

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages
2nd Term of 2024-25

Course code and title: LING 5404 Sign Linguistics

Course overview:

This course provides an introduction to the linguistic analysis of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and other grammatical issues in sign languages. It aims to demonstrate that the system of organization in sign language grammar reflects natural language properties and that sign language grammar is as complex and rule-governed as spoken languages. The focus will be placed on how the visual modality, availability of paired manual articulators as well as the use of signing space affect the organization of grammar at various linguistic levels. No prior knowledge of a sign language is required.

Sign Language Phonetics and Phonology – This part presents an overview of Sign Language Phonetics and Phonology, including key concepts of sign language phonetics, phonological processes, historical changes and variations in sign languages.

Sign Language Morphology and Syntax – This part's focus will be on selected topics concerning morphological structures and syntactic structures in sign languages. Topics covered include compounding, classifier constructions, word order issues, and sentence types.

Other grammatical issues – This part will include grammaticalization of gestures into sign language grammar, and sexual euphemisms in Asian sign languages.

Learning outcomes:

After completing this course, students will be able to do the followings:

1. Point out how the modality of sign languages affects sign language phonetics.
2. Identify the phonological processes that are found in phonologically related signs, and discuss how phonological processes lead to lexical variations and historical changes.
3. Discuss the types of linguistic evidence with respect to three basic phonological parameters (i.e. handshape, movement and location) that have been used to motivate sign phonology models, and apply this knowledge in the phonological analysis of other individual sign languages.
4. Name the different types of compounds and classifier constructions in sign languages and understand their underlying mechanisms.
5. Name the different types of sentence structures in sign languages and identify them in sign language data.
6. Able to explain how gestures can be incorporated to become manual signs and non-manual signals in sign languages.

List of topics:

Topic	Contents/fundamental concepts
Sign Language Phonetics and Phonology	This part discusses the concept of signing modality, minimal pairs, phonemic inventory, etc. A general introduction to

	different sign phonological models will also be included.
Common Phonological Processes in Sign Languages	This unit presents common phonological processes and changes that have been found in the world's sign languages. Students will practice how to identify processes that result in historical changes and sociolinguistic variations.
Morphological Processes in Sign Languages	This unit offers a general overview of compounding and classifier constructions in sign languages
Word order issues and sentence types	This unit covers some controversial issues related to the concept of basic word order and how word order is ordered in different sentence types.
Other issues	This unit covers the grammaticalization of manual and non-manual gestures into sign language grammar, and how deaf people formulate euphemistic expressions to express sexual concepts.

Learning activities:

Lecture (hr) in /out class	Interactive tutorial (hr) in /out class	Lab (hr) in /out class	Discussion of case (hr) in /out class	Field-trip (hr) in /out class	Projects (hr) in /out class	Web-based teaching (hr) in /out class	Other (hr) in /out class
26	13				20		
M;O; NA	M;O; NA	M;O; NA	M;O; NA	M;O; NA	M;O; NA	M;O; NA	M;O; NA

M: Mandatory activity in the course; O: Optional activity; NA: Not applicable

Out-of-class Learning Activity (optional):

- Students are encouraged to watch the movie "The Way We Talk" (看我今天怎麼說) to enhance their deaf awareness.

Assessment scheme (including rationale):

Task nature	Description	Weight
Final Quiz	To evaluate students' understanding on the course materials	40%
Written Exercises	To evaluate students' understanding on the course materials	30%
Individual Written Assignment	To ensure students' ability to apply their knowledge and skills learnt in lectures on sign language data	30%

