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Abstract

This article traces the origins of Hong Kong Sign Language (hereafter HKSL) and its subsequent development in relation to the establishment of Deaf education in Hong Kong after World War II. We begin with a detailed description of the history of Deaf education with a particular focus on the role of sign language in such development. We then compare the use of sign language among Deaf students in the first two Deaf schools in Hong Kong in the postwar period, and how both signing varieties contributed to the later development of HKSL. We maintain that the modern form of HKSL is a mixture of the Nanjing/Shanghai variety of Chinese Sign Language and the signing varieties developed locally among Deaf people in Hong Kong. This finding supports Woodward's (1993) hypothesis that some form of signing must have existed in Hong Kong before Nanjing/Shanghai signs were introduced in 1948 and 1949 by a Deaf signing couple who set up the first signing school.

THIS ARTICLE TRACES the origins of Hong Kong Sign Language (hereafter HKSL) and its subsequent development in relation to the establishment of Deaf education in Hong Kong after World War II.¹ Our data come from historical documents, relevant literature, and interviews with Deaf signers who graduated from different Deaf

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schools in the postwar period. We maintain that the modern form of HKSL is a mixture of the Nanjing/Shanghai variety of Chinese Sign Language and the signing varieties developed locally among Deaf people in Hong Kong. This finding supports Woodward's (1993) hypothesis that some form of signing must have existed in Hong Kong before Nanjing/Shanghai signs were introduced in 1948 and 1949 by a Deaf signing couple who set up the first signing school.

We first present a literature review and explain the purpose of this study. These are followed by a discussion of the methodology and an overview of Deaf education in Hong Kong both before and after World War II. We then consider the use of sign language in the two earliest Deaf schools and examine the ways in which the Nanjing/Shanghai signs gradually mixed with the local signing varieties developed by Deaf people, which led to the evolution of the present form of HKSL. The conclusion summarizes the information presented and comments on our hopes for Deaf education in Hong Kong and for the revitalization of HKSL.

Literature Review and the Purpose of This Study

Formal Deaf education in Hong Kong began in 1935. Before that, no documentation can be found that mentions the number of Deaf people in Hong Kong, what their lives were like, or whether they used signs to communicate among themselves.² Despite a lack of historical records, we cannot rule out the possibility that some forms of signed communication existed among Deaf people at that time. As is frequently reported in the literature, sign languages develop spontaneously whenever Deaf people have regular contact with each other (Groce 1985; Woodward 1993, 2003; Senghas, Senghas, and Pyers 2005). There is reason to believe that, because of the high population density, Deaf people in Hong Kong were able to meet frequently in the early days. At the turn of the twentieth century, Hong Kong was home to around 280,000 people, and its population density was 31,500 persons per square kilometer, one of the highest density figures in the world at that time (Hong Kong Government 1900). By 1961, Hong Kong's total population had soared to nearly three million, and certain districts reported a population density of 200,000 persons per square kilometer (Hong Kong Government, Census and Statistics Depart-

ment 1969). Given these figures, one would expect that Deaf people encountered each other on the streets with some frequency and thus developed some form of manual communication even though historical records cannot be found.

Besides regular contacts, another favorable condition for the emergence of sign language is the establishment of Deaf schools, particularly residential ones (Winzer 1993). The first Deaf school in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong School for the Deaf (hereafter HKSD), was established by missionaries in 1935. In the two to three decades after World War II, several more Deaf schools were initiated. Nonetheless, written records of these Deaf schools are scarce and scattered. Little is known about what language was used in these schools or whether the students interacted with other Deaf people outside the facilities. In addition, not much has been written on the government's attitude toward and policy on language use in Deaf education during that period. At present, the only documentation that touches upon the relationship between sign language and Deaf education is a booklet titled *The Origin and Development of Hong Kong Sign Language* (Hong Kong Society for the Deaf 1987). The information in the booklet was based largely on interviews with eight persons who were involved in the education of Deaf children from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s. The booklet suggests that HKSL originated mainly from Nanjing/Shanghai signs introduced by a Deaf signing couple who set up the Overseas Chinese School for the Deaf and Dumb (hereafter the OCSD) in the postwar period.³ Although the booklet provides some useful information on how the Nanjing/Shanghai signs spread beyond this signing school, it mentions little about the actual language use of Deaf students in the 1940s and 1950s.⁴

In order to examine the claim that HKSL is historically related to Shanghai Sign Language, Woodward (1993) adopted the standard glottochronological procedures (Gudschinsky 1956) and compared a list of one hundred basic vocabulary items from these two sign languages. Glottochronological studies in spoken languages posit an 80.5 percent average rate of retention in basic vocabulary per thousand years as a result of normal language change (Gudschinsky 1956). Woodward found a 66–68 percent similarity between HKSL and Shanghai Sign Language, although his study was conducted only forty-five years

after the latter was introduced to Hong Kong. He argued that, although the historical relationship between these two sign languages was confirmed, the rather low percentages of similarity suggested that HKSL did not develop solely from Shanghai signs.⁵ Rather, these figures show strong parallels to other sign languages in the world that resulted from mixtures of sign languages. For example, American Sign Language, which evolved from French Sign Language mixing with the indigenous signing in the States, shares 61 percent of cognates in basic vocabulary with French Sign Language (cf. Woodward 1978). Woodward therefore hypothesized that some local forms of signing must have existed in Hong Kong before Nanjing/Shanghai signs were introduced and that all of these were involved in the subsequent development of HKSL. His findings raise the question of where the other sign language varieties came from; without a doubt, Deaf education is a possible source of locally developed signing varieties.

Since the establishment of Deaf education is commonly regarded as a catalyst for the emergence of sign language, our investigation begins with an overview of Deaf education history in Hong Kong and of the use of sign language among Deaf people in the post–World War II era. Specifically, the questions we address are as follows:

- What was early Deaf education like in Hong Kong? What role did sign language play in Deaf education at that time?
- Were there locally developed signing varieties before the Nanjing/Shanghai signs began taking root in Hong Kong in the 1950s? If so, when and where did they arise?
- How did these signing varieties mix with the Nanjing/Shanghai signs to gradually evolve into the present form of HKSL?

Methodology

Our data come from two sources: written materials and individual interviews. Written materials include the annual reports and statistics published by the government of Hong Kong, Hong Kong yearbooks published by local news agencies, and publications by Deaf schools (e.g., anniversary reports). For the interviews, we designed a questionnaire that covered many aspects of school life and sign language use in the Deaf community (see appendix 1).

