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CHAPTER 30

IRISH SIGN LANGUAGE

Ireland's Third Language

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C30S1

30.1 INTRODUCTION

C30P1 IRISH Sign Language (ISL) is the third official language of Ireland.¹ While formal recognition is a recent phenomenon (Irish Sign Language Act 2017), reference to signing in Ireland can be traced back to at least the eighteenth century. Thus, it is not a 'new' language.

C30P2 Many myths exist around sign languages. One prevalent myth is that they were invented by hearing people to educate deaf people. This is untrue. From what we can tell, as long as there have been deaf people around, there has been some form of visual-spatial communication (McBurney 2012; Bakken Jepsen et al. 2015).

C30P3 Furthermore, it is often assumed that there is a single international sign language, which there is not (although there does exist a lingua franca known as International Sign, which requires its users to engage in trans-languaging, Adam 2012). When ISL is referenced, people often assume that the language is a version of Gaeilge (Irish) on the hands, which it is not. In fact, despite its physical proximity to Irish, it is not influenced by the language in any way. This is, in great part, because deaf children from Irish-speaking families were traditionally sent to boarding school in Dublin, and deaf pupils were exempted from Irish (e.g. see Department of Education 1994; Leeson 2005).

C30P4 In contrast, ISL has much closer contact with Irish English (IrE), but should not be mistaken for a manual version of it. That is, while some elements of IrE have arguably influenced the form of contemporary ISL, particularly in terms of fingerspelling and what is referred to as 'mouthing', as we shall see, the languages diverge typologically. However, the relationship between ISL and IrE concerning grammatical structures,

¹ Note that all information provided here refers to the Republic of Ireland. The situation in Northern Ireland is intricate and remains relatively unexplored. It is not taken into account here.

vocabulary items, etc. is wholly under-studied—no work has focused on this to date. ~~Investigations into the possible impact of characteristic grammatical IrE features, such as the *after*-perfective (see Filppula, Chapter 8 this volume), by deaf and hearing signers alike remains a desideratum for future research.~~

C30P5 In addition to English, ISL has borrowed from other languages that it has come in contact with, including French Sign Language (LSF), British Sign Language (BSL), American Sign Language (ASL), and French. But ISL has also travelled. Leeson and Saeed (2012: 2) report that Irish religious orders and some lay teachers, engaged in deaf education, travelled to Australia and South Africa. The variety of ISL that they used has left its mark on some varieties of Australian Sign Language (Auslan), particularly the variant used by Catholics (Adam 2014); and South African Sign Language (SASL), most notably the Cape Town variety of SASL, which Irish deaf visitors report as reminiscent of ‘old’ female-variant ISL (see also section 30.2.2; Aarons and Reynolds 2003; Leeson and Saeed 2012). In part, we can trace this back to the fact that the first principal of the school for the deaf was a deaf Irish woman, Bridget Lynne, who travelled to the Cape of Good Hope in 1873 and ran the school until 1886 or 1887 (Leeson and Saeed 2012).

C30P6 In this chapter, we draw on a range of data sources including the Signs of Ireland Corpus (SOI), a digital, annotated set of monologues from 40 ISL signers from across the Republic of Ireland (Leeson et al. 2006; Leeson 2008) who attended either St Joseph’s or St Mary’s school for deaf children and were (at time of filming) based in Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Galway, or Wexford. The main aim of this chapter is to present a portrait of language variation and change with regard to ISL, and in the process we touch upon the history and typology of the language (section 30.2), linguistic lenses for analysing sign languages, and in particular ISL (section 30.3), attitudes towards and ideologies of the language (section 30.4), as well as language contact (section 30.5).

C30S2

30.2 HISTORY AND TYPOLOGY OF IRISH SIGN LANGUAGE

C30P7 The history and development of ISL are closely entwined with its typology, which we turn to here. Figure 30.1 presents a summary overview of the milestone influences on ISL.

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30.2.1 Where does Irish Sign Language begin?

