



**The Sociolinguistics of
Ethiopian
Sign
Language**

A Study of Language Use and Attitudes

Eyasu Hailu Tamene

The Sociolinguistics of Ethiopian Sign Language



Ceil Lucas and Jordan Fenlon, General Editors

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The Sociolinguistics of Ethiopian Sign Language

Introduction

The study of language use and attitudes with respect to Ethiopian Sign Language (EthSL) has several advantages: not only will it assist in the development and recognition of the language itself by reinforcing EthSL as a real language, it will also potentially impact the lives of the Deaf community in Ethiopia by enhancing educational and employment opportunities. This has been true of other sign language communities around the world such as the American Deaf community (Lucas, 2004).

There are more than 80 languages in Ethiopia. Some are major languages with over a million users, serving as a medium of instruction, and having the status of being official and/or prestigious languages. By contrast, others are minor languages, confined to restricted domains, and are less prestigious. Ethiopian Sign Language (EthSL) is one of the minor languages, yet it has about a million users (WHO statistics).¹

Little work exists on EthSL that could serve as a starting point for a sociolinguistic study of the language. Not much is known about the language's sociolinguistic profile. Except for sign language dictionaries, there is no reference material available on the language. However, curiosity has been growing nowadays among educational and social domains as to what the sociolinguistic nature of EthSL and the Deaf community may look like. For example, although it is not possible to find any written information about the history of EthSL before the introduction of Ethiopian Deaf Education, many Deaf people in Ethiopia believe that American Sign Language (ASL) has had a strong influence on EthSL.²

1. This is an unconfirmed estimate. According to the 2013 World Health Organization report, 15 percent of every country's population consists of People with Disabilities (PWD). Out of this, 1/10th of them are assumed to be Deaf people (www.who.org). There is no other source that gives any exact figure.

2. The term *Deaf* (with upper case D) in this study refers to sociological deafness; the term *deaf* (with lower case d) refers to audiological deafness. The term *Hearing* refers to those (deaf) people who identify with oral language communities and their values; the term *hearing* means the ability to hear (Woodward, 1982; Lucas, 2004).

This is because ASL was brought to Ethiopia together with Deaf education and evidence of the continued contact between EthSL and ASL is apparent in the structure of EthSL today.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

As EthSL is an under-described and under-documented language of Ethiopia, the general objective of this study is to describe the sociolinguistic situation of EthSL by:

1. providing a current sociolinguistic profile of EthSL and the Deaf community;
2. illustrating the use of EthSL in various domains such as in the home, education, religious place, media, market, medical institution, courtroom, and informal social gatherings; and
3. investigating the factors responsible for attitudes toward the use of EthSL.

This research hypothesizes that the use of EthSL in various language domains will be a reflection of the community's attitudes toward its own language. In other words, the more domains in which the language is used, the more positive the community's attitudes toward the language. The objective of this research is not only to determine the current situation and to find out the factors responsible for various attitudes toward EthSL but also to set a benchmark for future language documentations on EthSL.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT

To date, there is very little research about the sign languages of Africa. Some grammatical sketches, which also include some information about the sociolinguistic profile, include Schmaling (2000), Nyst (2007), and Akach (2010). As a consequence, sociolinguistic studies of sign languages have been neglected in Africa.

A sociolinguistic description of EthSL is important for both academic and social reasons. Academically, it will foster the teaching and learning of the language. For example, it will empower the staff capacity of the EthSL and Deaf Culture Program at Addis Ababa University (AAU) and

will be of help expanding the BA program to MA level and ultimately to PhD once the required expertise is available. In such a case, the number of Deaf students going into the tertiary level would increase. Socially, it would contribute to the promotion of EthSL a better communication means for the Ethiopian Deaf community and its associated members. In other words, the research will increase understanding and general respect about the current situation of EthSL and will be an important resource for the ongoing development of EthSL. Lastly, the information gained from this research will be a valuable resource for those concerned with policy issues in connection with sign language and Deaf education in Ethiopia.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to address the basic research questions, this study follows both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Data was collected via interviews, questionnaires, and participant observation. All methods were administered by myself (the principal investigator) with the support of Deaf Research Assistants (DRAs).

Before conducting the fieldwork, information regarding the Ethiopian Deaf community and EthSL was gathered from individuals and organizations. As the national census underestimates the number of Deaf population in Ethiopia, the research data is dependent on the statistical data available from regional Deaf associations and Deaf schools. Although a large number of Deaf communities exist in Ethiopia, this study focused on communities in eleven regions: Addis Ababa, Hosaena, Adama (Nazareth), Hawassa, Arba Minch, Harar, Dessie, Mekele, Bahir Dar, Nekemt, and Gambella. These regions represent the locations of national Deaf associations, Deaf schools, and Deaf centers. When selecting participants from each region for inclusion in this study, care was taken to consider a range of factors known to account for sociolinguistic variation in Deaf children—such as age at onset of deafness, degree of hearing loss, medical history, linguistic background, age, gender, IQ, and socio-economic status (Baker and Woll, 2005). This study also involved prestratification of the population before selecting the sample size. The socially stratified sample population includes Deaf students, their teachers, school administrators, parents of Deaf children, children of Deaf parents/adults (CODA), Deaf community leaders, Deaf associations and organizations, and individuals

working with Deaf people. These participants were grouped into three types: Deaf participants, parents, and teachers.

Participant observation, sociolinguistic questionnaires (SLQ), as well as a sample sociolinguistic questionnaire found in Leigh (2010), and questionnaires from previous sign language corpus projects (mainly BSL and Auslan corpus projects) were used to gather information about Deaf communities, sign language use, and language attitudes.³ The questionnaires and interview guides were modified for the purpose of this research. In order to gather more personal information about the attitudes and ethnolinguistic identity of the Deaf community toward their language, both structured and open-ended interviews were conducted. To supplement the use of questionnaires, it was also necessary to observe participants at home and in schools.

3. Bickford (1988) and Showalter (1990) provided a basis to gather information about sociolinguistic data.

Sign Language Use and Deaf Education in Ethiopia

Out of Ethiopia's 80-plus spoken languages, only a handful (Amharic, Oromiffa, Tigrinya, and a few others) are well studied and have served as media languages, secondary school languages, official regional languages, and in other higher domains. The remaining languages, some of which have more than a million speakers, do not enjoy such a status. However, these languages serve as a major marker in defining the community, resulting in a strong establishment of culture, a sense of identity, and understanding. EthSL is no exception; its role as a minority community marker is underscored by the fact that it is a language expressed in the visual modality.

To date, EthSL has not been well studied and, as a consequence of this, most hearing Ethiopians doubt that EthSL is a complete language. Some electronic and printed sign languages dictionaries have been published (see pp. 12–17). At least 50 unpublished linguistic BA senior essays have been conducted by undergraduate students of the EthSL and Deaf Culture Program Unit at Addis Ababa University and a few MA theses on EthSL have also been completed.⁴ The BA topics are in the areas of sociolinguistics (34%), Deaf education (25%), sign language interpreting (18%), descriptive linguistics (16%), Deaf culture (3%), sign language history (2%) and sign language acquisition (2%). The sociolinguistic research mainly focuses on language variation, highlighting factors such as age, gender, religion, and school (e.g., Birhanesh, 2010; Berihun, 2010; Getu, 2010; Kidane, 2010; Selamu, 2010; Tigist, 2010; Meaza, 2011). Others have worked on sign language use in different sociolinguistic domains as in Demisachew (2010), Fikadu (2010), Firehiwot (2010), Getahun (2010), Seifu (2011), Yohannes (2011), Rahel (2011), and Woinshet (2013). All these studies illustrate how EthSL is a natural, rule-governed, and socially agreed-on system and that it is indisputably the real, preferred

4. See references for each of the titles of the BA senior essays and MA thesis.

language of the Deaf community. There are also computer engineering MA theses on EthSL, such as Endale Aseffa (2005), Dagnachew Feleke (2011), and Abadi Tsegay (2011); these are on such topics as machine translation into EthSL.

A pilot survey conducted by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) Ethiopia (2005) compared 249 signs published in both American and Ethiopian dictionaries. Of this number, 25 percent of the signs appear to have been borrowed from ASL and modified to suit Ethiopian culture (e.g., WATER, PARENTS, FATHER, MOTHER). In fact, when ASL signers communicate with EthSL signers, the communication gap appears to be relatively minor. Personal observation also suggests Deaf Ethiopians understand ASL better than Deaf Americans understand EthSL. This may be due to the fact that Deaf people in Ethiopia are more likely to be exposed to ASL in various settings and with various degrees of proficiency.

Currently, EthSL, apart from being used as a primary means of communication among the Ethiopian Deaf people, is also used as a medium of instruction at schools, in TV programs, and to provide interpreting services in parliament. However, sign language is not offered at all as a school subject at any level, except for the earliest grades at deaf schools.

The sign language that is now in use in Ethiopia used to have various names such as *Amharic Sign Language*, *deaf language*, and *sign language*. It was only recently, after the publication of the EthSL dictionary (2007) that the language was known as Ethiopian Sign Language. The acronym ESL was changed to EthSL soon after the launching of the BA program in sign language at Addis Ababa University in 2008, to distinguish it from the commonly used acronym referring to English as a Second Language. The term *Ethiopian Sign Language* refers to a language whose community lives within the geographical boundaries of Ethiopia, and is distinct from the sign languages used in the rest of the world.

FINGERSPELLING

Fingerspelling reproduces manually the written spellings of a spoken language. Almost all sign languages in the world have manual alphabets that are based on a spoken language that is dominant in the society. For instance, ASL has a manual alphabet of 26 signs corresponding to the 26 letters of the English alphabet (see Figure 2.1). EthSL has its

own Ethiopian Manual Alphabet (EMA) modeled on *fidäl*,⁵ (the Ethiopic script) with 34 handshapes, which represents the consonants; there are seven forms of vowels, each of which is distinguished by moving the consonants differently (see Figure 2.1). Therefore, in total there are 238 manual letters. For instance, the first *fidäl* syllabary ha(u) has 7 vowels including itself: ha(u), hu(u), hi(u), ha(u), he(u), hi(u), ho(u). Similarly, all the remaining 33 signs have the same vowel patterning. In Figure 2.1, numbers are written underneath the Ethiopian Manual Alphabet to show the order of the vowels.

Since manual alphabets are derived from spoken languages, they can be seen as a (weak) threat to sign languages, as they have the sociolinguistic power of spoken languages. However, they occur in everyday signing for various reasons such as: to introduce Amharic/English words that do not have equivalents in sign language, to gloss a new concept that has just been expressed as a sign, and for names of people and places (Sutton-Spence & Woll, 1999).

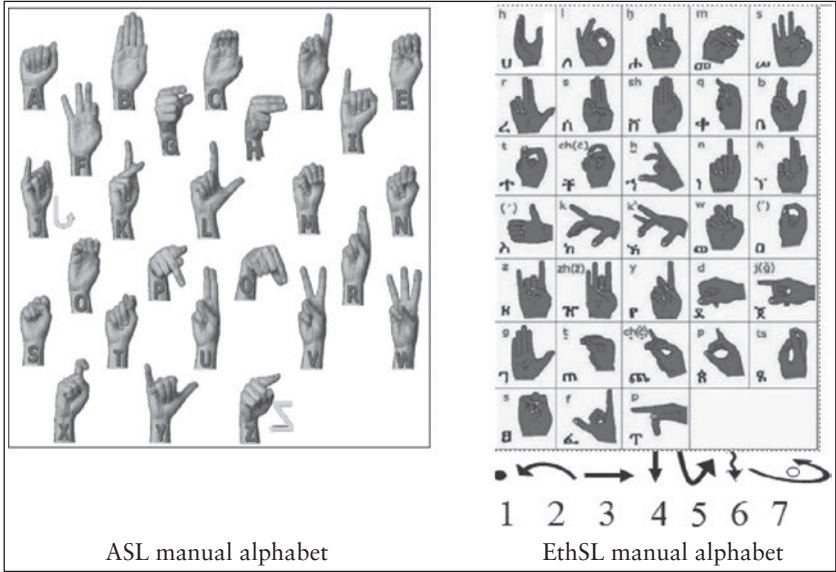


FIGURE 2.1. Manual alphabets of ASL and EthSL.

5. From personal conversations with prominent Ethiopian Deaf community leaders, I have learned that the EMA was invented by Mr. Minassie Abera who currently lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

EthSL, like ASL, uses one hand when fingerspelling. Usually the signer's dominant hand (right or left) is used to fingerspell. While producing fingerspelling, the arms are bent and positioned near the shoulders at chest level with the palms facing out toward the interlocutor. Almost all Deaf students learn both EMA and ASL fingerspelling at schools.

THE ETHIOPIAN DEAF COMMUNITY

As was noted in Eyasu (2016), the Ethiopian Deaf community is characterized by the following features: (1) it is a community that represents a large stable signing group showing considerable influence from ASL, (2) the majority of the community's members (up to 90 percent) learn sign language at school and Deaf clubs because their parents are hearing and unable to teach their children sign language at home, and (3) members are at least bilingual by default and sometimes are multilingual as well. These criteria suggest that the Ethiopian Deaf community is a Deaf macro-community or an urban sign language community (see Fenlon & Wilkinson, 2015, for a description of signing macro-communities).

The Ethiopian Deaf community were neglected and isolated until missionaries from Sweden and the United States came to Ethiopia, in the 1950s, to launch their Deaf schools in addition to their missionary activities. The arrival of foreign missionaries had the effect of removing the isolating curtain which cut off Deaf people from society and from each other. Their efforts also clearly demonstrated that, if given the opportunity, Deaf people could be educated, trained, and enabled to lead a life as normal as anyone's (Minassie, n.d.).

The fact that it was the foreign missionaries who demonstrated that Deaf people could be educated should not lead one to believe that EthSL does not have origins in Ethiopia. Some older Deaf Ethiopians living in Addis Ababa remember that prior to the arrival of the missionaries, the Deaf community used to have regular social gatherings at St. George Church, in Piassa. However, no research has been done on the signs used by older Deaf Ethiopians; such a study might well reveal signs used before the coming of the missionaries. The arrival of foreign missionaries sensitized the society to accept sign language as a proper means of communication and at the same time facilitated among the local signers to gain respect.

For the past several decades, the Ethiopian Deaf community has often been referred to as *duda* [mute] (a misnomer) or *dänk'oro* [deaf]. These

terms are now considered derogatory. Instead a “fine” name is used currently, *mäsmat yätäsanaččäw* [hearing impaired]. Unlike spoken languages, which typically have a geographical area of usage, EthSL users are dispersed within individual families of a spoken community. Relatively urban areas have a higher concentration of Deaf people than rural areas due to the existence of Deaf organizations, places that conduct religious services for Deaf people, social places where the Deaf community could gather and, most importantly, Deaf schools. In Addis Ababa, an urban area, there are more than 11 educational institutions enrolling Deaf students ranging from kindergarten to university. There are also six Deaf associations including the Ethiopian National Association of the Deaf (ENAD), Rehabilitation Services for the Deaf Association (RSDA), Sign Language Training and Social Services Association (SLTSSA), Deaf Development and Information Association (DDIA), *Timhirt Mesmat Letesanachew Hibret* (Union for the Education of the Deaf), and Jerusalem Inclusive Association. There are four religious institutions that provide religious services for the Deaf community; these are the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane-Yesus Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Islam. In addition, there are regular social gatherings in the center of Addis Ababa (e.g., cafes and meeting places within Piassa/St. George, Bole, and Mexico).

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING

Sign language interpreters narrow the communication gap between Deaf people and hearing nonsigners. In most cases, anyone who is accustomed to sign language can be an interpreter. In fact, a nonsigner can easily learn the basics of sign language and then act as an interpreter in any domain of public life (e.g., in schools, courtrooms, hospitals, meetings, and embassies). Woinshet (2013) highlights how these sign language interpreters lack specialized training providing them with an understanding of the ethics and professionalism of sign language interpreting. Woinshet suggests that the absence of such specialized training can hamper the provision of services and lower the quality of interpreter services. In addition to sign language interpreters, there are other hearing people who regularly interact with Deaf people in sign language. These hearing people play various roles within the Deaf community; they may be hearing parents of deaf children or they may work in Deaf associations and schools.

HISTORY OF DEAF EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIA

It is believed by most of the Deaf community in Ethiopia that EthSL is historically connected to and influenced by older forms of ASL and Swedish Sign Language, in addition to preexisting signs including home signs and gestural means, which were used among Deaf people in Ethiopia. The influence is linked to the 1958 launch of the first Deaf school in Keren, Eritrea (part of Ethiopia then), by Swedish missionaries; and of the second Deaf school, the Amha Desta school⁶ in Addis Ababa, founded in 1963 by American missionaries. Swedish missionaries, including Ms. Elsie Ross, who were among the first teachers at Keren Deaf School, used Swedish Sign Language. Signers from Eritrea then had exposure to other Deaf people in Addis Ababa and other parts of the nation (Fig. 2.2). Teachers at Amha Desta School for the Deaf (now Mekanissa School for the Deaf) used ASL signs and Signed English to teach the Deaf students.⁷ Little is known about the type of sign language that Deaf people used before the opening of the first Deaf school in Keren (1958) or Mekanissa (1963).

At the time of this research, a total of 302 Deaf schools (Table 2.1), including special schools (schools mainly for Deaf students) and special classes (i.e., a school that mainly enrolls hearing students but some classes are reserved for Deaf students only), are serving the Deaf population in the whole country (Mekonnen, 2013).

The majority of schools are state owned; a few are run by churches and nongovernmental organizations. As of 2007, a new law requires every Deaf student to be integrated into mainstream programs if possible. From this, it is expected that within a few years the majority of Deaf students will have been placed into hearing schools without interpreters or language access. A few special education teachers have been assigned

6. The school was named after Amha Desta, the grandson of Emperor Haile Selassie and eldest son of Princess Tenagnework and Ras Desta Damtew. Many Deaf people still believe Amha Desta was a deaf prince, but recent communication with members of the emperor's family who are living in Addis Ababa reveals that Amha Desta, who died at the age of seven while the Emperor and his family were in exile in Bath, England, was not a deaf child.

7. Signed English is like English on the hand. It is a form of communication using "normal" signs but with the grammar of spoken English. Similarly, there is Signed Amharic, which refers to Amharic on the hand. Neither of these are natural sign languages, but are rather modified forms of sign languages.

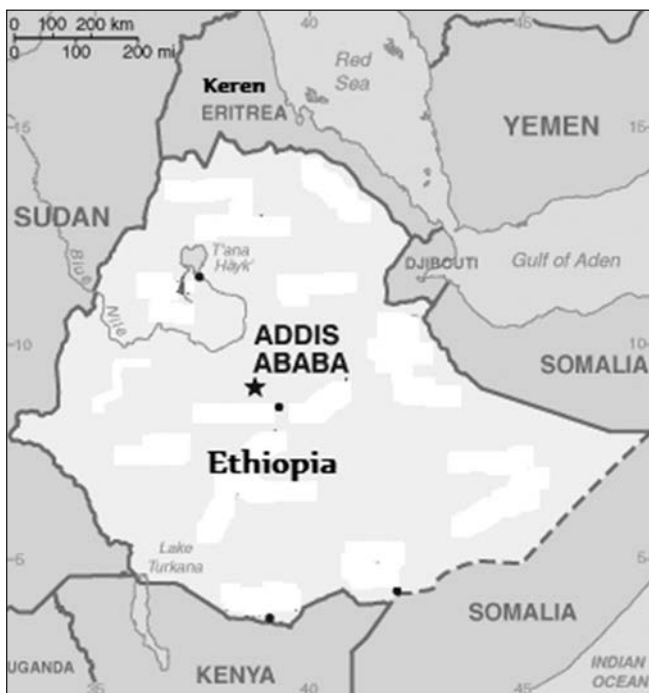


FIGURE 2.2. *Map of Ethiopia.*

TABLE 2.1. *The Number of Deaf Schools in Ethiopia.*

	Region	No. of Special Schools	No. of Special classes	Total
1	South	5	152	157
2	Oromia	1	64	65
3	Amhara	0	59	59
4	Addis Ababa	4	5	9
5	Tigray	1	4	5
6	Dire Dawa	0	3	3
7	Harari	1	0	1
8	Beneshangul	0	2	2
9	Gambella	0	1	1
10	Afar	0	0	0
	Total	12	290	302

to teach these students adjust to their new environment, but these teachers are supposed to take on this task in addition to their current responsibilities and to pay any related expenses out of their own pocket. Deaf adults are concerned for the Deaf youth who will now be submerged in a world of hearing people who do not speak their language or share their cultural experiences.

REVIEW OF SIGN LANGUAGE RESOURCES IN ETHIOPIA

Dictionary work, like the making of any other book, demands time, energy, resources, and above all a strong commitment. Preparing a visual sign language dictionary is different and brings with it its own challenges. What follows is a brief account of the dictionaries available in Ethiopia, in chronological order.

***Yeamarigna Yemilikit Quanqua Mesmatina Menager Letesanachew HA Andegna Mes'haf*—Amharic Sign Language for the Deaf and Mute—HA—First Book**



FIGURE 2.3. *Yeamarigna Yemilikit Quanqua Mesmatina Menager Letesanachew HA Andegna Mes'haf*—Amharic Sign Language for the Deaf and Mute—HA⁸—First Book (1979).

8. HA- is the first initial letter of Amharic.

The Ethiopian Deaf community calls this dictionary *HA MES'HAF* = HA BOOK (see Fig. 2.3). The letter HA (*v*) is the first letter of the Amharic *fidäl* syllabary. The naming of the dictionary reflects its status as a breakthrough material in the history of EthSL. It was published through a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Education, Mekanissa Deaf School, Alfa Deaf School, and ENAD in 1979. This dictionary contains a list of 1,009 signs with their Amharic descriptions, thematically grouped into 16 groups. Numbers and the Ethiopian Manual Alphabet are also included. The signs are presented in hand drawn figures provided with arrows to show the movement of the hands. Each page contains 12 signs, whose descriptions are presented in Amharic on the other facing page. Many of the signs in this dictionary were borrowed from ASL. The main motivation for this dictionary was to enable the Deaf community to participate in the social and cultural life of the nation. It took about 3 years to complete the work.

Yemilikit Quanqua Memariya Lejemariwoch, Andegna Mes'haf—Sign Language Primer for Beginners, 1st book

This book was published by Hosaena School for the Deaf in 2002 (see Fig. 2.4). The school is the country's first and only residential Deaf high school. It contains a total of 264 signs which are thematically grouped. In addition, it includes the Ethiopian manual alphabet, number signs, examples and exercises, all of which, as with *HA MES'HAF* (1979), are hand drawn. The signs are accompanied by Amharic and English translations. The signs in this book are those which are frequently used by the students



FIGURE 2.4. *Yemilikit Quanqua Memariya Lejemariwoch, Andegna Mes'haf—Sign language primer for beginners, 1st book* (2002).

of the school. This book is also in use by Deaf students as a reference material in a number of other schools.

Ye Ethiopia Milikit Quanqua Mezgebe-Qalat—Ethiopian Sign Language Dictionary

This dictionary was published by ENAD (2002–2007) with financial support of the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Finnish Association of the Deaf (see Fig. 2.5).

The dictionary process started by training six Deaf field workers in photography, use of videos, basic computer skills, and how to collect sign language data in the field. The signs were collected from nearly 14 selected locations in the country. Some of these locations were the ENAD branch associations, Deaf schools in remote rural areas, and in urban centers. In doing so, nearly 5,000 lexical items and a number of conversations were videotaped. In collecting the data, the field assistants used various methodologies such as Focused Group Discussion (FGD), personal interview, showing of the item, and storytelling. The data were recorded on Mini DV cassettes, and then some of them were converted to VHS format. For selected signs, a description in Amharic is provided.

After the data were collected, Deaf members of the dictionary team, in consultation with other Deaf community members, embarked on



FIGURE 2.5. *Ethiopia Milikit Quanqua Mezgebe-Qalat—Ethiopian Sign Language Dictionary* (2007).

the selection process. There are 1,321 signs included in this dictionary. Selection of the signs had two aspects. First, the most frequently used signs in the corpus were given preference. Second, in the case of unrelated synonyms (i.e., multiple competing signs for the same concept), preference was given to local signs (i.e., non-ASL signs) and to signs that are easy to learn. In addition, signs that did not start with initial letters (initialized fingerspelling) were given priority. However, it was not always possible to exclude these signs as they were in active use in the community.

During the structuring of the dictionary phase, digital cameras were used to take photos of the two selected Deaf sign presenters at the ENAD studio. A third presenter was added later to present the numbers and the manual alphabets of both Ethiopian and American sign languages.

For the 1,321 selected signs, more than 2,500 pictures were taken in such a way that a single sign consisted of one to three pictures. Each sign contains a picture(s) with movement directional arrows, accompanied by Amharic and English equivalent meanings with short and precise explanations. Only the manual component of a sign is included in the dictionary; the nonmanual component (i.e., accompanying nonmanual body gestures) is omitted for practical reasons. All the signs were categorized into 24 thematic classes such as *Body parts*, *Business and occupation*, *Clothing*, *Descriptive signs*, and 20 other themes. In each category, the signs are arranged alphabetically according to their Amharic glosses.

The main objective of this dictionary was to document indigenous signs which were totally mixed up with foreign signs in the HA Book. It explicitly tried to prioritize indigenous signs, which are directly taken from the Ethiopian Deaf people.

Many Deaf people in Ethiopia believe that only signs that are produced by right-handed people are “correct,” while people who use the left hand as the dominant hand are “incorrect.” During the dictionary process, the sign presenters showed the signs using their right hand as the dominant hand. Therefore, a note was given that if the picture of the sign in the dictionary shows the dominant hand as the right hand, then learners would need to use their dominant hand regardless of whether it is right or left.

Sign Language Training and Social Services Association DVDs

Sign Language Training and Social Services Association (SLTSSA) developed two DVD primers whose main objective was to enable families of Deaf people to learn sign language on their own (Fig. 2.6). The 2009

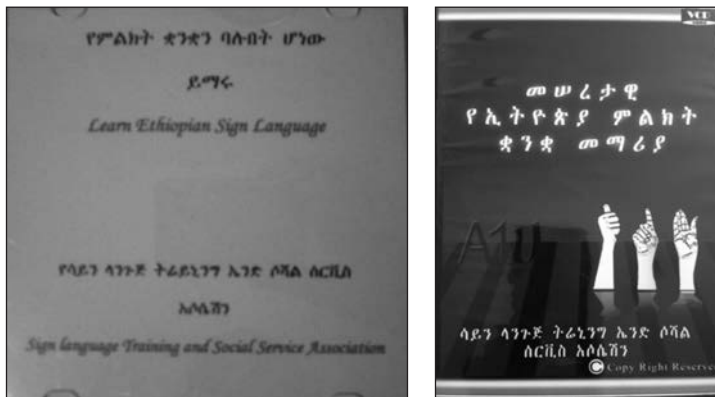


FIGURE 2.6. Sign language DVDs (2009 and 2012) produced by SLTSSA.

DVD was produced based on the signs listed in the HA (first initial letter of Amharic) book. The 2012 DVD was produced based on the signs listed in ENAD (2007). It consists of about 500 signs, signing dramas, signing examples, numbers, and manual alphabets of both EthSL and ASL. It took 1.5 years to accomplish the work.

