



Department of  
Linguistics and Modern Languages  
語言學及現代語言系

## Distinguished Scholars Lecture Series in Linguistics

### Public Lecture

# A Language Blooms in the Desert: Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language



#### Prof. Mark ARONOFF

Distinguished Professor of Linguistics,  
Stony Brook University

**Date:** 4 April 2019 (Thursday)

**Time:** 4:30 - 6:15p.m.

**Venue:** Room 220 of Fung King Hey Building,  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

#### Abstract:

80 years ago, four brothers and sisters were born completely deaf, because of a of recessive genetic trait, in a family in the village of Al-Sayyid in the Negev Desert in what is now Israel. The children were otherwise completely normal and together they created a sign language uninfluenced by the outside world. These were the first deaf people in the village, but since then 150 children have been born deaf in Al-Sayyid. Together, they have built a sign language that is now used by both deaf and many hearing members of the community. For the last fifteen years, a team of linguists, both deaf and hearing, has watched this language, Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language, grow. The language has revealed a great deal, not just about sign language, but about the drive for language that makes humans unique among all species on earth.

#### Speaker:

Mark Aronoff is Distinguished Professor of Linguistics at Stony Brook University, State University of New York. He has been on the Stony Brook faculty since receiving his Ph. D. from MIT in 1974. His research touches on almost all aspects of morphology and its relations to phonology, syntax, semantics, and psycholinguistics. He has used a wide variety of methods in his work, ranging from traditional morphological analysis of both primary and secondary data from a wide variety of languages to lexical decision experiments to dictionary-based counting. He maintains a research interest in writing systems, especially how they relate to spoken language and linguistic awareness. For the last fifteen years he has been a member of a team studying a newly-created sign language, Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language. Mark Aronoff is author or editor of ten books and more than 100 scientific articles. He has served as Editor of Language, the Journal of the Linguistic Society of America, and as President of the Society. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and LSA. He is a member of the United States National Commission on Language Learning.

Enquiries:

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