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ARTICLE

Attitudes Towards the Official Recognition of Hong Kong Sign Language by Hong Kong Citizens

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a pilot study that investigates the attitudes towards the official recognition of Hong Kong Sign Language (HKSL) by Hong Kong citizens. We used video-chat software (mainly WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger, but also FaceTime) to conduct long-distance semi-structured interviews with 30 participants grouped as deaf, hearing-related (hearing people that are closely involved in the Deaf community), and hearing-unrelated (hearing people that have little contact with deaf people and the Deaf community). Results show that the majority of participants (N=22) holds a supportive attitude towards the recognition of HKSL; Five participants hold a neutral position, and three participants hold a negative attitude towards it. We discussed each type of attitude in detail. Results show that participants' attitudes are positively related to their awareness of deaf people's need, the understanding of 'language recognition', and personal world views. In other words, the more participants are aware, the more they foster official recognition, at least as a general trend. Results also indicate that hearing people who are not involved in the Deaf community know very little about deaf people and the Deaf community, in general. At the end of the paper, we also reflect on two issues: we argue that the standardization of HKSL plays an important role in deaf education and empowering citizenship awareness and participation.

1. Introduction

With the increasing awareness among deaf people of their culture and identity, efforts fighting for equal human right with the majority hearing world have been carried out in different places around the world. In this study we adopt the general term 'deaf' when referring to deaf people, as some of the participants involved in this study do not consider themselves Deaf in identity. As sign languages are widely used among deaf people, calling for recognition of sign

languages have been one of the efforts to emphasize their linguistic rights (De Meulder, 2015^[2]; Murray, 2015^[3]; Parisot & Rinfret, 2012^[4]; Quer, 2012^[5]). In particular the UN General Assembly in 2006 states that countries should "accept and facilitate the use of sign languages (Article 21, e)". The recognition of a language influences relevant policies on the practical use of that language in the whole society, fields in education, media, and government work are closely related (Johnson, 2013)^[7]. On the other hand, the authors' participant observation in the field – lasting at

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least five years of active research – shows that the lack of knowledge or misunderstandings about deaf people and sign languages still exist in many societies. For example, many still regard that deaf people are inferior to hearing people; every deaf people can and should lip-read; the hearing impairment of deaf people can be cured by hearing aids; sign language is artificial and deaf people all around the world share one sign language; sign language is a signed version of a spoken language, or it is gesture. With the various perspectives of the social members, attitudes towards the request of recognizing a sign language as an official language could vary significantly.

Compared to spoken languages, studies on the attitudes towards sign languages and related issues are relatively rare (Kannapell, 1989)^[8], yet it is of great importance for language planning and language policy of sign languages (Cham, 2002^[9]; Geraci, 2012^[10]; Peddie, 1991^[11]). Given the fact that there is little literature on this topic, this study aims to fill the gap by investigating the attitudes towards the official recognition of Hong Kong Sign Language (hereafter HKSL) by Hong Kong Citizens. The Hong Kong case study is interesting at least for two reasons: first, the relation between language and identity in Hong Kong is rich and complex in general, as shown by (Lai & Poon, 2011^[12]; D. C. S. Li, 2017^[13]; Pennycook, 2002^[14]; Poon, 2004^[15]); second, there is no study as such, to the extent of the authors' knowledge. The general research question we pose is: what are factors impacting attitudes towards the official recognition of HKSL? Our aim is to give an answer to this research question that is relevant for the HKSL case study but not only. In other words, after the necessary adjustments, HKSL could work as case study used in comparison with others, stating the same research question, or a similar one.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides the background of this study; Section 3 introduces the sociolinguistic environment in Hong Kong; Section 4 elaborates the methodology; Section 5 presents the result of the interviews; Section 6 discusses the results, while Section 7 offers some concluding remarks that can be useful for sign linguistics research in general.

2. Background

2.1 The Motion on Recognizing HKSL as an Official Language

On January 11th, 2017, in the Council meeting of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong, a member of the Legislative Council, Leung Yiu-chung, proposed a motion to make HKSL an official language of Hong Kong. Before the meeting, there was also a small scale of campaign fighting for the recognition of HKSL. For example, the slogan 'Strive for the official recognition of HKSL' signed in HKSL were spread on Facebook, and a group of supporters of this motion also organized a demonstration in front of the parliament venue before the meeting. In his proposal, Leung argued that the Hong Kong government should fulfill the obligations in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which was signed by the People's Republic of China in 2008. In addition, the recognition of HKSL will promote building a real inclusive society in Hong Kong.

On the other hand, other members raised four main dissenting opinions: First, there has not been a standard version of HKSL. Deaf people from different groups use different variants in referring to the same thing. Therefore, the priority at this stage is to promote a standard HKSL and to provide relevant training courses to sign interpreters and sign language instructors (raised by the Secretary for the Hong Kong Labour and Welfare Bureau, retrieved and translated from HKSAR, 2017a, p. 2082)^[16]. The second dissenting opinion is that the official recognition of HKSL may lead to misallocation of social resources. This opinion was raised by Cheung Yu-Yan, a member of the Executive Council of Hong Kong SAR. He mentioned that "not everyone has the talent to learn a sign language, and not everyone needs to do it." Therefore, requiring every employee from the government and public sectors to learn HKSL will bring unnecessary burden to the individuals and the resource allocation. Also, convenient techniques such as smartphones and tablets enable deaf people and hearing people to communicate in written Chinese. This

¹There are distinctions between 'Deaf' and 'deaf'. According to Paddy (2003)[1]: "'Deaf' refers to those who are born Deaf or defened in early (sometimes late) childhood, for whom the sign languages, communities, and cultures of the Deaf collective represents their primary experience and allegiance" (p. xviii).

²The content cited by the proposal from UNCRPD (UN General Assembly, 2006)[6] also includes: "States Parties should ensure that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development (Article 24, 3c)"; and "Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture (Article 30, 4)".

can achieve basic communication purposes. Third, there are not enough eligible sign interpreters to ensure the follow-up measures to be brought after the recognition of HKSL (ibid.^[16], p. 2071). The fourth and last dissenting opinion is that the law will have to be amended (raised by the Acting Chairman of Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong, ibid.^[16], p. 2056).

This motion was voted down in the Council meeting (see Table 1 for the voting result). There were 11 affirmative votes, 19 abstention votes in the functional constituencies; 14 affirmative votes and ten abstention votes in the geographical constituencies. Interestingly, although some members proposed dissenting opinions on the motion before the voting, there were no negative votes in the result.

