Course title (English): Linguistics of Sign Language A+B

Course title (Hebrew): בלשנות שפת הסימנים א+ב

Course number: 133.1.0206 + 133.1.0216

Course slot (semester/s, weekday/s, hours): Semesters A+B, Tuesdays 10:15-11:45

Lecturer: Dr. Svetlana Dachkovsky

Lecturer’s conference hour and contact details: Tuesdays 12:00-13:00, upon appointment

Course description & objectives:
Linguistics of Sign Language introduces students to sign language linguistics on the basis of Israeli Sign Language. The course has a double focus: 1) it emphasizes the universal properties of language in signed and spoken modalities, and 2) aims to elucidate the interaction of these properties with the physical modality of language transmission and with the nature of the language community. The course is divided into two parts. The first part addresses all the essential aspects of ISL linguistic structure: phonology, morphological means, realizations of tense and aspect, word order rules, the system of classifiers, and prosody. The second part provides a glimpse into the history of Israeli Sign language and of the Deaf community in Israel. It provides evidence for the intricate interaction between linguistic structure and the history of language, illustrating the discussion of diachronic processes in ISL with multiple examples from the most recent research. The goal of the course is to demonstrate the contribution of sign language research to various subfields of general linguistic theory.

Course requirements:
Attendance is required. All the necessary adjustments will be made for the Miluim students and their partners in accordance with the University and Department regulations. Don’t hesitate to contact me personally with any issues – dachkov@yahoo.com.

Semester A:
Homework, and quizzes -- 30%
Final summarizing assignment – 70%

Semester B:
Homework, and quizzes -- 30%
Midterm exam – 30%
Final course project – 40%

Topics & bibliography

Lesson 1. Introduction. Human language in two physical modalities: Similarities and differences between spoken and signed languages. Iconicity and arbitrariness in language.
Reading:

Part I. Describing the Language: The Linguistic Structure of Israeli Sign Language.

Lesson 2. Phonology in the two language channels: minimal meaningless units. Formational characteristics of signs. Sequentiality and simultaneity in signed and spoken language.

Reading:

Lesson 3. The notion of ‘word’ in signed and spoken languages. Expressiveness of SL lexicon.

Reading:

Lesson 4. Derivational processes in spoken and signed languages

Reading:

Lesson 5. Grammar in space: The use of space in spoken and signed languages.

Reading:
2) Friedman, Lynn A. Space, time, and person reference in American Sign Language. Language 51, 940-961.

Lesson 6. Reference and pronominal system in the two language modalities. Verb agreement.

Reading:
1) Engberg-Pedersen, Elisabeth. 2003. From pointing to reference and predication: Pointing signs, eye gaze, and head and body orientation in Danish Sign Language.
Lesson 7. Tense and aspect in spoken and signed languages.

Reading:


Reading:


Reading:
1) Crasborn, Onno. 2007. How to recognize a sentence when you see one. Sign Language & Linguistics 10(2), 103–111.


Lesson 10. Prosody in the two language modalities. The role of facial expressions and head movements.

Reading:


Lesson 11. Negation and interrogation in sign language.

Reading:

Part II. The Language and its Community.

Lesson 12. The origins of the community: A few friends and a school.

Reading:


Reading:

Lesson 14. ISL versus signed Hebrew.

Reading:

Lesson 15. Deaf society and culture today.

Reading:


Reading:

Lesson 17. Changes in SL grammar: agreement verbs, relative clauses, etc.

Reading:

Lesson 18. The impact of other sign languages on ISL.
Reading:

Lesson 19. Language contact: The impact of ISL on other sign languages in Israel. The impact of spoken language on ISL.

Lesson 20. Language-gesture interface
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Lesson 21. Course summary and conclusions