Jordanian sign language: aspects of grammar from a cross-linguistic perspective
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Jordanian Sign Language, or *Lughat al-Ishāra al-Urdunia* (LIU), is the sign language used in Jordan. The language has several dialects. The dialect described in this dissertation is that of the residential school for the Deaf in Salt, where the author worked for six years. This school is currently the only residential school for the Deaf in Jordan and has about 140 students. It also has a number of Deaf staff members, both in the school and in the workshops for vocational training. Thus, it forms a Deaf community in its own right.

LIU appears to be related to other sign languages in the Middle East, but none of these have been researched extensively. An introductory grammar of Jordanian Sign Language has been published (Hendriks 2004, with an Arabic edition published in 2006). The main aim of this publication was to make hearing Arabs with an interest in sign language more aware of the grammar of sign languages in general and LIU in particular. Apart from this grammar, very little research has been done into the sign languages of the Middle East. In the context of a wider typological project some research has been done by Ulrike Zeshan of the Max Planck Institute (MPI) for Psycholinguistics on certain aspects of Lebanese Sign Language (cf. Zeshan 2006b), which appears closely related to LIU. Apart from this, only dictionaries have been published (which are in fact wordlists, rather than dictionaries, because they contain no grammatical information or sample sentences).

Beyond describing selected aspects of the grammar of LIU, this dissertation will focus on placing LIU in a cross-linguistic context. Its aim is not only to contribute to our general knowledge of sign languages in the Middle East, but also to add to our knowledge about the way in which different grammatical structures can be expressed in different sign languages around the world. This, in turn, has implications for the study of language in general, as will be explained in Section 1.5.

Before starting to describe LIU some background information about the community who uses the language and the culture in which the language is used will be provided, since in some cases sociolinguistic and cultural factors may have an influence on the structure of the language (cf. Nyst 2007a). This introductory chapter will therefore mainly be concerned with the sociolinguistics of deaf people and sign language in Jordan. In Section 1.1 the sociolinguistic background of the Deaf community in Jordan is presented. Section 1.2 comments on the influence of Arabic and Arab culture on LIU and presents information about sociolinguistic attitudes of Deaf people towards LIU. Data and methodology of the research is discussed in
Section 1.3. An explanation of glosses and typological conventions is given in Section 1.4. The aim of the present cross-linguistic study and a brief outline of the following chapters are presented in Section 1.5.

1.1 The sociolinguistic situation of the Jordanian Deaf community

1.1.1 Introducing Jordan

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a small country in the Middle East, bordering on Israel and the Palestinian areas to the West, Syria to the North, Iraq to the East and Saudi Arabia to the South and South-East (see Figure 1.1). It has a total area of 92,342 square kilometres, which makes it a little more than twice the size of the Netherlands. Most of the country consists of desert, however, and the population is for a large part centred in some urban areas in the Western part of the country. Almost half of the population lives in or around the capital Amman. The current population numbers about 6 million. In an educational study about the activities of deaf students in Jordan al-Zraigat (2002:17) states that

“The population of Jordan was estimated at 5 million inhabitants in 1998 (Department of Statistics, 1999). The male constitutes about 52% and the female 48%. Those who are under the age of 19 years constitute 64% (The Manual of Disability and Institutes Welfare and Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons in Arab Countries, 1998). The vast majority of inhabitants are concentrated in urban regions, 77% of the whole population live in urban regions, 20% in rural regions, and 3% in the badiyah (desert).”

As far as religion is concerned, 92% of Jordanians are Sunni Muslims, 6% are Christians from various denominations, and 2% have a different religion, including Shi’i Muslims.
A little more than half of the population (50-55%) is of Palestinian origin and registered as Palestinian refugees or displaced persons residing in Jordan. Most of them have citizenship. Since the 2003 Gulf War in Iraq many Iraqis have also fled to Jordan and are now living there. It is estimated that there are between 700,000 and 1.7 million Iraqis in Jordan, many of them illegally.

Jordan is classified by the World Bank as a “lower middle income country”. Education and literacy rates and measures of social well-being are relatively high compared to other countries with similar incomes. Jordan’s population growth rate, although declining, is still high, at approximately 2.8% currently. Unemployment rates are high, with the official figure standing at 12.5%, and the unofficial around 30%.

The official language of Jordan is Arabic, but English is used widely in commerce and government and among educated people. Arabic and English are obligatorily taught at public and private schools. A classic diglossia situation exists in Jordan (as in other Arab countries). There are considerable differences in both grammar and vocabulary between the written form of Arabic taught in schools around the Arab world (also referred to as Modern Standard Arabic, MSA or fusha) and the vernacular spoken on the streets of Jordan. Writing the vernacular is considered unacceptable in most contexts, although it is becoming more common.
among young people using communication methods supported by modern media such as text messaging on mobile phones or internet chatting. In formal contexts MSA is used as a spoken language, for example, by the king, government officials, imams preaching in the mosque and in news bulletins on television.

1.1.2 Cultural and religious attitudes towards disability in Jordan

In Arab culture, disability has traditionally been seen as something shameful. It was considered an ordeal, not only for the disabled person him- or herself, but also for their family. Most Arabs would believe this ordeal is put upon the families of the disabled by God himself.

“Islam is the dominant faith for more than 92% of the population. A core message of Islam is that anything that occurs and everything that exists in the world can be attributed to the will of God. Accordingly, impairment may be explained as an act of God, designed to test the faith of individuals and their capacity to accept that fate with gratitude and patience. This perception of disability as a test of the faith and as God’s will plays a major part in shaping attitudes towards disabled people.”

(Turmusani 1999b:196)

Another common, albeit somewhat contradictory, belief in Jordanian society, according to al-Zraigat (2002:74), is that disabled people are ‘special’ and have a certain power.

