

American Sign Language From a Psycholinguistic and Cultural Perspective
Spring 2012 Syllabus
Linguistics 242

(This syllabus is a guide that may be modified by the instructor as the semester progresses, for the students' best interest and learning.)

Class information: Linguistics

Room # and Building:

Day and Time: Monday and Wednesdays, 10:00- 11:30am

Pre-requisite: None

Instructor: Stephanie Berk, Ph.D.

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*email is the best way to reach me.

Phone: 314-935-8251 (office)

Office: Psychology, rm 235D

Office hours: Wednesday, after class

Required readings:

- 1) Linguistics of American Sign Language; an Introduction, 4th Edition,
Authors: Valli, Lucas & Mulrooney
Publisher: Gallaudet University Press
- 2) Seeing voices: A journey into the world of the Deaf,
Author: Oliver Sacks, New York, NY:
Publisher: HarperPress. 1990
- 3) Current journal articles, provided electronically by instructor

Not required, but potentially of interest to you:

“Extra” Resources:

- 1) The Gallaudet Dictionary of American Sign Language, Clayton Valli, Editor in Chief, GU Press
- 2) Website: www.ksd.k12.ky.us This is the website for the Kentucky School for the Deaf. It has a tremendous wealth of information ranging from cochlear implants to a timeline of Deaf history.

“Selected Picks” for additional interest:

- 1) Sweet Bells Jangled, Laura Redden Searing, A Deaf Poet Restored, Editors: Judy Yaeger Jones and Jane E. Vallier

Course Description:

This course will focus on Deaf culture and aspects of psycholinguistics of a signed language versus a spoken language. This is not an American Sign Language class, whereby you finish the course knowing how to sign; i.e. this is not a language instruction course. Current and past research serves as the foundation for the examination of what makes a signed language a true, natural, human language within members of a culture. The implications of understanding cross-modal similarities and differences of human language are explored through research articles, discussion of modern technology, e.g. fMRI and Blackberry, as well as through demonstrations.

Detailed Description:

American Sign Language (ASL) is a true, natural, human language used by the Deaf community in the United States of America and parts of Canada. It is the 3rd or 4th most commonly used language, following English and Spanish. However, it is only within the past 50 years that it has gained the recognition of being a true language, and not just a manual version of spoken English, and as being fundamental to the association of a separate “ethnic” Deaf group. From a psycholinguistic perspective, this course focuses on the historical linguistic roots of ASL as well as on specific aspects of linguistics and cognition that occur in a visual language as compared to a spoken language. By examining the syntax, phonology, semantics, and acquisition of ASL, it is possible to see the structure of language as manifested through behavior and neural representation, despite the difference in language modality. By placing the language within the context of the community that uses it, other aspects of cognition and cultural nuances can be investigated.

We will spend time discussing the differences between signed languages, spoken languages, written language, gesture systems, and communication systems. We will also critically evaluate what a signed language, such as ASL, can teach us about human language and psycholinguistics.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this semester, you should be able to:

- 1) Describe a signed language, such as ASL, as opposed to a manual system, a gesture system, and a verbal language.
- 2) Explain how Deaf people differ from people with physical challenges, and are socially differentiated as a group and culture.

- 3) Analyze the aspects of American Sign Language in terms of Syntax, Phonology, Semantics, Development, Historically- related languages, and culture from a psycholinguistic perspective.
- 4) Understand the effect of technology on both a signed language, and the culture that uses it.
- 5) Formulate relevant questions about ASL and Deaf community, understanding how research contributes to the understanding of what makes ASL important to studies of language, psycholinguistics, and the continuity of a culture.

Course Requirements

Class attendance and participation:

You are expected to attend all classes unless you have a documented medical excuse. Unexcused absences will result in a final grade reduction. Students with a chronic, medical condition, which is likely to interfere with attendance, are required to provide documentation of such a condition from their physician at the beginning of the course. Students who must miss class because of unavoidable personal crises or tragedies should consult University policy regarding notification and make-up work.

Students who have perfect attendance or miss only one class will not experience any reduction in their final course grade. Additional unexcused absences will result in a reduction from the final course grade. Students who have 5 or more unexcused absences will fail the course.

