

Dichotomy in the community of Deaf Eritreans

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In current linguistic phenomenon in Deaf community of Eritrea, there is a growing division between the urban and rural settings. The group of language planners is in process of developing a sign-language dictionary, which is an attempt of linguistic revitalization in the method of linguistic purism. In 1955, Swedish missionary established a school for the Deaf in Eritrea and imported their sign language for the students. The objective of the Eritrean Sign Language (EriSL) dictionary is to purify Eritrean signs by reviving the indigenous/local signs, which erases any linkage to the missionary sign language.

The conflict and dilemma of linguistic purism in the EriSL comes in tension between urban and rural residents. The language planning takes place in the capital city of Eritrea, Asmara, although a small number of the planners are natives of the rural villages. The language ideology for the EriSL is not consistent with either settings of the city-people or the villagers. The incentive of the dictionary is to validate their complete language to the national government and to reinforce educational resources. Linguistic purism is the method of language ideology extremists from the city-people to re-gain ownership of their own language rather than inherit the foreigners' languages. On the other hand, the villagers disagree in order to maintain their respect for their "parental" language and are satisfied with their language competence. The contradiction in this language ideology clashes between the rural and urban environments. It is critical for linguistic anthropology to explore the cultural differentiation and values in a linguistic minority and to answer the questions of modernization versus tradition in those social settings.