Table 1. The Voting Result of the Motion on ‘Striving to Make Sign Language an Official Language of Hong Kong’

(retrieved from the Legislative Council website, https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr16-17/english/counmtg/motion/mot_1617.htm#cm20170111)

	功能團體 Functional Constituencies	地方選區 Geographical Constituencies	最後結果 Final Result
出席 Present	31	24	
投票 Vote	30	24	
贊成 Yes	11	14	
反對 No	0	0	
棄權 Abstain	19	10	
結果 Result	否決 Negatived	通過 Passed	否決 Negatived

2.2 Language Recognition

Language recognition belongs to one aspect of language planning activity: status planning. De Meulder (2015)^[21] summarized two types of legal recognition of sign languages: explicit and implicit. Explicit legal recognition refers to those that recognize a sign language in legislation, such as a constitution, law, or act. It contains different subtypes: (1) constitutional recognition; (2) recognition by means of general language legislation; (3) recognition by means of a sign language law or act; (4) recognition by means of a sign language law or act, including other means of communication; (5) recognition by means of legislation on the functioning of the national language council (ibid.^[21], p. 500). The differences in types and their respective subtypes can be influenced by factors in the national context. For example, some countries do not have a constitution or language legislation (ibid.^[21]). Implicit legal recognition includes two subtypes:

(1) mentioning a sign language only in legislation on disability, equality, or education; (2) granting recognition by declaration or government decision.

As mentioned, the recognition of a language could influence the practical use of that language in the whole society, such as media, education, and government work. Take media, for instance, a recognized language often obtains a higher exposure rate. For example, Maori was recognized as an official language of New Zealand in 1987 (Benton, 1996)^[17]: by 1991, there were more than 20 radio channels on Maori set up by the Broadcasting Commission; moreover, the Maori channel started to broadcast in 2002 (Cham, 2002)^[9]. In educational settings, a recognized language is more likely to be used. For instance, in Ontario, a province of Canada, Quebec Sign Language (LSQ) has been officially recognized as a language of instruction, and the governments have carried out actions to include LSQ in educational settings across the provincial jurisdictions (Parisot & Rinfret, 2012)^[4]. On the other hand, the implementation of the follow-up measures after language recognition could fall short of the expectation (McKee & Manning, 2015)^[18].

3. The Sociolinguistic Environment in Hong Kong

This section introduces the sociolinguistic situation for the deaf and HKSL in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China since the sovereignty of Hong Kong was returned in 1997. Since the handover, the Hong Kong SAR (HK-SAR hereafter) government adopts “Biliteracy and Trilingualism” as the language-in-education policy. It refers to the use of standard English and Chinese as the written languages; and English, Cantonese and Putonghua (the national language of the People’s Republic of China, also known as Mandarin) as spoken varieties (Lai & Poon, 2011^[12]; D. C. S. Li, 2017^[13]). According to the Basic Law of HKSAR, Chinese and English are the official languages (Chinese version: ‘正式語文’) of HKSAR (Chapter I, Article 9). On the other hand, Hong Kong Sign Language (HKSL), which is widely used in the Deaf community in Hong Kong, is not mentioned.

We lack certain data on the number of deaf HKSL users. According to the report of a selected survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department in Hong Kong in 2014 (sample rate: 0.3% of all Hong

³Although in other related activities on this motion, HKSL was specified, the original wording in the official record of the motion was ‘striving to make sign language an official language of Hong Kong’, i.e., HKSL was not specified.

⁴The original table in the file was bilingual, which is the convention for the official documents in Hong Kong.

Kong households), the estimated population with hearing impairment was 155,200, among which 4,300 (2.8%) were unable to hear at all. There are 3,900 (2.5%) persons who knew how to use sign language (HKSAR, 2014)^[19].

In history, deaf education in Hong Kong has been predominantly adopted oralism especially after the mid-1970s (Siu, 2016)^[20]. Paddy (2003)^[1] defines Oralism in terms of the belief that the best way in order to integrate deaf students is learning speech, therefore they should learn to lip-read. Moreover, according to Oralism, sign languages as such are considered a tool that alienates deaf students from the ultimate goal of integration. As a result, oralists believe that sign languages should not be encouraged in educating deaf people. In the early 1960s, the oralist approach and inclusive education started to be stressed and gradually overrode manual approach. As a result, many members of the Deaf community in Hong Kong – meaning, with the sense of belonging to the Deaf, as briefly illustrated above – who were born after the 1960s grew up in deaf schools where speech and lip-reading was the primary medium of instruction, and signing was generally discouraged (Chan, 2017^[21]; Siu, 2016^[20]; Sze, Lo, Lo, & Chu, 2013^[22]). In the mid-1970s, all schools adopting sign language in instruction were closed, only four deaf schools remained, and they all employed the oralist approach (Sze et al., 2013)^[22]. Due to the growing concern about poor educational results of Oralism, in the latest decades, the use of sign language has been re-introduced to the education systems in many parts of the world. In spite of this rehabilitation of sign languages as the main tool of instruction for the deaf, in the 2000s, in Hong Kong, two of the four deaf schools closed down, one (the Lutheran School for the Deaf) has converted to a mainstream school and is phasing out the deaf students, only one remains until the present. A relatively small number of deaf students enter this school, and they are encouraged to use either speech or total communication (Siu, 2016^[20]; Yiu & Tang, 2014^[23]). The majority of deaf children enter mainstream schools, where no support of HKSL is provided. There is also one experimental sign-bilingual co-enrolment education program (the SLCO program) run by the Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Tang, Lam, & Yiu, 2014)^[24]. This program runs through kindergarten to secondary school. There is one co-enrolment class in each grade, where deaf and

hearing children learn together with both signed and spoken languages.

As for sign interpreters in Hong Kong, according to the registry organized by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, the number of sign interpreters is 51 (HKCSS, 2018)^[25]. From July 2018, the two major television channels started to provide sign interpretation to at least one news program during the period of 6 pm to 12 am each day. The total length has to be longer than 15 minutes. This was the implementation of the regulations on the TV channels issued by the Office of the Communication Authority of Hong Kong SAR (OFCA) in October 2017, that the condition of granting a TV channel the ‘License of Providing Local Free Program Broadcasting Service (本地免費電視節目服務牌照)’ is that it provides sign interpretation to Cantonese News programs (HKSAR, 2017b)^[26]. In terms of recourses for normal people to learn HKSL, the Chinese University of Hong Kong is the only university in Hong Kong that provides courses for students to learn HKSL. There are also a few deaf associations and spare time learning centers that teach HKSL, to the deaf as well as to the non-deaf.

From the motion striving for the official recognition of HKSL, we can see that there are opposing opinions towards the necessity of a sign language to be recognized. In addition, there is little literature on the topic of recognition of sign languages and attitudes toward sign languages. These two factors motivate this study. We aim to fill the gap by investigating the attitudes towards the official recognition of HKSL by Hong Kong Citizens. Our general research question can be stated concretely in two different steps: first, what are the attitudes in general towards the official recognition of HKSL? Second, what are the impacting factors on the attitudes? Our hypothesis is that attitudes vary according to the awareness of the HKSL and eventually to the engagement in terms of language activism.