Class preparation assignments:

Students will be expected to prepare for class by completing the assigned reading and various homework activities. Students are expected to present completed assignments when due.

Due dates:

All assignments are due at the times and dates announced. Late assignments and papers will be accepted until the end of the following class, but can earn only half of the possible assigned points. All assignments must be completed in order to pass this course.

Grading:

Evaluation will be based on the following criteria:

3 exams, worth 15% each	45%
1 article presentation	15%
4/5 homework assignments, worth 9 % each	36%
Participation, worth 4%	4%

The grading scale used on quizzes, exams, and for calculating your final grade is as follows:

94% - 100%	A	73% - 77%	C
90% - 93%	A-	70% - 72%	C-
88% - 89%	B+	68% - 69%	D+
83% - 87%	B	63% - 67%	D
80% - 82%	B-	60% - 62%	D-
78% - 79%	C+	0% - 59%	F

Class Schedule & Reading Assignments:

January 18th

What is Deaf Culture? What is American Sign Language?
Language modalities: spoken, signed, written, and musical.
What are the aspects of language, e.g. Syntax, Phonology, Semantics, Language Acquisition, Historical Linguistics
Read for 1/ 23: A) Seeing Voices (SV): Preface, and A Deaf World AND B) Linguistics of American Sign Language (LASL): Chapter 1: Defining Language.

January 23th & 25th

Weekly topic: a) Historical Linguistics: French Sign Language – American Sign Language, British Sign Language- Australian Sign Language, ASL vs. LSQ in Canada, Russian Sign Language versus Spoken Russian, versus ASL and spoken English.
b) How does a group become an accepted or recognized ethnic group?
Read for 1/25: LASL: pp. 440- 472. And File 1.4: Arbitrariness in Language
Read for 1/25: Online: Article on the history of social groups as part of “sub-main culture”.
Read for 1/30: LASL: pps. 17- 45; SV: pps 31-60.

Jan 30st & Feb 1st

Weekly topic: Phonology, Gender and Phonology in Deaf culture
Read for 2/1: Online: journal article on Phonology: Baker et al. (2005) The perception of handshapes in ASL.

Read for 2/6: LASL: pp. 141- 157, SV: pp 60- 72.
Homework 1 due on 2/6

Feb 6th and Feb 8th

Weekly topic: Semantics
Read for 2/8: Online: journal article on Semantics: Page J. (1985), Relative Translucency of ASL Signs Representing Three Semantic Classes.
Read for 2/13: SV: 60- 88
Prepare for 2/13: Bring in a list of 5 to 10 questions/ issues relevant to the topics we've covered thus far.

Feb 13th

Weekly topic: Language as part of culture
Review for Exam 1.

Feb 15th

Exam 1
Read for Feb 20: LASL: pps. 113- 133
Homework 2 due on Feb 2/20/11

Feb 20st and Feb 22nd

Weekly topic: Syntax
Read for Feb 22: LASL: pps. 336- 364
Read for Feb 27: LASL: pps. 51- 55, SV: pp. 88- 97
Read for Feb 27th: Online: Article on Black ASL, as presented by the Gallaudet group last Spring

Feb 27th and Feb 29th

Weekly topic: Syntax continued
Read for Mar 1: LASL: pp. 100- 104 and journal article on Syntax: Peyton T. (2009), Does ASL Really Have Just Two Grammatical Persons?
Read for Mar 6: Petitto and Marentette (1991). Babbling in the manual mode: Evidence for the ontogeny of language
Homework 3 due on 3/5/11

Mar 5th and Mar 7th

Weekly topic: Language Acquisition, Native vs non- native acquisition and status in the culture based on this.
Read for Mar 8: Emmorey (2002). Language, Cognition, and the Brain
Read for Mar 20: Lillo-Martin (1999). Modality effects and modularity in language acquisition: The acquisition of American Sign Language

