

Sign Language Phonology (LING 481/812)

Summer

Instructor: Claire Moore-Cantwell

M 2:30 - 4:20 BLU 10655

W 2:30-3:20 RCB 5120

General Info

INSTRUCTOR: Claire Moore-Cantwell

EMAIL: claire.moore-cantwell@sfu.ca

OFFICE HOURS: MW 11:00 - 12:00 RCB 9214

The course runs 6 May - 2 August. A final paper will be due August 10.

Course website: There is a Canvas website for this course, which you can access through your student account. This website will contain readings, lecture notes, and assignment instructions. Additionally, you will submit most of your assignments through the Canvas course.

Textbook: There is no textbook for the course.

Description

In this course, we will discuss major issues in the phonetics and phonology of sign languages. Topics to be covered include phonological features such as hand shape, movement, location, and arrangement of hands in two-handed signs. We will discuss the structure of a sign language lexicon, including borrowings and phonotactic constraints. Syllable structure, prosody, and intonation will also be discussed, along with a brief look at poetry and metrics in sign languages. Finally, we will discuss iconicity in sign languages, and the differences between sign and gesture. This subject matter will be framed within a discussion of the relationship between phonology in spoken languages and the phonology in sign languages. Throughout the course, we will ask questions like “What is phonology?” and “What can sign languages tell us about phonology that spoken languages cannot?” The course will be highly discussion-focused with all students expected to participate in each class.

Prerequisites: *To take this course, you must have taken at least one course in Phonology, as well as an introduction to general linguistics.*

Requirements

- Participation and class discussion: 15%

The bulk of the content in this course will come from discussion of original research papers on sign language phonology that we will read, and discuss in class. You are expected to read the papers before class and come prepared to discuss them.

Some of these papers may be quite difficult, and you are not expected to understand everything about them, rather you should read them as carefully as you can (take about an hour per paper), and be prepared to (a) summarize the overarching questions and conclusions of the paper. Why do the authors think this paper was worth writing? Why did I think it was worth assigning? (b) Ask questions about anything you don't understand, and finally (c) be critical of the paper - is there anything the author(s) say that you don't agree with? Do they have adequate evidence to back up their claims?

We will typically discuss two papers on Monday (the longer class) and one paper Wednesday. For each paper, you will have three ways to get your participation/discussion credit for that paper.

1. Demonstrate understanding of the paper by participating verbally in class discussion
2. Contributing to class discussion by submitting discussion questions to Canvas by **10:00am** the day of the class when we will discuss the paper
3. Submit to Canvas a 250 (approx.) word summary of the discussion that happened in class by **noon** the day after class.

Sometimes speaking up in class is scary, and sometimes it's hard to jump into a discussion if you've lost the thread, are kind of tired, or just don't feel like you have anything to contribute. I encourage every student to do their best to contribute to class discussion, as everyone's voice enriches the discussion. However, these options allow you to engage with the papers and the class discussion of them in a few different ways.

In general, students should make sure to come to class. However, things come up. You will be allowed 2 unexcused absences for this course before your participation grade is affected.

- Article Presentations: 20%

You will be required to present one article to the class. You should read your selected article somewhat more deeply than other articles, and you may want to spend several hours with it, and even read or skim some of the other papers it references. (This is not a requirement! But in some cases it may enhance your presentation of the article). Your goal should not be to summarize the article for the class, as they will have already read it, but rather to lead a coherent discussion of the article. You should prepare either a written handout, or a slide presentation. You should include discussion questions about the article itself, or about its relationship to other articles or content covered in the course. Each presentation should last about 50 minutes. You should meet with me before your presentation to discuss your plans.

In the first week of class we will establish the presentation schedule. Once you have signed up for a slot, you are committed to that date and time, and may not change unless another student is willing to swap with you. If you miss your presentation date for any reason, you will be required to submit documentation such as a doctor's note to avoid receiving a zero on this part of the course.