Twenty-two Deaf people (twelve males and ten females, who ranged from thirty-eight to seventy-seven years of age) who studied in Deaf schools between the 1940s and the 1970s were invited to participate in the interviews.⁶ A hearing signing teacher involved in Deaf education in the 1970s was also invited to provide supplementary information. We both conducted and video-recorded the interviews ourselves.

History of Deaf Education in Hong Kong

The following Deaf schools and clubs were established both before and after World War II (shown in chronological order):

1. Hong Kong School for the Deaf (1935–2004)⁷
2. Overseas Chinese School for the Deaf and Dumb (1948–1975/1976)⁸
3. Victoria School for the Deaf (1960–2006)⁹
4. Hill Chong Special School for the Deaf (1961–1974)¹⁰
5. clubs for Deaf children (1960s–1977)
6. Kai Yum School for the Deaf (1961–1975/1976)¹¹
7. Hong Kong Deaf and Dumb Association School (1962–1969)¹²
8. Lutheran School for the Deaf (1968–to date)¹³
9. Canossa School for the Deaf (1973–2007)¹⁴

Table 1 profiles these Deaf schools and clubs with regard to funding sources, medium of instruction, duration, types of education offered,¹⁵ and graduates who participated in this study.¹⁶

As table 1 shows, formal Deaf education began in Hong Kong in 1935 with the establishment of the Hong Kong School for the Deaf, a boarding school that employed a strict oralist approach. When the school was founded, only six students enrolled at first, but the number gradually increased to forty before the doors were closed in 1941 due to World War II. In 1949 the HKSD reopened with fourteen students. As the social and economic conditions gradually stabilized in the postwar period, the population of Hong Kong, which had plummeted during the war, increased rapidly. This development led to a surge in the demand for basic education in general, including schools for Deaf children. In the two decades following World War II, the number of Deaf schools increased steadily, reaching a peak in 1968 with a student population of nearly six hundred in eight institutions.

TABLE 1. Deaf Schools in Hong Kong from 1935 to the Present

Names of the Schools	Duration	Subsidized/ Private	Medium of Instruction	Education Offered	Informants + Duration of Enrollment
Hong Kong School for the Deaf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set up in 1935 • suspended between 1941 and 1948 due to World War II • became a mainstream school in 2004; phased out the remaining Deaf students 	subsidized by government	speech only	kindergarten to grade 11	Informant (1): 1947–1950 Informant (2): 1948–1956 Informant (3): 1953–1962 Informant (4): 1957–1968 Informant (5): 1970–1976# Informant (6): 1974–1979*
Overseas Chinese School for the Deaf and Dumb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set up in 1948 • a branch school was set up in 1956 • both schools closed in 1975/1976 	private	sign language (Nanjing/Shanghai variety of Chinese Sign Language)	kindergarten to grade 9	Informant (1): 1953–1958 Informant (2): 1953–1968 Informant (3): 1957–1962 Informant (4): 1958–1970
Victoria School for the Deaf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set up in 1960 as a companion school to HKSD • closed in 2006 	subsidized by government	mainly speech; limited use of signs	kindergarten to grade 6	Informant (1): 1966–1974* Informant (2): 1970–1977^
Hill Chong Special School for the Deaf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set up in 1961 • closed in 1974 	private	mostly sign language	kindergarten to grade 8	Informant (1): 1956–1960 Informant (2): 1957–1968 Informant (3): 1959–1966 Informant (4): 1966–1969#

Clubs for Deaf Children (by Social Welfare Department)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • six clubs for Deaf children were set up since 1960 • closed by 1977 	run by government	sign language	primary education (age 7 to 13)	Informant (1): 1960–1968 Informant (2): 1970–1977
Kai Yum School for the Deaf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set up in 1961 • closed in 1975/1976 	private	sign language and speech	kindergarten to grade 6	Informant (1): 1960–1966#
Hong Kong Deaf and Dumb Association School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set up in 1962 • closed in 1969 	private	sign language	primary education	Informant (1): 1960–1968
Lutheran School for the Deaf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set up in 1968 • the only Deaf school left at present in Hong Kong 	subsidized by government	mostly speech; limited use of sign language and cued speech	kindergarten to grade 11	Informant (1): 1968–1977 Informant (2): 1969–1978 Informant (3): 1971–1987 Informant (4): 1977–1990
Canossa School for the Deaf (Caritas Magdalene School)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set up in 1973 • closed in 2007 	subsidized by government	speech only	grade 1 to 11	Informant (1): 1975–1987 Informant (2): 1977–1982^

* , ^ and # indicate the three informants who studied in more than one school.

Before 1969, the education of Deaf children fell to the Hong Kong Social Welfare Department (hereafter the SWD), which concentrated mainly on providing informal training and educational placements for school-age Deaf children who could not be absorbed by the existing Deaf schools. We found no evidence that the SWD had any specific overarching principle to guide Deaf education or any particular direction for long-term development.¹⁷ From another perspective, however, this lack of official policy allowed the Deaf schools ample freedom to develop their own pedagogy. In fact, one of the most noteworthy features of Deaf education during this period was the diversity in the medium of instruction. The HKSD and the Victoria School for the Deaf adopted oralism. However, the OCSD, which was established by a Deaf couple from China, used sign language in all of its classes. Similarly, sign language was used in the Hong Kong Deaf and Dumb Association School, which was also founded by a Deaf person from China.¹⁸ The Hill Chong Special School for the Deaf and the Kai Yum School for the Deaf were run mainly by hearing staff, but both sign and spoken language were used in class. The Lutheran School for the Deaf employed speech most of the time, but signs and cued speech were occasionally used as well. Objectively speaking, when compared to Deaf children nowadays, who can attend only oral Deaf schools or ordinary schools without sign language support, Deaf children in the 1960s had a much wider range of available communication options for their education.

There is also reason to believe that the Hong Kong government in the 1960s was fairly open to the use of sign language in Deaf education. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the government enacted two policies to tackle the inadequacy of school placements for Deaf children.¹⁹ First, land was granted to establish the Victoria School for the Deaf as a companion school to the HKSD. The school, which opened in 1960, upheld oralism. The second policy directed the SWD to establish clubs to provide informal education for those Deaf children who had not yet been absorbed by the existing schools. Two clubs were opened in 1960, and by 1970 their number had increased to six.

