

## Language ideologies in the shared signing community of Adamorobe

ANNELIES KUSTERS

*Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity  
Department of Socio-Cultural Diversity  
Hermann-Föge-Weg 11, 37073 Göttingen, Germany  
[annelieskusters@gmail.com](mailto:annelieskusters@gmail.com)*

### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes language ideologies with regard to sign language in Adamorobe, a “shared signing community” in southern Ghana. Adamorobe Sign Language (AdaSL) is a “shared sign language,” used by all deaf people and a large number of hearing Akan-speaking people. Deaf schoolchildren from Adamorobe attend a school where Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) is taught. Hearing interviewees have experiential knowledge that everything can be said in AdaSL, emphasise the shared roots of AdaSL and Akan, and called AdaSL “natural.” Deaf interlocutors describe Akan, AdaSL, and GSL as three distinct but equivalent languages. AdaSL is said to be a “hard” language, more pleasant to use, and more expressive than GSL, but sign bilingualism is highly valued. These findings are compared and contrasted with accounts on language ideologies with regard to other shared sign languages and larger urban/national sign languages. (Language ideologies, language practices, Ghana, Ghanaian Sign Language, Adamorobe Sign Language, Akan, shared sign languages, shared signing communities, village sign languages)\*

### INTRODUCTION

“Elsewhere, they do not have this. Only in Adamorobe. The signs here are hard,” declares Kofi Pare, a deaf man in his thirties. By stating that Adamorobe Sign Language (AdaSL) is “hard,” Kofi means that the language is unique and difficult to learn for outsiders, but “hard” also means clear, firm, and expressive. He is giving expression to a language ideology that is widely held by deaf people in Adamorobe, a village in South-Ghana where this local sign language is used by forty-three deaf people native to the village, and by a much larger number of hearing inhabitants. The language emerged because a “deaf gene” has been circulated within Adamorobe (Meyer, Muntau, Timmann, Horstmann, & Ruge 2001), probably through marriages between the founding clans, starting in the late eighteenth century. While hearing people in Adamorobe speak the main

local language, Akan, and other spoken languages with each other, Adamorobe Sign Language (Nyst 2007) is used in interactions with and between the deaf inhabitants in the village.

Because AdaSL is shared by a wide number of inhabitants of the community, I was able to identify a number of widespread and persistent language ideologies with regard to AdaSL held by hearing and deaf people, such as the one expressed by Kofi. For the purpose of this article I follow Kroskrity's (2004:497) definition of language ideologies. He describes a language ideology as a "ubiquitous set of diverse beliefs, however implicit or explicit they may be, used by speakers of all types as models for constructing linguistic evaluations and engaging in communicative activity. They are beliefs about the superiority/inferiority of specific languages."

This article describes and analyses sign language ideologies in Adamorobe, and contrasts them with data about ideologies surrounding other sign languages: shared sign languages, and urban/national sign languages. "Shared sign languages" (Nyst 2012), also called "village sign languages" (Meir, Sandler, Padden, & Aronoff 2010; Zeshan & de Vos 2012), are the languages used in "shared signing communities" (Kisch 2008) like Adamorobe. These are communities with an unusually high prevalence of (most often hereditary) deafness, where local sign languages emerge in which deaf and hearing people communicate. A well-known historical example is the island Martha's Vineyard, an island off Cape Cod in Massachusetts on America's Eastern seaboard, renowned as a place where "everyone spoke sign language" for several hundred years. Changes in marriage patterns, due to processes of immigration and emigration of both deaf and hearing people, had the result that deafness in the Vineyard died out (Groce 1985). Martha's Vineyard is not unique though: in their recent edited volume, Zeshan & de Vos (2012) bring together a range of linguistic and anthropological articles on contemporary shared signing communities, most of them located in rural communities (hence the term "village sign languages"), in countries such as Mexico, Israel, Thailand, and Jamaica.

The reason that shared sign languages are said to differ from larger urban/national sign languages is that their user communities and circumstances of development are very different. Urban and national sign languages have typically emerged in user communities consisting of mainly deaf users, such as in schools for the deaf (such as Ghanaian Sign Language), or urban networks (such as Bamako Sign Language in Mali; Nyst, Sylla, & Magassouba 2012). In contrast, in shared signing communities, there is only a small minority of deaf (first language) users and a large majority of hearing (second language) users. The latter typically play an important role in the development, maintenance, and transmission of shared sign languages. Also, with regard to form and linguistic characteristics, shared sign languages are very different from urban and national sign languages (Nyst 2012). Examples are the use of relatively few different handshapes; a large signing space heavily making use of pointing to real locations for person and

place reference (based on shared knowledge of places and persons' homes); a high degree of multi-channelledness (i.e. one sign can have many different meanings according to the context in which it is used); and the absence (or infrequent use of) classifier verbs and simultaneous constructions (Nyst 2012). Nyst (2012) remarks that, as such, these languages are maximally adjusted to the communities that use them, that is, user communities with more hearing than deaf signers, with various levels of language proficiency. The simultaneous or complex iconic structures that are typical for urban/national sign languages would be more difficult to learn and produce for hearing second-language users.

Deaf inhabitants of shared signing communities often also come in contact with urban/national sign languages, such as through attending schools for the deaf. Formally educated deaf children of shared signing communities often use the school sign language with each other. In Adamorobe, most deaf schoolchildren and young adults aged under twenty-five (about ten to eleven) are bilingual in AdaSL and Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL), the latter being the language taught at schools for the deaf in Ghana, and have some basic literacy in English. Most deaf adults (numbering about thirty) aged over twenty-five are subsistence farmers who had only a few months or years of education. While they are largely monolingual in AdaSL and nonliterate, most of them know some GSL: they have been in contact with the language for at least fifty years during failed attempts to school them, and during church services. Because of the resulting decrease in the use of the shared sign language, most shared sign languages described in Zeshan & de Vos (2012) are considered endangered or at risk of becoming endangered (see Nonaka 2012). As I show in this article, the endangerment of AdaSL by another sign language (i.e. GSL) is less acute as in a number of other shared signing communities. (However, because the number of deaf people in Adamorobe seems to be decreasing, it is probable that the language will disappear within a few generations).

