

# Pointing signs in HKSL have undergone a language change and have a new function similar to *uh* in English...

## More than a pointing: Pointing sign as an interjective hesitator in Hong Kong Sign Language

Kenith K.L. Chan, Felix Y.B. Sze  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

### INTRO

- Interjective hesitator: subcategory of filler which fills up the delay when a speaker meets a word-finding difficulty.#

E.g. *uh* in English,

*ano* in Japanese#,

*nei-ge* in Mandarin#

??? in HKSL

- Pragmaticization: a grammatical item  
-> a pragmatic marker

E.g. *ano* in Japanese#

### Are pointing signs in HKSL undergoing this process?

#Hayashi & Yoon. *Stud. in Lang.* 2006, 30(3), 485.

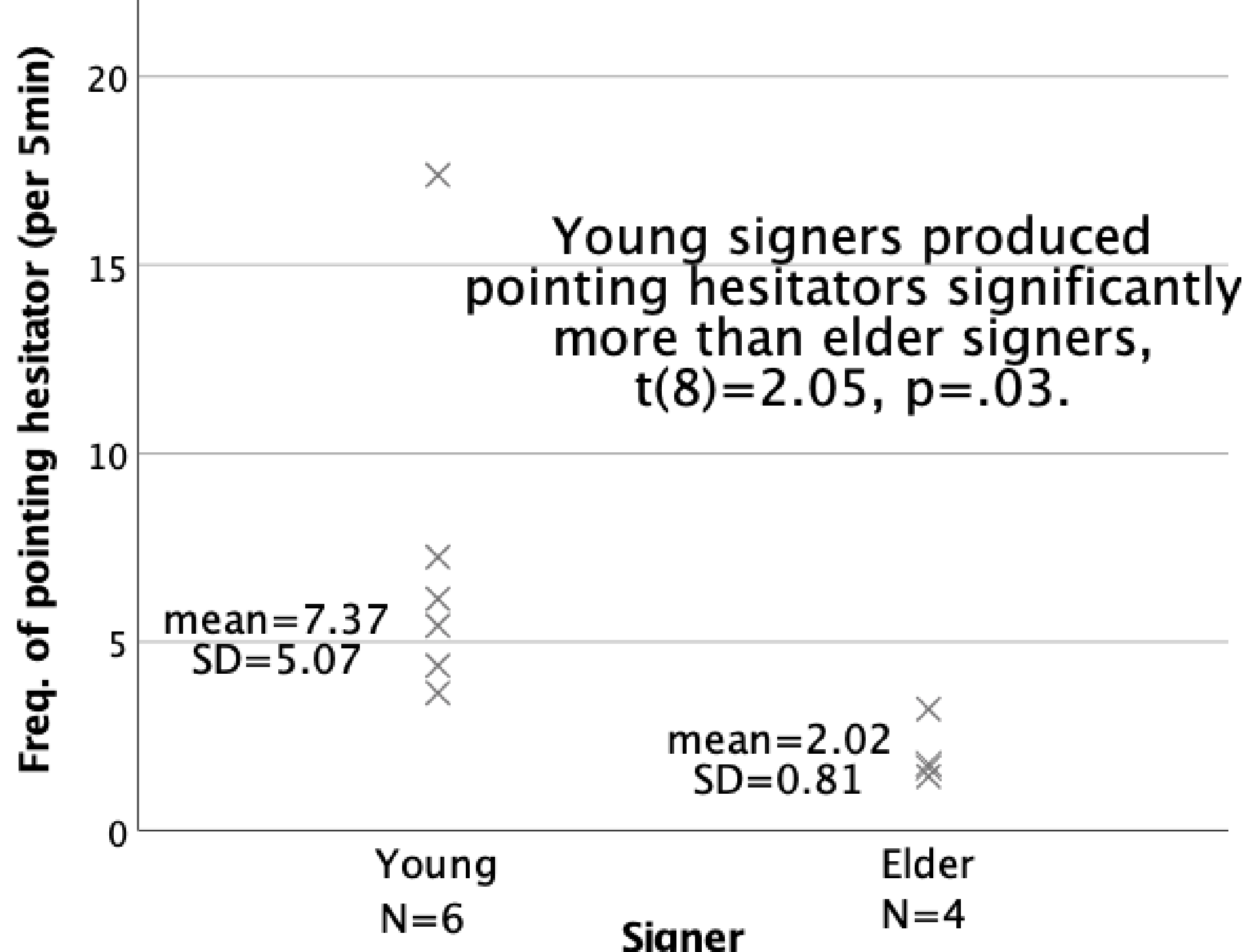
### METHODS

- 5 x 20mins conversational data: 3 pairs of young native signers (~30yrs old) & 2 pairs of elderly signer (~60yrs old)
- Identified non-referential & non-locative pointing signs by native signers

### RESULTS

1.

