

ABSTRACT

Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language (TTSL): Its Emergence, Development and Transmission

Alicia Venessa Lamb

Social forces affecting the lives of deaf people have been shown to heavily influence the development, use and vitality of sign languages globally. The Trinidad and Tobago Deaf community is no exception. This thesis provides historical and social perspectives of Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language (TTSL). This is done firstly through a sketch of the socio-historical background in which a native sign language in Trinidad and Tobago emerged. It identifies the early historical events, social factors, institutions and individuals that contributed to the emergence of Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language. Data reveal that the beginnings of the Deaf community can be traced to approximately 70 years ago where education brought deaf people together for the first time. This thesis also presents linguistic data which reflects the social history and historical language contact in the Trinidad and Tobago Deaf community. Lastly, this thesis explores the ways in which the interplay of social, educational, linguistic and medical factors in intergenerational transmission of TTSL is affecting the vitality of TTSL and the future of the language in the next generation. The data presented further solidifies the significant connection between social and linguistic factors and the need to understand the role of these factors in sign language emergence and development and transmission.

Keywords: Alicia Lamb; Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language; TTSL; Sign Language in the Caribbean; Trinidad and Tobago Deaf community