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When considering the transmission of sign languages, schools for the deaf are considered key (Matthews 1996; Ladd 2003). The number of deaf children who acquire a sign language from deaf, signing parents is very low, with estimates assuming 5–10%. The remaining 90–95% of deaf children are typically born to hearing parents

who cannot sign (Mitchell and Karchmer 2004; Chen-Pichler 2012). Thus, schools for the deaf traditionally served as key sites for sign language transmission everywhere.

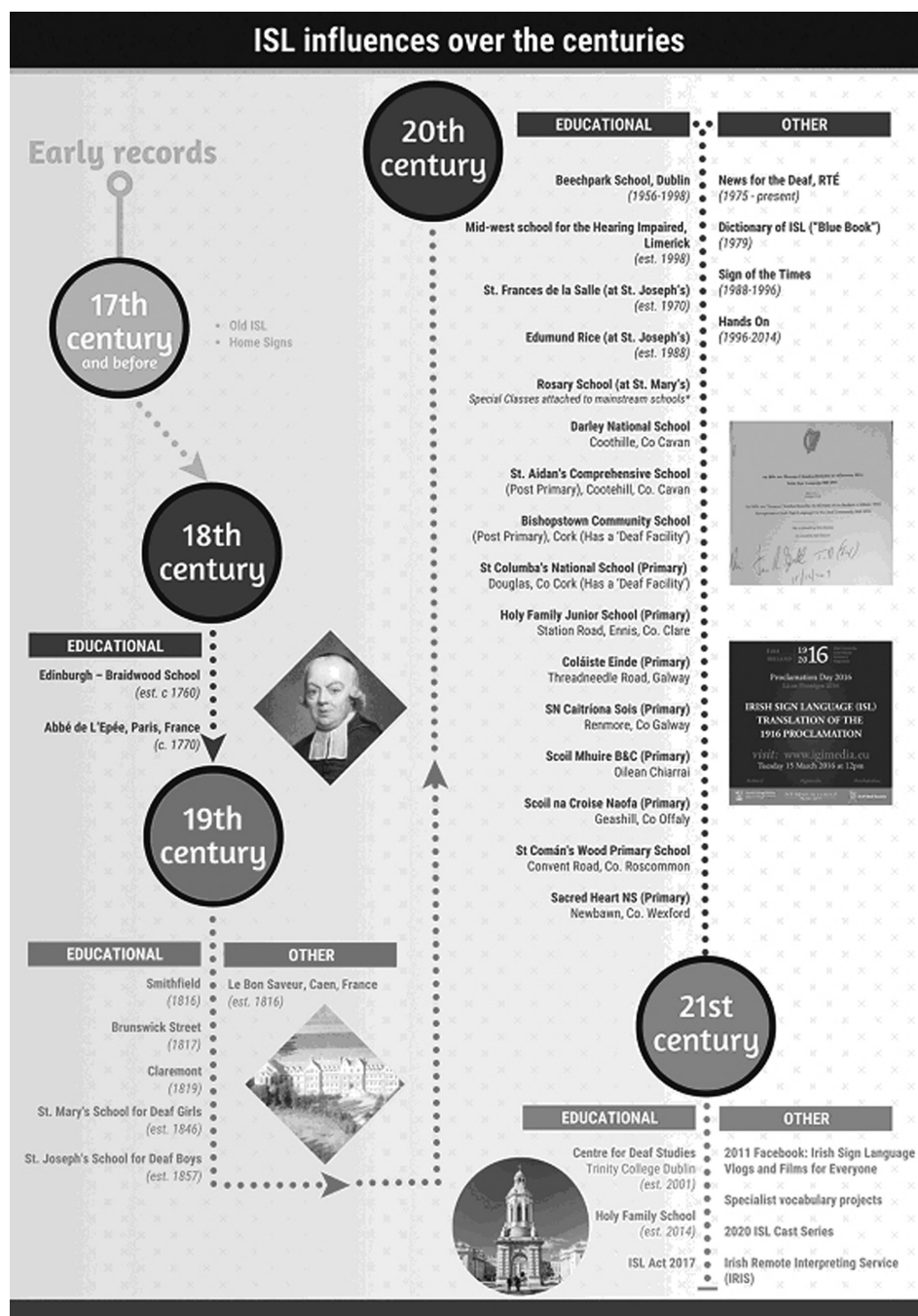
C30P9 In the Irish context, the first school for the deaf was established in 1816 (McDonnell 1979). The absence of any formal educational system prior to this time should not presuppose the absence of any sign language usage in Ireland (Leeson and Saeed 2012). Leonard and Conama (2020: 1) argue: '[the] history of Irish signed language(s) used by Deaf people is neither the story of signing systems invented by hearing people, nor of a single genesis leading in a straight line to modern ISL—but a layered and diverse account of social, historical, educational and language change.' They present a range of evidence drawing on fragmentary sources that point to sign language use across both the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Ireland by deaf people. Their dataset includes newspaper reports of court proceedings and census data, providing a tantalizing, incomplete, window onto use of 'natural signs' (the term used in many documents they found). Census data allowed for the tracing of family groupings of deaf people (e.g. deaf people married to other deaf people, or families with several deaf siblings). In such cases, where deaf children grew up with hearing families, the presence of home-signing systems is also highly likely (Leeson and Saeed 2012; Leonard and Conama 2020).

