

## ***Wh*-questions in the Trinidad and Tobago signing community**

*Wh*-questions are valuable when investigating asymmetries in language since they can be assumed to exist in all languages (Mackenzie 2009: 1133) and in spoken languages, they are associated with leftward movement (WALS). In signed languages, *wh*-words can appear alone in the left and right peripheries, and/or in both peripheries. This suggests that they are also a good sentence type for investigating the impact of modality on structure (Cecchetto et al. 2009). To investigate this question, data from as many different sign languages as possible is needed. Zeshan (2006) compares *wh*-questions in 37 sign languages; however, their sample primarily represents one kind of sign language — that of European communities (33), in which there are standardised sign languages. This study adds a non-European data point, signing in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) (south Caribbean), which is also a case of language contact, a phenomenon that characterises sign language communities that is not often discussed in the sign language literature on *wh*-questions. This study also represents some of the heterogeneity found in T&T signing, which is also characteristic of deaf communities in general (Suty 1986).

The sign language situation in T&T is characterised by variation, multilingualism and language contact. Two varieties, that emerged out of the move from oralism to Total Communication in deaf education, exist (Braithwaite et al. 2011; Braithwaite 2018): Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language (TTSL), defined as that variety that developed from 1947-75 at the Cascade School for the Deaf in Trinidad when oralism was practiced, and Trinidad and Tobago American Sign Language (TTASL), a local dialect of American Sign Language (ASL). The exact nature of the distinction between these varieties is unknown, and does not necessarily exist for all signers.

Data was collected from 3 informants, who each represent different kinds of sign language users (see table 1 for summary). Data collection was done using a novel picture elicitation task based on Geraci et al. (2015) and Friedmann & Sztermann (2010), grammaticality judgements, and interviews, in that order.

**Table 1:** Characteristics of informants (CODA = child of deaf adults)

Signer	Age	Status	Job	Education	Represents	Family	Relevant background
1	43	Deaf	Teacher	CSD	TTSL, TTASL	Hearing	Learned TTSL from maintenance staff at the CSD. Attended school in the USA for 1 year. Works in sign language research.
2	23	Hearing CODA	Interpreter	Hearing school	TTASL	Deaf parents	—
3	38	Deaf	Salesperson	CSD	TTSL	Deaf parents and relatives	Learned to sign with parents who attended the CSD between 1947-75,

All 3 word orders reported in the literature exist in T&T signing, but they are distributed unevenly between TTASL and TTSL. TTASL shows *wh*-words clause-finally, clause-initially, and duplicated clause-initially and -finally (1-3), and, assuming SVO order (Kwok 2015), there is leftward movement (2). In TTSL, *wh*-words are only found clause-finally, and there is rightward movement (4).

TTASL :	(1)	<hr/> <i>wh</i> <b>WHO-TTASL1</b> SCOOTER <b>WHO-TTASL1</b> PU “Who is scooting?”	(Signer 1)
	(2)	<hr/> <i>wh</i> <b>WHO-TTASL1</b> COOK IX <sub>2</sub> “Who (do you think) is cooking?”	(Signer 1)
	(3)	<hr/> <i>wh</i> TREE FALL PU IX <sub>3</sub> USE <b>WHAT-TTASL1</b> “What was used to make the tree fall?”	(Signer 1)
TTSL:	(4)	<hr/> <i>wh</i> COOK PU <b>WHO-TTSL</b> PU “Who is cooking?”	(Signer 3)
	(5)	<hr/> <i>wh</i> TREE TREE.FALL MAN <b>WHY-TTSL</b> “How did the tree fall?”	(Signer 3)

*wh* = *wh*-NMM (brows lowered + squint); *tp* = topic NMM (brows raised + wide eyes); PU = palm up gesture/ question particle

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