4. Methodology

We conducted long-distance semi-structured interviews with three groups participants. In this section, we will introduce in detail the procedure of this study and the design of the interview.

4.1 Participants

As a preliminary investigation, we narrowed down the range of target aspects involved in the topic. We anticipate

⁵It refers to the philosophy which encourages the use of whichever forms of communication were deemed appropriate for the individual deaf child. It led to the use of signed system, that is using signs in the word order of a spoken language. Under this philosophy, sign language is still regarded as an ‘educational tool’ rather than a bearer of an organic, holistic approach to the lives and experience of deaf children and deaf community.

two possible factors that might influence attitudes:

1) Whether the participant is deaf. We predict that deaf people will widely be supportive towards the recognition of HKSL, whereas the attitudes will vary among the hearing group.

2) Whether the participant is involved in the Deaf community. We anticipate that among hearing participants, those who are involved in the Deaf community tend to support the recognition of HKSL more than those who are not.

We took the two anticipated, controlled variables just stated as for the selection of participants in terms of purposeful sampling for our qualitative research. We recruited three groups of participants: 1) deaf: deaf participants who use HKSL as one of their major languages for daily communication; 2) hearing-related: hearing participants who are involved in the Deaf community in Hong Kong on (or nearly on) a daily basis; and 3) hearing-unrelated: hearing participants who do not have contact with the Deaf community in Hong Kong on a daily basis.

We recruited ten participants for each group on a friend-of-a-friend basis, following the snowballing method normally used in qualitative research. In this process of selection, we tried our best to even the distribution of gender and age in each group and the varieties of their vocations. However, limited by various factors, we did not manage to achieve a perfectly even distribution. The majority of the participants are from the age group of 20-40. The distribution of gender, age is shown in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively.

Table 2. Distribution of Gender of the Three Groups of Participants

Gender	deaf	hearing-related	hearing-unrelated	Total
Female	6	7	4	17
Male	4	3	6	13

Table 3. Distribution of Different Age Ranges of the Participants

Age range	deaf	hearing-related	hearing-unrelated	Total
20-30	0	5	4	9
30-40	5	4	5	14
40-50	3	1	0	4
50-60	2	0	1	3

The distribution of the educational attainment and the

vocations of the participants are shown in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4. The Educational Attainment of the Participants

Education attainment	deaf	hearing-related	hearing-unrelated	Total
Lower secondary	0	0	1	1
Upper secondary	7	0	0	7
Post-secondary	3	10	9	22

Table 5. The Distribution of the Vocations of the Participants (by Fields)

Field of vocation	deaf	hearing-related	hearing-unrelated	Total
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	1			1
Import/export, wholesale and retail trades			2	2
Information and communications			1	1
Financial service activities			1	1
Professional, scientific and technical	3	4		7
Administrative and support service activities	1		1	2
Public administration			1	1
Education	3	4		7
Human health and social work activities		2	3	5
Other service activities	1		1	2
Work activities within domestic households	1			1

(Note: The fields listed in the table follows the industrial classification defined in Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification (HSIC) Version 2.0, HKSAR, 2009.^[27])

The participants in the group of hearing-related are mainly from three fields: professional, education, and social work activities. They are researchers doing sign language research or Deaf studies, teachers of deaf students, sign interpreters, and staff from organizations that are related to the Deaf community. One participant also has deaf siblings. The vocations of the deaf group and the hearing-unrelated group are more varying. Their jobs include farm worker, research assistant, teacher, office clerk, individual businessman, housewife, civil servant, nurse, social worker, salesman, editor, and actuary.

4.2 The Form of Data Collection

In this study, we adopted a one-on-one long-distance

⁶Differ in factors such as level of hearing loss, family/socio-environment one is in, educational background, and personal preference, a few deaf participants interviewed in this study also use Cantonese on a regular basis, for example, in interacting with hearing families, or with hearing colleague at work. But the proficiency of their Cantonese is unknown, and such data is not relevant for the purposes of this study.

⁷The proficiency in HKSL is not a mandatory criterion of this group. However, most of them are highly proficient in HKSL.

semi-structured interview to collect the attitudes. The interviewer (the first author) is a native speaker of Mandarin and is fluent Cantonese and HKSL; interviews were conducted in Cantonese and HKSL, according to the situation. With the participants' consent, we recorded the interviews. For deaf participants, HKSL was used, and the videos were recorded; for hearing participants, Cantonese was used, and the audio-recordings were made.

There are three main reasons for choosing the method of semi-structured interview: first, in this study, considering the limited written proficiency of Chinese of the deaf participants, we did not adopt an anonymous written survey, although it might be more comfortable for the participants to express their attitude explicitly. Second, as mentioned above, the topic can be sensitive to some extent, therefore, some interviewee may not be willing to reveal their opinions explicitly. Concerning this problem, compared to a full-structured interview, a semi-structured interview could ensure enough rooms for the researcher to follow up or to back up according to the participants' various responses, and to get the answer to the research questions as much as possible. Third, although we anticipated two factors that might affect the attitudes, we do not have a clear idea of other possible affecting factors. Also, we want to know the specific opinions on the official recognition of HKSL. Therefore, an interview is more informative than a questionnaire. Above all, we argue that a semi-structured interview is the most suitable approach for this study.

4.3 The Design of the Interview

The researcher firstly sent the information brochure and the consent form of this study (in Traditional Chinese) to the potential participants. In the information brochure, we informed the purpose of the study, the target number of the participants and the form of the investigation. We also provided an ethical agreement. Each interview was scheduled after the participants gave us their consent for participating in the interview, being recorded during the whole conversation, and the use of the data for this study. The interviews were conducted on different dates from October 2018 to January 2019 using various messaging apps (WhatsApp, Facebook messenger, and Facetime). After the interview with each interviewee, demographic information was collected by several oral/signed questions.

The interview contains one warm-up question (Question 0), five real guiding questions that serve to answer the research questions (Question 1-Question 5), and one closing question (Question 6). The questions are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. List of the Interview Questions

#	Questions
0	Do you know how many people in Hong Kong rely on HKSL in communication? How do you know?
1	Have you read any news on the event of striving for the official recognition of HKSL?
2	What do you think of the provided news/the voting?
3	Have you followed the progress of this motion?
4	How do you think the recognition of HKSL would influence you?
5-1	Taking into account the official recognition of HKSL and the social environment in Hong Kong for deaf people, what do you think is the best situation in ten years?
5-2	What do you think is the worst situation in ten years?
5-3	What do you think is the best situation for now?
6	Do you have anything to add? Or, did you have anything else to say?