In some verses of the Qur’an disability is associated with sin, e.g. sura 16 verse 76 (translation by ‘Ali):

“God sets forth (another) Parable of two men: one of them dumb, with no power of any sort; a wearsome burden is he to his master; whichever way he directs him, he brings no good: is such a man equal with one who commands justice and is on a straight Way?”

In this verse it is implied that the dumb man is not on God’s straight Way and is not just. Additionally,

“in some Qur’anic verses, those with visual, hearing and speech impairments are referred to as those who lack mental capabilities. This is to describe those who do wrong and wicked people in society.”

(Turmusani 1999a:107)

Not all verses in the Qur’an are as negative about disabled people; there are also verses which indicate that God sees all people as equal. Traditionally, however, disability has carried with it a cultural, as well as a religious,
stigma. Because of this stigma, the existence of disability in a family used to be (and in some areas of the countries still is) denied, as it was felt to be a disgrace to the whole family. Disabled children might be kept hidden away by their parents in order to avoid this disgrace, making it impossible for them to receive education or other necessary services. The stigma is especially associated with families with disabled daughters, and may prevent other families from marrying into such a family. According to al-Zraigat (2002:74) the negative attitude towards disabled persons and their families causes many of these families to look for medical treatment or use mythical methods such as placing a talisman or blue beads (to ward off the evil eye) on the chest of a disabled child.

Although all disabilities have carried this stigma, some disabilities are less stigmatized than others. Because Islam puts great emphasis on the importance of the Arabic language as the language of the Holy Book, and essentially of God Himself, it is very important for an Arab to be well-versed in Arabic. Being able to recite the Qur’an is something that has high prestige.

“Therefore, we can see from the vantage point of history that some of those blind people who have mastered skills of reciting Qur’an, have managed to reach positions of some power in their societies.” (Turmusani 1999a:106)

Thus, people with a disability that prevents them from learning and speaking Arabic well, such as the deaf, are more stigmatized than, for instance, blind people or those that miss a limb.

However, Turmusani (1999b:197) indicates that fortunately:

“attitudes towards disabled people in Jordan seem to have improved over time, at least towards some sections of the disabled population. The changes are particularly apparent in relation to people with sensory and less severe physical impairments (rather than people with “mental retardation”), and in relation to men rather than women.”

This change in attitude, especially over the last 25 years, has also made it possible for care and rehabilitation services to be set up. Whereas traditionally the care for a disabled person was solely on the shoulders of the family, it is now perceived as being (at least partly) the responsibility of residential institutions or the state. This change in public perception has come about partly through the arrival of Western NGOs in the 1960s and the influence of Western style modernisation. The International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981 has also played a crucial role in making disability issues more prominent on the state’s agenda. From my own observations, education plays a very important role in changing the attitude of society
towards disabled people. Section 1.1.4 will deal with education possibilities for the Deaf in Jordan in more detail.

1.1.3 Deafness in Jordan

No accurate figures on the number of deaf or hard-of-hearing people in Jordan or the Middle East are available. The only nationwide survey on impairment in Jordan, conducted in 1979, focused solely on the incidence of visible impairment (Turmusani 1999b). Results from a census in 2004 have not yet been made public. Al-Zraigat (2002:66) states that hearing impairment is the second most common disability in Jordan and affects around 1% of the population (according to figures from the Ministry of Social Development in 1995). This would mean that there are currently about 60,000 hearing impaired people in Jordan. It is not clear, however, what exactly is meant by hearing impairment. The figure seems too low to include those who suffer from age-related hearing loss, but rather high if it only includes those born with a hearing loss or with a hearing loss onset in childhood.

Widely differing statistics about deafness in the Middle East are in circulation. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that in 1998 there were approximately 8 million people with a disabling hearing loss in the Eastern Mediterranean region (WHO/CBM 1998). Some sources talk about two million hearing impaired children in Egypt alone (El Bakary 1999:72-73), which would be 2.7% of the population. This figure is very high, even if it includes everyone with even a slight hearing loss. For Lebanon, a more realistic number of around 10,000 deaf people (0.27% of the population) is given (Roumanos 1999:224). The Gallaudet Encyclopaedia states that in Israel “the overall incidence of deafness […] in the population up to 18 years of age is about 1.2 per 1000”, but that among minorities, like the Druze, the Bedouin and the general Arab population the incidence of deafness is higher (Van Cleve 1987:102). Since Lebanon and Israel have better healthcare than many other Arab countries, we may assume that there is an even higher incidence of deafness in other Middle Eastern countries like Yemen.

For Jordan it would seem that a figure like that given for Lebanon, somewhere between 0.25% and 0.3% deaf people (that is, 15,000 to 20,000 people with severe to profound hearing loss), is realistic. This would mean that Jordan has a Deaf population which is comparable in size to that of a country like the Netherlands. The incidence of deafness in the Middle East is much higher than in Western countries, for which it has been calculated to be between 0.05% and 0.1%. The higher incidence is most likely due to the high incidence of consanguineous marriages in the Arab world. According to
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Shahin, Walsh, Sobe, Lynch, King, Avraham and Kanaan (2002:284) “prelingual hereditary hearing impairment occurs in the Palestinian population at a frequency of approximately 1.7 per 1,000 and is higher in some villages.” This means that among Palestinians the incidence of deafness with hereditary causes alone is higher than the total incidence of deafness in Western countries.

