The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages
First Term, 2026-27

Course Code: BMBL 2004 **Title in English: Language Acquisition of Deaf Children** **Title in Chinese: 聾童語言獲得**
Course Description: This course explores deaf children's acquisition of spoken language and signed language, either in a monolingual or bilingual fashion, focusing on the following issues: age of language acquisition, language deprivation, language input, the critical period, and (bimodal) bilingual acquisition. In the context of Hong Kong, where the dominant societal languages are oral-auditory, a significant portion of the discussion will be devoted to how deaf children acquire the sound segments, tones, vocabulary, morphology, and syntax in Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese. For comparison, the acquisition of signed languages by deaf children in corresponding linguistic domains will also be discussed, with specific reference to the framework of bimodal bilingualism.

Course Syllabus

Topic	Contents/fundamental concepts
Spoken language development	• Speech perception and production • Grammatical knowledge • Vocabulary and literacy
Sign language development	• Phonological knowledge • Morphological knowledge • Syntactic knowledge • Non-manuals
Critical period	It refers to the period during which children are said to be sensitive to linguistic data for language acquisition. Language acquisition beyond this period displays diverse ultimate attainments.
Impoverished Input	Linguistic data that is supposedly sensitive enough to trigger language acquisition is neither perceived nor processed efficiently. Alternatively, the so-called language data that deaf children are exposed to does not reflect natural language properties.
Sign bilingualism vs bimodal bilingualism	Sign bilingualism refers to a form of education philosophy for the deaf that promotes the use of sign language in education to nurture the 'L1' acquisition of deaf and hard-of-hearing children. Subsequent exposure to spoken language in the education process is taken to be their L2 acquisition. On the other hand, bimodal bilingualism has a much stronger linguistic orientation that promotes early and simultaneous exposure to both sign language and spoken language for deaf children.

Learning outcomes

At the end of this course, students are expected to understand:

1. How deaf children access the grammar of natural languages through the auditory/oral or the visual-spatial modality.

2. The complex situations in which deaf children acquire spoken and sign language.

3. Factors such as the effects of linguistic input and the critical period on deaf children's language acquisition.

4. The acquisition process of sign language and spoken language by deaf children.

5. Some basic research skills for investigating issues related to deaf children's language acquisition

Course components (Teaching modes and Learning activities)

Teaching Modes and Learning Activities	
On-site face-to-face	**Time**
Lectures	17 hours
In-class exercises	3 hours
Paper- presentation-based tutorials	10 hours
Workshops	6 hours
	Total: 36 hours
Out-of-classroom	
Readings	50 hours
Presentation Preparation	4 hours
Final quiz preparation	10 hours
	Total: 64 hours
	Total: 100 hours

Learning activities

Lecture (hr) in class	**Interactive tutorial (hr) in class**	**In-class exercises (hr) in class**	**Workshops (hr) in class**	**Final quiz preparation (hr) Out class**	**Reading (hr) Out class**	**Presentation preparation (hr) Out class**
16	10	4	6	10	50	4
M	M	M	M	M	M	M

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

Assessment scheme

Assessment types	**Description**	**Percentage**
Class participation	Students are expected to actively attend class activities and contribute to discussions. Punctuality (10%): • Definition of being punctual: No later than 10 minutes (0% deduction) • Late between 10 & 15 minutes (50% deduction) • Late >15 minutes (100% deduction) Bonus (no more than 10% in total to encourage active participation and contribution to class discussions)	Total: 10% (Individual) (No AI use)
Paper presentation	Groups of students (typically three students) take turns introducing a selected paper to the class. Group PPT (32 slides max, including a front slide for the title and a slide for work organisation purposes, such as a summary of who is responsible for which slides). Assessment scheme (A) Group PPT (Total: 15%) PPT contents: summary of the contents of the reading (5%) and critical analysis (5%) Organisation & presentation (5%) (B) Q and A session (Total: 5%) Answer question(s) from the audience. Please upload the PPT to Blackboard after the presentation for sharing with other students.	Total: 20% (Group-performance-based) (AI is allowed to facilitate paper reading and understanding. Students should prepare the PPT content themselves.)