In general, by the five guiding questions we expect to detect participants' knowledge of the Deaf community, their attentions and perspectives on the motion and relevant deaf issues, and their attitudes towards the recognition of HKSL. Considering that the motion strives for rights for deaf people – who are often regarded as a 'vulnerable group' in Hong Kong society, participants with negative attitude might have concerns to reveal it, as it might seem 'unkind'. Therefore, we designed Question 2 as a 'buffer question' that allows participants to comfortably comment as a bystander, yet still reveal their positions. The questions in 5 also direct participants to mention specific aspects such as sign interpretation, deaf education, and the relationship between hearing and deaf people, etc., which will enable us to find out possible factors affecting their attitudes on the official recognition of HKSL.

Before the real interviews, we conducted two pilot interviews with two other participants. The pilot interviews were useful to test the robustness of the very structure of the interview itself. During the actual interviews, the sequence of the questions was adjustable according to the participants' response. For example, some participants already mentioned their involvement in the campaign (target answer to Question 3) while answering Question 1 and Question 2, in such case, Question 3 was skipped. On average, each interview lasts for 30-45 minutes. For a few participants who were too talkative or too reticent, we adopted steering and prompting strategies. The most useful strategy was asking confirmations: if a participant gradually talked off track of the topic, then the researcher asked him/her for the confirmation of the opinions that s/he expressed previously; if a participant is less talkative, then the researcher also asked for confirmation for a certain point and asked for elaboration or reasons of thinking so.

4.4 After the Interviews: Some Observations

Generally, the designed questions worked well. It is important to note that all participants were aware that the researcher's job is related to sign language before the interviews started. We took into account this problem in our design and during the interviews. However, it is also important to underline the fact that the degree of knowledge on the researcher's occupation varies among different groups. In particular, all participants in the hearing-related group, as well as some participants in the deaf group, know exactly that the interviewer is a sign linguist specialized in (socio)linguistic research of sign languages. On the other hand, most of the participants in the hearing-unrelated group only generically know that the interviewer 'does research on sign language'. In other words, they did not have a clear idea of the working content of the interviewer in detail. Moreover, many of them thought that the job of sign linguists is to learn as many sign languages as they can. Admittedly, one could argue that the knowledge of the researchers' involvement in the Deaf community might cause a positive bias in the participants' response, i.e., a bias in favour of the official recognition of HKSL, in order to please the interviewer. We tried to avoid the researcher's influence as best as we could. In particular, during the interview, it could still be told that bias exists, particularly in the hearing-unrelated group: A few participants in this group with neutral or negative attitudes towards recognition of HKSL used proper wording on purpose. Let us report two individual cases of particular interest. Two interviewees almost used 'move' (挪) in referring to the use of hands by deaf people, and then they swallowed the word and changed to 'sign' (打). One participant also asked the researcher 'Is such answer okay?' after she responded: 'The recognition of HKSL will not influence my life.' When asked about 'What do you think of the voting?' (Question 2), one participant with negative attitude talked about why the council members and other social members do not support the recognition, s/he used 'they' all the time, instead of 'I'. We believe that it is a clear indication that s/he was avoiding clarifying her/his position on the issue. By contrast, participants in the deaf and hearing-related group were franker in expressing their positions and opinions, even for participants who hold neutral and negative attitudes towards recognition.

5. Results

In this section, we will elaborate our findings summarized from the response in the interviews.

5.1 The Attention on the Campaign

Overall, the three groups show a different degree of attention on the campaign of fighting for the recognition of HKSL. This observation mainly bases on the answers

to Question 1 and the interaction during the interview. In the analysis phase, according to the response of all participants, we identify four aspects of knowledge that are related to the topic, the first two addressing status planning, the other ones being more focused on HKSL specifically. First, *the motivation of fighting for official recognition of HKSL*. To be specific, some participants, whether they agree or not, are aware that the motion strives for a better linguistic right for deaf people and aims to bring more resources for deaf people to use sign language in society. Second, *the potential influence of the official recognition of HKSL*. Similar to the first aspect, some participants are clear about the specific consequences that could be brought by the recognition of HKSL, such as in sign interpretation services and deaf education; whereas others show less knowledge of it. The third point is more specific and general at the same time. The fact that HKSL *is a language*, and therefore it has properties common to all human languages, such as having vocabulary variation. Some participants know very well about the above-mentioned linguistic nature of HKSL, whereas some others know less about it, and a few of them think that it is a deprived gestural version of Chinese. The fourth point addresses the relation between language and the sense of belonging. *The role of HKSL in the Deaf community* that for many deaf people it is the most comfortable language to communicate. Some participants believe that HKSL is crucial to deaf people, others think that deaf people could learn to speak and use written Chinese as the major language to communicate in the society.

The results show two knowledge patterns in the interviewees: 'self-informed' and 'guided-by-the-researcher'. 'Self-informed' refers to those who clearly showed basic knowledge of all these four aspects; 'guided-by-researcher' refers to those who showed vague awareness of at least one of the four aspects and requested for further explanation by the researcher. Figure 1 presents the distribution of answers to Question 1, and Figure 2 depicts the distribution of the knowledge patterns of three groups.

All participants in the hearing-related group know about the motion and the result of the voting in the Legislative Council and was self-informed during the interview. In the deaf group, only one deaf participant did not hear about it and was guided by the researcher. By contrast, in the hearing-unrelated group, more than half of the participants (N=6) did not hear about the news about the campaign. In addition, during the interview, most of them (N=9) request further information on the topic from the researcher.

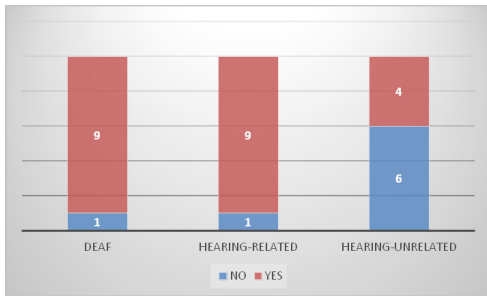


Figure 1. Count of Answers to Question 1 of the Three Groups

(Question 1: Have you read any news on the event of striving for the official recognition of HKSL?)



Figure 2. Distribution of Informed Type in the Three Groups

5.2 Different Attitudes of Each Group

According to the responses from the participants, we defined three types of attitudes towards the recognition of HKSL: 1) Support. The participant believes that the official recognition of HKSL is necessary and urgent; 2) Neutral. The participant does not show clear position on whether or not they support the official recognition of HKSL, or the participant thinks that the official recognition of HKSL is necessary for the future, but not now; 3) Not support. The participant does not think that the official recognition of HKSL is necessary. We present the distribution of different attitudes of each group in Figure 3.

