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978-0-521-83297-7 - Australian Sign Language (Auslan): An Introduction to Sign Language Linguistics

Trevor Johnston and Adam Schembri

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Australian Sign Language (Auslan)

This is first comprehensive introduction to the linguistics of Auslan, the sign language of Australia. Assuming no prior background in language study, it explores each key aspect of the structure of Auslan, providing an accessible overview of its grammar (how sentences are structured), phonology (the building blocks of signs), morphology (the structure of signs), lexicon (vocabulary), semantics (how meaning is created), and discourse (how Auslan is used in context). The authors also discuss a range of myths and misunderstandings about sign languages, provide an insight into the history and development of Auslan, and show how Auslan is related to other sign languages, such as those used in Britain, the USA and New Zealand. Complete with clear illustrations of the signs in use and useful further reading lists, this is an ideal resource for anyone interested in Auslan, as well as those seeking a clear, general introduction to sign language linguistics.

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To our parents: Patricia and Eric Johnston &
Marie and Charles Schembri

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Conventions for sign notation

General example	Specific instances	Explanation and example
SIGN	CAR	The English gloss of a sign is written in small capitals. It is the most commonly associated and/or nearest translation of the sign. Video clips of all Auslan signs cited in this book can be viewed by visiting the on-line Auslan dictionary at www.auslan.org.au .
SIGN-SIGN	LOOK-BACK	A sign glossed with more than one word. The words are separated by hyphens.
PRO-	PRO-1 I, me PRO-2 you PRO-3 he/him, she/her, it	A personal pronoun.
POSS-	POSS-1 my, mine POSS-2 your, yours POSS-3 his, her, hers, its	A possessive pronoun.
PT+	+f forward/front +c centre/self +lf left +rt right +dn down	A pointing sign. The gloss is followed by specification, after a plus symbol, of the location it points to.
SIGN+lf lf+SIGN+rt SIGN+gen	+f forward/front +c centre/self +lf left +rt right +dn down +rept repeated +exh exhaustive ('all') +mult multiple ('each') +fast +slow +hold +gen genitive (possessive)	A manual modification made to a sign is described by letters after a plus symbol, as listed here. The modification may involve a location, a direction, a manner of movement, or the addition of an affix (+gen). For example: ASK+lf = 'the sign ASK directed towards the left of the signing space ("ask him/her")'. lf+ASK+rt = 'the sign ask moves from the left of the signing space to right side ("he/she asked him/her")'. MOTHER+gen = 'the sign mother with the possessive affix ("mother's")'.
A-B-C-D.....	T-O-Y-O-T-A	A fingerspelled sign is represented by letters in small capitals separated by hyphens.
SIGN^SIGN	MOTHER^FATHER	The two elements of a compound are separated by a caret symbol (^). For example, MOTHER^FATHER = PARENTS.

General example	Specific instances	Explanation and example
<u>expression</u> SIGN SIGN SIGN	br brow raise bf furrowed brow hs head shake hn head nod hb head back ht head tilted htf head tilted forward htb head tilted back fl forward lean rl right lean ll left lean mm pursed lips oo rounded lips th protruding tongue gr grimace cs cheek to shoulder ! with stress rs: role shift (specified after colon)	A bar above a sign or series of signs is used to show the scope of a facial expression or non-manual behaviour. Letters at the right hand end of the bar are used as labels, with meanings as listed. For example, br PRO-2 DEAF <i>Are you deaf?</i> = the signer raises the eyebrows while the signs PRO-2 and DEAF are produced. An English translation (<i>in italics</i>) may be added underneath, as shown.
CL:G-PERSON-PASS-BY		A depicting sign is represented by CL (for ‘classifier’) followed a colon and a label representing the handshape. It is followed by a description of what is depicted.
CA:WINK		Constructed action is represented by CA (for ‘constructed action’) followed a colon and a description of the action.
sh SIGN2 2h SIGN1 dh SIGN3	sh = subordinate hand 2h = two hands dh = dominant hand	The notation of subordinate (usually left) and dominant (usually right) hands is placed on separate tiers to show simultaneous articulation of two signs, one on each hand. For example, sh CL:B-flat 2h BALL dh PT+dn = ‘after the two-handed sign BALL is produced the dominant hand points under subordinate flat hand’.
B, I, 5, Bent 5, A, H, X, 7, O, gO, O>, C, V, F, I, W, Y, ILY, 3.		Letter, names or numbers are used to refer to handshapes in the text. A complete list of handshapes used in Auslan can be found in Table 4.9