Grade	Overall Course
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A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An outstanding performance on all learning outcomes. • A solid understanding of the sign linguistic concepts covered in class. • A solid understanding of the linguistic differences between signed and spoken languages. • An outstanding ability to analyze sign language data with appropriate linguistic concepts, as reflected in the final quiz. • An outstanding ability in reviewing selected sign linguistics literature and carrying out small-scale sign language research project as reflected in the term paper.
A-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A generally outstanding performance on most learning outcomes. • A good understanding of the sign linguistic concepts covered in class. • A good understanding of the linguistic differences between signed and spoken languages. • A strong ability to analyze sign language data with appropriate linguistic concepts, as reflected in the final quiz. • A strong ability in reviewing selected sign linguistics literature and carrying out small-scale sign language research project as reflected in the term paper.
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A satisfactory performance on most of the learning outcomes. • A satisfactory understanding of most of the sign linguistic concepts covered in class. • A satisfactory understanding of most of the linguistic differences between signed and spoken languages. • Sufficient ability to analyze sign language data with appropriate linguistic concepts, with occasional errors, as reflected in the final quiz. • Satisfactory ability in reviewing selected sign linguistics literature and carrying out small-scale sign language research project as reflected in the term paper.
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A satisfactory performance on some of the learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses. • A satisfactory understanding of some of the sign linguistic concepts covered in class. • A satisfactory understanding of some of the linguistic differences between signed and spoken languages. • Still developing the ability to analyze sign language data with appropriate linguistic concepts, as reflected in the final quiz. • Still developing the ability in reviewing selected sign linguistics literature and carrying out small-scale sign language research project as reflected in the term paper.
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A barely satisfactory performance on some of the learning outcomes. • A basic understanding of some of the sign linguistic concepts in class only. • A basic understanding of some of the linguistic differences between signed and spoken languages. • Very little ability of analyzing sign language data with appropriate linguistic concepts as reflected in the final quiz.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very little ability of reviewing selected sign linguistics literature and carrying out small-scale sign language research project as reflected in the term paper.
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, or failure to meet specified assessment requirements. • Very little understanding of the sign linguistic concepts in class. • Very little understanding of the linguistic differences between signed and spoken languages. • Lack the ability of analyzing sign language data with appropriate linguistic concepts as reflected in the final quiz. • Lack the ability of reviewing selected sign linguistics literature and carrying out small-scale sign language research project as reflected in the term paper.

Individual Written Assignment (30%):

- Students can either write a critical review of a selected sign language issue or conduct a mini-research project.
- The written assignment should be no less than 8 pages (normal margin, font 12, Times New Roman, single-spaced). Deadline for submission is: *to be determined*.

Written Exercise (30%):

- Submission deadline: *to be determined*.

Recommended Readings:

- Baker, Anne, Beppie van den Bogaerde, Roland Pfau & Trude Schermer. 2016. *The Linguistics of Sign Languages: an introduction*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Battison, Robbin. 1978. *Lexical Borrowing in American Sign Language*. P.19-58. (*Linguistics of American Sign Language: an introduction*, p.199-218).
- Frishberg, Nancy. 1975. Arbitrariness and Iconicity: Historical Change in American Sign Language. *Language* 51,696–719.
- Pfau, Roland, Markus Steinbach and Bencie Woll. 2012. *Sign Language: An International Handbook*. De Gruyter Mouton. [HV2474 .S539 2012]
- Sandler, Wendy and Diane Lillio-Martin. 2006. *Sign Language and Linguistic Universals*, Cambridge University Press. [UL HV2474 .S28 2006]
- Sze, Felix, Monica Xiao Wei, Aaron Wong. 2017. Taboos and euphemisms in sex-related signs in Asian sign languages. *Linguistics*, 55(1), 153-205.
- Sze, Felix. 2022. From gestures to grammatical non-manuals in sign language: a case study of polar questions and negation in Hong Kong Sign Language. *Lingua*, 267, 103188.
- Sze, Felix. 2021. Effects of the semantic and morphological factors on word order in simple transitive clauses in three Asian Sign Languages. *Senri Ethnological Studies* 107: 5-41 (*Minpaku Sign Language Studies* 2).