In Jordan, most of the students enrolled in schools for the deaf have a genetic hearing impairment. A study by the Ministry of Social Development in 1994 showed that the genetic factor played a role in 51% of the students (al-Zraïgat 2002:78). According to other researchers heredity causes 60% of early childhood deafness (al-Zraïgat 2002:52). Among the students with a genetic form of deafness, 85% of the cases were caused by first-cousin marriages. The most common non-genetic causes of deafness were found to be Rubella in the mother during pregnancy, accidents, and hyperthermia (al-Zraïgat 2002:79). Although people in general are becoming more aware of the risks of consanguineous marriages, the percentage of these marriages seems to be reducing only in the middle classes. Both among the poor and among the rich the percentage of consanguineous marriages is going up. The poor can often not afford the dowry that is needed to marry outside the family, whereas the rich intermarry to keep their money within the family.¹

As a consequence, numbers of deaf people in Jordan do not seem to decrease, as they are in some Western countries. Modern technology like Cochlear Implantation (CI) is relatively uncommon. At the moment there are only about 60 people with cochlear implants in Jordan. In Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon together there may be a few hundred CI patients. Implant operations done in this part of the world are often performed by Western surgeons, who are not allowed to practice on people in their home countries and therefore go to countries with less strict legislation to get experience. The biggest problem with CI in the Arab world is that the necessary follow-up in terms of training and technical services is not readily available. Consequently, a number of CI patients never use their implants and function in sign language. About 5,000 hearing aids are sold annually in Jordan. As new hearing aids are needed about every four years, this implies that between 10,000 and 20,000 people (depending on whether they need them for one or two ears) wear hearing aids. Many of the deaf with severe-profound hearing loss do not use hearing aids and function mainly in sign language.

¹ Much of the information presented in this section and Section 1.1.4 for which no published sources are given has been kindly supplied by Br. Andrew de Carpentier (personal communication), director of the Holy Land Institute for the Deaf, who is one of the main authorities on deafness and education for the Deaf in Jordan.
Little genetic research has been done on deaf people in Jordan. Most deafness appears to be non-syndromic, although syndromes like Usher’s are quite common. At the Holy Land Institute for the Deaf (HLID) about 8-10% of the students are affected by Usher’s. In some cases Usher’s can result in deaf-blindness. Deaf-blindness also occurs as a result of medical mistakes, whereby premature babies are taken out of incubators too suddenly without enough time for them to get used to the lower level of oxygen outside the incubator. The first unit for deaf-blind children in Jordan was established at the HLID in 2003. Currently it provides care and training (using a modified form of LIU) for four children.

In Jordan, the Ministry of Social Development is responsible for rehabilitation as well as educational services for the deaf, although the Ministry of Education also has an important say in the latter. A World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) survey report from 1991 stated that there were no interpreter services available for deaf people in Jordan. Although there has been some change in this situation since 1991, there are still no qualified interpreters. Interpreters are working in some of the universities and colleges (see Section 1.1.4) but they do not have a degree or diploma, and have not taken official exams. People who want to work as interpreters are generally sent to the HLID, where the director asks them to communicate with some of the staff and students. Depending on how well they do, and how well the deaf think they function, they receive a letter recommending them as interpreters. In 2006 a basic sign language course was developed at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen (Netherlands), in co-operation with the HLID. So far this course has been used to train a small group of potential interpreters, who had to pass an exam at the end of the course and were given a (non-accredited) diploma. It is hoped that more advanced courses will be created in the future, and that the teaching of these courses can be done at one of the universities, so that an official interpreter training course can gradually be established. There are plans to integrate such a course within Jordan University and/or the recently established Jordan-German University in Madaba.

Due to the fact that interpreter services in higher education have only become available in the last five years or so, most deaf people in Jordan are involved in manual labor, such as carpentry, dressmaking, car maintenance, hairdressing or work in factories. A 1993 law states that public and private sector companies employing between 25 and 50 people have to employ at least 1% disabled people. Companies with more than 50 people have to employ at least 2% from the disabled population. However, by 2000 only 170 men and 7 women with hearing impairments were employed under this law (al-Zraigat 2002:83).
Because deaf people who have learned the local sign language can communicate freely with each other and will always have problems understanding those who do not know sign language, they tend to stick together and form a close-knit community of their own. In the Middle East, as in other parts of the world, there are many Deaf clubs\(^2\), where Deaf people mix and talk together. Many Deaf people marry other Deaf and have Deaf friends. Thus, the Deaf form a sub-culture, with their own language, their own humour, their own values, traditions and their own problems, as is the case in many other Deaf communities (cf. Padden and Humphries 1988; Ladd 2003). Because of the high number of deaf people, this community is quite strong in the Middle East. Although in most cases hearing people who are proficient in the local sign language are welcomed with open arms, in some cases they may be viewed as intruders who want to take advantage of the Deaf.

The first Deaf club in Jordan was established in 1986 in co-operation with the Ministry of Youth. Some of the official aims of this club are the integration of hearing-impaired people into society, providing them with a job, and providing them with interpreting services (al-Zraigat 2002:83). Since then Deaf clubs have been established in the three main cities of Jordan (Amman, Irbid and Zarqa). However, with no national association for the Deaf and the clubs being run mainly by volunteers, it is impossible for the clubs to provide such services to Deaf people all over the country. The clubs do provide some sign language training, and the interpreters that work for the national television, which has sign language interpretation for the 6 pm news broadcast and the weekly Friday broadcast of the mosque service, have been trained in the clubs.

It is hard to say what percentage of deaf people in Jordan actually know LIU. I have personally met several deaf people from more rural areas who did not understand LIU and appeared to use a form of home signing to a greater or lesser degree. However, to the best of my knowledge no research has been done into this form of communication in Jordan.

