

History and Documentation of Hawai'i Sign Language: first report

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Hawai'i Sign Language is Distinct from American Sign Language

- Evidence
 - Historical
 - Linguistic

Beginning of 6 page letter from Rev. Hiram Bingham to Rev. Thomas H. Gallaudet, dated Feb. 23, 1821.

Sandwich Islands, Necker, Feb. 23, 1821.

My dear friend & Brother Gallaudet since I wrote you from Boston Harbor, I have been concerned especially & super-ly over the great nation, & allowed to enter on my work in the Isles after you, with cheering prospects of success. The Lord has, in answer to the prayers of his people, begun the work of redeeming this land from the yoke of idols, & from the dominion of Satan. He has commanded the light to begin to shine, & we are permitted to witness the dawn of a happier day to this interesting portion of our human race. But let not the church be in haste to staid the victory as though her work were done, but continue her unceasing fervent & effectual prayer, that the arms of Jehovah may still be revealed, to protect & bless his feeble frame of law, & to renovate the heart of this people as well as to change the form of their religion: to send forth more la-

Bingham's description about the purchase of firewood

- ...“the deaf & dumb man immediately communicated the intelligence to me... To signify the quantity that was to come to me, he put his hands together 4 times so as to save his fingers, at each time giving a very little nod, counting off four tens...”

Deaf Man Selling Bingham a Pig

- “At another time he came to me expressing a desire to sell one a hog which he said he had at home. He ... me that it was long extending his arms in one right line, it was largehis hands and arms in a natural position to express magnitude, it was ready for slaughter, putting his finger suddenly to his throat, with great intensity of look and manner”
- “you may go and see for your self - pointing firstly to me then towards his house then ... his two forefingers so as to point directly forward from his temples or the corner of his eyes, enclined a little downward, & staring enquisitively with a little quick motion of his head & eyes as if narrowly examining something ... before him.”

- Examples show that Deaf people had at least a rudimentary sign language in 1820.
- Bingham mentioned other Deaf people in the village.
- Moreover, it is possible that Deaf and hearing people had some common means of communicating....
 - “The language of this people consists very much in signs and gestures,-- the spoken language, not only loses much of its force without gestures, but often cannot be understood. & the natives are able to converse almost wholly by signs & gestures.”
- Bingham noted of the Deaf man the “facility he could converse with the common people, and make himself understood by me”

Historical information on Hawai'i Sign Language (HSL)

Distant past to 1821
indigenous origins

1821--Deaf Hawaiians and some of their signs noted by Hiram Bingham.¹ However, missionaries never worked with sign language nor Deaf people in Hawai'i.²

1876—in a speech to the Legislature, Hon. E. Helekunihi noted the presence of Deaf youth and asserted the need for a Deaf school.³

Late 1800s and early 1900s. Numerous references to Deaf people and SL noted in English language newspapers^{4,5,6,7,8, 9,10,11,12}. Reports of SL interpreters in court.^{4,6,7}

Pooling of signs from Hawaiian and immigrant Deaf communities

2 handed British alphabet comes into use.

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From 1890 on, immigrants outnumber Native population.¹³ Deaf children are born to immigrants and descendants of immigrants.

