Younger Deaf People’s Attitudes Toward American Sign Language Structure

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation is divided into 6 Chapters: 1) Introduction, 2) Literature Review, 3) Pear Story Study, 4) The Experiment, 5) Discussion, and 6) Conclusion. This dissertation discusses word order and discourse strategies in older users of American Sign Language (ASL) and the added component of data on the younger generation’s ideology based on what they thought about which order is ASL and which is not ASL. My aim for this dissertation is to compare ASL discourse to perceptions, especially in areas where people are noticing that young people are using ASL differently and in ways that may be influenced by English. I also included the ideology of ASL word order. Nowadays, on social media, people claim that ASL users use ASL “incorrectly”. Deaf education systematically has forced English influence into ASL for years. This may be “why” SVO word order happened (this will be explained in depth in literature review, in Chapter 2). Thus, it seems like the younger generation is trying to “take ASL back” and are overly critical of other young people’s signing as I have seen frequently through social media. The younger generation may or may not see older signers as “better” in ASL, as it will be discussed in Chapter 4. I show that the younger generation indeed have the ideology of ASL being a SOV language that did not align with real world ASL. The younger generation accepted various ASL structures such as: SOV, SVO, the use of adpositions, unspecified/specified verbs and classifiers. Even though the younger generation know the ideology, some of them could not tell the difference between SOV and SVO structures.

In this chapter, I will discuss 1) The Research Questions, 2) Why is this Dissertation is Important: positionality, and 3) Roadmap of the Rest of the Dissertation.

1.1 The Research Questions

The research questions are: what are younger ASL signers’ opinions about the word order
strategies used by the older signers and what are their ideologies about the ASL? These research questions are presented in depth in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

I believe the “correct” version as perceived by younger signers is probably what younger signers believe to be an older version of ASL, but there is no documentation of that. Nevertheless, it seems that people perceive that the “correct” ASL is older, which is why they expect older signers to use it and younger signers to not use it. My hypothesis in regards to why younger signers believe the “correct” version is older versions of ASL is that younger signers believe that older signers did not have access to education as we currently have and that education has resulted in the “English-like” word order of ASL.

1.2 Why This Dissertation is Important: My Positionality

Coming from a fourth generation Deaf family, I had no problem with language access when growing up, in contrast with some Deaf children of hearing parents. I never had to think twice about how to communicate. From infancy, my parents were huge advocates for the Deaf community: for example in helping make closed captioning happen in the 1990s, making sure that the Deaf club in Pittsburgh stayed open, supporting early language acquisition, picking fights with educators to ensure that I had an education that was better than theirs. You see, my father did not go beyond a past high school diploma (my mother had an associate degree), but they knew what needed to be done. They knew ASL was imperative, as it tied to their Deaf identity and pride.

When I first realized that English was different from ASL in different ways, I would question my parents, hearing teachers, my grandparents, the Deaf senior citizen club, and any older people that I associated with in Deaf club about why they were different. I kept receiving answers such as: “I don’t know but that’s the way it is”, “that is ASL’s way”, “ASL is for signing, English is for speaking, that is why they’re different”, “you’re Deaf, you wouldn’t understand”, “ASL tend switch words, unlike English and ASL do not need articles”, etc. Those replies never gave me satisfactory answers to questions I wanted answers to. I was never able to get a straight
explanation of what ASL is, it was also a bunch of “you already know”, “you use ASL, that. So you know”, and/or “you know what I mean”. It was like it was something we should know.

The students at the Deaf school, my parents and the other Deaf people in the Deaf club would mention how a newcomer or other new Deaf person coming in our circle is signing in “English-like word order”. Or they might say, “oh, they’re not signing in ASL” or “not that ASL”. Growing up, I heard ASL was an SOV language more than I can count. Or being SOV makes the signing ‘ASL’ along with amazing clear facial expressions. I was told by other Deaf people, my Deaf friends, my Deaf family, Deaf people from the Deaf club that using ‘not enough’ facial expressions or using word order that is not SOV would be considered ‘not ASL’. I absorbed and acquired these beliefs; I’ve never had a formal ASL education like I received in English, so I never questioned anything. That is, not until a bit later in life.

I would like to think that the final straw for me was when I started to associate with hearing people in high school. When I started teaching them signs, they would ask me the same questions: “why is it that way?” and “what does that mean in English?”. I would find myself getting frustrated because I couldn’t answer the questions and to be frank, a bit embarrassed that I couldn’t explain and understand my own language myself.

Not until I went to college.

I took linguistics 101 class for fun and everything drew me in and suddenly made sense. I started to question everything and myself. All my life, I was TOLD what ASL should be and ‘how it is’ without an explanation. I took it in and the information became my beliefs, just because it is what a Deaf person in the Deaf community does. And then here I was, learning things that were almost opposite of my belief. There was a lot to unpack and accepting that ASL is changing, just like any language. But some of us didn’t want it to change and tried to fight against change for a long time. Is this wrong? No. It showed that the Deaf communities are rooted to the language. However, it was a wake-up call for me.

My dad, like me, is interested in languages but he always have told me that he never had a ‘right’ education and confidence (English-related) to go where he wanted to go. Naturally, I
was excited to tell my dad about what I have learned and showed him all of the ASL grammar and rules. He would start to ponder and ask more questions. He would shake his head with a hint of disappointment, “I wish I knew this before…”

However, not all Deaf people are like my dad, analyzing and questioning what ASL is or how ASL works and being unbiased. After getting a formal education on what ASL is (in college), I find myself analyzing people while they signed- in person and through videos on social media. Deaf people with no linguistics background, let alone a formal ASL education, kept criticizing the other deaf people’s ASL when their ASL did not break any ASL grammatical rules. It came to me that what they were criticizing was not necessarily about the “rules”, but they were trying to keep ASL as it is or as it was; trying to take the language back to the way it ‘used’ to be. I’m not sure if the community is afraid of the language change or they just feel empowered to “talk” about their language, because they can and/or have the right to do so. I have been told by some Deaf people that the older generation is “more ASL” than today’s generation. As what they call today’s generation’s ASL- ‘Englishlized’, because they have more access to education (to English). I will not deny that I thought the same way.

This, is what led me to do this research. As a Deaf person, I wanted to promote awareness within the Deaf communities how ASL (and any language) work. This passion led me to have access to this side of the linguistics world that is not exactly accessible for everyone. Regardless of how disappointed I was to discover some things that are not true in regards to my belief, I wanted to bring this access as well to my community.

There is almost-to-none research related to ideology within Deaf communities and I want to investigate in that area. I’ve seen some Deaf people made comments about how ASL is a SOV language and there is some controversy within community (mostly on social media) about the use of ASL. The older signers used both SOV and SVO word orders based on the findings in Chapter 3, which do the younger sighers perceive as correct ASL? With this being said, I’m trying to do scientifically research about what younger signers perceive as the “correct” or “incorrect” use of ASL. I want to see how many people have similar beliefs and/or how many belief systems there may be.
1.3 Roadmap of the Rest of the Dissertation

It is important to note that I will be using the usage-based approach for this dissertation. To describe what a usage-based perspective is; a language structure is considered to be emergent from how languages are used and is mediated by general cognitive mechanisms such as prototype categorization, rich memory, and analogical and inferential reasoning (see Lepic, 2019:1; Langacker, 1988; Barlow & Kemmer, 2000; Tomasello, 2003; Baybee, 2010; Ibbotson, 2013; Christiansen & Chater, 2016a; b; Lieven 2016). The usage-based perspective on the human capacity for language is in contrast to approaches which instead attribute linguistic structure to an innate, highly abstract, and language-specific endowment (Lepic, 2019:1-2). The usage-based framework considers grammar to be emergent from repeated instances of language use, across historical timescales (Lepic, 2019:2).

Usage-based accounts characterize linguistic knowledge in terms of recurring chunks of structure that are represented in the minds of speakers at varying strengths, according to the discourse contexts in which they are encountered (Lepic, 2019: 4). Under a usage-based approach, linguistic knowledge is emergent from language experience, with abstract schematic representations arising from our human ability to recognize correspondences in form and meaning across our individual experiences with language (Lepic, 2019: 21).

In Chapter 2, the literature review, I will discuss Deaf culture and Deaf communities, Deaf education, linguistics structure, and attitude and ideologies studies. Those topics are important and relevant to this dissertation as the use of ASL is a big part of Deaf culture and communities. Deaf education, as well as educational policy is always a major topic of controversy in Deaf communities, which makes it equally important to mention, since it may influence the use of ASL.

The linguistics structure section mentions word order, phonologically similar and phonologically dissimilar signs, unspecified /specified verbs, directional verbs, and classifiers. Those structures were based on the findings in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 data, which will be explained in details in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4.
The attitude and ideologies studies ends Chapter 2 with the explanation of similar and different towards ASL. There are a lot of articles and readings about attitudes and ideologies among hearing people towards Deaf (communities and education), however, there are almost none about Deaf people’s attitude and ideologies within the communities. Despite the insufficient readings, I discuss how Deaf people seem want to ‘take ASL back’ nowadays and based on Hill (2012), Kusters (2014), Hou (2017), Kanapell (1989), Reagan (2011), Krausneker (2015) and Spooner (2020), I was able to explain the attitude and ideologies I encountered in this dissertation. I discuss the attitudes and ideologies I encountered in this dissertation, so this research expands the limited research available on attitudes and ideologies of younger Deaf ASL users.

In Chapter 3, the Pear Story, I will briefly explain about the Noschese (2019) research, and how this research resulted in the selection of sentence strategies to use for the experiment used in this dissertation. Sentence strategies such as the choice of SOV/SVO sentence structure, the use of adpositions, and the use of classifier verbs, were chosen for the experiment. The experiment will be explained in detail in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the methods used in the experiment, the selection of sentence structures from Noschese (2019) and the creation of more sentence structures for the survey/experiment, the data, and the findings/results. I also discuss in depth about the specific linguistic structures mentioned earlier in this section.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the interviews I had with 10 participants from varying backgrounds, including coming from a Deaf or hearing family and type of school attended (mainstream or special Deaf school), among other variables. This chapter is where interviewees’ attitudes and ideologies come to light especially. This is also where I discuss my ideologies and attitude, how it differ from the interviewees.

In the conclusion Chapter 6, I summarize the whole dissertation and discuss about the future research possibilities in regards to this experiment and findings.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review discusses issues related to Deaf culture and community history, Deaf education, the linguistic structure of ASL, and ideology, all of which directly relate to the experiment performed in this dissertation. It is necessary to note the importance of having those specific components of literature review: since this research is about American Sign Language (ASL) which is used by Deaf people in Deaf Communities and is a vital part of Deaf Culture. More so with Deaf education, where I discuss the influence of English in the word order and/or the ideology and attitude from Deaf people. The education policy has had an impact in Deaf education, which will be explained in the section on Deaf education. Word order is one of the main parts of the research, where I discuss about the original structure of ASL and the structure of other signed languages word order and how ASL may evolve over time. Lastly, the attitude and ideology section discusses about the attitude of Deaf people towards ASL and its usage and their beliefs on how/what ASL should look like.

2.1 Deaf Culture and Deaf Communities

As I explained previously, ASL is a vital part of Deaf culture and Deaf communities, which is why it is necessary to have a basic understanding of this research. It is important to understand where Deaf culture and Deaf communities come from; a root cause of the research. As Ladd (2003) quoted Baker and Padden: “With regard to a definition of ‘Deaf communities’ from within or in sympathy with Deaf discourse, perhaps the most concise and useful working definition if provided by Baker and Padden (1978: 4): The Deaf communities comprise those Deaf and hard of hearing individuals who share a common language, common experiences and values, and a common way of interacting with each other, and with hearing people.”

There is no question the most important part of Deaf culture identity is ASL (Reagan, 2010) in America. “Deaf cultural identity presupposes communicative competence in ASL, and is impossible without it. As Jerome Schein explains, “Being Deaf does not in itself make one a member of the Deaf community. To understand this, one has to remember that the distinguishing feature of membership in the Deaf community is how one communicates” (1984 pg. 130). It is not merely signing that is necessary; it is, specifically the use of ASL” (Reagan, 2010: 13).

In 1817, the first public Deaf school was established in the U.S. when Laurent Clerc came to America with T.H. Gallaudet to provide Deaf education for Deaf children (Woodward 1975; Frishberg, 1975). French Sign Language (LSF) was brought to America through the education system and became creolized with local sign languages already in existence in the United States (Woodward 1978). While Woodward (1978) had shown through processes of historical change that ASL had to have developed from creolization of LSF and local sign languages, it was not until Groce’s 1985 book on Martha’s Vineyard Sign Language that one of these sign languages was empirically documented. Groce demonstrated that the indigenous sign language of Martha’s Vineyard (Martha's Vineyard Sign Language) came into existence in the United States in the late 1600s. That tells us that Deaf people in America have been around before 1817 and had their own language(s) before LSF was brought in.

In 1985, the normal rate of babies being born Deaf in the Western world was between 0.01%-0.02% (it is believed that it’s higher in places where there were poor hygiene and medical conditions) (Kusters, 2010). Hill (2012) claimed the numbers have changed significantly, however he did not provide percentages. The approximately statistics for Deaf babies/children has gone up. Approximately 8% of Deaf children in US have at least one parent who is Deaf or hard of hearing, about 4.8% of Deaf children have one hearing parent and one Deaf or hard of hearing parent, about 3.5% have two Deaf or hard of hearing parents, 92% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents (Hill, 2012:25-26). It is unknown how many homes uses ASL as the home language and it is high likely that the Deaf children with both hearing parents are not exposed to ASL at home (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004). Thus, it is important to note that 92% of Deaf children with two hearing parents are not exposed to ASL.
2.2 Deaf Education

For years, there have been controversies about how Deaf people should be taught. Deaf education has been pulled in several different directions but the majority of them are English-based instruction. ASL was looked down because it was thought to have no structure and was considered “broken English”. That attitude and influence has impacted Deaf people greatly, which is why it is necessary to understand the history and background of Deaf education in this chapter.

Before 1817, there were no public schools for Deaf people in the United States. From 1817 to 1867, there were no oral schools in the U.S. Mason Cogswell, a physician and the father of a Deaf child named Alice, contacted T.H. Gallaudet, a minister, to ask if he would help establish a school for Deaf children in the United States. Gallaudet went to England, where he visited the British school founded by Thomas Braidwood, but there were difficulties in establishing collaboration. Later on the same trip to England Gallaudet attended a lecture on French education of Deaf people. At this lecture in London, T.H. Gallaudet met Sicard, and two Deaf teachers, Jean Massieu and Laurent Clerc. Gallaudet accompanied Sicard, Massieu, and Clerc to Paris, visited the French school and convinced Clerc to come to the United States and help him to establish Deaf schools (see Woodward 1975, 1978 and Frishberg, 1975). Deaf education in the United States developed with strong influence from France, and ASL developed from a creolization of LSF with Martha’s Vineyard Sign Language (a local sign language) and possibly other local sign languages already in usage in the U.S (Woodward, 1978).

During the time of 1817-1868, many educators for the Deaf were Deaf up to 42% in 1868 and taught through sign language. However, the decline of Deaf educators happened when oralism, a system where Deaf people learn to communicate through speech and lip-reading instead of sign language, came into the picture in the beginning in 1867 and intensifying in 1880, after the Milan Conference. Afterwards in the U.S.; there was a long battle between oralism and ASL in the education system. In history, many modern language policies within Deaf education have been founded on auditory-based assumptions about ASL and English (Nover, 1995: 109). Alexander Bell was the ‘face’ of oralism and was against the use of ASL. It didn’t help that the
Congress of Milan in 1880 that supported the oralism and it had a huge impact in the United States, as well as worldwide, as they declare “the method of articulation should have preference over that of signs in the instruction and education of the deaf and dumb” (Van, C.J.V., & Crouch, B.A., 1989).

Oralism became a threat for sign languages, as American Annuals of the Deaf kept records of Deaf teachers over the years: the highest was 42% of Deaf teachers in 1868, then the number declined gradually to 7% in 1975. As the numbers for Deaf teachers declined, oralism went up from 7.5% in 1882 to 80% in 1919 (Van, C.J.V., & Crouch, B.A., 1989). However, when Stokoe’s work of proving that ASL is, indeed, a language in 1960s with the expansion of sign language research in the 1970s and 1980s; ASL slowly made its comeback in the education system. The attitudes towards Deafness and sign language also improved. Nevertheless, while ASL in the United States has grown, there are still threats to it. Even though ASL was finally getting more respect and attention in school environments, however, the clinical/medical perspective had more power on Deaf education especially with the promotion of cochlear implants by the medical community.

