The parameter 'Deaf community' in sign language evolution – the case of Adamorobe Sign Language (Ghana)

Most sign languages involving deaf users are assumed to have generated as home signing, i.e. the sign system developed and used by a small community of users, one of which is a deaf child. This deaf child user may grow up in the hearing community, continuing to use home sign. Alternatively, it socializes with other deaf people, forming a deaf community. This typically happens in schools for the Deaf, where they acquire a sign language from peers. Sign languages arisen in such Deaf communities show structural similarities. For example, regardless of the dominant spoken language surrounding them, these sign languages use classifiers to express motion and spatial modifications of verbs to signal agreement.
Sign languages evolved in communities with a high incidence of deafness behave differently in these respects. Instead of classifier predicates, Adamorobe Sign Language (AdaSL, Ghana) uses generic directionals, optionally in a verb series to mark the motion for control. The surrounding spoken language uses the same strategy. The verb series in AdaSL seem to be a contact induced feature. Rather than replacing a preexisting structure as in contact induced change, the grammaticalization of verb series in AdaSL is likely to be a form of contact induced evolution. I argue that the imposition of spoken language features in AdaSL is related to the absence of a Deaf community, affecting the ratio of primary and secondary language users. As such, the structural evolution of a sign language, including the evolution of assumed "universal" structures, is influenced by the social make up of its community of users.