According to our informants, the SWD intentionally hired experienced signing teachers from the OCSD to run these clubs. These hearing teachers not only taught the Deaf children but also imparted sign language knowledge to other hearing colleagues in the clubs. That all

of these clubs adopted sign language as the medium of instruction, we believe, indicates that the SWD had a positive opinion of the OCSD's signing approach. In fact, in its 1960 annual report, the government of Hong Kong clearly stated that the "[HKSD] uses the oral method of instruction, whereas the OCSD normally employs manual signs" (Hong Kong Government 1960, 179). This statement, albeit short, indicates that the government was aware of the difference between the oral and the manual approach for educating Deaf children. Moreover, between 1961 and 1964, the SWD's annual reports mentioned the expansion of both the Victoria Park School for the Deaf (i.e., additional places for instruction in the oral mode) and the Deaf children's clubs (i.e., additional places for instruction in the manual mode).²⁰ These facts indicate that the government allowed parallel development of both approaches in Deaf education. As we discuss later, the government's open-mindedness toward the use of sign language in the clubs for Deaf children at this time provided an indispensable impetus to the later development of HKSL in the Deaf community.

In the early 1960s the responsibility of educating Deaf children shifted from the SWD to the Education Department, precipitating a major change (Yung 1997). In 1960 the Education Department set up a Special School Section, and in 1962 the department invited a professor of audiology from Gallaudet College to serve as a consultant on Deaf education in Hong Kong. Among other things, this consultancy report emphasized early intervention, the enhancement of audiological services, and communication in verbal language, which was regarded as "a necessary precursor to progress in general education" (Frisina 1963, 11).²¹ The report also highlighted the need for early detection and treatment of hearing loss in order to increase the number of Deaf students who would be able to enter ordinary classrooms at a later stage.

After the submission of this report, the overall Deaf education policy began transitioning to the auditory/oral approach and inclusive education. In 1963, the Education Department set up an audiological unit (Yung 1997). Under a subsidy from the government, two more oral schools, the Lutheran School for the Deaf and the Canossa School for the Deaf, were established in 1968 and 1973, respectively. Coupled with the policy of six years of free and compulsory education instituted in 1972, the addition of these two subsidized oral schools led to

a substantial drop in enrollment at the signing schools, which were all privately run and charged a relatively high fee. As a result, all of the signing schools, including the clubs for Deaf children run by the SWD, were closed down one by one. By 1976, the number of Deaf schools stood at only four, all of which employed the oralist approach.

In 1968 and 1969, the government officially announced that the aim of special education was “to educate handicapped children in the same way as ordinary children whenever possible” (Hong Kong Government, Education Department 1968/1969, 4). In 1969, the first special class for children with partial hearing was created in an ordinary government primary school (Hong Kong Government, Education Department 1969/1970).²² To enhance the use of residual hearing, the government started providing free hearing aids to all Deaf children in 1972 (Yung 1997). In 1977, the government published a policy paper that firmly declared “integration” to be the main direction of special education in Hong Kong and stated that it would replace the “segregation” approach adopted in the 1940s (Hong Kong Government 1977). In 1994, cochlear implantation surgery for young Deaf children was begun in Hong Kong.²³ At present, a considerable number of Deaf preschoolers receive cochlear implants every year and afterward are placed in ordinary schools.

However, despite its strong orientation toward mainstreaming and the enhanced use of audiological services, the government has never officially denounced the use of sign language. On the contrary, the Education Department once attempted to “encourage” the use of signs by publishing a sign language handbook, which consisted of nearly a thousand vocabulary items (Special Education Unit of the Education Department of Hong Kong 1990). Nonetheless, the book was viewed basically as a reference, and it was entirely up to the Deaf schools to decide whether to use them. Owing to the still pervasive sentiment against sign language among the teachers of Deaf students, this handbook received a lukewarm response and had little impact on the long-standing oral-only tradition in Deaf schools.

In sum, the policy changes mentioned here affected Deaf education in Hong Kong in two ways. First, enrollment in Deaf schools declined steadily over the years, resulting in their closing down. By 1976 the number of Deaf schools had dropped from eight to four, and

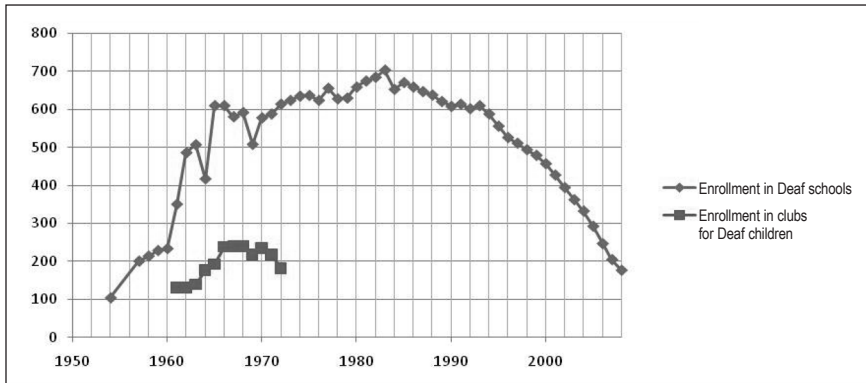


FIGURE 1. Enrollment in Deaf schools and clubs for deaf children from 1956 to 2008.

in 2008 only two schools remained.²⁴ The number of Deaf students in these schools also dropped from nearly 700 in the 1980s to 176 in 2008. At present, more than one thousand children with varying degrees of hearing loss are studying in mainstream schools without any sign language support. Figure 1 shows the number of students in Deaf schools and in clubs for Deaf children from 1956 to 2008.²⁵

Another significant consequence of these policy changes was the diminishing role of sign language in Deaf education. Under the philosophies of oralism and integration, Deaf teachers and sign language can no longer play a role in Deaf education as they once did in the 1950s and 1960s. After all of the privately run Deaf schools were closed, the remaining schools adopted speech as the sole medium of instruction. Thus, Deaf students in Deaf schools now have much less sign language exposure than before. Most—if not all—of those who are growing up in regular schools do not know how to sign. With few exceptions, most of these students never interact with other Deaf people for the rest of their lives.

Use of Sign Language in the Two Earliest Deaf Schools and the Emergence of Hong Kong Sign Language

This section offers a microanalysis of how HKSL emerged against the background of Deaf education discussed earlier. We focus on the language use of the two earliest Deaf schools: the Hong Kong School for the Deaf and the Overseas Chinese School for the Deaf and Dumb.

Our discussions are based primarily on the firsthand experiences of our informants, who graduated from these two schools.