The growth of technology is not necessarily a bad thing, however, it has become a concern for attacking the core value of Deaf culture and linguistic values (Reagan, 2010), especially when cochlear implants have become the first choice when it comes to Deaf babies with hearing parents. The medical professionals has also encouraged those who receive the cochlear implants not to use ASL and not to be part of the Deaf culture and Deaf communities. The numbers of Deaf infants and children received cochlear implants have increased rapidly. Deaf people view this as cultural and linguistic genocide (Reagan, 2010). That also came with the loss of Deaf residential schools since the mainstream schools have become the primary option. Deaf residential schools are the place where the language of Deaf children (with hearing parents) really develops.

By 1986, only 3 out of 10 Deaf children in the United States attended Deaf residential schools and have gone up since that time. The majority of Deaf children are placed in mainstream schools where they have a special class for the Deaf students or regular classes with an interpreter or special resource teacher (Lang, G.H., 2003). The study of history of Deaf
education shows that the neglect of practice (neglecting the use of ASL instruction and teaching methods/strategies for Deaf children) and ignorance, such as: not knowing how Deaf children learn and thinking that speech will help with spelling and reading are not new. There were different methods (Signed Exact English (SEE and SEE2), Cued Speech, simultaneous communication (SimCom)², and other mode of communication methods in Deaf education system, yet there are still the use of hands to communicate (rather than speech only) (see Johnson, 1989, Reagan, 2010, and section 2.2.1).

The examples as shown in Figure 2.1 (ASL), Figure 2.2 (PSE), and Figure 2.3 (SEE) below for English sentence of “The ball is red”, on the continuum of ASL to Manual English.

Figure 2.1: BALL RED IX(ball)

Figure 2.2: BALL I-S (two pictures) RED

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² SimCom originally developed as signed using ASL vocabulary in word order, without ASL and English morphology; an artificial system representing English morphology.
The English-like communication methods were developed because the hearing educators thought that only English was suitable for education for Deaf people. ASL, also used with hands, was still not encouraged. It’s often the case that with Deaf children who are born in hearing families the natural language of ASL is not used or encouraged. In many schools, sign language was generally a “last resort” for an “oral failure”.

To achieve social and political goals within Deaf education, Deaf education is often manipulated. Traditional researchers and educators have translated the distinctiveness of their own auditory-based experiences into philosophical arguments that have served as guidelines for preparing Deaf children and young adults to participate in a larger (hearing) society without including Deaf community and their decisions about the education of Deaf children (Nover, 1995: 115). Even though there are scholars that do sign language research and promote bilingualism education with ASL and written English, however, the majority of hearing people and people in the medical field follow ideologies that are English-based through auditory-based (speech or signed in English word order) over Deaf culture.

Exact excerpts from few different articles that I thought worth mentioning that summarizes the long grueling history of Deaf education:

“Most Deaf children of Deaf parents also function better in academic settings than Deaf children of hearing parents, who are forced to imitate English as a first language and lack exposure to their natural language” (Nover, 1995: 115).
“The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature on educating deaf students includes little reference to the heterogeneity of deaf learners. Both then, and in modern times, many young deaf people have suffered poor education, as influential figures have made sweeping generalizations about communication, language, and learning” (Lang, G.H., 2003: 11).

“Deaf people are not only a special case, but they are a case in which those out concerned- deaf people themselves- have historically been largely ignored in policy decisions, and this includes decisions about sign language. A great deal of language planning activity related to sign languages remains largely controlled by and in the hands of hearing people, most often hearing educators of deaf children. The concern, then, with the potential for “hearing hegemony” in such efforts is both real and substantial, and needs to be taken into account (see Eichmann, 2009; Turner, 2009)” (Reagan, 2010: 181).

2.2.1 Education Policy

According to Reagan 2010, there are four different kinds of “signing”: the natural sign languages (that are used by culturally Deaf people); contact sign languages (that are used by Deaf and hearing people to communicate efficiently); manual sign codes (hearing people created to put an effort to represent spoken languages in visual format which is usually in education system); and signed communication (used by hearing people only in certain situations (Reagan, 2010). Sign languages are actual languages that have grammatical rules that are different from the majority spoken language(s). As for contact sign language, this happens when Deaf children with hearing parents (it also happens vice versa) communicate with the elements of both natural sign language and spoken language. This happens often and it sometimes will be called
pidginized and contact signing. As for manual signed codes, they usually come in educational settings where the students will be provided with the access to spoken language with some kind of visual/gestural modality with speech, as shown in Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.3 in section 2.2. Like I mentioned, the use of hands will still need to be used. Figure 2.4 below from Reagan (2010) shows a ‘range’ of what is ‘more’ ASL to ‘more’ English. There are so many ways to NOT to use ASL (such as Signed English, cued speech, SimCom, etc.), (especially in school system and oppressions), it may influence the word order and attitudes that Deaf people have.

Figure 2.4

2.3 Linguistic Structure

2.3.1 Word Order

Word order is a big part of this research. Therefore, it's imperative to understand the definition of word order and its background for languages in general, especially ASL which will be discussed in this section.
Basic word order in a language is the position of the verb to its subject and direct object (O’Grady, 2015). In academic literature, the term ‘basic word order’ is often used with a specific definition in mind. It has been variously defined as the underlying word order of a language, the most unmarked, pragmatically neutral and/or frequently occurring word order, or the word order which, if taken to be the underlying order of all sentences in the language, generates the simplest overall grammar (Pichler, 2001).

Word order has six types ranked from most frequent to least frequent: SOV (47.5%), SVO (41.1%), VSO (8%), VOS (2.1%), OVS (0.9%) and OSV (0.34%) (Mithun, 1992 and Dryer, 2013). As we can see that SOV and SVO are the most common word order. The word order of OVS and OSV, as in the object comes first are rare in any language (Dryer 2013).

The word order for sign languages may allow no variation or some variation. Modern Laos Sign Language allowed no variation in basic word order for simple statements and wh-questions; SOV with nonreversible Subject and Object and SVO with reversible Subject and Object. Wh-question words are always at the end of sentences (E. Noschese. 2019 Ms. The Positioning of WH Words in Modern Laos Sign Language. Honolulu. University of Hawaii at Manoa, September 17, 2019), hence it has a rigid word order. On the other hand, ASL seem to have a more flexible word order which will be explained shortly in this selection.

Fischer (1975) discussed whether ‘standard’ ASL word order is SOV or SVO, or even OSV. In the 1970’s the word order in ASL was considered to be SVO, not including topicalization (indicated by pauses, head tilts, or raising of eyebrows) (Fischer, 1975). Fischer’s article used one hundred-year old evidence from French Sign Language, some ASL data from the 1970s, and internal ASL evidence that ASL was probably originally SOV (see Fischer 1975). As for the only earliest recorded of ASL found via film from the 1900s, the researchers argued that we cannot assume or depend that it is an accurate representation of ASL based on historical oppressions of natural ASL from educators and leaders (Supalla, 2004). It is important to note that the definition of what is ‘proper’ may be different from the 1990s compared to today - that the ‘proper’ form of signing will be a form of English (Supalla, 2004). Fischer believed the changes were influenced by English word order. Fischer attributes the pressure that caused the shift from SOV to SVO to prestige of and contact with English (1975).
An 1871 article written by Keep, who observed the surface part of sign language, documented sentence structure, possibly a basic word order: “Thirdly, inversion, or the placing of the object before the action, is, it will be seen, a striking feature of the sign-language. That in this respect it follows the method in which all minds conceive of objects and actions, we have no doubt” (pg. 224). That may indicate that older ASL was indeed a SOV language. Keep also explained how that works in mind, seeing the object first before action. He used the example of striking a board: to see the board first with intention to strike it, rather than striking into the air because there is no board mentioned until after.

While I will not discuss the typological implications of ASL word order, however it should be mentioned that whether ASL allows more freedom of constituent ordering in the main clause (the preference of rightward or leftward movement); this type of movement gives the impression that ASL shuffles word order (which is why there is a long debate over whether it has a basic word order) (Wilbur, 1997: 98). Aarons (1994) noted that problems with limited source for ASL discourse and word order, because of the modality of the language (visual), there wasn’t enough evidence from the early days of ASL research, when it was not documented and ASL is a language that does not have orthography.

A claim was made by Friedman (1975) that ASL had no strict word order rules, but that ASL sentences structure itself was ordered in terms of the discourse principle of topic-comment: introduction of the topic, followed by the comment; and that grammatical relations, such as subject, verb, and object were not relevant to ASL sentence structure (Aarons, 1994: 26). Nevertheless of the wide variety of surface word orders in ASL, it has proved difficult to ascertain the underlying word order of the ASL sentence; the early work by Fischer and Liddell claim that there is an underlying SVO word order in ASL and that topic marking reflects a disturbance in this order (Aarons, 1994: 43). Kegel, Neidle, MacLaughlin, Hoza & Bahan (1996) emphasized that there is no free word order in ASL.

Through contact and education, spoken languages can influence the grammars of sign languages through writing, reading, and oppression. When there has been emphasis on using spoken language at the same time as signing, there is a likelihood that the spoken language word order has influenced the sign language word order. It is probably no accident that the basic
structure of ASL is SVO and has other parallels to English, while the basic structure of NihonSyuwa (NS) is SOV and has other parallels to Japanese (Fischer, S.D., & Van Der Hulst, 2003). Grosjean (1996) has pointed out that most signers are to some degree bilingual, and is common in bilingual situations for a dominant language to influence the structure of a minority one.

However, where there has not been emphasis of the use of spoken language at the same time as signing there is not a likelihood that the spoken language word has not influenced the word order of the sign language. In an article on endangered sign languages (Woodward 2018, p. 192) states:

“Original Bangkok SL (Figure 8.27), Original Chiang Mai SL, and Modern Thai SL, Ha Noi SL, Ho Chi Minh City SL (Figure 8.28), and Cambodian SL (Figure 8.29) all have basic SOV word order in declarative sentences while spoken/written Thai, spoken/written Vietnamese, and spoken/written Khmer have basic SVO word order in declarative sentences. While spoken/written Indonesian has SVO word order, Yogyakarta SL has SOV word order where subject and object are non-reversible (Figure 8.30) and SVO word order where subject and object are potentially reversible (Figure 8.31”).

That is also true for Modern Laos Sign Language (MLSL) that I documented for my first Qualifying Paper (which is not published yet). MLSL has basic SOV word order where subject and object are non-reversible and SVO word order where subject and object are reversible, while spoken/written Laos has basic SVO word order in declarative sentences (E. Noschese. 2019 Ms. The Positioning of WH Words in Modern Laos Sign Language. Honolulu. University of Hawaii at Manoa, Qualifying Paper 1).

It is important to note that even if a sign language shows the same basic word order as the spoken language, it does not follow that the sign language is therefore necessarily identical to the spoken language (Fischer, S.D., & Van Der Hulst, 2003). Also if an utterance does not follow the word order of the spoken language does not automatically mean that it is grammatical in the sign language of the community; it may be grammatical in neither in the signed nor the spoken
language of the community (Fischer, S.D., & Van Der Hulst, 2003). Several other impact of the word order should be considered: the written system, the use of classifiers, and topicalization.

2.3.2 Phonologically Similar and Not Similar Signs

Word order in ASL is highly likely to be influenced when signs in a sentence are phonologically similar and when the signs are not phonologically similar. It’s more likely that phonologically similar signs would be in SOV word order. Whereas, the signs that are not phonologically similar, it can be in either SOV or SVO word order. For example, the signs BICYCLE and PEDAL are similar. The parameters of phonology in ASL are: handshape, palm and finger orientation, location, movement, and non manual markers. The only difference between those two signs is the mouthing (non manual markers), as shown in Figure 2.5 and Figure 2.6.

Figure 2.5: BICYCLE
When the two signs are phonologically similar, it’s possible to drop the object and the sentence would not be ambiguous. With this being said, the word order will be highly likely to be in SOV word order due to the object (and the verb). The sign of BICYCLE would be “unnecessary” because the sign of PEDAL will indicate what kind of object the signer is referring to.

The verb also can be modified, depending on the object. The verb will be a bit different if the object was a tricycle and/or a unicycle, which will be discussed in the next section in section 2.3.3.

When the signs are not phonologically similar (all parameters are different from one another), the word order will be more likely to be in SVO structure. It would not be possible to drop the object in not phonologically similar sentences because it would be ambiguous.

However, as Liddell mentioned about the sentence example of “I baked bread”, those signs of BAKE and BREAD are not phonologically similar, yet this sentence will be in SOV word order: I BREAD BAKE. It is because the bread has to happen first before the baking (oven) (Liddell, 1980).

### 2.3.3 Unspecified/Specified Verbs

Dan Slobin (2004) has proposed that rhetorical style is determined by the relative accessibility of various means of expression, such as lexical items and construction types (Slobin, 2004: 223). In ASL, the modifications will often happen in verb, as action reflects the
subject/noun. There are some verbs that are specified for a particular subject, such as: humans and animals. For example, related to the way of eating a food or drinking water, the verb for EAT or DRINK for humans will differ from animals. The cultural practices and preferences reinforce habitual patterns of expressions (Slobin, 2004).

With this being said, the verbs are split into unspecified and specified verbs. Unspecified verbs are verbs that do not specify any information about the subject or object of a verb. These verbs can always be used in questions, but they cannot always be used in statements. Whereas, specified verbs are verbs which specify some information about the subject or object of a verb.

The unspecified/specified verbs can sometimes be used in questions, but they must be used in statements. For example, in Ho Chi Minh, the sign of EAT in general is different from each sign of ‘eating’ related to each fruit as shown in Figure 2.7-2.10 (The HCMCSL Production Team, 2007).

Figure 2.7

Figure 2.8
The verb EAT (7) can be used in questions such as “What did the man eat?”. However, in statements like “The man ate watermelon”, only EAT (8) can be used. The unspecified/specified verbs also can be found in non-reversible subjects and objects, which will be discussed in next section, in section 2.3.4.

### 2.3.4 Directional Verbs

In ASL, the non-reversible subjects and objects are normally in SVO word order. However, they can be in SOV word order, if it was not ambiguous, such as the use of specified verb and/or directional verb, rather than the plain verb. ASL tends to change the form of the
signs themselves to show grammatical relationships, rather than to rely on word/sign order to show those relationships (Cokely, D & Baker-Shenk, C. L. 1991).

For example, for the use of plain verb in sentence of MAN WOMAN DRAG, it is not clear on who is dragging whom. With the use of directional verb, it will be unambiguous when subject and object are mentioned before the directional verb, as shown in Figure 2.11 and Figure 2.12.

![Figure 2.11: The man drags the woman](image1)

![Figure 2.12: The woman drags the man](image2)

In these examples, Figure 2.11 shows that the verb DRAG moves from right to left and indicates that the man is the subject and that woman is the object. Whereas the inflections in the Latin and Russian examples were attached to certain nouns, the inflection that shows who is the
subject and who is the object in the ASL sentence occurs on the verb DRAG (Cokely, D & Baker-Shenk, C. L. 1991). This inflection involves changing the direction of the verb so that it moves from the spatial location of the subject (i.e. on the right) to the spatial location of the object (i.e. on the left). (Cokely, D & Baker-Shenk, C. L. 1991:32)

In their ASL grammar book, Cokely, D & Baker-Shenk, C. Cl. (1991) explained in few sentences clearly about directional verbs/inflections among languages:

“Most languages use both word/sign order and inflections as grammatical signals. However, in general, languages tend to use one kind of signal more than the other. So, for example, English and Chinese are more dependent on word order to show how symbols are related, and ASL and Latin are more dependent on inflections to show how symbols are related” (Cokely, D & Baker-Shenk, C. L. 1991:33).

Dan Slobin (2004) also mentioned Galvan and Taub report about moving from location to another:

“The hand has to move from one location to another. Galvan and Taub report that ASL frog stories give more specific information about spatial relations and movement than comparable English stories. However, in so doing, the signers tend to break up a complex path into separate elements, often followed by a composite path representation. Part of the explanation may lie in a possible boundary-crossing constraint, but on-line factors may also play a role. The organization of path information may be designed for the receiver, rather than the producer” (Slobin, 2004:243).
2.3.5 Classifiers

I am including a discussion of classifiers in this literature review, because there are classifiers in my data. I will not be going in-depth, but only to explain briefly how it may impact the data regarding word order. The grammar may have rules that change the basic word order, such as the use of classifiers- because most classifiers are anaphoric, they require antecedents, which generally must precede them; assuming the classifier is in a predicate, that predicate must then occur last (Fischer, S.D., & Van Der Hulst, 2003: 344).

Verbal classifiers are not aligned to nouns, but to verbs, normally indicating how a verb is performed. Verbal classifiers commonly referred to as classificatory verbs, which are found in some North-American Indian languages (such as those in the Athabaskan language family), some North-Australian languages, some Papuan languages and some South-American Indian languages. Different verbal stems are used for handling, existence and location of round things, long things, granular things, things in bags, etc. (Aikhenvald, 2003).