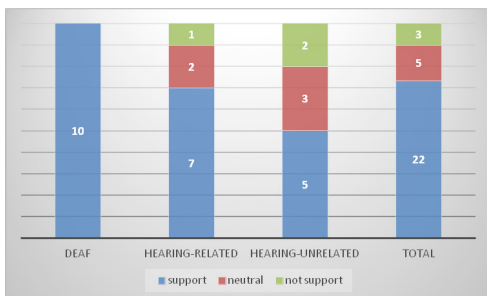


Figure 3. Different Attitudes towards the Recognition of HKSL by the Three Groups

As can be seen, the majority participant expressed a supportive attitude towards the recognition of HKSL, five out of 30 participants hold a neutral position, and three expressed negative attitudes. Looking closer into the three groups, all deaf participants support the official recognition of HKSL; whereas in other groups, three different attitudes exist. In the following, we will summarize the main reasons for the three types of attitudes expressed by the participants in each group.

5.2.1 Deaf Group

We summarized six main reasons mentioned by the deaf participants why they support the official recognition of HKSL. The details of the supporting reasons mentioned by each participant is shown in Table 7, while explanations will follow immediately.

Table 7. Details of the Supporting Reasons Mentioned by Each Participant in the Deaf Group

Participant	Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3	Reason 4	Reason 5	Reason 6
	Equal human right	Improve sign interpretation and living quality of the deaf	Better education for the deaf	Better social environment for the next deaf generation	Good for the development of HKSL	Legal safeguard
D1			*	*		
D2	*	*				
D3	*	*	*	*	*	
D4	*	*		*	*	
D5		*		*	*	
D6	*	*	*	*	*	
D7	*	*		*		
D8		*			*	
D9		*	*	*	*	*
D10		*				
Total	5	9	4	7	6	1

Reason 1. It will ensure deaf people to have equal human right as hearing people.

Five deaf participants believe that by recognizing HKSL as an official language, the government acknowledges that HKSL has the equal social status as Cantonese, English, and Mandarin, and deaf people have the equal linguistic right as hearing people. Besides, one participant also thinks it will show that the government fulfils the obligations in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

⁸One participant in the hearing-related group answered 'no' for Question 1, but s/he was involved in the campaign. As s/he humorously said: "You know, usually people who are involved in a course does not follow the news reports on it."

Reason 2. It will improve the sign interpretation service, which will enhance the overall quality of living of deaf people.

Nine deaf participants mentioned that the official recognition of HKSL will urge the government to promote the development of the sign interpretation. It will apply to various aspects of the society both quantitatively and qualitatively. For example, official report, news report, emergency broadcast, and even sitcoms will have sign interpretation; sign interpretation training school and service center may be built up; and public places such as police offices, hospitals, job markets, examination centers, museums, banks, and restaurants will provide sign interpretation service.

Reason 3. It could create a better educational environment for deaf people.

There were four deaf participants who believe that if HKSL is recognized as an official language, schools will provide sign language interpretation for deaf students. Moreover, HKSL might be instructed in schools, and deaf students could even be able to use it in exams. These changes will ensure deaf students to have equal access to the educational resources as hearing students. In a long run, it could improve the overall literacy level of the deaf community, enabling deaf people to fit in different vocations and to contribute to society better. At the same time, it could also educate more hearing social members to know about sign language.

Reason 4. It will prepare a better social environment for the next generation of deaf people.

Seven deaf participants argue that the official recognition of HKSL will prepare a better social environment for the next generation of deaf people in terms of mental health, educational opportunity, job opportunities, and living environment. As a result, the next generation could live less passively in society.

Reason 5. It could create a better social environment for the development of HKSL.

Six deaf people said that, although nowadays there is more and more effort from various civil groups to promote the development of HKSL, the official recognition of HKSL and the measures implemented by the government will be much more efficient and influential, such as in educating the public about HKSL, and conducting HKSL class or sign interpretation training.

Reason 6. It acts as a legal safeguard for the linguistic right of deaf people.

One participant mentioned that if HKSL is officially recognized, the public will have the legal reference to urge and supervise the government to implement measures in protecting the linguistic right of deaf people.

5.2.2 Hearing-related Group

In the hearing-related group, seven participants support the official recognition of HKSL, two of them are neutral, and one does not support. In the following, we will illustrate each type of attitude in detail.

(1) Support

The six main supporting reasons raised by the deaf participants were all mentioned by the participants in this group (Table 8).

Table 8. Details of the Supporting Reasons Mentioned by Each Participant in the Hearing-related Group

	Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3	Reason 4	Reason 5	Reason 6
Participant	Equal human right	Improve sign interpretation and living quality of the deaf	Better education for the deaf	Better social environment for the next deaf generation	Good for the development of HKSL	Legal safeguard
HR2		*				
HR3	*		*	*	*	*
HR4		*			*	
HR5	*	*	*	*	*	
HR6	*				*	
HR7	*	*	*			*
HR8	*	*			*	
Total	5	5	3	2	5	2

The majority of participants with supportive attitudes mentioned that the recognition is good for members of the Deaf community. One participant said that the official recognition of HKSL would create a better society for all members: *“If deaf people have the right to use their language in society, their life will be easier, they might earn more money, getting better educated. As a consequence, their ability to take care of their families, or to educate their children would improve, in this sense, the official recognition of HKSL not only improves the living quality of deaf people but also their families as a whole. Its impact is therefore immense.”*

(2) Neutral

One participant argues that the official recognition of HKSL is good and necessary for the future, but it is not for the current Hong Kong society. In the following, we summarize the main points of such an argumentation line, which is quite articulated. As a starting point, s/he thinks that many members of the Deaf community in Hong Kong

nowadays are not yet ready for the situations to be brought by the recognition of HKSL. S/He raised two issues: First, the existence of different varieties of signing. S/He argues that given the fact that one concept can have different signs in sign language, among Deaf people, they do not have a consensual version of signing. The argument by this interviewee continues as follows. Deaf people sometimes still fight with each other on which version of signing is correct, making different varieties linger across different groups. According to this participant, that behavior can bring confusion to the governors and social members on how to apply the measures after the recognition of HKSL. In particular, the translation of the official documents and the qualification of sign interpretation, etc. We will reprise and comment on this objection in the Discussion. Moreover, this participant thinks that although deaf people tend to believe that once HKSL is recognized, they will become more informed about their surroundings. In this participant’s opinion, a concept such as ‘official language’ as well as other legal concepts may not be understood correctly by many deaf people, due to their poor educational background in this field. The result, paradoxically, may be that the implementation of sign interpretation could be achieved only formally, but eventually not so useful. S/He believes that the recognition of HKSL would be more effective if done after 10 years or so, because by then a group of deaf children who are now studying in the SLCO program has grown up and have adequate world knowledge to comprehend and promote these things.

Another participant states that whether or not s/he supports the official recognition of HKSL is not important; instead, it is what Deaf people thinks about this topic that matters.