### 1.1.4 Education for the Deaf in Jordan

Regular education in Jordan consists of two years of pre-school (kindergarten), a ten-year basic cycle (grades 1 to 10, from about age 6 to

\(^2\) As is common in the literature, in this dissertation ‘Deaf’ is written with a capital D when it refers to people who belong to this Deaf community. They are the people who have a good command of sign language and a lot of contact with other Deaf people. In contrast, the term ‘deaf’ refers to the medical condition of those with a severe-profound hearing loss.
about age 16), which is compulsory (and free of charge) for all students in
government schools, and a secondary education cycle of two years (grades
11 and 12). This latter cycle has two streams: a comprehensive stream
(which includes general education plus academic training or vocational
education) and a vocational training and preparation stream. The
comprehensive stream is concluded with a national exam (*Tawjihi*) which
allows those who pass it to go on to university if they have followed the
academic track, or to college if they have followed the vocational track.

The first school for the Deaf in Jordan was the Holy Land Institute
for the Deaf, established in 1964 as a charity under the Anglican Church. It
has a kindergarten, primary and secondary school as well as a vocational
training department. Students in this school have been able to take *Tawjihi*
exams since 1999, following the vocational track. They can then go on to
college. Recently it has also become possible for students to follow the
academic track, although they all have obligatory vocational training up to
grade 10. The HLID is currently the only residential school for the Deaf in
the country and is also the leading institute in the country and the Middle
East for deaf education and sign language research and implementation.
According to Al-Fityani (2007:8) it is “now considered a model school for
deaf people in the Middle East”.

In 1969 the Ministry of Social Development started to establish the
al-Amal (meaning ‘Hope’) government schools for the Deaf in different
parts of Jordan. There are currently eleven such schools scattered across the
country (cf. Figure 1.2). In the past only primary education (up to grade 6,
around age 12) was available in the government schools, but in 2006 some
of the larger schools (Irbid, Amman and Aqaba) started secondary
departments which aim to teach up to grade 9. This is still less than the
compulsory education for hearing students, and Deaf students graduating
from these schools cannot go on to higher education. It is the intention of the
government, however, to create possibilities for secondary education up to
*Tawjihi* level in all the schools for the Deaf. A vocational skills department
for girls is also part of the programme at the al-Amal schools.

Finally, in 1977 a second private school was established near Zarqa.
Al-Raja School for the Deaf is monitored by the Charitable Deaf Society and
has classes from kindergarten level up to secondary *Tawjihi* level. Students
who graduate from that school can go on to university or college. Al-Raja
School, like the government schools, is a day school, which in practice
means that only Deaf students from Zarqa and Amman can attend.
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Altogether there are about 850 Deaf children enrolled in the 13 schools just described. In addition, there are also Deaf units in some mainstream schools scattered throughout Jordan, which cater for another 400-500 children. Consequently, there are about 1300 Deaf children in total enrolled in Deaf education at the primary level (kindergarten up to grade 6). Nationwide about 17% of the population is of primary school age. If we assume that there are around 15,000 Deaf people in Jordan, this would give a figure of about 2500 primary school age Deaf children. About 1300 of these are enrolled in education, implying that around 50% of Deaf children currently receive primary education. A WFD survey report from 1991 gives a figure of 20-25% (Joutselainen 1991:34), suggesting that the percentage of Deaf children receiving education has doubled over the last 15 years.

When we look at secondary education (ignoring the recently established grades 7-9 in some of the government schools), percentages decrease drastically. The two private schools for the Deaf have about 70 students enrolled at secondary level (grades 7-12). Most of these students end up taking Tawjihi exams. About half of the Deaf students taking Tawjihi have attended regular schools and may have had some home support. Hence, all in all there may be about 150 Deaf people enrolled in secondary education. Nationwide, more than 50% of the people are under 18 (64% of the population is aged under 19 according to the Manual of Disability and
Institutes Welfare and Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons in Arab Countries in 1998, quoted in al-Zraigat 2002). If we once again take the figure of 15,000 Deaf people in Jordan as a starting point, this means that there are at least 7,500 Deaf people under 18. Consequently, we have to assume that only 0.2% of the Deaf receive secondary education, half of them in mainstream schools with little support.

Currently about 35-40 Deaf students are enrolled in higher education (college and university). For comparable figures in European countries, cf. Stevens (2004). There are three universities that employ interpreters and have sign language support for Deaf people. These universities are al-Balqa' Applied University in Salt, which also has affiliated colleges all over the country, Jordan University in Amman, and al-Hashemiyya University in Zarqa. It is hoped that the Irbid University of Science and Technology will also start employing interpreters. An agreement between the universities and the Ministry of Education says that every two students have the right to one interpreter. This means that the subjects the Deaf students can choose from are limited. There is, for instance, one Deaf student studying English, but because she is alone (and there are no interpreters with enough knowledge of English) she has to go through university without an interpreter. The choice of subjects is also limited because the three universities that offer sign language support do not teach all subjects. Most Deaf students enrolled in colleges study special education, with the aim of becoming teachers of the Deaf. There is also a considerable group of Deaf people acquiring college-level computing skills, as well as Deaf people studying accounting and administration. Other subjects that Deaf people are studying are sports, physiotherapy, architecture and general education. Higher education for the Deaf plays an important role in reducing the stigma associated with deafness. In some cases, Deaf students have been the first in their families to graduate from college or university. This has been the source of great pride within these families and proves to people in general that Deaf people are not mentally deficient.

Great progress has been made in the education for the Deaf over the last 15 years, both in the numbers of Deaf students enrolled in schools and in the extent and quality of education. Jordan is now the leading nation in the Middle East in terms of education for the Deaf. It is, for example, the only country in the region where Deaf people can study at university level with the aid of interpreters. Deaf education, however, is still in need of improvement. One of the problems noted by al-Zraigat (2002:85) is that many schools lack sufficient tools and materials, as well as teachers that are specialized in teaching the hearing impaired. Many teachers come from regular schools and have no knowledge of special education. Even those who have studied special education have focused on a wide variety of target
groups, including education for the blind, deaf, physically disabled and mentally disabled. Most teachers that start working at schools for the Deaf do not know any sign language, and courses in LIU are not offered at most schools (the exception being the HLID). As a result, communication between Deaf students and their teachers is often limited, and this affects the level of education provided and achieved.

