

## **ABSTRACT**

### **A Linguistic Description of the Language of the Urban Deaf in Jamaica**

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The underlying structures of Caribbean sign languages are largely unknown. This dissertation investigates the linguistic structure of Jamaican Sign Language (JSL), the principal means of communication used by Jamaican Deaf. It is the first in-depth study of a sign language used in a CARICOM territory. The thesis focuses on several key areas of linguistic organisation, viz. cheretics, cherology, morphology and syntax and examines them mainly within functionalist paradigms. Neurolinguistic and physiological aspects of the production of the sublexical units of JSL are covered under cheretics and cherology. In morphology, major word classes are examined. It appears that JSL may not have a distinct class of adjectives with words denoting

properties and attributes being signified by words labelled as nouns or verbs. JSL presented a nominative/accusative system and unique syntactic structures such as violation of the universal on doubling structures by allowing entire clauses to be copied. The thesis ends with a look at issues in language description within a community-oriented study, and possibilities for future research. The thesis validates JSL as a language and its findings suggest that JSL can provide insight into what is known about how the human mind organises language.

Keywords: Deaf, Caribbean, Jamaican Sign Language, linguistics, functionalism