Not support

One participant does not support the official recognition of HKSL, because s/he thinks that an official language should be a language widely used by society before to be recognized. This interviewee doubts: “*Apart from HKSL, there are also many other minority languages in the Hong Kong society. They should also be treated equally. Then does it mean that every language has to be officially recognized? To me, it makes little sense.*” Besides, s/he argues that whether or not the government takes measures to promote a language is not directly related to its status of being an official language. Instead, it is the government’s willingness and motivation to promote HKSL that decides

the development of HKSL.

5.2.3 Hearing-unrelated Group

In the hearing-related group, five participants support the official recognition of HKSL, three of them are neutral, and two does not support.

Support

The details of the supporting reasons given by the hearing-unrelated group is shown in Table 9:

Table 9. Details of the Supporting Reasons Mentioned by Each Participant in the Hearing-unrelated Group

	Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3	Reason 4	Reason 5	Reason 6
Participant	Equal human right	Improve sign interpretation and living quality of the deaf	Better education for the deaf	Better social environment for the next deaf generation	Good for the development of HKSL	Legal safeguard
HU1	*	*				
HU5	*	*			*	*
HU7	*	*				
HU9		*				
HU10		*	*			
Total	3	5	1	0	1	1

Overall, the supportive reasons given by this group are more general. Although all of them mentioned ‘It (the official recognition of HKSL) will help deaf people communicate better.’ Compare to the other two groups, they showed more vague knowledge about how exactly HKSL will enhance the communication. Also, aspects such as deaf education, the impact of the next generation of deaf people, and legal impacts were less mentioned. Four participants mentioned that they feel that the current support to the deaf from the government is not enough, and the government often neglects deaf people’s needs.

Neutral

Among the participants who reveal neutral attitudes, all of them mentioned that they are not familiar with the exact needs of deaf people. In addition, whether HKSL is recognized or not has little influence on their current life. Nevertheless, they all agree that more support to improve the communication of deaf people is needed. One believes

⁹According to the ‘2016 Population by Census Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities’ (HKSAR, 2016)[28], there were a total of 58, 383 ethnic minorities, constituting 8.0 % of the whole population in Hong Kong. A significant proportion of them is foreign domestic helpers from the Philippines, Indonesia, and immigrants from South Asia and other western countries.

that expanding the influence and the use of HKSL does not need to rely on statutes by the government but can be promoted by civil groups such as sign language activists, via platforms including media and the Internet. Another two participants mentioned they are not sure that the recognition of HKSL could guarantee a better life of deaf people.

Not support

Analogously to the participant with negative attitude in the hearing-related group, one participant in this group also believes all minority languages spoken by different groups in Hong Kong should be treated equally, therefore recognizing HKSL is not necessary. However, s/he agrees that measures to increase sign interpretation are needed. The other participant expressed the concern that if HKSL is recognized, a great range of aspects in the whole society will require changes, such as facilitating sign interpretation in various of departments, adding sign language in the compulsory course in school, adding statutes in the law, etc. In this participant’s opinion, since deaf people form a small group of people in Hong Kong, changes involving the whole society is not ‘economically profitable and necessary’ -- whatever this would mean. In addition, s/he reveals the concern on the potential conflicts of interest brought by the changes after the recognition: “If HKSL is recognized, does that mean if I’m not able to sign HKSL, or not able to provide sign interpretation in my business, they (deaf people) have the right to sue me?”

5.3 What is the Best Situation in 10 Years?

When asked to imagine the best social situation in 10 years (Question 5-1), the three groups generally mentioned that they hope that society becomes more inclusive. Deaf people could easily communicate in society, with well-equipped sign interpretation services. Also, deaf people could equally participate in society. They are equally respected, get equal access to information, and could work in various positions as hearing people. Despite the shared hopes, the answers still reveal some slight differences across the three groups, as we will see immediately. In particular, more participants in the hearing-unrelated groups mentioned that they hope the public will get general education on basic HKSL, whereas no participant in the hearing-related group mentioned it. In addition, more participants in the deaf group mentioned that deaf people be treated equally as hearing people; for example, they mentioned the set-up of deaf colleges and deaf TV channels, whereas comparably, hearing participants mentioned more about how the society could become better inclusive by improving sign interpretation services and sign language education. In Table 10, we summarized the different points specified by the participants in the

answers to Question 5-1.

Table 10. Summary of Answers to Question 5-1 by the Three Groups of Participants

Best situations in 10 years	deaf	hearing-related	hearing-unrelated	Total
HKSL is recognized as an official language.	1	3	2	6
The society becomes inclusive, such as in education, media, and public services, sign interpretation services are well facilitated and accessible in these areas. Hearing and deaf people can communicate and cooperate easily.	6	8	6	20
The public gets an education on HKSL and Deaf culture. Everyone knows that HKSL is a language and can communicate with deaf people in basic HKSL.	2	0	6	8
Deaf people can equally participate in society as hearing people. They are equally respected; they get equal educational opportunities; they can work in most occupations, and they get the same amount of information.	3	2	2	7
Deaf people are more aware of their identity, culture, and rights	1	0	0	1

5.4 What is the Worst Situation in 10 Years?

When asked to describe the worst situation in 10 years, the majority of participants believe that if the situation remained the same as today, it would be the worst. Six participants mentioned that the worst case would be the SLCO program and the only deaf school eventually shut down, and deaf children will no longer have access to sign language. Eight participants mentioned that the worst situation is when the Deaf community and their culture, language eventually extinct, and right defense movements for deaf people gradually disappear. The different points mentioned by the participants in the answers to Question 5-2 are summarized in Table 11.

Table 11. Summary of Answers to Question 5-2 by the Three Groups of Participants

Worst situations in 10 years	deaf	hearing-related	hearing-unrelated	Total
The situation for deaf people remains the same. The government does not acknowledge and support the use of HKSL; Deaf people still live passively in the society in their relatively closed circles, with low social status, and little sign interpretation support, many barriers in education, work, and communication; The public knows and cares very little about deaf people’s need.	8	5	8	21
Deaf children no longer have access to sign language in schools. The SLCO program shuts down. There is no deaf school, or deaf schools do not use sign language in teaching.	3	3	0	6
People no longer fight for the right of using HKSL and the right for deaf people in Hong Kong. There are fewer and fewer sign interpreters because they do not earn enough money. Deaf community and HKSL eventually disappear.	1	5	2	8

5.5 What is the Best Situation for Now?

When asked to suggest the best situation for the current Hong Kong society, the three groups commonly believe that the public should be better informed about deaf community and HKSL (deaf group: N=4; hearing-related group: N=3; hearing-unrelated group: N=6). In particular, the needs and strengths of deaf people, and the vitality of HKSL. This reflects that such knowledge is lacking in the current Hong Kong society. The second most mentioned situation is that deaf people get better informed by having more access to sign interpretation in schools, public services, and media. Four participants (deaf: N=3; hearing-unrelated: N=1) mentioned that more news reports, live streaming TV shows and speeches by politicians should facilitate sign interpretation and subtitles. Table 12 presents the aspects mentioned by the participants.

