

HAND'S CONFIGURATION IN HAUSA DEAF GRAMMATICAL ITEMS

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Abstract

Hand or hands has an important role to play in the formation of lexical sign in Hausa Deaf Language. Hand (s) is one of the vital parts in the human body which is paramount and also functions in expression grammatical class in the language of Hausa Deaf. It serves as the root in any lexical formation or syntactic production. Some studies have been conducted on various aspects of spoken and sign languages grammatical class, but none focused on this current study. The paper tries to identify the grammatical categories that exist in Hausa deaf language. It also analyses how the lexical signs are ordering in deaf construction. The data was collected from the various joints of deaf people within Kano metropolis, participatory observation, written documents on sign language and photographs which are used for analysis. Finally, the study adopted Hand Tiers Model which initiated by Sandler (1989).

Introduction

During the past sixty years sign languages have been recognised as genuine languages with their own distinctive structure. Signed languages and spoken languages have many similarities, but also differ due to the different modalities: visual-gestural modality vs. auditory-vocal modality. Research on sign language linguistics essentially started with the publication of William Stokoe (1960) which was the first work that recognised the linguistic and communicative status of signing (Klima & Bellugi, 1979: 34). Therefore “Natural Sign Languages (SLs), are not merely pantomime and their grammatical structure was proven about 60 years ago” (Stokoe, *ibid*). Sign languages are looking very similar to each other but according to Klima and Bellugi (1979:64) “some people consider sign language as universal language even though, some linguists who conducted research on sign language verified that deaf people are varied among countries/communities and each has their own languages”.

Research on the grammar of Hausa Sign Language (HSL) per se is limited; some work has been done on individual aspects of its phonology, morphology, as well as an applied and educational linguistics. But no work that focuses on hand's configuration in Hausa Deaf Language. HSL shares the same cross-linguistic tendencies as many other well analysed sign languages. It has developed in a social and linguistic context similar to most other sign languages. The Hausa deaf people produce their signs via combining the manual (hand, movement, location and orientation), and non-manual (head, face, and other parts of the body). There were researches conducted on different sign languages to mention a few; Pfau and Steinbach (2006), Johnson (2013) Schmaling (2000, 2011, 2013, and 2016), Gwammaja (2009, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2018, and 2019) and Kita (2003).

Hausa Sign Language

Hausa Sign Language (HSL) is the name of the most well-known gestural-visual language used by members of the Speech Community (SC) with several thousands of native and non-native signers. The language interacts among deaf and non-deaf in various meeting places. “Hausa Sign Language is the language employs by deaf in the Hausa speaking areas of northern Nigeria. There are no records on when deaf Hausa people began using Hausa Sign Language (HSL), the way it is being employed today” (Schmaling, 2000: 47).

A survey of deaf people in Kano demonstrates that there are; (a) home signers, known as mother tongue sign language and (b), educated bilinguals who are fluent in both Hausa Sign Language (HSL) and the American Sign Language (ASL). Carroll and Mather (1997) posit that “ASL introduced into the Nigerian deaf education system by Rev. Foster, the deaf African American preacher.” cited in (Orie, 2013: 245). Many educated bilingual deaf people live and work in Kano because the city has one of the ASL-based elementary schools in north-western Nigeria. Deaf people generally do not acquire HSL through formal instruction but learn it in a variety of contexts, such as residential, meeting centers, their parents, peers or other members of the community as well as through sign language activities, or social exposure to other deaf people.

In addition, Hausa sign language is used for those people who spoken language is blocked, either by deafness or muteness. Hausa sign language is typically appearing as their primary communication systems. It develops at home which is a type of self-developed sign language. This form of communication takes place at the home and it also known as mother tongue sign or “home sign” language.

Methods and Theory of Framework

This research examines the daily conversations of deaf at various joints in Kano metropolis (Municipal, Dala, Gwale, Fagge, Nasarawa, Tarauni, Ungogo and Kumbotsu). On the aspect of examining lexical signs in Hausa language, the data has been collected via participatory observation. The selected lexical signs are used for the purpose of this paper. However, some sign words in spoken Hausa were also presented to them and asked them to produce the corresponding sign in their native language (Hausa sign language). On the other hand, signs were presented to them in context, and they were asked to demonstrate their meanings in their language. Photographs were taken and sketched by artists for the detail analysis. Written documents on sign languages were also consulted. Finally, substantial information was collected via participant observation, as well as taking part in casual conversation in the following places: - *Kwana Huxu, (Rimin A'i), Fagge, Gidan Shattima, Kumbotso and Masaqa* as well as every day conversation with my neighbourly deaf friends. The study adopted Hand Tier (Sandler, 1989) as framework which comprises hand location, movement, and location (body or neutral space) and it's more appropriate in sign languages analysis.