The Hong Kong School for the Deaf

Previous studies point out that, as a result of frequent interaction, Deaf people spontaneously develop signing systems (Groce 1985; Senghas, Senghas, and Pyers 2005). Deaf schools, especially residential facilities, provide a natural breeding ground for sign language (Winzer 1993). The HKSD, besides being the first Deaf school in Hong Kong, was a residential school with an extremely high boarding rate. Before 1968, all of its students were required to stay in the dormitory and were allowed to go home only several times a year, usually on major holidays such as Lunar New Year or Christmas.²⁶ Hence, due to prolonged, intense interaction, the Deaf students at HKSD may well have developed their own form of signing. Six of our informants were graduates of the HKSD. From interviews with three of them, who had been enrolled at HKSD in the 1940s and 1950s, we learned that the students there did indeed develop a variety of signing before the Nanjing/Shanghai signs, which were introduced by the OCSD, took root in Hong Kong.

In 1949 Informant 1 was among the first students enrolled at HKSD when it reopened after World War II; she studied there for three years. At that time twelve to fourteen students were in residence at HKSD. During our interview, she said the students liked to use hand movements or gestures to communicate in the dormitory, but there were a lot of variations. The students “sometimes” created new “gestures/signs,” too. She did not think they were using “sign language,” as the gestures were too simple and loosely organized. Peer teaching of sign language among the students was not observed, either. She claimed that she did not learn “sign language” from her schoolmates; rather, she learned sign language at the age of thirty, when she started interacting with others in the Deaf community.

Although Informant 1 told us that “sign language” was not used during her school years, two things in her interview caught our attention. First, when telling us how the students in the dormitory created signs, she showed us a handshape (with extended thumb, index finger, and pinky) that stood for “airplane.” Another HKSD informant

showed us the exact same sign when giving us examples of signs created by his fellow students. This handshape was essentially a classifier commonly attested in sign languages, and it is still being used in polymorphemic constructions in HKSL to indicate “airplane” (Tang 2007). This example suggests that the HKSD students created classifier-like constructions from early on.

Even more revealing is the fact that, when asked how many teachers were working at HKSD, Informant 1 recalled four hearing teachers by their name signs, which were based on the teachers’ physical characteristics (e.g., a big belly, wearing glasses). According to our HKSD informants, under the school’s antisign policy, the teachers did not use signs to communicate with the students. Thus, it is unlikely that the teachers created their own iconic name signs and introduced them to their charges. Furthermore, these signs were not created by Informant 1 for her own personal use. Of the four name signs she showed us, two were also mentioned by other informants from HKSD in the 1940s and 1950s. In other words, these name signs were indeed circulated among the students at school. Informant 1 told us she lived at HKSD for only three years. After leaving, she lost contact with her schoolmates and did not interact with any other Deaf people until she turned thirty. In view of this, it is quite unlikely that she learned the name signs of the hearing teachers after leaving HKSD. On the basis of these facts, we feel justified in hypothesizing that, within just three years after HKSD reopened in 1949, Deaf students there—even though they numbered only a dozen or so—were able to develop iconic name signs for their teachers.

The use of name signs indicates that the HKSD students were using a language-like communication system rather than just a home-sign-like gesture-based system. One notable feature of home signs, which are created by isolated Deaf individuals for simple communication with their hearing friends or family members, is the lack of names. Home signers typically refer to objects with deictic gestures (i.e., pointing) rather than descriptive ones (Morford 1996). Given that name signs generally do not perform a vocative function in sign languages and that the hearing teachers at HKSD rarely, if ever, communicated with the Deaf students in signs, we may further assume that the Deaf students used these name signs when they talked among

themselves. If we are right, they were using gestures and signs to talk about things not immediately present, a process known as “displacement,” which is a property of human language (Hockett and Altmann 1968). In brief, Informant 1’s denial of having any sign language calls for a more careful interpretation inasmuch as her mention of name signs and classifiers suggests that this early form of HKSL indeed existed.²⁷

Informant 2 entered HKSD at more or less the same time as Informant 1, but he remained there for eight years (1948–1956). In his recollections we find evidence that the gestures and signs the students used continued to develop and began assuming a more central role in their daily lives. Whereas Informant 1 said the Deaf students “sometimes” created signs, Informant 2 stated that, during his stay at HKSD, all of the students “enjoyed” creating signs: “We imitated with our hands what we saw on TV, and we created a lot of new signs in this way . . . it was great fun . . . we all laughed at these signs . . . for example, planes that fly in the sky, machine guns, things like that.” Such extensive creation of new signs was accompanied by intense sign language interactions among the students, regardless of grade level. Informant 2 recalled that the students signed with each other whenever the hearing teachers were not looking. Although the older students did not sleep in the same rooms as the younger pupils, they were responsible for taking care of them (e.g., waking them up, dressing them, taking them to class). He said he signed with the younger students in all of these day-to-day interactions and in this process passed his signs on to them.

Overall, during Informant 2’s eight years at HKSD, the signing variety spontaneously developed by the Deaf students continued to “grow” in both quantity and quality. Nonetheless, like Informant 1, Informant 2 did not regard this signing as “sign language.” He believed that he started learning “real” sign language at age nineteen, when he began meeting older signers from Shanghai and other mainland cities at social gatherings. Yet he admitted that the signs he had created during childhood and those he had learned from his classmates at HKSD played an important role in his current signing. This contrasts with the perspective of Informant 1, who believed she had not learned *any* signs at HKSD.

We believe that the signing variety used at HKSD had evolved into a more mature, stabler form by the time our third HKSD informant, who studied there between 1953 and 1962, graduated. Like Informant 2, Informant 3 recalled extensive signing interactions. However, a few of his remarks suggest that sign language use at HKSD at that time was a somewhat more widespread and was characterized by a slightly higher level of stability than earlier. In his memory, the students created signs themselves, and very often other students would quickly adopt them. He also said that, although there were some variations in signs depending on the grade level, the differences were minor since the older students would teach the younger ones to adopt the same signs. These comments suggest that, although the students continued devising new signs, a signing convention gradually developed as new lexical items spread or the older students taught their signs to the younger pupils. This is in vivid contrast to the diverse gestures and signs reported by Informant 1.

