

PREFACE

Sign language linguistics has become increasingly important in the past years because it has presented new ideas about language structure and universals of language – whether spoken or signed. The analyses of the structure of sign languages have also provided theoretical insights into questions as the origin of language, language acquisition and language change. While sign languages in the USA and in Europe are relatively well researched, systematic analyses of African sign languages have only recently begun and were carried out in South and East Africa.

This book is the first comprehensive account of a West African sign language. It is a descriptive analysis of the phonology, morphology and lexicon of Hausa Sign Language (HSL) as used by deaf people in Kano State, northern Nigeria. The book is aimed at different groups of readers: on the one hand at linguists, both those concerned with African languages and those working in the field of sign language linguistics, on the other hand, at the deaf in Kano State and those living and working with them. I have therefore chosen to divide the book into two parts, including a comparatively large ‘background’-part which serves as an introduction to the different fields.

In Chapter 1, I will present a sketch of Hausa history, culture and language. Chapter 2 looks at the deaf community in Kano State and their organisations, at the status of deaf people in Hausa society, at education programmes for the deaf in Nigeria with particular focus on Kano State, and at the language situation in schools for the deaf. In Chapter 3, I will give an overview of the history of sign language studies and its main concerns; I will also describe data collection and explain the transcription system.

The main part of the book is devoted to the analysis of HSL itself. The description focuses on manual signs. In Chapter 4, I will look at the phonological structure of signs and present an inventory of the sublexical components in HSL, i.e. the manual and non-manual parameters. Chapter 5 is concerned with morphological processes in HSL. I will investigate different types of polymorphemic signs which can be composed both through simultaneous and sequential processes. In Chapter 6, the role of iconicity in the established lexi-

con will be examined. I will also briefly describe instances of lexical borrowing and of lexical variation in HSL. A summary is given at the beginning of each chapter.

The analysis does not follow any particular model; however, each chapter in the main part of the book is introduced with an overview of different models of analysis and current issues of debate. Further references which are of relevance for the data discussed are given within each chapter in footnotes. Where necessary or useful, comparison with better researched sign languages is included. I have chosen to transcribe a large number of sign examples to make the data more easily accessible to the reader even at the risk of producing a rather bulky piece of work. A large amount of space has also been allowed for culture-specific vocabulary.

This book is a revised version of my 1997 PhD dissertation. Literature since that date has not been included. The book does not claim to be a complete description of HSL; the analysis is open to revision and modification. More detailed research is needed in a number of areas, for example regarding the syntactic structure of HSL, the relationship of HSL to spoken Hausa, and the question of lectal variation within HSL. Documentation of sign languages such as HSL can contribute to the search for language universals in general and sign language universals in particular. It could also help in testing and possibly modifying models which have been developed for the linguistic analysis of sign languages to date. Despite problems of distance and finance it is hoped that the data presented in this book will provide the practical basis for the production of a Hausa Sign Language dictionary.