Based on my research in Adamorobe, I argue that the following three themes are important when studying sign language ideologies in shared signing communities: (i) the perceived form, function, and status of shared sign languages, (ii) the experienced difference/relationship between local spoken languages and shared sign languages, and (iii) the experienced difference between shared sign languages and larger, urban/national sign languages. In contrast to a (small) number of studies that focus on attitudes and ideologies surrounding urban and national sign languages, mostly American Sign Language (such as Burns, Matthews, & Nolan-Conroy 2001; Reagan 2011; Hill 2012, 2013), in-depth studies of sign language ideologies in shared signing communities are lacking. The extant literature about shared signing communities does not offer any insights with regard to the first two themes, and with regard to (iii), there are a few indications of a lower status of the shared sign language and a higher status of the national sign language that is used in the country (see Zeshan & de Vos 2012). In this article, I explore the three abovementioned underresearched themes with regard to the case of Adamorobe: I describe how AdaSL is described (i) in itself, (ii) in

relation to spoken Akan, and (iii) in relation to Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL). As I demonstrate, AdaSL is talked about positively, and the status of AdaSL is not regarded lower than the status of GSL or Akan. As such, this account differs from these reports from other shared signing communities. The findings also show that hearing people's ideas about sign languages are not universal; Adamorobe characterizations of AdaSL by hearing people do not show the general misconceptions that exist around national sign languages such as American Sign Language, as described by Burns et al. (2001) and Hill (2012, 2013), which is discussed further in the concluding section.

Because ideologies emerge when people reflect their visions of a language and its use(rs), I believe that any study of language ideologies must be paralleled by an observation of language PRACTICES. In his book about language policy, Spolsky (2004) uses the term LANGUAGE PRACTICES to denote choices of language use (different languages and language variations) that people make. Some language ideologies can be said to be implicit in these language practices while other ideologies seem to run counter to practice. The article therefore commences with a discussion of language practices in Adamorobe. As observed and experienced language practices and my research methodology cannot be separated from each other, a description of both is naturally interwoven. In this respect, I describe the contexts and ways in which sign language is used in Adamorobe and by whom: signed deaf-deaf interactions in AdaSL, signed deaf-hearing interactions in AdaSL, and the use of GSL. I then describe and analyse explicit language ideologies (i.e. discourses about language), firstly those of hearing people who reflect on the form and function of AdaSL, and how it relates to Akan, and secondly those of deaf people who do the same, and reflect on the relation to both Akan and GSL. In the last section I discuss how my findings contribute to sign language studies: they not only contrast with and expand upon existing research in shared signing communities; they also contrast with findings on language ideologies with regard to urban/national sign languages.

#### LANGUAGE PRACTICES AND IMPLICIT LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES IN ADAMOROBÉ

##### *Doing research amongst deaf people in Adamorobe*

When I first arrived in Adamorobe in April 2008, I was surprised that I did not see many deaf people or their sign language being used. Nonaka (2007:11) writes that “the extent to which the local sign language is used and the range of its users may remain hidden from the researcher without extended and systematic observation.” The implication is that a long period of fieldwork is necessary in order to document sign-language practices in shared signing communities. The extent to which the use and knowledge of sign language is widespread in Adamorobe became visible by searching out or following deaf people rather than by looking around in the

village. The data described in this article were generated during nine months of staying in Adamorobe (in 2008–2009), during which I investigated deaf-deaf and deaf-hearing social relationships, and discourses about being deaf and sign language, through participant observation and ethnographic interviews. I resided with a hearing family who had a large house with a spare room, located centrally in the village, just a few meters from a number of deaf people's homes. Every day I woke up at the same time as the sun and the rest of the village—at 5:30am, bathing myself quickly and going outside to mingle in the highly social village life in the morning hours, before many people leave for their farmlands, jobs, or schools. Most people live in compounds with their extended family: rooms built around an inner courtyard, where people do everything in the open air, for example, wash clothes, prepare food, and socialise. Both deaf and hearing people regularly go to the compounds of their relatives (kinship networks in Adamorobe are extensive) and friends to greet them, especially in the morning. They enquire after everyone's health and wellbeing, they tease and playfully interact, converse about practical matters such as housekeeping, gossip, argue with each other and tell each other off, and exchange family and village news and opinions. Evenings were also important: after people are back from their farms and have bathed, they sit together outside and chat.

As the main focus of my study were the deaf people and their experiences of life in Adamorobe, I mainly interacted with them. Connecting with deaf people in Adamorobe was facilitated by my own deafness: the deaf people told me that they were attracted by the fact that I was deaf like them. (Elsewhere, I elaborated upon the roles that this shared deafness played in my research; Kusters 2012). AdaSL is used intensively between deaf people in deaf-only conversational spaces that frequently arise on various places in Adamorobe, so I usually went to these spots where deaf people often meet each other to exchange greetings and to have a chat. I also followed the local custom of making rounds in the village to greet (mostly deaf) people that I knew. If I came across deaf people processing maize or other small farm products or plants, I sat down and lent a hand. I also attended the weekly signed (in GSL) Lutheran deaf church services and other village events such as funerals or festivals.

Several deaf people spent many hours teaching me their language. They started by telling me the signs for food items and animals by demonstrating, pointing, drawing, or pantomiming. They talked about topics such as their farms, witchcraft, dwarf spirits at the river at the edge of the village, their relationships with hearing people, village life in the past, traditional religion, and the Christian church. When talking with me, they adapted their signing, signing plain AdaSL slowly, and providing additional contextual information that they would normally leave out. As mentioned in the introduction, most deaf people knew some GSL signs through the church. Two years before my research I had resided for three months in North Ghana, volunteering at a school for the deaf, where I had learned some GSL, so deaf people in Adamorobe initially used GSL signs here and there when

using AdaSL with me. Gradually our mutual language use became more and more AdaSL and the deaf people were very proud that their teaching was fruitful, and they increasingly expected me to actively participate in conversations and to tell about life where I come from.

In the field, I always carried a small notebook with me to write jottings as an intermediate stage to my fieldnotes. I often openly jotted during conversations when they were telling me things about past and present life in Adamorobe. Most of the time, I was not using the notebook though: I did not make any notes when people were greeting, catching up on news, gossiping, quarreling, conversing about sensitive topics, or during observations and participation in everyday life. Then, I was doing mental jottings. In my room, I used these written and mental jottings to write elaborate fieldnotes on my laptop at least once a day, ending up writing approximately one to three hours every day, describing observations and conversations, reflections on my methodology and analytical ideas. In later stages of the research, I also organised unstructured ethnographic interviews to explore a number of themes in-depth, such as to record stories of historical events, village myths, and so on. The data described in this article is based on utterances that were recorded during daily observed interactions and on informal conversations, thus laid down in my fieldnotes (rather than these interviews, in which other themes were discussed).

