

DVD dictionary of Langue des Signes d'Afrique Francophone: Descriptive study of Creole ASL in French-speaking Africa

Nobutaka Kamei

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies - Japan

In most countries in west and central French-speaking Africa, Deaf individuals use a sign language with two characteristics: (1) vocabulary borrowed from American Sign Language (ASL); and (2) grammar and mouthing borrowed from French. This can be considered a Creole sign language, derived from language contact between ASL and spoken/written French.

I have conducted field research in four countries (eastern part of Cameroon, Gabon, Bénin, and Côte d'Ivoire) since 1997. During this time, I have observed this 'mixed' sign language being widely and naturally used in daily conversations between Deaf individuals and in schools for the Deaf. I have also observed that members of Deaf communities consider it to be a shared, or common, sign language. Therefore, I have termed this common sign language "Langue des Signes d'Afrique Francophone (LSAF)" (Francophone African Sign Language).

As part of my efforts to describe this sign language, I have produced a DVD dictionary of LSAF. The DVD was produced for the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (ILCAA-TUFS), in collaboration with Deaf counterparts in French-speaking Cameroon (Kamei ed. 2008). It contains about 3,300 video clips of signs (total duration: approximately 7 hours 40 minutes) that can be searched using French and Japanese indices.

Around the same time, I published the first LSAF textbook for beginners (Kamei 2008). These pedagogical materials were developed and used for a class entitled "Langue des Signes d'Afrique Francophone". The class was taught by a Deaf visiting lecturer from Cameroon for five weeks in August–September, 2008, as an Intensive Language Course at ILCAA-TUFS.

In this seminar, I will present the finished DVD and the textbook, and share the results of the LSAF Intensive Language Course. I will also discuss my plans to construct a LSAF database.