



Distinguished Lecture Series – Lecture 2

Age Matters! A Global Assessment of The Impact of Late Exposure on Language Competences in Deaf Adults



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Date: March 12, 2024 (Tuesday)

Time: 4:30pm - 6:15pm (Hong Kong Time, UTC +8)

Venue: Room 306, Lee Shau Kee Building,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract:

Who is a native signer? Since around 95% of deaf infants are born into a hearing family, deaf signers are exposed to a sign language at various moments of their life, and not only from birth. Moreover, the linguistic input they are exposed to is not always a fully fledged natural sign language. In this situation, is the notion of native signer as someone exposed to language from birth of any use? I shall review the results of the first large-scale cross-linguistic investigation on the effects of age of exposure to sign language (stemming from the ERC funded Sign-Hub project). The results show a clear effect of being native, with significant differences across languages and tests between signers exposed to sign language from birth and those exposed in the 1st years of life. This confirms the life-long importance of language exposure from birth and the reliability of the notion of “*nativeness*”, at least for syntax. On the other hand, while in most domains the differences observed between populations might be differences in performance, for some specific constructions, signers belonging to the three groups may have different grammars. This latter finding challenges the generalized use of native signers’ grammar as the baseline for language description and language assessment.

Speaker:

Caterina Donati is full professor at the University Paris Cité. She works on syntactic theory and sign language linguistics, and has written, among other books, *(Re)labeling* (MIT Press, 2015, with C. Cecchetto) *SignGram Blueprint, A Guide to Sign Language Grammar Writing* (2019, De Gruyter, with J. Quer, et al.), and *Generative Grammar: Ideas, history and Models of analysis* (in press, Cambridge University Press, with G. Graffi). She is the author of some 50 articles on descriptive, theoretical and experimental syntax published in important journals and venues (*Linguistic Inquiry*, *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, *Glossa*, *Syntax*, *The linguistic review*, *Journal of Memory and Language*, *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* etc).

All Are Welcome

Enquiries

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