C30P10 A total of nine educational institutes dedicated to deaf education were established between 1816 and 1849 (McDonnell 1979; Pollard 2006), with the Dublin-based Claremont Institute a key point of reference. There, the original headmaster was an alumnus of the famous Edinburgh-based Braidwood school (established in the late eighteenth century), who must have known British Sign Language (BSL) (Woll and Sutton-Spence 2007). Into the 1970s, Claremont Institute alumni used the two-handed BSL alphabet, and many contemporary ISL signs can be traced back to BSL-influenced signs from this period, e.g. ISL signs for PROFESSIONAL, MEMBER, GUINNESS all take initialized handshapes that come from the BSL manual alphabet, but none of these signs are the BSL signs for these concepts (Leeson and Saeed 2012). The sign GUINNESS is exemplified in Figure 30.2.

C30P11 From its establishment, Claremont served as the main school for the deaf in Dublin. The Claremont admission books reveal that many of the children are reported to have had 'signs' on arrival (Pollard 2006). Leonard and Conama (2020: 8) observe that the second school for the deaf (the Cork Day School) was not established until 1822:

C30P12 deaf children in Ireland would not have been exposed to any other standardised form of signed language used in Deaf education, other than Claremont Sign. It is possible that some applicants had already been educated privately or abroad, but given the high cost of these options, and the fact that Claremont was primarily intended as a school for the poorer classes, this seems a highly unlikely possibility.

C30P13 Yet between 1816 and 1922, some 50% of the children admitted to Claremont were recorded as having 'signs' (Leonard and Conama 2020: 8). Thus, we know that there was an 'Old ISL' in existence prior to this time (Leeson and Saeed 2012; Leeson, Saeed, and Grehan 2015),



C31F1 **FIGURE 30.1** Influences on ISL typology and variation: seventeenth to twenty-first centuries



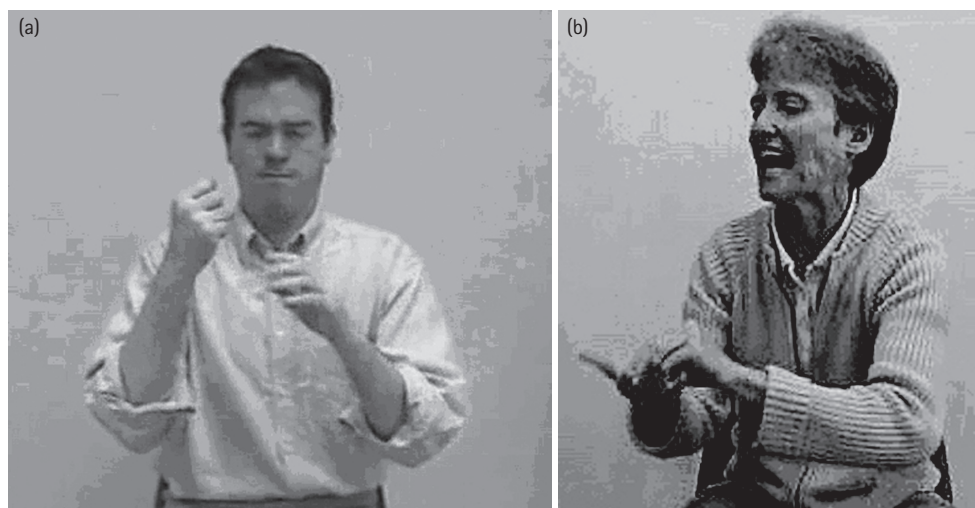
C31F2 **FIGURE 30.2** GUINNESS: the handshape captured here is the BSL G handshape (Eilish (Dublin), SOL, personal stories 10)