Deaf Development and Information Association DVD

The Deaf Development and Information Association (DDIA) collected a good number of signed stories and free conversation from the Deaf informants for their DVD (Fig. 2.7). If a particular sign has a repeated occurrence throughout a story or conversation, then the DVD dictionary team took it as a basic sign that learners would need to know. The DVD consists of introductory information about sign language and related issues, and about 400 signs that are grouped into two: one-handed signs and two-handed signs. Each group has subgroups based on hand shape. It took 1.5 years to complete the production.

DOMAINS OF LANGUAGE USE

Domains of language use, according to Fishman (1972, p. 20), are a “socio-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationship between communicators, and locales of communication, in accord with the institution, of a society and the area of activity of spoken community in such a way that individual behavior and social



FIGURE 2.7. *Sign language DVD (2013) produced by DDIA.*

patterns can be distinguished from each other and yet related to each other.” Fishman (1965), drawing on Schmidt-Rohr (1932), states that the concept of domains of language use evolved before World War II when German emigrants (*Auslandsdeutsche*) settled in other countries and made contact with the local languages; different patterns of language choice arose depending on the particular domain of use.

In order to study the varying linguistic circumstances of expatriate Germans, Schmidt-Rohr (1932), cited by many other writers, listed nine domains of language use that are constituent types of bi- and/or multilingualism. These are the family, the playground and street, the school (language of instruction, subject of instruction and language of recess and entertainment), the church, literature, the press, the military, the courts, and the governmental administration. Each has its own typical location, participants, and topics of discourse. Understanding these domains, according to Fishman (1965), helps us understand related topics including language choice, language shift, and language maintenance.

Specifically in the context of sign language, McKee (2007) mentions Deaf cultural domains as sports, political advocacy, clubs, television, and marriage. Thus, the number of domains differs from context to context and setting to setting. Below is a summary of five domains based on Fishman (1965) and Spolsky (2004). These are family, school, religion, workplace, and local government domains.

Family Domain

Fishman et al. (1971) present the family domain as having a particularly crucial role in multilingual settings, because multilingualism begins

at home. The family domain is divided into two groups: the first group consists of father, mother, child, house cleaners, governess, and tutor. The second group involves cross-generational interaction of grandparents with grandchildren. The role of each participant—who can be either speaker or hearer—determines the language use pattern. Both Fishman (1965) and Spolsky (2004) include the family domain within the home domain, because a home is located in a house or apartment; participants are family members; and topics are family activities.

There are many factors affecting the choice of language in a family; such as the user's proficiency in language, the desire of the user to achieve advantage by using his or her stronger language, the desire of the user to derive advantage by accommodating to the wishes of the audience, intermarriage, and immigration (Spolsky, 2004). If families' dominant home language is one language, it can be assumed that it is due to a single language proficiency that the families have. Even in intermarriage situations, several studies of bilingual couples revealed that the couple continued to speak to each other in the language that they had used together when they first met. However, this private situation was gradually seen to be pressured by children's schooling, and grandparental presence at home. In this case, a decision to shift to another language and abandon their original language could happen (Spolsky, 2004).

School Domain

The school domain is mostly related to language in education policy. It includes language use as a medium of instruction, school subject language, and managing the gap between students' home language and school language (i.e., mother tongue education). School domain should also consider at what age the students should start learning. In many African countries, including Ethiopia, there are complex educational systems that start teaching the children's home language in the first few years, then move to English at the secondary levels; by contrast, in French- and Portuguese-speaking African countries, French or Portuguese start to be used as a language of instruction at an early stage. Thus, schools are central domains to contribute to language policy and choice (Spolsky, 2004). In Ethiopia, the language-in-education policies are seen to have had slight differences over the last three governments: the imperial regime of Haile Selassie, the socialist Derg regime, and the present government (see next section). Two issues are presented next: language-in-education policy and language use in Deaf education in Ethiopia.

Language Use in Education Policy in Ethiopia

Meyer and Richter (2003) describe the language use situation in the Ethiopian education system in three different regimes: Imperial Ethiopia, the Derg regime, and the current regime. The language-in-education policy during Imperial Ethiopia fell into three time periods. The first one was a time between the founding of the first modern school in Ethiopia, 1912, to Italian occupation, in 1935. During this period, foreign languages such as English, French, Italian, or Arabic languages were employed as languages of instruction in schools. Textbooks were written in foreign languages and were mostly imported. The role of Amharic was limited to that of a school subject (Pankhurst, 1963; Girma Amare, 1963; Meyer & Richter, 2003).

The second phase started right after the 5-year Italian occupation and extended until the 1960s. During this period, the role of Amharic became more prominent due to the fact that the constitution of the country explicitly stated that the official language of Ethiopia was Amharic. It was during this period that the majority of Ethiopian languages, except Amharic, were disregarded and their speakers felt discriminated against with regard to their own languages and identity. This situation eventually led to the spread of the Amharic language and strengthened its role as the medium of instruction (Dendir Dansamo, 1984; Negarit Gazeta, 1955).

The third time period, 1960 to 1974, saw a relaxation of the Imperial Ethiopian language-in-education policy, which heretofore had been governed by a strict “Amharic-only” rule. In the third period, a relatively good number of Ethiopian languages such as Oromo, Tigrinya, Somali, Saho-Afar, Kafa, Sidama, Tigre, or Wolaytta were used as the language of instruction in elementary grades in their own ethnic areas (Tefaye Shewaye, 1971).

Language use in education during the Derg regime was characterized by the use of various nationalities’ languages especially in the national adult literacy campaigns which ran for a decade starting in 1979. The campaign used 15 regional languages to facilitate the spread of literacy and these are Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya, Wolaytta, Somali, Sidama, Hadiyya, Gurage-Silt’e, Kembata, Afar, Tigre, Gedeo, Kafa, Saho, and Kunama. These languages were chosen based on the fact that they encompassed the mother tongues of 93% of the Ethiopian people. Participants in this literacy training were taught basic literacy, numeracy, and political education. The literacy campaign contributed to the promotion of Ethiopian languages. However, this was not reflected in formal education; the medium of instruction in the elementary and secondary

grades remained as Amharic and English (Richter, 1977; McNab, 1990; NLCCC, 1991; Hoben, 1994; Meyer & Richter, 2003).⁹

The current regime's constitution of 1994, states that all languages have equal recognition by the government. Article 5 of the constitution reads as follows:

1. All Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal State recognition.
2. Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.
3. Each member of the Federation shall determine its own working language.

Although equal recognition is given to all languages of the nation, including EthSL, Amharic is the official working language of Ethiopia. Currently, a total of over 25 Ethiopian languages are employed as a medium of instruction in primary education. However, while implementing regional languages in education, various problems were encountered including lack of well-trained teachers, inaccessible schools in the area, inadequate supply of schooling and its high cost, lack of appropriate teaching materials and equipment, unsuitable curricula, poor management, a chronic shortage of funds, and unfavorable language of school instruction. These problems have led to high dropout rates, uneven distribution of educational opportunities across regions, and most seriously an overall decline in the quality of education at all levels (Ayalew Shibeshi, 2000; ESDP, 1998a; Meyer & Richter, 2003).¹⁰

According to Baker (2001), Bench (1992), Nover et al. (1998), and Everhart (2004), Deaf education takes place in three domains: oracy, literacy, and signacy. Oracy refers to the ability to use oral medium of linguistic transmission in the form of listening and speaking skills. Literacy involves the ability to use the visual/graphic medium in the form of reading and writing. Signacy is the predominant or exclusive use of sign language, but sometimes in combination with oracy and literacy.

As was mentioned previously, American missionaries used ASL to teach Deaf Ethiopians right at the beginning of Deaf education in Ethiopia. Figure 2.8, taken in the 1970s, is one piece of evidence how Deaf students used to be taught at Amha Desta School for the Deaf. The picture shows the American missionary, Lini Darden, teaching a Deaf boy the sign for

9. The NLCCC is the National Literacy Campaign Coordinating Committee.

10. ESDP is the Education Sector Development Program.



FIGURE 2.8. *A missionary demonstrates the sign for FLAG to a student. The word is also written on the blackboard in Amharic, yeEthiopia bandera = Ethiopian Flag (Source: Personal communication with Rebekah Payne).*

FLAG in what seems to be an older form of EthSL. The current sign for FLAG in EthSL is presented in Figure 2.9, extracted from the EthSL dictionary (2007) to show a simple comparison of EthSL in about 50 years' time.

Netzley (2005), in her account of Ethiopian Deaf people and EthSL, states that the first generation of Ethiopian Deaf students who were taught by the American missionaries had wide exposure to English and ASL.

Kyle and Woll (1985) describe the ineffectiveness of the use of signs in the classroom as being mostly the result of the interference of spoken language in its correct order which is not the same as the correct order of signs. This could only apply to hearing teachers who had a very minimal knowledge of sign language. However, if one knows the difference between the sign language and spoken language, then the possibility of using spoken language would not affect the use of sign language.

Many teachers of Deaf students in Ethiopia are assigned to teach with no proper skills in sign language and Deaf awareness. In many classrooms, Deaf students are combined with hearing ones. Netzley (2005, p. 5) explains the result of such a situation as follows:

Teachers are not able to focus much on signing in class, so the Deaf students rely on the chalkboard or other students. In some schools



FIGURE 2.9. *Sign for FLAG (source: EthSL dictionary, 2007).*

where there is a separate class for Deaf students, the teachers use a method called “total communication,” where the teachers speak, sign along with speaking, write on the board and use any available visual aid. Very few classes, besides one or two at very exceptional schools, are actually taught in natural sign language.

In high schools, as is clear from my own field observation and in Mekonnen (2010), except for two government schools in Addis Ababa (Tikur Anbessa Secondary School and Menelik Preparatory School), there are no secondary schools in other parts of the nation where Deaf students are combined with hearing ones, and no access to sign language. In the two high schools mentioned, there are sign language interpreters, initiated by ENAD, who form a bridge between a nonsigner teacher and Deaf students.

Signs used in urban and rural areas have some disparity, which could be due to the reason that those who are living in rural areas are isolated from meeting each other, lack schooling at an early age, and have difficulty developing their language under such circumstances. Rural signers mostly use a home sign system, which is created by the Deaf person and their family members for communication. A home sign system allows the Deaf person to communicate with closer family members on basic issues in their day-to-day life. It does not help them explain abstract concepts. I observed this situation while I was traveling for my fieldwork throughout the nation. All of my DRAs who traveled with me to the field

sites also found it hard to communicate effectively, especially with older Deaf people who did not go to school at an early age. In fact, there are other methods for communicating with them like lipreading and showing objects; however, these methods only help for those items in the questionnaire that required short answers.

In 2008, the Ethiopian Sign Language and Deaf Culture program was launched at Addis Ababa University. Sign language is the prime medium of instruction in the program. Sign language interpreters facilitate communication at classes where the service is needed. It is always a challenge for many of the Deaf students to read and write in English or Amharic. During examination, they are expected to provide answers in written English and many of them could not succeed in getting good grades, simply because they cannot express a concept in writing even if they have it in mind. It is also observed that many of the students join the university with little or no written English/Amharic.

Religious Domain

Many writers, including Ferguson (1982) and Spolsky (2004), discuss how religion has been one of the most powerful forces for spreading spoken, signed, and written language. Spolsky (2004) asserts that every religious belief system contributes some elements to languages. He adds that prominent world religions are accountable for the spread of a variety of scripts; for instance, Christianity for Latin, Greek, and Ge'ez—as well as a variety of other languages with their own special scripts (Armenian, Georgian, Old Church Slavonic, and Syriac); Islam for Arabic script, as used in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu; Judaism for Hebrew script, as used in Hebrew and other “Jewish languages” such as Yiddish; and Hinduism for Sanskrit and a large number of languages of India. Religious missionary work connected with proselytizing and with Bible translation, by using the language in question, thereby contributes to its spread. Languages which are introduced as a result of religion may sometimes still be confined to the sphere of “holiness.” Thus, language can interact with religion in many ways. The way a language is used in religion both at the individual level (praying, confessing, and reading religious texts) and in group activities (praying in groups, singing hymns, listening to sermons, and taking part in classes) can vary considerably (Spolsky, 2004).

One good example in Ethiopia is the fact that the Ethiopian Orthodox religion and Ge'ez have been interconnected for many centuries. Ge'ez

was the language of the church liturgy and the state for more than 1,000 years. Knowing the Ge'ez language by itself was once a key to a good salary job or good administration position. In the last 400 years or so, Amharic has taken over from Ge'ez as the dominant language. Both Amharic and Ge'ez are believed by many as taking advantage at the expense of the other languages. Both languages are Semitic and use *fidäl*. However, at this time, Ge'ez is becoming low profile; *fidäl* script continues to be dominant, but many languages prefer to use Latin script instead (Girma, 2014).

The use of sign language in religious domains among the Ethiopian Deaf community has decades of history. There are prominent Deaf priests, pastors, and preachers who have been serving their followers in their particular churches or mosque. As explained earlier, there are churches (Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and Mekane-Yesus Christians) and mosques that use sign language exclusively and some mainstream ones that communicate through the provision of sign language interpreters. The yearly gathering of *mesk'el* (celebration of the founding of the true cross) in September, and Epiphany in January, are among the notable religious gatherings where Deaf members present their chorus in sign language. Many of them have communal religious gathering places in Addis Ababa, Adama, Hawassa, Mekele, Bahirdar, and Nekemt. In other places, they simply go to the religious places with no sign language access. The communal gathering at religious places has larger space than the individual religious differences among the Deaf Ethiopians. In other words, a member of one religious sect may go to every other religious sect looking for the accessible communal gathering.

Workplace Domain

Language use in the workplace can be determined by either the higher government bodies or the organization's management, according to Spolsky (2004). Be it a marketplace, business firms, or any other, every workplace can determine its own language policy based on understood language practices, language ideologies, or language management efforts. Typically, working together among people who speak the same language can result in increased productivity. Many companies give priority to people who know the dominant language fluently. Even organizations that have branches outside of their native area urge their employees to learn the local language, as in the case with companies from many

non-English speaking countries who urge their employees to learn English when the company branches into English speaking countries. During the Imperial Ethiopia, reading and writing Amharic used to make someone more privileged than knowing other languages.

It is often observed that the Deaf people in Addis Ababa, and other places, are mostly engaged in more labor-intensive work than academic skills. The labor tasks include such activities as eyeglass making, umbrella making, flower farming, woodworking, painting, cobbling, and others. Deaf workers in Ethiopia are often engaged in these typical laborious tasks, even if they are academically qualified to assume white-collar tasks. These would indirectly mean that their preferred workplace domain is Deaf-oriented.

Local Government Domain

Local governments, in most cases, set laws to control language use in public education, billboards and notice boards, and obscene language use. Out of these three, language use on billboards is now regulated by law in regional towns in Ethiopia, for instance, in Adama, Nekemt, and other regional towns, the law requires billboards to be in three languages: Oromiffa, English, and Amharic; in Mekele: Tigrigna, English, and Amharic; and in Jijiga: Somali, English, and Amharic. These trilingual patterns are legally enforced.

With regard to Deaf Ethiopians, the government domain, such as the municipalities, sub-cities, courtrooms, and *weredas* (lower administrative body) are the least equipped in terms of sign language accessibility. Deaf people usually go to these places accompanied by either family members or sign language interpreters. In such a situation, the interpreter's fee is covered sometimes by the Deaf person, or is considered as a voluntary service. There are rare occasions of government offices arranging sign language interpreters for meetings—but most of the time, the issue is ignored.

LANGUAGE ATTITUDES TOWARD THE USE OF SPOKEN AND SIGNED LANGUAGES

The topic of language attitudes includes the attitudes of individuals, of communities, of nations, and of governments. It also includes the attitudes of people using the language, and the attitudes of people using other languages toward the language and its users. Language attitudes, like all

attitudes, can be positive, negative, or neutral. They can be consciously held and expressed, or unconsciously held and expressed unknowingly (Fasold, 1996).

Ferguson (1996) states that the effectiveness of language policies in education is determined more by the attitudes of the people to language use than it is by the simple demographic facts of language distribution and use. Language attitudes are about the beliefs that the users of the language have about its esthetic, religious, and logical values.

Another important work on language attitudes is Hill's work (2012) on the American Deaf community. He thoroughly explores the linguistic and social factors that govern attitudes toward signing in the American Deaf community. In order to identify the factors, he investigates four different studies on perception, social information, evaluation, and description of signing types whose finds are presented analogous to each one. In the first study, his finding shows "the subjects in different social groups were able to differentiate the signing types but some social groups perceived the non-ASL signing type differently from the other social groups." In the second study, "certain social characteristics of Deaf signers produced a significant effect on the subjects' perception to some extent." In the third study, he presents "the subjects were more favorable to ASL than Mixed or Signed English." Finally, in the fourth study, he illustrates that "the subjects were able to discuss the forms and features of signing that led them to perceive it as ASL, Mixed, or Signed English." He concludes that the general attitudes about ASL are positive compared to decades ago (pp. xi–xii).

Hill (2011) also describes language attitudes toward spoken and sign language varieties from the US perspective. Although linguistically all languages are equal, speakers mostly tend to view dominant languages as prestigious for sociocultural and socioeconomic reasons. Compared to English, Spanish is a nonprestigious language in the United States—although, naturally and linguistically, both languages are equal.

For the purposes of the present research, however, the most applicable definitions are those that focus on the individual language user's attitudes toward his or her own language use. Since the objective of the present language attitudes survey is to find out how the Ethiopian Deaf community feels about EthSL, the wider perspectives that deal with issues of language planning, for instance, are not so relevant.

Many writers have pointed out the interconnection of language attitudes with a wide range of concepts including language identity, language

ownership, and standardization. There are also other concepts to which language attitudes are linked, such as borrowing, language policy, and planning.

Language Attitudes and Language Identity

Burns et al. (2004) further explain that the most significant difference between Deaf communities and other linguistic minorities is the relationship between language and identity. In the case of Deaf communities, sign language is absolutely crucial. Use of natural sign language is a defining and indispensable part of being “ethnically” Deaf.

In the Ethiopian case, for instance, one might feel that in order to be Somali, one has to have at least one Somali parent. To be accepted as a full-fledged Somali probably one does not need to be born in the Somali region. In addition, a Somali born in Addis Ababa, as long as he or she speaks the Somali language, and knows Somali culture and values, is likely to be accepted as an equal.

There are analogous issues that arise in the Deaf community in connection with identity. Issues such as the audiological and the linguistic aspects are focused on when deciding the Deaf identity. Deaf people are seen in a different way than other ethnically based linguistic minorities. And these differences are attitudes-based. Thus, it is an observable fact in Ethiopia that most people value ethnic identity; but Deaf identity may be less highly valued. In any event, sign language is a very important part of Deaf identity.

Language Attitudes and Language Ownership

When talking about “owning” a language, many people who think of English think of England. Of course, the English gave their name to the English language. However, many other people also feel that they “own” English. In fact, it may be true that naturally anyone who uses a language can be said to own it.

In the Ethiopian case, Amharic is seen by many as being the language of all Ethiopians, not just of the Amharas. Girma (2014) also affirms that it is frequently heard that an Amharic speaker who does not consider himself/herself to be ethnically “Amhara” may still refer to himself/herself as Amhara. The term *Amhara* is used with different meanings. Originally, it meant a Christian region of historic Ethiopia bounded on the west

by the Abbay and its tributary the Bashilo River (i.e., today's Gojjam and Gondar). The term *Amhara* came to be used in the general sense of "Ethiopian" during the time of Empress Zewditu and Emperor Haile Selassie (Girma, 2014). Girma further explains that many people today, who speak Amharic as their native language, have ancestors who spoke no Amharic 400 years ago.

When we turn to sign language, it is generally accepted that sign language is the language of the Deaf community. However, some questions can be posed in this regard. For example, many deaf people (small "d") are raised orally, learn to sign very late in their lives, and never learn to sign fluently. Some hearing people are native signers—for example, there is a term in the United States called CODAs (hearing children of Deaf parents) and in the United Kingdom called HMFD (Hearing, Mother–Father Deaf). CODAs or HMFDs have a unique status within the Deaf world. Also, sometimes hearing people who work as sign language interpreters, sign language linguists, Deaf school teachers, or hearing people who marry a Deaf spouse learn to be near-native signers, sometimes even better signers than some Deaf people. So who "owns" sign language? People who are deaf (small "d"), or anyone who signs like a Deaf person (big "D"), the community or institutions? Although this might be controversial, I would say that language is societal and should not be owned as a possession to any institution as the sole protector of the language.

In addition, because of the issue of national sign languages, sometimes a national association of the Deaf may act like it owns the respective sign language. Policy decisions (regarding language planning and standardization) are often made by the national association of the Deaf board members. I am aware that the Ethiopian National Association of the Deaf (ENAD) has been lobbying the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs for a long time to include the ownership of sign language into ENAD's charter, and the effort is still going on.

Language Attitudes and Language Standardization

Milroy and Milroy (1999) define standardization in language as "the suppression of optional variability in a language" (p. 6)—a process that language communities undergo over a considerable period of time. Standardization may operate on the phonology, lexicon, and syntax of a language. According to Milroy and Milroy (1999), language standardization describes more a process than an end product (a "standard

language”). This process can be broken down into various stages: the selection, diffusion, maintenance, codification, and prescription of a standard form of the language. Language attitudes play a large role in the process of standardization. Sign language dictionaries are essential elements in the standardization process (Johnston, 2003). However, many are concerned that a prestigious form of a sign may be selected at the expense of a variant sign, which is thus left out.

In Ethiopia, the best-known example of unsuccessful standardization was WOGAGODA, an acronym composed of the initials of the linguistic groups of Wolaita, Gamo, Gofa, and Dawro. In 1999, there was an effort made by the local officials of North Omo zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region of Ethiopia to impose WOGAGODA, a hybrid language, to be the region’s official administrative language and medium of instruction at school. When WOGAGODA was introduced and declared as an official language of North Omo, it brought huge conflict and destruction of almost all of the project’s infrastructure and books, worth 40 million birr; seven people died; 139 teachers were transferred to other schools, many people were imprisoned, and three hotels were reduced to debris (Daniel, 2001). The standardization process was not successful because it was performed without the approval of the respective communities (BBC, 1999).

In the case of sign language, standard sign languages have mostly been formulated by a small group of people, notably the sign language committee of the National Association of the Deaf. There may be a question of adequate representation if the committee does not include sufficiently diversified people from all corners of the nation. For instance, while I was engaged in the preparation of ENAD’s EthSL dictionary, which was published in 2007, there was a national sign language dictionary committee whose members came from Deaf schools from across the nation, the Ministry of Education, the Addis Ababa Education bureau, Addis Ababa University, and other friends of ENAD. In addition, the work on the dictionary project was led by Deaf people themselves. The sign language raw data was collected by trained Deaf data collectors all over the nation. The decision whether to select among competing variant signs or just to keep all the alternatives in the dictionary was made by the national sign language dictionary committee, with the approval of the sign language dictionary preparation team. These participatory processes helped the new sign language dictionary to gain quick positive acceptance by the Deaf community. For the past 8 years, all the Deaf schools in Ethiopia have been using it as a main reference book.

Language Attitudes Toward Signing Varieties

Burns et al. (2001) describe how the choice of a variety is dependent on factors such as topic, purpose, and participants. For instance, a Deaf person in conversation with another Deaf person takes into account the role of the participants, whether they are Deaf or hearing, whether or not they are able to use any form of manual communication. Thus, they state

Deaf people not only sign differently with other Deaf people than with hearing people, but that they may initiate a conversation in one language and then radically switch when the interlocutor's hearing status is revealed. Indeed, it has been postulated that contact signing [mixture of oral and signed language] serves to prevent significant intrusions of dominant language patterns into a Deaf community, and that it, therefore, functions as a device for maintaining an ethnic boundary between hearing and Deaf people. (p. 193)

In the Ethiopian case, language attitudes toward signing varieties is not understood well among the public at large. Many assume that sign language is one and the same across the nation. There are also attitudes of not accepting one variety as correct and equal to the one outside of its mainland. For many people, variation and mutual unintelligibility are one and the same that if two languages are variant forms of a single language, they should be totally different languages. Detailed analysis of attitudes toward sign language varieties is presented in Chapter 4.

Deaf Students' Attitudes Toward Sign Language

Although her contribution lasted for two decades, Kannapell (1989) isolates two significant social variables that contribute to Deaf students' attitudes toward ASL, even to the present day. These factors are the number of years spent at a Deaf school and the age when sign language is learned. There are also lesser factors contributing to the attitudes of the subjects under her investigation, including age of onset of deafness, parental history of deafness, and age of introduction to spoken language. During the study, some contradictory (or at least superficially conflicting) statements were observed; for instance, some of the participants say that ASL is a language in its own right but at the same time they think that ASL has no rules, is just pictures, and is broken English. They also say that a subject may support the use of ASL in classrooms with

Deaf children but also say that spoken word is important too because the world is filled with hearing people. Such kind of contradictory statements might result from the subjects' subconscious ability to adapt their communication modes (Kannapell, 1989).

This result was based on students' perception toward ASL long ago, and as evident from the public awareness, today's perception is not the same as a couple of decades ago. It is presented in this section that the findings mentioned above could have some resemblance with the current situation in Ethiopia as well.

Attitudes Toward Sign Language by Teachers of Deaf Students

In many Deaf schools, the roles of teachers, administrators, counselors, researchers, and support personnel are staffed largely with hearing people—who have little or no sign language skill and Deaf awareness. Such people are powerful in shaping the structure of the education system in a way suitable to them. With regard to educators of Deaf students, the Milan Conference (1880) is remembered as the day when the dark age of sign language began. At this conference, Deaf educators decided that Deaf people should be educated strictly through the oralist approach, meaning only spoken language would be used. In order to put this decision in place, Deaf students used to be tied up with their hands behind their back in order to not allow them to use sign language; this is equal to plastering a hearing person's mouth in order not to practice spoken word. Deaf children were beaten or given harsh punishment if they were seen to be using their hands to communicate.

Until recently, the practice of tying the hands still continued in some countries, as those who personally went through such corporal punishment testify. On a less barbarous level, many people continue to deny the naturalness of sign language as a real language. It took 130 years to realize that the 1880 approach was totally wrong. In 2010, at the same conference in Canada, the conference organizers officially apologized for such a historical mistake.¹¹

According to Erting (1985), many educators of Deaf students are influenced by their pre-existing positive attitudes toward spoken, auditory

11. www.wfdeaf.org/news/international-congress-of-the-deaf-iced-july-18-22-2010-vancouver-canada.

training, the use of hearing aids, and cochlear implant.¹² Many perceive fluency in sign language as a threat to their job and to their professional identity. Obviously, language attitude has an impact on classroom interaction and on the child's education. Teachers' attitudes toward sign language can influence student's attitudes toward the same (Ward Trotter, 1989).

Teachers of Deaf people in Ethiopia mostly join the profession with a sympathetic and helper approach. Even if many of them are graduates of teachers' training colleges, only a few of them are Deaf aware. Compared to the number of Deaf students across the nation, it is observed that the number of teachers of Deaf students is less in number. It can be observed that Deaf schools that are available in the country use sign language and spoken at the same time.

