

# Acquisition of nonmanual adverbials in HKSL by deaf children in the Jockey Club Sign Bilingualism and Co-enrolment in Deaf Education Programme

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## Abstract

Unlike many grammatical nonmanual markings, nonmanual adverbials do not have communicative counterparts (Anderson & Reilly, 1998). This grammatical category therefore allows us to examine how children develop their linguistic facial behaviors. Unfortunately, only few studies on the acquisition of nonmanual adverbials, largely on ASL, have been conducted (cf. Anderson & Reilly, 1998; Reilly & Anderson, 2002; Reilly 2006). These studies show that deaf children of deaf parents acquiring ASL as their native language master manual adverbs earlier than nonmanual adverbials which share the same meaning with the manual one. Nonmanual adverbials emerge at around age 2;0. By age 3;6, nonmanual adverbials become more productive.

33 deaf children in the Jockey Club Sign Bilingualism and Co-enrolment in Deaf Education Programme (JC-SLCO), aged from 5 to 13, participated in the current study. They were divided into 6 cohorts in accordance with their years of enrollment in the JC-SLCO program. All of them were exposed to both Hong Kong Sign Language (HKSL) and Cantonese at school. Most of them were late learners of HKSL. The production and comprehension data were collected by means of a video/animation description and a video-signing matching task, respectively.

Generally speaking, these deaf children performed better in comprehension than in production. They are not sensitive

to nonmanual adverbials in the beginning. But the older group performed better than the younger group. However, there is no evidence of these deaf children having acquired nonmanual adverbials. The accuracy of comprehension task by Cohort 1 (the eldest group), who had at least five years of HKSL exposure, is only 66.67%. Most errors produced by deaf children are omission of obligatory nonmanual adverbials. With the data of two time points, we observe that manual predicates are modified first with manual adverbs then with nonmanual adverbials. Co-ordination of the production of nonmanual adverbials and modified manual predicates can be found at the later stage.

## References

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