Similarly to spoken languages, classificatory verbs in sign languages belong to semantic groups of handling, location and motion. For example, Ho Chi Minh City Sign Language has different transitive verbs for giving bowls or other similar objects; giving bottles, glasses, or other similar objects; and giving pens, pencils, or other similar objects, etc. (Woodward et al. 2015). Verbal classifiers in sign languages can also categorize the intransitive subject argument in terms of orientation, stance or movement in space. ASL has what is it already called verbal classifier, for example, in ASL there are different classifier verbs for a-person-going-forward, a-vehicle-going-forward, and an-animal-going-forward. As shown in Figure 2.13 (a-vehicle-going-forward), Figure 2.14 (a-person-going-forward), Figure 2.15 (an-animal-going-forward) below.
In my data, which will be discussed in Chapter 3, there are intransitive classifier verbs such as the first, second, and third events: MAN CL: TREE-CLIMB TREE/MAN CL: TREE-CLIMB, MAN WITH GOAT CL-GO, and BOY BICYCLE CL-GO.

Instrument classifiers will cause a potential object not to occur. To give comparative examples of objects versus instruments in both English and ASL, while it is possible to use an object with the English verb ‘ride’ as in “The boy rode a bicycle”, it is not possible to use an object for the verb “go-by” as in the sentence “The boy went by bicycle.”. Instead, an instrument needs to be used. In ASL, it is impossible to use an object with the verb sign RIDE, but it is possible to use an instrument with a classifier verb in ASL: BOY BICYCLE CL-GO, where CL-GO has a 3 handshape (spread thumb, index, and mid finger).

2.4 Attitude and Ideologies Studies

As I mentioned above, word order and attitude and ideology comprise a big part of this research and it is possible that they go hand in hand. Seeing how Deaf education and culture may have made clashing impact in Deaf community and their attitudes and beliefs. Thus its imperative to include this part of the literature review to show the reader a better picture.

There are different sets of beliefs in language ideology. There is one set of beliefs about what is “natural” and ideas about what language is and how a language works. Beliefs about how “language” and reality” are related, beliefs about how communication works, and beliefs about linguistic correctness, goodness and badness, articulateness and inarticulateness all are aspects of language ideology, as are beliefs about the role of language in a person’s identity,
beliefs about how languages are learned, and beliefs about what the functions of language should be, who the authorities on language are, whether and how usage should be legislated, and so on (Johnstone, 2017: 66). Those beliefs can impact the language and the social relations in communities, by linguistic choices and language change.

The common ideology of sign languages in urbanized communities is that sign languages are associated with low status and lack of prestige (as well as attractiveness and aesthetic value), however, that did not happen in this village of Adamorobe in Ghana (Kusters, 2014). When compared to the United States (and the other signing communities), their ideologies about the shared sign language seem to be more positive. The hearing people in this village did not think any less of their Deaf people’s sign language. It also should be noted that the use of hearing aids and speech training have not been used (or spread) into most communities in Ghana. However, that does not happen as often with small villages in rural areas. As Hou (2017) visited the Quiahije Village in Southern part of Mexico, the people there were shocked that they weren’t there to provide medical treatment or teaching them literacy. When Hou wanted to film the Deaf caretakers to converse with children, they would do one or two filming sessions and call it a day. The Deaf caretakers thought it would not be beneficial for Hou to film them together because the children were too young to know sign language or that it may be too much for them to learn and that they should wait until the children were old enough to learn. It was also expected a Deaf researcher (Hou) to play an interventionist role in the lives of Deaf children (such as teaching them some signs and/or how to carry on a conversation). Whereas, the Deaf villagers expected the hearing researcher, Kate, who went with Hou to converse with the hearing families.

Kannapell (1989), Reagan (2011), and Krausneker (2015) suspected that the language attitudes from Deaf people are based on their experiences with hearing people, including hearing signers. Regarding Kannapell’s study, there was a strong relationship between attitudes towards ASL and Deaf people for Deaf signers; there was no relationship between attitudes towards English and hearing people. Kannapell suggested that the conflicting feelings came from Deaf people’s upbringing experiences and are based on misconceptions about the languages that hearing people and/or hearing educators have implanted in their thoughts that sign languages are
“broken”, “bad” and “animalistic” and that it will not help with their English which is the pedestal of “success”.

It is no secret that Deaf children say that English is hard or too strict and that ASL is better when it comes to learning different subjects in school. Sure, it is not easy to learn a language when there is limited access to it, especially for Deaf children that do not have access to the spoken modality aspect of English. Thus, Deaf children who use ASL prefer it, because it occurs in a visual modality that they find easier to access and use (Spooner, 2020). Spooner (2020) discovered that Deaf students made “liberal and indiscriminate use” of derivational morphemes, prepositions and other small words such as articles to mark that ‘this is English’. This belief also relates to Deaf children often complain that English has too many complicated features, such as the English articles, prefixes and suffixes, etc. (Spooner, 2020). The findings of this study are that Deaf students think that ASL does not have those “English words” since it was cut out of ASL. Several Deaf students drew comparison between ASL and English and decided that ASL is either broken English or a weaker language. One student mentioned that ASL syntax often follows a topic-comment or SOV structure, as opposed to the SVO syntax that is common in English (Spooner, 2020). Because ASL syntax does not match the structure that student sees and since she has studied extensively in English, she assumed that important information must be missing from the ASL sentences. The most common term that the students used was ‘missing’, which indicates (to them) that ASL does not need grammatical rules and does not have any parts of speech, which is fine because that’s the “ASL way”.

Those Deaf students in this study identified only two rules for ASL: 1) it must be signed clearly enough for the recipient to understand and 2) it has to have good facial expressions (Spooner, 2020). According to the students, as long as these two criteria are met, it’s “good ASL” (Spooner, 2020).

Possibly because of the work of Fischer and other linguists on the historical nature of ASL, possibly because of the observations that some older signers use SOV word order, the ideology in the U.S. Deaf Community that SOV structure is “correct” still remains today even though we can observe younger people using ASL differently, and in ways that may be
influenced by English. Nyle DiMarco, a well-known activist for the Deaf Community, has commented to me on how ASL today is “Englishized” (p.c., 2019). For young Deaf people, strong bonds exist between attitudes toward a language and its users, though only with regard to Deaf signers (Krausneker, 2015). Krausneker also commented that it is unlikely that attitudes on sign languages will be freed from ideological influences.

Compared to the study of spoken languages, there has been relatively little research on attitudes towards sign languages and their users. Kannapell (1989) notes that most of the research that has been carried out on sign languages focuses on structural analysis and variation, and that there is a significant lack of research on language attitudes among Deaf people (Burns, Matthews, & Nolan-Conroy, 2001). However, what we do know is that, like users of other languages, Deaf ASL users will often judge other Deaf users as to whether they are using so-called “standard ASL;” this includes judgement of people who learned ASL later in life who were born Deaf or hearing. The term “standard ASL” appeared when the linguistic studies of ASL began, it refers to a version of ASL that has been sustained and shaped by ASL teaching curriculum, canonical publications, ASL proficiency evaluation and professional organizations (Hill, 2012). The boundaries of sign languages and their use have a way to bring strong emotions in Deaf and hearing people. In social media, especially Facebook has become a place for discussions where Deaf people in the world elucidate, clarify, and debate the origins and “correctness” of certain signs (Kusters, Green, Moriarty, & Snoddon, 2020). Some ASL users have started using “new” signs de-initializing signs such as “culture,” “philosophy,” “family,” and “interview” as shown in Figure 2.16 and Figure 2.17 below (Kusters, Green, Moriarty, & Snoddon, 2020). This process can be seen as restoring of English from ASL (which is also a debate on Facebook) (Kusters, Moriarty & Snoddon, 2020).

Because of the paucity of research on language ideology in the U.S. Deaf Community, it is not possible to determine the reasons for this belief.
A common ideology within the Deaf community is that early ASL exposure and acquisition are the crucial factors in developing proficiency in standard ASL (Hill, 2012). For example, Deaf people who are proficient in ASL are either part of Deaf generational lineage, or have attended special schools for the Deaf where ASL is the norm; whereas “less proficient” users (that is, those who use another variety that “standard ASL”) are assumed to have been raised by hearing families, or to have been schooled in a mainstream education setting where ASL has a marginal role in an English-dominant curriculum (Hill, 2012). Despite ideologies about standard ASL, it is easy to observe in almost any ASL community that ASL is in fact not monolithic, and that many varieties exist side by side.

In his book on language attitudes in American Deaf communities, Hill (2012) describes the effect of standardization of ASL on signers’ attitudes:

“One result of standardization is that signers develop certain attitudes toward other signers’ use of linguistics items and features: one could assume just because the signer’s signing has more ASL forms than English-like forms, it should be ASL. However, it really depends on what is perceptually salient for the observer: (1) The signer could be perceived to be using ASL because ASL forms have a predominant presence in the signing compared to the marginal
presence of English-influenced forms; (2) the signer could be perceived to be using contact signing because ASL and English forms are equally salient even though the number of English forms is minimal; or (3) the signer could be perceived to be using English-based signing because of the striking presence of English word order and English-influenced signs that is too difficult to ignore” (Hill, 2012: 39-40).

Hill also mentioned that even in the signing of the same linguistic items, a marginal presence of English-influence forms can have an effect on someone’s perception of the signing. There is a desire to set the language apart from English and claim ASL is a separate language, and also as a way to explain why ASL users sometimes struggle with writing and reading English. This, of course, ignores systemic oppression like the lack widely-available of ASL-based education and the pervasive view among doctors that deafness is “a problem to be solved”, medically.

English-based sign systems and the privileging of oral means of communication have attempted repeatedly to undermine ASL as a linguistic and cultural treasure of the Deaf community (Hill, 2012). Despite a large body of research with evidence of ASL as a natural language, there has been a general disregard, either out of ignorance or opposition, to accepting the linguistic validity of ASL. Because of that, efforts by the Deaf community and allies to standardize and preserve ASL through dictionaries, proficiency exams, teaching materials, organizations and courses (Hill, 2012) has led to the codification of a variety of ASL that is quite different from what fluent users actually do in natural language use settings. The question of word order in ASL discourse is still not settled even after five decades, and my Pear Story data (Noschese, 2019) show that even the notion of focusing on a “basic word order” may be a flawed concept. This prospectus demonstrates that in fact a wide variety of strategies relating to dealing with basic word order exist in ASL discourse.
Chapter 3
Pear Story Study

Since research on my dissertation includes information taken from (Noschese 2019), relevant information from Noschese (2019) is discussed in this chapter. My research question for this Noschese, 2019 study was: what is the variety of word order strategies that older ASL signers use in different grammatical conditions when telling a narrative to a friend? Below I briefly describe the hypothesis, data collection, and results as they relate to the work in this dissertation.

3.1 Hypothesis

My hypothesis before starting documentation was that older signers who use an “older” version of ASL would have SOV word order in discourse settings, based on the ideology that older signers conform to the “standard”. This hypothesis was actually incorrect, the older signers have a wide range of strategies they use. I followed the Pear Film research paradigm that is well known and has been used all over the world for linguistics research in various aspects (see Chafe 1980). 4

For this dissertation, I took from Noschese 2019 word/constituent ordering strategies in three specific scenes in the film: the beginning of the story, the man with the goat, and the boy on the bicycle. These scenes were chosen because they were likely to contain transitive verbs and, as “new events” in the timeline, were also likely to contain lexical nouns for the participants.

4 The Pear Film is a six-minute film that was produced at the University of California at Berkeley in 1975 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRNSTxTpG7U). The users of languages worldwide were asked to tell what happened in the film. The goal has been to present cinematically a series of more or less natural events to multiple viewers, who are then asked to verbalize/express what they remember https://www.linguistics.ucsb.edu/research/pear-film. This film has no sound of any kind and/or subtitles. If the readers are not familiar with the film, I would recommend viewing the film before reading further.
These then became the basis for some of the stimuli that I developed for the experiment I will discuss in Chapter 4.

### 3.2 Participants

Forty older Deaf people, aged 55-91 living in Pittsburgh, PA, Flint, Michigan, and Eastpointe, Michigan participated in the research. Being 4th generation Deaf myself and having lived in both Pennsylvania and Michigan, I was easily able to recruit the participants. Most of the participants that were part of the analysis have been Deaf since birth, though a handful became Deaf in childhood. All of them completed a background questionnaire, and all of them had gone to a deaf school, an oral school, or both. Twenty-four of the participants had at least one deaf member in the family. Eighteen participants were the only deaf member of their family. They all either learned ASL at home (deaf family) or at school at one point (for some, through signing outside of classrooms in oral schools).

### 3.3 Procedure

For each of the three locations, I explained the task to the entire group, then asked for volunteers as to who would watch the film and retell the story to their partner in ASL. The Pear Film was shown to one participant at a time on a Macintosh Powerbook Pro with a 15 inch screen. The film watchers were able to pick one of their friends (who had not seen the film) to tell the narratives to, not in my presence. The friends who did not see the film were permitted to ask for clarifications, questions, and/or additional comments. I had two digital video cameras, so I was able to film two different pairs of participants at the same time in the same room, each on the opposite sides. After they were done telling the narrative, I followed up with background questionnaires at the end.

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5 I decided not to be the one who they told the narrative to because I wanted them to use their own language naturally. It is likely that they would try too hard to be prestigious and their signing structure would not be as natural as if they were talking to their friends.
3.4 Data Coding

I focused my data coding on selected ‘new’ events throughout the film. These ‘new’ events included the beginning of the story, where the man climbed up the pear tree; the arrival of man who dragged the goat; and the boy who rode his bicycle.

I then coded these scenes for constituent order in a spreadsheet. My expectation was that I would find overwhelmingly SOV word order, for example MAN TREE CLIMB, MAN GOAT DRAG, and BOY BICYCLE PEDAL.

After viewing the videos of each participant, most data points were unambiguous. I was able to recognize the word order easily such as: MAN CLIMB TREE (SVO structure) or MAN TREE CLIMB (SOV structure).

However, some signers skipped one or more scenes. Since this data was missing, there was no way to code it. Therefore, the missing data could not be included in the analysis and were omitted from the analysis.

3.5 Results

I found a surprising variety of word order strategies in the data, and furthermore the strategies used varied from participant to participant. In addition to subjects, objects, and verbs, I also found prepositions, classifiers, and “missing” subjects. Those strategies that are outside of SVO and SOV word order can be found in Noschese, 2019⁶. I will only include the strategies of SVO and SOV word order that are applicable to this dissertation. Below I describe my findings⁷.

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⁶ The longer version (or whole paper) of the Pear Story can be found in Noschese, 2019.

⁷ Abbreviations in this paper include: “S” = subject; “O” = object of the verb; “V” = verb; “I” = instrument; “CL:V” = classifier verb; “PP” = preposition; “OP” = object of the preposition.
3.5.1 Start of the Story

For the data for beginning of the story where the man climbed up a tree; out of a total of 40 people, 28 people had responses that could be analyzed. The 28 people utilized 6 different strategies in their talking about a man climbing a tree. Out of 6 strategies, 3 were chosen to become the basis of stimuli in the experiment in this dissertation. These 3 strategies are shown in examples (1)-(3) below. The reasons for choosing these sentences for these sentences are discussed in Chapter 4. Discussion of other strategies not relevant to my dissertation can be found in Noschese (2019).

(1)  \( S O V \) Word Order

![Image of sign language gestures]

MAN TREE CLIMB
‘The man climbs the tree’

(2)  \( S V O \) Word Order

![Image of sign language gestures]

MAN CLIMB TREE
‘The man climbs the tree’
For the data for the man dragging a goat; out of a total of 40 people, 21 people had responses that could be analyzed. The 21 people utilized 6 different strategies in their talking about a man dragging a goat. Out of 6 strategies, 2 were chosen to become the basis of stimuli in the experiment in this dissertation. These 2 strategies are shown in examples (4)-(5) below. The reasons for choosing these sentences are discussed in Chapter 4. Discussion other strategies not relevant to my dissertation can be found in Noschese (2019).

(4) \textit{S V PP OP Word order}

MAN STRUGGLE WITH GOAT
‘The man struggled with a goat’
3.5.3 BOY PEDAL BICYCLE

For the data for the boy pedaling a bicycle; out of a total of 40 people, all 40 people had responses that could be analyzed. The 40 people utilized 8 different strategies in their talking about a boy riding a bicycle. Out of 6 strategies, 3 were chosen to become the basis of stimuli in the experiment in this dissertation. These 3 strategies are shown in examples (6)–(8) below. The reasons for choosing these sentences for these sentences are discussed in Chapter 4. Discussion other strategies not relevant to my dissertation can be found in Noschese (2019).