1914 – School for Defectives^{14,15}

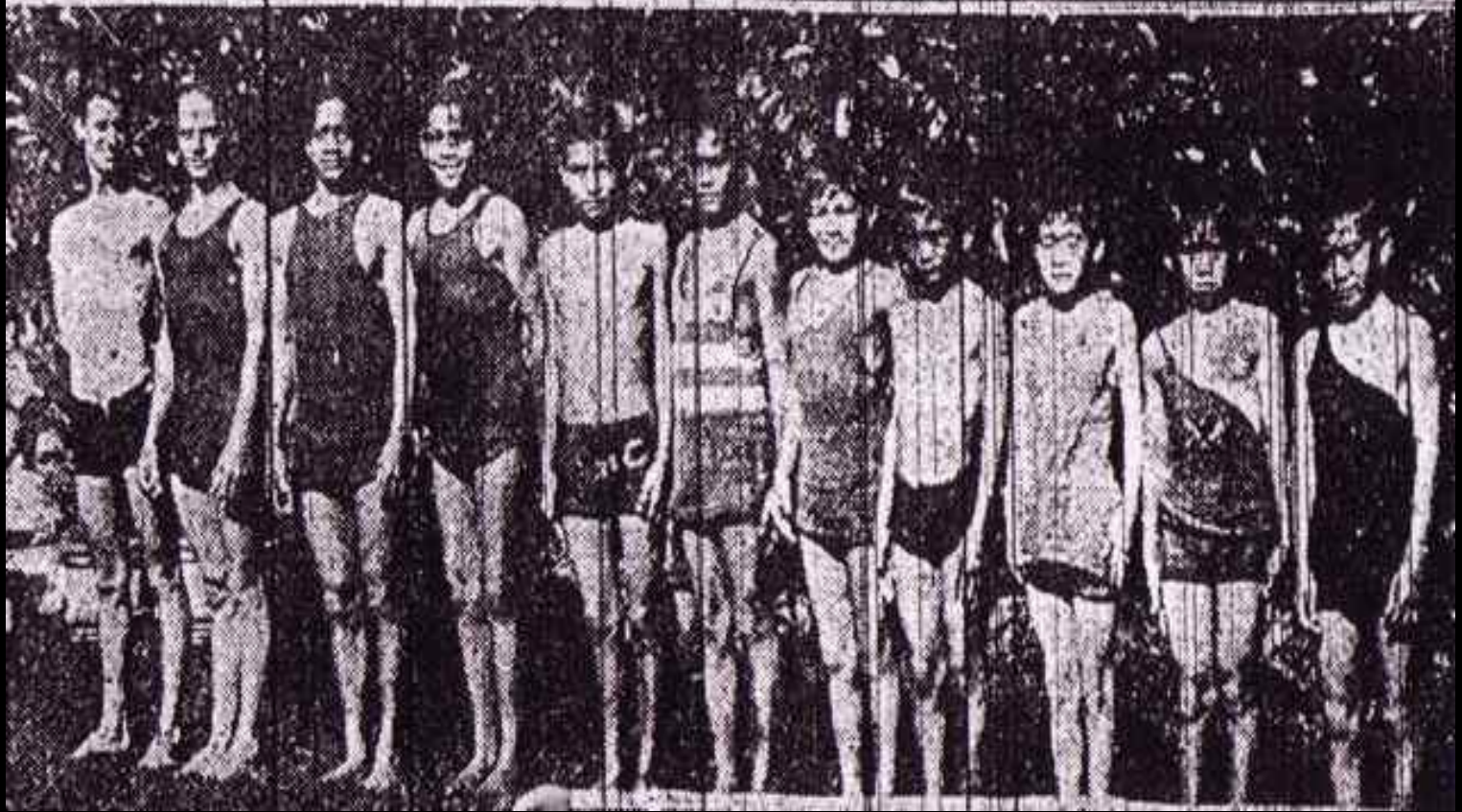
1921-- Territorial School for the Deaf and Blind.¹⁶ 1923-- Children from other islands