Bound Morphemes in Hausa Deaf Language

Bound Morphemes in Hausa deaf language are morphemes that cannot stand alone as independent lexical sign and cannot be expressed unless the four morphemes are combined together, the morphemes include; the hand, movement, location, and orientation. Even though the hand stands as root or stem in any lexical formation within the language.

Hand Morphemes in Hausa Deaf Language

Hand morphemes comprise size, shape, or surface of an object. These hand shape (HS) also appear without carrying a specific meaning. Brennan (1990: 371-372) clarified that they can be “put together in different ways at different times to suit the needs of the discourse...” (Brennan, 1990:371-372). However, there are four bound morphemes originally serve as components of sign formation. The Hand configuration comprises the hand, movement, location and orientation (fingers selection and palm facing) during articulation. Often referred to by the numbers and letters they represent in the language as well as the manual alphabet, though the Hausa sign language do not have manual alphabet.

Location Morphemes in Hausa Deaf Language

Location refers to the major bodily areas or neutral space in which the full signs are articulated but still remain as bound morphemes unless it combines by another dependent morphemes (articulation parameters) on the eye, mouth or nose regions etc. Similarly, the location is the second morpheme in forming sign lexical is neutral space (Schmaling, 2000: 98-99).

Movement Morphemes in Hausa Deaf Language

Sign can be either static or have path movement between two locations. Movement morpheme can occur on the body/face or in space. There may also be movement from the body into space and vice versa. Movement may also involve interaction between the two hands (separate; come together; approach each other, contact each other), and the hands can move simultaneously and alternatively (Schmaling, 2000: 98-99).

Orientation Morphemes in Hausa Sign Language

Orientation is one of the morphemes primes which differentiate among varieties of signs within a sign language. It comprises information in both the location that palm facing and the finger (s) selection during sign formation. Orientation might remain static within a monomorphemic sign and it may also be changed (Battison, 1973. Cit. in Gwammaja, 2018: 60).

Formation of Hand Sign in HSL

The formation of lexical sign in Hausa Sign Language occurs as a result of combining hand with others morphemes such as movement, location and orientation. Hand acts as root in any lexical formation. The hand forms lexical sign, either in body or in neutral space.

Hand Sign in the Neutral Space

Hand sign(s) form when the hand morpheme attaches with three morphemes (movement, location, orientation) in the neutral space location. Signs produce in the neutral space have no contact with any part of the body. Most signs in HSL are produced in the neutral space, as some previous works proved that (See Schmaling (2000; 84); and Gwammaja (2018:68). Examples of neutral space signs:



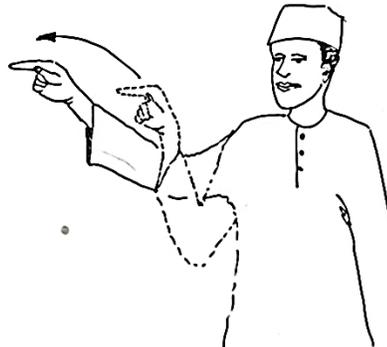
Shi 'he'



Ita 'she'



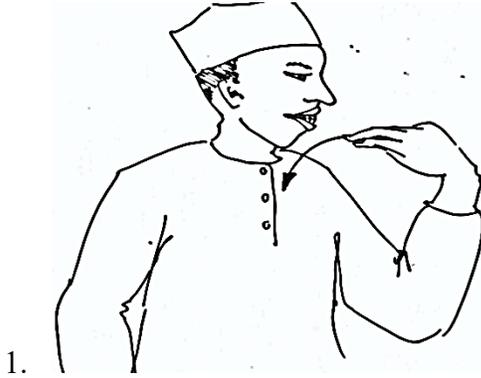
Nan 'here'