(6)  $SOV$ Word Order

PRO-1 BOY BICYCLE PEDAL
‘That boy pedaled his bicycle’
(7)  *S I V Word Order* (with bound morphological I-CL simultaneous incorporation with V)

BOY BICYCLE CL:3  
VEHICLE  
LEFT-RIGHT  
GO-BY  
‘The boy went by bicycle’

(8)  *S PP OP V Word Order*

BOY WITH BICYCLE CL:1  
PERSON  
LEFT-RIGHT  
GO-BY  
‘The boy with a bicycle passed by’

3.6 Summary

My expectation and hypothesis was that the older signers would have a clear SOV structure in discourse, however, this was not the case. In fact, in the 2 out of the three scenes where an object was included, participants used SVO more than SOV. SVO word order was used most frequently with ‘drag’ and used less frequently with ‘climb’. ‘Ride/pedal’ took SOV order more frequently than SVO word order. For this dissertation, those eight sentence strategies mentioned above were chosen:
We will now turn to Chapter 4 to look at why these 8 sentences were chosen for my dissertation.

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8 The classifier handshape for vehicle is the same as a cardinal number 3 (index finger, mid finger, and thumb extended) in ASL.
Chapter 4
The Experiment

4.1 Hypothesis

My hypotheses are the younger signers will think that the older ASL is considered “standard” or “correct” (less “English-like”) and the word order matches their ideology of what ASL is, as in a SOV language.

The younger signers seem to be overly critical of other young people’s signing as I’ve seen mostly on social media. This may happen because the Deaf younger generation is trying to “take ASL back” as they have learned the history of ASL. Moreover, the younger generation is much more technology savvy, which means there are more videos of sign languages up in social media than ever in history and it’s easier to comment “behind the screen”.

4.2 Participants

In the flyer to recruit the specific participants, I stated that I was looking for a person: 1) who is Deaf, 2) who uses ASL, and 3) who is in the age group of 18-40. The participants were the younger generation, from the age of 18-40; the reason I’m picking that age group, because it is more likely that they will be able to identify themselves as Culturally Deaf that are involved with Deaf communities and by in that age, they will be aware of the differences between English and ASL.

Since this survey/interview happened online, I was able to bring in 83 Deaf participants from all over the United States. Since I have Deaf friends in social media, they were able to share the survey with the other Deaf people that are outside of my circle.

10 participants did the interview after the survey. These 10 participants were chosen based on the answers to specific sentences and the background characteristics from the demographic questions. 4 of the participants had at least one deaf member in the family, 6 of participants were the only deaf member in their family. 5 of the participants went to Deaf
schools, 3 of the participants went to mainstream schools, and 2 of the participants went to mainstream then transferred to a Deaf school. They all either learned ASL at home or at school at one point.

4.3 Methodology

This procedure was done online, through a Google Form survey/form. I showed the Deaf participants videos of myself performing the various word orders from the Pear Story data, as shown in chapter 3 results, as well as the other sentences I constructed. The other sentences I constructed were generalization/not in data, and distractors where the participants wouldn’t need to think as a short brain break. All sentences consists the word order of SVO, SOV, classifiers, and prepositions. Some of the sentences are also ungrammatical.

I understand that it may be difficult to replicate the exact signing style and facial expressions from the actual Pear Story data, however, in addition to being 4th generation Deaf and watching the videos from the Pear Story data countless times that I have become adept at mimicking (or imitating) different signing styles and facial expressions. I also have a background in theater and this also ensured that I followed through in copying the sentences.

In the survey, I had consent and introduction videos in ASL. Then, I asked the Deaf participants to rate the 53 videos that are broken into 10 videos each section on a 5-point Likert scale; the points between the end points had no other labels: the emoji of thumbs up (which means ASL) <——— > the emoji of thumbs down (which means not ASL), as shown below.

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9 In this chapter when I refer to sentences that are “in the data” or “from the data” I am referring to sentences that were recorded during the Pear Story study described in chapter 3.
The reason of the consent and introduction videos in ASL and putting in the emojis is to avoid any English influence. The sentences presented here in this section are grouped together by sentence type (that is, from the data, reflecting the structure of the sentences from the data but with different words, or distractors). The sentences as discussed here also do not represent the order they were seen by participants, which the reader can find in the appendix.

To break down the percentages from the 5-point Likert scale, I put 1, 2, and 3 together to create a percentage for “correct” ASL. I put 4 and 5 together to create a percentage for “incorrect” ASL. For the reason to put 3 with the “correct” ASL scale, when 3 was dropped, the pattern and/or statistics did not change.

Then, based on the answers from the specific sentences from the experiment and demographic questions, I selected 10 participants who provided their email address to be contacted to do a bit of depth interview about ideologies regarding what they think about correctness in older signers versus younger signers. For example, if a participant consistently checked ‘incorrect’ for SOV word order or accepting the ungrammatical sentences, I will then check their background characteristics and decide if it's necessary to interview said participant. It's important to note that the video with ratings happened first to prevent the Deaf participants to be more suspicious and vigilant during the video if I interviewed them first as I wanted it to be a natural reaction.

The results of the Noschese, 2019 contained several different structures that I wanted to follow up on: SOV, SVO, classifiers, unspecified/specified verbs, and prepositions. I wanted to mention that some of the sentences are glossed and some of them are glossed based on the morphology description of a sign that consists a classifier or a specified verb.

They were chosen because of the variety of strategies. I wanted to see if the new generation signers will accept each of these varieties. I should mention the slight changes I made in sentence number 5 and 8 below. For sentence number 5, instead of the classifier, I switched to the verb of DRAG. I wanted to try to see if this sentence is acceptable with the new generation signers.
As for sentence number 8, I switched the handshape of a classifier (CL: 1), which represents a person to a vehicle classifier (CL:3) to be in sync with sentence number 7 and to compare those two sentences (7 and 8) to see which the new generation signers accept.

To discuss the difference between instrument and object: when an unspecified vehicle classifier (CL:vehicle) was mentioned, it can be asked, what kind of a vehicle is it? It is considered instrument, not an object; compared to BOY BICYCLE PEDAL which identifies object. In addition, when one say, BOY PEDAL, it could be asked as what is the boy pedaling? A bicycle, tricycle, or even unicycle? It is considered instrument. This will also be discussed in details in this chapter, including the word order, phonology similar/not similar, and unspecified/specified verb.

Sentences representing these structures are:

1. MAN TREE CLIMB
2. MAN CLIMB TREE
3. MAN (TREE CL: CLIMB)
   CL: TALL-OBJECT
   ON
   UP
4. MAN STRUGGLE WITH GOAT
5. MAN WITH GOAT DRAG
6. BOY BICYCLE PEDAL
7. BOY BICYCLE CL: 3
   VEHICLE
   LEFT-RIGHT
   GO-BY
8. BOY WITH BICYCLE CL:3
   VEHICLE
   LEFT-RIGHT
   GO-BY
These structures fit into 4 different categories: 1) word order, 2) verb choice, and 3) prepositions. In terms of word order, examples from the Noschese, 2019 data in placement of direct object and the placement of location in relation to the verb. Sentences 1, 2, and 6 taken from the data examine SOV versus SVO word order. Sentence 3 examines SLV versus SVL word order. As for verb choice, the study looks at plain verbs versus classifier verbs. Sentences 1, 3, 6, and 8 examine plain verbs compared with classifier verbs. As for prepositions, the study analyzes the prepositions in signed sentences. Sentences 4, 5, and 8 deal with the use of Prepositional phrases. All of these features were chosen based on chapter 3 data.

I included the preposition in the experiment because it would be considered “less” ASL. Even though my intuition says the preposition in ASL is influenced by English, however, it may be a part of ASL nowadays. So I wanted to include those in the experiment to test if the participants thought otherwise. The use of a preposition was also found in the Noschese, 2019 data.

Because there were not enough examples in the data, I created new ASL sentences based on the data. I kept the data sentences and changed the sign vocabulary to expand the sentence choices and ensure that they are also generalization, as in making sure that the grammatical structure remained the same. For example, I changed the word from the data sentence (7), BOY BICYCLE CL:V to (14), BOY CAR CL:V to keep it consistent in word order strategy. Those new sentences below are in the same order as the relevant sentences in the data above.

9. WOMAN STREET WALK
10. WOMAN WALK STREET
11. WOMAN STREET CL:WALK
   CL: FLAT-OBJECT
   ON
12. GIRL BORROW WITH CLOTHES
13. GIRL WITH CLOTHES BORROW
14. BOY CAR DRIVE
15. BOY CAR CL:V
    VEHICLE
    LEFT-RIGHT
    GO-BY
16. BOY WITH CAR CL:V
    VEHICLE
    LEFT-RIGHT
    GO-BY

I also included some distractor sentences, because the survey can be tiring. I wanted to
give the participants a brain break without realizing it. Those sentences are easily recognized as
part of ASL and one WH-question that is sentence-final that could be found in ASL structure.
Also, I wanted to avoid the participants to learn about the distribution of stimuli in the
experiment and start consciously answering that is not based on their natural knowledge of each
sentences. Sentences 17-20 were from Noschese, 2019 data that I decided to use as a distractor,
because it didn’t have other sentence that could be worked with in the analysis. I also generated
sentences, sentences 21-24 that are similar with the data sentences, sentences 17-20.

17. BOY GIVE PEAR
18. PEAR CL:PEAR-GIVE (me to you)
19. BOY THREE PEAR GIVE GIVE GIVE
20. GIVE PEAR THREE CL:GIVE-GIVE-GIVE
21. BOY THROW FOOTBALL
22. FOOTBALL CL:FOOTBALL-THROW (me to you)
23. BOY THREE FOOTBALL THROW THROW THROW
24. THROW FOOTBALL THREE CL:THROW-THROW-THROW
25. GIRL BEACH SWIM
Finally, I also included some other sentences because I felt they were also important to compare and confirm the hypothesis I had about particular sentences.
BOWL-FROM
LIQUID
LICK
47. BABY COOKIE EAT
48. BABY EAT COOKIE
49. BABY APPLE (EAT-APPLE)
   ROUND-OBJECT
   HOLD-WITH-HAND
   BRING-TO-MOUTH
   CHEW
50. BABY APPLE EAT
51. BABY (EAT-APPLE) APPLE
   ROUND-OBJECT
   HOLD-WITH-HAND
   BRING-TO-MOUTH
   CHEW
52. GIRL BORROW CLOTHES
53. GIRL CLOTHES BORROW

I included ungrammatical sentences in all categories (except for those from the Pear Story data) as well, to be able to validate the sentence choices and would be obvious for the participants to recognize that it is ungrammatical. One ungrammatical word order strategy was using SVO with a classifier. As I mentioned in chapter 2 literature review about ASL classifiers has a rule for the classifier and the rule is the classifier has to happen after the object (noun). Thus, any sentences that has S-SCLV-O with a classifier is considered ungrammatical.

Before we get to the section on results, I want to discuss the explanation of some specific signs and sentences that will be used. These include: 1) the use of verb and object that are phonologically similar and 2) the use of verb and object that are not phonologically similar, 3) unspecified and specified verbs (in nonreversible and reversible sentences), and 4) classifiers.
4.3.1 Phonologically Similar

There are two examples of pairs of sentences in which the verb and the object are phonologically similar: 1) BOY BICYCLE PEDAL vs. BOY PEDAL BICYCLE and 2) BOY CAR DRIVE vs. BOY DRIVE CAR. In the first pair of sentences, BOY BICYCLE PEDAL was found in the Noschese, 2019 data. The SVO version of the first sentence was created for the study. In the second pair of examples both sentences were created for the study.

It is useful at this point to compare the phonology of the signs PEDAL and BICYCLE as shown in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2. The parameters of phonology in ASL are: handshape, palm and finger orientation, location, movement, and non manual markers.

Figure 4.1: BICYCLE

Figure 4.2: PEDAL
The phonological parameters of handshape, palm and finger orientation, location, and movement are the same in the ASL signs PEDAL and BICYCLE are the same. The only difference in these two signs is in the non-manual marker. BICYCLE has no non-manual marker, while in PEDAL the lips are puckered, as shown in Figure 4.2. The puckering of the lips is a derivation, changing the noun BICYCLE to the verb PEDAL. Therefore, it’s possible to drop the object and would not be ambiguous.

Turning to the second pair of sentences where the verb and object are phonologically similar, it is now useful to compare the phonology of the signs DRIVE and CAR as shown in Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.3: CAR

Figure 4.4: DRIVE
The phonological parameters of handshape, palm and finger orientation, and location are the same in the ASL signs DRIVE and CAR are the same. The are only two differences in these two signs are the movement and the non-manual marker. CAR has no non-manual marker, while in DRIVE the lips are puckered, as shown in Figure 4.4. The puckering of the lips is a derivation, changing the noun CAR to the verb DRIVE. The movement differences are shown in Figure 4.5 and Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.5: DRIVE (forward/back with wrist)

Figure 4.6: DRIVE, CAR
4.3.2 Not Phonologically Similar

To compare the verb and object that are phonologically similar to the verb and the object sentences that are not phonologically similar, the example of not phonologically similar signs in the verb and the object: BORROW and CLOTHES, as shown in Figure 4.7 and Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.7: BORROW

Figure 4.8: CLOTHES

The phonology (all parameters) in ASL in BORROW and CLOTHES are different. Therefore, it’s not possible to drop the object.
4.3.3 Unspecified/Specified Verbs

Next, unspecified verbs are verbs that do not specify any information about the subject or object of a verb. These verbs can always be used in questions, but they cannot always be used in statements. An unspecified verb in the data is DRINK (1), as shown in Figure 4.9.

Figure 4.9: DRINK (1)

Specified verbs are verbs which specify some information about the subject or object of a verb. These verbs can sometimes be used in questions, but they must be used in statements. A specified verbs in the data is DRINK (2), as shown in Figure 4.10.

Figure 4.10: DRINK (2)

The verb DRINK (1) can be used in questions such as “What did the man drink?” or “What did the cat drink?” However, in statements like “The man drank water” DRINK (1) can
be used, while in statements like “The cat drank water” DRINK (1) cannot be used because DRINK (1) means “drink while holding a glass in one hand”. Since cats do not have hands, DRINK (1) with a subject of “cat” is ungrammatical DRINK (2) meaning “drink by licking” must be used.

The unspecified/specified verbs also can be found in non-reversible subjects and objects of ‘a man drags a goat’ that looks like in SOV word order in ASL: MAN GOAT DRAG. This sentence is somewhat ambiguous, even though it’s generally known that a man drags the goat, which is somewhat biased for the man to be the agent, not vice versa unless specified. It is semantically impossible for goat to drag man if the plain verb is being used. The verbs as shown in Figure 4.11 and Figure 4.12, showing the difference between the plain verb of DRAG and the specified verb of DRAG if the goat is dragging the man.

Figure 4.11 DRAG (plain verb)

Figure 4.12 DRAG (the verb of goat dragging the man with its teeth)
The unspecified and specified verb in the reversible subjects and objects of ‘a man drags a woman’ that looks like in SOV word order in ASL: MAN WOMAN DRAG. The subject of this sentence is ambiguous, unless the verb is a directional verb. The difference between the plain verb and the directional verb is the use of space and changing the subject and object by changing the direction of the verb. For the use of plain verb in sentence of MAN WOMAN DRAG, it is not clear on who is dragging whom. With the use of directional verb, it will be unambiguous when subject and object are mentioned before the directional verb, as shown in Figure 4.13 and Figure 4.14. This directional verb starts from the object to the subject, depending on which side the shoulders or the body leans on. For this sentence, in my variety of ASL, I prefer it to be in SVO word order if there is no directional verb being used.

Figure 4.13: The man drags the woman

Figure 4.14: The woman drags the man
4.3.4 Classifier Verbs

Classifier verbs do not take objects, but instead take locations or instruments. Some plain verbs take objects. ASL users do not tend to use prepositions. Instead they use as classifier verbs that include adpositions. Adpositions occur at the same time with the verb, such as in Table 4.11 and Table 4.12 in section 4.4.1.4.1. With the use of both hands, one hand, the handshape of flat closed palm-down which demonstrates the street (or the flat surface), the other hand that looks like a person’s legs which demonstrates the verb of walking. The hand that demonstrates walking on the top of the hand that demonstrates street (or a flat surface) and the movement is going forward. The adposition occurs when the combination/contact of both hands, which means ON or ON TOP. The direct English translation will be: “The woman walks on (top of) the street”. The photo in Figure 4.15 shows the details.

Figure 4.15: WALK (on the) STREET

Adpositions occur at the same time with the verb, such as in Table 4.12 and Table 4.13 in section 4.4.2. With the use of both hands, one hand, the handshape of flat open palm-upward which demonstrates the tree, the other hand that looks like a person’s bended legs which demonstrates the verb of climbing. Then the hand that demonstrates climbing, on the side of the forearm that demonstrates tree and the movement is going upward. The adposition occurs when
the combination/contact of both hands and the forearm, which means ON. The direct English translation will be: “The man climbs upon the tree”. The photo in Figure 4.16 will show the details.