Parents' Attitudes Toward Sign Language

Many writers, such as Lane et al. (1996) and Ladd (2003) have estimated that globally 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents. Only the remaining 10% are born to a Deaf family and thus can learn sign language directly from their parents. Akach (2010) describes South African Sign Language (SASL) in terms of the application of SASL in Deaf Education. He explains the crucial role of parents' attitudes toward sign language in shaping their children's educational performance. Erting (1985, p. 230) had asserted this fact much earlier, saying:

When hearing parents discover that a child is deaf, they face an abrupt change in their lives, one that challenges their understanding of themselves as parents and of what it is to be human. The diagnosis of deafness changes their role as parents to a new role, that of parents of a deaf child. Soon they discover there must be changes in their expectations for their child's present and future life. Relaxed communication between them and their child will not develop in the same way as with their own parents. Something as taken-for-granted and as seemingly natural as speaking with each other, as parent and child, is precluded by deafness. If anything that even approximates satisfactory communication is to occur, parents soon learn they must change their form of communication from spoken language to signed language.

12. Cochlear implants are electronic devices that are surgically implanted into the inner ear and activated by a device worn outside that restores partial hearing. This technology costs about 100,000USD.

There is inevitably a communication challenge when there is a Deaf person in a hearing family. In a developed nation, as Lane et al. (1996) observe, the hearing family is in a position to spend more time, energy, and resources to compensate for the child's loss of hearing. In such a way, they try to address the child's need for communication. However, in developing nations such as Ethiopia, it is typical to see parents go to religious places or appeal to witchcraft to have their children get cured of the "evil" situation. Many parents still believe that if they have a deaf child, it is a punishment from the Creator or simply a curse. This difference in approach results from the difference in level of understanding and awareness of the issue of deafness—Deaf people and sign language. The more parents are aware of the general nature of deafness, the more optimistic they are toward the issue.

According to Lane et al. (1996), the first language for any person is the language through which primary socialization occurs. Just as hearing parents are socialized with spoken language—with the exception of those having Deaf parents—Deaf parents identify and are socialized with sign languages. Hearing parents with Deaf children usually face a serious challenge in being introduced to the Deaf world mainly because they lack sign language. It is an observable fact that it is hard for them to accept the reality that their child is a deaf person who will have sign language and will identify mainly with the Deaf world. In addition, it is also difficult for many parents to acculturate themselves to Deaf culture. By contrast, Lane et al. (1996) observe that Deaf parents are seen mostly to prefer their children to be Deaf.

Cohen (1974) points out that when there is a change, people struggle to preserve their identity and their selfhood in the old traditional ways. In other words hearing parents struggle to preserve their hearing identities in the face of deafness. The struggle is manifested in different forms, such as refusing to learn signed communication with their child, or they may accept and even actively advocate its use but insist that their child only learn signed English. Sometimes, they may urge their child to use voice and signing at the same time. Hearing parents are also seen, knowingly or unknowingly, to talk to their children by shouting.

By contrast, Deaf parents of Deaf children typically expect their children to use sign language. Most Deaf parents feel comfortable communicating with their Deaf children. In most instances, Deaf parents whose children are hearing teach them sign language; eventually the children may become sign language interpreters. In fact, the first sign language

interpreters are believed historically to have been CODAs. For some Deaf people, especially those with hereditary deafness, a Deaf child is more preferred than a hearing child for sociocultural reasons. However if a hearing child comes, they do not consider it as a “curse,” as hearing parents might do when a Deaf child is born to the family.

The above cases have resemblances to the situation of many of the Ethiopian cases. Many parents usually take their deafened children to religious places and get holy water or take them to traditional medicine to quickly fix the situation. For many parents, it takes a number of years to accept the deafness of their child, learn their child’s language, and assimilate to the Deaf-world. As practiced by many parents in the countryside, they keep the child at home for many years, fearing the social stigma and discrimination of the parents. In fact, this situation is quite to the contrary in a family of Deaf children of Deaf parents. There are not many Deaf parents of Deaf children, as described in the fourth chapter, but there are a number of cases of Deaf siblings.

LANGUAGE CONTACT IN SIGN LANGUAGES

Sign Language Contact with Spoken Language

Spoken languages have always been in contact with each other, and such contact has linguistic and sociolinguistic consequences. Sign languages too can interact with spoken languages. In Ethiopia, evidence for the contact of EthSL with Amharic is the Ethiopian manual alphabet. The same is true for many other sign languages, such as ASL/BSL with English, German Sign Language (DGS) with German, and French Sign Language (LSF) with French.

Contact Among Sign Languages

Quinto-Pozos (2007) presents a number of possible outcomes of contact between two or more signed languages, such as interference and pidgin formation. In an environment where two sign languages are both used extensively, they can overlap and show interference phenomena. When signers from very distant environments meet for a relatively short time, the result can be a mixed sign language. When Deaf people interact with each other, primarily at international gatherings, they use

International Sign (IS) for communication. As a result, IS could be said to be “foreigner talk.” Another situation happens among EthSL signers when they communicate with foreign signers, in which they use either Signed English or speech-supported signs, often with simultaneous mouthing.

Language Maintenance and Shift

According to Fasold (1996) language shift is when a community gives up a language completely in favor of another one. Language maintenance is the process of preserving or restoring the threatened language. Language shift and maintenance constitute evidence for language’s dynamism.

Turner (1995) uses the term *enclave community* for a spoken community tending to language shift or attrition in a context where users of one language, X, are surrounded and dominated by speakers of a different language, Y, in a defined political or geographic area. Deaf communities are prime examples of enclave communities. Enclave communities are characterized by some of the following features, as evident from Deaf communities in many countries of the world (Turner, 1995, p. 219):

- the community is multilingual
- the language X is natively used by a significant number of people
- the users of X constitute a minority of the polity
- the X-using community has been relatively isolated from other X users for 100–400 years

In a language shift situation, the presence of a writing system, and the choice of a writing system “belonging to” the minority Language 1 (L1) as opposed to one imported from a dominant Language 2 (L2), are—other things being equal—indicators of relative stability. Linguistic maintenance and sociopolitical maintenance are both influential in respect of literacy practices, which are, conversely, the agent (Turner, 1995).

Turner (1995) summarizes Fishman’s (1965) model of Reversing Language Shift (RLS). We can consider how this model is applicable to the situation of sign languages. The model is presented in terms of an 8-stage scale of “language disruption”: the highest number indicates the greatest degree of disruption. They are presented in a chronological order toward effective implementation. Stage 8–Stage 5 represent urgent situations.

Stage 8—The Reassembly of the “Home” Language Model

This stage mainly focuses on the language’s analysis, description, and codification of which the motivation must come from the community. Collaborative efforts of the community and language specialists are essential at this stage.

Stage 7—Public Event Conducted in the Home Language

At this level, the main target is to enable the community maintains motivation and confidence in its language. Thus, the community needs to conduct its own affairs in public using the desired language.

Stage 6—Home–Family–Neighborhood–Community

The key aspect at this stage is the promotion of intergenerational transmission of the language within the community and it should start at the home level to the community level.

Stage 5—Formal Linguistic Socialization

At this stage, the language should be used at various formal linguistic domains such as religious, legal, and storytelling so as to give the language a positive image.

Stage 4—Language of Schooling

There are two plans at this stage. The first plan (4a) promotes schools run by people from the minority community instead of the majority schooling and the second (4b) prefers schooling run by members of the majority community for children of the minority group. “It is important that children are firmly embedded in the minority language within the home–family–neighborhood–community circle, since only this will enable them to remain in tune with RLS ideals when thrust into the broad horizons and excitements offered by the wider society’s schooling practices.”

Stage 3—Non-Neighborhood Work Sphere

Although this stage is very difficult for the RLS campaign, small-scale operations can be carried out to support the RLS campaign in the work sphere.

Stage 2—Local Public Services

Fishman (1965) repeatedly stresses that the continuity of language within home–family–neighborhood–community circle has undoubted impact in the stage 2 language promotion at civic services, health care, legal environments, local media, and the like.

Stage 1—Higher Education, National Media, Government

At the final stage, it can be made possible to create incentives by showing people how minority language-based activities can be constructive,

creating environments where there is maximum incentive to know the language at higher levels.

As regards the issue of language shift and language death, sign languages are in a unique position compared to all other minority languages. Profoundly deaf people do not have the sociolinguistic option (available to speakers of a minority-spoken language) of simply shifting to a spoken language. As long as there are Deaf people, there will be sign languages. The only possible issue in this area are new technologies to overcome deafness (notably cochlear implants), and a shift from one sign language to another sign language. In Ethiopia, neither of these is an issue. Cochlear implants are not available in the country (and would be prohibitively expensive if they were available). As for the option of sign language shift, there are no serious competitors to EthSL within Ethiopia. Only signed English or signed Amharic might possibly be considered as competitors; but full communication in either of these is artificial and unnatural. Thus the continuing vitality of EthSL seems to be guaranteed.

Sign Language and Diglossia

Ferguson (1959) first coined the term *diglossia*. Literally, it refers to two language varieties of the “same” language that exist side by side throughout the community with each having a definite role to play. One variety will have a higher (H) status and the other variety will have a lower (L) status.

Coming to EthSL, if we follow Stokoe’s (1972) position, there is a similar diglossic situation in EthSL as well. There are varieties like signed Amharic or other signed Ethiopian spoken languages, Signed English, and EthSL. The pilot study that I conducted prior to the main research shows that informal situations predominantly use the L variety and formal situations like schools or television programs tend to use H variety. Signers in marketplaces, cafés, and friendly conversation use EthSL. Teachers at Deaf schools tend to use signed Amharic/English or other Ethiopian spoken languages.

Linguistic Imperialism

The term *linguistic imperialism* is mostly connected to the colonization of indigenous languages by imperial languages mainly for political

and economic reasons. One of the notable contributions to the topic is Phillipson (1992). He describes English Language Imperialism (ELI) as the dominance of English, which is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages. Phillipson (1992) presents English linguistic imperialism as one example of *linguicism* (linguistically argued racism). Linguicism occurs, for instance, if there is in principle a policy of supporting several languages but if in fact priority is given to one language in teacher training, curriculum development. Like English, there are other imperial languages all over the world. These languages are termed as *killer languages* by Pakir (1991). These languages are developed, modernized, and technologically advanced so that they can easily attract indigenous language users.

Akach (2010) gives a critical analysis of double linguistic imperialism with regard to the African sign languages. Some of the reasons for the double linguistic imperialism include the stigma associated with being Deaf as reflected in many African countries, and a lack of official sign language recognition. There are also factors such as disfavoring the use of sign languages as medium of instruction and lack of teaching-learning materials for sign language. Additionally, a lack of trained teachers to teach indigenous sign languages and a lack of research on African sign languages have been contributing toward double linguistic imperialism on African sign languages.

Akach (2010) further suggests that the education system is a key area that can help strengthen African sign languages against further marginalization. Deaf education is a crucial intervention area that needs to be given strong support, or else the phenomenon of double linguistic imperialism will continue to persist.

A similar situation was seen in Ethiopia with regard to the spread of ASL. As stated earlier, the first school for Deaf students was launched in Keren, of the then Ethiopia, by Swedish missionaries in 1958. Five years later, American missionaries founded the Mekanissa School for the Deaf (then Amha Desta School for the Deaf) in Addis Ababa. The publication of the first sign language dictionary (HA book), in 1979, showed that many ASL signs were labeled as EthSL. The dictionary has still been used in almost all Deaf schools. Compared to the signs from Sweden, ASL is widespread in today's EthSL. Although a new sign language dictionary was published in 2007, it was impossible to avoid ASL signs from the lists of EthSL. Furthermore, many schools lack proficient sign language

teachers and were not able to properly use the original sign language, but kept on using Signed Amharic/English. The role of ASL in the current domains of language use among the Ethiopian Deaf community can be considered as at substratum level.

Language Choice

Language choice is another social factor in determining the language use and attitudes of a family, community, or a nation. According to Bianca's (2008) study on language choice among parents of Deaf and hearing children, there are a number of factors, which govern language choices: accommodation to an audience, discourse topic, setting, and the conversational participants' social and cultural identities. The ways that speakers/signers explain their own choices to themselves and to others reveal their ideologies or beliefs toward the languages. In homes where there are deaf parents and hearing children (CODAs), language choice is an issue, which is sharply in focus. This is because if family members are involved in an activity together, the deaf parents will have full access to the progress of the activity only if the children choose to sign to their bilingual siblings (Bianca, 2008). An analogous statement surely holds for deaf children of hearing parents.

Bianca's (2008) research also reveals that for the now-adult CODAs living in a family with Deaf parents was simply normal to them. However, their choice of language was determined by their parents when they went outside of their homes for shopping and restaurants. Some of the CODAs parents even faced embarrassment using sign language outside of their home. However, this was in the 1950s; due to changes in hearing people's attitudes toward sign language, if a similar study was conducted, not on adult CODAs but on still-young CODAs, it would probably show significant differences.

For Deaf people in Ethiopia, there are a number of language choices for a given purpose: EthSL, Amharic, English, ASL, Signed Amharic, Signed English, Signed Tigrigna, Signed Oromo, Signed Hadiya. The typical economic reason for choosing any of these languages or language systems is to find well-paid jobs, as knowing the languages or the language systems can open doors to employment. Therefore, utility is a driving force for language choice. Language choice may or may not be conscious. For instance, below is a personal communication made to one Deaf student at Addis Ababa University in connection with a language choice

made by a certain Department (deliberately unnamed here) that favors “speaker” Deaf people.

A department announced a vacant post to employ a sign language teacher. A number of Deaf applicants submitted their credentials; all of them were indeed qualified for the job. One person got the job; the other applicants were not happy at this. Later, it was leaked that the winner was selected because of being a partially “speaking” Deaf person.

The attitudes favoring “speaking Deaf” over “non-speaking Deaf” is seen by many Deaf people as politically incorrect and discourages them from being proud of their deafness and Deaf culture. The situation has potential to encourage them to be more dependent on spoken language than sign language.

LANGUAGE PLANNING AND POLICY

Language planning is a deliberate effort to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure (corpus), or functional allocation (status) of languages (Cooper, 1989).

According to Reagan (2010), some of the questions related to language planning that people grapple with are:

- What language(s) will serve as the official language(s) of the government?
- What are the roles of indigenous vs. foreign languages?
- What efforts need to be taken to employ indigenous languages in new domains of language use?
- What languages should be used for education, media, and preparation of literary material?
- What role should the state play in supporting or discouraging the use of particular languages?
- What language rights need to be recognized for citizens?

With regard to language planning activities in Ethiopia, several studies have been carried out recently on the education and media domains; these include Seidel and Moritz (2009) on language and education planning and policy, and Heugh (2010) on language planning in education. It emerges clearly from these writers’ texts that all four of the above types of language planning activities are being carried out, mainly in the

three major languages: Amharic, Oromiffa, and Tigrigna. According to official government policy, a mother tongue (first language) education program can in principle be carried out in almost any language, but practically this is limited to not more than 20 languages in the lower primary grades. With regard to media, a considerable number of languages are being used in radio broadcasts, both regionally and nationally. However, fewer languages are being used in television, newspapers, and magazines, as compared to radio.

As far as the EthSL is concerned, all four activities are being carried out. Concerning the corpus planning activities, a few sign language resources were available (see section on sign language resources on EthSL). EthSL and Deaf culture students of Addis Ababa University do their senior essays on the language, and so do a few MA students. Although, unofficially, there are currently a good number of domains that EthSL is being used in—media, religion, education, and group (associations)—concerning the status planning. Sign language interpretation services are made available only in a small number of schools in Addis Ababa, in connection with language-in-education planning. There have been more attitudes planning activities compared to the above three. A lot of workshops, conferences, and meetings have been carried out that focus on changing the attitudes of deafness, sign language, and Deaf people. There are gatherings like the International Deaf Week, which marks the sociocultural, linguistic, and political heritage of Deaf people.

Language policy is related to decisions, rules, regulations, and guidelines about the status, use, domains and territories of language(s), and the rights of the target group or population (Liddicoat, 2007).

According to Spolsky (2004), explicit or overt language policies are those that have clear legal support in official written documents such as the constitution. Implicit or covert language policies are not explicitly stated in any official documents, but may have even stronger influence than explicit ones. One example is Addis Ababa University: the official teaching-learning language is English but in certain contexts, a number of Ethiopian languages are used, including Amharic, Oromiffa, and Tigrigna; informal classroom discussion in Amharic is not unusual.

In language planning and policy (LPP) there are three orientations one might take, as stated by Reagan (2010). These are language-as-a-problem, language-as-a-right, and language-as-a-resource. The Table 2.2 presents these orientations and their attitudes to specific language issues,

TABLE 2.2. *Orientation of Language Planning and Policy.*

Orientation	View of Linguistic Diversity	View of Societal Bilingualism/ Multilingualism	View of Individual Bilingualism/ Multilingualism	View of Minority Languages in Society	View of Language in Second/ Foreign Language Education
Language-as-a-Problem	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
Language-as-a-Right	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
Language-as-a-Resource	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive

as per Reagan (2010). In fact, Richard Ruiz (1988) originally proposed the model for spoken languages, and later on, Nover (2000), Reagan (2010), and others adopted it.

The problem-based orientation focuses on challenges that have arisen as a result of linguistic diversity (allegedly) promoting ethnic divisiveness. The right-based orientation focuses on principles of social justice and on the acceptance of the principle that language rights are a fundamental part of human rights. The resource-based orientation sees language and linguistic skills as a kind of cultural capital that can, and should, be developed by society.

Ethiopia has had a history of putting the Amharic language at the center of governance and administration, religion, and symbolic identity of the nation for the last several centuries. Amharic was once termed as *Lōssanä Nōgus* “the language of the kings,” a term which probably started during the reign of King Lalibela (1140–1180) (Girma, 2014). The legacy of Amharic still continues today. Ethiopian language policies are mostly overt (i.e., a few articles are written in the constitution) but separate language policy documents were not prepared. The Imperial and the Derg regimes extremely propagated Amharic as the sole national language. Thus far, the current Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime does not have a separate language policy document. In fact, the constitution asserts the recognition of all languages as equal, and users have the full right to enjoy them, but still Amharic remains the official working language of the federal government.

Sign Language Policy and Planning (SLPP)

Language planning and policy (LPP) activities are now flourishing in many parts of the world. National and international organizations, such as the European Union and the United Nations, are giving due attention to the official recognition of sign languages, and to the acceptance of their true and natural aspect as the primary and preferred language of the Deaf community. The issue has also been extended to the educational and human rights of the Deaf people. One of the most visible activities of SLPP is the official recognition of sign languages. This recognition, according to Reagan (2010), has three purposes:

1. symbolic recognition of the legitimate status of the sign language as the vernacular language of the national Deaf community

2. guarantee of the linguistic rights of sign language users in all aspects of the lives of Deaf people
3. a commitment to the use of sign language in the educational domain

In fact, the strength of sign language policies differs from nation. Wheatley and Pabsch (2012) provide a complete list of sign language legislation in the European Union (EU). Some of the documents are available online—<https://www.un.org/disabilities> and <https://www.eur-lex.europa.eu>—including the EU and UN resolutions.

In the EU, a number of legal documents and initiatives have been employed to safeguard the rights of Deaf people and sign language. The UN Convention for the Rights of People with Disabilities (UN–CRPD) is seen by many people and nations as the most influential document of the UN regarding human rights and other related issues. It was adopted in 2006, and ratified on May 3, 2008 (Wheatley & Pabsch, 2012). The main purpose of the Convention is “to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities.”

Among others, the following crucial articles of the Convention focus on issues of sign language recognition:

- Article 2—Language includes both spoken and signed languages
- Article 9e—To provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers, and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities
- Article 21b—Accepting and facilitating the use of sign languages
- Article 21e—Recognizing and promoting the use of sign languages
- Article 24.3b—Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the Deaf community
- Article 30.4—Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture

The articles above and the remaining part in the Convention indicate that anytime the Convention uses the word *language*, it is also to include

sign language. It also recognizes the provision of sign language interpretation service and the right to access information in sign languages.¹³ It also encourages member states to accept and facilitate the use of sign languages by recognizing and promoting the use of sign languages. The Convention is a legal policy document, which has been highly applauded by Deaf communities across the globe. It also urges nations to quickly proceed to ratification and implementation strategies. In June 2014, 158 UN member nations signed, and 147 ratified the convention (www.un.org/disabilities).

To date, four African nations have officially recognized sign languages in their constitutions: Uganda (1995), Kenya (2005), South Africa (1996), and Zambia (2010).¹⁴

The issue of standardization is a critical component when considering the issue of official language recognition. Like Spain, which gave recognition to two different sign languages: Spanish Sign Language (LSE) and Catalan Sign Language (LSC), other nations are also advised to consider the existence of sign language variation in their territory. Following the second International Conference on Linguistic Rights of Deaf People—Moscow, May 20–22, 2014—the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) released a statement concerning sign language standardization. WFD acknowledges the fact that all sign languages have the potential to say the same thing in different signs. In other words, sign language variations are natural and there can certainly be more than one sign language variety in a particular nation. WFD in its statement¹⁵ denounced negative sign language standardization practices such as:

13. The UN provides sign language interpreting services in either ASL or IS in some high-level committee meetings as one of its working language. I had the chance to work as an EthSL interpreter at the UN headquarters at a high-level meeting of the General Assembly on Disability and Development, in New York City on September 23, 2013. While I was interpreting for the Ethiopian delegate, similar to other nations' sign language interpreters for their own delegates, an ASL/IS interpretation was seen on the wall screen for the general delegates.

14. All constitutions are accessible online. Ugandan SL (1995) in Chapter 4 of their constitution, Kenyan SL (2005) in Chapter 2, Article 7.3b of their constitution; South African SL (1996) in Chapter 1, Article 6.5a of the same and Zambian SL (2010) in Part IV:48c:iii.

15. <http://wfdeaf.org/news/wfd-statement-on-standardized-sign-language>.

- replacing old sign languages with “better” sign languages
- unifying several sign languages to a single sign language or
- deleting foreign signs from sign languages

None of these are supported by the WFD

Is EthSL Officially Recognized?

There are two answers: yes and no. First, yes, because Ethiopia has signed and ratified the UN Convention for the Rights of People with Disability (UN–CRPD).¹⁶ In addition, there are a number of official documents in which the issue of Deaf people is mentioned directly and indirectly. Many of these are best policies and guidelines, which many of the nations did not have.

Ethiopian Constitution (1995)

Article 5

All Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state recognition. Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal government. Members of the federation may by law determine their respective working languages.

The Federal Constitution of Ethiopia guarantees freedom of language, not explicitly mentioning sign language (or any other language). However, it is understood that this includes the national sign language. Besides, the parliament has begun providing sign language interpreting services at critical meetings such as the Prime Minister’s quarterly report.¹⁷

DRAFT ETHIOPIAN LANGUAGE POLICY (2013)

One of the references to sign language in a legal document in Ethiopia is the Ethiopian Language Policy, which was prepared under government mandate by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.¹⁸ The Ministry

16. The signing was on March 20, 2007 and the ratification was on July 7, 2010.

17. I am informed that due to lack of space for sign language interpreters at the parliament, the interpreters go to the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation studio, a different place, and in this way do the interpretations live.

18. I was involved in this project, collecting sociolinguistic data on four languages: Harari (Harar), Somali (Jigjiga and Dire Dawa), Afar (Afar), and Argoba (Afar).

presented the draft language policy at a stakeholders' consultative meeting in April 2013. Major articles, which mention sign language, the Deaf, and sign language interpretation are as follows:

Article 4.1.6

The Deaf have the right to learn in a sign language typical to their geographical area, the right to use it for communication, the right to develop and access information, the right use adaptive technology and the right to gain special support from the Government.

Article 12.1

The Government will consider the different professions of oral and sign language interpretation and translation to give standard training in the field.

Article 12.2

Sign language interpreters and translators would be obliged to be certified as to their competence and would need to be licensed from the responsible body before they assume their actual task.

Article 12.3

Standard and quality assurance will be assigned for those interpreters and translators working in government offices.

Article 15.7

A national development program will be designed for Ethiopian Sign Language, to be investigated by experts so that it can gain the benefits of modern technology.

The draft policy was recommended for further review especially as to whether the definition of “language” would include sign language. The draft policy was criticized for not explicitly mentioning (except in one passage) which sign language is being referred to, and also whether EthSL is considered as a language of its own. It also touches briefly on language variation in article 4.1.6; sign language variation is a serious issue in EthSL and it was suggested that it be considered in the updated version of the policy. During discussion of the policy, it was noted that full recognition of EthSL must be stressed and for that matter it was proposed that a separate EthSL policy could be prepared.

GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATIONAL PLAN (GTP)

(2010/11–2014/15)

This document contains major plans that have in fact been carried out within the past 5 years. Although many have criticized it for its over-ambitiousness, it was hoped that it would radically transform the nation within this 5-year period. In a number of places, it mentions the issue of disability in the areas of education, employment, health, social services, and awareness rising, but it lacks specificity. No specific mention is made about sign language or Deaf people.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Special Needs Education Program Strategies (I–IV) are documents that the ministry has prepared for the Deaf community and other people with disabilities (special needs). These documents mention Deaf issues, sign language, and sign language interpretation in various places. It recommends the need to provide sign language interpreters for Deaf students in their secondary education and technical and vocational education. It also proposes that Deaf children need to be taught in both sign language and written language.¹⁹

MINISTRY OF LABOR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS (MOLSA)

Proclamation no. 20, 2008, deals with the rights of employment of persons with disabilities. This document does not specifically mention the Deaf community or sign language, but implicitly includes Deaf people. Similarly, the National Employment Policy and Strategy of Ethiopia (2009) also focus on general disability issues, again implicitly including Deaf people.

There is also a National Plan of Action of Persons with Disabilities (2012–2021) which presents a plan for enabling Ethiopia to become a more inclusive society. Apart from adopting the Special Needs Education Program Strategy (2006), this document explicitly adds the need to promote sign language and the linguistic identity of the Deaf community. MOLSA is stated to be the responsible body to facilitate the implementation of the Convention for the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) and many of the CRPD provisions have been totally adopted.

19. I heard recently that there is now a draft of an Inclusive Education Policy proposed by the Ministry of Education. Many in the Deaf community have not accepted it fearing that it would end up closing special schools. It encourages integration and inclusion but provision of resources is lacking.

The above documents are assumed to create a favorable environment that could lead to the recognition of EthSL. However, none of the above documents mentions or alludes to the symbolic importance of sign language in the lives of Deaf people. Moreover, the task of implementing the UN-CRPD is left for MOLSA only. The experience of other countries shows that there is one responsible implementing body but other ministries take their share, for instance, the Ministry of Education takes the sign language in education part, and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism takes Deaf cultural and identity promotion stakes.

To return, then, to the question raised above as to whether EthSL is recognized, I have given reasons for saying *yes* with supporting evidence. However, there is also the answer *no*: in fact, EthSL has not yet explicitly been officially recognized as such. If so, what can be done for EthSL to be officially recognized?

The best answer has to do with changing people's attitude. No matter how many sign languages may have secured legal and official recognition, these by themselves do not guarantee that sign language and the Deaf community are fully and truly recognized. Most importantly, symbolic recognition is vital for an effective development of a sign language and its community. Concerning this, Burns et al. (2004, p. 215) note the following:

It is important to note that constitutional recognition does not guarantee full rights for deaf people, and service provision varies widely. Indeed, some countries, such as Sweden and Norway, which have not yet recognized sign language in their constitutions, enjoy a much more developed service than countries where sign language is officially recognized.