Freq. of Pointing Hesitator by young and elder signers



- None of the hesitators pointed downward, toward the signer himself/herself, or to the ipsilateral side of the signing hand

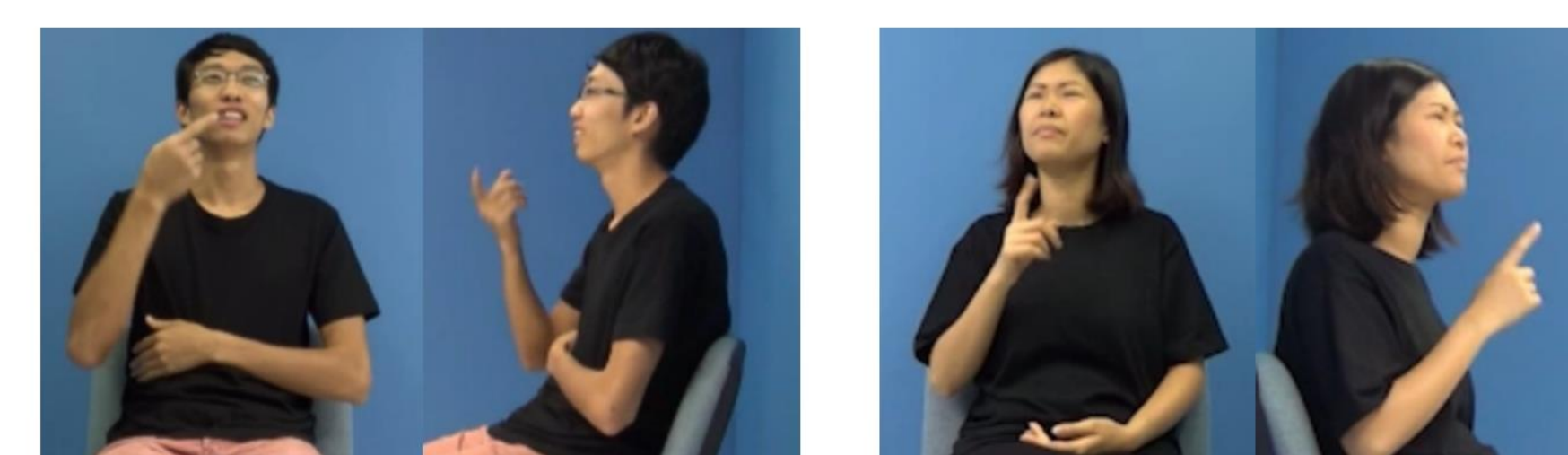
### DISCUSSION

- Pragmaticization took place in HKSL.
- Pointing signs in HKSL have a new function: interjective hesitator.
- Direction of pointing interjective hesitators are not fixed, but they tend to avoid directions that would lead to misunderstanding or require strenuous wrist extension.

### MORE about pointing interjective hesitators

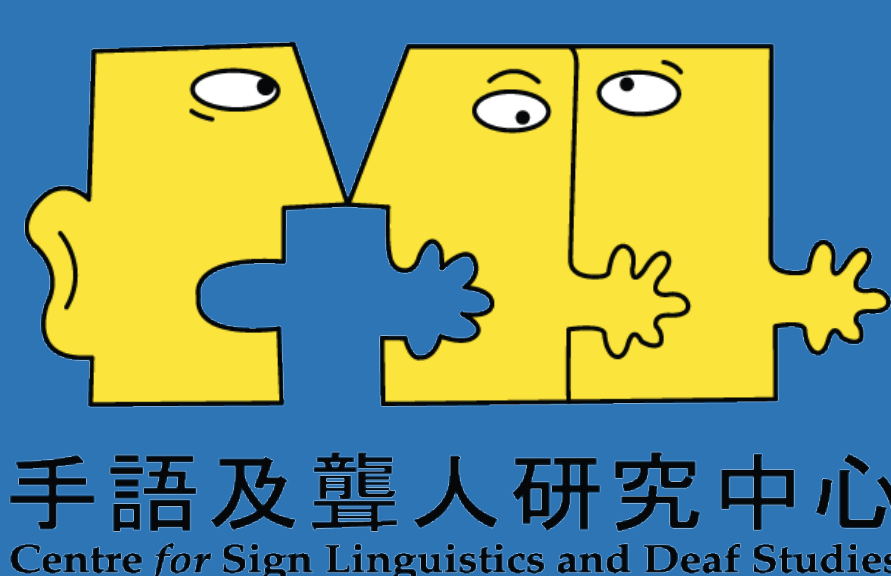
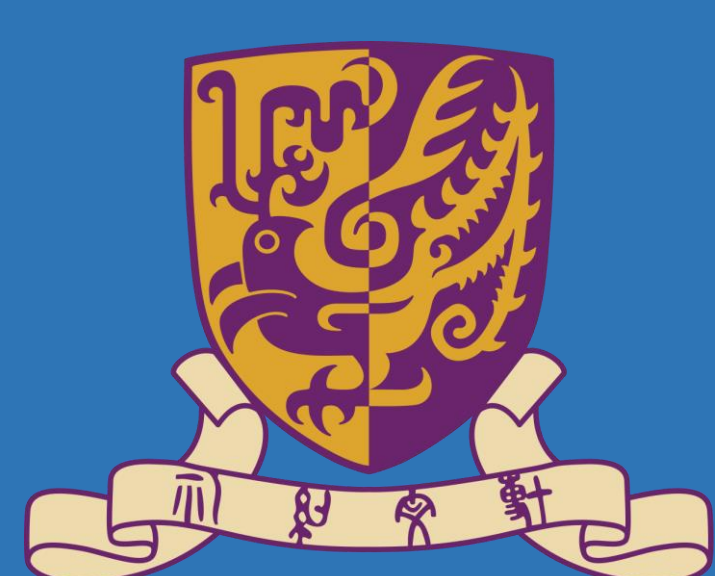
How to identify hesitators:

- Is the pointing sign associated with an entity or an event? (Referential?)
- Would the utterance become 'bad' if the pointing sign was deleted? (Syntactically important?)
- Is the pointing direction important? (Locative?)



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thank Mr. Chu Kwan Ngai Kenny and Ms. Xu Hong Sandy, who provided judgments and comments on the signing conversation.



手語及聾人研究中心  
Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies