

**The Chinese University of Hong Kong**  
**Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages**  
**Second Term, 2022-2023**

**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**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Concepts</b>
Introduction and the history of sign linguistics research	This unit provides an introduction to the major concepts that will be covered in the course, as well as a brief overview of the history of sign linguistics (especially sign phonology) research.
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.
Sign language versus speech and gesture	In this unit, we will draw on data from sign language phonology to discuss the relationship between sign language and spoken language, as well as sign language and gesture.

**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. Describe linguistic commonalities shared by both signed and spoken languages.
6. Explain how sign language phonology is involved in reading and literacy development in deaf people.
7. Give examples of variation and historical change in sign languages.
8. Identify and transcribe the location, handshape, orientation, and movement of a sign.
9. Name and explain the common phonological processes that lead to variation in signs.
10. 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 worksheets and pop quizzes	In-class work includes worksheets and pop quizzes. <i>To be submitted online.</i>	40%
Homework assignments	Students will be asked to complete and submit two homework assignments. <i>To be submitted online.</i>	30%
Final test	Final test will assess students on concepts covered throughout the course. Mainly, it will consist of short answer questions and sign language transcription problems. <i>Conducted face-to-face.</i>	30%

### Grade descriptors

Grades	Descriptors
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes;</li> <li>· Competent in theorization, generalization, hypothesization, and reflection upon issues;</li> <li>· Skilled in creating, hypotheses and generating proposals to tackle issues with unanticipated extension.</li> </ul>
A-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes;</li> <li>· Skilled in comparing and contrasting arguments, explaining causes, analyzing and relating concepts to general theories;</li> <li>· Good at applying issues to relevant social contexts and predicting logically related outcomes.</li> </ul>
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· 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;</li> <li>· Able to enumerate, describe, list, and clarify concepts and topics;</li> <li>· Capable of examining a topic from multiple perspectives.</li> </ul>
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Satisfactory performance on a majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses;</li> <li>· Able to state, recognize, recall, and tell single points of topics of discussion.</li> </ul>
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes;</li> <li>· Barely able to state, recognize, recall, and tell single points of topics of discussion.</li> </ul>
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, or failure to meet the specified assessment requirements;</li> <li>· Missing the points.</li> </ul>

## 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.
- Brentari, D. (2019). *Sign language phonology*. Cambridge University Press.
- 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.
- Johnston, T., & Schembri, A. (2007). *Australian Sign Language (Auslan): An introduction to sign language linguistics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Petitto, L. A., Langdon, C., Stone, A., Andriola, D., Kartheiser, G., & Cochran, C. (2016). Visual sign phonology: Insights into human reading and language from a natural soundless phonology. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, 7(6), 366-381.
- Sandler, W. (2012). The Phonological Organization of Sign Languages. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 6(3), 162–182. <https://doi.org/10.1002/lnc3.326>
- Valli, C., & Lucas, C. (2000). *Linguistics of American Sign Language: An introduction*. Gallaudet University Press.

## Course schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
1	Jan 10 <sup>th</sup>	Introduction and the history of sign linguistics research  Duality of patterning in sign languages  Sign phonetics	Valli and Lucas (2000), Part I (Basic Concepts)  Baker et al. (2016), Chapter 10
2	Jan 17 <sup>th</sup>	Sign parameters: Location  Sign parameters: Handshape and orientation	Baker et al. (2016), Chapter 11
3	Jan 24 <sup>th</sup>	University holiday	
4	Jan 31 <sup>st</sup>	Sign parameters: Movement  Prosody	Johnston and Schembri (2007)
5	Feb 7 <sup>th</sup>	Sign language phonemics	Sandler (2012)
6	Feb 14 <sup>th</sup>	Markedness	Baker et al., (2016), pages 257–259
7	Feb 21 <sup>st</sup>	Phonological processes (I)	Valli and Lucas, (2000), Unit 5  Frishberg (1975)
8	Feb 28 <sup>th</sup>	Phonological processes (II)  Sociolinguistic variation and change	Brentari (2019), Chapter 8
9	Mar 7 <sup>th</sup>	Reading week	
10	Mar 14 <sup>th</sup>	Sign language acquisition	Chamberlain et al. (1999), Chapters 4 & 5
11	Mar 21 <sup>st</sup>	Sign phonology and cognition (I)	Emmorey, (2001), Chapter 4
12	Mar 28 <sup>th</sup>	Sign phonology and cognition (II)	Baker et al. (2016), Chapter 2
13	Apr 4 <sup>th</sup>	Disorders of sign languages	Corina (2015)
14	Apr 11 <sup>th</sup>	Sign phonology and literacy development	Petitto, et al. (2016)
15	Apr 18 <sup>th</sup>	Sign language versus speech and gesture  Iconicity	Brentari (2019), Chapter 3
16	TBA	Final exam	

### Teacher and TA contact details

<b>Instructor</b>	
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Teaching Venue:	LDS 214
Lecture Time:	Lecture: Tuesdays 9:30–11:15 Tutorial: Tuesdays 11:30–12:15
Office hours:	Available by appointment
<b>Teaching Assistant</b>	
Name:	Yuya Yanai
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### 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.