



The Center for Gesture, Sign, and Language presents



**Unexpected routes to language:  
Evidence from child and adult  
homesign systems  
Marie Coppola (University of  
Connecticut)**

**Friday, February 19, 3:30-5pm  
Neubauer Collegium  
5701 S Woodlawn, First Floor Forum**

Colloquium organized by [The Center for Gesture, Sign, and Language](#) with support from the [Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society](#).

*Many trajectories of emerging language systems assume the development of a conventional lexicon as a starting point, subsequent development of morphological and syntactic structure, and the possibility of never developing relatively more arbitrary structure such as phonology. I will discuss three types of recent evidence from child and adult homesign systems, comparing them with early cohorts of signers of an emerging language which do benefit from a linguistic model and a linguistic community. 1) At the lexical level, a fully connected social network, vs. one in which all individuals do not interact with each other, hastens conventionalization of lexical items. 2) The emergence of morphophonological contrasts (in terms of the distribution of complexity of finger configurations) precedes morphosyntactic oppositions (in terms of the mapping of handshape type to the presence/absence of an agent) in both child and adult homesign systems. Finally, I will discuss how the absence of a language model and linguistic community has a negative impact on narrative abilities in people who are cognitively mature and have extensive life experience. Taken together, these results suggest that the progression of linguistic organization at various levels interacts with the presence of a language model, interaction within the context of a linguistic community, as well as the structure of interactions between and among users.*

Free and open to the public. ASL-English interpreting will be provided. Persons with disabilities who need an accommodation in order to participate in this event should contact Laura Tharsen at [ltharsen@uchicago.edu](mailto:ltharsen@uchicago.edu).