Workshop reports	Students write two reports based on observations from two workshops.	30% (i.e., 2 x 15%) (Group discussion is encouraged; individual report writing) (No AI use)
On-site final exam	Answering some multiple-choice questions, True/False questions, short-answer questions, and 1 essay question (500 words max)	40% (Individual) (No AI use)

Late submission policy

Timeline for making requests:	Students with valid reasons for submitting an assignment late must submit a formal request, including supporting documentation, to the course teacher no later than the very day of the workshop.
Supporting documents:	Extension requests, accompanied by valid and official supporting documents, must be submitted to the course teacher by email for approval.
Penalty:	Unless an official extension is approved and properly documented, late assignment submissions may incur a penalty. Specifically, late submissions will result in **a 5% deduction from the marks awarded per day, with no marks given for delays** beyond 5 calendar days. For extension requests supported by appropriate documentation, a make-up data analysis session will be arranged and must be completed on a working day within the following 7 days (calculated from the date of the workshop under discussion). Submit the report on the same day as the make-up session. Only unforeseen or exceptional circumstances beyond a student's control will be considered.
Remarks:	Requests submitted late or without valid reasons and supporting documents will not be accepted.

Make-up Test Arrangements

Timeline for making requests:	Students seeking permission to be absent from an assessment and requesting a make-up arrangement must submit a written application to the relevant course teacher **on or before the scheduled test date**, accompanied by appropriate supporting documentation.
Supporting documents:	1. **<u>For medical and/or other health reasons</u>**: Students must submit their request together with a valid medical certificate, issued and signed by a registered medical practitioner, explicitly recommending **sick leave** for the exact date or period of the relevant assessment. Attendance certificates will NOT be accepted. 2. **<u>For other compelling reasons/events</u>**: Students must provide official documentation, such as invitation letters from competition organisers, interview invitation letters or emails from employers, or external examination schedules, clearly stating that the event **cannot be rescheduled**. These documents will serve as supporting evidence for consideration by the course teacher.
Timeline for conducting make-up tests:	All approved make-up arrangements must be completed within a specified timeframe, i.e., 5 working days or 7 calendar days following the date of the originally scheduled examination for the entire class.
Number of attempts:	Upon approval of a student's absence application, only one make-up test will be scheduled according to the timeline specified above for each assessment.

Penalty:	A penalty of a **10% deduction** from the full mark of the test will be applied, **regardless of the reason** for the absence. Only **one make-up test** will be scheduled for the entire class, to be held within **5 working days** or **7 calendar days** after the originally scheduled examination date.
Remarks:	1. Late submissions or requests that do not include valid supporting documents will NOT be considered. 2. Students who are absent from any examination without prior approval will receive a failing grade for that examination.

Feedback for evaluation

- Students are encouraged to give timely comments and feedback directly to the course instructor.
- In addition to the University course evaluation, there will also be a midterm evaluation to collect students' opinions.

Grade Descriptors

A	Outstanding	➢ Outstanding performance in all learning outcomes; ➢ Competent in theorization, generalization, hypothesization, and reflection upon issues; ➢ Skilled in creating hypotheses and generating proposals to tackle issues with unanticipated extension.
A-	Excellent	➢ Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes; ➢ Skilled in comparing and contrasting arguments, explaining causes, analyzing and relating concepts to general theories; and ➢ Good at applying issues to relevant social contexts and predicting logically related outcomes
B	Good	➢ Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, or high performance on some learning outcomes which compensate for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance; ➢ Able to enumerate, describe, list, and clarify concepts and topics; and ➢ Capable of examining a topic from multiple perspectives.
C	Fair	➢ Satisfactory performance on a majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses; and ➢ Able to state, recognize, recall, and tell single points of topics of discussion.
D	Inadequate	➢ Barely satisfactory performance on quite a number of learning outcomes; and ➢ Barely able to recognize and state arguments in topics of discussion.
F	Fail	➢ Unsatisfactory performance on several learning outcomes, or failure to meet the specified assessment requirements; ➢ Missing the points.

* The final grade attained will be adjusted downward for each unexpected absence or tardiness in submitting assignments.
* Students are encouraged to be punctual, and there is a 15-minute allowance beyond which time the attendance is counted as zero.