Also telling is the remark by Informant 3 that he did not create signs at all; rather, he simply learned them from his schoolmates. This contrasts with Informant 2, who said he created new signs throughout his schooldays. Although individual personality might explain why some students enjoyed inventing signs, the fact that Informant 3 did not feel the urge to create signs himself at least suggests that the signs he learned from other students were sufficient to meet his communication needs. Most important, Informant 3 stated that he acquired his sign language at HKSD at the age of five, and he has been using mainly the HKSD signs since then. Once again this diverges significantly from the view of Informants 1 and 2 on the origin of their signs. In brief, comments by Informant 3 have led us to the hypothesis that the students at HKSD had developed a self-sufficient signing variety within thirteen years of the reopening of HKSD in 1949. As we discuss later, this signing variety at HKSD and the Nanjing/Shanghai signs introduced by the OCSL both played an important role in the subsequent development of HKSL.

Sign Language Use at the Overseas Chinese School for the Deaf and Dumb

The OCSL was established in 1948 (*Overseas Chinese Daily News* 1962) by a Deaf couple from China, Chen Zhuo Xian and his wife,

Huang Zhen Dong. In 1956 another branch school was opened. Both adopted sign language as the medium of instruction. Chen originated from Nanjing (Hong Kong Society of the Deaf 1987) but graduated from a Deaf school in Shanghai (*Overseas Chinese Daily News* 1962). Hence, the sign language he and his wife used was probably a mixture of Nanjing and Shanghai signs.²⁸

Unlike the compulsory boarding at HKSD, the OCSD was a day school with a limited number of dormitory rooms for students who lived far away. However, because all of the teachers, Deaf and hearing, used sign language in their lessons and informal interactions, the day students were nonetheless immersed in a complete signing environment during school hours. Naturally, interactions among students also employed signs. Because the teaching staff, especially the school principals, were a major source of sign language input, students at the OCSD in general viewed the signing teachers as the only “authentic” sign language model. The creation of new signs by students was usually frowned upon. One informant from the OCSD told us that “creating your own signs cannot be accepted; one should learn the signs from the teachers; this is better.” Another informant said, “The teachers taught us how to sign. One shouldn’t create new signs.”

This does not mean, however, that the OCSD students never created their own signs. On the contrary, as two other informants reflected, Deaf students at the OCSD occasionally created some new signs, but they were few in number. Due to the presence of “authentic signing models,” signs across grade levels were more or less the same.

Obviously, the strong signing tradition at the OCSD turned out signing graduates with a full-fledged grammar and a highly stable lexicon. It is also likely that many of the OCSD graduates were able to attain native or near-native signing competence if they entered the OCSD at an early age. Moreover, before 1965, the size of the school population at OCSD was comparable to that of HKSD.²⁹ We maintain that the large student population, the strong signing tradition, and the high level of the students’ signing proficiency partly explain why the Nanjing/Shanghai variety introduced by the OCSD became so influential in the subsequent development of HKSL. In fact, quite a number of non-OCSD informants in our study expressed their admiration of the signing skills of the OCSD graduates and said that the latter served as their signing models.

In the 1960s two major developments in Deaf education further contributed to the spread of the Nanjing/Shanghai signs from OCSD. The first was the establishment of the Hill Chong Special School for the Deaf in 1961 by Cheung Kin Fan, a former hearing teacher at OCSD. According to our Deaf informants, Principal Cheung and the other teachers, mostly hearing, basically used the OCSD signs along with some newly created ones.³⁰ Although the teachers' signing proficiency varied, the school provided a sign-friendly environment, where students could freely communicate in signs. Hence, acquiring sign language naturally from signing interactions was the norm for the students there.

The OCSD signs were also used in the clubs for Deaf children, set up by the SWD between 1960 and 1977. At least two Deaf and three signing hearing teachers from the OCSD left the OCSD to work for these clubs. Like the Hill Chong Special School for the Deaf, these clubs not only offered a sign-rich environment but also adopted an accepting attitude toward the use of signs, which encouraged new hearing staff members to learn signs from the students. One of our club informants reflected, "We taught the new teachers sign language, and gradually they understood the signs."

Owing to the establishment of the Hill Chong Special School for the Deaf and the clubs for Deaf children, the number of students exposed to the signing variety of the OCSD grew three- to fourfold—a drastic increase. Table 2 shows the number of Deaf students at oral and signing schools between 1955 and 1968.³¹

As table 2 shows, by 1968, nearly four hundred school-aged Deaf children were using the OCSD signing variety at the Hill Chong Special School for the Deaf and the six clubs for Deaf children, whereas the OCSD accommodated fewer than one hundred Deaf students.³² Of the three venues, the clubs for Deaf children accommodated the greatest number of signing students. This fact, we believe, is a direct reflection of the SWD's decision to employ ex-OCSD signing teachers to run the clubs, a move that turned out to be an indispensable catalyst for the circulation of the OCSD signing variety in Hong Kong's Deaf community and boosted the subsequent development of HKSL.

Besides the OCSD, the Hill Chong Special School for the Deaf, and the clubs for Deaf children, there were two more signing schools

TABLE 2. Number of Deaf Students at Oral and Signing Deaf Schools between 1955 and 1968

	1955	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968
Oral Schools													
Hong Kong School for the Deaf	70	105	110	105	110	107	110	118	129	149	127	126	131
Oral schools with limited use signs													
Victoria School for the Deaf					20	40	80	97	119	116	116	116	118
Lutheran Deaf Evening School										37	46	45	59
Lutheran School for the Deaf													9
<i>Total number of students at oral Deaf schools</i>	70	105	110	105	130	147	190	215	248	302	289	287	317
Signing schools using Nanjing/Shanghai signs													
Overseas Chinese School for the Deaf and Dumb	33	95	103	103	103	114	120	120	50	100	100	93	96
Hill Chong School for the Deaf Clubs for Deaf children						52	80	80	48	110	140	143	152
						130	130	139	177	192	238	240	240
<i>Subtotal</i>	33	95	103	103	103	296	330	339	275	402	478	476	488
Other signing schools													
Kai Yam School for the Deaf						37	50	50	28	50	48	30	15
Hong Kong Deaf and Dumb Association School							46	42	43	48	33	28	12
<i>Subtotal:</i>						37	96	92	71	98	81	58	27
<i>Total number of students at signing Deaf schools</i>	33	95	103	103	103	333	426	431	346	500	559	534	515

in the 1960s: the Kai Yam School for the Deaf and the Hong Kong Deaf and Dumb Association School. We were able to contact only one informant from each of these schools and were unable to obtain much information about the type of signs used there.³³ However, one informant said the signing variety at the Hong Kong Deaf and Dumb Association School was similar to the Shanghai signs. No matter what signs these two schools used, overall in the 1950s and 1960s, the signing variety of Nanjing/Shanghai played a prominent role in Deaf education. This provides a natural explanation of the fact that the modern form of HKSL is, to a significant extent, similar to Shanghai Sign Language (cf. Woodward 1993).

