

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Department of Linguistics
Second Term, 2021-2022

Course code and title: BMBL 2001, Sign Linguistics I: Phonetics and Phonology

Course overview: This course presents an overview of important concepts and issues in sign language phonetics and phonology. Foundational topics to be discussed include sign phonetics (location, handshape, orientation, and movement), sign phonemics, markedness, phonological processes, sign syllables, and visual prosody. Students will learn to transcribe signs using the modified Stokoe notation system. Examples will be drawn from American Sign Language, Hong Kong Sign Language, and a variety of other sign languages from around the world. Furthermore, this course will look at other issues in sign phonology research, including language acquisition, cognitive processing, and literacy development.

Content, highlighting fundamental concepts

Topic	Concepts
Introduction to the course	This unit provides an overview of the concepts that will be covered in the course.
Sign phonetics and phonological parameters	These units present the five parameters of sign language phonology (locations, handshapes, orientations, movements, and non-manual expressions) that have been found in the world's sign languages. Students will learn to transcribe signs using the modified Stokoe notation system.
Sign phonemics	This unit describes how the methodology used by classic phonemic theory has been used to classify sign parameters into phonemic classes. This unit also discusses minimal pairs and how to determine if a sound or parameter is distinctive or important in a language.
Markedness in sign language phonology	In this unit, students will learn about the concept of markedness and look at how markedness influences how frequent or infrequent a handshape is likely to be across sign languages.
Phonological processes in sign languages	These units present common phonological processes that have been found in the world's sign languages. Students will have opportunities to practice identifying these phonological processes.
Sign language acquisition	In this unit, we look the characteristics of early sign production and how deaf children acquire the parameters of location, handshape, and movement.
Sign phonology and cognition	This unit looks at the research on the cognitive processes underlying sign production and perception. We will also look at disorders that affect sign languages.
Sign phonology in education and reading development	This unit discusses the relationship between sign language phonology, reading processing, and literacy development.

Learning outcomes

After completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Define the key concepts taught in the course, such as distinctiveness and markedness.
2. Describe how different disorders can affect phonological acquisition and production.
3. Describe key findings from psycholinguistic research regarding the roles of location, handshape, and movement in lexical access.
4. Describe the patterns of phonology acquisition in signing children.
5. Explain how sign language phonology is involved in reading and literacy development in deaf people.
6. Give examples of variation and historical change in sign languages.
7. Identify and transcribe the location, handshape, orientation, and movement of a sign.

8. Name and explain the common phonological processes that lead to variation in signs.
9. Transcribe signs using the modified Stokoe notation system.

Learning activities

Lecture (hr) in /out class		Interactive tutorial (hr) in /out class		Reading assignments (hr) in /out class		Homework (hr) in /out class	
2	NA	1	NA	NA	2	NA	2
M	NA	M	NA	NA	M	NA	M

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

Assessment scheme

Task nature	Description	Weight
In-class activities	In-class activities include discussions and worksheets. <i>To be submitted online.</i>	30%
Homework assignments	Students will be asked to complete and submit three homework assignments. <i>To be submitted online.</i>	30%
Final test	A final oral exam will test students on concepts covered throughout the course. <i>Conducted face-to-face or online as the situation permits.</i>	40%

Grade descriptors

Grades	Descriptors
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Student shows excellent performance in all learning outcomes · Student can discuss all key concepts critically and with substantial depth. · Student can transcribe and analyze a wide variety of signs with almost no errors. ·
A-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Student shows strong performance on almost all learning outcomes. · Student can discuss almost all key concepts critically and with substantial depth. · Student can transcribe and analyze a wide variety of signs with relatively few errors. ·
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Student shows relatively strong performance on most learning outcomes. · Student can discuss most key concepts critically. · Student can analyze and transcribe many signs but struggles with more difficult exercises. ·
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Student shows satisfactory performance on most learning outcomes. · Student shows some familiarity with important concepts and can discuss them at a superficial level. · Student can transcribe or analyze some signs at a basic level. ·
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Student shows below-satisfactory performance on most learning outcomes. · Student shows minimal familiarity with key concepts taught throughout the course. · Student shows minimal familiarity with sign transcription or analysis. ·
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Student shows unsatisfactory performance in learning outcomes. · Student is unfamiliar with key concepts taught in the course. · Student is unable to transcribe or analyze signs.