### *Interactions between deaf and hearing signers*

As mentioned above, my research centred around the deaf people from Adamorobe. However, the fact that much of daily life in Adamorobe happens in the open air and a lot of social interaction happens, as explained above, also meant that I automatically witnessed interactions between deaf and hearing people. When I observed such interactions, variations in hearing people's signing proficiency became apparent. Generally, the literature on shared signing communities suggests that it is difficult to make clear distinctions between hearing signers and nonsigners; that is, there seems to be a continuum of signing proficiency. Hearing people with deaf family members or neighbours are often reported to be the most fluent signers (Zeshan & de Vos 2012). In Adamorobe, I noticed that people who are especially able to sign well are typically close relatives of deaf people, people who grew up with deaf people, friends of deaf people, or people who work with/near deaf people (for example having adjoining farms). Many hearing people used mixed forms of AdaSL with varying degrees of spoken Akan and varying degrees of fluency in AdaSL. Sometimes even people who were very fluent in AdaSL still mixed their signing with spoken Akan (see Kisch 2012 for similar observations amongst the Al-Sayyid Bedouin). I did not notice any difference between men and women regarding signing proficiency. There were differences in age though: children generally did not know AdaSL unless a deaf person lived in their compound or they had a deaf neighbour; and more elders than young or

middle-aged people were proficient in AdaSL, which is a development that is explained further in another section. There is a fast growing number of migrants in Adamorobe and most (recent) migrants do not know AdaSL. And even though there are many hearing people that are fluent in AdaSL, I have met hardly any hearing people who I felt to be as fluent in producing the language as the deaf people are.

The fact that deaf people are the most fluent signers does not mean that deaf people learn the language from other deaf people only. Most of them told me that they learned the language from their relatives, particularly hearing or deaf siblings and (grand)parents, and in few cases from unrelated deaf people (see Lanesman & Meir 2012, Kisch 2012 for a similar point on fluent hearing signers' roles in language transmission to deaf children). When deaf people and hearing people who are not fluent in AdaSL communicate with each other, the interlocutors tend to sign slower, use a larger signing space, and use more imitations and make use of the large number of conventional gestures that are commonly used in Ghana (which often differ from AdaSL lexicon). When communication through gesture feels limiting or slow, there are usually people around who can help with interpretation.

AdaSL is only used by hearing people when talking DIRECTLY to or with a deaf person, not in mixed deaf-hearing group conversations. It is thus not the case that in any hearing conversation where a deaf person is present or arrives, the language of conversation is switched to AdaSL, not even when all the hearing people present are fluent signers. This contradicts nonethnographic statements about how such shared communities work, such as Bahan & Nash's (1995:20) claim that "if a deaf person arrives, the hearing people unconsciously shift to signing without missing a beat." Instead, deaf people will rather receive a summary in AdaSL. Also, even though many hearing people know AdaSL, this does not mean that hearing signers in Adamorobe readily join in signed conversations for a long time: in conversations between deaf people, hearing people typically only join for greeting, joking, and relaying news, that is, for short interactions. So although a number of deaf people have a close relationship with certain hearing relatives and friends with whom they have long signed conversations, most signed interactions that I observed between deaf and hearing people were short and one-to-one.

The fact that AdaSL is the only language to which the deaf people have full access while the hearing people have potential access to both AdaSL and Akan results in a certain asymmetry between deaf and hearing people, because the former are excluded from Akan conversations. Although deaf-deaf conversations are also not accessible for hearing people who do not sign well, there is still an imbalance because the majority of social interactions in Adamorobe happen in Akan (see Kisch 2008 for a similar observation among the Al-Sayyid Bedouin). Some deaf people complained that they were bored in the compounds where they live when the hearing people talk with each other. I never saw any of them request that hearing people use AdaSL rather than Akan in the space of the home or in village social interactions (they rather asked a summary of what hearing people

were talking about), while they did request interpretation during village events (sometimes successfully, sometimes not).<sup>1</sup>

During the numerous informal conversations that I had with deaf people, a number of them nostalgically told me that in the past there were more hearing people who signed fluently, more deaf-hearing (group) conversations, and these conversations were longer in duration rather than short interactions such as greeting. Growing differentiation among villagers with regard to employment and societal status impacts on the extent to which Adamorobe Sign Language is used. People are now less often engaged in collective activities such as work and eating (which was a communal experience with members of the compound and neighbours), which traditionally kept villagers in close (language) contact. These changes have influenced the degree to which hearing people, especially those without deaf close relatives, are likely to learn and use AdaSL. In the words of Agnes Bomo, a hearing person with a number of deaf relatives: “those modern people don’t know how their ancestors did.”

### *The use of Ghanaian Sign Language*

Ghanaian Sign Language, the language used in schools and churches for the deaf in Ghana, is based on American Sign Language (ASL), in common with a number of other West African sign languages (Nyst 2010). ASL was brought to Africa by Rev. Foster, a deaf African-American who is said to be the father of deaf education in Africa, as he has set up thirty-one schools for the deaf throughout Africa, starting in Ghana (Diouf 2007). Deaf people from Adamorobe have had contact with GSL, its predecessor ASL, and/or a version of signed English based on ASL (i.e. signs from ASL used in English syntax, with some additional signs to fill up “gaps”) for more than fifty years: during attempts to school them in 1963 in Ghana’s first school for the deaf in Mampong; from 1974–1980 in a school for the deaf in Adamorobe; and since the early 1960s at church services held in Adamorobe by Rev. Foster and subsequently several deaf Ghanaian pastors. One of them, called Samuel Adjei, moved to Adamorobe in 1988 and was a propagator of GSL use in the community, using it in church services and teaching the language in private to three deaf Adamorobean men: the late Kofi Adin, Kofi Pare, and Kwasi Boahene. In 1998, a Lutheran deaf pastor named Kofi Akorful took over from Samuel Adjei. He continues to come to Adamorobe weekly to conduct services.

In the past, the services were translated into AdaSL by the late Kofi Adin (who had been taught by Samuel Adjei). During my research, Kofi Pare sometimes provided limited translations, but only on an irregular basis. The Lutheran pastor, Akorful, could understand AdaSL rather well when deaf people signed to him, but he was not fluent in producing it, so most of the time he used a mixture of GSL and signed English (the former is used between deaf people in Ghana and the latter is used by teachers at Ghanaian schools for the deaf), adding varying

amounts of AdaSL signs. When communicating with Akorful, deaf people mostly used basic GSL with a heavy AdaSL accent, or AdaSL with some GSL signs. They explained that they could not understand Akorful fully except when he used slow and simple GSL (with or without AdaSL), which he mostly did not. Even though there was a contrast between Akorful's fluency in GSL and the deaf adult's limited knowledge of the language, knowing the basics of a language that hearing people in Adamorobe did not know brought a little bit more balance in the aforementioned asymmetric language situation in Adamorobe. Deaf adults took advantage of this fact: they used GSL for short remarks, for example, when gossiping about hearing people in the vicinity ("he is bad!", "she's a thief!").