Because education in the Arab World focuses mostly on rote-learning, Deaf students with a good memory may pass exams which they do not understand. Until recently education in most of the government schools and in al-Raja school was strictly oral, but most teachers have switched to some form of manual communication because it yields better results (cf. Chamberlain and Mayberry (2000), who show that the same holds true in the United States). Most teachers nowadays call what they use Total Communication, whereas in fact it is some form of signed Arabic. Abdel-Fattah (2005:213) comments that “in Arabic [countries], hearing learners of sign language vernaculars have considerable difficulty in grasping the idea of not signing every word in an utterance as one would say it in the spoken variety.” This situation is not unique to Jordan or the Middle East. In fact, Burns, Matthews and Nolan-Conroy (2001:184), commenting on the situation in the United States, note:

“In the classroom…use of natural sign language has traditionally been viewed negatively and considered unworthy in the education of deaf children. Numerous studies have reported that where hearing teachers do use sign, they are not fluent in the natural sign language, and typically develop a contact code that intermixes spoken and sign language grammatical elements.”

Because there is no standard form of this ‘contact code’ of Arabic and LIU, teachers all have their own way of signing and this causes problems in communication. As a result of these language and communication problems, most Deaf people in Jordan (even the ones who have passed their Tawjihi exams) do not acquire the necessary reading skills to be able to read and understand MSA. Rather, when writing, they communicate in word-for-word translations from LIU, often writing words from the spoken dialect, which are not normally written.

Burns et al. (2001:183) state that “within Deaf communities, attitudes towards sign languages, and particularly their use in education, are a major issue worldwide.” This also holds true for Jordan. It is to be expected that education and reading skills will be improved if the use of LIU can be introduced in Deaf education in Jordan. For the US, Chamberlain and Mayberry (2000:226) give a brief overview of several decades of research which reveals “that most studies showed a positive effect of sign language
on reading and academic achievement”. It is encouraging, therefore, that LIU was recognized as a subject by the Ministry of Education in the spring of 2006. It is now supposed to be an official subject on the curriculum for schools for the Deaf. This means that all Deaf students should receive a grade for their sign language skills. It is also an elective subject in mainstream schools, provided that there are people available to teach it. LIU has not yet been recognized as an official language of Jordan, but proposals to have it recognized as such are in the making. Experiments with bilingual education in LIU and Arabic started at the HLID in 2005 with very positive results. An introductory grammar of LIU in Arabic, published in 2006 (a translation of Hendriks 2004), and other materials in sign language are hoped to make teachers (and others dealing with Deaf people) more aware of the fact that LIU is a real language with its own grammar.

In summary, we can say that with regards to the sociolinguistic situation of the Deaf community in Jordan, many positive changes have taken place within the last ten years. This is particularly true for urban areas of the country, where most schools for the deaf are situated. Social and religious stigmas associated with deafness appear to be gradually reduced. Better education for the deaf, as well as acceptance of their sign language as a real language, plays an important role in this process. Although much remains to be done in this area, Jordan plays a leading role in the Middle East when it comes to the acceptance and use of sign language in deaf education.

1.2 The status of LIU

With regards to the status of LIU, two aspects are of interest: the influence of the dominant language and culture on LIU, and the attitude of Deaf people towards LIU. These two aspects will be discussed in this section. More information on the relationship between LIU and Arabic will be presented in Chapter 3, which gives an overview of the grammar of LIU.

1.2.1 Influences from Arabic and Arab gestures on LIU

The lack of education for deaf people in the past has had an influence on the way sign language has developed in the Middle East. Extensive use of fingerspelling, as attested in American Sign Language (ASL) for example, is absent in LIU. Two fingerspelling systems are in use within the educational system, one for spelling Arabic script and one for spelling Roman script. The fingerspelling system used for Roman script languages like English is based on the American fingerspelling alphabet with some minor changes in
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handshape (cf. Hendriks 2004). The fingerspelling system used to represent the Arabic alphabet is shown in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3: the Arabic fingerspelling alphabet

The Arabic fingerspelling alphabet appears to be replacing an older system that resembles cued speech and is based on the sounds of the Arabic language. This system is still in use in some Arab countries. However, the Arabic fingerspelling alphabet appears to be used increasingly in different Arab countries, with some slight modifications (cf. also Abdel-Fattah 2005:219 for a picture of the alphabet). For an important part, the shapes of the letters are based on the written form of the Arabic letters. For instance, the handshape for the letter baa (ـ) has one finger extended because the written letter has one dot, the taa (ـ) has two fingers extended because the written letter has two dots and the tha (ـ) has three fingers extended because it has three dots. The Arabic fingerspelling alphabet is used mainly to spell names and unfamiliar words and is not an integral part of LIU itself. Contrary to what Lucas (2000:149) claims for ASL, it includes a number of handshapes that do not occur in the phonology of LIU (cf. Figure 3.1). LIU
does not use lexicalized fingerspelling and there are no indigenous initialized signs or sign names, as is common in ASL (cf. Supalla 1990, 1992; Padden 1998). Instead, most sign names are descriptive and based on physical characteristics like a scar or a certain haircut. According to Nyst (2007a), such descriptive name signs are used in most sign languages, but their proportion varies.

Deaf people tend to use mouthings of Arabic words (as used in the spoken Jordanian dialect) to different degrees. The use of mouthings depends, to a certain extent, on their knowledge of spoken Arabic as well as the degree of their hearing loss. Mouthing of Arabic words tends to be used more when Deaf people sign to hearing people than when Deaf people are signing to each other. Some signs are almost always accompanied by the Arabic mouthing, but for most signs the mouthing appears to be optional (cf. Chapter 3.1.2).