Can 'there'

Hand Sign on the Body

Hand sign(s) produce in the body are opposite to those signs form in the neutral space. In this category, the signs produce when hand morpheme attaches with movement orientation and any of the body part location such as head, face, nose, mouth, `ear, chest and hand, see (Gwammaja, 2018: 40). Below are some examples of body signs :



Ci 'to eat'



Gani 'see or look'



Ni 'I'

Hand's Configuration in Hausa Deaf Grammatical Category

Hand plays important role in any sign grammatical formation in Hausa Sign Language. The hand shape comprises movement (straight and arc), location (space or body) and an orientation (finger selection and palm facing).

Noun Signs

Noun signs refers to the name of person, place, animal or things and can be produced when the hand morphemes attach with movement and orientation morphemes (palm facing and finger selection), as well as either in neutral space or body locations. See examples:



Budurwa 'matured girl'



Yarinya 'girl'



Bazawara 'Divorced woman'

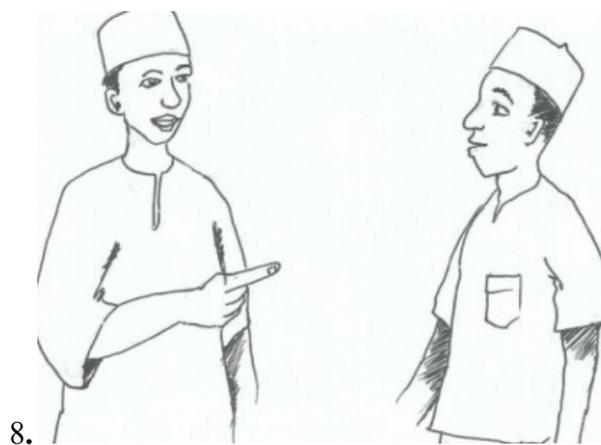
Figure 4, demonstrates hand movement in arc directly to the chest location (breast) of the signer with bowing fingers and palm facing the signer. This indicates sign of breast at its peak which refers to *budurwa* ‘matured girl’ in HSL. In figure 5, the sign of *yarinya* ‘girl’ produces when the hand moving to the ear location with bending fingers and palm facing the right side of the earring location. Finally, figure 6 shows the sign of divorced woman, commonly known as *bazawara* in Hausa community. The sign forms as a result of hand movement to chest location ‘breast’ with all fingers extension and palm facing signer body.

Pronoun Signs

Pronoun signs in HSL refer to signs that are used to replace the name of person(s) or things which always appearing at NP (subject) and NP (object) and indicate number(s) and gender in the morphosyntactic configuration. See from figures 7-9;



7. *Ni* ‘I’



8. *Kai/Ke* ‘you’



9.

Shi ‘he/him’



Ita ‘she/her’

Figure 7, demonstrates hand moves in arc directly to the chest location of the signer with an extension of an index finger and palm facing the signer. This indicates first person, muscular/ feminine, singular (1st per, m/f sg). In fig 8, the hand moves straight with an extension of an index finger and palm facing the right side of the signer to the direction of the addressee, which signifies the second person, muscular/ feminine, singular (2nd per, m/f sg). Finally figure 9, shows hand movement (straight) on the space with an extension of index finger to the right or left side location, to indicate male or female (he/him & she/her).

Verb Signs

Verb refers to an action sign for a word. In Hausa Sign Language, there are so many signs for action, which formed at both neutral space and body locations. Below are some examples:



10.

Gani 'to see'



11.

Ci 'to eat'



12.

Ja 'to pull'



13.

Tura 'to push'

In 10, the hand moves in arc directly to the eye location of the signer, with an extension of an index finger and palm facing the signer. This shows action sign for *gani* 'to see'. In 11, the sign of *ci* 'to eat' forms when the hand moving close to mouth location with bending fingers and palm facing the down. As in 12, the action sign of *ja* 'to pull' produces when the double hands move to the neutral space and pulling back at the same time to signer's body. Then, in 13, the hand moves away from the signer's body to neutral space, with an extension of fingers and palm facing away from the signer.

Adverbs Signs

Almost all the adverb signs produce in HSL are indicated the signs of place, time and manner etc. No sign can be produced in any sign language without using the hand morpheme. Below are the examples:



14.