Table 12. Summary of Answers to Question 5-3 by the Three Groups of Participants

Best situations for now	deaf	hearing-related	hearing-unrelated	Total
Governors revisit the issue of recognition of HKSL and listen more about the needs of deaf people.	1	2	1	4
The government actively promote HKSL to the public.	0	2	5	7
The public gets to know more about HKSL and deaf people, and know more about their strengths. The cooperation between hearing and deaf people improves.	4	3	6	13
Deaf education improves. Deaf children and their parents have more access to HKSL.	1	1	0	2
Deaf people better participate in society; they become more confident, explore the world more actively. They have more working opportunities.	2	2	0	4
Deaf people get better access to surrounding information. More sign interpretation in schools, public services, and media, especially emergency announcements and live telecasted events.	4	1	1	6
Training of sign interpretation, HKSL are boosted. The quality of sign interpretation and the number of sign interpreters improve.	3	2	0	5

6. Discussion

In this section, we will first discuss the affecting factors of attitudes. Second, we will reflect on two issues: we will discuss the role of HKSL in education, and then touch the issue of language standardization.

6.1 Affecting Factors of the Attitudes

In the analysis, we identify three factors that affect the attitudes of the participants.

1) The knowledge of deaf people.

Our anticipations of the two major influencing factors are partially proved. First, every deaf interviewee supports the recognition of HKSL, and they all believe that it could improve their linguistic situation, which will influence

every aspect of their life. Compare to the two hearing groups, deaf participants emphasize more on the equality in accessing and participating the society as hearing people. On the other hand, unlike what we anticipated, the two hearing groups does not differ tremendously in terms of the distribution of three different attitudes.

Nevertheless, the perspectives behind the positions seem to differ. Overall, the hearing-unrelated group tends to be aware of the problem in communication faced by deaf people. They used more wording such as ‘help’ and ‘deaf-mute people’, which many Deaf individuals do not agree. By contrast, the hearing-related group is more aware of different aspects of problems faced by deaf people, including education, work, media, and legal rights. They also emphasize more on the equal opportunities for participation in society, compare to the hearing-unrelated group. Such a difference seems to be positively related to the varying level of knowledge of deaf people, including their needs, culture, and linguistic situation, etc. In addition, it shows that the specific opinions expressed by the participants depend on their occupations and working experiences. For instance, teachers of deaf students commonly emphasize the critical role of sign language in schools. They believe that it plays a vital role in getting deaf students equally informed and educated. There is a slight difference between deaf and hearing teachers, though: hearing teachers tend to pay more attention to sign interpretations in class, whereas deaf teachers emphasize more on the opportunities of using sign language for both deaf and hearing students. Compare with other participants, sign interpreters seem to be more aware of the self-independence of deaf people, two of the three sign interpreters mentioned that it is essential for deaf people to understand the mechanism behind the recognition of HKSL, and how different groups in society operate and influence each other.

2) How the participants view the recognition of HKSL.

The responses in the interview reveal that participants view the recognition of HKSL differently. Take its influence as an instance, all deaf participants seem to believe that recognition of HKSL will directly lead to the improvement of sign interpretation service. As a result, it could guarantee the improvement of the living situation of deaf people. On the other hand, some participants from the other two groups reserve judgment on such a direct correlation. Some of them expressed that the promotion of HKSL does not necessarily have to rely on recognition.

Besides, some participants view ‘the recognition of HKSL’ statically, they see it as an ultimate consequence, whereas others see it as a dynamic process. Several

participants falling into the first type anticipated that before ‘the recognition of HKSL’ succeeds, campaigns striving for the recognition of HKSL, like the one in 2017, will re-occur several times in the future. This perspective could also be one of the reasons why two participants (hearing-related group: N=1; hearing-unrelated group: N=1) believe that the current situation in Hong Kong is not ready for the recognition of HKSL. In comparison, among those who see the recognition of HKSL as a dynamic process with several stages, six participants (hearing-related group: N=3; hearing-unrelated group: N=3) mentioned that the government should set a schedule to achieve the recognition of HKSL step by step. They raised that before recognizing HKSL in the law, promoting HKSL to the public, making it widely known by social members is an urgent and reachable step; likewise, revising and adjusting the implemented measures in the latter stage is also a necessary step for the whole process of recognition of HKSL.

3) How the participants view the achievement of the things in general.

About the fact that there are still many unsolved problems that are closely related to the official recognition of HKSL, such as lack of adequate deaf teachers, sign interpreters, and research, different ways of thinking of the participants also influence their attitudes towards the issue. Some participants argue that the recognition of HKSL should be first taken as a pioneering step, regardless of the tendency that many unexpected problems will pop up. They are convinced that only after this step is achieved, would the following problems be fixed once they present themselves, one by one. On the other side, some participants insist that before HKSL could be recognized, more work should be done to avoid the anticipated problems as much as possible.

6.2 How Important is HKSL?

As can be seen from Section 5, the opinions on whether the recognition of HKSL could guarantee a better promotion of HKSL in society vary among the participants. A core motivation to support the recognition of HKSL is that people hope the recognition will eventually make it easier for deaf people in Hong Kong to use HKSL in society. It would then allow them to communicate more comfortably, to become better informed about the surroundings, to better participate in the society, and to change the existing situation in which deaf people are often at disadvantaged positions in different aspects of the society. We do not have an answer to the question of how directly the recognition of HKSL will influence the achievement of these hopes of improvement. However, from the deaf participants’

responses, it is obvious that deaf people in Hong Kong still encounter many obstacles in communication and in getting information about the society. The barriers range from daily life activities such as going to the bank, visiting doctors, studying in schools to spiritual achievements, such as getting access to amusement and art, and being respected as deaf.

When it comes to the consensus that ‘actions should be taken to strive for a better situation’, the next questions will be “How urgent is it?” and “What are the best choice of actions?” As mentioned earlier, during the interviews, many participants from the hearing-unrelated group asked questions about the Deaf community. This reflects that the majority of social members still know very little about deaf people’s needs. As one hearing-unrelated participant said, “*We know that many deaf people need help, but we don’t know what they need exactly.*” In fact, several participants from the deaf and hearing-related group also observed and mentioned this problem. Concerning the urgency, social members that have little contact with the Deaf community also tend to feel vague about it. On the other hand, hearing people that are closely involved in the Deaf community show stronger eagerness to the implements of the actions, even stronger than the deaf group. Most of these hearing people commit to various occupations that serve the Deaf community, such as sign interpreters, teachers of deaf students, and researchers. At the same time, they are hearing people who have free access to the majority of society. Being at such positions, they show clearer awareness of the problems. One hearing teacher of the deaf puts it: “*Whenever I think of the many deaf students being absent in mind in class, just because they could not hear well, I feel worried and sad. It (the use of HKSL in deaf education) really needs to be implemented as soon as possible. The kids are growing up!*”

