# Social network theory as a predictor of sign language boundaries; a proposal for a better understanding of African Sign Languages

Jason Hopkins

SIL - Kenya

*Three key factors common to the experiences of many Deaf present challenges and unique opportunities for sign language surveys, (1) the sign language acquisition process (2) tight-knit communities, and (3) excellent language negotiation skills. Most Deaf acquire language from someone other than their parents at places other than their homes. These places have been called centers of innovation. These centers often foster tight-knit communities. Further, being a member of a language group that is in a constant language contact situation many Deaf develop excellent language negotiation skills. A skilled Deaf communicator from such a community will spot an outsider quickly and will automatically adjust their language to meet that of the outsider, often subconsciously. This factor alone makes traditional language survey difficult.*

*The use of social networking has been demonstrated as a way to reduce the impact of observer's paradox in tight-knit communities allowing language to flow in more natural ways. Social networking analyzes the density and multiplexity of relationships within the community clusters.*

*This paper is a proposal for the use of social network theory as a predictor of language boundaries for African sign languages. First, a rational for the use social network theory as a tool for sign language survey will be given. Second, will be a discussion of the basics of social network theory with an emphasis on levels of abstraction and what that may mean in terms of costs and benefits, along with a purposed expansion of social network theory by including a fifth cluster unique to the Deaf experience, the center of innovation. Finally, a purposed procedure for data collection and analysis will be presented.*