Readings for students

- Baker, A., van den Bogaerde, B., Pfau, R., & Schermer, T. (2016). *The linguistics of sign languages: An introduction*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Chamberlain, C., Morford, J. P., & Mayberry, R. I. (1999). *Language acquisition by eye*. Psychology Press.
- Corina, D. P. (2015). Sign Language, Disorders of. In J. D. Wright (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Elsevier.
- Emmorey, K. (2001). *Language, cognition, and the brain: Insights from sign language research*. Psychology Press.
- Frishberg, N. (1975). Arbitrariness and iconicity: Historical change in American Sign Language. *Language*, 696–719.
- Grosvald, M., Lachaud, C., & Corina, D. (2012). Handshape monitoring: Evaluation of linguistic and perceptual factors in the processing of American Sign Language. *Language and Cognitive Processes*, 27(1), 117–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01690965.2010.549667>
- Johnston, T., & Schembri, A. (2007). *Australian Sign Language (Auslan): An introduction to sign language linguistics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sandler, W. (2012). The Phonological Organization of Sign Languages. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 6(3), 162–182. <https://doi.org/10.1002/lnc3.326>
- Thierfelder, P., Wigglesworth, G., & Tang, G. (2020). Sign phonological parameters modulate parafoveal preview effects in deaf readers. *Cognition*, 201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2020.104286>
- Valli, C., & Lucas, C. (2000). *Linguistics of American sign language: An introduction*. Gallaudet University Press.

Course schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
1	Jan 15 th	Introduction Sign phonetics Sign parameters: Location	Valli and Lucas (2000), Part I (Basic Concepts) Woodward (2018), pages 172–184
2	Jan 22 nd	Sign parameters: Handshape and orientation Sign parameters: Movement	Baker et al. (2016), chapter 10 Baker et al. (2016), chapter 11 Johnston and Schembri (2007)
3	Jan 29 th	Sign language phonemics	Sandler (2012)
4	Feb 5 th	University holiday	
5	Feb 12 th	Markedness	Baker et al., (2016), pages 257–259 Grosvald et al. (2012)
6	Feb 19 th	Phonological processes (I)	Frishberg (1975)
7	Feb 26 th	Phonological processes (II)	Valli and Lucas, (2000), unit 5
8	Mar 5 th	Sign language acquisition	Chamberlain et al. (1999), chapters 4 & 5
9	Mar 12 th	Sign phonology and cognition (I)	Emmorey, (2001), chapter 4
10	Mar 19 th	Sign phonology and cognition (II)	Baker et al. (2016), chapter 2
11	Mar 26 th	Disorders of sign languages	Corina (2015)
12	Apr 2 nd	Reading week	
13	Apr 9 th	Reading week	
14	Apr 16 th	University holiday	
15	Apr 23 rd	Sign phonology and literacy development	Petitto, et al. (2016) Supplementary reading: Thierfelder et al. (2020)
16	TBA	Final exam	

Teacher and TA contact details

Instructor	
Name:	Philip Thierfelder
Office Location:	Room 104, Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Email:	dpthierfelder@cuhk.edu.hk
Teaching Venue:	Wu Ho Man Yuen Building, Room 301
Lecture Time:	Lecture: Saturday 9:30 – 11:15 Tutorial: Saturday 11:30 – 12:15
Office hours:	Available by appointment
Teaching Assistant	
Name:	Rebecca Sun Yao
Office Location:	Room 203, Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Email:	Rebeccasun@link.cuhk.edu.hk

Course announcements

A Blackboard account has been set up for students to access information of the course.

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 statement that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

You have to submit a soft copy to VeriGuide (i.e., CUPIDE, the Chinese University Plagiarism Identification Engine System) on or before the date of the deadline via:

<http://veriguide1.cse.cuhk.edu.hk/portal/page/index.jsp>

The VeriGuide system will issue a receipt which also contains a declaration of honesty. Sign the receipt and stapled to the hard copy of the assignments. Assignments without the VeriGuide receipt will NOT be graded.