1939-40 Edwin Inn, HSL instructor and President of Deaf Club¹⁷

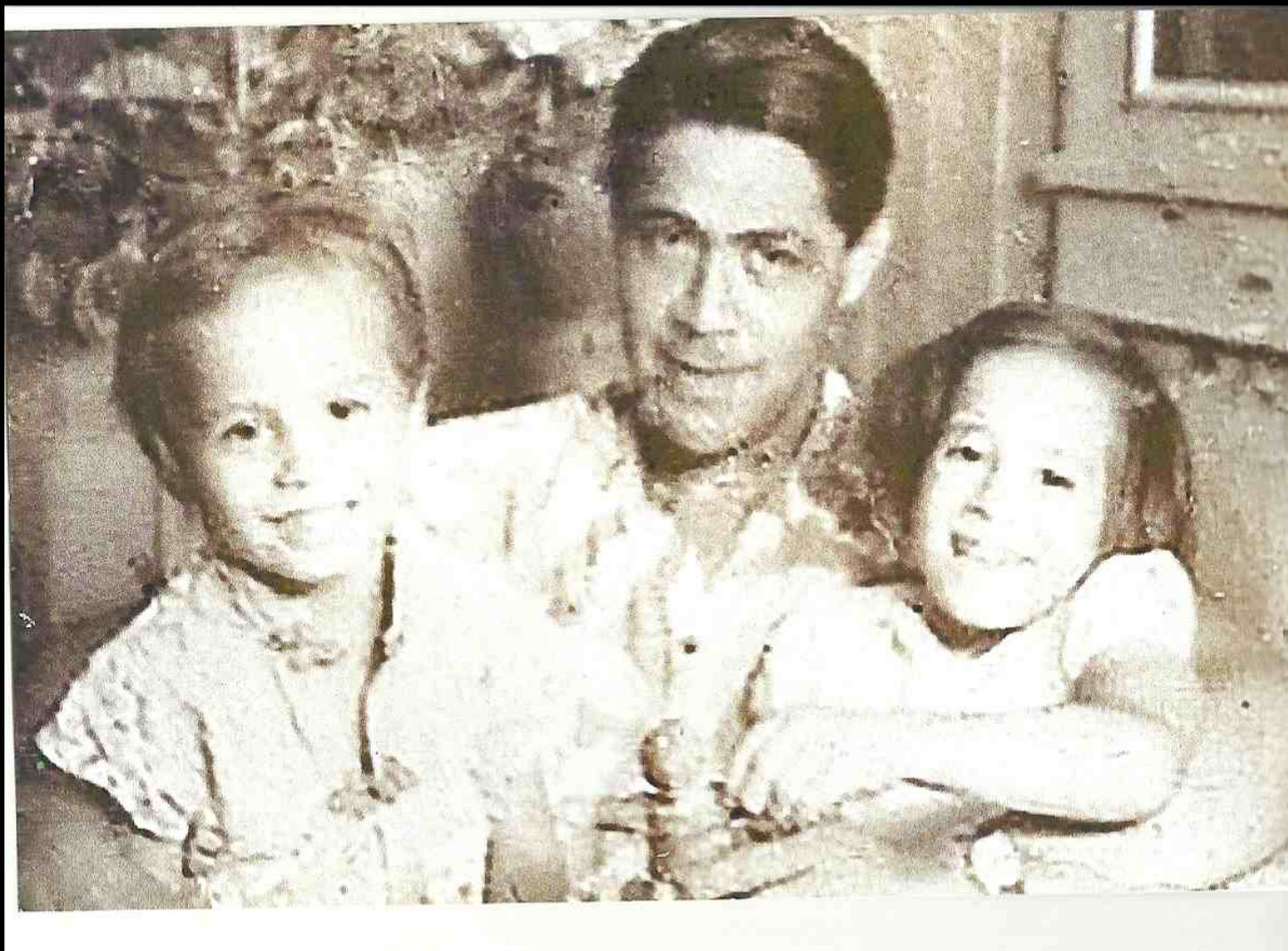
Strong ASL influences. Mr. Palmer (hearing Principal 1939-1946 “taught us lots of signs”)¹⁸ Herschel Mouton, (Deaf teacher, arrives 1948); ASL considered better than HSL.¹⁹

1950s-- ASL superimposed on HSL

Some Deaf, Some Blind, All Swimmers



Edwin Inn fourth from left. Source: The Honolulu Advertiser, March 10, 1928



Edwin Inn as a young father circa 1942 with son Roland (left) and daughter Beverly (right). Source: Roland Inn

Linguistic Evidence Related to HSL & ASL

- Many hearing people have claimed HSL is a dialect of ASL.
- However, there have been no previous historical-comparative linguistic studies of HSL and ASL.
- We will now examine the possible relationship of HSL and ASL using lexicostatistics.

Topics for Discussion for This Section

- 1) Why Lexicostatistics was Used
- 2) Methodological Issues in SL Historical/
Comparative Research
- 3) Lexicostatistical Comparisons
- 4) Word Order Comparisons
- 5) Endangerment Issues
- 6) Efforts for Documentation &
Conservation

1) Why Lexicostatistics was Used

- Insufficient amount of data to use internal recognition.
- Insufficient amount of data to use the comparative method.
- Sufficient amount of data to use lexicostatistics.

Value of Lexicostatistics for HSL

- Lexicostatistics is often used for determining relationships across unwritten languages which are under-described or undescribed and for which there are relatively limited amounts of data available.
- Since HSL is unwritten, undescribed, and for which there are only limited amounts of data.

2) Methodological Issues in SL Lexicostatistical Analysis

- To ensure accuracy in SL lexicostatistics, certain standard procedures need to be followed:
- The need to compare only core basic vocabulary,
- The need to use a Swadesh word list modified for sign language research,
- The need to invoke phonological processes, such as assimilation, deletion, epenthesis, metathesis, etc. when comparing for cognates.

3) Lexicostatistical Analysis of HSL and ASL (1)

- Using the Swadesh word list modified for sign language research, basic core vocabulary in the HSL and ASL were compared for possible cognates. Pairs of items were considered cognate only if they were identical or could be shown to be related using the same standards linguists working on spoken languages use;

- that is, only if the application of plausible rules can derive form A from form B, form B from form A, or both form A and form B from some other form which once existed or continues to exist in related languages, by considering phonological processes of assimilation, dissimilation, deletion, epenthesis, coalescence, metathesis, maximal differentiation, centralization, and/or some other phonological process in sign languages recognized by modern linguistics.