Since 2000, deaf children from Adamorobe have been attending the residential deaf school in Mampong, with about 300 other deaf pupils. During my research in 2009, all of the school-age deaf children (ten in total) from Adamorobe were in education. At the school in Mampong, pupils are taught through signed English and written English and use GSL amongst themselves. The pupils return to their home only four times a year, during Christmas, spring, summer, and midterm holidays. For most of the deaf schoolchildren from Adamorobe, AdaSL was the sign language they used before they started schooling at age eight to ten. Following my own observations and judgements of deaf adults, most of them have some fluency in AdaSL, in the sense that they do not falter or stammer when using the language and they are able to express most of what they want to say. The lexicon they used seems to be less varied than that of the deaf adults though, and they sign AdaSL more slowly. Probably due to the fact that the schoolchildren are at school most of the year, there are clear variations in proficiency among them (unlike the deaf adults who are uniformly fluent): about half of the children attending Mampong have one or two deaf parents and they are generally more fluent in AdaSL than the others. When the schoolchildren were in Adamorobe during the holidays, I noticed that they were inclined to use GSL with each other and with me, probably because GSL is the language they use with their peers at school during most of the year. The deaf schoolchildren in Adamorobe also pointed out that the use of this language has an additional benefit: in Adamorobe, where so many (deaf and hearing) people know AdaSL, the use of GSL offers them privacy in their conversations. So, while the deaf adults use the language for short remarks to gossip about hearing people, the deaf schoolchildren use the language for full discussions.

When deaf schoolchildren and deaf adults communicate with each other, they use either AdaSL or GSL or, in the majority of cases, a mixture of both. The adults do not understand everything of the schoolchildren's GSL that they use with each other, and the children do not always understand the way a group of adults would use AdaSL. During mutual communication, however, both parties could and would easily adapt to each other. (It could be said that this mutual adaptation is displaying implicit language ideologies.) A few weeks into the summer holiday (which lasts six weeks in total), I noticed that the schoolchildren's language

use became less exclusively GSL: they started to use AdaSL with me, used more AdaSL with the deaf adults than previously, and also inserted expressions in AdaSL in their signing to each other. I also noticed a difference between the AdaSL use and proficiency in the schoolchildren who came home for the holidays, and particularly in three young people who had stopped or completed their schooling (whom I call “homecomers” here) and became significantly more fluent in AdaSL since moving back to Adamorobe full time. This is reminiscent of Schmalting’s (2003) account of the Hausa in Nigeria: deaf pupils learn ASL at school but switch to the local sign language after school. So while Nyst (2007) remarks that AdaSL is potentially endangered because the language is losing child speakers who use the language as their first language in everyday life, I argue that the endangerment of AdaSL by GSL is not (yet) as serious and acute as in a number of other shared signing communities, such as Ban Khor (Nonaka 2012).

#### LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES IN ADAMOROBE

##### *Hearing people’s language ideologies*

The lack of use of AdaSL in mixed deaf-hearing contexts even when all hearing people present are fluent signers raises questions about how hearing people think about the possibilities, limits, and status of the language. Does this lack of use reflect implicit negative language ideologies about AdaSL? Exploring hearing people’s perspectives was not as straightforward for me as exploring deaf people’s, for a number of reasons. First, the deaf people claimed me as “theirs,” and tried to limit my interactions with hearing people (see Kusters 2012), and second, hearing people’s AdaSL was typically mixed with Akan and was difficult for me to understand (deaf people in Adamorobe seemingly had no problem with this). Hence, in order to investigate hearing people’s perspectives on AdaSL, a hearing research assistant, Okyere Joseph, conducted interviews with hearing people in Akan, and translated their answers into written English for me. He interviewed nineteen hearing people, asking them about their (positive and negative) experiences with deaf people, whether they regarded deaf people to be equally intelligent as hearing people or not, their perspectives on AdaSL, and so on. The interviews were anonymized, but I gave Okyere an explanation about sampling with as aim to create a sample as varied as possible, and he documented the interviewees’ (estimated) age, gender, ethnic background and migration status, AdaSL knowledge, if they had close deaf relatives, and if they had a lot of contact with deaf people.

Two of the questions asked by Okyere Joseph concerned language ideologies with regard to AdaSL: he asked the interviewees if they thought that one can say anything in sign language or not (i.e. not only “concrete” things), and if they felt if the language was of equal worth and value in comparison with Akan or not. (These questions were motivated by current Western ideological conversations

about sign languages and multilingualism. This is further discussed in the concluding section.) Hearing people's replies on both questions were overwhelmingly positive and strikingly similar. Replies on other questions, such as hearing people's positive and negative experiences with deaf people, were much more varied. Recognising that language ideologies are multiple, co-existing, and often conflicting, I take pervasiveness and coherence across users of the language as requisite for ideologies to be described in this article. The fact that the replies of the very diverse sample of hearing (both signing and nonsigning!) respondents were so similar seems to confirm that we are talking about pervasive language ideologies here.

Eighteen out of the nineteen respondents replied positively on the question if anything can be said in sign language,<sup>2</sup> most of them arguing that deaf people can name or describe everything, just like hearing people can do in Akan, "because it is their language, their way of speaking." One respondent thought that this language "is the way God has given them to say or describe anything." Two persons added that for them the living proof that everything can be said in sign language is that "We stay together in the same house and town and understand them very well. They too understand us very well." These comments are reminiscent of what Kisch (2008:284) writes about hearing Al-Sayyid Bedouin: she concluded that they have "the experiential knowledge that a visual-spatial mode of communication can express the full complexity of human experience and serve as a vehicle to impart knowledge." There seems to be a positive correlation between "experiential knowledge" about deaf people and language ideologies that recognize rather than deny that signed languages can do what spoken languages can do.

