

## **Standardisation in Kenyan Sign Language Led by Deaf Teachers**

Shane Gilchrist, Austine Otieno & Evans Namasaka

University of Amsterdam – the Netherlands  
Kenyan Federation of Deaf Teachers - Kenya  
Wajir School for the Deaf - Kenya

Kenyan Federation of Deaf Teachers and Deaf teachers in Kenya's deaf schools are holding discussions on the standardisation of Kenyan Sign Language, quoting one teacher "making it easier for us to teach our deaf children."

This paper will explore the relationship between the formal and ideological aspects of language standardisation, looking at the several roles played by different groups for instance, the role of the state-backed educational agency being instrumental in the creation and promotion of an artificial sign system that is promoted by non-deaf teachers in Kenya's deaf institutions and how a University research project & Deaf teachers make efforts in promoting Kenyan Sign Language as a real living language that can be used as a language of instruction.

We will argue that standardisation projects in general need not involve writing, though they must involve the objectification of some level of linguistic form. As Kenyan Sign Language does not have an agreed written form, this has allowed different deaf institutions to promote grammatically distinct forms of signing that reflect and promote distinct ideologies about the nature of the language, while still adhering to the same overarching standardisation project.

In addition, the arguments we offer about language standardization contribute to the discipline's understanding of language ideologies more broadly by highlighting the multiplicity of linguistic forms, ideological perspectives, and the semiotic processes by which linkages between the two are created and reinforced.