN
THROW
TICKET
TODAY
TOWEL
TRADE
TRAVEL
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNIVERSITY
VACANT
VALUE
VICTORY
VOICE
WAIT
WARM
WATER
WHISPER
WHO
WINDOW
WISH
WOLF
WORLD
WORRY
WORSHIP
WRESTLING
YELLOW
YOUTH

Appendix F

Basis of difference between LIU and PSL signs which are related-but-different

CONCEPT	Handshape	Location	Movement	Orientation
BEE			*	
BIRTH OF THE PROPHET MOHAMMED		*		
BOX				*
BUILDING			*	
CAMEL			*	
CANDLE				*
DEAF	*			
DOCTOR	*			
EXAMINE			*	
FEAR			*	
FREEDOM	*			
GENERAL		*		
HIDE			*	
HISTORY				*
HOW MANY			*	
IMPORTANT		*		
LAW				*
LIFE			*	
LIGHT				*
LUNGS			*	
MONEY				*
NEIGHBOR		*		
NERVOUS BREAKDOWN			*	
NEW	*			
PALESTINE		*		
PETRA	*			
PUSH	*			
RECTANGLE			*	
RED			*	
SAND				*
SCHOOL	*			
SKILL			*	
SPRING			*	
TRADE			*	
TRIANGLE				*
UNIVERSE			*	
WIRE				*
WORKER			*	
TOTAL	**7**	**5**	**17**	**9**

Appendix G

Basis of difference between LIU and KSL signs which are related-but-different

CONCEPT	Handshape	Location	Movement	Orientation
BANANA	*			
BOX				*
BUTTERFLY				*
CIGARETTE	*			
CORN			*	
DATES				*
DEFEAT				*
DUST			*	
EAGLE	*			
FEELING			*	
FISH			*	
FLY			*	
GLOVES				*
GRAPES	*			
GUARD				*
INJECTION			*	
LETTUCE	*			
LIGHT				*
PETROL	*			
PIANO			*	
PLANE				*
PRAYER			*	
PUSH			*	
RECTANGLE			*	
RIVER	*			
SAND			*	
SEPARATE		*		
SIT		*		
SOAP	*			
SURGERY			*	
TABLE			*	
TRIANGLE				*
TYPING			*	
TOTAL	8	2	14	9

Appendix H

Basis of difference between LIU and LSL signs which are related-but-different

CONCEPT	Handshape	Location	Movement	Orientation
ACCIDENT	*			
ADOLESCENT	*			
ANSWER	*			
BOXING		*		
CAMEL			*	
CHICKEN			*	
CIGARETTE			*	
COMPETITION			*	
CROCODILE			*	
DATES			*	
DRINK			*	
EARTHQUAKE			*	
EGGS	*			
ELEPHANT	*			
ELEVEN	*			
EMPTY	*			
FAST-RAMADAN	*			
FOUR				*
FOURTEEN	*			
FRIEND			*	
FULL			*	
GRAPES	*			
HANDICAPPED		*		
HELP			*	
ICECREAM			*	
IMPORTANT			*	
INJECTION			*	
LAW			*	
LOSE	*			
MATCHES	*			
MEAT	*			
MEXICO	*			
MILK			*	
MOSQUITO			*	
NINETY NINE	*			
OLD	*			
OUD		*		
PEAR	*			
PEPPER			*	
PLUM				*

Basis of difference between LIU and LSL signs which are related-but-different

CONCEPT	Handshape	Location	Movement	Orientation
RABBIT		*		
RACE			*	
RED				*
SAME-THING			*	
SHEEP			*	
SMALL			*	
SWIM			*	
TABLE			*	
THIRTEEN	*			
TRUMPET	*			
TURKEY			*	
TWELVE	*			
TWO				*
WARM			*	
WRITE				*
TOTAL	20	4	26	5

Appendix I

Basis of difference between LIU and ABSL signs which are related-but-different

CONCEPT	Handshape	Location	Movement	Orientation
DEEP			*	
DRY				*
ELEPHANT	*			
FARMER				*
FUTURE			*	
HANDICAPPED			*	
HOPE			*	
MIRROR			*	
MORNING			*	
PRAY			*	
STREET			*	
SURPRISE				*
TODAY			*	
UNDERSTAND			*	
TOTAL	**1**	**0**	**10**	**3**

Appendix J

Basis of difference between LIU and ASL signs which are related-but-different

CONCEPT	Handshape	Location	Movement	Orientation
ACCIDENT	*			
ANNOUNCE	*			
BINOCULARS			*	
BLOOD				*
CONFRONT	*			
DRESS	*			
DRUMS		*		
ELEGANT			*	
ELEPHANT	*			
EMBRACE		*		
FACE			*	
FEELINGS			*	
FIRE	*			
FLAG		*		
FORK			*	
FULL			*	
GENERAL (military)		*		
HAIR	*			
HARD	*			
HELLO		*		
LOSE		*		
MIRROR			*	
MONKEY		*		
MUSIC		*		
ONION		*		
PIANO			*	
PLANE				*
PLATE			*	
PLUMBER			*	
PRESENT (available)			*	
RACE			*	
RAIN		*		
ROAD			*	
SCHOOL	*			
SPOON	*			
SUITCASE		*		
SUMMER	*			
SWALLOW	*			

Basis of difference between LIU and ASL signs which are related-but-different

CONCEPT	Handshape	Location	Movement	Orientation
TORN			*	
WIND			*	
WRITING	*			
TOTAL	**13**	**11**	**15**	**2**

Appendix K

3-way comparison of concepts found in the LIU and PSL dictionaries and ABSL elicited signs

Similar (3)

ELECTRICITY
FASTING (Ramadan)
SUMMER

Related (2)

FARMER
MONEY

Different (49)

AMMAN
ANIMAL
ANNOUNCE
ANSWER
ARAB
ARMY
BED
BLOOD
CHURCH
COTTON
DANGEROUS
DATES
DEAF
DOCTOR
DRY
ELEPHANT
EVIL/DEVIL
FAMILY
FEAR
FREE/FREEDOM
GAZA
HANDICAP(PED)
HAPPY
HELP
HIDE
HOSPITAL
IMPORTANT
JERUSALEM
KORAN
LIFE
LION
MIDDLE
MIRROR
MUSIC
NEIGHBOR
NEW
NUMBER
PALESTINE
POLICE
POLITE
PRAY/PRAYER
PROTEST
RAINBOW
RIVER
SAD
SALT
SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY
WATER