Week of March 12-17	Spring Break
Mar 19th and Mar 21st	Weekly topic: Language Acquisition continued Read for Mar 22: Conlin et al. (2000). Acquisition of first signs: Place, handshape, and movement. Read for Mar 26: Chen- Pichler (2001). Evidence for early word order acquisition in a variable word order language.
March 26th	Weekly topic: Catch up and students' interests discussion. Review for Exam 2
March 28th	Exam 2 Read for Apr 2: Schick et al (2007) Language and Theory of Mind: A Study of Deaf Children Homework 4 due on 4/4/11
Apr 2 nd	Weekly topic: Cognitive Development and Language Structure, e.g. ToM, Vocab development (on 4/4) Read for 4/4: Half of class reads Morgan, et al. (2008). Half reads Goodwyn et al (2000). Class debate Read for 4/4: Recent article on memory studies and ASL.
Apr 4th	Weekly Activity: Class debate and discussion Weekly Topic: Memory studies and ASL Read for 4/9: Anderson & Reilly (2002) The MacArthur Communicative Development Inventory: Normative Data for ASL.
Apr 9 th	Weekly topic: Vocabulary development and implications for language Read for 4/11: Recent article on spatial skills in people who use a signed versus a spoken language. Read for 4/16: Grimshaw et al (1998) First-Language Acquisition in Adolescence: Evidence for a Critical Period for Verbal Language Development

Apr 11th	<p>Weekly topic: Gesture versus language, spatial skills and language modality.</p> <p>Weekly topic: CODAs (child of Deaf adult), use of gesture and acceptability.</p> <p>Read for 4/16: Read SV: pp. 100- 130. Make sure you are caught up on your readings, especially from the textbook.</p> <p>Homework 5 due on 4/23/11</p>
Apr 16th and Apr 18th	<p>Weekly topic: Technology and language, e.g. tty, blackberry, email, fMRI</p> <p>Read for 4/18: Keating and Mirus (2003) ASL in virtual space: Interactions between deaf users of computer-mediated video communication and the impact of technology on language practices.</p> <p>Read for 4/23: Article on ABC sign stories and Deaf theatre.</p>
Apr 23	<p>Weekly topic: Cultural and psycholinguistic importance of signed stories (ABC stories versus Fairy Tales). Review for exam. Additional interests</p> <p>Homework for 4/25: Study for Exam 3.</p>
Apr 25 th	Exam 3
Week of May 3	Final exam

Have a great summer!!

Assigned Articles:

Anderson & Reilly (2002) The MacArthur Communicative Development Inventory: Normative Data for ASL.

Baker et al. (2005) The perception of handshapes in ASL.

Chen- Pichler (2001). Evidence for early word order acquisition in a variable word order language.

Conlin et al. (2000). Acquisition of first signs: Place, handshape, and movement.

Emmorey (2002). Language, Cognition, and the Brain

Frishberg, Nancy (1975). Arbitrariness and iconicity: historical change in American Sign Language. *Language*, 51, 696–719.

Grimshaw et al (1998) First-Language Acquisition in Adolescence: Evidence for a Critical Period for Verbal Language Development

Keating and Mirus (2003) ASL in virtual space: Interactions between deaf users of computer- mediated video communication and the impact of technology on language practices.

Lillo-Martin (1999). Modality effects and modularity in language acquisition: The acquisition of American Sign Language

McClave, Evelyn (2001). The relationship between spontaneous gestures of the hearing and American Sign Language. *Gesture*, 1 (1), 51–72.

Page J. (1985), Relative Translucency of ASL Signs Representing Three Semantic Classes.

Peyton T. (2009), Does ASL Really Have Just Two Grammatical Persons?

Petitto and Marentette (1991). Babbling in the manual mode: Evidence for the ontogeny of language

Schick et al (2007) Language and Theory of Mind: A Study of Deaf Children

Woodward, James (1979). Sociolinguistic aspects of French and American Sign Language. *Langages*, 13 (56), 78–91.

Woodward, James & Susan Desantis (1977). Negative incorporation in French and American Sign Language. *Language in Society*, 6 (3), 379–388.

Still considering:

Baker, Charlotte. *American Sign Language: a teacher's resource text on grammar and culture*. Silver Spring, Md.: T.J. Publishers, 1980. (DEAF 425 B3a 1980)

This emphasizes ASL history, its relation to the Deaf community, and sign formation. It also shows how to sign in ASL.