Subsequent Evolution of Hong Kong Sign Language

Earlier we discussed the development of a signing variety by the students at HKSD in the 1940s and 1950s. We believe that Deaf students at other orally oriented schools also developed their own varieties in a similar fashion as long as they had prolonged contact with each other. We have also explained how the Nanjing/Shanghai signing variety first adopted by the OCSD became predominant in Deaf education in the 1950s and 1960s. The next question we address is, How did these signing varieties gradually mingle and shape the subsequent development of HKSL? Our interview data revealed clues that suggest that Deaf-Deaf interactions in Deaf schools and in the Deaf community played an all-important role in the mingling of these varieties. Patterns of interactions could be highly individualized at times, and the reaction to the exposure of signing varieties other than one's own varied from person to person.

As mentioned earlier, signing schools once flourished in the 1950s and 1960s. By the mid-1970s, however, all signing schools and clubs for Deaf children had been closed down, leading to a large-scale relocation of the signing students to the remaining orally oriented schools, most notably the Lutheran School for the Deaf and the Canossa School for the Deaf.³⁴ This relocation process, which may have begun in the late 1960s, reached its peak in 1975 and 1976, when all of the signing schools had been shut down. One must note that the number of signing students who changed schools was considerably large relative to the original size of the oral Deaf schools that took them in. The special report published by the Lutheran School for the Deaf

stated that, in the 1974/1975 school year, the school expanded rapidly in order to absorb Deaf students from privately run Deaf schools that had ceased operating; moreover, within a year, it opened fifteen more classes at the primary level (Lutheran School for the Deaf 1991, 51).³⁵ The Canossa School for the Deaf also admitted a substantial number of former students from Hill Chong Special School for the Deaf and the clubs for Deaf children, as one of the informants told us. The influx of these signing students undoubtedly influenced the sign language use of the students in the oral schools that admitted them.

Deaf people were exposed to other signing varieties not only at Deaf schools but, more often than not, in informal social settings as well. Our interviews captured quite a few personal experiences of this sort. We present some of them here to illustrate the diversity of their reactions to social encounters with signers of different backgrounds:

- One of the oldest informants from HKSD bumped into some old deaf immigrants from Shanghai on the streets after he left school. Since the Shanghai signs looked a lot clearer to him, he decided to replace some of his original signs with them.
- An informant from HKSD had an elder sister who studied at the OCSD. Through her connections he made friends with OCSD students and often socialized with other Deaf people at the Hong Kong Deaf and Dumb Association.³⁶ Due to his wide social circle, he claimed he learned signs early on from the Deaf association and did not use those of the HKSD at all.
- An informant from the Hong Kong Deaf and Dumb Association School said that, after marrying her husband, who was a graduate of the HKSD, she socialized mainly with HKSD graduates and adopted their signs. Now she has forgotten most of the signs she learned at school.
- An informant from the Hill Chong Special School for the Deaf told us that, since leaving school, she has been learning signs she thinks look “cool” or “beautiful” to replace her earlier signs, which look “bad.” She has picked these new signs up from other Deaf people.
- An informant from the Lutheran School for the Deaf said that, since leaving school, he has been socializing with Deaf people from other Deaf schools. He learns signs from them to expand his knowledge but never relinquishes his own signs.

- An informant who graduated from the Victoria School for the Deaf and the HKSD said that, after leaving school, she met a lot of other Deaf people while participating in the activities of Deaf organizations. From them she has learned several varieties of signs. She can now switch from one variety to another, depending on who she is signing with.

From these personal accounts, it is obvious that informal social gatherings and activities at Deaf organizations played an extremely important role in the mingling of the Nanjing/Shanghai signs with other local signing varieties. However, the outcome of these cross-variety encounters depended largely on one's personal preference, ranging from an expansion of one's earlier lexicon to a complete abandonment of it. Whichever option a Deaf signer chose, one consequence of these interactions was that variations among signers gradually smoothed out to a significant extent, leading to the modern form of HKSL. This is clear from the comment made by an informant from the Hill Chong Special School for the Deaf: "The signs used by Deaf people are more or less the same. In the past there were a lot of differences. Deaf people interacted with each other, and over the years the signs became more or less the same. We can understand each other well." At present, lexical variations among signers still exist, and as such the name "Hong Kong Sign Language" is better viewed as an umbrella term for several signing "dialects." Nonetheless, the differences are usually viewed as minor by Deaf signers and apparently affect mutual intelligibility very little.³⁷

Conclusion

We have traced the origin of HKSL in the context of Deaf education in Hong Kong and charted its subsequent development. We have provided evidence that a signing variety developed among the residential students of HKSD and that the OCSL introduced the Nanjing/Shanghai signs to its students. Owing to several major developments in Deaf education in the 1960s, the signing variety of the OCSL quickly spread beyond its campus and influenced the sign language use of a much larger Deaf population. Our findings indicate that HKSL is indeed an offshoot of the Nanjing/Shanghai signing variety of Chinese Sign Language, lending support to Woodward's (1993) speculation

that local signing varieties in Hong Kong mixed with the Nanjing/Shanghai signs to evolve into the current form of HKSL.

As we have pointed out, the signing variety of the OCSD once played an influential role in the sign language use of Deaf people who were in school in the 1950s and 1960s. Unfortunately, its influence within the Deaf community is on the decline due to the predominance of oralism in Deaf education since the 1970s. Nowadays, most Deaf people between the ages of twenty and forty graduated from oral schools. In the absence of exposure to formal sign language at school, these people have been able to learn signs only through peer interactions, and the creation of idiosyncratic signs was the norm rather than the exception. Hence, the latest development of HKSL among the younger generation of Deaf people is continuing to deviate from the original signing variety used at the OCSD.

On the other hand, the vast majority of the younger Deaf are mainstreamed in regular schools, where one would be considered “fortunate” to find another Deaf student as a companion in the same school. With the exception of a very few who are determined to enter the Deaf community again and learn sign language in adulthood, these mainstreamed, isolated Deaf people do not know sign language at all. What makes it even more difficult to pass sign language on to the younger generation is the diminishing role of Deaf organizations in their lives. In the past, when communication methods among Deaf people remained rudimentary, gathering at Deaf organizations was a natural part of social life. Such get-togethers were perfect opportunities not just to socialize and share information but also to use sign language.