Nan 'here'



15

Can 'there'



16.

Yau 'today'



17.

Jiya 'yesterday'

In addition, fig.14 demonstrates the movement of hand straight to neutral space, with an extension of an index finger and palm facing down in signing *nan* 'here' and for the sign of *can* 'there' hand moves in arc/straight to neutral space location, with an extension of an index finger and palm facing away from the signer. Therefore, the sign of *yau* - 'today' - produces as a result of straight movement of hand to neutral space, with an extension of an index finger and palm facing down.

Finally, fig. 17 shows how the hand moves back in arc to cross the shoulder of the signer and instantly moves forward, with an extension of index finger as well as the palm facing front of the signer.

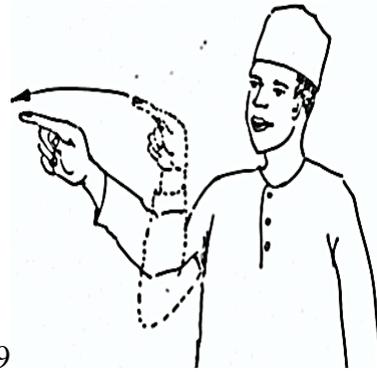
7.4 Demonstrative Signs

Demonstrative signs in HSL refer to lexical signs that can be produced via pointing to the location where person (s) or thing(s) are located and their number (s) will be specified. There are two types of demonstrative signs: proximity and distance. The sign describes how close or far away an object (s) or person (s) be at a specific location from the signer body.



18.

Wannan 'this'



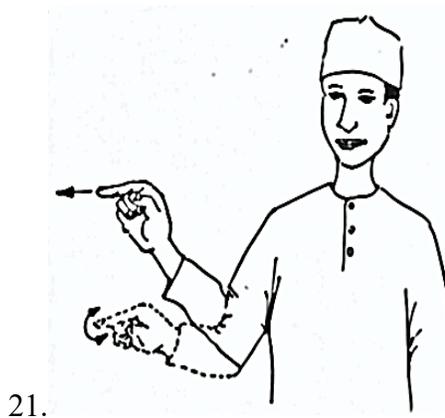
19

Wancan/Waccan 'that'



20.

Waxannan 'these'



21.

Waxancan 'those'

The sign of *wannan* 'this' produces when the hand moving away from the signer towards the space location using an index finger extension, with the palm facing down. This indicates how close the location of person or object is from the signer's body. In figure 19, the sign of *wancan* or *waccan* 'that' is formed as result of the hand movement (straight) into the space location, with the index

finger extension and palm facing downward. The sign involves pointing to a person or object that is located far away from the signer. There is no gender difference in these forms of signs (*wancan* and *waccan*). The dotted lines in the above figures indicate the starting point of the global (primary) movement of the sign. Therefore, in figure 20, the hand moves (straight) to the neutral space with an extension of index finger as well as the palm facing leftward. Slightly, a repetition of movement is made when the sign of *waxannan* ‘these’ is produced. The sign employs to point at the people or objects positioned nearer to the signer body. The above arrow points at persons or items directly.

Finally, in 21, the sign of *waxanacan* ‘those’ is produced when hand is moved straight to the neutral space, with an extension of index finger and palm facing downward, slightly a local movement of sweeping is also added. The above sign uses to point persons or objects that are positioned far away from the signer. The dotted lines in this figure describe the path (secondary) movement in sign production.

Conclusion

Results of this study on Hand’s configuration in Hausa deaf grammatical items indicated that the hand adopts a shape in any lexical sign formation. The shape comprises hand movement, selection of finger or fingers during the movement, as well as location and palm facing. All signs of grammatical class in HSL are formed in both neutral space and body locations.

The study discusses Hausa Sign Language and illustrates how nouns, verbs, adverbs, pronouns and demonstrative signs are produced within the language. Each sign represents a class of grammar it belongs to in HSL. The pictures of signs used describe how nouns, pronouns, adverbs, and demonstrative are produced. This particular discrepancy is given by the combination of hand position, movement, location and orientation of the signs.

This paper contributes to the grammar of hearing and non-hearing (deaf) people in HSL. It also identifies that Hausa sign language has grammatical categories, which are contrary to the other sign languages in the world.

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