Course schedule

Class	Date	Topic	Lecture-related readings **(* = compulsory reading)**	Student presentation readings for tutorials
1	8 Sept	Language acquisition in deaf children: An introduction	*Thierfelder, P., Tang, G., and Li, J. 2024. The acquisition of Hong Kong Sign Language in deaf and hard-of-	(Extended lecture)

			hearing children: A longitudinal study of sign language development in a bimodal bilingual co-enrollment programme. *Deafness & Education International*, 26(1), 6-36. *Humphries, T., Mathur, G., Napoli, D.J., Padden, C., and Rathmann, C. 2022. Deaf children need rich language input from the start: Support in advising parents. *Chilren*, 9, 1609. https://doi.org/10.3390/children9111609 Hand, L.S., Liu, C.K.Y., Hardman, G., & Mahon, M. 2023. Language skill development in children with cochlear implants and impact of age at switch-on. *Deafness & Education International*, 25(1), 59-78, DOI: 10.1080/14643154.2021.2001616 Lillo-Martin, D, & Henner, J. (2021). Acquisition of Sign Languages, Annual Review of Applied Linguistics. *Annu. Rev. Linguist*. 2021. 7:395–419,doi.org/10.1146/annurev-linguistics-043020- 092357 Nittrouer, S., and Caldwell-Tarr, A. 2016. Language and literacy skills in children with cochlear implants: Past and present findings. In N.M. Young, K. Iler (eds.), *Pediatric Cochlear Implantation*. DOI 10.1007/978-1-4939-2788-3_11. (pp. 177-197).	
2	15 Sept	Spoken language: Speech perception and production (1)	*Camarata, S., Lighterink, M., Sunderhaus, L., Labadie, R., and Gifford, R. 2025. Phonological processing, oral language abilities, and reading comprehension in children with cochlear implants. *Scientific Reports*, 15:45800 *Cheung, K. K.L., Lau, A. H.Y., Lam, J.H.S., and Lee, K. Y.S. 2014. Cantonese tone production performance of mainstream school children with hearing impairment. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*. 16(6): 624-636 Holt, C. M., Lee, K.Y.S., Dowell, R. C. & Vogel, A. P. (2018). Perception of Cantonese lexical tones by pediatric cochlear	(Extended lecture)

			implant users. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 61, 174-185. Blamey, P. J. and Sarant, J. 2011. Development of spoken language by deaf children. In Marc Marschark and Patricia Elizabeth Spencer (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language, and Education*, Vol 1 (2nd edition). Pp.241-257.	
3	22 Sept	Spoken language: Speech perception and production (2)	*Li, Q., Meng, Y., Li, Q.-L., Zhao, H., & Li, S.-Y. 2025. Preliminary study on the neural mechanisms of four tone recognition in deaf children using fMRI. *Scientific reports* 15: 27320. *Nematova, S., Zinszer, B., Morlet, T., Morini, G., Petitto, L.-A., and Jasińska, K. K. 2024. Impact of ASL exposure on spoken phonemic discrimination in adult CI users: A functional Near-Infrared Spectroscopy study. *Neurobiology of Language*, 5(2), 553-588. https://doi.org/10.1162/nol_a_00143 Tang, P., Yuen, I., Rattanasone, N. X., Gao, L.-Q., and Demuth, K. 2021. Longer cochlear implant experience leads to better production of Mandarin tones for early implanted children. *Ear & Hearing*, 42(5), 1405-1411. Zhou, N., Huang, J., Chen, X.W., and Xu, Li. 2013. Relationship between tone perception and production in prelingually deafened children with cochlear implants. *Otology & Neurotology* 34: 499-506.	*Thierfelder, P., Tang, G., and Li, J. 2024. The acquisition of Hong Kong Sign Language in deaf and hard-of-hearing children: A longitudinal study of sign language development in a bimodal bilingual co-enrollment programme. *Deafness & Education International*, 26(1), 6-36.
4	29 Sept	Spoken language grammatical development: morphology and syntax (1)	*Tang G., et al. (2023). Chinese grammatical development of deaf and hard of hearing children in a sign bilingualism and coenrollment program. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 167(5), 675-699. Berent, G.P. (2001). English for deaf students: Assessing and addressing learners' grammar development. In D. Janakova (ed.), *International Seminar on*	*Humphries, T., Mathur, G., Napoli, D.J., Padden, C., and Rathmann, C. 2022. Deaf children need rich language input from the start: Support in advising parents. *Children*, 9, 1609. https://doi.org/10.3390/children9111609