Nowadays, as in many other parts of the world, Deaf people rely much more on the Internet and various telecommunication devices to socialize and obtain information. Deaf youths frequent Deaf organizations far less often. In fact, our observation is that the younger a Deaf person is, the less that person participates in the Deaf community—to the detriment of the person’s signing skills. In view of these recent developments, we are not optimistic about the future of HKSL. In Vancouver, British Columbia, in 2010, the organizers of the Twenty-First International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED) openly rejected the 1880 Milan resolutions, which banned sign lan-

guage in educational programs for Deaf children. We sincerely hope that this bold statement will help reinstate sign language in Deaf education in Hong Kong. Such a move would help maximize Deaf children's educational opportunities by vastly improving their access to classroom activities in whatever education settings they are in. Only under such circumstances can HKSL regain its vigor and flourish in the years to come.

Notes

1. Some of our findings stemmed from a Deaf studies assignment by Kenny Chu, Connie Lo, and Lisa Lo, three of the Deaf trainees in the Asia-Pacific Sign Linguistics Research and Training Program (2006–2012) at the Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies, the Chinese University of Hong Kong. This program is funded by the Nippon Foundation. We offer our heartfelt thanks to the Nippon Foundation for supporting the training, which not only introduced the Deaf trainees to the realm of sign language studies and Deaf education but also instilled in them a strong sense of commitment to the future development of the Deaf communities.

2. In 1959 the Social Welfare Department started keeping a record of Deaf persons who sought assistance from them, but this voluntary registry did not tell exactly how many Deaf people lived in Hong Kong (Choa 1968).

3. We are not sure whether the English name of the school is Overseas Chinese School for the Deaf and Dumb or Chinese Overseas School for the Deaf and Dumb, as both appeared in the government's documents. In this article, we use "Overseas Chinese School for the Deaf and Dumb."

4. Only two interviewees in that study were involved in Deaf education before 1968. One was a Deaf instructor who taught in a small private signing school that operated for six or seven years in the 1960s. The other person was a hearing government official who was put in charge of Deaf education in 1964. Given the background of the interviewees, it is likely that the language use of Deaf students between the 1940s and the 1960s was underrepresented in that study.

5. Comparison of basic vocabulary is a method used in glottochronology to determine when two related languages diverged. First developed by Swadesh (1955, 1972), glottochronology is based on the assumption that the core vocabulary of a language generally resists borrowing and changes at a constant average rate. Hence, in the core vocabulary the degree of resemblance of two languages can reflect the passage of time after they separate. This approach predicts that two related languages should on average retain 86 percent of common vocabulary after 1,000 years, 70 percent after 1,180 years, 50 percent after 2,290 years, and 20 percent after 5,560 years (cf. McMahon and McMahon 2006). Despite some criticisms leveled against the accuracy

of this approach, comparisons of basic lexical items can still offer a general idea as to how “related” two languages are.

6. These interviewees were selected mainly through our personal social networks. We also visited a fast-food shop frequented by elderly Deaf people to look for informants. Unfortunately, we were unable to find anyone who attended the HKSD before World War II. Some Deaf schools were short lived with a small number of students, which made it difficult for us to find suitable informants. Furthermore, despite our explanation that the video would be used only for academic purposes, some Deaf people declined to participate because they did not want to be videorecorded.

7. Although the school policy required all of the teachers at HKSD to use only speech in class, some of them occasionally communicated with the students in simple signs or gestures.

8. According to the *Hong Kong Yearbook (Overseas Chinese Daily News 1962)*, Chen Zhuo Xian founded the OCSA in 1948 and its Kowloon branch in 1956. These descriptions confirmed the information in the annual reports of the Social Welfare Department. Basing on the annual reports of the Education Department, the number of Deaf schools in Hong Kong decreased from seven to four between 1975 and 1976. We believe that one of the three schools that closed was the OCSA.

9. According to the Special Memorial Report (1960–2006) published by the Victoria School for the Deaf (Victoria School for the Deaf 2006), the VSD was put under the supervision of the principal of the HKSD when it was established in 1960. Hence, the teaching practices of these two schools were similar.

10. This school’s beginning and ending years were stated in the annual reports of the Social Welfare Department (Hong Kong Government 1961/1962–1974/1975).

11. The number of students enrolled at the Kai Yum School for the Deaf first appeared in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department in 1961/1962. We believe this school was one of the three Deaf schools that closed down in 1975/1976.

12. The record of the Hong Kong Deaf and Dumb Association School first appeared in the annual reports of the Social Welfare Department in 1962. The *Hong Kong Yearbook (Overseas Chinese Daily News 1962–1969)* had records of this school from 1962 to 1969.

13. The same missionary group that founded the Lutheran School for the Deaf also set up an evening school in 1965. We were unable to find any information as to when the evening school was closed.

14. When this school was opened in 1973, it was known as the Canossa School for the Deaf. In 1993 it was renamed the Caritas Magdalene School (*Caritas Magdalene School 20th Anniversary Memorial Report 1973–1993*).

15. Table 1 lists all of the grades offered at each school (this information was provided by the informants). If a school started with the kindergarten level and gradually expanded into a full secondary-school curriculum, we simply put down “from kindergarten to secondary school.”

16. Table 1 lists the duration of enrollment as reported by each informant. There are, however, occasional discrepancies between the actual facts and the information provided by the informants. For example, one HKSD informant reported enrolling at the school in 1947, and another reported officially registering in 1948. However, according to the school documents, the HKSD was closed until 1949 because of World War II.

17. Between 1948 and 1974, the annual reports by the SWD usually included one or two paragraphs on Deaf education. They mentioned the number of Deaf schools and the school locations, newly added schools, the number of clubs run by the SWD, the number of children accommodated, the number of hearing aids provided, and so on.

18. The principal of this school, Sun Min Sheng, was a Deaf man from China (www.cnDeaf.com/html/tejiaodongtai/20071119/516.html; accessed June 17, 2010).

19. In 1959 and 1960 (Hong Kong Government 1959, 1960), the HKSD and the OCSD were able to accommodate around two hundred deaf students, but three hundred school-age Deaf children who remained on the register of the SWD still had no access to education.

20. As mentioned in note 17, the SWD’s annual reports typically included one or two short paragraphs on Deaf issues. In the 1960–1961 report, for example, paragraph 71 contained around one hundred words on Deaf concerns. This short paragraph highlighted five topics: the total number of Deaf persons on the register, Deaf children’s clubs, the Victoria School for the Deaf, the issue of hearing aids, and vocational training to prepare students for employment as cleaners or factory workers. In other words, Deaf children’s clubs and the Victoria School for the Deaf were the only two facets of Deaf education during the entire year that the SWD found worth mentioning. We noted similar mentions in the next three annual reports. We strongly feel that, at least in terms of social welfare policy, the expansion of oral school placement and informal education in the clubs using the sign language mode were equally important in the eyes of the SWD.