In some cases LIU appears to follow Arabic word order. Numbers in LIU, for instance, have the same order as in both spoken Jordanian Arabic and MSA. In Arabic units follow tens (e.g. in the number 32 the 2 comes first and the 3 last ‘two and thirty’) and the same is true for LIU. In fact, it appears that many sign languages follow the word order of the surrounding spoken language in this respect. In Sign Language of the Netherlands (Nederlandse Gebarentaal, NGT) and German Sign Language (Deutsche Gebärdensprache, DGS) the digits are signed first, followed by the tens, as in Dutch and German, in ASL and British Sign Language (BSL) the tens come first followed by the digits, as in English. Also, adjectives normally follow the noun in LIU as they do in Arabic (both the spoken dialect and MSA). However, there are also quite a number of differences in word order between LIU and Arabic. In Arabic, for instance, numbers tend to precede nouns (at least in indefinite constructions\(^3\)), whereas in LIU they tend to follow nouns. It is not clear to what extent similar word order patterns in LIU are caused by the influence of Arabic or are coincidental. The strongest influence from Arabic on the structure of LIU is seen in individual educated signers, who may be influenced by Arabic grammar to a greater or lesser extent. Interestingly, however, where there is a difference in word order between spoken Jordanian Arabic and MSA, the word order used appears to be derived from the spoken dialect. Moreover, the influence of Arabic on LIU can vary in different situations. Some educated signers tend to use Arabic constructions and word order more when they are signing with hearing people (cf. Section 1.2.2).

\(^3\) If the whole phrase is definite, as in “the five books” or “his five books” the number may follow the noun, but in indefinite constructions (which are by far the most frequent), such as “I have five books” the number precedes the noun.
Besides the spoken language, conventional hand and head gestures of the surrounding culture have some influence on LIU. In Arab culture, the use of gestures is very common (Barakat 1973) and many of these gestures also appear in LIU. In some cases they are used by Deaf people in the same way as by the hearing population, as is the case with the backward head-tilt expressing negation (cf. Chapter 4.4.1). In many cases, however, these gestures have been integrated into LIU to such an extent that their meaning is more specific than the same gesture used in the surrounding hearing culture. The gesture in Figure 1.4, for instance, is used by Arabs all over the Middle East, and in a similar form in India and Pakistan (cf. Zeshan 2006c:309-310) as a gesture to signal a question. In LIU the same gesture is used as a specific question word, which functions alongside other question words (cf. Section 3.5.1). In the same way, the gesture in Figure 1.5 is used by Arab children when requesting something. They may use this gesture before, during or after a request. In LIU the gesture has become a sign that can be glossed as PLEASE and that generally occurs at the beginning of an utterance to mark it as a request.

The process whereby a gesture becomes a lexical item is referred to as lexicalization. A lexical item derived from a gesture may subsequently become a grammatical marker, a process that is called grammaticalization. According to Pfau and Steinbach (2006) the grammaticalization of gestures in sign languages is a modality-specific phenomenon.

### 1.2.2 Sociolinguistic attitudes of Deaf people towards LIU

According to Kyle and Woll (1983) deaf people in Britain had no label for their language apart from ‘signing’ when research into BSL began. To the best of my knowledge, the same is true for Jordan. The term Jordanian Sign Language or LIU is not used by Deaf people and sign language is simply
referred to as ‘signing’, although distinctions may be made between ‘signing
of Salt’ and, for example, ‘signing of Amman’ or ‘signing of the clubs’. In
recent years an effort has been made to standardize the sign language to a
certain extent, in order to create a dictionary that can be used throughout the
country. This project was coordinated by a group of Deaf people working at
the HLID, who started the project by holding several meetings with Deaf
people from different parts of the country. The goal of these meetings was to
decide which signs should be included in the dictionary, and which should
be categorized as ‘non-standard’ and therefore excluded. In many cases the
dictionary (which is hoped to be published in 2008) still includes two or
three different regional signs for the same concept, but other variants have
been left out. It seems, therefore, that Deaf people do have a certain
awareness as to what varieties of the sign language constitute ‘acceptable
forms of LIU’, and which varieties are ‘substandard’.

Because sign languages are viewed by many people in Jordan,
including some deaf people, as substandard, some deaf people refuse to use
the sign language because they regard it as inferior to the spoken language.
Even deaf people who do use sign language do not generally realize that it is
a real language with its own grammar, although this idea has started to take
hold in some segments of Deaf society since the publication of Hendriks
(2004). Deaf people sometimes distinguish between ‘hearing signing’ and
‘deaf signing’. They may view the latter as their own ‘slang’ and consider a
hearing person’s sign language as more ‘standard’ than their own. When
signing to a hearing person, they may even modify their own sign language
to become more ‘hearing’ without realizing that this makes it less well-
formed or grammatical. This situation is by no means unique to Jordan.
about ASL:

“It has been suggested that deaf people not only sign differently with
other deaf people than with hearing people, but that they may initiate a
conversation in one language and then radically switch when the
interlocutor’s hearing status is revealed.”