Regarding the question about the worth and status of AdaSL in comparison to Akan, again eighteen out of nineteen replied positively.<sup>3</sup> Their explanation of this was that "both deaf and hearing speak the same language." Some people called AdaSL "Akan sign language," while others said that it is Akan. Ghanaian Sign Language, by contrast, is called the "school sign language" (cf. Kisch 2012) or "English sign language" and is perceived to be entirely different. Thirteen replies gave the impression that AdaSL is regarded as a signed version of Akan: for example, "The signs look like Akan language" or "The way we speak Akan, the same we can translate in sign language to deaf people." This ideology, in which AdaSL and Akan are identified as the same language, contrasts with the ideology of mainstream sign-language linguistics that sign languages are languages in their own right, the perspective applied by Nyst, who documented AdaSL (2007), and by myself. Perhaps this sense of AdaSL as being Akan in a different modality parallels the knowledge that Akan has a written form, too. In addition, as Nyst (2007) reports, the structure of AdaSL is thoroughly influenced by spoken Akan in several ways: mouth shapes and conventional gestures, and parallel semantic and syntactic structures. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, AdaSL, as a shared sign language, has a number of features that makes it easier to learn and understand for the hearing L2-users in Adamorobe than GSL. Nyst's observations of the relationships of the structure of AdaSL with Akan and the lack of highly iconic,

simultaneous or complex structures in AdaSL, could parallel with (or reinforce) hearing people's perception of the similarities between the languages.

Related to the observation above, a number of hearing interviewees emphasised the common root or breeding ground of Akan and AdaSL: "We are not English people. Not Northerners. We are Akan." Akan culture and society, and the languages sprouting from these (i.e. Akan and AdaSL) are seen as belonging to the same family, as if these are two branches of the Akan cultural tree. Adamorobe Sign Language (contrarily to GSL, which is based on American Sign Language) is entirely grounded in Akan culture, that is, its core consists not only of a large number of local gestures, but also of mimes of Akan customs, local foods and their preparation, farming terms, and festivals. Similarly, shared sign languages are often depicted as local/old versus national/urban sign languages as school/new (Zeshan & De Vos 2012).

The fact that people emphasise the SAMENESS of the languages used is a good example of how "language ideologies are productively used in the creation and representation of various social and cultural identities" (Kroskrity 2004:509). The emphasis on sameness as Adamorobees and Akan people is also evident in often repeated expressions such as: "deaf and hearing people are all connected," "deaf and hearing people are all one"; and a quote by a hearing villager about the deaf population in Adamorobe: "We have been with them since time immemorial and we will be with them until the end." Thus, while AdaSL is not always used in social interactions where all (deaf and hearing) people present are fluent signers, the language is experienced as a connector between people in the village. Asymmetries in daily communication situations (i.e. lack of accessibility to hearing conversations) are not caused by a conviction that AdaSL is limited or inferior, but has been triggered or reinforced by the abovementioned demographic and economic—and resulting sociolinguistic—changes. While these demographic and economic changes had influence on sign-language practices in Adamorobe, they did not seem to have had a negative influence on the language ideologies surrounding AdaSL (yet), which confirms the fact that these language ideologies are deeply historically rooted and resistant to change.

### *Deaf people's language ideologies*

AdaSL is called *mumu kasa* in Akan, which means 'deaf language.'<sup>4</sup> Even though AdaSL has arisen during intense social contact between deaf and hearing people, and its structure and grammar reflects this (Nyst 2007), it is the language used WITH the deaf people and BY the deaf people, and this is probably why it is associated with them. This perspective is reflected in deaf people's language ideologies. Their perspectives were noted during the intensive participant observation and informal conversations that I described earlier in the article. Language ideologies surfaced when they compared AdaSL with GSL and when they criticised hearing Akan-speaking people who did not know sign language. When deaf people in Adamorobe

commented on the difference between AdaSL and GSL and between AdaSL and spoken Akan, they signed that AdaSL is a “hard/difficult” language, “harder” than spoken Akan and GSL, which are “soft/easy.” It was clear that “hard” held a positive connotation for them when they were talking about their language, and in different contexts, this expression took different meanings.

First, to call AdaSL hard is to say that it is a language unique to Adamorobe and thus difficult to understand for outsiders. This point is suggested by Kofi’s quote in the beginning of this article, where he states that only people in Adamorobe know the language. Even hearing people from Adamorobe and deaf GSL-using school-children in Adamorobe do not have command of AdaSL as fluent as the deaf adults, and it was a source of pride to be so proficient in a language that few people are fluent in. Second, “hard” also means clear, firm, and expressive, not blurry, flabby, or muddled. For example, Akua Fiankobe (a deaf woman in her forties) explained: “I don’t understand GSL well, but I do understand the signs that are used here [i.e. AdaSL], here my eyes are wide open. It is ‘hard’ here.” Kwame Osae (a deaf man in his sixties) commented: “Signing in AdaSL is ‘hard’! For example signing ‘Hey, are you doing well?’ [signed strongly] and then giving a heavy handshake.” Kofi Pare demonstrated how both people who primarily use GSL or spoken languages such as Akan, use the body in a lax way, with feeble and weak hand movements when they sign or gesture. The three “home-comers” (young deaf adults who completed or stopped schooling) said that because of its expressivity, AdaSL was more pleasant to use than GSL. One of them gave the example of the signs for the days of the week in GSL, which are based on finger-spelling, as opposed to the AdaSL weekday signs, which are based on Akan events and customs. Deaf people were proud of their sign language, seeing it either as “better” than GSL or Akan because it was “harder” and pleasant, or as good as these languages, because—they emphasised—anything can be said in each language and they are thus equivalent languages. The latter is the point that was also made by the hearing interview respondents in relation to AdaSL and Akan. While hearing people unified the two languages as the “same”, however, deaf people did not do this—when deaf people signed that the languages were “the same” they meant that the languages are of equal value, not that they have the same (or an overlapping) structure. They did not have access to Akan and as such have a different relationship with this language than hearing people who in principle have access to both Akan and AdaSL.