21. This report also pointed out that the Education Department expressed a desire to see advice on “a programme for the education of Deaf children by combined oral-manual methods” (Frisina 1963, 1). Nonetheless, it did not explain how to integrate manual signs into the proposed speech-oriented measures. This emphasis on residual hearing and speech training was not at all surprising, given that the field of Deaf education worldwide was still dominated by oralism—even at Gallaudet College.

22. A partial-hearing class was a special class in an ordinary school. Here the Deaf/hard-of hearing students studied the major subjects. For nonacademic lessons and activities, they joined their hearing peers. Over the years, the government had set up similar classes from grade 1 to grade 9 in one of its primary schools and two of its secondary schools. All of these classes have gradually been cancelled since 2000.

23. http://www.Deaf.org.hk/documents/newsletter/2009/1209/ci_lunch.php (accessed June 9, 2010).

24. The two remaining schools are the HKSD and the Lutheran School for the Deaf. The former was converted to a mainstream school in 2004 and is now phasing out its Deaf students in the secondary school section. The latter is currently facing a reduction in funding due to the low enrollment. In 2010, approximately 160 students were still enrolled in these two schools.

25. The data in figure 1 come from four different sources: (a) the SWD's annual reports (1948–1971), the Education Department's annual reports (1961–1972), the Hong Kong government's annual reports (1954–1964), and the *Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics* (1980–2009).

26. According to the HKSD's anniversary magazine (1995, 83), all of that institution's students were boarding until 1968. That year the school began accepting day students, but 73 percent of the students continued to live in the dormitory. The proportion of residential students began dropping only in the 1970s.

27. The anonymous reviewer pointed out to us that it is actually quite common for naïve Deaf signers to believe that they do not have a functional sign language and suggested that we add the last sentence of this paragraph. We wish to express our thanks for this suggestion.

28. Nanjing and Shanghai are geographically close to each other, and their signing varieties are quite similar (Gong Qun Fu, pers. comm.).

29. The statistics from different annual government reports indicated that, between 1958 and 1964, the student population at OCSD was around one hundred, which was comparable to that at HKSD.

30. The Hill Chong Special School for the Deaf later employed two of its deaf graduates as teachers, though they taught there only briefly. One of them later switched to the Lutheran Deaf Evening School, thus influencing the signing of the students there.

31. The sources of the data in table 2 are the same as those for figure 1 (see note 25). There are no statistics available for enrollment at individual Deaf schools before 1955 and after 1968.

32. According to the statistics given by the annual report of the Social Welfare Department (1964/1965), in 1964 the enrollment rate at the OCSD dropped to 50. We are doubtful about the accuracy of this number as there were 120 students there in 1963 and 100 in 1965. However, although this

sudden drop in enrollment does not appear reasonable, we cannot find other relevant data to either confirm or dispute it.

33. We know only that the Deaf principal of the Hong Kong Deaf and Dumb Association School once established a Deaf school in Shen Yang (a city in northeastern China) (www.cnDeaf.com/html/tejjiaodongtai/20071119/516.html; accessed June 17, 2010) and that another Deaf teacher came from Guangzhou (Hong Kong Society for the Deaf 1987).

34. One informant commented that the HKSD did not want to accept students from signing schools because it did not want to expose its students to sign language input.

35. The report stated that, for the 1974/1975 school year, the Lutheran School for the Deaf rented extra space at a nearby theological college and offered twenty primary classes. According to the same report, up to that time the school had offered only five classes.

36. The Hong Kong Deaf and Dumb Association, which was the first Deaf organization in Hong Kong, was established in 1955 by Deaf immigrants from China.

37. In the interviews we asked our informants for their perception of the underlying cause of the lexical variations in HKSL. Many of them said the signs created by students at different schools are a major factor, but at least three informants openly stated that such variations are minor and that Deaf people can still understand each other with ease.

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Appendix I.

Question Items in the Interview

Personal Information

Date of birth, place of birth, sex, age

Degree of hearing loss

Use of hearing aids/cochlear implant

Means of communication

Education

Highest level of education attained

Which school(s) did you go to? When?

Were the teachers hearing or Deaf?

How many Deaf students were there in a classroom?

How many teachers were there in the school?

Did the same teachers teach all subjects?

Deaf Teacher

Where did the Deaf teacher(s) (if any) come from? Hong Kong? Mainland China?

What was/were the name(s) of the Deaf teacher(s)?

What language did the Deaf teacher(s) use in class?

Was/were the Deaf teacher(s) fluent in that language?

How well did you understand the lessons conducted by the Deaf teacher(s)?

What language do you want the Deaf teacher(s) to use in teaching?

Would you like the Deaf teacher(s) to use sign language?

Did the school principal allow the Deaf teacher(s) to use sign language in class?

Hearing Teacher

What language did the hearing teachers use in class?

How many hearing teachers in your school know natural sign language? What were their names?

How many hearing teachers in your school know Signed Chinese? What were their names?

Were the hearing teachers fluent in using the medium of instruction (speech, signed Chinese, or natural sign language)?

How well did you understand the lessons conducted by the hearing teacher(s)?

What language do you want the hearing teachers to use in teaching?

Would you like the hearing teachers to use sign language?

After-Class Communication at School

What language did the Deaf teacher(s) use when communicating with Deaf students after class?

What language did the hearing teachers use when communicating with Deaf students after class?

What language did the Deaf students use when communicating among themselves?

Did you stay in a student dormitory? If yes, for how many years?

Why did you stay in a student dormitory?

How many students were there in the dormitory?

What language did the students use in the dormitory?

Did students create their own signs?

In the dormitory, were the students allowed to use signs as a means of communication?

Social Gathering

Did you maintain contacts with your schoolmates after you left school?

What did you usually talk about in such gatherings?

What activities did you engage in with your Deaf friends?

Sign Language Use

Do you have any Deaf family members? Which school(s) did they go to?

What language do you use to communicate with your family members?

Do you know what kind of sign language variety you are using?

Which school does your sign language variety belong to?

When did you start learning sign language?

Where or from whom did you learn sign language?

How do you evaluate your sign language proficiency?

Backgrounds of Friends

Which schools did your Deaf friends attend?

What kind of sign language variety do you use when you communicate with your Deaf friends?