- Final Project Presentation: 25%

The final week of the course is reserved for presentations of your final projects to the class. You will have a relatively short amount of time for this presentation (around 5 minutes, depending on enrollment). Your grade for this part includes not only giving your own presentation, but also attending and commenting on others' presentations. Make sure you block these class sessions out on your calendar, and don't miss them!

- Final Paper: 40%

The bulk of your grade in this course will come from a final paper that you will write. This can be (a) an original research paper on sign language phonology in which you collect and/or analyze data, (b) a design for an experimental study in which you discuss your proposed methods, and what the various possible outcomes of your experiment are and what they would mean, or finally (c) a critical review of the literature in an area of your choosing within sign language phonology. You will be required to meet with me to discuss your paper at various points throughout the course (see the schedule below). In the last week of class, you will give a brief (~ 5 minutes) presentation of your paper to the class (see above).

Academic honesty

The academic enterprise is founded on honesty, civility, and integrity. As members of this enterprise, all students are expected to know, understand, and follow the codes of conduct regarding academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required. This also means you should not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work. Violations of academic integrity (i.e., misconduct) lead to the breakdown of the academic enterprise, and therefore serious consequences arise and harsh sanctions are imposed. For example, incidences of plagiarism or cheating may result in a mark of zero on the assignment or exam and more serious consequences may apply if the matter is referred to the Presidents Advisory Committee on Student Discipline. Careful records are kept in order to monitor and prevent recurrences.

Accommodations

If you have a disability or ongoing medical condition, and require accommodations for this course, you should contact the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL).

Website: <https://www.sfu.ca/students/accessible-learning/faculty/faq/faq-general.html>
Phone: +1 778-782-3112
Email: caladmin@sfu.ca
Physical Location: 1250 Maggie Benson Centre

Other Academic Concessions

Other concessions can be made in this course in order to fully support you as a student and as a person. **Please let me know as soon as possible** if you need to miss class or assignments because of reasons such as physical illness or injury, mental health concerns, religious observance, obligations to SFU or the Canadian government, work to support yourself or a family member, or caretaking responsibilities. For foreseeable conflicts, such as religious observance, you must notify me in advance, preferably at least one week in advance. For unforeseeable conflicts, like illness, injury, mental health concerns, or sudden changes in job/caretaking schedule, let me know as soon as possible. **For all conflicts you must notify me by email, even if you also mention it to me in person!**

Communication and Office Hours

I encourage all of you to drop by my office hours for any course-related reason. This is time I have set aside to discuss your questions about material covered in class or related material, one-on-one or in a small group. You can also use this time to get additional review of course material, discuss your progress in the course, or to raise any concerns you have about any aspect of the course. I am available between 10:00-11:00 Mondays and Wednesdays, in RCB 9214. You do not need an appointment to come by during this time. If you want to talk to me at a different time, email me to make an appointment.

Email: Email is also a good way to communicate with me, but I will generally not answer emails outside of business hours (Monday-Friday, 9-5), except in case of emergency. Please ensure that your email registered to Canvas is up-to-date and that you check it regularly as I will periodically send email announcements this way. You are responsible for all communication sent via Canvas, so make sure you get them!

It's not always easy to figure out how to actually write an email to a professor, especially if you are not sure how they'll respond to your request or question. A straightforward approach is usually best, and will hopefully save you time and energy. I've included a few sample emails on Canvas to guide you. I prefer to be addressed by my first name (Claire) in emails, but if you want to be more formal please address me as Dr. Moore-Cantwell or Dr. Claire Moore-Cantwell, or even Dr. Claire. Please don't use Miss, Ms., or Mrs.

Course Outline

Readings should be completed **before** the class date listed.