While valuing their own “hard” sign language, deaf adults in Adamorobe also indicated that there were practical benefits—prestige and pleasure associated with knowing GSL—and they emphasised the value of bilingualism in the two sign languages. It is important to acknowledge that these people do not distinguish the ASL/signed English used by Rev. Foster from modern GSL/signed English. Ghanaian deaf people outside Adamorobe called their language “Ghanaian Sign Language,” and at the same time they were aware of the language’s roots in ASL. Deaf people in Adamorobe, by contrast, regard GSL and ASL as one and

the same language, calling it “fingerspelling,” “English,” or “American”; probably because for them, the most obvious difference with AdaSL is the use of fingerspelling to spell English words, the integration of fingerspelling in the handshapes of many signs, and the connection between the use of GSL/ASL and English literacy. Hence, for them this language is not merely “the school and church sign language in Ghana,” but “the sign language used everywhere outside of Adamorobe,” and the sign language of the land of white people. Because of this language ideology, the deaf people from Adamorobe are generally inclined to use GSL (with a heavy AdaSL accent) with foreign visitors. In the UK, I met a deaf man who had visited Adamorobe a few years ago, and the thing he most strongly remembered was that he was “disappointed by the degree of ASL influence in the language used in this village.” He clearly did not realise that the deaf people were adapting their language use for him, by using what they saw as “world sign language.” In fact, when deaf people from different nationalities meet for the first time, they often make use of International Sign or ASL instead of their own sign language, sometimes as a “temporary bridge.” In that respect, Kwame Osae told me that one of the benefits of knowing GSL is that “If a white person is coming, then you can try to communicate by using those signs and to teach them AdaSL until they know AdaSL.” As explained earlier, I experienced this myself during the initial stage of my research.

In addition to the practical use of GSL, I found that some deaf people found it pleasant to be able to use another language than AdaSL to have longer conversations with each other. Amongst the deaf adults, Kofi Pare and Kwasi Boahene (two deaf men in their thirties) have the best command of GSL (because of Samuel Adjei’s teaching) and often talked in GSL with the schoolchildren, stating that “If you know them both and can switch between them, that’s nice, that’s fun.” They also occasionally switched to GSL when talking to me, declaring that “I like to use it, it is different, but the same [i.e. equivalent to AdaSL].” Many of the deaf adults regretted that they did not know GSL better.

There is a contrast between language ideologies with regard to Adamorobe Sign Language shared by deaf people in Adamorobe, and ideologies in the wider Ghanaian deaf community outside Adamorobe. It appeared that in the eyes of the latter, there is a status difference between AdaSL and GSL, in favor of GSL, while in the eyes of the former, there is not. This is in contrast with other shared signing communities where deaf people seem to have accepted or adopted the status difference (such as documented by Kisch 2012, Nonaka 2012).

While I have not studied language ideologies of deaf people outside Adamorobe in-depth, a few anecdotes should be enlightening to the reader. When I asked Akorful why he did not try to sign in AdaSL, he argued that the schoolchildren did not know AdaSL well enough to understand him and would “forget GSL” should he use AdaSL. I got the impression, however, that there was another deeper-rooted inherent reluctance, too: he laughed when he saw people using AdaSL when he did not expect it (such as the schoolchildren) and sometimes

disapproved of AdaSL lexicon (for example, the AdaSL sign for ‘defecate’), reflecting the idea that deaf adults from Adamorobe cannot help it that they are illiterate and use AdaSL. This needs to be situated in a wider context.

Deaf people in Africa, as elsewhere, who are not in a shared signing community or a deaf school often use gestures and home signs<sup>5</sup> with people in their environment. The movements and handshapes of AdaSL are reminiscent of movements and handshapes in gestures, and many conventional gestures are incorporated in AdaSL. This is not the case with GSL. Nyst (2010) mentions that signers in West Africa tend to perceive ASL-based sign languages as superior to such local sign languages and gestures. The use of local sign languages not only had a low status and was associated with gesturing and illiteracy, but also was associated with residence in villages. Deaf people in Ghana’s capital, Accra, typically reacted with horror and incomprehension when I explained that I resided in Adamorobe (“You stay in a VILLAGE?”), and I saw a deaf teacher at a small primary school for the deaf tell his pupils that I stayed in an “illiterate village where they use illiterate signs instead of good signs.” Hence deaf people from Accra were not necessarily impressed when I told them that many hearing people in Adamorobe know how to sign: in their eyes, these were not “good” or “real” signs, not a “real” language as Ghanaian Sign Language, and certainly not of the same status.

Nyst (2007) suggests that GSL has a higher status than AdaSL in Adamorobe, too, although she emphasises that she did not encounter negative judgments about AdaSL. She argued that an example of the status of GSL is that deaf adults have adopted GSL-style name signs. The deaf people indeed insisted that I used their GSL-style name signs instead of their AdaSL name signs, although they typically used their AdaSL name signs amongst themselves. The reason is that many of the AdaSL names (which are based on characteristics of people) are seen as insulting nicknames, and GSL names (which are little more than a gender marker<sup>6</sup>) as neutral and polite. Because of the association with respect, the GSL name signs might indeed have a “higher status” than the AdaSL name signs, but I suggest that this conclusion should not be extended to the languages as a whole. When I asked the deaf adults which sign language they preferred to use, the answer was never “GSL,” but either “AdaSL” or “both AdaSL and GSL.” They never said (nor showed behaviour that clearly illustrated) that GSL is “high [status]” and AdaSL “low [status],” but that they are “the same” (and thus equal), or that AdaSL is “high” because it is “hard.” It does have prestige, though, to be bilingual in AdaSL and GSL. Prestige, however, that comes with knowing more than one language should not be confused with the status of each language. A possible influence in this ideology about the equal status of GSL and AdaSL is the fact that foreigners are typically interested in AdaSL. The best examples perhaps are Nyst (2007) and myself because we stayed in Adamorobe for months and learned to use the language, but there have also been day visitors who came and wanted to film deaf people using AdaSL. Kofi Pare explained: “If white people came and I used GSL to communicate with them, they didn’t want that! They wanted AdaSL! That surprised me.”

The deaf adults not only value bilingualism in AdaSL and GSL for themselves but also for the deaf schoolchildren. While they did not seem to have negative feelings about the fact that the children use GSL most of the time, it was criticised if they were not able to sign in AdaSL without a heavy GSL accent. (In contrast, it happened very seldomly that the deaf adults were criticised by the children for not knowing GSL better.) Kofi Pare demonstrated how the schoolchildren should sign more forcefully and use a larger signing space, and expected that their AdaSL knowledge will “become hard” when the children grow older (such as in the homecomers language use). The schoolchildren themselves also valued the knowledge of AdaSL, which they not only saw as necessary to communicate with deaf adults and hearing people in Adamorobe, but as mentioned above, they also adopted the ideology that it is pleasant to use because of its expressivity. Sometimes their experience of AdaSL was contrasted with the earlier discussed language ideologies with regard to “illiterate signs” in the wider Ghanaian deaf community, as these are also reflected on the Mampong school. According to Asare Kwabena (one of the homecomers), teachers and students at school regarded AdaSL as a “low status” language. Hence, when a girl from school visited a Sunday church service in Adamorobe, his concern was that she would tell the other pupils at school that the signs used in Adamorobe are silly and “illiterate.” During my visits to Mampong, however, I found that the schoolchildren from Adamorobe used AdaSL with me without shame and seemingly even with pride that they (and I) knew the language, even though other children were staring and laughing. What I noticed, however, was some uncertainty among some of the schoolchildren about whether it really was possible to say all of the same things in AdaSL as in GSL (an uncertainty that could be caused by the very different spheres of primary usage: school versus village); something deaf adults did not seem to question. Such doubts were countered by other deaf schoolchildren such as “homecomer” Owusua Abena: one day I saw her having a lively conversation with a schoolgirl from Adamorobe, demonstrating that it was perfectly possible to translate a sentence from GSL into AdaSL, giving several examples. In sum, the status of AdaSL in relation to GSL seems to be very positive if compared with other shared sign languages in relation to larger sign languages.