It is also the position of this research that EthSL should be recognized, not only legally and officially (overt), but also in terms of practical day-to-day services (covert).

So when is EthSL recognized? Perhaps,

- when the Deaf community is seen to use it for official purposes and in as many domains as possible,
- when all the curriculum and teaching materials are produced in sign language,
- when it is given as a school subject and is available as a medium of instruction at all levels,
- when it is accessible in as many domains as possible either through sign language professionals or through sign language interpreters.

Many people ask what can be done for EthSL to gain official recognition. The Deaf community is and must be the main actor to give EthSL the primary recognition. It is through their advocacy and awareness raising campaigns that the society at large can learn to accept sign language as a true and natural language and the government will come to grant it explicit official recognition.

Ethiopian Sign Language: One Language or Many?

Ethiopia is a multilingual and multicultural nation with more than 80 languages. Some of these languages have over a million users (e.g., Amharic, Oromiffa, Tigrigna, Somali, Sidama, Wolaita, Hadiyya, Gammo, and Afar) and some have as few as 10 speakers or less (Ongota, Anfillo, and others) (CSA, 2007). There are some languages that can be observed quite easily in almost all corners of the nation both in cities and in the countryside, for example, Amharic. There are also languages, which can only rarely be observed in areas outside of their own localities—for instance an Afar speaker in Gambella, or a Wolaita speaker in Axum. EthSL is one of the Ethiopian languages that have over a million users, and the users are found in almost every corner of the nation. Wherever there are Deaf people, there is sign language. So are there different sign languages in the different parts of the nation, or are all similar?

Aarons and Akach (1998) list some of the myths and misconceptions that many South Africans have about South African Sign Language (SASL). The same myths and misconceptions have been observed by many educators and authorities in Ethiopia with regard to EthSL. Two of them are presented below, adapted to suit the Ethiopian scene.

MYTH 1: FOR EVERY 80 PLUS LANGUAGES, THERE IS AN EQUIVALENT 80 PLUS SIGN LANGUAGES

In order to test the above myth, data was extracted from equivalent videotapes made at four sites: Arba Minch, Mekele, Nekemt, and Gambella. The local spoken language is different at these sites, respectively: Gamo, Tigrinya, Oromiffa, and (perhaps) Anyuak. Hence, (according to the myth) we might have expected four very different sign languages at the four sites. This is not at all what we observed. At all four sites EthSL is essentially one and the same language. The data I looked at for this connection was lexical types. Figures 2.10 and 2.11 depict two signs,

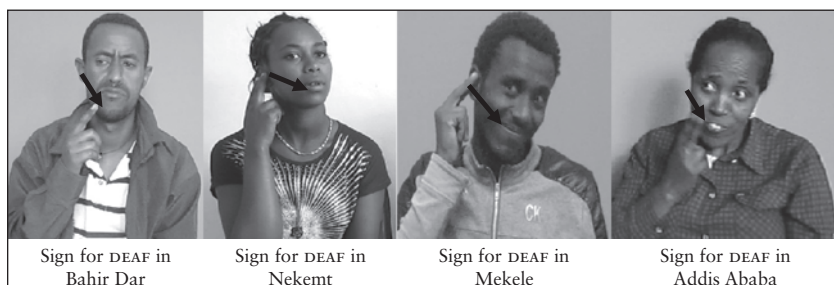


FIGURE 2.10. *DEAF at four different sites.*



FIGURE 2.11. *SIGN LANGUAGE at four different sites.*

namely DEAF and SIGN LANGUAGE, as produced at four sites: Bahir Dar, Nekemt, Mekele, and Addis Ababa. For both signs, there was only slight variation across sites. Crosslinguistically, these signs might share similarity and thus I would suggest further lexico-statistical work is required in another study.

As can be understood from the first set of images, the sign DEAF was uttered in almost the same way in the four different places. One phonological difference in Bahir Dar is that the signer used his index finger while the rest of the signers used their middle finger. Mouthing was also observed in the Addis Ababa signer. These are minor differences.

All four of the signers produce the sign in very similar ways in regard to the phonological parameters of similar movement, location, palm orientation, and facial expression. There is a difference in hand shape: the Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar signers use the open palm whereas the Mekele and Nekemt signers use the L handshape. Additionally, all four signers accompany the sign with similar mouthing. DEAF and SIGN LANGUAGE are presented as examples and may not be enough to justify variations until

a detailed linguistic analysis is done. This task will be the next phase of the sign linguistics project.

There is one further factor that contributes (in a minor way) to diversity within EthSL, and that involves the unexpectedly divergent linguistic behavior observed among uneducated people (nonschoolers) at least in Adama, Arba Minch, Gambella, and Harar. These people's sign language is different from those who went to school. This phenomenon was especially noticeable in Arba Minch and Gambella. If the situation in Arba Minch and in Gambella were further investigated, they could turn out to have significantly divergent sign languages.

MYTH 2: EthSL IS CONCERNED JUST WITH THOSE SIGNS THAT ARE FOUND IN THE FIRST HA BOOK NUMBERING 1,009, OR THE NEW EthSL DICTIONARY NUMBERING 1,321.

Sign language dictionaries are lists of signs, which are selected as per the objectives of the dictionaries such as comprehensive Country Names, Science, Mathematics, Language, Technology, Etymological dictionaries. When the EthSL dictionary (2007) was prepared, the corpus consisted of over 5,000 signs selected from signing conversation, stories, showing of objects. Out of over 5,000 lexical items, only 1,321 signs were included in the dictionary. Even at this current size, the dictionary includes 460 A4 pages. If all the 5,000 signs had been included in the dictionary, it would have been massively bulky, unaffordable, and less accessible. Thus, the 1,321 signs in the dictionary are only about 25% of the 5,000 signs that we know exist, and an even smaller percentage of the signs we may assume to exist.

In Ethiopia, there is a major difficulty in managing variation of any language, in particular in connection with EthSL dialectal variation. There are basically two views among educators. One view is to neglect the existence of sign language variation altogether. This view reflects the attitudes that people have toward variation in general as something chaotic and which is to be avoided. The second view would give due consideration only to one typical variety. Some people think that it is only their own form of sign language, which is “correct.” Under such circumstances, there will be different variant forms under the one language label “EthSL.” One approach, as suggested by Wardhaugh (2006), would be to acknowledge all the variant forms—easy in principle but difficult in practice.

BI- AND MULTILINGUALISM IN THE DEAF WORLD

Ann (2004, p. 43) defines Deaf bilinguals as any of the following:

- Native signers of xSL who are fluent in a spoken language (reading, writing, and speaking)
- Native signers of xSL who read and write a spoken language fluently but do not speak it
- Native signers of xSL who are fluent to varying degrees in reading and writing a spoken language
- Deaf signers of xSL as a second language who read and writes a spoken language fluently but do not speak it
- Second-language xSL signers who first learned a signed version of a spoken language
- Native signers of xSL who have learned another signer's language as a second language
- First/second language xSL signers who speak a spoken language.

As can be seen in the above list, there are a number of possible ways that a Deaf person can be called a bilingual. Interestingly, many bilingual Deaf people (in any of the above senses) are not aware that they are bilingual.

In all the above four cases, the fact that sign language is used by an entire community is evidence showing full individual and community bilingualism in a signed and an oral language. It is no doubt that such cases could exist in EthSL, although it demands further research. Individual sign/oral bilingualism is not unusual in Ethiopia, but there are no reports of community-wide bilingualism.

Borrowing

Whether intentionally or not, it is possible that a foreign signer may introduce new elements into sign language. For instance, many Ethiopian Deaf signers perceive that ASL signers use exaggerated facial expressions and a wide area of signing space compared to Ethiopian signers; some Ethiopian signers sometimes adopt this “foreign accent” from ASL. In various Deaf communities throughout the world, the indigenous sign language has been influenced by foreigners who, often with the best of intentions, have brought with them their ability to communicate in sign. Woll et al. (2001) note that educational institutions are a common domain for this

type of influence, and they touch in particular on the influence of Gallaudet University upon non-American Deaf students who incorporate ASL features into their sign language and carry it back to their native country.

As already mentioned, EthSL has borrowed a number of ASL signs due to the missionaries' engagement in Ethiopian Deaf education in the 1950s. Following the launching of the first Deaf school in Addis Ababa, the publication of the first sign language book *HA MES'HAF* (1979) also contributed to the spread of ASL signs in Ethiopia mainly due to the fact that the signs were taken from Riekehof's book about ASL, *Talk to the Deaf* (1963). In addition, there were a few Ethiopian Deaf missionaries who had a chance to go to Nigeria to attend religious courses through the Christian Mission for the Deaf (CMD). The Nigerian courses were given in ASL. When they returned to Ethiopia, these Deaf missionaries were mainly engaged in teaching Deaf students using an ASL mixed variety of EthSL. Today, many Deaf signers are seen to resist the influence of ASL signs, although they may freely use a sign without knowing that it is originally an ASL sign. The new ENAD (2007) sign language dictionary found it impossible to fully avoid the use of ASL signs but made an effort to incorporate more local signs greater than in the earlier *HA MES'HAF*.

Research Methods

The study of language use and attitudes demanded certain steps to be taken, before, during, and after the recording. In order to help the current research determine these procedures, several documentation projects in the world were reviewed. These are the ASL corpus project led by Ceil Lucas, Robert Bayley, and Clayton Valli (2007); the BSL corpus project led by Adam Schembri et al. (2011); Italian Sign Language (LIS) corpus project led by Carlo Geraci et al. (2011); and finally the New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) corpus project led by Rachel and David McKee (2011). As the ASL corpus project has informed all succeeding corpus projects, the present survey of EthSL also follows, if not replicates, the various methods and techniques used by the ASL and the other corpus projects.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This section presents all the possible procedures followed during the sampling of participants and sites, data collection, and data analysis. Each section also presents the details of how each procedure was designed.

Subjects

Following Baker and Woll (2005), information was collected from the informants on variables such as age at onset of deafness, linguistic background (of both signed and written language), educational background, current age, gender, and geography. These criteria were used to create a stratified sample of participants.

Participant recruitment was based on criteria presented in Labov (1972), Milroy (1987), and Lucas, Bayley, and Valli (2007). Participants were recruited in groups by a Deaf contact person (“the local contact”: Milroy, 1980; Lucas et al., 2001) in each region. This local contact was

a Deaf individual, who had spent most of his/her life in the area and had knowledge about the local Deaf community. The local contact person's role was to help the main researcher recruit participants in each region, and later to explain the purpose of the research to the selected participants.

Deaf participants were divided into two categories: ages 10–34, and ages 35 and over.²⁰ To understand the reason for this split, we need to consider the history of Deaf education in Ethiopia. In 1963, the first Deaf school in present-day Ethiopia was launched. Gradually, the number started to grow. In 1970, Ethiopian fingerspelling was introduced. In 1982, the first boarding school for Deaf students was launched. Soon after the introduction of inclusive education programs in Ethiopia in the 1990s, a number of “unit classes” for the Deaf students (classrooms reserved for Deaf students) were opened in various parts of the country. Generally speaking, these marks in the history of the Deaf community in Ethiopia divide its members into the two age groups referred to above: Group 1: 10–34, and Group 2: over 35. The first group, the younger generation who attended school in the late 1980s onward, is typically characterized by a combination of “mainstreaming” schools,²¹ boarding schools, and much more fluent and natural use of sign language, fingerspelling, and sometimes total communication. By contrast, it is an observable fact that older people (i.e., the second group, who attended school in the 1960s and 1970s) tend not to use fingerspelling and sign language as frequently. EthSL was not used in television until the beginning of sign language television in 2000. This older group had their education within hearing schools where there was no awareness about deafness, sign language, and related concepts.

Therefore, the interviewing was conducted in four groups comprising two age ranges. Two groups consisted of 3 adult participant signers each; two other groups consisted of 2 younger participant signers each; this yield 4 groups altogether, consisting of a total of 10 participants (3+2+3+2=10) at each site. The first two groups were “schoolers” (i.e., participants who have been to school; the last two groups were “non-schoolers,” participants either who dropped out of school or who never

20. Although no lower limit was placed on the age of child participants, in fact the youngest participant was 15: hence the de facto minimum age of 10 mentioned here.

21. These are schools that principally meets the needs of all pupils.

went to school at all). Each group of signers was interviewed by one DRA, who was a cameraman at the same time.

A total of 154 consultants were targeted to be involved in this project: 10 Deaf consultants from each of 11 sites (totaling 110), consisting of 5 males and 5 females and covering two age ranges (10–34 and over 35). The 10 consultants were divided into two groups, each consisting of 2 younger and 3 older signers. The 2 younger signers included one who has not been to school and one who has. The older group included one person who has not been to school and 2 who have. Twenty-two teachers (2 from each site) and 22 parents (2 from each site, one of a younger nonschool signer and one of a school signer) were also part of the sample, yielding a total of 154 subjects (=110+22+22). Additionally, in each region a local member of the Deaf community was recruited to act as the local liaison and to be responsible for recruiting the other consultants in the region. Finally, there were altogether 4 DRAs who were responsible for interviewing all the participants.

Seventy-one percent of the research subjects (110 out of 154) were selected by virtue of being members of the Deaf community. The other 29 percent (the 22 teachers and 22 parents) sometimes were Deaf and sometimes hearing; this was checked during the data collection process. Presenting the questionnaire in written form (Amharic or English) did not prove practicable among the Deaf consultants; rather, all the Deaf participants were interviewed in EthSL by a Deaf interviewer. The aim of including the 3 types of participants was due to the perception that they are highly involved with Deaf issues on a regular basis.

The 4 DRAs were based in Addis Ababa and always accompanied the researcher to each research site. Two of them were early signers who have known sign language since the age of 3 or 4 (early childhood sign language acquisition); two were late Deaf trilingual in Amharic/English and EthSL. All 4 of them were graduates of AAU, and have experience of linguistic research. Hearing participants who were teachers and families of Deaf people were interviewed by the main researcher.

Research Setting

Many studies of sign language in the world have found it difficult to get representative data for their respective signing communities. This is typically because not enough is known about the Deaf communities who use sign language. Similarly, there is difficulty in securing representative

data from the Deaf community in Ethiopia as many of them are living dispersed within each hearing community. Finding Deaf people in urban areas is easier than in rural areas. Through acquaintance or sign-of-hand (an equivalent expression to word-of-mouth) inquiry, the DRAs asked if they knew of Deaf groups living in rural areas, including possible isolated families.

To obtain a relatively representative sample of the entire Deaf community in the country, data was collected at 11 sites (Tables 3.1–3.11). These places were selected because they have sizable Deaf communities, Deaf-led organizations and/or special Deaf schools. These criteria were those used in the ASL corpus project (Lucas et al., 2001). The recording was carried out in 13 field trips. A pre-main fieldwork took place in Addis Ababa and Hosaena. Addis Ababa has the largest urban Deaf community in Ethiopia, and the oldest Deaf residential school in Ethiopia is in Hosaena; this enabled the easy collection of data from native signers in two different regions. The pre-main fieldwork also included establishing contacts with branches of the ENAD, Deaf schools, and Deaf centers in 9 other towns. Of these 9 towns, in the first main data collection phase, data was collected in Nazreth/Adama, Awasa/Hawassa, and Arba Minch; in the second one, Harar; in the third Dessie and Mekele; in the fourth Bahir Dar and Nekemt; and in the fifth Gambela. When planning the travel, intercity transport availability was taken into consideration for the first, third, and fourth field trips. Figure 3.1 shows the locations of the data collection sites.

Research Instruments

The two most important challenges in conducting sign language research are how to get representative data from a stratified sample and the type of instruments for collecting the required data in terms of quality and quantity. In order to tackle these problems, in all four of the above corpus documentation projects three data collection procedures were used: free conversation, an interview, and an elicitation task. Since the main purpose of the present research is studying the sociolinguistic factors that are responsible for attitudes on the use of EthSL, elicitation of lexical items was not considered. The methodology rather involves the use of free conversation and of a questionnaire guide presented in the form of an interview.

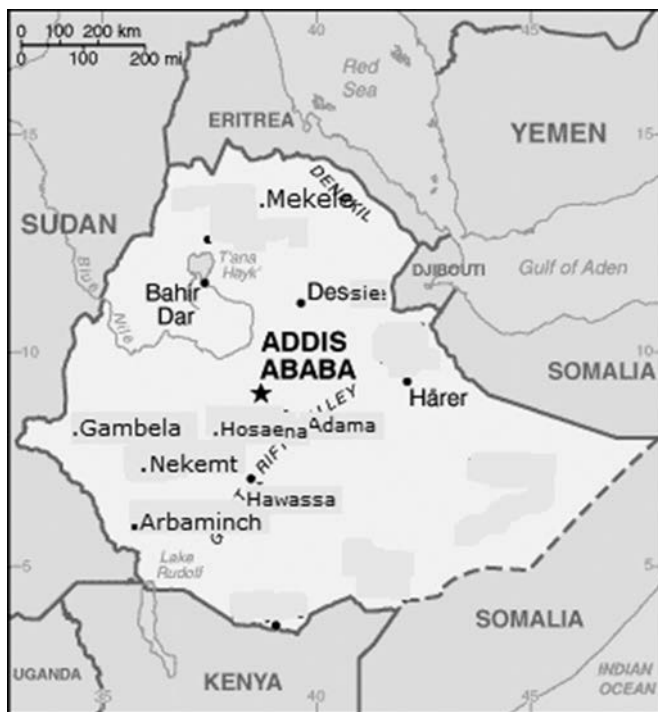


FIGURE 3.1. *Field sites (Addis Ababa, Hosaena, Adama (Nazareth), Hawassa, Arba Minch, Harar, Dessie, Mekele, Bahir Dar, Nekemt, and Gambela in the order of field work sites visited.*

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The sociolinguistic interview guide that was used for the BSL corpus study (2011) and sociolinguistic questionnaires (SLQ) found in Leigh (2010) were used in the present research as an instrument to gather a wide variety of information about the social situation of the Deaf communities, sign language use, and the attitudes of the participants.²² The instruments were modified to fit the purposes of this research.

The interview guide for this research consists of 5 parts. The first part is about personal background data, providing demographic information on gender, age, place of birth, education and place of residence of the interviewees, history of Deafness in the respondent's family, and leisure time activities. The interview for this part takes about 10 minutes.

22. Leigh based her sociolinguistic questionnaire on Bickford (1988) and Showalter (1990).

TABLE 3.1. *Profile of Site 1, Addis Ababa.*

Approximate number of Deaf people in Addis Ababa	5,586 as per CSA (2007 ²⁴)		
Deaf social sites	Associations, schools, cafes (mainly Arat Kilo, Piassa, Mexico, and Bole), religious institutions (Orthodox Churches mainly—Holy Savior Church; Mekane Yesus in Amist Kilo, Sar Bet, Tor Hailoch)		
Deaf Associations found in Addis Ababa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ethiopian National Association of the Deaf (ENAD) – Rehabilitation Services for the Deaf Association (RSDA) – Deaf Development and Information Association (DDIA) – Sign Language Training and Social Services Association (SLTSSA) – Timhirt Mesmat Letesanachew Lijoch Hibret (Education for Deaf Children Union) – Jerusalem Inclusive Association 		
Deaf schools/institutions (names and affiliation found in Addis Ababa)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mekanissa School for the Deaf is run by Church of Christ (USA) – Alfa School for the Deaf is run by the government – Victory School for the Deaf is run by Bible Outreach International (USA) – Co-action Pre-School for the Deaf is run by ENAD – Yekatit 23 (unit school) is run by the government – Menelik II primary (unit school) is run by the government – Menelik II preparatory (unit school) is run by the government – Tikur Anbessa secondary (unit school) is run by the government – Addis Ababa University, BA program in EthSL and Deaf culture within the Department of Linguistics, is run by the government 		
Recording sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Addis Ababa University – Mekanissa School for the Deaf – Victory School for the Deaf 		
Number of respondents ²⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 14 Deaf respondents (including 2 Deaf teachers) – 2 parents 		
Size of corpus	Total original size	Total compressed size	Total time
	58.57 GB	~2.5GB	6:23:00 hrs

23. These official CSA figures are undoubtedly much too low.

24. Unlike all the other sites, there were 16 respondents in Addis Ababa.

TABLE 3.2. *Profile of Site 2, Hosaena (230 km southwest from Addis).*

Approximate number of Deaf people in Hosaena	232 as per CSA (2007)		
Deaf social sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – School cafe – Every Sunday at churches together with the hearing people 		
Number of Deaf Associations	– Ethiopian National Association of the Deaf (ENAD)–Hosaena Branch		
Number of Deaf schools/institutions (names, belonging)	There is one boarding school (1–10) and one primary unit school in Hosaena <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Hosaena boarding school is run by Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus (EECMY) – Ersa Adeda (Unit primary school is run by the government) 		
Recording sites	– Hosaena boarding school		
Number of respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 12 Deaf respondents (including 2 Deaf teachers) – 2 parents 		
Corpus profile	Total original size	Total compressed size	Total recorded time
	13.53 GB ²⁶	~1.5 GB	5:47 hrs

TABLE 3.3. *Profile of Site 3, Adama (Nazareth) (91 km east of Addis Ababa).*

Approximate number of Deaf people in Adama (Nazareth)	485 as per CSA (2007)		
Deaf social sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ENAD – Adama branch – Cafes and churches 		
Number of Deaf Associations	– ENAD – Adama branch		
Number of Deaf schools/institutions (names, belonging)	There is one unit school for Deaf students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Adama no. 2 primary school is run by the government 		
Recording sites	– ENAD – Adama branch office		
Number of respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 12 Deaf respondents (including 2 Deaf teachers) – 2 parents 		
Corpus profile	Total original size	Total compressed size	Total recorded time
	70.1 GB	~3.5 GB	5:47 hrs

25. The Hosaena data were recorded on a different video camera at much lower resolution, hence the much smaller size.

TABLE 3.4. *Profile of Site 4, Hawassa (272 km south of Addis Ababa).*

Approximate number of Deaf people in Hawassa	285 as per CSA (2007)		
Deaf social sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ENAD – Hawassa branch – Churches – Hawasa Lake shore and cafes 		
Number of Deaf Associations	– ENAD – Hawassa branch		
Number of Deaf schools/institutions (names, belonging)	There are 2 schools that enroll Deaf students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tabor primary school is run by the government – Hawassa School for the Deaf which is run by Church of Christ (USA) 		
Recording sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Hawassa Deaf Church – Tabor primary school – Cheshire services office, Hawassa branch 		
Number of respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 12 Deaf respondents (including 2 Deaf teachers) – 2 parents 		
Corpus profile	Total original size	Total compressed size	Total recorded time
	50.53 GB	~ 2.3 GB	4:32 hrs

TABLE 3.5. *Profile of Site 5, Arba Minch (446 km south of Addis Ababa).*

Approximate number of Deaf people in Arba Minch	145 as per CSA (2007)		
Deaf social sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ENAD – Arba Minch branch – Cafes 		
Number of Deaf Associations	– ENAD – Arba Minch branch		
Number of Deaf schools/institutions (names, belonging)	There is 1 school that enrolls Deaf students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Arba Minch – Sikela Special School is run by government 		
Recording sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Arba Minch – Sikela Special School – ENAD – Arba Minch branch 		
Number of respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 12 Deaf respondents (including teachers) – 2 parents 		
Corpus profile	Total original size	Total compressed size	Total recorded time
	50.53 GB ²⁷	~ 2.3 GB	4:32 hrs

26. By coincidence, exactly the same amount of data was collected at Hawassa and Arba Minch.

TABLE 3.6. *Profile of Site 6, Harar (514 km east of Addis Ababa).*

Approximate number of Deaf people in Harar	614 as per CSA (2007)		
Deaf social sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ENAD – Harar branch – Cafes 		
Number of Deaf Associations	– ENAD – Arba Minch branch		
Number of Deaf schools/institutions (names, belonging)	There is 1 school that enrolls Deaf students – Harar School for the Deaf is run by the government		
Recording sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Harar School for the Deaf – ENAD – Harar branch 		
Number of respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 10 Deaf respondents – 2 hearing teachers – 2 hearing parents 		
Corpus profile	Total original size	Total compressed size	Total recorded time
	57 GB	3 GB	4:40 hrs

TABLE 3.7. *Profile of Site 7, Dessie (384 km northeast of Addis).*

Approximate number of Deaf people in Dessie	124 as per CSA (2007)		
Deaf social sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ENAD – Dessie branch – Cafes 		
Number of Deaf Associations	– ENAD – Dessie branch		
Number of Deaf schools/institutions (names, belonging)	There is 1 school that enrolls Deaf students – Tigil Fre Special School run by the government		
Recording sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tigil Fre Special School – ENAD – Dessie branch 		
Number of respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 10 Deaf respondents – 2 hearing parents – 2 hearing teachers 		
Corpus profile	Total original size	Total compressed size	Total recorded time
	54.54 GB	2.68 GB	5:45 hrs

TABLE 3.8. *Profile of Site 8, Mekele (770 km north of Addis Ababa).*

Approximate number of Deaf people in Mekele	Official figure is unknown but the Deaf people estimated that more than 5,000 Deaf live in Mekele town		
Deaf social sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ENAD – Mekele branch – Cafes – Churches 		
Number of Deaf Associations	– ENAD – Mekele branch		
Number of Deaf schools/institutions (names, belonging)	There is 1 school for Deaf students – Mekele School for the Deaf run by the government		
Recording sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mekele School for the Deaf – ENAD – Mekele branch 		
Number of respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 10 Deaf respondents (including 2 Deaf teachers) – 2 parents – 2 hearing teachers 		
Corpus profile	Total original size	Total compressed size	Total recorded time
	57 GB	~ 2 GB	5:45 hrs

TABLE 3.9. *Profile of Site 9, Bahir Dar (570 km northwest of Addis Ababa).*

Approximate number of Deaf people in Bahir Dar	172 as per CSA (2007)		
Deaf social sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ENAD – Bahir Dar branch – Cafes 		
Number of Deaf Associations	– ENAD – Bahir Dar branch		
Number of Deaf schools/institutions (names, belonging)	There is 1 school that enrolls Deaf students – Yekatit 23 Special School run by the government		
Recording sites	– Yekatit 23 Special School		
Number of respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 10 Deaf respondents – 2 hearing parents – 2 hearing teachers 		
Corpus profile	Total original size	Total compressed size	Total recorded time
	42.6 GB	~ 2.4 GB	4:31 hrs

TABLE 3.10. *Profile of Site 10, Nekemt (325 km west of Addis Ababa).*

Approximate number of Deaf people in Nekemt	232 as per CSA (2007)		
Deaf social sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Churches– Nekemt Boarding School for Deaf		
Number of Deaf Associations	None		
Number of Deaf schools/institutions (names, belonging)	There is one school that enrolls Deaf students <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Nekemt Boarding Deaf School for the Deaf is run by the Swedish Evangelical Church		
Recording sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Nekemt Boarding School for the Deaf– Deaf working sites such as hotel rooms		
Number of respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– 11 Deaf respondents (including 1 Deaf teacher)– 2 parents– 2 hearing teachers		
Corpus profile	Total original size	Total compressed size	Total recorded time
	25.19 GB	~ 860 MB	2:34 hrs

TABLE 3.11. *Profile of Site 11, Gambela (714 km west of Addis Ababa).*

Approximate number of Deaf people in Gambela	709 as per CSA (2007)		
Deaf social sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Under the mango trees along the Baro River		
Number of Deaf Associations	None		
Number of Deaf schools/institutions (names, belonging)	There is 1 school that enrolls Deaf students <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Ras Gobena primary school is run by the government		
Recording sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Ras Gobena primary school– Hotel room		
Number of respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– 11 Deaf respondents (including 1 Deaf teacher)– 2 parents– 2 hearing teachers		
Corpus profile	Total original size	Total compressed size	Total recorded time
	34.18 GB	~ 2 GB	3:52 hrs

The second part is about language use in different domains and language skills of the respondents. This part contains six clustered open-ended questions, each followed by additional related questions to support a better explanation. This part took 20 minutes. The third part, which is about services and service-rendering organizations for Deaf people, asks the participants to indicate to what extent they are aware of these service issues. It contains eight open-ended questions and it took 10 minutes. The fourth part is the largest one; it incorporates both attitudes toward EthSL and toward the use of EthSL. It contains nine clustered open-ended questions and 30 minutes were used. The fifth part contains two open-ended questions, which give respondents a chance to add comments to what they have already said in the previous four parts. The total number of open-ended questions is thus 25, excluding the bio data. During the pilot testing, it was possible to reduce the number of questions in cases where some of them were found unnecessary. In addition, the pilot testing helped to pretest and validate the questions. An average of a little more than 1 hour was spent to conduct the interview with each of the four interviewees. Thus, a total of about 4 hours and 30 minutes of data was recorded at each site. The total amount of data that was recorded at all of the 11 sites was thus about 52 hours—all in EthSL.