Figure 4.16: TREE CLIMB

4.4 Results

As mentioned in early of this chapter, this study aims to look at the following types of constructions: 1) word order, 2) verb choice, 3) prepositions, and 4) other. In terms of word order, the study examines the placement of direct object and the placement of location in relation to the verb. As for verb choice, the study looks at plain verbs versus classifier verbs. As for prepositions, the study analyzes the prepositions in signed sentences. Finally, the study analyzes the findings that were not part of the categories listed above, including problems that I encountered. All of these features were chosen based on chapter 3 data. I analyzed the sentences that were used in my previous study with the older generation of ASL users and found that those structures mentioned above were being used frequently. The features will be broken down into small components below.
4.4.1 Word order

This section discusses 1) placement of direct object and 2) placement of location.

4.4.1.1 Placement of Direct Object

As pointed out in the literature review chapter, older forms of ASL tended to have Subject Object Verb (SOV) word order, while newer forms of ASL tend to have Subject Verb Object (SVO) word order. ASL tends to use SOV when subject and object are non-reversible and uses SVO when the subject and object are reversible. However, there may be cases of SOV word order for some signers in certain types of sentences where the subject and object are reversible, but only with certain types of directional verbs. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

4.4.1.2 Sentences Where the Verb and the Object are Phonologically Similar

In this section, we compare participants’ evaluation of SOV and SVO constructions by examining the responses to two different kinds of constructions: 1) sentences where the verb and object are phonologically similar, and 2) sentences where the verb and object are not phonologically similar. Sentences where the verb and the object are phonologically similar and sentence where the verb and the object are phonologically similar are constructed differently. In the data in Noschese, 2019 and in my own variety of ASL, sentences where the verb and the object are phonologically similar require SOV word order. In addition, the object of the sentence can be dropped when the verb is phonologically similar to the object of the sentence.

We will see the result of verb and the object sentences that are phonologically similar in this section.

As mentioned earlier, in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 in section 4.3.1, in addition, to the SOV example, BOY BICYCLE PEDAL found in the Noschese, 2019 data, I also constructed the SVO sentence BOY PEDAL BICYCLE. It was expected that most of the participants would
accept the SOV version of the sentence, and that most would reject the SVO version of the sentence.

However, Table 4.1 below shows a different story.

Table 4.1.

X4 by X39 (BOY BICYCLE PEDAL/ BOY PEDAL BICYCLE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X4:</th>
<th>X39:</th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>NOT ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOY BICYCLE PEDAL</td>
<td>BOY PEDAL BICYCLE</td>
<td>49 (62%)</td>
<td>21 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td></td>
<td>9 (11%)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 49 out of 79 people, the majority of participants (62%) indicated that both SOV and SVO are ASL. If the respondents indicated that only one word order was ASL, there was a clear preference of 16 percentage points for SOV word order (27% to 11%). Another way of looking at these data is that a total of 89% (62%+27%) of the participants said that SOV was ASL, while a total of 73% (62%+11%) of the respondents said that SVO was ASL.

In my variety of ASL, only SOV is acceptable. SVO is not acceptable for this kind of construction. This verb is a specialized verb for how to ride a bicycle. This verb is the only way it is semantically possible for a person to pedal a bicycle. Any other verb is semantically impossible. In this case, the object must precede the verb.

Turning to the second pair of sentences where the verb and object are phonologically similar, it is now useful to compare the phonology of the signs DRIVE and CAR as shown in Figure 4.3 - Figure 4.6 in section 4.3.1.
Both BOY CAR DRIVE and BOY DRIVE CAR were constructed on the basis of BOY BICYCLE PEDAL which was found in the Noschese, 2019 data, and BOY DRIVE CAR which was constructed on the basis of BOY PEDAL BICYCLE. It was expected that most of the participants would accept the SOV version of the sentence, and that most would reject the SVO version of the sentence.

However, Table 4.2 below shows a different story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X38: BOY CAR DRIVE</th>
<th>X29: BOY DRIVE CAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>52 (68%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td>19 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td>5 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), the majority of respondents 52 out of 76 people (68%) say that both SVO and SOV versions of this sentence are ASL. If the respondents indicated that only one word order was ASL, there was a clear preference of 18 percentage points for SOV word order (25% to 7%). Another way of looking at these data is that a total of 93% (68%+25%) of the participants said that SOV was ASL, while a total of 75% (68%+7%) of the respondents said that SVO was ASL.

In my variety of ASL, only SOV is acceptable. SVO is not acceptable for this kind of construction. The fact that participants show a preference for SOV for both sentences is expected. However, the high acceptance of SVO word order for these sentences in not expected. Those who accept SVO word order come from hearing families. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter entitled discussion.
4.4.1.3 Sentences Where the Verb and the Object are Not Phonologically Similar

In this section, we will see the result of verb and the object sentences that are not phonologically similar. In this section, the example of not phonologically similar signs in the verb and the object: BORROW and CLOTHES, as shown in Figure 4.7 and Figure 4.8 in section 4.3.2.

There are six pairs of sentences that fit this criterion, as shown in Tables 4.3 - 4.8. For all six pairs of sentences, the majority of participants indicated that both SOV and SVO are ASL. In three out of the six sentences when the respondents only indicated that one word order was ASL, the difference in preference for SOV or SVO was less than 10% points, so it is not counted as a significant difference. In the other three out of the six sentences, when the respondents only indicated that one word order was ASL, there was a preference for SVO.

Table 4.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X28: BABY APPLE (EAT-APPLE)</th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>NOT ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X21: BABY (EAT-APPLE) APPLE</td>
<td>67 (86%)</td>
<td>5 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td>6 (8%)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 67 out of 78 people (86%) say that both SVO and SOV versions of this sentence are ASL. An additional 6 people (8%) say that only SVO is ASL—SOV is not ASL, while only 5 (6%) of the respondents said that SOV is ASL, while SVO is not ASL. There is only 2 percent points difference in preference for SVO over SOV. The signers are more comfortable with using either SOV and SVO for this sentence.10

My initial assumption of a native signer and background knowledge of ASL, I would determine that SVO for this sentence should not be accepted, just like above table, Table 4.3- as the sign for EAT-APPLE is similar to a “classifier”. The grammatical rule of putting a classifier verb in a sentence is to have it after the object noun. I think this happened because the respondents didn’t pay attention to the word order of the sentence, but rather on the sign EAT-APPLE itself. That sign is in the spectrum of “more” ASL, which the respondents would react both SVO and SOV word orders as grammatical.

I did not expect for the respondents to accept the SVO version of this sentence. During the interviews, I found that the respondents accepted both SVO and SOV as ASL for this sentence. I noticed that the group of respondents that has hearing family would point out that SOV is ‘more’ ASL, but accepted both word orders, whereas, the respondents that have Deaf family would say that the SVO of this sentence is ASL or could not tell the difference between those two sentences. When they realized that the object and the verb were in a different position in the sentences, they said that the both sentences are acceptable.

10 In the U.S. Deaf community, we would refer to a toddler as ‘baby’. We do not have specific sign for ‘toddler’. We also do not often use the sign for ‘kid’ or for ‘child’ when referring to one child.
When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 44 out of 79 people (56%) say that both SVO and SOV versions of this sentence are ASL. An additional 18 people (23%) say that only SVO is ASL—SOV is not ASL, while 17 (21.5%) of the respondents said that SOV is ASL, while SVO is not ASL. The difference in preference between SOV and SVO is less than 10% points, so there doesn’t seem to be an important difference in preference for these sentences.

In my variety of ASL, I accept both SOV and SVO. The result of this is to be expected. Both SOV and SVO are labelled as ASL. When one is chosen, there is a slight preference of SOV for ASL. It’s acceptable to have it in SVO and SOV. Since cookie and baby are nonreversible (a cookie cannot eat a baby), the word order is more flexible.

When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 44 out of 79 people (56%) say that both SVO and SOV versions of this sentence are ASL. An additional 18 people (23%) say that only SVO is ASL—SOV is not ASL, while 17 (21.5%) of the respondents said that SOV is ASL, while SVO is not ASL. The difference in preference between SOV and SVO is less than 10% points, so there doesn’t seem to be an important difference in preference for these sentences.

In my variety of ASL, I accept both SOV and SVO. The result of this is to be expected. Both SOV and SVO are labelled as ASL. When one is chosen, there is a slight preference of SOV for ASL. It’s acceptable to have it in SVO and SOV. Since cookie and baby are nonreversible (a cookie cannot eat a baby), the word order is more flexible.
When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 60 out of 79 people (76%) say that both SVO and SOV versions of this sentence are ASL. An additional 11 people (14%) say that only SVO is ASL—SOV is not ASL, while 8 (10%) of the respondents said that SOV is ASL, while SVO is not ASL. The difference in preference between SOV and SVO is less than 10% points, so there doesn’t seem to be an important difference in preference for these sentences.

In my variety of ASL, only SOV is acceptable. SVO is not acceptable. This verb is a specialized verb for how cats drink. This verb is the only way it is semantically possible for a cat to drink water. Any other verb is semantically impossible. A cat drinks by licking (specified verb) not holding a glass when drinking, as shown in Figure 4.9 and Figure 4.10 in section 4.3.3. In this case, the object must precede the verb.

I think this happened because the respondents didn’t pay attention to the word order of the sentence, but rather focused on the sign LICK itself. That sign is in the spectrum of “more” ASL”, so the respondents might not pay attention to the word order and accept both SVO and SOV word orders as grammatical.

I did not expect the respondents to accept SVO. After the interviews, I found why the respondents accepted both SVO and SOV as ASL for this sentence. I noticed that the group of respondents that has hearing family would point out that SOV is ‘more’ ASL, but accepted both word orders, whereas, the respondents that have Deaf family would say that the SVO of this sentence is ASL or could not tell the difference between those two sentences. When they

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X6: CAT WATER LICK</th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>NOT ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>60 (76%)</td>
<td>8 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td>11 (14%)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 60 out of 79 people (76%) say that both SVO and SOV versions of this sentence are ASL. An additional 11 people (14%) say that only SVO is ASL—SOV is not ASL, while 8 (10%) of the respondents said that SOV is ASL, while SVO is not ASL. The difference in preference between SOV and SVO is less than 10% points, so there doesn’t seem to be an important difference in preference for these sentences.

In my variety of ASL, only SOV is acceptable. SVO is not acceptable. This verb is a specialized verb for how cats drink. This verb is the only way it is semantically possible for a cat to drink water. Any other verb is semantically impossible. A cat drinks by licking (specified verb) not holding a glass when drinking, as shown in Figure 4.9 and Figure 4.10 in section 4.3.3. In this case, the object must precede the verb.

I think this happened because the respondents didn’t pay attention to the word order of the sentence, but rather focused on the sign LICK itself. That sign is in the spectrum of “more” ASL”, so the respondents might not pay attention to the word order and accept both SVO and SOV word orders as grammatical.

I did not expect the respondents to accept SVO. After the interviews, I found why the respondents accepted both SVO and SOV as ASL for this sentence. I noticed that the group of respondents that has hearing family would point out that SOV is ‘more’ ASL, but accepted both word orders, whereas, the respondents that have Deaf family would say that the SVO of this sentence is ASL or could not tell the difference between those two sentences. When they
realized that the object and the verb were in a different position in the sentences, they said that the both sentences are acceptable.

Table 4.6.

X50 by X44 (GIRL CLOTHES BORROW/ GIRL BORROW CLOTHES)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X50: GIRL CLOTHES BORROW</th>
<th>X44: GIRL BORROW CLOTHES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>66 (82.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td>5 (6.25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 66 out of 80 people (82.5%) say that both SVO and SOV versions of this sentence are ASL. An additional 9 people (11.25%) say that only SOV is ASL—SVO is not ASL, while 5 (6.25%) of the respondents said that SVO is ASL, while SOV is not ASL. The difference in preference between SOV and SVO is less than 10% points, so there doesn’t seem to be an important difference in preference for these sentences.

In my variety of ASL, I accept using both SOV and SVO. The result of this in the data is to be expected. Both SOV and SVO are labelled as ASL. When one is chosen, there is a slight preference (5%) of SOV for ASL. It’s acceptable to have it in SVO and SOV. Since clothes and girl are nonreversible (clothes cannot borrow a girl), the word order is more flexible.
Table 4.7.

X43 by X18 (MAN TREE CLIMB/ MAN CLIMB TREE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X43: MAN TREE CLIMB</th>
<th>X18: MAN CLIMB TREE</th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>NOT ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td></td>
<td>36 (50%)</td>
<td>13 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td></td>
<td>23 (32%)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 36 out of 72 people (50%) say that both SVO and SOV versions of this sentence are ASL. An additional 23 people (32%) say that only SVO is ASL—SOV is not ASL, while only 13 (18%) of the respondents said that SOV is ASL, while SVO is not ASL. SVO is preferred to SOV for this sentence by 14 percentage points, slightly more than 10%.

In my variety of ASL, I would rather to sign in SOV structure for this sentence, regardless of the higher number of SVO preference. However, I expected for respondents to accept both SOV and SVO. My expectation was confirmed after the interviews. However, the respondents ultimately preferred the classifier verb to the plain verb, as seen in Tables 4.12 and 4.13 in section 4.4.2. This is important here because it shows that they prefer classifier verb.
When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 55 out of 80 people (69%) say that both SVO and SOV versions of this sentence are ASL. An additional 22 people (27.5%) say that only SVO is ASL—SOV is not ASL, while only 3 (4%) of the respondents said that SOV is ASL, while SVO is not ASL. SVO is preferred to SOV for this sentence.

As mentioned in Chapter 2 Literature Review, in ASL, reversible subjects and objects are usually in SVO word order. This analysis of SVO being preferred over SOV is not surprising, even though, given this particular verb, the subject and object are non-reversible, as discussed in Figure 4.11 and Figure 4.12 in section 4.3.3.

To compare this sentence with one of the non-reversible sentences in the analysis, ‘the girl borrows the clothes’ that looks like in SOV word order in ASL: GIRL CLOTHES BORROW, this sentence is unambiguous as clothes cannot borrow the girl.

In my variety of ASL, I accept the non-reversible of MAN DRAG GOAT/MAN GOAT DRAG as SOV and SVO. The result is to be expected because there is no ambiguity because the verb drag that is used can only have a human subject (based on the fact that two hands are doing the dragging). Based on the explanation of SVO preference for reversible subject, it is not surprising that the respondents preferred SVO over SOV word order, even though the sentence is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>X22: MAN DRAG GOAT</th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>NOT ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X34: MAN GOAT DRAG</td>
<td>Not ASL</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>55 (69%)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
non-reversible. Again, I prefer SVO if the sentence was reversible such as: MAN WOMAN DRAG.

4.4.1.4 Effects of Unspecified Verbs and Specified Verbs on Word Order

Unspecified verbs are verbs that do not specify any information about the subject or object of a verb. These verbs can always be used in questions, but they cannot always be used in statements. As discussed in Figure 4.9 and Figure 4.10 in section 4.3.3.

This is being examined because I wanted to ensure that the participants are paying attention when they took the survey.

Table 4.9.

X32 by X42 (CAT WATER DRINK/ CAT DRINK WATER)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X32: CAT WATER DRINK</th>
<th>X42: CAT DRINK WATER</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>12 (15%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td>20 (25%)</td>
<td>47 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 12 out of 81 people (15%) say that both SVO and SOV versions of this sentence are ASL. An additional 20 people (25%) say that only SVO is ASL—SOV is not ASL, while only 2 (2%) of the respondents said that SOV is ASL, while SVO is not ASL. However, 47 (58%) of the respondents said that both sentences are NOT ASL.

In my variety of ASL, both sentences are not acceptable, because of the verb choice.
Based on my assumption as a native signer, the reason of it being rejected as ASL— the verb choice of DRINK is not acceptable for the subject of this sentence. A cat cannot drink the same way as humans. The sign DRINK includes the morphemes “hold” “glass” and “in-one-hand”. Since cats cannot hold a glass in one hand, the sign DRINK is unacceptable if “cat” is the subject. The verb choice of LICK would be acceptable due to the nature of how cat ‘drink’ water from the bowl. I developed those sentences to ensure that the respondents are paying attention to the sign choice as ungrammatical.

However, there are some respondents that accepted it as grammatical. I selected those who accepted it to be part of the interview and I was able to ask why it was acceptable. The respondents said it is acceptable if they were signing to a hearing person or vice versa, as in it is still understandable, yet it would still be an immense eye sore. Their immediate response was NO when asked if it is still considered ASL and acceptable when talking to a Deaf person.