## DISCUSSION

This study has brought to light sign language ideologies with regard to AdaSL—in itself and in relation to Akan and GSL—expressed by both deaf and hearing people in Adamorobe (and a few deaf people outside of Adamorobe). While hearing people regard Akan and AdaSL as “the same” and emphasise the shared roots of AdaSL and Akan, deaf people describe Akan, AdaSL, and GSL/ASL as three distinct but equivalent languages. Hearing people have experiential knowledge that everything can be said in AdaSL; deaf people (both adults and children) realize that one can say the same things in AdaSL as in GSL/ASL. Also, the distinctive

features of AdaSL are commented upon: deaf people say that the language is “hard” (which is a source of pride rather than concern), that AdaSL is more pleasant to use, and that it is more expressive (and therefore more clear) than GSL/ASL. Burns et al. (2001) write that while many minority languages are often associated with low status and lack of prestige, minority languages are also attributed positive connotations, particularly relating to integrity and attractiveness, aesthetic value, and identity. The attribution of positive connotations is clearly the case with regard to AdaSL (while low status is no issue there). In contrast to the prevailing assumptions and current literature, this study indicates that a shared sign language may be prestigious in comparison to a national sign language. Neither the asymmetries in daily communication situations in Adamorobe, nor the introduction of GSL through church and schooling correlate with negative ideologies about AdaSL.

This in-depth account about ideologies with regard to the difference between a local spoken language and a shared sign language, and how a shared sign language and a national sign language are described and experienced, goes much further than the often mentioned status difference in the literature concerning shared signing communities, on the one hand and offers different data than general sign language ideologies research, on the other hand. First, the deaf schoolchildren in Adamorobe seem to have a more favorable perspective on the local sign language than those in a number of other shared signing communities. This difference is significant because the general patterns in deaf-hearing and deaf-deaf language practices in Adamorobe actually seem to resemble those reported in other shared signing communities: the knowledge of sign language is widespread but variable; sign language is typically used with deaf people only; sometimes there is translation during group events, sometimes not; there are variations in the signing proficiency of hearing people; hearing people use mixed forms of speech and sign; there is a widespread availability of ad-hoc interpreters; and deaf schoolchildren use the school sign language as their first language. Ideologies about the shared sign language seem to be more positive in Adamorobe than in other shared signing communities, though: AdaSL is experienced as pleasant, and because knowing different sign languages means that one can interact with a wide range of different people, sign bilingualism is highly valued. It is not known whether deaf people in other shared signing communities value sign bilingualism to the same extent. The findings encourage us to be cautious about making generalizations, even when the ‘situations’ (ie shared signing communities) seem similar.

Second, my findings also contrast with findings on language ideologies with regard to urban and national sign languages. In their article about language attitudes with regard to sign languages, Burns et al. (2001) list a number of misconceptions generally held about sign languages: they are not “real languages” and do not have linguistic syntax, are merely gesture, and depend on concrete situations and mime and therefore cannot be used to express abstract issues. The issue that the status as “real language” is questioned (because of sign language’s visual modality) does not happen with regard to other minority languages such as Spanish in the US (Reagan

2011). The misconception that sign languages are not real languages is not (only) because they are minority languages but because of ideologies about the superiority of oral-auditive languages where the studies are based (also see Senghas & Monaghan 2002; Hill 2012). In shared signing communities, spoken language is typically not expected from sign-language users, and this view seems to be held by the majority of the people in the communities. The use of hearing aids and speech training have not yet been spread into most communities<sup>7</sup>.

Historically, many deaf people internalized abovementioned negative attitudes and ideologies with regard to sign languages (Burns et al. 2001; Hill 2013), a deplorable situation which has fortunately improved since the linguistic research of Stokoe and others (Hill 2012). Nowadays, Hill (2012) remarks, American Sign Language has a remarkable dual status: while the language is typically not regarded as a “real language” in mainstream society, and often stigmatized, it is typically regarded as the standard language with prestige inside the Deaf community. In contrast, in Adamorobe, the linguistic status of AdaSL was not questioned. AdaSL was regarded as a language that was of practical use to communicate with deaf people, in which everything could be discussed just like in Akan. A number of hearing interviewees in Adamorobe called the language “natural.” This attitude in Adamorobe towards sign language is more similar to the stance taken in historical philosophical discussions. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, sign language was often described as example of “natural” human communication. With the spread of evolutionary thought, however, sign language came to be regarded as crude and animalistic, and the uniform use of spoken language as the “natural” evolution of humankind (Baynton 1996).

The demographic (influx of migrants) and socioeconomic processes (diversification) in Adamorobe have resulted in a change in sign language practices and knowledge: less contact between deaf and hearing people, and thus less widespread knowledge and use of AdaSL. Historical changes in sociolinguistic networks in Adamorobe, asymmetries, and inaccessibilities notwithstanding, shared identities as Adamorobee are emphasised by deaf and hearing adults alike. It seems to fit in this picture of emphasising unity and equity that the shared cultural roots of AdaSL and Akan are emphasised and that these languages are valued equally. AdaSL was thus seen and experienced as a unifying force for the inhabitants of the village. While the demographic and economic changes had influence on sign language practices in Adamorobe, they did not seem to have a negative influence on the language ideologies surrounding AdaSL (yet).

#### NOTES

\*Thanks to Rachel Sutton-Spence, Victoria Nyst, Mara Green, Josefina Safar, and two anonymous reviewers for their very useful and thorough feedback on draft versions of this article.