The questions were prepared in Amharic and English. Before starting the interview, the DRAs read the questions silently to themselves and rehearsed saying them in sign language.

The hearing nonsigning parents of the Deaf children were interviewed by the researcher himself. Only those who could read and write Amharic/English well filled out the questionnaire.

The interviewing sequence is systematically modeled on the use of interview questions as presented in Labov (1966). These flow charts enable the DRAs to easily keep the interview moving smoothly.

Figure 3.2 is about the background status of the participants. The questions do not necessarily have to be asked in the order given above but the most important issue is coverage of each topic. It took 10 minutes to conduct this part. By the end of the last topic, the DRAs should have enough information to create a good transitional question to the next part, language use situations (Figure 3.3).

The Language Use part has three main components: language use in particular domains, language skills, and other (ungrouped). A number of domains are mentioned to delimit the sphere of usage of EthSL.

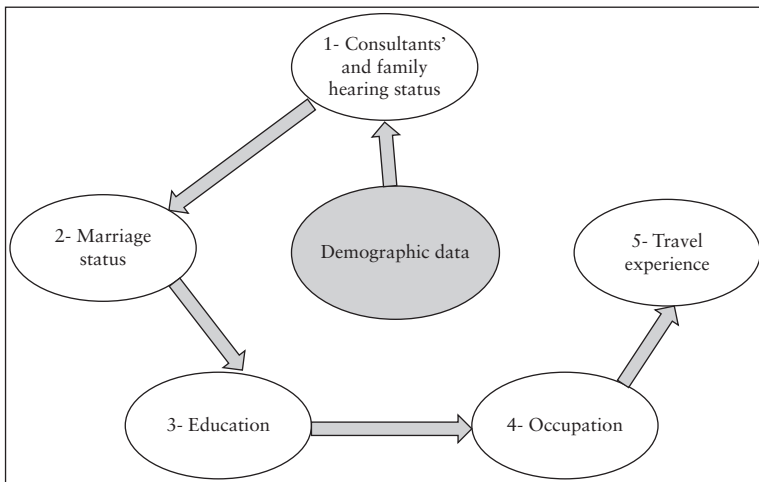


FIGURE 3.2. Interview procedure 1: Demographic data.

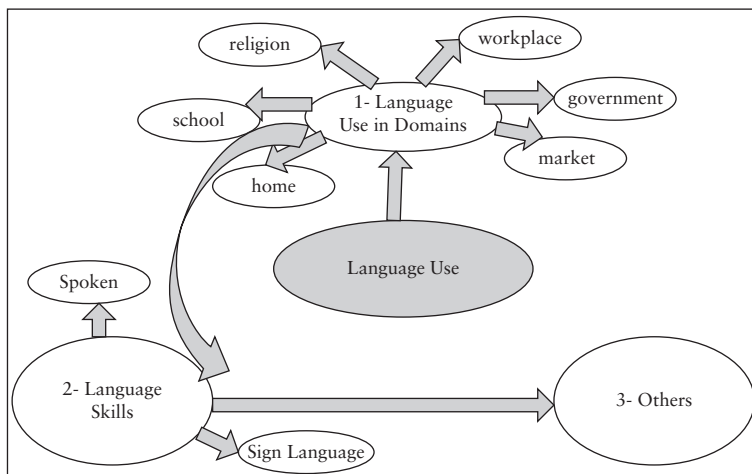


FIGURE 3.3. Language use interview guide.

They were presented in no particular order. A transition question was asked at the end of this part, leading into language attitudes.

Figure 3.4 shows that the attitudes interview guide has two core questions: Language attitudes toward EthSL and toward the use of EthSL. The first part asks questions that are related to variation, opinion about variation, and other related questions, in a particular order. The second part is about how it is used, who is using what, which variety is used, and where.

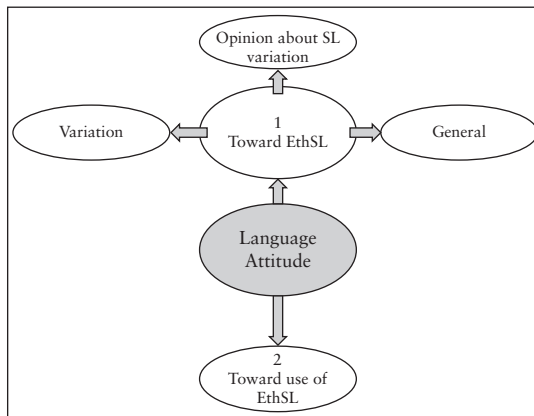


FIGURE 3.4. *Language attitudes interview guide.*

The main part of this research focuses on language use and attitudes. These are the domains presented in the above charts. The other parts of the interview guide (regarding “services”) are not put in the chart, since there aren’t many questions, and are easy for the DRAs doing the interviews to comprehend.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The procedure for the data collection was as follows: after getting the research permission and supporting letter from the Department of Linguistics at Addis Ababa University, the research team (consisting of one DRA at a time and the main researcher) traveled directly to Deaf schools and/or Deaf associations. We introduced ourselves and informed the authorities of this research project. The main researcher asked the director of the institutions for permission to collect data in that particular school or area. Local Deaf community leaders were also contacted upon arrival to each site. This top-bottom approach helps to minimize bureaucratic obstacles in data collection and also builds trust at the given institution. Many schools teach from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. At some sites, such as Mekele and Gambela, due to the hot weather, school closes at 11:00 a.m. Thus, in order not to interrupt classes, the appropriate time for interviews was after school, and on weekends and holidays.

INSTRUMENTS AND FILMING PROCEDURE

The filming was carried out without the presence of a hearing person. In Valli and Lucas's (1992) research on American Deaf signers, it was shown that when a hearing person is present while recording, the signers will shift style toward the norm of English, such as following English word order, mouthing of English words, and shifting to signed English. This is a clear example of what Labov (1972) calls the "Observer's Paradox," explaining, "Our goal is to observe the way people use language when they are not being observed." I, as the principal investigator, was not present in the recording room. Thus, the recording site was reserved for the Deaf signers and "keep-out" notices were posted at the site.

Video recordings were made against a plain colored background screen and consultants were asked to wear contrasting plain colored T-shirts to maximize visibility. In addition, chairs used did not have arms so as not to interfere with free movement of elbows and arms while signing.

The filming was conducted in a familiar environment for the participants so that they could produce their utterances in a relaxed manner. Such places are Deaf schools, Deaf clubs, or private homes as suggested by Lucas et al. (2007). Interviewing was done taking into consideration all those sociolinguistic factors mentioned in Baker and Woll (2005), which were discussed in Chapter 1.

Deaf signing parents and Deaf signing teachers were interviewed by the DRAs. Hearing parents and hearing teachers were interviewed by the main researcher.

ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

This study follows a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data analysis procedure. There are a number of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis packages for analyzing mixed data. The software produces a data file of glossed text generated by free conversation and interviews. This data is then described, interpreted, and summarized. The numerical analysis of the data is something that the researcher did himself, by using an MS Excel spreadsheet.

The majority of this sociolinguistic study is qualitative in nature and does not need statistical abstraction, though it does include numerical

data, which are directly connected to the variables. After quantifying the responses, descriptive statistics were used to show the results of the study. The use of bar charts helped to compare between different variable units and to see the cause-and-effect relationship among them. The analysis was based on the questionnaire results. It described the responses straightforwardly and tried to present the participants' responses in light of the literature. It did not test the sign language skills or level of bilinguality to check what they said and their actual language proficiency.

Presentation of the Data

This chapter presents the results for three groups of respondents: Deaf participants, parents, and teachers. The first group of respondents, the Deaf participants, make up the lion's share of the total participants, numbering 119. We interviewed 22 parents (representing 22 households, one parent per household), 2 each from the 11 sites. All of the parents were hearing except for one Deaf parent who preferred to fill out the questionnaire in writing (not by signing). Three questionnaires were disqualified for incomplete answers. I interviewed many of the parents; a few others preferred to fill in the answers on their own. The actual number of parents was 19 out of 22, a return rate of 86%. Twenty-two teachers were targeted at 11 sites, 2 from each. Only 20 teachers filled out and returned the forms; of these, 3 were found incomplete; thus a total of 17 teachers out of 22 were included, a return rate of 77%.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Sixty-nine male and 50 female Deaf participants were involved in this research, making up a total of 119. Most were between the ages of 21 and 30 (see Table 4.1) and had been born in the region where the data was collected. The parents we interviewed were predominantly female (14 women to 5 men) and the majority were over the age of 40. Two younger "parents" were actually the legal guardians of Deaf participants. Parents also tended to have remained in the area of their birth.

Teachers were younger than the parents, and were overwhelmingly male (12 male teachers to 5 female). School administrators explained that many teachers begin teaching at a young age but then leave for higher paying jobs. The teachers predominantly came from another location in Ethiopia (see Table 4.2).

TABLE 4.1. *Age of the Participants.*

	<20	21–30	31–40	41–50	>50
Deaf participants	26	58	23	10	2
Parents	0	2	2	11	4
Teachers	0	6	58	4	1

TABLE 4.2. *Place of Birth.*

	Onsite	Offsite	Unknown	Difficult to Interpret
Deaf participants	73	41	2	3
Parents	11	8	0	0
Teachers	7	10	0	0

DEAFNESS STATUS

The majority of the Deaf participants (108) considered themselves to be profoundly Deaf (they mostly signed DEAF by puffing out their cheeks and using their fingers to make a large arc from their ear to their mouth, indicating that they were proud of their deafness—see Figure 4.1). Eleven considered themselves to be hard of hearing. In Ethiopia, however, no political distinction is made between the two groups.

All of the parents, except for 2, were hearing, as were most of the teachers (14 identified as hearing, 1 as hard of hearing, and 2 as Deaf). In Ethiopia, teachers of Deaf students are mostly hearing people who either have a Deaf person in their family or simply took the job voluntarily.

USE OF HEARING AIDS

Respondents were asked whether they use a hearing aid or not, and its relevance. All the respondents knew what a hearing aid is. The large majority of Deaf participants, 94 (79%), responded that they had never used any type of hearing aid (see Table 4.3). Out of those 94 respondents, 13 (14%) reported that they do not want to use one because it creates disturbing sounds inside their ear, or because of costly hearing aid batteries.



FIGURE 4.1. *Proudly DEAF.*

TABLE 4.3. *Use of Hearing Aids.*

	Yes	No	Difficult to Interpret	Not Applicable
Deaf participants	21	94	4	0
Parents	2	17	0	0
Teachers	3	14	0	0

TABLE 4.4. *Sound Audibility.*

	Yes	No	N/A	DI
Deaf participants	90	23	1	5
Teachers	2	1	14	0
Parents	2	17	0	0

SOUND AUDIBILITY

When asked about the type of sounds the Deaf respondents can hear, the majority, 90 (76%), gave lists of sounds that they could perceive without the assistance of a hearing aid, such as thunder, louder car horns, explosions, loud knocking on the door, meaningless noise, gunfire, people shouting, and heavy rain on a roof. It is noteworthy that most of the Deaf respondents characterize themselves as profoundly deaf, but at the same time a majority report that they can hear very loud sounds (90 respondents or 76%; see Table 4.4). It is also to be noted that sound audibility tests of the respondents has not been carried out in this research.

TABLE 4.5. *Age at Onset of Deafness.*

	Birth to 5	6 to 10	11 to 20	>20	N/A (H)	Don't Know
Deaf participants	72	24	12	1	5	5
Teachers	0	1	2	14	0	0
Parents	1	1	0	0	17	0

In line with the above question, the parents and teachers of Deaf people were asked whether or not they could hear loud sounds. Of the 3 Deaf teachers, 2 could hear loud sounds, and one could not. The 2 Deaf parents reported that they could hear loud sounds.

A greater part of the Deaf respondents, 72 (61%), became deaf before the age of five; a large majority (96, or 81%) became Deaf before the age of 10, and almost all (108, or 91%) before the age of 20. Out of the 72 respondents who became Deaf before they were five, 30 (42%) reported that they had been deaf since birth, “born deaf,”²⁷ followed by those who became deaf at four, 11 (15%); those who became deaf at three, 10 (14%); at age one and five, each numbered 8 (11%), and finally those at age two, resulted in 5 participants. Almost all of the respondents thus became Deaf either as children or as teenagers.

The two Deaf parents became Deaf in childhood (<10); the Deaf teachers, somewhat later (6–20).

REPORTED CAUSES OF DEAFNESS

Most of the Deaf participants felt that they had become deaf as a result of man-made (accidental) factors, such as falling out of a bed, hearing bomb blasts or gunshots, being hit by family members (domestic violence), sinking in water, being caught in a strong wind, having been given the evil eye, and hearing thunder (in their order of prominence). Almost an equal number of respondents replied that they did not know exactly

27. Born Deaf are those who become deaf at birth or in earliest infancy. Among others, typical causes are genetic, complications during pregnancy, and illness such as rubella (www.deafchildworldwide.info). Of those who are identified as “born Deaf,” many are observed to get special respect and to feel proud in the sense of being a native signer.

TABLE 4.6. *Causes of Deafness.*

	Meningitis	Since Birth	Manmade Causes	Unknown	N/A (Hearing)
Deaf Participants	16	16	45	42	0
Parents	1	0	0	1	17
Teachers	1	0	0	2	14

TABLE 4.7. *Deaf Family Members.*

	Yes	No	DI	No answer
Deaf participants	17	97	5	0
Teachers	2	14	1	0
Parents	19	0	0	0

how they became deaf (see Table 4.6). Only 16 respondents reported that they had meningitis and, as a result, had become deaf. Of the 72 Deaf participants who became deaf before the age of five (see Table 4.5), most replied that their deafness was due to man-made factors. This is followed by 18 (25%) who did not know exactly the causes of their deafness. Sixteen (22%) replied that their deafness had started since birth and only 6 (8%) were diagnosed with meningitis. No evident pattern emerges from this comparison, except that (necessarily) the percentage of “deaf since birth” is greater for the below five group.

On the other hand, causes of deafness among parents and teachers were: two cases of meningitis, three unknown. There were no reported instances of man-made causes (accidental).

DEAF FAMILY MEMBERS

When we examined the occurrence of deafness among other members of the Deaf respondents’ family, we saw that about a seventh do have other Deaf family members (see Table 4.7). Out of the 17 who said that they have Deaf members in their family, only one stated that her mother and her two siblings were Deaf due to meningitis. Five of them stated that they had four Deaf siblings each for genetic reasons; three confirmed that they had three Deaf siblings, each caused by unknown reasons; four said that they had two Deaf siblings, each caused by sickness, and the rest had

one Deaf sibling each, mainly caused by accidents. Regionally, almost all the above respondents are fairly distributed. It is clear from the above description that genetically caused (congenital) deafness exists among the Ethiopian Deaf community, especially within the household of more than three Deaf siblings.

Obviously, all the parents reported having at least one Deaf member in the family (i.e., the Deaf child him/herself) and at most four Deaf members in the family. One of the parents stated that she had a Deaf child. One of the teachers has a Deaf wife but hearing children (CODAs), but the other teacher has a hard of hearing sibling.

MARITAL STATUS

The majority, 84 (71%), of the Deaf participants were single when the interviews were carried out. This high number arguably is a reflection of the relatively young average age of the participants. Out of the 29 (24%) who were married, 25 (86%) of them married another Deaf person.

Overall, the marital status of parents and of teachers is almost the same. Contradictory to the above situation is the two parents, and the one other Deaf teacher who is married to another Deaf person. The rest are married to hearing people (see Table 4.8).

TABLE 4.8. *Marital Status.*

	Married	Single	Divorced	Widowed	DI
Deaf participants	29	84	1	0	5
Teachers	13	3	1	0	0
Parents	15	2	1	0	1

TABLE 4.9. *Educational Levels.*

	Elementary	High School	Diploma	BA	MA	No formal education	DI
Deaf participants	41	36	28	8	1	1	4
Teachers	0	2	5	9	1	0	0
Parents	5	4	2	1	0	7	0

Level of Education

About one-third of the participants were either in elementary school at the time of the interview, completed elementary school (but went no further), or dropped out of elementary school. Another third were in the high school category, and the final third had graduated from high school. One participant reported having no formal education. With regard to the correlation with age, half of those in the elementary category were under the age of 20, which can be taken as a normal phenomenon (see Table 4.9). However, half of those in the high school were 20 to 30 years old. This indicates a number of issues including:

- Deaf students begin schooling at a late age, or
- They drop out at the elementary level, or
- They repeat some class at the elementary level, or
- They return to school after some delay.

The normal age to go to the tertiary level is 20, but the figure is quite different here.

Those older Deaf people who did not go to school at an early age were not answering the question asked by the interviewers, but simply copying what the interviewer signed. This kind of copying phenomenon is observed among some respondents in Adama/Nazreth, Arba Minch, and Gambella. It could be the case that either the interviewees did not understand the language, or the interviewer did not understand the interviewees' language.

Not surprisingly, the parents show a lower overall level of education than the teachers. Compared to their parents, the Deaf children are more literate than their parents. Also not surprisingly, almost all the teachers had graduated from school.

EMPLOYMENT

The majority, 51 (43%) of the respondents' jobs are explained as "other," and includes both skilled and unskilled work (see Table 4.10). The majority are engaged in unskilled work such as cooking or manual labor (car wash, factory work, shoe shining); and the minority are engaged in skilled work, such as woodworking, tailoring, and project

TABLE 4.10. *Employment.*

	Student	Teacher	Other	No work	DI
Deaf participants	34	26	51	3	5
Teachers	0	17	0	0	0
Parents	1	0	12	6	0

coordinating (in order of prominence). About one-quarter are students, and one-third are teachers. Very few are unemployed.

Of course, all the teachers' jobs are predefined as teaching. A large majority of parents, 12 (71%), have a variety of jobs including cooking, selling things, factory work, and so forth. The percentage of unemployed parents is much higher than for the Deaf participants (35% versus 3%). One single parent (actually a caretaker sibling) is attending his elementary education at night school.

LANGUAGE USE

Almost all the Deaf participants, 111 (93%), use both sign and spoken languages (see Table 4.11). The spoken language skills vary from site to site, in terms of both which spoken language is known and the skill level. Some participants report knowledge of two or more spoken languages. Notably, all the 111 participants have some skills (reading, writing, understanding, and speaking) in Amharic, although it was not measured to what extent their skills range. The majority of the participants, 64 (54%), learn sign language at places other than home.

There is a correlation between age at onset of deafness and competence in sign language. Participants who became deaf below the age of five make up 47 (42%) out of the total 111. These participants have sign language as their first language. These participants do not necessarily have Deaf parents but they mostly have early exposure to schools and daily interactions with Deaf peers. Those participants who became deaf after the age of five consist of 64 (58%), and reported to have sign language as their second language. In general, Deaf people use spoken language to communicate with hearing people; they typically speak with an exaggerated voice, mouth gestures, and mouthing.

Among the parents, the majority (most of whom are hearing parents) have learned sign language to communicate with their children. It was

TABLE 4.11. *Language Skills.*

	Sign language	Spoken language	Sign & spoken language	DI
Deaf participants	0	0	111	8
Teachers	1	3	13	0
Parents	1	7	11	0

TABLE 4.12. *Frequency of Sign Language Use.*

	Daily	Occasionally	Never	DI
Deaf participants	99	8	0	12
Teachers	10	6	1	0
Parents	3	13	3	0

observed during the interview process that most parents of late Deaf children can indeed communicate using speechreading as one means of communication. Those parents of the early Deaf children mostly use home signs and wider gestures as another mode of communication. Among the teachers of Deaf students, it is noteworthy and puzzling that 3 out of 17 report that they do not know sign language. This situation happens at three sites: Bahir Dar, Nekemt, and Gambella. The three teachers at these sites are newly assigned teachers to the schools by the education bureaus, who have a teaching qualification but no sign language skills. This situation of assigning teachers with no sign language skills to Deaf schools is observed in some other schools but schools in Hosaena were seen tackling the challenge by giving intensive sign language skill training for the newly assigned teachers before they begin regular classes.

Frequency of Sign Language Use

The large majority of the cases, 99 (83%), use sign language frequently for daily communication (see Table 4.12). They use it daily, mainly for social interactions with peers and family members. Some of them even stressed, “I use it daily because I am Deaf.” Eight (7%) of the participants reported that they use sign language “sometimes.” These are mixed groups of Deaf and hard of hearing, late and early signer people living in Dessie and Nekemt, who said, “I use it whenever I meet with Deaf people.” It means that the possibility of meeting with Deaf people regularly is not frequent.

The parents seem to use sign language somewhat less than would be expected: 11 parents report that they know sign language out of which some say that they use it minimally when they attend a sign language course, but only 3 report that they use it every day. As for the teachers, one-third (6 teachers, or 35%) say they use sign language only “occasionally,” which seems puzzling. One teacher never uses sign language at all; he has in fact now moved to teaching hearing students.

Family Language Skills

The majority, 89 (75%), of the participants report that their family do not have good knowledge of sign language, (as the respondents explained), for a home sign system or gestural communication. A total of 22 (19%) of the participants’ families knows sign language well. It is interesting to compare these results with the part of the survey where the parents assessed their own sign language abilities; a majority of parents reported that they did have sign language skills. It is to be noted that this research did not use mechanisms to evaluate the respondents’ sign language skills.

Sign Language Skills of Spouse

Only about one-quarter of the Deaf participants were married. Of these, a large majority reported that their spouse did know sign language. Only 4 (3%) participants’ spouses were reported as not having sign language skills. These participants’ spouses are all hearing people with no sign language skills.

Parents and teachers were asked about their spouse’s sign language skills. Not surprisingly, only a couple of teachers’ spouses knew sign language. It is interesting that the same is true for the parents. One might think that if one parent knows sign language (to communicate with

TABLE 4.13. *Use of Sign Language by Spouse.*

	Yes	No	N/A	No Answer	DI
Deaf participants	25	4	80	0	10
Teachers	2	11	0	4	0
Parents	2	13	4	0	10

his/her child), then the other parent (=spouse) would also know sign language. However, this is not the case. A total of 4 parents reported that they are guardians.

Dominant Language Skills of Spouse

Among the study participants who are married (a small minority), most of the spouses use sign language as the dominant language when communicating with the Deaf participant.

Among the spouses of the parents, spoken languages are (not surprisingly) the favored languages. The obvious reason for this is that someone who has sign language skills does not necessarily use it dominantly unless he/she is Deaf.

Sign Language Skills of Siblings

Regarding sign language skills of the participants' siblings, 17 reported having no siblings. Of the remainder, almost one-third reported that the siblings did have sign language skills, and nearly half reported that they did not. Those who did not have sign language skills communicate in spoken languages, predominantly in Amharic, Oromiffa, or Tigrigna.

Language Use in Selected Domains

HOME DOMAIN

Participants were asked about what languages(s) they use at home with their parents. Over half (66 respondents=12+16+22+16, i.e., 55%) reported using some kind of manual communication at home, vs. 38 (32%) who use only spoken language. It is observed that these languages are almost the same when the Deaf child speaks to their parents and the parents speak to their Deaf child. In one way or another, many of the Deaf participants expressed the following representation:

I try to communicate with my parents and siblings by using spoken language so long as they understand me but I do not understand when they talk to me in spoken.

Participants were asked how they communicate with their grandparents (or communicated with them when they were alive). The profile of

language use with grandparents is clearly different from that of language use with parents. With grandparents, unlike parents, the dominant mode of communication is oral (57 participants, vs. 45 [=11 + 4 + 18 + 12]).

Of those participants who were married, a large majority communicate with their spouse using sign language. (The answer “NA” refers to unmarried participants).

All the parents communicate with each other using spoken language, except for the single Deaf parent (whose spouse is also Deaf), who uses sign language.

Furthermore, of those relatively few participants who have children, a large majority (22=3+9+0+10) communicate with their children via some form of manual communication, as opposed to only 5 who use exclusively spoken language. (Note that none of the children are deaf.) The use of spoken language is characterized by exaggerated mouthing.

Looking at the sample group of 19 parents, very few (only 4=21%) report that they use only spoken language with their Deaf children. This contrast with the evaluation made by the participants themselves, who say that 32% of their parents use only spoken language at home with their children. Out of the 7 parents who use sign language, 2 of them were the Deaf and hard of hearing parents.

Of the 119 participants, the 24 who reported having no siblings have a higher possibility (28=29%) of not using sign language for communication at home with any other family members. Over half (52=5+28+12+7, i.e., 55%) use some form of manual communication; 23 (24%) communicate orally with exaggerated mouthing. Also, siblings’ choice of sign language is greater than that of their parents when communicating with the Deaf member of the family.

Friends’ Domain

The Deaf participants predictably reported that they use sign language almost exclusively (109=92%) with their acquaintances who signed. There is no doubt that if the remaining 10 responses were interpretable, they would choose sign language.

Similar to the Deaf participants, the overwhelming majority of the teachers, 13 (77%) reported that they use sign language with their signing acquaintances. One teacher said she would use both spoken and sign language, and another said he would use spoken language (with exaggerated mouth gestures).

There is a drastic change of language use with nonsigner acquaintances. Fifty-four (45%) participants responded that they make use of gestural means and 33 (28%) replied they make use of spoken. Only 5 (4%) of the participants reported that they try to communicate with their nonsigner acquaintances using simple and slower paced sign language. This profile is similar to the one presented with nonsigner merchants.

On the other hand when speaking with nonsigner acquaintances. Thirteen (76%) teachers responded that they make use of spoken language, and none would use sign language. Interestingly, 2 (12%) teachers reported that they basically combine it with spoken language but unintentionally use sign language.

Neighborhood Domain

In speaking about neighbors (who are presumably hearing people), spoken language (written or spoken forms) is by far the most preferred means of communication, sometimes combined with sign language; some of the participants use gestures or home signs. None of the participants use sign language alone.

Parents were asked what language would they use with their neighbors, and except for the two Deaf parents, all of them reported that they use spoken language. The two Deaf people use both sign and spoken to communicate with their neighbors. None have used sign language with their neighbors, and in general, the neighbors are assumed to be nonsigners.