Woodward, James. 1976. Signs of Change: Historical Variation in American Sign Language. *Sign Language Studies* 10, 81-94

Feedback for evaluation:

Students are welcome to give comments and feedback to the instructors via the following channels:

- Mid-term and course-end evaluation
- in-class discussions
- Blackboard's discussion forum, personal emails or individual appointments with the instructor

Course schedule:

Classes	Date	Topic	Reading assignments
1	7 January	Introduction Sign Language Phonetics	1. Battison (1978) 2. Baker et al. (2016) Chapter 10
2	14 January	Sign Language Phonetics	1. Woodward (1976) 2. Baker et al. (2016) Chapter 11 3. Pfau et al (2012) Unit 2
3	21 January	Phonological Processes, historical changes and variations in Sign Languages	Frishberg (1975)_historical development
	28 January	Lunar New Year Vacation – No class	
4	4 February	Sequentiality and Simultaneity in sign language phonology	Sandler & Lillo-Martin (2006) Chapter 8, 9
5	11 February	Hand-Tier Model I (handshape)	Sandler & Lillo-Martin (2006) Chapter 10, 11, 13
6	18 February	Hand-Tier Model II (location & movement)	
7	25 February	Morphology I Morphological Processes, compounds and classifiers	Baker et al. (2016) Chapter 9 Sandler & Lillo-Martin (2006) Chapter 5 Pfau et al (2012) Unit 8
8	4 March	Morphology II Morphological Processes, compounds and classifiers	
9	11 March	Morphology III Morphological Processes, compounds and classifiers	
10	18 March	Syntax I Word order issues	Pfau et al (2012) Unit 12 Sze (2021)

11	25 March	Syntax I Different sentence types	Pfau et al (2012) Unit 14_sentence types
12	1 April	Grammaticalization of gestures	Sze (2022)
13	8 April	Sexual taboos and euphemisms	Sze et al. (2017)
14	15 April	Final Quiz	

Contact details for teacher(s) or TA(s):

Professor/Lecturer/Instructor:	
Name:	Prof. Felix Sze
Office Location:	G08, K.K. Leung Building
Telephone:	31634178
Email:	felix_cslds@cuhk.edu.hk
Teaching Time and Venue:	Tuesdays 6:30-9:15 pm, Lee Shau Kee Building LT1

Teaching Assistant:	
Name:	Miss. Qingyi CHEN
Office Location:	G28, K.K. Leung Building
Telephone:	39430672
Email:	qingyichen@cuhk.edu.hk

A facility for posting course announcements

All announcements will be posted via Blackboard or Email.

Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>.

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed [declaration](#) that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

- In the case of group projects, all members of the group should be asked to sign the declaration, each of whom is responsible and liable to disciplinary actions, irrespective of whether he/she has signed the declaration and whether he/she has contributed, directly or indirectly, to the problematic contents.
- For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment.
- Students are fully aware that their work may be investigated by AI content detection software to determine originality.
- Students are fully aware of the AI approach(es) adopted in the course. In the case where some AI tools are allowed, students have made proper acknowledgments and citations as suggested by the course teacher.

Assignments without a properly signed declaration will not be graded by teachers.

Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submissions. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one's own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

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Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools in Learning and Assessment

Use of some AI tools is allowed

Students may use some AI tools in some in-class activities and assignments on the following conditions:

1. The AI tools to be used are restricted to the following tools: **N.A.**
2. The specified AI tools will only be allowed for the following types of class activities and assignments: ***Information search and preparation of class assignments only. Direct use of AI generated writing is not permitted in class assignments.***
3. Collaboration of AI tools is only allowed for the following purposes / tasks: ***Information search and preparation of class assignments only. Direct use of AI generated writing is not permitted in class assignments.***
4. The input contributed by the AI tools are properly acknowledged and cited ; and
5. The input together with the prompts used to elicit the AI responses should be highlighted or included as appendices wherever appropriate.

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