confirmed also by historical documentation reporting the participation of deaf people as signing witnesses in court cases dating back to the late 1700s (Leonard and Conama 2020).

C30P14 While most of the children registered at Claremont were Catholic, a Protestant doctrine was taught (Pollard 2006; Woll and Sutton-Spence 2007). This concerned the Catholic Church. Father Thomas McNamara, a Vincentian who, fearing ‘wholesale proselytism’ (McDonnell 1979: 13), visited Caen to experience how Catholic education was being delivered in France, and went on to contribute to the establishment of the Catholic Institution for the Deaf and Dumb (as it was then; ~~now Catholic Institute for Deaf People, CIDP~~) in 1846. Critical to the story of contemporary ISL, the Dominican Sisters, who managed and ran St Mary’s School for Deaf Girls, sent two of their nuns and two young deaf girls (Agnes Beedan, aged 8, and Mary Ann Dougherty, aged 9) to Le Bon Sauveur school in Caen for a six-month stay. Here, a form of signed French² was used in teaching, though it is fair to speculate that amongst themselves, the deaf children used contemporary Langue des Signes Française (LSF) (Leeson and Saeed 2012). This French connection thus built on and integrated with whatever form of ‘Old ISL’ was in existence (the Claremont variety, homesign systems, and other varieties that may have been in use). We must also remember that the Dominican Sisters sought to modify the

² Signed French was a methodical system developed to represent the morphology and syntax of written French, just as signed English sought to represent the properties of written English. This manifested, for example, in the creation of initialized signs and signs to mark morphological endings like -ING, -ION, -s (plural) and -s (present tense, added to verbs).

form of signed French that they learned in Caen to map onto the grammar of English so that they could teach through a form of signed English (Foran 1994; McDonnell 1997). As a result, there are French and English influences on the forms of ISL signs that are observable via the extent of initialization in the language. This can be seen in signs like *MOTHER*, which takes an ISL M handshape, and *FATHER*, which takes an ISL F handshape. Some LSF signs were borrowed into ISL; for example, there is a traditionally female variant for *FRIDAY* that is articulated with a V handshape at the chin, maintaining the connection to the French *vendredi* (Matthews 1996); and see Figure 30.4). There are also BSL borrowings—some more recent, and many of which also face some resistance from language users who may consider them as not quite ISL, e.g. one variant of *HAVE* is borrowed from BSL,³ widely used and sometimes contested. Two-handed *HAVE* was first described in 1847 with direct links to LSF (Foran 1994: 53). While this variant appears to be less widely used now than the BSL-influenced variant, it is firmly considered as an ISL lexical item (see Figure 30.3).



C31F3 FIGURE 30.3 *HAVE* (BSL-influenced) and *HAVE* (LSF-influenced)

C30P15 St Joseph's School for Deaf Boys was established in Dublin in 1857. Situated approximately one mile down the road from St. Mary's, the schools became *de facto* language islands (Grehan 2008): the Christian Brothers made alterations to the form of many signs that the Dominican Sisters had introduced in St Mary's, and it has been suggested that they drew on published references to ASL (Crean 1997). Folk belief suggests that the Christian Brothers wished to make the signs they learned from the Dominican Sisters less feminine and more masculine so as to be appropriate to the teaching of young boys

³ See <https://bslsignbank.ucl.ac.uk/dictionary/words/have-1.html> for the BSL dictionary entry for *HAVE*.