Education Domain

When asked what language(s) they use in the classroom with their teachers and Deaf peers, a large majority of participants reported that sign language is the exclusive medium; sometimes sign is mixed with spoken language. The spoken languages vary regionally, as in the case with Mekele-Tigrigna; Nekemt-Oromiffa, and all other places, Amharic. Very few use exclusively spoken language, and none use home signs.

When asked what language(s) they use in the classroom with students and other teachers, most of the teachers (13 out of 17) reported that they use sign language, either alone or in combination with spoken language. Only 3 teachers reported that they use only sign language in the classroom, with exaggerated mouthing.

Participants were also asked about the language use situation outside the classroom. The profile is almost identical to that seen inside the classroom. This shows that the education domain has an exceptionally large use of sign language both inside and outside classroom. This is due to the fact that the education domain is the most user-friendly domain. The use of sign language in the education domain also includes the use of sign language interpreters outside the classroom, although sign language interpreters are provided at three schools only in Addis Ababa (Tikur Anbessa, Menelik II, and Entoto).

The profile of sign language use among teachers is significantly different inside and outside the classroom. Spoken language dominates much more outside the classroom. Inside the classroom, teachers are evidently aware of the pedagogical priority of sign language and use sign language much more. Out of the two Deaf and one hard of hearing teachers, only one Deaf teacher reported that he uses sign language outside the classroom; whereas the two others use a mix of both sign and spoken languages.

Market Domain

Regarding the market domain, in cases where the merchant knows sign language, the communication with the Deaf participants is (unsurprisingly) overwhelmingly via sign language. This of course does not necessarily mean that signer merchants exist everywhere, but rather it refers to the probable situation that Deaf people might encounter signer merchants. Very few use a mix of both sign language and spoken language.

On the other hand, teachers and parents were asked similar questions. The teachers and parents also strongly prefer to use sign language with signing merchants, although a few report that they have never met any signer merchants. The fact that teachers and parents prefer sign language in the market domain is mostly due to making the communication smooth, in the absence of any other ways of communicating with the signer merchant.

With nonsigner merchants, the profile is (of course) quite different in regards to the Deaf participants vs. their parents/teachers. Of the participants, 45 (38%) reported that they would use gestural communication to a nonsigner, followed by 41 (34%) who communicate using spoken language and speechreading. The few respondents, 10 (8%), who use sign language with nonsigners often also make use of sign language

interpreters, siblings, or family help (based on interviews). Only 7 (6%) of the respondents reported that they use a mix of both sign and spoken languages.

- I usually go to my regular seller who understands my signing.
- If the merchant does not understand my signing, I will leave him/her and look for another merchant.
- I will use writing (one of the spoken language components) or speechreading and try to understand each other.

One of the respondents expressed how challenging it is to communicate with some merchants who usually cover their mouth or much of their faces by cloth:

I went to a market and found the item. The shopkeeper almost covered her face with cloth and I was not able to read her lips or understand her totally. Therefore, I have to find other merchants.

The parents and teachers, as expected, use almost entirely spoken language with nonsigning merchants; except for the one or two Deaf parents and teachers.

Domain of Religion

Almost all the persons interviewed—Deaf participants as well as their parents and teachers—attend religious services. In several communities, there are special Deaf churches or mosques as in the case in Addis Ababa, Hosaena, Adama, Hawassa, Mekele, Bahir Dar, and Nekemt where there are Deaf preachers or sign language interpreters while the service is being conducted. Some (but not all) of those who are deaf attend. In sites like Arba Minch, Harar, and Dessie no special Deaf churches were seen.

In addition, every parent and teacher expressed that they attend religious services. It is slightly different from the Deaf participants, in that parent and teacher respondents were seen wholly as attendants of religious services. It may be because these types of participants are more attracted to the religious places than the sign language services. The church services are mostly of an oral medium, and teachers and parents are mostly inclined to oralist tradition.

A total of 31 (26%) respondents reported that they prefer to pray inside their heart, explaining that they do not want other people to watch their praying. Silent praying is a sort of modeless communication, which

can be manifested by spoken language, sign language, or conceptual expression. Among the Deaf participants, 31 respondents could signal whether they attend a special Deaf place of worship, or not. However, the respondents did not explicitly mention so. Some of the Deaf participants were also showing the typical pray sign, “Our Father,” to witness that it is also possible to pray in sign language. Some have also presented songs in sign language. Many stated that the social gathering has more relevance for them than the spiritual value. One of the respondents expressed her childhood experience as follows:

When I was a child, I used to go to a church with my family. I never understand what the priests are saying or how the prayer used to be carried out. I used to sleep even in the middle while the religious service was carried out. What I used to watch was the movements, actions, dresses, shoes of the priest. At church-school, there are regular prayers and preaching in sign language and many times in sign language interpretation. I came to understand the words of God and started to go to a church different from my parents where I can get the church services in sign language.

The parents and teachers, as expected, use almost entirely spoken language in religious places. Among the Deaf participants, there is a difference depending on whether the Deaf person attends a special Deaf place of worship, or not.

Government Domain

Language use in such government domains as local authorities (*k'ebeles*), municipality, bureaus, and so forth, is mostly dominated by the use of sign language. Fifty-nine (50%) used interpreters who were family members or friends of a Deaf person. There were also 21 (18%) respondents who reported using spoken or written communication at the government domains. Twenty-one (18%) respondents reported that they never go to government places—a family member takes care of their interests. If they were not accompanied by sign language interpreters, then many found it uneasy to communicate with the officials. If they were accompanied by sign language interpreters, they would be expected to cover costs of transportation and allowance, if volunteers were not found. One of the respondents explained his experience as follows:

When I go to government places or election centers, alone, I usually find it difficult to communicate with the local officials. They usually insist that I come back with an interpreter, though it was supposed to be their responsibility to arrange that for me. I feel devastated as if I do not have full human rights like the hearing people.

As for the parents and teachers, the use of spoken language at government places is near universal. There is no good reason for why a single parent replied that she never went to government places.

Deaf Foreigner Domain

A majority of participants, 55 (46%), have not had the chance to meet with a foreign Deaf person. However, those who have met one, reported that the first thing they asked was:

q
DEAF (YOU)
Are you Deaf?
መስማት የተላከህ/ሽ ነህ/ሽ?

The first line in the gloss is sign language expression with “q” above the gloss to show that it is a question. The next line is in English, and the last in Amharic. Of those who answered YES, about two-thirds, 29 (24%), reported that they managed to communicate in sign language, even though it is not the same sign language as EthSL. Deaf foreigners were encountered from the United States, Kenya, Germany, Japan, Finland, Sweden, Korea, the Netherlands, and China. Participants from Addis Ababa, Hosaena, Mekele, and Nekemt are among those who had the experience of meeting a foreign Deaf person. Ten (8%) participants reported that they communicated using gestural means and another 6 (5%) preferred speaking and writing. To summarize, the Deaf participants’ impressions of foreign Deaf people:

- Silence at first but try to communicate little by little either by sign language or writing
- Some of the ASL signers are fast and difficult to understand
- Signers from UK and Sweden are totally different but if they write in English then possible to understand

- If he/she is Deaf from other country then I will not have trouble to communicate in sign language

When the teachers met a foreign Deaf person (only 9 out of the 17 teachers), they used sign language, while the rest did not have the chance to meet with a foreign Deaf person.

Television

In the study, 59 (50%) participants reported that they watch television occasionally while 40 (34%) respondents stated that they watch TV every day. They mentioned a number of ways on how they understand the message transmitted through the television: reading subtitles, asking family members or friends to interpret for them, and following the body movements and gestures of the TV presenters. Those who have some residual hearing, reported that they turn the TV louder and thus manage to hear by themselves. Some are selective and choose TV programs that do not demand understanding the language, such as football matches, wrestling, and mime shows (e.g., *Mr. Bean*).

Also, 7 (37%), parents said they watch television every time, 6 (32%) occasionally, and another 6 (32%) parents never watch television. The two Deaf parents watch TV every day and have a family member child interpret or read subtitles. Of course, the hearing parents can follow through hearing, reading subtitles, and so forth. A larger percentage of parents never watch TV, as compared to the Deaf participants; they reported that this is due to absence of a television set in their homes.

A majority of Deaf participants, 70 (59%), reported that they watch the EBC sign language program.²⁸ The weekly EBC sign language program has two segments. First, the news is read orally in Amharic. Then comes a feature program, read orally and simultaneously interpreted in EthSL (not signed Amharic). Some of those who are regular followers of the program commented that the use of the sign language was not natural. This refers to the signed Amharic. Some Deaf people have trouble understanding it; others are bothered by the simultaneous oral and manual presentation. The two basic comments are summarized as follows:

28. ETV (re-named as Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation [EBC] as of August 2014) broadcasts a sign language program every Friday for 25 minutes from 1:35–2:00 p.m.

- The way the interpretation is presented with the manual and nonmanual expressions attracts the TV viewers.
- The news presentation needs to be adjusted to keep the originality of the sign language.
- The pieces of information must be up-to-date and should not present news past a week old.

But the majority experienced pleasure at seeing sign language used on television. The teachers almost unanimously watch the EBC sign language program, whereas only about half the parents do so. Clearly, the EBC program has a great positive value for the teachers.

Restricted vs. Non-restricted Places for Using Sign Language

Respondents were asked if there are any restricted places or situations where they might not be comfortable using sign language. The large majority of the respondents, 96 (81%), said they had never been in a situation that made them hesitate to use sign language. The majority cases state similar statements as: “It’s my language, my identity—How can I hide it?”

Nevertheless, there are other respondents numbering 13 (11%), who reported that there are places and situations where they experience embarrassment and discomfort at using sign language. These are: if two sign language interlocutors are the only Deaf people in the area, when people stare at the signers for various reasons, at a mourning place when meeting with hearing people, when a nonsigner joins the conversation, and so forth. A respondent shares his experience:

While chatting with a friend, we passed in front of a police officer. The police officer stopped us and talked to us in Amharic, which we hardly understand. We realized that the police officer felt that the language we were using was just to cheat him. After some investigations, he let us go free.

Parents and teachers were also asked if there are any restricted places or situations where they might not be comfortable to use sign language. Not surprisingly, the profile is very different from the Deaf participants. A much larger percentage, 8 parents (47%) and 9 teachers (47%), said there were situations where they did feel inhibited at using sign

language—situations like non-Deaf domains, election centers, in streets with lots of hearing nonsigner people, when they run out of signs, and so forth. We can guess at the reasons: for parents and teachers, sign language is just one option, whereas for Deaf people, it is the major option. Parents and teachers can typically avoid sign language if they wish; Deaf people, much less so.

Thinking that I might get different responses, I asked the same question in an inverse way: are there any unrestricted places? One would expect the answers to this question to be the inverse of the answers to the “restricted” question. For the Deaf participants, this is exactly right. Typical unrestricted contexts include Deaf associations, Deaf churches, Deaf social gatherings, Deaf schools, and all other Deaf domains.

However, for the parents and teachers, the profile is definitely not an inverse and seems almost to contradict the “restricted” results. Of the teachers, 6 said there were no restricted places, but 14 said all places were unrestricted. Of the parents, 4 said there were no unrestricted places, but 10 said all places were unrestricted. The difference may have occurred due to one or more questions not being fully understood.

SERVICES FOR DEAF PEOPLE

Sign Language Interpreters

This part discusses the various services for Deaf people available among the Ethiopian Deaf community. The large majority of the cases, 88 (74%), reported that they are aware of the existence of sign language interpreters in the area. It is also reported through interviews that the number of available interpreters decline as we move out from Addis Ababa to other sites of data collection. Interpreters tend to be available at churches and Deaf associations, and some are siblings of Deaf people themselves. On the other hand, 19 (16%) respondents said that they had never seen any sign language interpreters in their areas. Geographically, out of the 88 who replied that they are aware and have used interpreting services, almost all participants were from Addis Ababa, Hosaena, Adama (Nazareth), Hawassa, Dessie, Mekele, Bahir Dar, and Nekemt. However, participants from Harar, Arba Minch, and Gambela admitted that they observed that the absence of sign language interpreters and the services in their area is creating communicational, educational, and social

challenges. The availability of sign language interpreters is mostly interconnected with the level of awareness among the executives.

Eleven teachers, (65%), as expected, were usually aware of sign language interpreters. However, the parents were much less aware, which could be due to the fact that they do not have education or fewer elementary grades. Almost all the 11 teachers serve as part-time sign language interpreters in their areas. Teachers from Addis Ababa, Hosaena, Hawassa, Arba Minch, Harar, Dessie, Mekele, Bahir Dar, and Nekemt were among the 11 who serve as sign language interpreters sometimes at their localities, and sometimes in other places. The fact that teachers in Harar and Arba Minch work as part-time interpreters does not necessarily mean that they meet all Deaf communities in their particular places.

Deaf Associations

Respondents were asked about their knowledge regarding a list of local and national Deaf associations in their respective areas. These associations are mostly branch offices of ENAD (almost all over the country). Additionally, there are other Deaf associations found only in Addis Ababa, such as Rehabilitation Services for the Deaf, Deaf Development and Information Association, Eyerusalem Inclusive Association, and Sign Language and Social Services Association. Remarkably, the responses about this topic showed almost similar numbers. The majority, 88 (74%), responded that they have the knowledge and have benefitted from the associations. However, 19 (16%) participants said that they have never seen any Deaf associations in their area. These areas do not have strong Deaf communities. If we look at the regional distributions, out of the 81, almost all of Addis Ababa participants, and all of Hosaena's, Adama's (Nazreth), Hawassa's, Dessie's, Mekele's, and Bahir Dar's participants reported that they knew and used their respective branch Deaf association; but half of Arba Minch and Harar participants had the knowledge, but did not use it. In addition, it was reported that there were no Deaf associations at all in Nekemt and Gambella. Therefore, the participants being aware of the existence of Deaf associations does not necessarily mean that they use it. Some distanced themselves out of fear of Deaf politics.

Parents and teachers were asked the same question, about their knowledge regarding a list of local and national Deaf associations in their

respective areas. The profile of the responses is very similar to the part of the survey concerning the presence of sign language interpreters.

Use of Deaf Associations

The 72 Deaf participants who make use of Deaf associations are (of course) a subset of those who are aware of Deaf associations. Some of the benefits of using the associations are membership, attendance at workshops and training, getting information, getting recommendation letters for employment, participation in various advocacy activities, learning sign language, and participation in social events.

Comparing the knowledge versus the use of Deaf associations among teachers and parents), we see that the profiles overall are quite similar. The only significant difference is that, of the 8 (42%) parents who know about Deaf associations, only half actually use them; two of these are themselves Deaf. Parents make use of Deaf associations mostly to learn sign language; teachers are involved in Deaf associations mostly as interpreters and teachers.

Sign Language Dictionaries

The huge majority of the Deaf participants, 97 (82%), know that there are sign language dictionaries that they can make use of. Many of these respondents are familiar with the *ha mes'haf*, sign language primer produced by Hosaena school for the Deaf and the recent EthSL dictionary. Some of the Deaf students and teachers use these as reference materials in class and outside of class, to learn and teach sign language, and so forth. Looking at the regional distributions, almost all participants, except those at the Gambella site, mentioned they had knowledge of sign language dictionaries. The data showed only the participants' knowledge about the existence of the dictionaries, but did not show if they actually use it. It also showed that the ENAD (2007) has to do promotional activities for the dictionary so that the public understand about the new terminologies introduced in the dictionary.

Furthermore, essentially all of the teachers, 16 (94%), know about sign language dictionaries. By contrast, the greater number of parents, 10 (53%), are neither aware nor use of such dictionaries. The well-known ones are the *ha mes'haf*, sign language primer (produced by Hosaena school for the Deaf) and the recent EthSL dictionary, which they use as

reference materials in class and outside of class, to learn and teach sign language, etc.

Deaf Leaders

The Ethiopian Deaf community has a number of Deaf leaders, as mentioned by about two-thirds of the respondents, 64 (54%). These leaders are known chiefly by their political and social participation in local and national Deaf associations. Each of the Deaf participants knew of perhaps 10 such leaders, which is an unrealistically small number; this is because a person would only know national Deaf leaders and Deaf leaders within their own local community. This indirectly would mean that the Deaf leaders are mostly known interregionally. The Deaf participants were also asked their criteria for choosing their Deaf leaders and they listed them as: sign language skill, good behavior, education, Deaf culture awareness, and commitment to serve the community.

Parents and teachers were also asked to what extent they know of Deaf leaders. As expected, the teachers showed a high degree of awareness, 10 (59%), in fact even slightly higher than the Deaf participants themselves. Only 3 (16%) parents showed very little awareness of Deaf leaders.

At the end of the “service” part of the survey, Deaf participants were asked to name suitable cities for Deaf people in Ethiopia. The most favored choices are Addis Ababa 53 (45%), and Hosaena 11 (9%). These two cities were chosen both by local residents and by people who do not live there. They were chosen, according to the respondents, for the fact that they have a relatively greater number of sign language users, and more accessibility to job, information, and education. The third and fourth most suitable cities in Ethiopia, as selected by the respondents, are Mekele 9 (8%) and Nekemt 6 (5%); all of these respondents are residents of Mekele and Nekemt, respectively. There were also respondents who did not select their own home towns as suitable cities; these include participants from Hawassa and Arba Minch.

SIGN LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

This part is divided into two major parts: attitudes toward EthSL and toward sign language use. The first part consists of three sub parts: sign

language users' perception toward EthSL, toward EthSL variation, and toward the general Deaf community.

The first question in the attitudes section was how the participants view the attitudes toward sign language found among various professionals, including teachers, lawyers, merchants, and restaurant owners. The scoring of this question was (unavoidably) more subjective than with the other questions. The respondents seldom answered simply "Good" or "Not good," but answered with a discussion. I had to convert this subjectively to an assessment of "Good" or "Not good."

In fact, the only category of "professionals" that turned out to be really relevant was "teachers" (which here means specifically "teachers of the Deaf"). None of the Deaf respondents knew any Deaf lawyers or restaurant owners, and only a very few Deaf merchants. Still, the Deaf respondents apparently answered in terms of how they believed that lawyers, merchants, and restaurant owners (whether hearing or Deaf, signing or nonsigning) would feel about the use of sign language. A respondent has shared his encounter in a certain government office responsible for licensing a business:

I wanted to open a business with friends and went to an office to ask for the business license. Together we filled an application form and submitted to a clerk officer. The officer took the application and gave it to his boss. The boss checked for the application and sent back the application to us to change the name of the business. Our business title in the application was written in English and had a word "Deaf" at the end of the title. The officer in charge wanted us to replace the word "Deaf" with the word "hearing-impaired." We had a strong dialogue as the officer became resistant to accept our application without changing the word "Deaf" with "hearing-impaired." We realized that the officer positioned himself that the term "hearing-impaired" is a better label for us than "Deaf." It took us a lot of time to convince him that the word "Deaf" is a positive term that Deaf people could be proud of.

A television interview broadcasted on January 25, 2015, with a high ranking official of the Ethiopian Electoral Commission, also revealed that the commission would not assign sign language interpreters at each election center²⁹ as they believed that the number of Deaf voters was not

29. There was a national election carried out on May 2015.

very significant. Such an attitude has its own implication on the right of getting information.

Over half of the Deaf participants, 68 (57%), gave responses that I viewed (and scored) as indicating “Good attitudes.” As their additional comment clearly indicated, this answer primarily concerns teachers. Teachers have much greater sign language skills and much higher Deaf awareness than other professionals; and Deaf respondents tended to view the attitudes of the professionals as a reflection of their sign language skills. What is less clear is what the “Not good” answer means. Does it mean that (in the view of Deaf people) there are some teachers who actually have bad attitudes toward sign language? Or does it mean that the non-teachers (in the view of Deaf people) are expected to have bad attitudes? Apparently both! It should be borne in mind, however, that many professionals who do not know sign language nevertheless show sympathy and helpfulness.

When teachers and parents were asked the same question, the large majority of teachers, 12 (71%), replied that most teachers—hence most professionals—are aware of Deaf people and sign language so their attitudes are good. A smaller percentage of the parents, 8 (47%), also share a similar idea with the teachers.

Participants were asked about their impressions if sign language is officially recognized by the government. At first, many did not understand what official recognition meant, exactly. With no objection, Deaf respondents, parents, and teachers wholly expressed their excitement for their language becoming a language of government, education, media, and all other domains, officially. The combined reasons they all replied toward the advantage of official sign language recognition are as follows:

- Deaf human and linguistic rights will be respected, such as getting interpreting services at all places and increased participation at all levels
- Sign languages will be promoted to an equal status like other spoken languages
- The public will have greater sign language and Deaf awareness
- Helpful for accessible education for Deaf people
- It would give rise to Deaf culture
- Increase self-confidence among Deaf people, and avoids burden attitudes
- It would have a national significance in terms of promoting human rights

Attitude to sign language variation is another question asked under the language attitudes category. Respondents were asked to what extent they knew about the existence of sign language variation. The large majority, 97 (81%) respondents, reported knowing various lexical signs of different regional sites. It is clear from their responses that they are aware of the existence of sign language variation. Most of them also say that these variations are not a big challenge to communication with Deaf people living outside of their hometowns. Many (including people who did not live in Addis Ababa) stressed that sign language in Addis Ababa is easier for them to understand than the Hosaena variety. For them, the Addis Ababa variety is the one that is more urbanized with modern terminology and greater prestige, while the Hosaena variety is distinct and for some people it is difficult to understand.

Note that analysis of sign language variation is not the objective of this study but simply to report to what extent the variation exists. Finally, the 4 people (3%) who responded “No variation” argue that some variation did exist but that it was so trivial and insignificant that it did not really “count.”

The same question was posed to parents and teachers. The teachers show the same overall profile as the Deaf respondents themselves: 13 teachers (76%) know about variation. They too, like the Deaf respondents, were generally aware of the fact that the variations are not much and do not create a communication gap. The parents, on the other hand, showed much less awareness of variation. They typically only know about the sign language variety that their children speak.

The large majority, 98 (82%), reported that they support the concept that all sign language varieties should come to one. It should be recalled that most of the Deaf respondents, if they have any experience at all with non-EthSL, will know primarily about American Sign Language (ASL), which has a clear historical connection with EthSL and is easier for Ethiopians to understand than other sign languages. It is observed from their further explanations that none of the respondents are aware of the concept of standardization but indirectly support the case in question. Some of the aggregate reasons for this:

- Communication would be easier across boundaries
- Education would be more accessible if it were available everywhere in at least one sign language
- For unifying the nation
- Helpful for finding jobs in other countries

The same percentage (82%) of parents as of Deaf participants supports the idea of one unified sign language. Eight (42%) parents also support the idea, although about the same number (6+4=53%) have no opinion. Some of the aggregate reasons are:

- Communication among people who are deaf and hearing people will be easier
- It creates a unified nation

The question whether Deaf people should use sign language as their daily means of communication was overwhelmingly answered “yes” by 103 (87%) of the participants. No respondents at all suggested any other primary means of communication. The respondents were also asked how they could cope with communication if there were no sign language for Deaf people. Some of the aggregate replies were by using body movement, gesture, speechreading, spoken, or writing; but nobody felt that these would really satisfy their communication needs. As one Deaf person said, “As hearing people find it difficult to communicate, so is true for Deaf people if no sign language.” It would be fair to say that all Deaf people share this attitude. For many Deaf people, if they had no sign language then communication would be difficult, and in some cases, impossible.

Both the teachers and the parents showed the same overwhelmingly positive response as the Deaf participants. One single parent said that she prefers and encourages spoken rather than sign language at home and other places, but for no particular reason. When asked how Deaf people would manage to communicate if there were no sign language, the parents and teachers in general said that it would be difficult to communicate, or perhaps through mouth and body movement.

Deaf participants were asked about changes that show progress with regard to sign language use comparing the past and the current situations. The majority, 83 (70%), believe that things are getting better. Some of the aggregate justifications they gave are:

- It used to be unusual to see Deaf people signing in public, which is now common
- The presence of television broadcasting in sign language is a sign of awareness

- Many past EthSL signs were borrowed signs; now they are being replaced with indigenous signs
- Most hearing people show an interest in communicating at least by using gestures

There are also those who responded that either things are getting worse now, 4 (3%), or there is no change, 6 (5%). Both groups are categorized as showing negative attitudes. Some of their reasons are:

- Some people still see a Deaf person signing as a “crazy” person
- Some make a joke of sign language
- Some Deaf still feel shame using sign language, but instead use spoken and speechreading

The profile of both teachers and parents is similar to that of the Deaf participants: most feel that things are improving (13 parents, 68%; 14 teachers, 82%).

Deaf participants were asked about their attitudes toward those hearing people learning sign language. Almost all of them, 102 (86%), were very positive because of the following main reasons:

- It increases awareness about sign language and Deaf people
- It narrows the communication gap between Deaf and hearing people
- It creates harmony in the family

However, they expressed their opinion that there are still many of the hearing people who express their pity when they see Deaf people signing. Seven (6%) respondents did not answer whereas 10 (8%) participants' responses remained difficult to interpret.

Participants were asked if hearing families of Deaf people should learn sign language. With no disagreement, almost all parents and teachers said “Yes.” Aggregate reasons are to narrow the gap between parents and Deaf children, and to avoid misunderstanding.

In order to evaluate respondents' attitudes toward sign language use, three hypothetical questions were presented. One of them was:

“When you go to the market to sell a chicken, if two people offer the same price at the same time, one uses sign language very well, the other does not, to whom would you sell the chicken?”

Ninety-nine (83%) respondents went for the signer buyer, providing reasons such as for easy communication and to avoid misunderstanding.

There are also 7 (6%) respondents who reported that they would have no preference. Their reasons are the following:

- Whoever gives the highest price has priority
- Can manage to communicate using spoken and speechreading
- Interested in the chicken not in other issues
- Sell it to whoever comes first

Teachers and parents were also asked the same question. The majority of the teachers, 16 (94%), opted for the signer merchant.

- Communicate effectively
- Pity
- Creates happy feeling
- Establish friendship

In sharp contrast, the large majority of the parents (14=74%) did not give an answer at all. I interpret this as a combination of indifference and embarrassment at the question. The teachers, on the other hand, answered in a way that expressed their emotional solidarity with Deaf people.

The second test question was connected to employment:

“When two people come to your village to hire labor, if both will pay the same amount of wage, one signs very well and another doesn’t sign, for whom would you choose to work?”

With hypothetical question 2, the same pattern was observed as hypothetical question 1: overwhelming preference for the signing employer. The reasons given were also very similar to test question 1.

Teachers and parents also showed the same pattern as with hypothetical question 1. Again, the parents were reluctant to answer.

The third question was on the choice of a medical doctor:

“When you go to see a doctor in the hospital, if two doctors are specialized in the same area, one signs very well and another doesn’t sign, from whom would you ask help?”

The pattern of responses was again the same. The reasons given for preferring a signing doctor included two new specific points: suspicion that a miscommunication might lead to them getting the wrong medication, and a fear that interpreters might leak personal information outside of the subject’s control.

With parents and teachers, again the profile was almost identical to questions 1 and 2.