			Teaching English to Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students at Secondary and Tertiary Levels of Education: Proceedings (pp. 124-134). Prague, Czech Republic: Charles University, The Karolinum Press. Berent, G.P. (1996). The acquisition of English syntax by deaf learners. In Ritchie, W., & Bhatia, T. (eds.). Handbook of Second Language Acquisition (pp. 469-506). San Diego: Academic Press. Friedmann, N. & Szterman, R. 2011. The comprehension and production of Wh-questions in deaf and hard-of-hearing children. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*. 16(2), 212-235.	
5	6 Oct	Spoken language grammatical development: morphology and syntax (2)	*Geers et al. (2017). Early sign language exposure and cochlear implantation benefits. *Pediatrics*. 140(1): e20163489 Sze, Tang, Lau, Lam & Yiu. 2015. The development of discourse referencing in Cantonese of deaf/hard-of-hearing children. *Journal of Child Language*. 42: 351-393. de Villiers, J., & de Villiers, P. (1994). The central problem of functional categories in the English syntax of oral deaf children. In Tager-Flusberg, H. (ed.), *Constraints on Language Acquisition* (1st edition). New York: Psychology Press. (pp.9-47). Lam, S. (2017). Acquisition of Chinese relative clauses by deaf children in Hong Kong. *Language and Linguistics* 18:1, 72-115.	*Nematova, S., Zinszer, B., Morlet, T., Morini, G., Petitto, L.-A., and Jasińska, K. K. 2024. Impact of ASL exposure on spoken phonemic discrimination in adult CI users: A functional Near-Infrared Spectroscopy study. *Neurobiology of Language*, 5(2), 553-588. https://doi.org/10.1162/nol_a_00143
6	13 Oct	Workshop 1	(Analyzing spoken language data (written Chinese data) from deaf children)	(Composing workshop report) (Submit the first workshop report alongside Veriguide receipt by the end of the day) (Use of AI is not allowed)
7	20 Oct	Sign phonological acquisition by deaf children (1)	*Boyes Braem, P. 1990. Acquisition of the handshape in American Sign Language: A	*Camarata, S., Lighterink, M., Sunderhaus, L., Labadie, R., and Gifford, R. 2025. Phonological

			preliminary analysis. In V. Volterra & C.J.Erting (eds.), *From gesture to language in hearing and deaf children* (pp. 107-127). Heidelberg, Germany: Springer-Verlag. Conlin, Kimberly E. et al. (2000). The acquisition of first signs: Place, handshape, and movement. In Charlene, C. etal (eds.), *Language Acquisition by Eye*. (pp.54-72). Marentette, P.F. (2000). Principles for an emerging phonological system: A case study of early ASL acquisition. In Charlene, C. etal (eds.), *Language Acquisition by Eye*. (pp.73-90).	processing, oral language abilities, and reading comprehension in children with cochlear implants. *Scientific Reports*, 15:45800
	27 Oct	*(No class arranged)* *(The instructor is out of town for conference)* (The readings should go on→)	*Holcomb, Leala. (2023). ASL Rhyme, Rhythm, and Phonological Awareness for Deaf Children. *Perspectives on Early Childhood Psychology and Education,* 5(2), Article 3. Holcomb, L., Golos, D., Moses, A., Broadrick, A. (2022). Enriching Deaf Children's American Sign Language Phonological Awareness: A Quasi-Experimental Study.	(N/A)
8	3 Nov	Sign phonological acquisition by deaf children (2)	*Morgan, G. (2006). 'Children are just lingual': The development of phonology in British Sign Language (BSL). *Lingua*, 116, 1507-1523. Brentari, D., Falk, J., & Woldford, G. (2015). The acquisition of prosody in American Sign Language. Language, 91 (3), e144-e168.	*Li, Q., Meng, Y., Li, Q.-L., Zhao, H., & Li, S.-Y. 2025. Preliminary study on the neural mechanisms of four tone recognition in deaf children using fMRI. *Scientific Reports* 15: 27320.
9	10 Nov	Sign Language grammatical development: morphology and syntax (1)	*Hoffmeister, R., Henner, J., Caldwell-Harris, C., and Novogrodsky, R. 2022. Deaf children's ASL vocabulary and ASL syntax knowledge supports English knowledge. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 37-47. Reilly, J. (2006). How faces come to serve grammar: the development of nonmanual morphology in ASL.	*Holcomb, Leala. (2023). ASL Rhyme, Rhythm, and Phonological Awareness for Deaf Children. *Perspectives on Early Childhood Psychology and Education,* 5(2), Article 3.