Week	Day	Date	Topic	Reading
1	Mon	6 May	Introduction	
	Wed	8 May	History of sign language phonology	Stokoe (1960), part 1 & 2
2	Mon	13 May	Features in signed languages	Eccarius (2011) Brentari (2011)
	Wed	15 May	Features in signed languages	Crasborn (2011)
3	Mon	20 May	VICTORIA DAY	
	Wed	22 May	NO CLASS (Claire out for conference)	
4	Mon	27 May	Movement	Sandler (2011) Hansen (2011)
	Wed	29 May	Movement <i>Deadline to meet with me about your final paper idea</i>	Mak and Tang (2011)
5	Mon	3 June	Syllables	Brentari (1990)
	Wed	5 June	Syllables	Meier (2012)
6	Mon	10 June	Sonority	Perlmutter (1993)
	Wed	12 June	Sonority <i>Deadline to submit list of references for your Final Paper</i>	Brentari (1993)
7	Mon	17 June	Theoretical models	Brentari et al. (1998) Van der Hulst (1993)
	Wed	19 June	Theoretical models	Channon and van der Hulst (2011)
8	Mon	24 June	The Lexicon	Brentari and Padden (2001) Zwitzerlood (2012)
	Wed	26 June	Sign and gesture <i>Deadline to submit your abstract & outline for final paper</i>	Cormier et al. (2012)

Week	Day	Date	Topic	Reading
	Mon	1 Jul	CANADA DAY	
9	Wed	3 Jul	Sign Phonetics	Emmorey et al. (2003)
	Mon	8 Jul	Sign Phonetics	Mauk and Tyrone (2012)
10	Wed	10 Jul	Understudied Sign Languages	Fischer and Gong
	Mon	15 Jul	Poetry and Metrics	Sutton-Spence
11	Wed	17 Jul	Poetry and Metrics	Klima and Bellugi (1979)
	Mon	22 Jul	Ancestral roots of ASL	Cagle (2010) (excerpt)
12	Wed	24 Jul	Pro-tactile phonology	Edwards (2014)
	Mon	29 Jul	Final Projects - presentations	
13	Wed	31 Jul	Final Projects - presentations	

References

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- Diane Brentari. Establishing a sonority hierarchy in american sign language: The use of simultaneous structure in phonology. *Phonology*, 10(2):281–306, 1993.
- Diane Brentari. Handshape in sign language phonology. *The Blackwell companion to phonology*, pages 1–28, 2011.
- Diane Brentari and Carol Padden. Native and foreign vocabulary in american sign language: A lexicon with multiple origins. *Foreign vocabulary in sign languages: A cross-linguistic investigation of word formation*, pages 87–119, 2001.
- Diane Brentari et al. *A prosodic model of sign language phonology*. Mit Press, 1998.
- Keith Martin Cagle. *EXPLORING THE ANCESTRAL ROOTS OF AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE: LEXICAL BORROWING FROM CISTERCIAN SIGN LANGUAGE AND FRENCH SIGN LANGUAGE*. PhD thesis, University of New Mexico, 2010.
- Rachel Channon and Harry van der Hulst. Are dynamic features required in signs? *Formational units in sign languages*, pages 229–260, 2011.
- Alessandra Checchetto, Carlo Geraci, Carlo Cecchetto, and Sandro Zucchi. The language instinct in extreme circumstances: The transition to tactile italian sign language (list) by deafblind signers. 2018.
- Kearsy Cormier, David Quinto-Pozos, Zed Sevcikova, and Adam Schembri. Lexicalisation and de-lexicalisation processes in sign languages: Comparing depicting constructions and viewpoint gestures. *Language & communication*, 32(4):329–348, 2012.
- Onno Crasborn. The other hand in sign language phonology. *The Blackwell companion to phonology*, pages 1–18, 2011.
- Petra Eccarius. A constraint-based account of distributional differences in hand-shapes. *Formational units in sign languages*, pages 261–84, 2011.

- Terra Edwards. From compensation to integration: Effects of the pro-tactile movement on the sublexical structure of tactile american sign language. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 69: 22–41, 2014.
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- Joe Mak and Gladys Tang. Movement types, repetition, and feature organization in hong kong sign language. *Formational units in sign languages*, pages 315–38, 2011.
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