The next question asked, “If you wanted to marry, would you prefer your spouse to be Deaf/Hearing/Either, and why?” Of the Deaf participants, two-thirds (69) preferred a Deaf spouse; 25 (18 + 7=21%), who were all single, except 3, expressed no preference; only 10 (89%) preferred a hearing spouse, or were already married to a hearing person. One respondent was upset by the question and did not give an answer at all stating—“why do you ask me?” The reason why so many Deaf people would choose to have a Deaf spouse is mostly in order to have a comfortable communication atmosphere in sign language. Those who are already married to a hearing person, or are planning to do so, reasoned that hearing spouses can help as interpreters or sometimes if a baby is crying, they can hear sounds of crying and can take care of the baby. A few respondents expressed some regret that they had married a hearing person. These respondents were among those 10 who were already married to a hearing person.

In answer to the same question, three of the teachers—partially or fully Deaf, and already married—expressed their preferences for a Deaf spouse. The other teachers either had no preference or preferred a hearing person. The majority of parents, 15 (79%), remained silent. All but two of the parents are married, so of course their answer has to do with their actual spouse. Their silence probably reflects embarrassment at the question.

Parents’ and Teachers’ Attitudes Toward Deaf Marriage

Parents and teachers were asked about their views regarding Deaf people’s choice of spouse. The parents again were silent, surely for the same reason: embarrassment. This was notably evident to me when they were sitting next to their Deaf daughter at the time of the interview. The number of teachers who responded with a “No” answer was unusually high (6=35%); perhaps this also reflects embarrassment. Surprisingly, more of the teachers favored a hearing partner than a Deaf partner (4 vs. 3). It could be due to this reason that many of the weddings of Deaf people in Ethiopia are hearing centered. It keeps the interest of the hearing culture: no sign language interpreters, music, and dancing, and all means of communication is in spoken language. On the other hand, when

Deaf parents celebrate the marriage of their hearing children, the same hearing culture dominates. In both cases, the Deaf issues are overlooked.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Two open-ended questions concluded the questionnaire: “What do Deaf people need to become successful in life?” and a request for any general comments. The following lists are aggregate responses from the three groups of respondents:

- Accessible education at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels
- Create job opportunities
- Sign language development activities
- Strong Deaf associations
- Government attention toward the rights of Deaf people in all sorts of life
- Raised awareness about Deaf people living in the countryside
- Provision of qualified sign language interpreters
- Production and wide distribution of sign language materials (books, dictionaries)
- Raise parents’ awareness to learn sign language

Many of the participants claimed for accessible education and job opportunities as priority areas.

The Sociolinguistic Profile of Language Use and Language Attitudes in Ethiopian Sign Language

This study has addressed the various sociolinguistic issues in connection with EthSL and the Ethiopian Deaf community. It tried to make the data representative in terms of the various social and linguistic factors including age, sex, age of onset of deafness, place of birth, marital status, and level of education. Data was collected at 11 sites throughout the country from 119 Deaf participants, 19 parents, and 17 teachers. A video camera was used to collect signing conversation data from the Deaf informants; many parents and teachers instead gave their responses by filling in questionnaires in writing. For technical reasons (oversampling in some cases), the overall return rate was above 100%. Of the 11 sites, the data from Gambella were found to be difficult to interpret. However, the limitations of the study were found not to affect the conclusions: the responses at 10 of the sites (excluding Gambella) showed much consistency. A similar situation was observed in sign language corpus projects on ASL, BSL, and Auslan, where a limited sign language data set served as representative of the majority case. In addition, as all the corpus projects agree, a truly representative sample for sign language data is impossible to attain, as Deaf people are not distributed evenly across the territory under study. What makes it even more difficult in the current research is that in Ethiopia, people who are deaf can readily be found in groups either at schools or Deaf associations, but those in the countryside remain largely invisible and could not be covered by this study.

As explained earlier, in describing the sociolinguistic nature of EthSL and the Deaf community, three groups of respondents were targeted in order to map out the issue: members of the Ethiopian Deaf community, the parents, and the teachers of Deaf students. In answering the research questions, the various studies presented in Chapter 2 will serve as points of reference.

THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC PROFILE OF EthSL

Sign Language Use

Sign language use is described in terms of two basic components: sign language skills of the participants, and domain analysis of sign language use. When we look at sign language skills, we find that for each of the three groups of respondents, various types of interlocutors are relevant and can be described.

Language skills among the Deaf participants are mostly characterized by the simultaneous use of both sign and spoken languages when communicating with family members or interlocutors. They are surrounded by a number of spoken languages. This may imply that bilingualism and multilingualism is the true condition of the Deaf participants. The language skills of the Deaf participants range from knowing two languages (e.g., EthSL and Amharic) to knowing as many as five languages (e.g., EthSL, Amharic, Gammo, Dorze, and English). All of the Deaf participants have at least minimal language skills in EthSL and Amharic regardless of age, gender, place of birth, or other variables. Although they know sign language well, and in some cases as their first language, the Deaf respondents were observed not to consider their sign language skill as being part of their overall language skills. This situation of having bimodal language skills coincides with what Lucas and Valli (1992), Davis (1989), and Grosjean (1992), which are cited in Ann (2004), presented in connection with bi- or multilingualism in the Deaf world. Ann (2004) presents seven different ways that a Deaf individual can be called bi- or multilingual, even though he/she may not be aware that he/she is so. The Deaf participants in the present study fall into all seven possibilities of bi- or multilingualism. Ann (2001) further noted that full sign language competence is not a necessary condition to be bi- or multilingual because it is obvious that those who acquire sign language late typically have less developed linguistic competence than those who learned it early. Kyle and Pullen (1984), Fischer (1998), and Newport and Supalla (2000) also provide similar justification that the late start of the language acquisition leads to an irremediable disadvantage in developing competence not only in the first language but also in the second language. To the contrary: the fact that the Deaf community increasingly acquires sign language as a first or second language is one indicator that sign language is being maintained. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 show the language skills of Deaf participants based on age of onset of deafness and by place of data collection respectively.

It is clear from Table 5.1 that the bimodal nature of the Deaf participants begins at the earliest age of their deafness. The birth to five age group is also seen as a critical time to acquire sign language as a native language, especially among those Deaf people who are exposed to Deaf school or Deaf oriented areas. Obviously, late Deaf people have a spoken language, namely Amharic, as their primary language. Amharic is also the language known by almost every Deaf participant. The influence of Amharic on their signing is seen phonetic and phonologically through fingerspelling, morphologically by adding Amharic plural markers to noun forms of a sign, and syntactically by following the Amharic word order while signing. However, from my observation, there are a number of Deaf people who seem to use sign language in a native way, even if they are late Deaf signers. In other words, early deafness and signing proficiency do not always have a simultaneous relationship. The key point that needs to be addressed here is how early deafened people are keen to be more bi- or multilingual in two or language modalities (sign and spoken), which could be because of travel experience and accessed education at the early age, as Grosjean (1992, p. 5) states:

In addition, parents' and teachers' responses were also investigated with regard to their language skills. Although parents and teachers reported that they have skills in both sign and spoken languages, teachers' sign was more formal and standardized than that of the parents. For parents, raising a bimodal child is difficult and they mostly abandon their Deaf child and focus on the hearing ones.

That teachers have relatively better signing skills in addition to their spoken language is presumably due to their daily exposure to the language at school. Parents mostly have basic sign language skills, which sometimes resemble gesture or home signs. The fact that the majority of the parents are hearing means that sign language has only become their second or third language. As stated by Lane et al. (1996) and Ladd (2003), globally, it is estimated that 90% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents, while only 10% of Deaf children are born into a Deaf family. In the present study, there was only one Deaf parent who reported having a Deaf child. In such a family, the nature of sign language is believed to be much more natural and authentic.

Frequency of sign language usage was another parameter along which sign language use was investigated. The Deaf participants used sign language more frequently than their parents did. Teachers, on the whole,

TABLE 5.2. *Profile of Sign Language Skills of Deaf People (by Place)*

Name of the sites	Number of Deaf participants	Name of the Languages															Typical first language	Typical language skills/ participant
		Afar	Amharic	Agnauk	Arabic	Dorze	English	EthSL	Gamo	Guraghegna	Hadiya	Kembatta	Nuer	Oromiffa	Sidama	Tigrigna		
Addis Ababa	14	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	EthSL	EthSL, Amharic, English
Hosaena	12		✓				✓	✓	✓		✓						EthSL	EthSL, Amharic, English
Adama	10	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓				✓		✓		Amharic	EthSL, Amharic, English
Hawassa	9		✓				✓	✓	✓					✓			Amharic	EthSL, Amharic
Arba Minch	12		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓								Amharic, Gamo	EthSL, Amharic, Gamo
Harar	10		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				EthSL, Amharic	EthSL, Amharic
Dessie	10		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		Amharic	Amharic, EthSL, Tigrigna
Mekele	10		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓					✓		Tigrigna	EthSL, Tigrigna, Amharic
Bahir Dar	10		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓							Amharic, EthSL	Amharic, EthSL, English
Nekemt	11		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				EthSL, Amharic, Oromiffa	EthSL, Amharic, Oromiffa, English
Gambella	10		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓			✓					Amharic, EthSL	Agnuak, Amharic, Nuer

also are frequent users of sign language. The more frequently a language is used, the more the language flourishes and maintains its vitality. In addition, frequent use of sign language, actively and habitually, is believed to reflect a choice made by the users, consciously or unconsciously, (Ann, 2004; Schembri, 2007).

As shown in Table 5.2, most Deaf people living in Addis Ababa, Hosaena, Harar, and Nekemt typically have EthSL as their first language. This could be due to the presence of Deaf schools at the sites mentioned.

Domain analysis is another approach to language use patterns. The domains under investigation were home, friends, neighborhood, education, market, religion, government, foreigner Deaf, and television.

SIGN LANGUAGE USE AMONG THE DEAF PARTICIPANTS, BY DOMAIN

One of the findings of the pattern of language use among the Deaf participants shows that signer coworker's domain takes the primary position followed by signer merchants (see Table 5.3). The education domain takes third place in the "inside classroom" category followed by "the outside classroom." The least sign language use was found with neighbors—none. It is followed by sign language use with grandparents in the home domain. Sign language use with nonsigner friends takes the third place from the bottom. Deaf participants are seen to use sign language exclusively more in the formal, an average of 98%, than the informal domains, an average of 69%. To determine the distinction between formal and informal domains, this research considered Wardhaugh (1992). He describes formal and informal styles in language use as influenced mainly by factors such as: the kind of occasion; the various social and age; and the emotional involvement of one or more of participants. Based on this, education, employment, religion, and government are formal; family, friends, neighborhood, market, and foreigner Deaf are more informal domains. Woodward and Markowicz (1980), Kannapell (1982), and Padden and Perlmutter (1987) show that most Deaf people feel uncomfortable using sign language with hearing people, in the belief that it is only appropriate for use with other Deaf individuals. When a minority language remains dominant in the community, it shows that the language is being maintained. UNESCO's criteria also assure the language is vital.

TABLE 5.3. *Sign Language Use Among the Deaf Participants (out of 119).*³⁰

Domain		Use of Sign Language	
		No. of Deaf Respondents	%
Home domain	With parents	16	13
	With grandparents	4	3
	With spouse	21	18
	With children	9	8
	Siblings	28	24
Friends domain	Signer friends	106	89
	Nonsigner friends	5	4
With neighbors		0	0
Education domain	Inside classroom	88	74
	Outside classroom	77	65
Market domain	With signer merchants	101	85
	With nonsigner merchants	17	14
Religion domain		66	55
Government domain		64	54
Foreigner Deaf		29	24
Average sign language use by the Deaf participants		79	66

SIGN LANGUAGE USE AMONG THE PARENTS (BY DOMAIN)

Table 5.4 presents sign language use by the hearing parents of Deaf children across different domains. It is observed here that parents exhibit the highest use of sign language at home with their children, followed by 12 signer merchants. They never use sign language in government and neighbors' domains. The findings also show that the closer affiliation to sign language is by hearing parents of Deaf children, and is mostly limited to the home and market domains. Had the case been that of the Deaf parents, there undoubtedly would be a significant difference in the patterns of language use. As Marschark et al. (2002) state, quality parent-child communication may be the single best predictor of language

30. The total number of Deaf participants is 119. Table 5.3 presented only those who use sign language in the domains mentioned.

Table 5.4. *Sign Language Use Among Parents (out of 19)*³¹

Types of Domains		Use of Sign Language	
		No. of Parents	%
Home domain	With spouse	1	5
	With children	14	74
Neighbors domain		0	0
At market domain	Signer merchants	12	63
	Nonsigner merchants	2	11
Religious domain	Parents	1	5
Government places	Parents	0	0
Average sign language use by parents		6	32

development, and it is clearly a central factor in later academic success, as the first experience with education begins at home.

SIGN LANGUAGE USE AMONG THE TEACHERS (BY DOMAIN)

When we turn to sign language use among teachers (see Table 5.5), we see that the education, friends, and market domains (with signer merchants) are overwhelmingly the leading domains for sign language use. Education is a predictable domain given the day-to-day connection between the students and their teachers.

In summary, the group with the highest degree of sign language users out of the three types are the Deaf participants, closely followed by the teachers. Parents of Deaf children were found to be the least frequent users of sign language.

SERVICES FOR DEAF PEOPLE

This part summarizes the awareness levels regarding different types of services provided for Deaf people, according to the three types of participants. These services include sign language interpreters, Deaf associations, and sign language dictionaries.

31. The total number of parents is 19. Table 5.4 presented only those who use sign language in the domains mentioned.

TABLE 5.5. *Sign Language Use Among the Teachers (out of 17)*³²

Types of Domains		Use of Sign Language	
		No. of Teachers	%
Friends domain	Signer friends	13	76
Education domain	Inside classroom	13	76
	Outside classroom	12	71
Market domain	Signer merchants	13	76
	Nonsigner merchants	3	18
Religious domain		3	18
Government places		0	0
Deaf Foreigners		4	24
Average sign language use by teachers		10	60

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SERVICES FOR DEAF PEOPLE AMONG THE DEAF PARTICIPANTS

With regard to the services for Deaf people, it is observed that the Deaf participants were found to be more knowledgeable than the other two groups of participants. Table 5.6 shows that the majority of the Deaf participants knew sign language interpreters in the area; they knew of the existence of Deaf associations in the area; they had experience using those Deaf associations; and they knew about the use of sign language dictionaries. The average number of Deaf participants who expressed their awareness regarding services for Deaf people is 85 (72%).

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE SERVICES FOR DEAF PEOPLE AMONG PARENTS OF DEAF CHILDREN

Parents were the second group we asked about their knowledge on the services for Deaf people (Table 5.7). They show much smaller percentages for each question than the Deaf participants.

32. The total number of teachers is 17. Table 5.5 presented only those who use sign language in the domains mentioned.

TABLE 5.6. *Knowledge About Services for Deaf People by the Deaf Participants (out of 119).*

Types of Services for Deaf People	Awareness of Services	
	No. of Deaf Participants	%
Knowledge about sign language interpreters	88	74
Knowledge about Deaf associations	88	74
Knowledge about the use of Deaf associations	72	61
Knowledge about the use of sign language dictionaries	92	77
Average on knowledge about services to Deaf people by the Deaf participants	85	72

TABLE 5.7. *Summary of Knowledge of Services for Deaf People by the Parents (out of 19).*

Types of Services for Deaf People	Awareness of Services	
	No. of Parents of Deaf Children	%
Knowledge about sign language interpreters	8	42
Knowledge about Deaf associations	8	42
Knowledge about the use of Deaf associations	4	21
Knowledge about the use of sign language dictionaries	6	32
Average on knowledge about services for Deaf people by parents of Deaf children	7	34

**KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SERVICES FOR DEAF PEOPLE AMONG
TEACHERS OF DEAF STUDENTS**

The same questions were asked to the third group of respondents, the teachers of Deaf students (see Table 5.8). According to their report, teachers have much better awareness about the services for Deaf people than the parents, and indeed show almost the same degree of awareness as the Deaf respondents themselves.

In summary, it is found that the Deaf participants have relatively high knowledge of services for Deaf people, followed by teachers of Deaf

TABLE 5.8. *Knowledge About Services for Deaf People by Teachers (out of 17).*

Types of Services for Deaf People	Awareness of Services	
	No. of Teachers	%
Knowledge about sign language interpreters	11	65
Knowledge about Deaf associations	9	53
Knowledge about the use of Deaf associations	9	53
Knowledge about the use of sign language dictionaries	16	94
Average on knowledge about services to Deaf people by teachers of Deaf students	11	66

students; and finally parents of Deaf children. Compared to the parents, the teachers' awareness level of the services for Deaf people is greater, which could have a direct link with the teachers' better literacy level.

ATTITUDES ABOUT EthSL AND THE USE OF EthSL BY DEAF PARTICIPANTS

Table 5.9 shows a summary of results on a number of attitudinal questions. The summary compares only three types of attitudes: positive, negative, or indifferent; other kinds of responses were already presented in the main result section of this chapter. As can be observed from the table, a good number of Deaf participants, on average 93 (78%), show positive attitudes toward EthSL and the use of EthSL. Only 4 Deaf participants show negative attitudes in different ways, and a similar number show indifference toward EthSL and its use. There is also an exclusively positive attitude on the issue regarding the learning of sign language by hearing people: it is welcomed by 86% of the participants with no contradiction or abstainers.

ATTITUDES ABOUT EthSL AND THE USE OF EthSL BY THE PARENTS OF DEAF CHILDREN

A summary of sign language attitudes is presented in Table 5.10. An average of 8 parents' responses showed positive attitudes about EthSL

TABLE 5.9. Attitudes of Deaf Participants (out of 119).

Types of Attitudes About EthSL and Sign Language Use	Positive Attitudes		Negative Attitudes		Indifferent	
	No. of Deaf Participants	%	No. of Deaf Participants	%	No. of Deaf Participants	%
Attitudes of professionals about sign language use	68	57	24	20	3	3
Attitudes about official sign language recognition	98	82	0	0	1	1
Attitudes about sign language variation	97	82	4	3	0	0
Attitudes about sign language unification	98	82	0	0	1	1
Attitudes about sign language use by Deaf people	103	87	0	0	1	1
Attitudes about sign language use past and present	83	70	4	3	0	0
Attitudes about learning SL by hearing people	102	86	0	0	0	0
Attitudes on question I	99	83	0	0	7	6
Attitudes on question II	101	85	0	0	3	3
Attitudes on question III	105	88	0	0	2	0
Attitudes about Deaf marriage	69	58	10	8	25	21
Average	93	78	4	3	4	3

TABLE 5.10. *Attitudes of Parents of Deaf Children (out of 19).*

Types of Attitudes About EthSL and Sign Language Use	Positive Attitudes		Negative Attitudes		Indifferent	
	No. of Parents	%	No. of Parents	%	No. of Parents	%
Attitudes of professionals about SL use	8	42	1	5	3	16
Attitudes about sign language recognition	15	79	0	0	0	0
Attitudes about sign language variation	6	32	8	42	0	0
Attitudes about sign language unification (*unification good or bad?)	8	42	1	5	0	0
Attitudes about sign language use by Deaf people	13	68	1	5	1	5
Attitudes about sign language use past and present	13	68	2	11	0	0
Attitudes about learning SL by the hearing people	14	74	0	0	0	0
Attitudes on question I	3	16	2	11	0	0
Attitudes on question II	2	11	2	11	0	0
Attitudes on question III	1	5	3	16	0	0
Attitudes about Deaf marriage	1	5	1	5	2	11
Average	8	40	2	10	1	3

and the use of EthSL. Many parents felt embarrassed to respond to the three questions (I, II, III), as well as the marriage question. An average of 2 (10%) parents showed negative responses and 1 (3%) parent showed indifference to the attitudes questions. It is to be noted that there were a great many parents (almost 50%) who responded with “no answer” and “difficult to interpret”; these are not included in Table 5.10. Comparing to the Deaf participants, parents of Deaf children show much less decisive attitudes toward EthSL and the use of EthSL. This is equivalent to what Lane et al. (1996) explains, in which many parents in developing nations still believe that having a Deaf child is a punishment from the Creator, or simply a curse. This is due to lack of understanding and awareness with the issue of deafness.

ATTITUDES ABOUT EthSL AND THE USE OF EthSL BY TEACHERS OF DEAF STUDENTS

As observed in Table 5.11, teachers report a very similar positive pattern of attitudes toward EthSL and use of EthSL as compared to Deaf people themselves. An aggregate 13 (77%) teachers showed positive attitudes; on average only 1 teacher showed negative attitudes, and 1 showed indifference. There were other professionals, as pointed out by the Deaf respondents, who doubt the status of sign language as a true and natural language. As Lucas (2004) revealed in her investigation of the sociolinguistic research in the Deaf community: many people doubt that sign language is a “real language.”

Except for the question about Deaf marriage, teachers have clear opinions on all the attitudes questions—all overwhelmingly positive. Compared to the parents, the teachers have much more positive attitudes.

In summary, it is found out that the Deaf participants have relatively greater positive attitudes on EthSL and the use of EthSL; followed closely by teachers of Deaf students; and finally parents of Deaf children. In all three parts—language use, services for Deaf people, and attitudes—there is a similar pattern of respondents: the Deaf participants are the leaders, followed by the teachers, with the parents a very distant third. The responses of parents are so different from both the Deaf respondents and the teachers. Teachers use sign language about as much as the Deaf respondents themselves. This could be due to the level of awareness and

TABLE 5.11. *Attitudes of Teachers (out of 17).*

Types of Attitudes About EthSL and Sign Language Use	Positive Attitudes		Negative Attitudes		Indifferent	
	No. of Teachers	%	No. of Teachers	%	No. of Teachers	%
Attitudes of professionals about SL use	12	71	3	18	0	0
Attitudes about sign language recognition	16	94	0	0	0	0
Attitudes about sign language variation	13	76	2	12	0	0
Attitudes about sign language unification (unification good or bad?)	14	82	2	12	0	0
Attitudes about sign language use by Deaf people	15	88	0	0	0	0
Attitudes about sign language use past and present	14	82	3	18	0	0
Attitudes about learning SL by the hearing people	15	88	0	0	0	0
Attitudes on question I	16	94	1	6	0	0
Attitudes on question II	12	71	1	6	3	18
Attitudes on question III	15	88	2	12	0	0
Attitudes about Deaf marriage	3	18	4	24	2	12
Average	13	77	1	10	1	3

literacy about deafness among the teachers is greater than the parents. Most parents in the current research never see deafness as a sociocultural phenomenon but rather as an “abnormal” phenomenon that challenges themselves, as parents and teachers, and as human beings. The level of literacy among the parents is also lower than the teachers. One of the parents in the current research, who is a single mother of four Deaf children, presented her past experience as follows:

While selling *t’ella* (traditional beer) at home, once I heard people calling my place as, “the one with four” = የባለአራቱ ቤት (satirical expression to demean the four Deaf children). I took up a rod and hit the man on the head who was trying not to use the proper name. It was an unforgettable harsh moment to raise the four children, as the society in general did not have positive attitudes.

This research revealed that many things in connection with Deaf awareness are improving. If this sign language research had been done a couple of decades ago, no doubt it would have shown a different outlook. Similarly, if it was conducted a couple of decades in the future, a different outlook would again be expected. The difference reflects the level of awareness, social and educational support, and the government’s commitment toward the human and linguistic rights of Deaf people. A couple of decades ago, there were no television programs for Deaf people. Deaf people were not seen in public using their language. Few educational opportunities for people who were deaf existed above elementary education. Terms, which are now considered derogatory, were regularly used to refer to Deaf people and their sign language. There was no information technology like mobile telephones, Internet, or video communications. In such a situation, society could not be expected to be aware of the linguistic and human rights of Deaf people. Thus, it seems almost certain that sign language use among the Deaf community would have been much lower in the past than it is today.

During the research, it turned out that both the Deaf participants and the teachers of the Deaf students strongly feel that EthSL is a language, and mostly find it appropriate and useful to use it in as many domains as possible. On the other hand, parents of Deaf children, the majority of whom are hearing, are much more hesitant to use EthSL in as many domains as possible. Compared to the Deaf respondents and the teachers, the parents of Deaf children show a more restricted usage of EthSL; their sign language use is mostly limited to the home. A few

of them go to school to develop their signing skills. Siblings were the family members who mostly communicated with the Deaf members of the family.

Similar patterns were reflected in the respondents' knowledge about the services for Deaf people. The Deaf participants and teachers were more aware and made more use of the services for Deaf people than the parents. Based on informal discussion, the awareness and use of the services for Deaf people among the hearing parents have changed a little since the birth of their Deaf child, but not greatly, since the majority of the parents have not changed their habits of language usage yet.

Similarly, the attitudes of the Deaf participants and the teachers to EthSL and the use of EthSL is quite positive, reflecting what we have already seen regarding their relatively greater dominance in using EthSL in their day-to-day activities and their greater awareness about services for people who are deaf. Parents' attitudes cannot be called negative, but their limited use of sign language and awareness about the services for people who are deaf has affected their attitudes toward EthSL and the use of EthSL.

In her study of the attitudes of Deaf students toward ASL, Kannapell (1989) found out that the relevant factors are number of years spent at Deaf schools and the age when sign language was first learned. She also included onset of deafness, parental history of deafness, and introduction to spoken languages in childhood.

The present study confirms that the major factors that govern Deaf people's attitudes toward the use of EthSL are onset of deafness, parental deafness, age of sign language introduction, age of school enrollment, and the availability of Deaf social services in the area. These factors are interconnected and they have a combined effect toward sign language attitudes. Of course, there are also other minor factors that can contribute to the attitudes, such as travel experience and leisure time activities. Figure 5.1 is a pictorial model of the five major factors governing Deaf people's attitudes toward EthSL.

AGE OF ONSET OF DEAFNESS

Those who became Deaf early (i.e., below age five) have a relatively greater chance of developing positive attitudes toward the use of EthSL than the age groups above five. The five groups of Deaf people

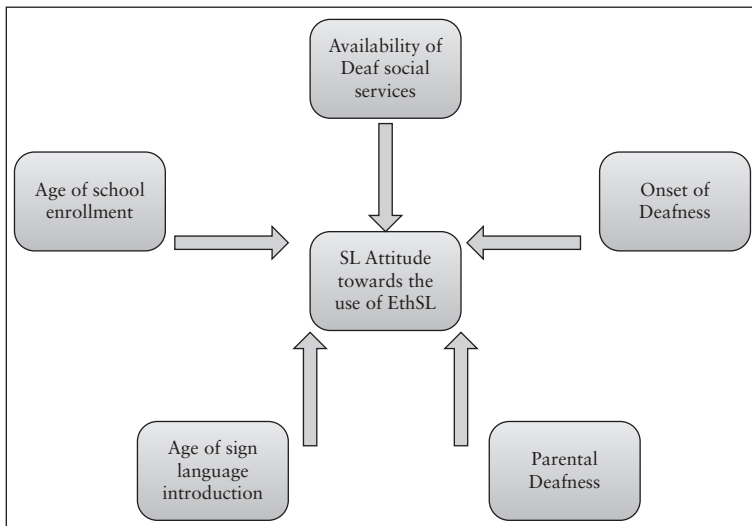


FIGURE 5.1. *Factors that govern attitudes about the use of EthSL.*

are characterized by frequent use of sign language among each other at school, in the market with signer friends, and at religious places, but less frequently at home. They have no fear or shame at using sign language in public places. They have also developed positive attitudes toward urban areas like Addis Ababa and Hosaena because of the availability there of Deaf social services, information, and Deaf gathering sites. This certainly does not imply that “late Deaf” people do not share similar characteristics, but these features are more prominent among Deaf people who became Deaf below the age of five.