That this also affects the way they view language in general becomes
obvious when they distinguish ‘hearing Arabic’ (which is grammatical well-
formed Arabic) from ‘deaf Arabic’ (usually a word-for-word translation of
their sign language). This attitude is problematic, especially in education,
because it may interfere with the learning of the spoken language and
prevent students from learning grammatical Arabic. Many Deaf students do
not expect to use the same language variety as their hearing teachers, and
may view mistakes in Arabic as ‘differences’ rather than errors.
Overall, however, it seems that many Deaf people in Jordan are proud of their sign language and to a certain extent realise that it is a language, even if they do not have a name for it. This is clear from the fact that Jordanian Deaf people tend to be opposed to the idea of having a unified Arabic Sign Language to replace their own language, an idea that is promoted in some other Middle Eastern countries (cf. Chapter 2). However, some ambivalence can be seen in the attitudes of certain Deaf people towards their language and how it should be learned. On the one hand, they are proud of their language and compliment hearing people who learn it well. On the other hand, they do not seem to expect hearing people to learn to sign in the same way they do, and in some cases even try to prevent them from learning ‘deaf signing’. This ambivalence is common in minority languages and particularly in sign languages (Burns et al. 2001:207). It can only be resolved when the language acquires more status. Burns et al. (2001:209) state that language attitudes change over time and that official recognition of the minority language as a language plays an important role in this process. An increased awareness among both the Deaf and the hearing population of the structure of LIU and its value as a language will eventually give the Deaf community more power and more self-esteem. Positive changes are already taking place in the language attitude of Deaf and hearing people towards LIU thanks to linguistic research into LIU. The recent official acceptance of LIU within the educational system and the production of a basic sign language course which does not teach only individual signs but also grammatical concepts are important results of this research. Both are expected to increase awareness of the linguistic status of LIU.

1.3 Data and Methodology

The data for this dissertation was collected between 1999 and 2007, mainly at the HLID in Salt. Most of the wordlists in Chapter 2 were recorded with the help of Deaf informants that were visiting the HLID, or during trips to other Arab countries in 2003 and 2004. Chapter 3, which gives a brief overview of the relevant aspects of the grammar of LIU, is based on Hendriks (2004). The data for the other chapters of this book consists of elicited and semi-spontaneous data. In the first couple of years very little data on video was used, because video recording was initially frowned upon by some of the leading figures of the Deaf community in Salt, who were very suspicious of the work of a hearing, non-Arab linguist. Also, within Islamic culture taking pictures or collecting data on video is sometimes problematic for religious reasons. From about 2003 onwards the resistance to linguists and video-recording had sufficiently subsided to be able to use this
much more efficient way of collecting and analyzing data. Chapters 4 to 7, therefore, are based on data recorded on video. Most of the data discussed in these chapters, then, was recorded between 2003 and 2007.

In total, about 12 hours of video were collected, ranging from elicited data to semi-spontaneous data. Data was elicited by means of games, particularly for the chapter on possession (Chapter 5), questions and answers, picture descriptions, re-telling of picture stories or stories shown on DVD or video (e.g. an episode from the famous Canary Row cartoons featuring Tweety and Sylvester, by Warner Brothers). Semi-spontaneous data include stories told by a Deaf person asked to sign a story (mostly to another Deaf person) in front of the camera. These stories include the re-telling of a film seen on television, a ghost story, Bible stories, and some stories about events the Deaf person had experienced in his or her own life or direct environment. These data also include some conversations between Deaf people and some teaching material. The data that was actually used in Chapters 4-7 was glossed and analyzed using Signstream® and later ELAN.4 There were a few utterances that were ambiguous or contained signs that were not well understood. These were not included in the analysis. Overall, no attempt was made to distinguish between signs and gestures, because this would have entailed a detailed study of the differences between the two, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Signers that participated in the elicitation tasks were mainly students at the HLID, ranging between age 14 and 21 years, although some of the signers were older staff members. Students were asked because younger signers seemed, in general, to be the most fluent signers. Also, there were more students available to choose from. The signers who participated generally had either at least one Deaf parent, or at least one Deaf (in most cases older) sibling and used LIU at home. Informants signed a consent form allowing the use of their data for the purpose of research, as long as the data was confidentially stored. Additionally, informants could indicate whether they were happy to have their picture occur in a book or as part of a presentation. Naturally, all those whose pictures are shown in this dissertation consented to this. More detailed information about the signers and the data used in Chapters 4-7 is presented at the beginning of each of these chapters.

4 Signstream is a program for the Macintosh. The copyright belongs to Dartmouth College & Trustees of Boston University & Rutgers the State University of New Jersey. ELAN was created for both Macintosh and PC by the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen (Netherlands) and can be freely downloaded from their website: www.mpi.nl.
1.4 Glosses and typological conventions

In this book, signs from LIU are glossed in English for reasons of transparency and typographical convenience. When examples are given from languages other than LIU the glosses are presented in the same language as in the source article. Consequently, in some cases the glosses are in English with a free translation, and in some cases they are in a different language with both a literal and a free English translation.

I have tried to keep glosses consistent throughout the book, which means that glosses are based on the form of the sign rather than its meaning in a specific context. For example, the sign glossed as ONLY might be translated as “only” but also as “that’s enough”, or “that’s final”, depending on the context. Similarly the sign glossed as SELF can be translated as a possessive pronoun, as a reflexive pronoun or as “belong”.

The following conventions are used:

- For examples that are not from LIU, the source language is specified between square brackets. Examples from LIU are not marked.
- Glosses of signs are presented in small capitals.
- When more than one word is needed to gloss one sign, the words are separated by a hyphen, e.g. OPEN-DOOR.
- When a sign represents more than one concept in a single form, the glosses for these concepts are separated by a colon, e.g. NEG:EMPHATIC.
- When a compound sign is glossed with an English word for each compound part, these words are separated by a plus, e.g. RED+ETCETERA (“colours”).
- When a sign has an affix, the two are separated from each other in the gloss by a ^, e.g. NICE^NEG (“not nice”).
- When a description of a sign, rather than a gloss, is given below a picture, normal font is used, e.g. ‘negative affix’.
- Inflections for person on signs are represented by subscript numbers, directly adjacent to the gloss for the sign, e.g. 1GIVE2 (“I give to you”).
- Similarly, placement in the signing space is represented in subscript, e.g. INDEX_{right} or INDEX_{i}.
- Where relevant, additional information about a sign, such as whether it is a noun or a verb, may be given in brackets and in subscript after the gloss, e.g. PHONE_{(v)}.
- Descriptions of classifiers or classifier constructions are preceded by CL:, e.g. CL:PERSON.
When a description of the movement of the classifier is important, it is presented in superscript adjacent to the gloss, e.g. 