Table 4.10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X28 by X11 (BABY APPLE (EAT-APPLE) / BABY APPLE EAT)</th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>NOT ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>X28:</strong> BABY APPLE (EAT-APPLE)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>54 (75%)</td>
<td>17 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 54 out of 72 people (75%) say that both SOV sentences are ASL. An additional 17 people (24%) say that only X28 is ASL—X11 is not ASL, while only 1 (1%) of the respondents said that X11 is ASL, while X28 is not ASL. The use of specified verb is preferred over the unspecified verb by 23% points.

To compare the use of unspecified verb and specified verb with Table 4.9, it is acceptable to use either for this sentence. For the specified verb, it is possible for the baby can hold an apple and eat from the hand. The unspecified verb is a generalization of eating, which applies and acceptable for all nouns. If I were to use this specified verb for the noun of CAT, it would be unacceptable as the cat cannot eat the apple the same way as humans.

Based on my intuition of a native signer and interviews with the respondents, this is to be expected. In my variety of ASL, both sentences are acceptable. The use of specified verb is preferred because it can look like a ‘classifier verb’ which is why respondents would be quick to say EAT-APPLE is ‘more’ ASL in the spectrum.

When asked in interview why the specified verb is preferred and the respondents immediately said that the specified verb is a classifier verb, which is why it is ‘more’ ASL. It is interesting because that shows that the respondents could not tell the difference between specified verb vs a classifier verb. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter entitled discussion.

4.4.1.5 Placement of Location

4.4.1.5.1 Plain S+L+V/S+V+L (no adposition)

Table 4.11.

X36 by X24 (WOMAN STREET WALK/WOMAN WALK STREET)
When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 35 out of 81 people (43%) say that both SVL and SLV versions of this sentence are ASL. An additional 16 people (20%) say that only SVL is ASL—SLV is not ASL, while only 11 (14%) of the respondents said that SLV is ASL, while SVL is not ASL. However, 19 of the respondents said that both SVL and SLV are NOT ASL.

Even though both SVL and SLV are accepted by some respondents, the sentences are also not accepted by “good number of respondents” may be because the use of classifier verbs with location/adpositions are often preferred, as seen in Tables 4.12 and 4.13 in section 4.4.2. Rather than saying ‘the woman walks on the street’ as a direct translation (WOMAN WALK ON STREET), a classifier verb will be used. In ASL, it is not usual for the signers to have a separate sign for the preposition ‘ON’, the signers prefer to use an adposition with a classifier verb as we will see in the next section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X36: WOMAN STREET WALK</th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>NOT ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>35 (43%)</td>
<td>11 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td>16 (20%)</td>
<td>19 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.2 Verb Choice

This section discusses word order of plain verb object and classifier verb with location. This is being analyzed because I found the signs that the older signers used classifier verbs with adpositions. Since this is different from the comparison of SOV/SVO discussed earlier, this
section was created. The verb choice influences the word order in the sentence and/or may influence the participants’ decisions about what is considered ‘more’ ASL.

4.4.2.1 Plain Verb Object/Classifier Verb (Location)

Classifier verbs do not take objects, but instead take locations or instruments. Some plain verbs take objects, as discussed in Figure 4.15 in section 4.3.4. I wanted to see how much of an influence and impact those two types of verbs can make in a sentence.

It was not surprising that the use of classifier would be preferred over the plain verb sentences or with a preposition, which will be discussed in the next section. It is unnatural for signers to have a separate sign for an English preposition in a signed sentence. The use of a classifier verb will have an adposition and adverb at the same time, so an English preposition would be unnecessary.

Table 4.12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X47 by X36 (WOMAN STREET CL:WALK /WOMAN STREET WALK)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X47: WOMAN STREET CL:WALK (CL:FLAT OBJECT ON)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X36: WOMAN STREET WALK</th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>NOT ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>40 (56%)</td>
<td>24 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td>7 (10%)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), the majority of respondents 40 out of 71 people (56%) say that both both SLV (CL) and SLV versions of this sentence are ASL. If the respondents indicated that only one form was ASL, there was a clear preference of 17 percentage points for the classifier verb with adpositions (34% to 10%). Another way of looking at these data is that a total of 90% (56%+34%) of the participants said that the classifier verb with adposition was ASL, while a total of 66% (56% +10%) of the respondents said that the plain verb was ASL.

In my variety of ASL, only the classifier verb with adposition is acceptable. The plain verb is not acceptable for this kind of construction. The fact that participants show a preference for the classifier verb for both sentences is expected. However, the high acceptance of plain verb for these sentences is not expected. Those who accept the plain verb come from hearing families. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter entitled discussion.

Table 4.13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X47: WOMAN STREET CL:WALK</th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>NOT ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>40 (54%)</td>
<td>23 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td>11 (15%)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), the majority of respondents 40 out of 74 people (54%) say that both SLV (CL) and SVL versions of this sentence are ASL. If the respondents indicated that only form was ASL, there was a clear preference of 31 percentage points for the classifier verb with adpositions (31% to 15%). Another way of looking at these data is that a total of 85% (54% + 31%) of the participants said that the classifier verb with adposition was ASL, while a total of 69% (54% + 15%) of the respondents said that the plain verb was ASL.

Based on my intuition of a native signer and interviews with the respondents, this is to be expected. The percentages in Tables 4.12 and 4.13 are closely similar, that the respondents preferred a classifier verb sentences over SVL and SLV. The word order of the sentence did not matter, a classifier verb would be preferred. As I mentioned above, it is usually preferred to use a classifier verb when referring to location and adpositions.

When asked why SVL and SLV would be accepted and the answer is the same as Table 4.9 in section 4.4.1.3, CAT WATER DRINK/ CAT DRINK WATER. The respondents accepted SVL and SLV if they were talking to a hearing person or a hearing person signing this way to a Deaf person.

4.4.2.2 S+O+V/S+L+CLV (TREE CLIMB)

Like I mentioned in previous section, it’s not often for ASL users to use prepositions, as classifier verb would include adpositions. Adpositions occur at the same time with the verb, such as in Table 4.14 and Table 4.15 below.

It was also not surprising that the use of classifier would be preferred over the plain verb sentences or with a preposition, which will be discussed in the next section.
When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), the majority of respondents 46 out of 74 people (62%) say that both SOV and CL versions of this sentence are ASL. If the respondents indicated that one form was ASL, there was a clear preference of 34% points for the classifier verb with adposition (34% to 4%). Another way of looking at these data is that a total of 96% (62% + 34%) of the participants said that the classifier verb with adposition was ASL, while a total of 66% (62% + 4%) of the respondents said that the plain verb was ASL.

4.4.2.3 S+V+O/S+L+CLV (CLIMB TREE)

Table 4.15.

X41 by X18 (MAN (TREE CL: CLIMB) /MAN CLIMB TREE)
CL:TALL OBJECT
ON
UP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X43: MAN TREE CLIMB</th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>NOT ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X41: MAN (TREE CL:CLIMB)</td>
<td>46 (62%)</td>
<td>25 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), the majority of respondents 52 out of 78 people (67%) say that both SVO and CL versions of this sentence are ASL. If the respondents indicated that only form was ASL, there was a clear preference of 24% points for the classifier verb with adposition (24% to 9%). Another way of looking at these data is that a total of 91% (67% + 24%) of the participants said that the classifier verb with adposition was ASL, while a total of 76% (67% + 9%) of the respondents said that the plain verb was ASL.

Those sentences in Tables 4.14 and 4.15 comparison are similar to Tables 4.12 and 4.13. Classifier verb with adposition is preferred to SVO.

In my variety of ASL, all three sentences (CL, SVO, and SOV) are acceptable, however, I would strongly prefer CL or SOV over SVO. I wanted to compare both of those sentences even though they are not in the same word order. Classifier is still preferred over SVO, however, it’s accepted to use both verb choices.

### 4.4.3 Prepositions

As mentioned in previous section, I found that some of the older generation signers used classifiers with simultaneous adpositions. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Literature Review, it is possible for ASL signers to move their signing along a continuum to approach English more closely. This is done under certain circumstances, such as when a fluent ASL user is
communicating with a hearing person who is not fluent in ASL. One of the ways fluent ASL signers can move their signing towards English is to use signs that translate English prepositions.

This section will be solely focused on the prepositions without classifiers and classifier verbs in which the signer signs English prepositions. I wanted to compare the sentences that are similar to each other in semantics. The placement of prepositions will be different in those sentences. I also included sentences that are ungrammatical to ensure that the participants paid attention to the survey, as shown in Table 4.17.

It should be noted that some ASL users will call this kind of signing “ASL”, while others will call this kind of signing “Not ASL, but signing in English”.

### 4.4.3.1 Plain PP

Table 4.16.

X19 by X45 (MAN STRUGGLE WITH GOAT/ MAN WITH GOAT DRAG)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X19: MAN STRUGGLE WITH GOAT</th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>NOT ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>30 (37%)</td>
<td>24 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td>6 (7%)</td>
<td>22 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 30 out of 82 people (37%) say that both V PP N and PP N V sentences are ASL. An additional 24 people (29%) say that only V PP N is ASL—PP N V is not ASL, while only 6 (7%) of the respondents said that PP N V is ASL, while V PP N is not ASL. However, 22 (27%) of the
respondents said that both V PP N and PP N V are NOT ASL. V PP N is preferred to PP N V for this sentence.

In my variety of ASL, I would not accept either sentences as ASL, however, I have seen some signers sign in this structure. It is not an immediate eyesore, but it does immediately inform me that the signers who signed those two sentences did not acquire ASL at younger age and learned ASL later in life. The reason of it not being an immediate eyesore because it’s a direct translation in English grammar. Those who accept the plain verb come from hearing families. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter entitled discussion.

The numbers for those sentences are so close in regard to the sentences being NOT ASL. Again, ASL do not have a tendency to have WITH in a sentence. So it made sense. However, there are also a number of respondents that also said both of the sentences are ASL- it is probably because it is a direct translation of English.

Table 4.17.

X3 by X14 (GIRL BORROW WITH CLOTHES/ GIRL WITH CLOTHES BORROW)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X3: GIRL BORROW WITH CLOTHES</th>
<th>X14: GIRL WITH CLOTHES BORROW</th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>NOT ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td></td>
<td>12 (15%)</td>
<td>11 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT ASL</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 (12%)</td>
<td>49 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 12 out of 82 people (15%) say that both V PP N and PP N V sentences are ASL. An additional 11 people (13%) say that only V PP N is ASL—PP N V is not ASL, while only 10 (12%) of the
respondents said that PP N V is ASL, while V PP N is not ASL. There is not much difference in those sentences—however, 49 (60%) of the respondents said that both of them are NOT ASL.

In my variety of ASL, I would not accept either sentences as ASL. Both sentences are ungrammatical in ASL and English. The reason to have those sentences is to make sure that the participants are paying attention to the survey they were taking.

Compared to the sentences before this: MAN STRUGGLE WITH GOAT/MAN WITH GOAT DRAG and even though those sentences are the same word order as the last sentence comparison; this sentence(s) (GIRL BORROW WITH CLOTHES/GIRL WITH CLOTHES BORROW) are unacceptable for the respondents. This made sense because it is ungrammatical for both languages (English and ASL).

For people who label these sentences as ASL, perhaps they were not looking at the sentences carefully or they might have been “hyper-correcting” their signing to what they think is English-like signing. I asked one person during the interview about this sentence and that person admitted that he may not have paid complete attention to the survey.

4.4.3.2 Plain PP with Classifier Verb

As I mentioned several times throughout the chapter that it’s not usual for ASL users to use prepositions, especially with a classifier. In this section, the classifier of vehicle, as shown in Figure 4.17, was found in the Noschese, 2019 data.

![Figure 4.17: a classifier for a vehicle, with movement of going by](image)
One of the older signers used the English translation of ‘with’ in a sentence, as shown in Table 4.16. I wanted to see what the respondents thought about that. I also added a generalization sentence that is similar with the bicycle sentence, as shown in Table 4.18 to see whether if it is acceptable or not.

Table 4.18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X49 by X13 (BOY BICYCLE (CL:3)</th>
<th>/BOY WITH BICYCLE (CL:3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VEHICLE</td>
<td>VEHICLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEFT-RIGHT</td>
<td>LEFT-RIGHT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GO-BY</td>
<td>GO-BY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 37 out of 77 people (48%) say that both instrument with PP and instrument sentences are ASL. An additional 37 people (48%) say that only instrument is ASL—instrument with PP is not ASL, while only 3 (4%) of the respondents said that instrument with PP is ASL, while instrument is not ASL. Plain instrument is preferred, however, it equals with both version of sentences.

In my variety of ASL, I accept the sentence that does not have prepositions. I’m not fully confident about the sentence that includes a preposition. I might have seen it with other signers but I would not sign it that way. However, I would sign a sentence with preposition if it didn’t include a classifier, as if I needed to describe the boy who has a bicycle. A classifier for GO-BY

11 The classifier handshape for vehicle is the same as a cardinal number 3 in ASL.
would be different and it would be related to the subject of BOY.

Table 4.19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X2 by X7 BOY CAR (CL:3) / BOY WITH CAR (CL:3)</th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>NOT ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOY CAR CL:GO-BY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VEHICLE LEFT-RIGHT GO-BY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VEHICLE LEFT-RIGHT GO-BY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When people classify these two sentences as either ASL (1, 2, & 3) or not ASL (4 & 5), 25 out of 74 people (34%) say that both instrument with PP and instrument sentences are ASL. An additional 39 people (53%) say that only instrument is ASL—instrument with PP is not ASL, while only 10 (13%) of the respondents said that instrument with PP is ASL, while instrument is not ASL. Plain instrument is preferred.

In my variety of ASL, I do not accept WITH in this sentence. The sentence that has WITH is ungrammatical in ASL and English\(^\text{12}\). The reason to have this sentence is to make sure that the participants are paying attention to the survey they were taking and to see if it's acceptable as well compared to Table 4.18.

ASL generally does not have a tendency of having WITH in a sentence, let alone in a sentence with a classifier. It would be considered ungrammatical. The direct translation to English for the sentences that contain WITH would be: ‘The boy with a bicycle goes by’/‘The

\(^\text{12}\) Ungrammatical in English if the context was about a life-sized car, rather than a toy car.
boy with a car that goes by’. These would be considered ungrammatical in English as well. However, for the bicycle sentence, there was an equal percentage for both being ASL and instrument is ASL, instrument with PP is not ASL. I have a feeling that it’s possible that the respondents accepted WITH with bicycle because you can walk with bicycle, holding its handle and walking on the side of the bicycle. The car, on the other hand, is not ideal for a person to hold the steering wheel and push/walk by the side with a car.

Most of the respondents in the interviews said both sentences that has WITH in it are not accepted, however a few of them may accept the sentence that has WITH BICYCLE. Those respondents said they are not sure of why, but it seems OK, even though they know it is not ASL. Nevertheless, they much prefer sentences that do not have WITH.
Chapter 5
Discussion

Here I will discuss the preliminary research and result from Chapter 3 (section 5.2), how previous results from Noschese 2019 impact this dissertation (section 5.3), interviews with the participants (section 5.4), and summary (section 5.5).

5.1 Chapter 3 Preliminary Research and Result

I believed that the older signers version of ASL structure would be dominantly SOV, however, it was not the case. There were several different strategies for specific sentences, as shown in ch 3 section 3.5.1.

Fischer’s evidence for SOV structure in ASL came from three sources: written texts such as sign books published in France and Abbe Lambert’s publication: “The Key to the Language of the Body and Gesture—Extract of the Short, Easy, and Practical Method of Teaching Illiterate Deaf-Mutes”, ASL written text from the story, and some of the grammatical rules of ASL.

Regarding Fischer’s claim that ASL was indeed SOV in the past, my data supports that claim since my data showed SOV patterns.

It is interesting to note that here are two people that stood out in the data as having an SOV word order the entire time, the most elderly man, aged 91, and a woman aged 77. According to the background questionnaire, they had the lowest level of formal education. (They were the only ones that did not finish high school). This means that these two individuals were least likely to be affected by the pressure to use English in school, so they kept an older, more traditional form of ASL. Like Fischer, S.D., & Hulst (2003) mentioned, if the members of the deaf community are not exposed to the educational system, there is less chance for the spoken language to influence the sign language structure).
Fischer also mentioned about the SOV structure that happened one hundred years ago when she wrote the article in 1975, this elderly man at the age of 91 may be a possible model of one of the last few remaining that uses SOV structure.

Even though the ideology of ASL was not directly reflected in my data, since there is a majority of SVO word order, I believe that the ideology was reflected indirectly in the avoidance of using an object. The signers often will not mention the object and/or omit object in the word order. They would rather use the strategy of SV with or without prepositions, or change the object to an instrument or location plus classifier verb.