PARENTAL DEAFNESS

Parental deafness can also refer to guardians or other family members who are Deaf. Those Deaf people who are from a Deaf family background develop greater positive attitudes toward the use of EthSL than those families who do not have Deaf members. Deaf people from a Deaf family, including hearing children of Deaf adults (CODAs), are characterized by markedly higher frequency of sign language use at home, school, marketplaces, religious places, and by having an increased sense of Deaf identity. They also claim Hosaena as the best place for Deaf people in light of its Deaf-oriented situation.

AGE TO SIGN LANGUAGE INTRODUCTION

Another major factor that governs the attitudes toward the use of sign language is the age of sign language introduction. Those individuals who acquire sign language early have a greater chance of developing positive attitudes toward the use of sign language than those who acquire it later. In line with the onset of deafness, these groups of people have greater confidence in using sign language at school, marketplaces, with signer friends, and in religious domains. All three of the previously mentioned factors (age of onset of deafness, parental deafness, and age to sign language introduction) are closely linked in such ways that in most cases people learn sign language when there are Deaf members in their family, or when they themselves become Deaf at a relatively early age.

AGE OF SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

It has already been discussed in Chapter 2 that many Deaf people acquire sign language at Deaf schools. Age of school enrollment is one factor that determines the attitudes toward the use of sign language. Children who enter school early show a greater chance of developing positive attitudes than those who enter later. The “early” group of people is characterized by frequent use of sign language at school, in the marketplace, at religious domains, and they make use of sign language interpreters in government domains. They also have developed positive attitudes toward urban areas like Addis Ababa and Hosaena due to the social services, information, and Deaf gathering sites available there.

AVAILABILITY OF DEAF SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE AREA

The last major factor is the availability of Deaf social services like associations, sign language interpreters, and Deaf gathering sites. These social services are not only where Deaf people socialize and get information but also are a means of constructing Deaf identity. The more available the Deaf social services in the area, the more positive are the attitudes toward the use of sign language in among the neighboring Deaf community.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study of the sociolinguistics of EthSL has addressed many issues while attempting to investigate the patterns of EthSL use and attitudes toward the use of the language. This research has tried to answer three basic questions:

- What does the current social position of EthSL look like?
- How is EthSL used in different domains of language use?
- What factors govern attitudes toward the use of EthSL?

In order to answer these basic questions, relevant literature was reviewed and applied to EthSL and its Deaf community. The study hypothesized that if a language, EthSL in this case, is used in as many domains as possible then it shows the users' positive attitudes toward the language, which is a clear indicator for the vitality of the language. Sample subjects were recruited from 11 sites all across the nation: considering variables such as age, gender, education, onset of deafness, and history of deafness in the family. The total number of participants was 155, which included 119 deaf subjects, 17 teachers, and 19 parents of deaf children. The results were discussed under three major headers: sign language use, services for Deaf people, and sign language attitudes. Based on the summary of results in Chapter 5, the concluding remarks below provide tentative answers to the basic questions.

ON SIGN LANGUAGE USE

As has been pointed out earlier, the patterns of sign language use in the Ethiopian Deaf community are mostly governed by the concomitant use of EthSL, Amharic, and (sometimes) English, a feature shown in many Deaf macro-communities. Significantly, EthSL does not seem to be affected by the local spoken language in the different regions of Ethiopia. Signers from Nekemt, where Oromiffa predominates in many domains of

public life, can easily communicate with signers in Bahir Dar, where there is predominance of Amharic, and with signers from Mekele, where the Tigrigna language predominates.

Following Turner's (1995) Reversing Language Shift (RLS), EthSL was investigated to check its current state of vitality. In all of Fishman's eight stages of language disruption, the key criterion for RLS is the degree of intergenerational language transmission. The more a language fails to fulfill this criterion, the more it will remain in use only in home or family affairs. One of the challenges that not only EthSL but also all sign languages face regarding this criterion, is the fact that sign language is very seldom acquired at home but instead acquired mostly outside, in the context of Deaf associations and schools. As is seen in the data, there was only one Deaf participant who has a Deaf parent. Thus, there is almost no possibility of parents transmitting EthSL to their children. Seen from this perspective, the vitality of not only EthSL but all sign languages of the world is endangered. On the other hand, there are points mentioned by Fishman (1991) that would serve to accentuate the vitality of EthSL, for instance, public events conducted in the language. Every year, the Deaf community celebrates the International Week of the Deaf in September across the world, including the Ethiopian Deaf community. During this week, National Deaf Associations worldwide, who are members of the World Federation of the Deaf, are encouraged to carry out information campaigns about their work, culture, and identity, and to publicize their needs and demands. All these events are intended to popularize sign language and to manifest Deaf culture. In addition, there are a number of new domains where EthSL is being used. A recent new domain, in which EthSL is being used, is the electronic media. Deaf people have started blogging (including video clips in EthSL) and talking about Deaf-related issues. These, and other situations, will contribute to increasing the vitality of EthSL.

The Ethiopian Deaf community is mostly characterized by bimodal skills in both signed and spoken languages. Those people who became Deaf below the age of five,³³ typically referred to as "born deaf," were found to have the highest degree of bimodal language skills compared to the other age groups (see Table 5.1). Based on my own experience,

33. Age five is assumed to be school age for a child. This research considers that those children who acquired sign language before age five are native signers whose languages do not have contact with signs at schools.

many educators of Deaf students in Ethiopia believe that the “early deaf” are much less able to learn spoken languages compared to those who became deaf at a later age. The present research does not support this assumption: to the contrary, the early deaf are more able to learn spoken languages compared to people who became deaf at a later age based on the results of the questionnaires. It has also been noticed that in many instances Deaf people do not consider their sign language skill as being one of their “language skills” as stated in Grosjean (1992). This implies that a bilingual (bimodal) Deaf person may not recognize him/herself as bilingual at all. In any event, Deaf people inherently are by far the most frequent users of sign language, followed by the teachers, and distantly by the parents. Compared to parents of Deaf children, teachers of Deaf students are much more skilled in sign language. Even though the majority of the teacher respondents are hearing, they were observed to have commendable sign language skills.

Eight domains of sign language use were investigated: home, friends, neighborhood, education, market, religion, government, and foreign Deaf person. It was discussed that friends, signer merchants, and education domains are the most sign language user-friendly domains. The least sign language user-friendly domain was the neighborhood. The home domain, unexpectedly, turns out not to be a particularly sign language user-friendly domain. Within the home domain, siblings rank highest and grandparents lowest in terms of sign language skills.

There are a number of crucial factors that govern the use of sign language: Age of onset of deafness, presence of another Deaf person in the family, competence in sign language, age of sign language introduction, and introduction to Deaf school at early age. These are the major determinants of whether or not sign language will be used.

The results about sign language use in Chapter 5 reveal that there is a regular use of two languages: EthSL and Amharic; sometimes three languages, EthSL, Amharic, and English; and occasionally even more.

ON SERVICES FOR DEAF PEOPLE

The three types of participants: Deaf people, the parents, and the teachers of Deaf students show patterning with regard to their perspectives toward services for Deaf people, which is similar to their patterning regarding sign language use. Deaf people are more aware of and are

prime users of Deaf social services such as sign language interpretation and Deaf social gatherings at the associations. Teachers of Deaf students are also seen to have better understanding and to be greater users of services for Deaf people, followed distantly by the parents of Deaf children. Although the parents believe that EthSL is very important to the lives of their children, parents tend to be discouraged from learning the language by external factors such as stereotypes.

ON ATTITUDES

The study of attitudes is a complex phenomenon; as Garrett (2010) explains; each discipline has its own approach to the study of attitudes. This research has applied the approach and definitions used by Fishman (1974) to investigate the feelings and attitudes that the Ethiopian Deaf community has toward EthSL.

This research has demonstrated—non-impressionistically—that the Ethiopian Deaf community has positive attitudes toward EthSL. The Deaf participants were questioned about their feelings and views toward the EthSL and its use, about sign language variation, and about Deaf marriage. There were also hypothetical questions presented to them to explore indirectly their feelings toward EthSL and its use. In all categories of responses, over half of the Deaf participants were seen to have “good attitudes.” Social factors such as age of school enrollment, availability of Deaf social services, age of onset of deafness, availability of a Deaf member in a family, and age of sign language introduction all make relevant contributions to the subject’s attitudes toward the use of EthSL in the various domains mentioned in the earlier chapters. This very positive attitude is reflected in the ongoing use of EthSL by the Deaf community. Thus, it can now be said that EthSL is flourishing and can be predicted to have a positive future.

The teachers, like the Deaf participants, had positive attitudes; although the percentage is different. This surely is due to the fact that they have regular and sympathetic contact with their Deaf students. However, the fact that parents of Deaf children were seen reluctant to answer many of the questions regarding their Deaf children points indirectly to a threat in their attitudes toward the use of sign language at home. If the promotion of a language does not start in the home, according to Fishman (1991), it is a sign of an intergenerational gap and hence of a threat to the vitality

of the language. This clearly applies to EthSL. In addition, it is to be noted that the low level of awareness on the part of educators and policy makers in the implementation of educational policies and strategies could possibly affect the development of EthSL.

This research has traveled a long way in order to answer the research questions. In doing so, it has illuminated a large number of sociolinguistic issues in connection with EthSL and the Deaf community. It has shown that, like any other language, EthSL has its own spoken community with their own perceptions and attitudes toward the language. The respondents were stratified and an effort was made to select a sample of respondents who would be as representative of the Ethiopian Deaf community as possible. A number of questions were asked to three groups of respondents: Deaf people, parents, and teachers of Deaf students. Their responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the analysis of the study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the concluding remarks, this research recommends the following points on sign language use, on services for Deaf people, and on attitudes toward sign language in light of the research questions. I will also make suggestions for the improvement of the research methodology used in this study.

On Sign Language Use

As EthSL is the most preferred and best-known language of the Ethiopian Deaf community, it was unexpectedly found that the home domain is one of the least favored domains for the use of EthSL. In other words, people who are deaf are isolated in family discussions and sign language is not considered as a major component of family communication. Hearing parents of Deaf children do not get enough information about how to communicate with their children. It would be important to let them know how to communicate in sign language with their Deaf children and/or to make sign language a predominant home language. Information must be provided for parents to introduce their child to sign language via the Deaf community. Hearing parents need to be given sign language training by qualified sign language teachers. Awareness-raising

sessions must be provided for parents of Deaf children to enable them to create a harmonious relationship with their children. While conducting the research, there was only one case of a Deaf child of Deaf parents. However, there is no doubt that this situation would arise frequently if a larger sample was taken. These parents could serve as role models to demonstrate harmonious relationships with their children. This situation could create a more favorable atmosphere for seeing deafness not as a disability, but as a distinct linguistic group with its own ethnic and cultural characteristics. Eventually, such pro-Deaf promotional activities could result in a change of attitudes on both a home and a societal level.

The education domain has a special role in every multilingual (and multicultural) nation, such as Ethiopia, in saving minority languages and cultures. According to Katsui et al. (2014), the Finnish government has been the major stakeholder in several education projects and the only donor in the field of special education in Ethiopia. For instance, the Finnish Embassy distributes over half a million euros every year for education projects and over 5 million euros for supporting the second phase of the General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP II), which has been running since 2013. However, it was evident from the field observation that Ethiopian Deaf education has mostly suffered from lack of expertise, lack of teaching materials, and above all failed strategies that are being carried out in the implementation of so-called “inclusive education.” The most serious of the three is the last one, which has inherently threatened the existence of Deaf special schools as an educational option. The issue of so-called “inclusiveness” is becoming a crucial issue—its ultimate target is the closure of Deaf schools and bringing Deaf and hearing students together in one classroom to be taught by a teacher who is not aware of Deaf issues or sign language at all. This practice has already begun at Deaf schools all across the nation. A psychological disadvantage exists for both Deaf and hearing students who are polarized by being forced together in a purely oral approach.³⁴ This kind of forced immersion could possibly result in an imposed oral monolingualism in Deaf education. The history of Deaf education in the world teaches us that Deaf people always reject the oral method; instead, the manual method is the preferred approach to Deaf education. The rivalry between the two methods showed a great rift at the second International Congress of the Education of the Deaf, in Milan, 1880, which passed a resolution

34. I myself have seen such polarization and hostility in high school classrooms.

giving the oral approach a monopoly status in Deaf education. This situation continued for over a century; only in 2010 did the same conference, now held in Canada, officially apologize for the inappropriate resolution passed 125 years ago.

The oral approach is definitely contradictory to the bilingual and bicultural approach—in this case a manual approach—to Deaf education. From the very slow development of cognitive achievement, it is possible to assume that the oral method does not foster the development of an independent and successful life for the Deaf children, nor the possibility of good social integration. All the benefits of a bilingual and bicultural approach, such as improved reading and writing skills, self-expressions, self-evaluation, ability to acquire additional languages, and overall success in educational achievement are undermined in the oral approach (Baker & Baker, 1997).

Therefore, this research recommends the following major points:

- a. The use of EthSL should be maximized at schools wherever appropriate, as both medium of instruction and school subject.
- b. Educational policies and strategies should be revised for the ultimate utilization of EthSL at school and ensure the Deaf students to have at least a foundational skill and at most competence in EthSL.
- c. Deaf individuals should be actively recruited for teaching positions in Deaf schools and other institutions.
- d. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism should adopt a policy supporting EthSL and urging that it be included as one of the official languages of Ethiopia.
- e. Teachers must be provided with intensive sign language training before taking up their positions at Deaf schools.
- f. All teacher training institutions and universities need to offer sign training and proficiency in their curriculum.
- g. A legal document should explicitly guarantee the legitimacy of sign language as a teaching and learning language.

On Services for Deaf People

It was pointed out, in the result section, that the limited availability of Deaf social services such as sign language interpreters, Deaf associations, and sign language resources have had a considerable negative impact on

the language development of EthSL and on the amount of readily available information on the sociolinguistic profile of Deaf people in Ethiopia. Thus, the following recommendations would help to increase the vitality and the development of EthSL:

- a. Higher education institutions should provide sign language interpretation training across the nation.
- b. The Ministry of Education or other concerned bodies should set up an institution to certify properly qualified sign language interpreters.
- c. A sign language proficiency test should be provided to ensure the quality of sign language skills of teachers and sign language interpreters.
- d. Deaf associations and higher institutions should produce a variety of sign language dictionaries aimed at specific audiences, such as children, technical fields, and so forth.
- e. Deaf associations must expand their network to reach Deaf people outside of the capital.
- f. The media should give due attention to sign language by providing a regular option for signing captions (as is currently done in the United Kingdom).³⁵
- g. Deaf associations should take a dominant role in lobbying legislators and policy makers for the proper implementation of the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

All the above recommendations regarding services points could be summarized in the following language planning activities:

- a. Corpus planning—production of sign language materials, books, teaching aids, research, and documentation on EthSL.
- b. Status planning—using EthSL in the official arena, and making it a language of wider communication, would help to upgrade the current status of the language.
- c. Acquisition planning—serious attention needs to be given for second-language acquisition of EthSL by both late-Deaf students

35. In the UK, the BBC has an option for Deaf people to access information with or without sign language interpretation, and with or without written captions, which all are monitored by the remote controller.

- and hearing students, and for “first-language” acquisition of EthSL in school by young born-Deaf children who did not learn EthSL at home and thus (in a sense) come to school with no “language” at all. Qualified teachers are absolutely essential.
- d. Attitudes planning—advocacy tasks have to be done like those carried out at the International Week of the Deaf every September.

For these and other activities, government and nongovernment organizations—including the Deaf associations—must allocate a budget as part of their regular activities.

On Attitudes

Chapter 5 revealed a variety of attitudes-related results. Tables 5.9, 5.10, and 5.11 summarized these results. They showed that Deaf people, in general, have positive attitudes toward EthSL and the use of EthSL. The same is true for teachers but not for the parents of Deaf children. The sustainability of such overall positive attitudes is relevant for the vitality and development of EthSL. The negative or negligent attitudes observed among some respondents would need to be improved. Therefore, this research recommends that:

- a. Family members or guardians need to learn that enrolling a Deaf child at an earlier age has much greater advantage than at a later age.
- b. Hearing family members or guardians have to learn sign language to communicate with their Deaf children and to make sign language one of the languages of the home.
- c. Deaf associations, the Ministry of Education, and education bureau officials need to be aware of the right of Deaf people (as stated in the UN-CRPD documents) to get an education in sign language.
- d. The media, especially the Sign Language Program section of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation need to play a bigger role of advocacy regarding the use of air time to increase the availability of Deaf social services, parental awareness about deafness, sign language, and related issues and the rights of Deaf children in education and other services. The media should also make a point of providing up-to-date information in their news coverage for Deaf people.

On the Methodology Used in This Study

Doing a study on EthSL is challenging, mainly because there is extremely little reference material on the language. These challenges affected the outcome of this research. In this section, these challenges are presented for future research.

First, this study did not analyze or evaluate the linguistic aspect of the respondents' answers, nor the level and competence of the respondents' language skills. Clearly, some aspects of the linguistics of sign language should have been included. Second, the fact that the interview questions were quite numerous led to participants becoming tired in the middle of the interview. In future research, the interview questions could be reduced to include only the elements that were essential for the research, saving the participants' energy. Third, I (a hearing person) was not present in the room where the interviews were conducted, to avoid the Observer's Paradox. This, however, sometimes led to miscommunication or omissions in administering the questionnaire, which I could have corrected if I had been present. Fourth, completely unexpectedly, the results show that there is one specific place where the local sign language shows significant differences from EthSL, namely Gambella. My Deaf Research Assistants (all from other areas) found it difficult to communicate with the Gambella Deaf students, and vice versa. In Gambella, there is only one school that hosts Deaf students, in one classroom from grades 1 to 4; students' age range from 8 to 34. Their answers were, in majority, characterized either by repeating (copying) what the interviewer had said or by replying in a way that the interviewer did not understand. This phenomenon of a "local" sign language is surely not unique. As is evident from situations like that in Martha's Vineyard, USA (Groce, 1985), in Desa Kolok, Indonesia (Branson, 1996), in a Yucatec Mayan village, Mexico (Johnson, 1994), in Adamorobe, Ghana (Nyst, 2007), and many others in the world, researchers should always consider the possibility of finding Deaf villages in Ethiopia with their own local sign languages. It is clear that the Gambella case, like other possible separate signing varieties found in Ethiopia, needs a documentation task of its own. Fifth, there was a problem with nonschooler Deaf respondents. One critical challenge when doing this research was the impossibility of usefully incorporating the responses of, nonschoolers, or of adults who only went to school at a late age, (these "late schoolers" were observed at Hawassa, Arba Minch, Adama, and Harar). As stated in Chapter 4, the DRAs could

not communicate and understand the language of these nonschoolers. Their answers were classified as “difficult to interpret.”

Sixth, and most seriously, the analysis was based almost entirely on the questionnaire results. It did not test the actual sign language skills or level of bilinguality of the participants to check the accuracy of what they said and compare it to their actual language proficiency.

All these and other points not mentioned could be taken as research gaps to be filled in the future investigation of EthSL.

In conclusion, from a utopian perspective, EthSL might be proposed as an answer to the question of what constitutes the Ethiopian national language, which is a “hot issue” in the current language policy atmosphere. None of the spoken languages in Ethiopia can truly be said to be an “official national language,” but EthSL does have national scope.

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Interview Questions for PhD Research on Language Use and Attitudes on EthSL

DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

These questions are designed to investigate the language use and language attitudes toward Ethiopian Sign Language and its Deaf communities. I assure you that the responses will be kept confidential and for research purposes only. Please try to answer all the questions.

Date____/____/____ No. _____
Region _____ Institution _____
(Answering questions with an asterisk * for those who are married)

PART I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sex M____ F____

Age _____ years

Place of birth _____

1. Hearing status:

- i- Deaf/Hard of Hearing/Hearing _____
- ii- Do you use hearing aid? If so, how helpful is that to you? _____
- iii- What sounds do you hear under normal circumstance?
Car going past _____ thunder _____ animal/birds sound _____
Spoken but not understood _____ Other _____
- iv- Onset of Deafness _____
- v- Cause of Deafness _____
- vi- Hearing Status of family members _____

Person	Deaf	Hard-of-Hearing	Hearing
Mother			
Father			
Siblings			
Other family members			

2. Status of marriage: M____ S____ W____ D____

3. Education:

a. No school b. Elementary education c. High school/vocational

i- Name the school(s) you have attended. _____

ii- (If not finishing primary) Reason for dropping out:

a. No money b. Helping with house work c. No sign language

d. Too far to go to school e. Other reasons _____

iii- Where do you interact with Deaf people? _____

a. Home b. Nearschool c. Another town _____

4. Occupation:

a. Farmer b. Laborer c. Student d. Housewife e. Gov. Employee

f. Private employee g. Other: _____

Place of work/ Study: _____

5. Travel:

Where is the furthest place you have ever been away from home? _____

i- Why did you go there? a. Travel b. Study c. Work d. Trade e. Other reasons: _____

ii- Which places other than your home have you ever stayed for more than a month? _____

iii- Why did you go there? a. Travel b. Study c. Work d. Trade e. Other reasons: _____

6. Conversations among each other

What do you usually do in your leisure time?

a. Talk, tell stories

b. TV/Movies/ VCDs

c. Read books/magazines

d. Play sports

e. Play cards/ chess

f. Garden

g. Fish/hunt

h. Crafts/carving/knitting

i. No leisure time

j. Other: _____

PART II. LANGUAGE USE

1. Language skills

- i- Which language did you learn first as a child? _____
- ii- Would you tell me your language skills?

Language ↓	Skill →	Read	Write	Speak/ Communicate	How did you learn?
EthSL					
Amharic					
English					
Tigrigna					
Oromiffa					
Somali					
Any of Guraghe languages					
Other					

- iii- If still living, do your father and your mother know/use sign language?
 - a. Yes _____ No _____ Occasionally _____
 - b. (If yes, what language? _____)

2. Language use

- i- *If married, is your spouse Deaf? Yes ___ No ___ (If no, _____)
- ii- *Does he or she use sign language? Yes ___ No ___ (If no, what language? _____)
- iii- *Which language does he or she use best? _____
- iv- *Are any of your children Deaf?
- v- *(If have children) Do your children all use sign language? Yes ___ No ___ (If no, what language? _____)
- vi- *Which language do your children use best? _____
- vii- How often do you use sign language?
 - a. Daily b. Often c. Occasionally d. Never
- viii- How often do you watch TV (any program)?
 - a. Daily b. Often c. Occasionally d. Never
- ix- If the news or other TV programs is on, how do you understand it?
 - a. spoken/lip-read b. ask children to interpret c. read subtitles
 - d. other _____

3. Language use in domains

- i- What language do you use at home?
 - a. With parents _____
 - b. *With spouse _____
 - c. *With children _____
 - d. With siblings _____
 - e. With ancestors who have passed away _____
 - f. With neighborhood _____
 - g. With foreign Deaf person _____
 - h. With pet/livestock (dog, cat, sheep, cattle, etc.): _____
- ii- (If at school or used to be) what language do you use at school?
 - a. With the teacher/students in the classroom _____
 - b. With the teacher outside of the classroom _____
 - c. With friends in the classroom _____
 - d. With friends outside the classroom _____
- iii- What languages do you use at a market? (Can you show me an example?)
 - a. With a signer merchant _____
 - b. With a non-signer merchant _____
- iv- (If employed) what language do you use at your workplace? (Can you show me an example?)
 - a. Talking with your colleagues who don't know sign language _____
 - b. Talking with your client/customer (teacher-student, doctor-patient, seller-customer, etc.) _____
 - c. Talking with your leader/boss _____
- v- If you are going to religious places, what language do you use for religion? (Can you show me an example?)
 - a. Praying to God _____
 - b. Reciting the dogma _____
 - c. Talking with other worshipers _____
- vi- What language do you use when you go to the Government office? (Can you show me example)
 - a. Local *k'ebele* _____
 - b. City municipality _____
 - c. Meetings _____

4. Have you or anyone you know interacted with Deaf people from other countries in person? If so, which countries and in what context? What language did you use to help you communicate with?

5. Are there places where you feel you could not use EthSL?
6. Are there places where you could use EthSL confidently?

PART III. SERVICES FOR THE DEAF

1. Are there sign language interpreters in your area?
If “yes”, how many, how are they trained, where do they work, etc.?
2. Would you tell me what you know about:
ENAD?
RSDA?
DDIA?
SLTSSA?
Other Deaf association whom you may know- their roles?
3. Do you make use of the above associations? For what purpose?
4. Do you attend religious services? If yes, where do you go? What about other Deaf people? If not, any particular reason why?
5. Do you know that there are some sign language dictionaries like:
HA book?
New EthSL Dictionary?
Any other?
How helpful are these materials for you? What do you use them for?
6. Please describe the leaders, deaf or hearing, of your local deaf community?
7. When choosing a president in your deaf association/organization, what criteria do they use?
8. What do you think is the best city in Ethiopia for deaf people to live in (most services, education, support, etc.)?

PART IV. ATTITUDES

A-TOWARD EthSL

Perception

- i- How do you see about teachers using sign language in schools? A judge/lawyer using sign language in the courtroom? a merchant using sign language? a restaurant owner/waiter using sign language?

- ii- What would it mean to you if sign language was to be recognized by the higher authorities?

Variation

- i- Do deaf people in your area use signs that are different from the signs used in other parts of Ethiopia? Can you give specific examples?
- ii- Which sign varieties do you find most difficult or easy to understand in Ethiopia?
- iii- Do you think that everyone in Ethiopia should use the same sign language? Why?
- iv- What does “correct” or “good” EthSL look like? Who uses “correct” or “good” EthSL in the Deaf community?

General

- i- Do you think all deaf people in Ethiopia should sign? Why?
- ii- If there were no EthSL in use, how would deaf people communicate with each other?
- iii- How do your hearing family members react toward using sign language? Explain your answer.
- iv- Would you tell me your experience about using signing in public places in the past and present?
- v- Would you tell me your experience of watching the ETV sign language program?
- vi- How do you see hearing people signing?

B- TOWARDS USE OF SIGN LANGUAGE

1. When you go to the market to sell a chicken, if two people offer the same price at the same time, one uses sign language very well, another does not, to whom would you sell the chicken?
a. EthSL signer b. non-signer c. either one d. neither one
Why? _____
2. When two people come to your village to hire labor, if both will pay the same amount of wage, one signs very well and another doesn't sign, for whom would you choose to work?
a. EthSL signer b. non-signer c. either one d. neither one

Why? _____

3. When you go to see a doctor in the hospital, if two doctors are specialized in the same area, one signs very well and another doesn't sign, from whom would you ask help?
a. EthSL signer b. non-signer c. either one d. neither one
Why? _____
4. If you wanted to marry, would you prefer your spouse to be:
a. Deaf b. Hearing c. doesn't matter d. other
Why? _____
5. In your opinion, how do you about the intermarriage situation of Deaf people in Ethiopia?
6. When you interact with Deaf/hearing people what sorts of interaction do you have with them? With whom do you interact more? Why?

PART V. FINAL OPINIONS

1. In your opinion, what do you (as member of Deaf community) need most to succeed in life? E.g., education, work, etc.
2. Any additional comments are welcome:

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