<sup>1</sup>During public events in Adamorobe, sometimes a designated interpreter named Agnes Bomo interprets speeches, such as during meetings or ceremonies, when a political party comes for a rally, or when visitors come for the deaf people. Apparently, in the past, two men who are now deceased were

interpreters, but now Agnes Bomo (who has a deaf mother and deaf siblings, uncles, and aunts) is the deaf people's interpreter. It seems that in the past, interpretation was provided more often than now: Agnes is not that young anymore and no new or additional interpreter has turned up. This can lead to frustration when the deaf people attend a public event in Adamorobe where speeches are held but no interpretation is provided, such as funerals. Sometimes the deaf people put up with it, sometimes they get upset and leave, and sometimes hearing people will provide ad hoc translation after a complaint.

<sup>2</sup>The one person who replied “no” on the question if everything can be said in sign language, explained that “Even the few people who understand the sign language [very well], fail to understand certain signs from the deaf people.” In fact this person does not seem to imply that the language itself is limited, but that hearing people are never as fluent in the language as deaf people are, thus confirming what the deaf people said: to attain real fluency in AdaSL is difficult for hearing people.

<sup>3</sup>The one person who replied negatively, again did not explain his opinion with a reference to the structure of sign language, but pointed at the scope of its dispersal: “The sign language is only limited to a few sections of Adamorobe people, while the Akan language covers Adamorobe and almost the whole Ghana.”

<sup>4</sup>In many other shared signing communities, the sign language is called “deaf talking” or “deaf language.”

<sup>5</sup>Home sign languages often arise when a deaf child grows up within a nonsigning hearing family and they use visual communication (both conventionalised gestures and creatively invented gestures) in a way that becomes conventionalised within that context (Goldin-Meadow 2003).

<sup>6</sup>People in Adamorobe have at least two first names: their day name (i.e. the day of the week that they were born) and a second name where they are named after an elder from the family. In the day names, all women's names start with an A, and all men's names start with a K. The GSL name signs are—inspired by ASL name signs and by the Akan day names—based on an initialised hand shape, usually K for a man and A for a woman.

<sup>7</sup>An exception are the Al-Sayyid Bedouin where fourteen children have received a cochlear implant and have been increasingly segregated from their deaf peers (Kisch 2012).

## REFERENCES

- Bahan, Ben, & Joan Nash (1995). The formation of signing communities. In Jackie Mann (ed.), *Deaf Studies IV Conference Proceedings*, 1–26. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University College of Continuing Education.
- Baynton, Douglas C. (1996). *Forbidden signs: American culture and the campaign against sign language*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Burns, Sarah; Patrick A. Matthews; & Evelyn Nolan-Conroy (2001). Language attitudes. In Ceil Lucas (ed.), *The sociolinguistics of sign languages*, 181–216. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Diouf, Kenneth Yali (2007). Missionary biographical sketch of Andrew Jackson Foster (1925–1987). Online: <http://www.freewebs.com/kennethdiouf/foster.htm>.
- Goldin-Meadow, Susan (2003). *The resilience of language: What gesture creation in deaf children can tell us about how all children learn language*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Groce, Nora Ellen (1985). *Everyone here spoke sign language: Hereditary deafness on Martha's Vineyard*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hill, Joseph C. (2012). *Language attitudes in the American deaf community*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- (2013). Language ideologies, policies, and attitudes toward signed languages. In Robert Bayley, Richard Cameron, & Ceil Lucas (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of sociolinguistics*, 680–700. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kisch, Shifra (2008). Deaf discourse: The social construction of deafness in a Bedouin community in the Negev. *Medical Anthropology* 27(3):283–313.

- (2012). Demarcating generations of signers in the dynamic sociolinguistic landscape of a shared sign-language: The case of the Al-Sayyid Bedouin. In Zeshan & de Vos, 87–125.
- Kroskrity, Paul (2004). Language ideologies. In Alessandro Duranti (ed.), *A companion to linguistic anthropology*. Malden: Blackwell.
- Kusters, Annelies (2012). Being a deaf white anthropologist in Adamorobe: Some ethical and methodological issues. In Zeshan & de Vos, 27–52.
- Lanesman, Sara, & Irit Meir (2012). The survival of Algerian Jewish Sign Language alongside Israeli Sign Language in Israel. In Zeshan & de Vos, 153–79.
- Meir, Irit; Wendy Sandler; Carol Padden; & Mark Aronoff (2010). Emerging sign languages. In Marc Marschark & Patricia Spencer (eds.), *Oxford handbook of deaf studies, language, and education*, vol. 2, 267–80. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Meyer, Christina G.; Birgit Muntau; Christian Timmann; Rolf D. Horstmann; & Gerd Ruge (2001). Skin changes associated with GJB2-R143 W mutations in Ghana: Evidence for balancing selection of hearing impairment. In *Bernard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine: Scientific Report 2000–2001*, 78.
- Nonaka, Angela M. (2007). *Emergence of an indigenous sign language and a speech/sign community in Ban Khor, Thailand*. Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles dissertation.
- (2012). Language ecological change in Ban Khor, Thailand: An ethnographic case study of village sign language endangerment. In Zeshan & de Vos, 277–312.
- Nyst, Victoria (2007). *A descriptive analysis of Adamorobe Sign Language (Ghana)*. Utrecht: LOT.
- (2010). Sign languages in West Africa. In Diane Brentari (ed.), *Sign languages: A Cambridge language survey*, 405–32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (2012). Shared sign languages. In Roland Pfau, Markus Steinbach, & Bencie Woll (eds.), *Sign language: An international handbook*. (Handbooks on language and communication science 37), 552–74. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- ; Kara Sylla; & Moustapha Magassouba (2012). Deaf signers in Douentza, a rural area in Mali. In Zeshan & de Vos, 251–76.
- Reagan, Timothy G. (2011). Ideological barriers to American Sign Language: Unpacking linguistic resistance. *Sign Language Studies* 11(4):606–36.
- Schmaling, Constance (2003). A for apple: The impact of Western education and ASL on the deaf community in Kano State, Northern Nigeria. In Leila Monaghan, Constance Schmaling, Karen Nakamura, & Graham H. Turner (eds.), *Many ways to be deaf: International variation in deaf communities*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Senghas, Richard, & Leila Monaghan (2002). Signs of their times: Deaf communities and the culture of language. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31:69–97.
- Spolsky, Bernard (2004). *Language policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zeshan, Ulrike, & Connie de Vos (2012). *Sign languages in village communities: Anthropological and linguistic insights*. (Sign language typology 4.) Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter & Ishara Press.

(Received 21 December 2012; revision received 7 June 2013;  
accepted 6 July 2013; final revision received 4 August 2013)