I suggest avoiding the object through the above strategies allows the user to avoid choosing between SOV and SVO word order. The belief of SOV being better than SVO can still be seen by the respondents’ avoiding using a direct object by using prepositions, by their omitting the direct object, or by using an instrument or location with classifier verb. In these ways, a person doesn’t have to choose between following ASL ideology of SOV and not following it by using SVO. However, this hypothesis is something that needs to be tested.

I suspect that the choice of alternatives may depend on the verb. For example does the verb require an overt object or not? Specifically, we need to examine what is it about the verb that influences whether an object is present? This also needs to be tested through further research.

The way ASL works now may be influenced by English, and the signers feel pressured to use language in the way that expresses the idea of ‘success’. The younger generation of Deaf people are now educated, and they understood how ASL “supposedly” works, which gives the possibility of why the ideology still holds today even though it’s not entirely true in reality.

5.2 How the Preliminary Result Impacts the Dissertation

Based on the pilot research and what I have seen in Deaf community about the “correctness” of ASL; younger people seem to believe that older ASL is “correct” because the older signers weren’t as educated, even though they knew that the older signers were also victims of the oralist system. Moreover, based on the literature review, the Deaf community knows
about English’s oppression of ASL that has been happening for a long time. The younger generation seems to be trying to demonstrate pride in ASL by trying to “take ASL back” by being overly critical of other young people’s signing, as I’ve seen on social media.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the goal of this study is to discuss the ideology of young signers about some word order strategies in particular verb phases and noun phrases in a single genre of discourse in older ASL users. This is important since there has been almost no documentation of the ideologies/attitudes of younger signers towards older signers (or older version of ASL). The only documentation that mentioned about Deaf people’s ideology is the Hill (2012) book. While some mentions of attitudes and beliefs can be found in personal communication and social media surrounding the deaf communities, there is no documentation of how younger generation thinks of/about the use of older ASL.

My intention in Chapter 3, the Pear Story study was a way to begin to answer the above questions and describe a few features of word order in a single genre among a small group of signers. One of my hypotheses in the dissertation is that younger signers will view the strategies used by older signers as “correct” ASL, which did happen. However, the younger signers also accepted the other strategies as “correct” ASL, even with unspecified and specified verbs, such as CAT DRINK WATER in Chapter 4, section 4.4.1.3.

In the next section, I will discuss why the younger signers also accepted the other strategies as “correct” ASL when it’s ungrammatical and why they also accepted SVO sentences and their thoughts about that.

5.3 Interviews

After collecting the survey results, I was able to interview 10 people. The average interview time was about 1 and half to 2 hours each. I was able to collect information about their thoughts, education and language upbringing, and their beliefs in regard to ASL. I also was able to ask questions in regard to the sentences that they accepted as “correct” ASL and why they accepted it.
5.3.1 English and ASL Instructions

All but one of the 10 interviewees did not have any formal ASL instruction/structure until college. It was then when they realized that there are rules to ASL. One interviewee did not realize that he was learning ASL structure when he was younger. When he explained what it was like and I pointed out that he indeed learned the ASL structure at the time. He had thought it was part of English instruction all along.

Most of the interviewees learned formal English instruction throughout K-12 settings and they never could retain how it actually worked. As I now quote them:

“English class was like memorization rather than understanding how English works.”

“I don’t remember learning English but I remember being introduced to English when I was encouraged to read in 6th grade. Maybe I was “mature” at that time to retain English.”

“(People) Always criticized my paper (for English) and I would just change, following suit. She (the teacher) did explain some (English grammar) but I never remembered.”

“Staying in one class for all subjects, it can be a blur of what is taught at the time.”

“I learned how to write English through repetitive drills from elementary school to middle school. Then, in high school, I did creative writing with no English rules (taught). From there, I noticed that my English skills had declined..”

“I felt like I improved my English from my career. I paid more attention to reading emails from (my) co- workers and boss, seeing how they used English sentences. So I’d say I learned English from interacting with hearing people though emails.”

“When I read/write English, I just know what is right or wrong. I can’t tell you how I know, I just know also what would look better.”
“When I used a TTY, it helped my English a lot…But I didn’t really understand how English works until college.”

They admitted that reading books helped them to retain English skills rather than the instruction itself. One interviewee admitted that he hated reading books and he remembered one of his classmates was better in English because she loved to read.

What I also found during the interview is it seems like some participants “forgot” that they were evaluating of what is “correct” and “incorrect” ASL at some point during the survey. When I asked about the acceptance of sentences that consist of unspecified and specified verb of DRINK vs LICK or the ungrammatical sentences such as: GIRL BORROW WITH CLOTHES, the responses would be, as I quote the interviewee: “If hearing people sign like that (GIRL BORROW WITH CLOTHES), I let them, fine with me. As long I can understand them”. That interviewee also mentioned that he did not have a patience to correct a signer who is not culturally Deaf. That goes for the other interviewees as well. This indicates that the respondents may have lost the purpose of the survey by accepting most sentences as “correct ASL” as in switching their mind by signing they still “understand what you meant by that” and how they will use those sentences when they encounter hearing people that do not know ASL or are learning ASL, rather than repeating themselves or correct the newly signer.

There are some interviewees who automatically turn those sentences down. In regards to unspecified and specified verbs, one interviewee said he would sign in SVO structure, but accepted SOV structure because he knows it is ‘more’ ASL. However, he accepted both SVO and SOV structure because of the sign of the specified verb, rather than the unspecified sign “DRINK” for that sentence. He stated that a cat cannot drink water that way, using its paws.

I had a very short video of a cat drinking out of the bowl, a little boy eating an apple, a person pedaling a bicycle, and a woman driving a car during the interviews. Those videos consist unspecified/specified verbs and phonology similarity. When I asked the interviewees to sign out on the spot when they see those videos and five out of ten interviewees dropped the
object. When I encouraged them to repeat those sentences with object, three out of five interviewees repeated the sentences in SOV structure.

5.3.2 Their Attitude Towards ASL Classes in K-12 Settings

When asked the interviewees about their opinion on having a formal ASL classes in K-12 settings and majority of their responses were: yes, they should have formal ASL classes. Those who took “ASL” classes in K-12 settings were an ASL literature classes, rather than the grammar class, yet few of interviewees still thought ASL literature is part of ASL grammar rather than a separate genre. However, the interviewees’ reasons of having ASL classes were interesting:

“I already have ASL access so I never knew the rules for proper ASL, still to this day. I feel like we’re being unsure of what is ASL so we can just go with whatever is being used, without knowing anything. I would think it’s sloppy? But yes, ASL instruction should be in K-12 settings.”

“Yes, they should have ASL in K-12 settings. Many children do not have a deaf family so it should help them to have access to ASL as it’s their form of expression.”

One of the interviewees thinks that ASL classes in K-12 may be confusing for students because it was confusing for him. He doesn’t sign the way ASL was structured (ie: STORE I GO). He thinks it’s awkward to sign that way. He also mentioned that he could tell if the person he was conversing with is a new signer based on them thinking too hard to do the structure. However, if student do not have language access at home, thinks they should have a formal ASL classes in K-12 settings.

Those responses above were responses from people who have a Deaf family. They are more likely thought that children that are language deprived that should have ASL classes, rather than the children with language access.
There are other responses from hearing families:

“SEE (Signed Exact English) really failed me, it burns in my mind. When I was in second grade, I learned about time and money. You know how money were signed, right? Quarter, nickel, penny… Then there’s time. You know, half hour, quarter past 5… So, when the teacher spoke, “quarter past 5” and the interpreter signed like quarter (as money). I kept answering wrong answers because the interpreter kept signing signs for money instead of signs for time.”

She felt that this wouldn’t have happened if she had formal ASL classes so she can advocate for herself instead of using the interpreter. She knew something was wrong with the way the interpreter was signing, but, at the time she didn’t know enough about ASL to pinpoint what exactly was wrong.

Another respondent stated:

“I understand there are pros and cons for ASL (classes) to English: some children retain ASL and still can’t write English because they use ASL sentences. But ASL structure should be taught in K-12 settings, still… But as an elective?”

When I pointed out that he did indeed learn ASL formal instruction for a short time during his earlier years, he didn’t realize that. He was never been told the separation of instruction or what is being taught at the time, he thought it was part of English instruction. I then pointed out how learning formal ASL at the beginning had helped him to learn English effectively, he changed his mind and said ASL shouldn’t be an elective; it should be required.

5.3.3 Attitude About Knowing Their Own Language

When asked if they wished that they knew more about ASL and/or what is it that they wanted to know? The most common responses from those who went to Deaf schools:
“I really don’t care about learning about ASL. I already know ASL that I don’t feel the need to learn about it.”

However, there are some responses like this from people who attended Deaf schools:

“I wish to know more about ASL origins- Like background of ASL is from France and if people know about that, then maybe will believe that ASL is actually a language. It may give ASL some creditability.”

“I wish to know more about ASL regional signs.”

When asked those who went to mainstream schools:

“Importance of having ASL class is identity.”

“I wish to know more about Deaf culture and identity.”

“I wish I knew more about ASL- when discussing linguistics of ASL, I can’t follow. I’m disappointed in that because it’s MY culture, MY language and it’s something I should know”.

As you can see, the difference between those who went to Deaf school and mainstream programs, the difference of knowing the regional signs and not need to know more about ASL versus culture and identity. It is fairly obvious to see that the students that went to Deaf schools had confidence in identity compared to those who went to mainstream schools. With established identity, which comes with language, they didn’t feel the need to know more about ASL. For those who went to mainstream schools did not receive the same confidence which leads to wanting to know more about ASL so they could be “qualified” enough to be part of the Deaf communities.
5.3.4 What Makes ASL “Perfect”

During the interview I asked the interviewees what they thought about “good” ASL, as in if they can identify what exactly is it being “good”. Most respondents mentioned the same sets of features, including sign choices, situation-dependent and audience-dependent code-switching, correct non-manuals, and pacing, as can be seen from these quotes below:

“Easy to understand, easy on eyes, no struggles to understand, and smooth and pace of signing.”

“SMOOTH and has RHYTHM. The flow of conversation.”

“No English words. Like long sentence (in English) to short. Facial expressions… The smooth pace, rather than choppy… Hard to say, just… an intuitional feeling, you just can tell if that person is using ‘perfect’ ASL.”

“Word choice. Also no English articles. Proficient with facial expressions and the pace of signing. But, at the same time, I look at those who is skilled at ASL is skilled at “switching” to different comprehension level, depends on where, who, and what situation. In my personal opinion, that is proficiency in ASL.”

“Feels like I’m seeing pictures in my head. Like painting a picture and matches exactly in my head. Less mind work.”

“Based on how well I understand the conversation. Pace, sign choices, sign accuracy.”

As mentioned in Chapter 2, literature review, section 2.4: Spooner (2020) mentioned that those deaf students in the study identified only two rules for ASL: 1) it must be signed clearly enough for the recipient to understand and 2) it has to have good facial expressions. According
to the students, as long as these two criteria are met, it’s “good ASL” (Spooner, 2020). It’s interesting to see what they deem on what is ‘good’ or ‘perfect’ ASL based on the speed, pace, the flow of conversation, facial expressions, and the sign choice/accuracy. Nothing about it is restricted to syntax or word order, except for the exclusion of English articles.

I also should refer here to Chapter 2 about Hill (2012)’s description of the effect of standardization of ASL on signers’ attitudes:

“One result of standardization is that signers develop certain attitudes toward other signers’ use of linguistics items and features: one could assume just because the signer’s signing has more ASL forms than English-like forms, it should be ASL. However, it really depends on what is perceptually salient for the observer: (1) The signer could be perceived to be using ASL because ASL forms have a predominant presence in the signing compared to the marginal presence of English-influenced forms; (2) the signer could be perceived to be using contact signing because ASL and English forms are equally salient even though the number of English forms is minimal; or (3) the signer could be perceived to be using English-based signing because of the striking presence of English word order and English-influenced signs that is too difficult to ignore” (Hill, 2012: 39-40).

5.3.5 Attitudes About Word Order

The interviewees’ responses about the “ideal” ASL; when asking about what IS ASL, and how they differ from English and the answers are:

“There are specific sentences that you can see if they’re using ASL such as: instead of signing, ‘WHERE IS THE BATHROOM’ You sign, ‘BATHROOM WHERE’.”

“…Object before verb is more ASL because it paints a picture better.”
“ASL switches noun and object? I can never remember the rules! But ASL is not in the same order as English.”

Their ideology of what is ASL is based on the word order. However, those who went to Deaf school and had a Deaf family will often say they do not see the difference between SOV and SVO. At the end of the interview, I often will explain about the word order of ASL and point out that they accepted the word order of SVO, which is also an order of English. Their discussion/responses were as interesting:

“Sometimes.. depends on individual.. no matter how they sign, point what is more important part of the sentence- like if want to emphasize CAR, will sign CAR first. But if DRIVE is important part of the sentence, then will say DRIVE first.”

“Object and verb- it doesn’t matter where they are in the sentence, as long it ‘looks’ right. The use of ASL is more towards how comfortable you are with signing some sentences.”

“I remember your survey- I remember the word orders that could look similar but in different position. Honestly, I sometime sign this way or the other way. I do both. I did click what is really ASL but I don't sign that way…The official 'rule' of ASL and real world ASL don’t always match.”

“ASL has some connection with English structure…I think I sign in SVO word order because I think in English.”

I then had a discussion with this interviewee about thinking in English, why did this happen? Why was she thinking in English? She said, “K-12 instruction really emphasizes English more than ASL. So if we had both, and taught HOW to do both, maybe we would be able to switch structures efficiently?” Somewhere along the conversation, she stated, “When you see beautiful
ASL stories with classifiers, it’s such an awe. Because you don’t see that much anymore…

“Beautiful” ASL may not be functional in today’s world because our everyday life incorporates a lot of English, such as writing up emails. My mind may have shifted to SVO structure because I deal with English everyday. That way it’s “less” work to switch structures. English influence ASL so it makes what ASL is today.”

Since she is one generation in a Deaf family, I then asked if she is ok with the idea that ASL is influenced by English and her response was: “yes and no. It may actually make it easier?” I asked what she meant by that, and she said, “the thinking process for reading and writing in English.”

I also had the similar conversation with another interviewee who also had a Deaf family. He mentioned that he never went to college, yet prefers SVO word order because of the interaction with hearing people at work. He mentioned he knows that his writing is not as good, but “at least in that structure (SVO), hearing people understand me better.”

I had a discussion with a Deaf mother with Deaf children, but came from hearing family and went to a mainstream program (and then went to a Deaf school at end of her high school years) about the word order. She accepted SVO as ASL because she thinks that it will help kids to write English better. Also, when she wants to teach her kids reading or anything school related, she can feel that she changed her signing to English-like structure. But after her children understands, she will switch back to her “more” ASL structure.

I asked her why she changed her signing to English order? “I want them to be able to have access to writing without struggles”, she stated. She also felt like with today’s technology with the use of video chatting will decline the writing skills. She felt that the use of TTY\(^\text{13}\) texting, which involves a lot of writing practice, improves the English writing skills.

I then asked her if she thinks that her children will not write well if she signed in ASL? She firmly said yes.

\(^{13}\) TTY is an abbreviation for teletypewriter which helps people that are Deaf/hard-of-hearing/non-verbal to be able to use the telephone to communicate.
5.4 Summary of the Findings in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5

This is a summary of the findings in Chapter 4 and the interviews in this early chapter. I will discuss selected findings from Chapter 4 that are relevant to the findings from the interview. This section will discuss selected sentences where the object and the verb are phonologically similar (section 5.5.1), not phonologically similar (section 5.5.2), unspecified/specified verbs (section 5.5.3), verb choices (section 5.5.4), and the use of prepositions (section 5.5.5).

5.4.1 Phonologically Similar

For sentences where the object and the verb are phonologically similar, even though the respondents accepted both SOV and SVO as ASL: 68% (for a boy driving a car) and 62% (for a boy pedaling a bicycle), five out of ten of the interviewees seem to prefer to drop the object when I asked them to sign them out. However, three of them would often sign in SOV word order.

5.4.2 Not Phonologically Similar

For sentences where the object and the verb are not phonology similar, the data showed that the respondents accepted both SOV and SVO structures, for example: 86% for baby ate an apple, 56% for baby ate a cookie, 76% for a cat drinking water from the bowl, 82.5% for a girl borrowing clothes, 50% for a man climbing a tree, and 69% for a man dragging a goat. Like I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the interviewees from Deaf family did not notice the difference in word order (that I signed out during the interview, giving them an option to pick one that is ‘more’ ASL); the interviewees that had either Deaf or hearing families continue to accept either one when I asked them which sentence they would choose as ‘more’ ASL. Like in earlier section, section 5.4.5, the interviewees mentioned that they didn’t remember the rules that ASL had, that they would sign either one or both, and that it didn’t matter where the object is in the sentence, as long ‘it looks right’.
5.4.3 Unspecified/Specified Verbs

For the unspecified/specified verb sentences, the respondents (58%) did NOT accept the sign of unspecified verb DRINK for cat drinking water. However, 25% of the respondents said the SVO word order was acceptable. I then asked specific interviewees who accepted that sentence as SVO and I was given this answer: “if hearing people signed like that, it's fine with me…No, I wouldn’t sign like that with a Deaf person!” as mentioned in section 5.4.1.