\text{CL:PERSON} \uparrow \circ \circ \circ \circ \circ \circ 

In some examples a double slash // appears in the gloss as a boundary marker. The placement of these markers is based on pauses, eye-blinks, and/or changes in facial expression.

Translations of a sign, or a string of signs, are rendered between double quotation marks. Where information from the linguistic or situational context is needed for a correct interpretation of the utterance, this information is added to the translation between brackets, e.g. (she said:).

Non-manual information is presented in subscript on the line above the main gloss. The scope (i.e. onset and offset) of the non-manual is indicated by means of a line, e.g. 

\text{yes/no question} 
LIVE AMMAN
“Do you live in Amman?”
For reasons of space this information may be abbreviated, i.e. “y/n” for “yes/no question”, or “hs’” for “headshake”.

Descriptions of simultaneous constructions are represented on two lines. The upper line represents the dominant hand and the lower line the non-dominant hand. Whenever two glosses are written directly above each other, the signs are produced simultaneously. If a sign that is normally produced with both hands occurs in the simultaneous construction, the sign is glossed on both lines and receives the specification (2h) for two-handed. If a sign (or the perseveration of a sign) is held on one hand, while the other hand simultaneously produces several signs, the duration of that prolonged sign is indicated by means of a line following the gloss. Any significant changes in the movement of such signs are represented in superscript, e.g. 

\text{CHILD(2h) TWO} 
\text{CHILD(2h) GIRL WHAT FATHER DEAD CRY ;} 
\text{CL:BRIDGE KNOW CL:BRIDGE} 
\text{CL:VEHICLE forward hold backward} 

Words transliterated from Arabic are presented in italics. In some cases, the Arabic word itself is added between brackets.

In Arabic transliterations a letter with a period underneath represents a so-called ‘emphatic’ (pharyngealized) sound, e.g. § for ص, ِ for ح, a 9 represents the voiced pharyngeal fricative (غ) and an apostrophe
represents the glottal stop (\(\ddot{\text{i}}\)). Long vowels are represented with a hyphen above them (\(\ddot{\text{a}}, \ddot{\text{i}}\) or \(\ddot{\text{u}}\)).

### 1.5 Aim and outline of the book

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the aim of the present study is to describe some aspects of LIU grammar from a cross-linguistic perspective. Beyond describing LIU, one of the main goals of the study is to investigate in how far a non-Western sign language like LIU is structurally similar or dissimilar to other sign languages that have been described. Zeshan (2008:672) notes that the cross-linguistic study of sign languages is still in its infancy and comments that

“[a]lthough typologists use a very wide range of language data to study patterns of language variation, including many ‘exotic’ languages in all parts of the world, sign language data have previously been almost entirely absent from research in linguistic typology.”

The fact that sign languages are produced and perceived in a different modality than spoken languages (visual-gestural vs. aural-oral modality) makes them an interesting topic for cross-linguistic research. In fact, due to the absence of sign language data from typological research, typologists cannot really claim to make statements about the true nature of human language. At most, they can claim that so-called ‘language universals’ are universal to spoken languages. Such universals need to be reassessed in the light of sign language data to find out whether they are true universals or whether they are modality-specific. A problem for sign language typology is that only a minority of the world’s sign languages has been documented to date, and these are mainly Western European and North American sign languages. No typological conclusions can be drawn from such a limited range of languages. Zeshan (2008:674) notes that one of the first aims of sign language typology must therefore be “to collect reliable and adequately structured information on a broad range of sign languages”. The aim of this dissertation, then, is twofold: firstly, to present a description of the grammar of a non-Western sign language, from a region which has seen very little sign language research to date; and secondly, to compare the patterns to be described with what is known about other sign languages from different parts of the world.

Because of the scarcity of research into Arab sign languages, Chapter 2 is devoted to placing LIU in its wider regional perspective, by presenting the results of a lexical comparison between different varieties of
sign language used in the Middle East. In addition, Chapter 3 gives a brief overview of relevant aspects of LIU grammar at the phonological, morphological, and syntactic level. The main body of this dissertation, however, consists of four chapters which discuss different syntactic and discursive phenomena in LIU and compare them to similar constructions in other signed (and where applicable spoken) languages. I have chosen to describe some grammatical aspects of LIU in depth, rather than attempt to give an overview of the entire grammar of the language in order to be able to ‘adequately structure’ the information presented and to allow for interesting cross-linguistic comparisons. Because of the cross-linguistic perspective taken in this dissertation, the topics that were chosen for detailed analysis were to a certain extent dependent on research done on other sign languages. Thus, Chapter 4 looks at negative constructions from a cross-linguistic perspective, making use of typological information available for negative constructions (cf. Zeshan 2004, 2006a). Chapter 5 constitutes part of a typological project comparing possessive and existential constructions in different sign languages (cf. Perniss and Zeshan 2008). Chapter 6 looks in detail at manual simultaneous constructions in LIU, comparing them to simultaneous constructions in other sign languages (cf. Vermeerbergen, Leeson and Crasborn, 2007a). Chapter 7 describes the use of perspective in LIU narrative discourse. This subject was chosen, despite the absence of typological studies in this area, because LIU displays a number of features which are interesting in light of what is known about other (mostly Western) sign languages. Finally, Chapter 8 summarizes the similarities and differences found between LIU and other sign languages, discussing the implications and giving suggestions for further research.