Deaf education is a crucial issue. It was mentioned frequently by the deaf and hearing-related participants (Section 5, Reason 3 and Reason 4 for the supportive attitude). It is intimately related to the well-being of the next generation of deaf people and the development of the Deaf community. In our opinion, strategies adopted in deaf education should consider the characteristics of deaf people, such as their culture, nature of identity, and their language, etc., so that deaf people can get equal opportunities to education as hearing people, without trying to assimilate themselves into the hearing world at all costs. In the interviews, several participants from the deaf and hearing-related group mentioned the use of HKSL in deaf education. Some of them worry about the sign bilingual program -- the SLCO program --

no longer exists due to lack of financial support. Two participants believe that the students under the program could grow up with sufficient world knowledge to sustain the future campaigns that strive for the benefits of deaf people. More than one deaf interviewee expresses their hope that one day a Deaf college using HKSL as the medium of instruction could establish, so that they could take the courses that they like, instead of envying hearing people's abundant choices. These comments imply a shared position: HKSL plays a vital role in deaf education in Hong Kong. Actually, adopting HKSL as a medium of instructions in an educational setting has been proved helpful for deaf students to acquire Chinese literacy, proficiency in Cantonese, and to build up a healthy identity (Ho, Yiu, & Pun, 2014^[29]; J. Li, Lee, Tang, & Lam, 2014^[30]; Q. Li & Tang, 2014^[31]; Tang et al., 2014^[24]). Therefore, it is more a matter of coming up with a practical measure that could timely meet this need of the deaf, and at the same time optimize its influence on the whole society.

As mentioned, some participants with negative attitudes concern about that once HKSL is recognized as an official language, the implementation of measures to promote HKSL would cost too much of the social resources, yet it seems only to benefit a small group of people society. In other words, it is not so economically profitable. In our opinion, despite the small population, deaf people should be respected the right of using the languages which they feel comfortable with, be it a sign language or a spoken language. As stated in the Declaration on the Rights of the Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities: "...persons belonging to... linguistic minorities have the right... to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination (Article 2)" and "persons belonging to minorities may have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue (Article 4)" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1992)^[32]. Besides, it is a fact that HKSL is the essential language for many deaf people in Hong Kong to get information and to communicate. Imagine how much information a person needs in a day to fulfill a convenient daily life, and how much information one needs to obtain a higher educational level or a set of world knowledge that could sustain his/her living and self-development. Unfortunately, in Hong Kong society nowadays, a large percentage of such information is only assessable to hearing people. In our opinion, easier access to use HKSL in Hong Kong society will not only benefit deaf people but the whole Hong Kong society. It would not only bring more

convenience to the daily life of deaf people but will also influence the education and career of deaf people. This will bring them more possibilities and better abilities to participate and contribute to society. Therefore, efforts for a more inclusive community is tremendously profitable.

6.3 On the View of Standardization

One of the main counterviews and concerns against the official recognition of HKSL is that there exist many variations in vocabulary, for example, there exist 13 versions referring to the geographical name 'Lantau Island'(CSLDS, 2019)^[33]. So far, there is no standardized version of HKSL that all HKSL users agree on for official use. This situation could cause stagnation if the official documents provide an HKSL version after the official recognition of HKSL. On the other hand, some deaf signers of HKSL expressed their concerns about the standardization of HKSL. During a recent personal communication, one deaf friend of the researcher argued that such a standardization would have as a direct consequence that many dialects gradually die out because the next generation does not acquire the dialects anymore, like what happened after the spread of Putonghua in Mainland China. In other words, once HKSL is standardized, different varieties of words will be gradually lost. In the following, we will discuss our views on such concerns.

As for Putonghua, it is the standard form of modern Chinese which is commonly used across the vast territory of Mainland China. The promotion of Putonghua was to remove the barrier created by dialects across the nation that hinders social development in China (People's Daily, 1998)^[34]. Chinese citizens are asked to use Putonghua conscientiously on formal and public occasions, such as in broadcasts, education, and official business, to remove the communicative obstacles and to improve the efficiency of communication (Guo, 2002)^[35]. The relationship and coexistence of a standardized language version and the varieties/dialects is another big topic to explore. Due to space, we are not diving in.

Nevertheless, in comparison to Mainland China, the territory of Hong Kong SAR, where HKSL is used, is much smaller. Although there are only a tiny amount of studies on the varieties of HKSL (c.f. Siu, 2016^[20]), we estimate that differences between the varieties of HKSL are not as massive as the many dialects and ethnic languages in Mainland China. Therefore, the potential problems caused by the standardization of HKSL would be less challenging. Moreover, in our view, the existence of varieties of HKSL should not be an excuse to put off the promotion of HKSL, which strives for a more convenient use of HKSL for deaf people in society. To

conclude, the current situation in Hong Kong requires a compromise proposal that could promote the development of HKSL, and at the same time sustain a linguistic environment which allows a natural coexistence of different varieties of the language. In our opinion, setting standards for vocabularies in official use is necessary.

7. Conclusion

Align with our anticipation, deaf participants widely support the recognition of HKSL. In general, they commonly argue that the official recognition of HKSL would guarantee a more active promotion of HKSL, which closely affects their daily life and well-being. For the two hearing groups (i.e., hearing participants who are intimately involved in the Deaf community, and those who are not), the majority of them also support the recognition. The distributions of different kinds of attitudes between these two hearing groups are similar, indicating that – out of our initial hypothesis – the involvement of the Deaf community is not directly related to the types of attitudes. This reflects that the majority of our interviewees hold a supportive opinion on the recognition of HKSL. Nevertheless, compared to the hearing interviewees who merely have contact with deaf people and the Deaf community, hearing participants who involve in the Deaf community show more knowledge and awareness of the situation of deaf people, including their needs and the specific barriers that they face in Hong Kong society.

Finally, as mentioned at the beginning, this is a preliminary study. Overall, the methodology worked out well. But in future studies, we should consider better strategies to eliminate the influence of the researcher. The size of the participants is relatively small. Also, because the participants were recruited on a friend-of-a-friend basis, the diversity of the background of the interviewees might be limited. Therefore, the attitudes we gathered in this study may not be representative enough for the whole population of Hong Kong citizens. Nevertheless, the study presents a picture of different perspectives that Hong Kong citizens hold on the recognition of HKSL. Moreover, we also hope to provide several insights for future effort in improving the linguistic situation of deaf people. For future studies, other methods such as questionnaire, could be used, in order to gather quantitative data with a larger sample size. We believe that whatever methods are to be used, the characteristics and different perspectives of the three groups should be considered. Similarly, governors working on the language planning of sign language should be aware of the differences when they take the various attitudes as a reference.

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