Percentages of Cognates Used for Classification of Languages and Dialects

- 80% to 100% Dialects of the Same Language.
- 36% to 79% Distinct Languages Belonging to the Same Language Family
- Below 36% Distinct Languages Belonging to Different Language Families

Percentages of Shared Cognates Between HSL & ASL & Classification of HSL

- HSL and ASL only have 20% possible shared cognates. Therefore HSL and ASL are distinct languages that belong to different language families.
- HSL looks like NO other sign language. For now, HSL must be classified as a Language Isolate, until comparisons can be made with other Pacific Island Sign Languages.

Data on Basic Word Order

Limited data analysis suggests that HSL

- has SOV word order.
- has Noun+Adjective+Numeral order
- has Verb+Negative order
- has sentence final WH-Q words.

However much more data needs to be collected and analyzed.

Movie goes here but file is too big to include.

movie can be found at:

<http://vimeo.com/uhmanoa/review/60799119/4450697e1a>

4) Degree of Endangerment

- HSL scores 92% on the scale of Endangerment used by Catalogue of Endangered Languages, indicating that HSL is “critically endangered”, the highest level of endangerment on the scale.
- The level of certainty for this level of endangerment is the highest possible (25).

Breakdown of Endangerment/ Certainty Scores

- 10/10 Intergenerational Transmission
- 3/5 Absolute Number of Users
- 5/5 User Number Trends
- 5/5 Domains
- 23/25 Total

Reasons for the scores occur in the next slide.

- HSL scores 10 (5x2) on intergenerational trans-mission since there are “few users, all elderly”.
- HSL scores 3 on absolute number of users because the projected number of users is 140/280.
- HSL scores 5 for user number trends, since “only a small percentage of community members use the language and the rate of shift is very high”
- HSL scores 5 in domains of use of the language, since it is only used in a limited number of situations”. It is very difficult to elicit spontaneous use of the language for extended periods without the signers code-shifting to ASL or code-mixing with ASL.

Need for Documentation

- HSL scores as only 1% documented on the need for documentation criteria used by the Endangered Languages Catalogue indicating an urgent need for documentation, the highest on the scale for need for documentation.
- 0/10 grammar documentation
- 0/9 dictionary documentation
- 0.5/5 corpus documentation

5) Efforts for Documentation & Conservation

- A proposal for a certificate program in Sign Language documentation that will train users of HSL and ASL how to document HSL (and other Pacific Island sign languages).
- A team of HSL users, other Deaf people in Hawaii and linguists who will work on documentation, conservation, and revitalization of HSL (and other Pacific Island sign languages)

- At least 3 student handbooks for teaching HSL.
- At least 3 companion two-way HSL-to-English and English-to-HSL dictionaries (related to the student handbooks).
- A comprehensive two-way HSL-to-English and English-to-HSL dictionary.
- At least 20 hours of videotaped data on HSL, with at least 5 hours fully transcribed in 5 tiers with ELAN and the rest transcribed with free translation.

- An exhibit on HSL and the lives of HSL users (including printed and videotaped data and on historical artifacts from the lives of HSL users) ready for exhibition at the Centenary Celebration at the Hawaii School for the Deaf in 2014.
- For credit certificate program in Sign Linguistics/Sign Language Documentation for people interested in documentation of Pacific Island sign languages offered at UHM and/or KCC.

- For credit HSL courses offered at UHM and/or KCC.
- A small permanent exhibit on HSL and the lives of HSL users at UHM, Hawaii School for the Deaf, or another site.

Mahalo!!

The Hawai'i Council for the Humanities

Gallaudet University

The Gallaudet University Regional Center for the Pacific

The College of Languages, Linguistics and Literature (UH Mānoa)

The Department of Linguistics (UH Mānoa)

Hawai'i School for the Deaf and the Blind (HSBD)

Aloha State Association of the Deaf (ASAD)

Patty Sakal

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- ³Ka Haiolelo a ka Hon. E. Helekuihi (1876). *KA LAHUI HAWAII*. B2H28A1, 6 Iulai 1876.
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- ⁶Deaf and Dumb Boy Has Disappeared. *Evening Bulletin, H.T.*, August 2, 1902, p. torn off.
- ⁷Deaf and Dumb girl Testifies in U.S. Court. *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, Thursday, January 7, 1915, p. 3.
- ⁸Stowaway in Come Back Club. *Hawaiian Star*. Honolulu, Hawaii. Friday, July 7, 1911, p.1.
- ⁹40 Applicants for Navy Jobs. *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, Territory of Hawaii, Thursday, May 3, 1917, p.1.

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- ¹⁹Patty Sakal, personal communication. August, 2012.