Nicaraguan Sign Language
ISO 639-3: ncs

Idioma de Signos Nicaraguense
History of Nicaragua and the Deaf Population

I. Pre-Revolutionary Period (1939-1979)

- Nicaragua under the Somoza Dynasty. The country was ruled by military dictatorship.

- There are Deaf Communities in the country
  - Many deaf individuals lived in isolation; no contact with other deaf individuals
  - Often times the only deaf member of their immediate and extended families
  - Deaf individuals developed home signs and gestural systems to communicate with family
  - There is no educational options for the deaf

- 1946 the first special education school was establish in Managua, Nicaragua
  - The founders of the school were interested in establishing a school for developmentally delayed students not deafness
  - The school accepted children with mental retardation, blindness, deafness, and motor disabilities
  - Initially 10 deaf and hard-of-hearing students enrolled
  - Education available only up to primary and elementary grade level
  - Deaf students taught a strictly oral curriculum- lip-reading, speech and voice lessons
History of Nicaragua and the Deaf Population

II. Post Revolutionary Period (1979-1990)

- The Sandinista Revolution a socialist movement party overthrows the Somoza dictatorship
  - One of the philosophies of the included a dedication to universal education
  - Basic philosophy for education of the deaf did not change after the Sandinista revolution
  - Special education schools were incorporated into the national system;
  - An additional fifteen schools were opened in every administrative district

- The Deaf Community begins to emerge
  - 1979 fifty deaf students enrolled in the special education schools
  - By 1983 the number of students jumped to 400 deaf students
  - Sign Language use was prohibited in the classroom;
  - Although students used sign during recess and away from school
Three Distinct Periods of NSL History

I. Pre-Contact Period
   a) Prior to interaction among deaf individuals in Nicaragua;
   b) Use of isolated home sign systems in families with deaf members;
   c) Earliest (small) schools with oralist programs for deaf students

II. Initial Contact Period
   a) Establishment of a larger school in San Judas;
   b) Establishment of vocational program for adolescent.

III. Sustained Contact Period
   a) Establishment of a Deaf association
   b) Control and direction of Deaf association assumed by Deaf members;
   c) Beginning of Dictionary projects;
   d) Deaf individuals as linguistic models in schools

(Senghas, Senghas, Pyers. 2005)
Children Influence Language Evolution

Pre-Contact (Prior to the 1970’s)
- Homesigns- (substrate) an idiosyncratic gesture system that is action based used primarily with hearing family members

Initial Contact (~1977 through mid-1980’s)
- Previously isolated deaf students began interacting and exchanging homesigns
- First cohort of students (now in their mid to late thirties) to create language
- Partial-crystallized pidgin called Lenguaje de Signos Nicaraguenses
- LSN still in use by older signer in the community

Sustained Contact (mid-1980’s to present)
- Second cohort of younger students (as young as four years old) used the first language/pidgin sign and started to modify sign system
- Nativization or abrupt creolization called Idioma de Signos Nicaraguense
- With in 30 years/ three decades Nicaraguan Sign Language has developed complex signs and grammatical structure
- With each new cohort of younger children NSL continues to evolve
Linguistic Structure

Phonology

The smallest contrastive units of language. Refer to how signs are structured and organized

- Handshape
- Location
- Movement
- Orientation
- Facial expression
Linguistic Structure
Spatial Modulations

• Grammatical devise not found in spoken language
• Typical building blocks in the grammar of sign languages, found in all sign language
• Perform various functions, such as indicating person or number; provide deictic, locative, or temporal information; or indicating grammatical relationships, such as a verb’s subject and object
• Examples: “cup” “tall” modifies “cup”
Linguistic Structure
Morphology and Syntax

• Verbs- can be states as nouns. Example: “sit” “chair”
• Spatial verb agreement- such as a pointing motion following the verb or directional orientation that associates it with a previously established referent
• Inflectional verb morphology- process of adding grammatical information to units that already exist. Example: SIT- becomes SIT-FOR-A-LONG-TIME
• Inflections included number inflection, person inflection, position or orientation inflection, and aspectual markers.
• Noun classifier system
• Topicalization
• Classifiers
Bibliography


Bibliography


