

# Evaluating theories of language acquisition and impairment through children's learning of sign languages

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## Abstract

Various theories of developmental language disorders have sought to explain these impairments in modality-specific ways – for example, that the language deficits in SLI arise from impairments in auditory processing. Studies of signers with language impairments provide a unique opportunity to compare compromised abilities across language modalities. As the study of sign language acquisition reveals what is modality specific and general in development so developmental sign language impairments can also reveal the relationship between language impairments and modality. In this talk I describe the development of a research program to document atypical sign language use. I will try to relate this set of projects to how we think language and other cognitive systems are linked and what distinguishes sign language from gesture.

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