5.4.4 Verb Choices

For verb choice sentences, the data showed that the respondents preferred the use of classifiers over plain verb even though they accepted both plain verb and the use of classifier. For the SLV and classifier verb sentence, a woman walking on the street, the respondents (56%) accepted both, however 34% of the respondents did not accept the plain verb as ASL. As the interviewees mentioned that they consider the use of classifier (word choice) is what makes ASL good.

5.4.5 Prepositions

For the use of prepositions in a sentence, the data showed that respondents do accept prepositions in some ASL sentences as ASL. However, there are some sentences that are unacceptable, such as WOMAN WITH CLOTHES BORROW/WOMAN CLOTHES WITH BORROW. If the preposition sentence is grammatical in English, then it may be acceptable for ASL if the signer tries to sign in English-like grammar, as I mentioned in Chapter 2 section 2.2 and section 2.4. If the preposition sentence is not grammatical in English, then it would not be acceptable for ASL. The respondents (60%) rejected both sentences as ASL. There were a few respondents (15%) that accepted those sentences as ASL and when I asked about those sentences, the interviewees admitted that they may have not paid attention fully to the survey because their response to those sentences was a strong no.
It’s interesting to note that the preposition with a classifier for bicycle, BOY WITH BICYCLE CL:3 compared with no prepositions for the same sentence, the respondents’ percentages for acceptance for each sentences were (48%). The respondents (53%) rejected the sentence of BOY WITH CAR CL:3. It’s possible that the respondents accepted WITH with bicycle because you can walk with a bicycle, holding its handle and walking on the side of the bicycle; it’s not possible to do so with a car. However, the percentage (48%) for bicycle sentences with preposition are lower compared to the other sentences without prepositions.

5.5 Differences Related to Family Type

It’s noticeable that those interviewees who had a hearing family knew a bit more about ASL and its structure and were able to tell the difference between SOV and SVO as compared with Deaf people who came from Culturally Deaf families. It is possible because they wanted to be “equally good” as Deaf people who had access to ASL from infancy. They also wanted to be accepted into Deaf communities because they knew ASL or about ASL. They also felt the need to have classes on culture and identity since they did not have that while growing up.

It is notable that those interviewees who had a Deaf family couldn’t really tell the difference between SOV and SVO and didn’t care to. It’s as long it ‘looks’ and/or ‘feels’ right. Also, they didn’t care about learning more about the language, but rather about history of the ASL lexicon and how it were developed. They already had a strong identity and culture awareness that they felt that was ‘enough’ for them to be qualified to be part of the communities and determine what is ‘good’ ASL.

My hypothesis and the possible ideology that the deaf communities had a tight grasp on: ASL being perceived as an SOV language, through and through- did prove to be true. As I mentioned in section 5.4.5, one interviewee pointed out that he knows ASL has a SOV structure but it didn’t align with real world ASL usage. Also the others gave examples about SOV word order structure when I asked them to give me an explanation of what is the difference between ASL and English. Yet, they stuck with SVO structure because it’s part of everyday life in regards to be career-successful.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 My Attitude

My attitude towards ASL may come from the upbringing and my uttermost interest in language, compared to those Deaf people who had a different interest. When I started to notice that the ideology of ASL being a SOV language and the real world use of ASL word order didn’t align, I wanted to research this. When I got the survey’s results, I will be the first to admit that I was disappointed. I had a big hope of people saying ASL was an SOV language, even when I knew I’m not using that structure as often, however I still could identify the difference. The result and interviews told me otherwise for the interviewees.

I thought that the older signers would have SOV word order, because it was not typical for them to receive an education back then, which would result less English influence into their structure. However, I was so very wrong. They had several different strategies that resulted with few uses of obvious SOV or SVO structure. It may be because they avoided the SOV and/or SVO word order due to unsureness of which structure to pick. Nevertheless, more research in that area, specifically if they are avoiding the word orders would be needed.

I also thought that Deaf people will automatically recognize the difference between SOV and SVO structure and can easily determine that SVO word order is not ASL at all. Again, I was very wrong about that. I would think that if I know the difference, easily, doesn’t mean they would too. Again, this showcased my knowledge about ASL because I studied it. I thought it would be general knowledge, but if Deaf people did not have training in sign linguistics it doesn’t always mean those Deaf people would follow suit.

I think I was a bit more shocked when people who had a Deaf family thought that learning the ASL grammar is not as important because they use the language fluently think they know about ASL grammar. However, while they know how to use ASL fluently, and have
unconsciously internalized the rules of ASL, they do not have the metalinguistic knowledge that they would have if they studied the linguistics of ASL. If they study the linguistic of ASL, I believe their feelings/mind towards it would change.

There is another widespread belief among many Deaf people and their families (both Deaf and hearing families) that learning about ASL grammar in school would negatively impact Deaf students’ English skills or somehow confuse Deaf students. When I talked with them, they seemed to not understand that being bilingual is a normal state for many people in the world. This belief among some Deaf people that studying ASL would negatively impact English is, in fact, similar to the belief among hearing people that learning a sign language would negatively impact speech abilities.

Many Deaf interviewees expressed ambivalent feelings about ASL. For example, they said, “I support ASL, but…I’m not sure if Deaf students should learn about ASL grammar in school, but…it’s important to use ASL and to make ASL equal to English, so…maybe it’s OK to use ASL in school but maybe the students don’t need to learn about how ASL works.”

What Deaf people (and hearing people) do not realize is that ASL does not negatively impact English skills. From my impression and experience with teaching Deaf children ASL structure, in fact, improved their English skills greatly. Being bilingual or multilingual is a normal state of affairs for most people in the world, just like the ability to switch between the languages they know. It is not often that teachers and parents would tell the children which language they are using when teaching or reading to them. Did they emphasize what language they are using when they read to children? Did they emphasize the difference between ASL and English in home or school? All of the interviewees said no and I will tell you that it didn’t happen with me either. We never knew the difference, which is why most Deaf people will say “broken English” or “ASL is like English but without articles” because we have never been told the difference between English and ASL.

Like this Deaf mother who was concerned about her children’s literacy skills would prefer to sign in English word order, just because she believed that it would help. But she never had the guideline of HOW that works if ASL was included. She had that fear within her because
she never saw how it works or had that in school. She had to struggle, and she still struggles to this day.

With this being said, when some of the interviewees said they had some ASL classes in K-12 settings, they meant ASL literature classes where they learn about ASL poetry, ASL stories, ASL alphabet stories, ASL handshape stories, etc. Nothing in class will discuss grammar and structure. They also considered ASL literature as ‘grammar’, which is why they didn’t feel the need to “learn” about ASL because they ‘know’ it. That surprised me because if they compare it to English, the way we learn English is nothing like the way we learn ASL. We don’t learn English literature till in high school or in college. That tells me that they couldn’t tell the difference between grammar and literature and couldn’t identify ASL grammar.

With my upbringing in the culture and communities which always have fought for our rights and education; I am a living example of Deaf education and have first-hand experience with language oppression- I think it’s natural for me to feel frustration and disbelief about the interviewees’ responses. My first thoughts were: don’t you want to preserve ASL? Why wouldn’t you care about English’s influence into ASL? But it may be because the language is actually changing- that the signers did not notice the changes and embraced them.

6.2 What I Could Have Done Differently

Based on the Chapter 4 data and analysis and Chapter 5 discussion, there are several things that need some further research, which will be mentioned in the next section, section 6.3. Nevertheless, the data and analysis showed that there are more sentence strategies that has been used, other than SOV structure. Those strategies did not align with the ideology that the Deaf people may have today, as I mentioned in Chapter 5, section 5.4.5, the interviewee pointed out and recognized that the ideology of ASL within the communities did not align the real world ASL.

The strategies included the use of word order structures, the use of prepositions, and classifiers. It has not been usual for ASL in general to have English prepositions in ASL sentences, however, it’s noticeable that English-like prepositions have been used more frequently
nowadays. There were also data that showed that the Deaf participants accepted some sentences that are ungrammatical as ASL, such as the use of unspecified/specified verb. When asked in interviews, they mentioned that they accepted those sentences because they either: did not pay attention to the details and/or accepting this sentence if they were conversing with a hearing person who is learning ASL or hearing people in general.

With this information from the interviews, there are some things that I would like to have changed in the research methods. Even though I explained in the introduction/instruction video before the survey that the goal of this survey is for them to determine which is ASL or not ASL based on their institution, not based on the “switching mode” when conversing with other people that do not use ASL or ASL wasn’t their first language. Such as: “would a fluent Deaf signer sign this way to another fluent Deaf signer?”, “would you sign like that to a fluent Deaf signer?”, or “would you sign like that to a hearing person who is learning ASL?”. They should pick the scale based on how they would converse with a Deaf person who is fluent in ASL. This explanation may need more reminder throughout the survey, such as reminding after every 5 videos to ensure that they are following through the instruction.

This survey could have gone a bit differently by asking each participants in the survey if they would sign this way if they were conversing with a Deaf person? This question may be unambiguous and direct for the participants to be able to follow through the entire survey. This question should also appear halfway through of the survey as well to remind the participants.

Regardless of the changes that I would like to make on the survey, the interviews have helped tremendously to find the answers and confirm to those sentences that I deem ungrammatical. Those interviews also confirmed the attitudes and ideologies that Deaf communities may have. I am aware that this research is the very small portion of this field, however, I feel and hope that this will give more information in regards to attitudes and ideologies within Deaf communities since there are insufficient data and articles about that area. I also feel that this will open up the discussion among Deaf people and researchers in regards to word order structures and attitudes and ideologies.
6.3 Future Research

This research uncovered some areas that has a potential for future research: there is insufficient data in regards to the Chapter 3, Pear Story Study at present to know why the majority of signers avoided choosing constructions where an object was expected to be chosen. However, if it is true that in U.S. Deaf Cultural ideology that SOV is the “correct” word order in the ideal culture yet signers know in the real world that they tend to use SVO word order, it is reasonable to assume that signers avoid constructions where SOV and SVO word order have to be chosen. However, this is something that needs to be tested.

In addition to the future research, it may be a good idea to have more sentences in each area of structures/strategies to have a wider comparison and/or more in-depth data. The specific example would be: how I should have more sentences that are comparable- to make sure ALL SOV and SVO examples are comparable. I did have most sentences that are comparable, but I occasionally had a few sentences that are not comparable and had to not include them in the analysis. Also it is possible to have more participants to partake the survey through compensation. Those are the small changes, I felt I have gotten really good information with this research, regardless.

As a fourth generation Deaf person, this research has been humbling. There were a lot of assumptions that have not been discussed or researched, and it was an eye-opening for me, as a fourth generation Culturally Deaf person, to find and accept that some of the results contradicted the beliefs that I have in the communities that I am part of.
Appendix A

List of Sentences

Sentences found in data:

1. MAN TREE CLIMB
2. MAN CLIMB TREE
3. MAN (TREE CL: CLIMB)
   CL: TALL-OBJECT
   ON
   UP
4. MAN STRUGGLE WITH GOAT
5. MAN WITH GOAT DRAG
6. BOY BICYCLE PEDAL
7. BOY BICYCLE CL: 3
   VEHICLE
   LEFT-RIGHT
   GO-BY
8. BOY WITH BICYCLE CL:3
   VEHICLE
   LEFT-RIGHT
   GO-BY

Sentences based on the data:

9. WOMAN STREET WALK
10. WOMAN WALK STREET
11. WOMAN STREET CL:WALK
    CL: FLAT-OBJECT
    ON
12. GIRL BORROW WITH CLOTHES
13. GIRL WITH CLOTHES BORROW
14. BOY CAR DRIVE
15. BOY CAR CL:V
    VEHICLE
    LEFT-RIGHT
    GO-BY
16. BOY WITH CAR CL:V
    VEHICLE
    LEFT-RIGHT
    GO-BY

Sentence distractors:

17. BOY GIVE PEAR
18. PEAR CL:PEAR-GIVE (me to you)
19. BOY THREE PEAR GIVE GIVE GIVE
20. GIVE PEAR THREE CL:GIVE-GIVE-GIVE
21. BOY THROW FOOTBALL
22. FOOTBALL CL:FOOTBALL-THROW (me to you)
23. BOY THREE FOOTBALL THROW THROW THROW
24. THROW FOOTBALL THREE CL:THROW-THROW-THROW-THROW
25. GIRL BEACH SWIM
26. GIRL BEACH CL:SWIM
27. GIRL SWIM BEACH
28. GIRL CL:SWIM BEACH
29. DOG OUTSIDE RUN
30. DOG OUTSIDE CL:RUN
31. CAR RED CL:GO-BY
32. MAN MAD WORKWORK
33. DOG BONE CHEW
34. GIRL SUITCASE HEAVY DRAG
35. MONKEY BANANA EAT
36. PRINTER PAPER JAM
37. WOMAN STORE GO
38. NAME YOUR WHAT

Sentences that are added in

39. MAN DRAG GOAT
40. MAN GOAT DRAG
41. BOY PEDAL BICYCLE
42. BOY DRIVE CAR
43. CAT WATER DRINK
44. CAT DRINK WATER
45. CAT (BOWL-FROM-LICK) WATER
   BOWL-FROM
   LIQUID
   LICK
46. CAT WATER (BOWL-FROM-LICK)
   BOWL-FROM

103
LIQUID
LICK

47. BABY COOKIE EAT
48. BABY EAT COOKIE
49. BABY APPLE (EAT-APPLE)
   ROUND-OBJECT
   HOLD-WITH-HAND
   BRING-TO-MOUTH
   CHEW

50. BABY APPLE EAT
51. BABY (EAT-APPLE) APPLE
   ROUND-OBJECT
   HOLD-WITH-HAND
   BRING-TO-MOUTH
   CHEW

52. GIRL BORROW CLOTHES
53. GIRL CLOTHES BORROW
Appendix B

The Survey
Demographic/Open end questions
1

Short answer text

2

Short answer text
Short answer text
Short answer text
Appendix C

Survey Sentences in Order

1. BABY COOKIE EAT
2. BOY CAR CL-3
3. GIRL BORROW WITH CLOTHES
4. BOY BICYCLE PEDAL
5. BOY GIVE PEAR
6. CAT WATER LICK
7. BOY WITH CAR CL:3
8. GIRL CL:SWIM BEACH
9. FOOTBALL THROW
10. DOG OUTSIDE RUN
11. BABY APPLE EAT
12. DOG BONE BITE
13. BOY WITH BICYCLE CL:3
14. GIRL WITH CLOTHES BORROW
15. GIRL BEACH CL:SWIM
16. CAT DRINK WATER
17. MONKEY BANANA EAT
18. MAN CLIMB TREE
19. MAN STRUGGLE WITH GOAT
20. CAR RED CL:3
21. BABY (EAT-APPLE) APPLE
22. MAN DRAG GOAT
23. MAN MAD WORK
24. WOMAN WALK STREET
25. PRINTER PAPER JAM
26. PEAR (GIVE-PEAR)
27. BOY THREE FOOTBALL THROW THROW THROW
28. BABY APPLE EAT
29. BOY DRIVE CAR
30. DOG OUTSIDE CL:RUN
31. BOY THROW FOOTBALL
32. CAT WATER DRINK
33. GIRL BAG HEAVY DRAG
34. MAN GOAT DRAG
35. BABY EAT COOKIE
36. WOMAN STREET CL:WALK
37. THROW FOOTBALL THROW THROW THROW
38. BOY CAR DRIVE
39. BOY PEDAL BICYCLE
40. GIRL BEACH SWIM
41. MAN CL:CLIMB TREE
42. CAT DRINK WATER
43. MAN TREE CLIMB
44. GIRL BORROW CLOTHES
45. MAN WITH GOAT DRAG
46. WOMAN STORE GO
47. WOMAN STREET CL:WALK
48. GIRL SWIM BEACH
49. BOY BICYCLE CL:3
50. GIRL CLOTHES BORROW
51. NAME YOUR WHAT
52. BOY THREE PEAR GIVE GIVE
53. GIVE PEAR GIVE GIVE GIVE
Appendix D

Demographic Question List

1. What is your age?

2. What is your gender identity?

3. What kind/type of school did you attend?

4. What is your highest level of education?

5. Are there any members in your family Deaf?

6. How old were you when you learned ASL?

7. Who did you learn ASL from?

Open end questions:

8. In brief, how do you think English and ASL differ from each other?

9. Is ASL changing for the worse? Or for the better?
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