			Tang, G. et al. (2007). Acquisition of simultaneous constructions by deaf children of Hong Kong Sign Language. In Vermeerbergen et al (eds.), *Simultaneity in Signed Languages: Form and Function*. Amsterdam, NLD: John Benjamins Publishing Company. (pp. 283-315).	
10	17 Nov	Sign Language grammatical development: morphology and syntax (2)	*Krebs, J., Roehm, D., Wilbur, R., Malaia, E.A. (2021). Age of acquisition effects has life-long effect on syntactic preferences in sign language users. *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, 45/4:397 408. *Cheng, Q., & Mayberry, R. (2018). Acquiring a first language in adolescence: the case of basic word order in American Sign Language. Chen Pichler, D. (2010). Using early ASL word order to shed light on word order variability in sign language.	*Hoffmeister, R., Henner, J., Caldwell-Harris, C., and Novogrodsky, R. 2022. Deaf children's ASL vocabulary and ASL syntax knowledge supports English knowledge. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 37-47.
11	24 Nov	Bimodal bilingual acquisition	*Goodwin, C., and Lillo-Martin, D. 2023. Deaf and hearing American Sign Language-English bilinguals: Typical bilingual language development. Tang, G., & Li, J. 2018. Acquisition of classifier constructions in HKSL by bimodal bilingual deaf children of hearing parents. Frontiers in Psychology,9, article 1148. Fung, C., & Tang, G. 2016.Code-blending of functional heads in Hong Kong Sign Language and Cantonese: A case study.	*Krebs, J., Roehm, D., Wilbur, R., Malaia, E.A. (2021). Age of acquisition effects has life-long effect on syntactic preferences in sign language users. *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, 45/4:397 408.
12	24 Nov	Workshop 2	(Analyzing signing and speech data from deaf children) (Each student takes along a computer with ELAN installed to the classroom)	(Composing workshop report) (Submit the first workshop report alongside Veriguide receipt by the end of the day) (Use of AI is not allowed)
13	1 Dec	To tie up loose ends		
14	8 Dec	Final quiz (On-site, paper and pencil)	(Details to be announced by the middle of Nov)	

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

Instructor:	
Name:	Dr. LI Jieqiong
Office Location:	Rm 203, Academic Building No.2, CUHK
Telephone:	3943-6029
Email:	cslds-jieqiongli@cuhk.edu.hk
Teaching Assistant:	
Name:	Ms. Mandy Tang
Office Location:	Rm 203, Academic Building No.2, CUHK
Telephone:	
Email:	mandy_cslds@cuhk.edu.hk
Lecture time and venue:	
Lecture & tutorial Time:	Tuesday, 10:30 am- 12:15 am
Teaching Venue:	Lee Shau Kee Building 308

Details of the course website

Key point: Information concerning the course is provided in the Blackboard platform hosted by the University.

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 acknowledgment 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 before the submission of the piece of work.

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

Use of generative AI tools

Guiding principle: Use only with prior permission

Permission is given to students resorting to AI-driven software to facilitate:

a. reading comprehension of journal papers
b. grammar checks on writing outputs in research paper writing

Using AI-driven softwares to compose reports and essays is DISALLOWED. Specifically,

a. For the two workshop reports, using AI tools to compose the reports is not allowed. Furthermore, students need to pass their reports to the TA of this course to check the AI writing index first. Only if the AI index is within an acceptable range, the report is eligible to be further submitted to the instructor for grading.
b. For the paper presentation, students should not ask AI to generate PPTs for them. PPT preparation should be done on their own, based on their understanding and summarization of the paper after carefully reading it.
c. For both in-class exercises and the final quiz, students should complete these two components of assessment individually and independently. They are not allowed to ask AI to do the exercises in lieu of them.

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