(Leeson and Grehan 2004). Whatever the motivation, the outcome of this deliberate modification of the signing systems used, coupled with the relative isolation of the girls from the boys, served to support the development of a significant gendered generational variant (e.g. LeMaster 1990). In the late 1970s, efforts to ‘unify’ the contemporary language to support ease of learning for hearing people led to what the Deaf community called ‘New ISL’ (see S. Foran’s Foreword in National Association for the Deaf 1979 for discussion).

C30S4 30.2.2 The introduction of oralism and its consequences

C30P16 Claremont report moving from signed instruction to an oral system, i.e. spoken instruction, in 1887 (McDonnell 1979). The time-frame is noteworthy, as it is within a decade of the Congress of Milan (1880), a key milestone in deaf history. The Congress, attended by mostly hearing educators of the deaf, declared the superiority of speech over sign and set deaf education on a course to pursue a ‘pure’ oral approach. Over time, this contributed to significant suppression of sign languages across the western world, the punishment of children for using sign language in educational spheres, and significant consequences for language transmission and usage as signing went ‘underground’ to survive (McDonnell and Saunders 1993; Leeson and Grehan 2004; Coogan and O’Leary 2019). While Claremont were ‘early adopters’ of oralism, the Irish Catholic Schools did not make the shift to oralism until the mid-twentieth century (Griffey 1994; Crean 1997). This shift is important because it led to the physical segregation of deaf children who were sign language users (so called ‘oral failures’) from those who were educated through speech only (so called ‘oral successes’) (Griffey 1994; Crean 1997; Grehan 2008). This, in turn, led to an increased level of variation, emerging from the within-school cohorts, strengthening the female and male variants (Leeson and Grehan 2004), and further facilitating generational variational divergence. A very simple example of this can be seen in the gendered variants for days of the week, which include documentation of the now extinct female variant (reported by Marian Moloney). Today, the female variant appears most widely used, though older, and mostly male, signers continue to use the male-variant signs shown in Figure 30.4.

C30P17 The consequences of the shift to a strict oralist regime have been well documented (e.g. Griffey 1994; Crean 1997; O’Connell 2013). At the same time, oral instruction (i.e. the inclusion of some speech training rather than a rigidly enforced oralist approach that had no place for sign language) was not considered problematic by Irish Deaf community members in the 1940s. Rather, the oral language policy that was enforced, which rigidly suppressed use of sign language, was highly problematic (Leeson and Saeed 2012).

C30P18 A consequence of the implementation of oralism was the difficulty students encountered in accessing the curriculum: they could not understand what their teachers were saying. Further, sign language use was actively suppressed. Students were forced to sit on their hands, confess signing as a sin, and give up sign language for Lent (McDonnell and Saunders 1993; Leeson and Grehan 2004). Students who signed were physically

DAYS OF THE WEEK	FEMALE VARIANT	MALE VARIANT	OBSOLETE FEMALE VARIANT (ST. MARY'S SCHOOL FOR DEAF GIRLS)
MONDAY			 WASH
TUESDAY			 HANG-CLOTHES-TO-DRY
WEDNESDAY			 IRONING
THURSDAY			 COOKING
FRIDAY			 FISH (ONE HANDED)
SATURDAY	 [ONSET]	 [ONSET]	 WASH -HAIR
	 [OFFSET]	 [OFFSET]	

C31F4 FIGURE 30.4 Gendered variants for days of the week in ISL

segregated from those who spoke (Grehan 2008). This led to a school-wide hierarchy which (falsely) considered those who spoke to be more intelligent than those who signed. Indeed, for many years, only those who were considered ‘oral successes’ could sit state examinations. This policy of strict segregation was effectively ratified by the 1972 Advisory Committee on the **education of the Deaf and hard of hearing**, which saw sign language as a last resort for children with ‘additional handicaps’, whom the authors perceived as ‘not capable of making adequate progress when taught by oral methods alone’ (Department of Education 1972: 69–70). Parents—both hearing and deaf—were advised against signing to their deaf children. Deaf siblings were told they could not sign to each other. This created several generations of Irish Deaf people who could not effectively communicate with their parents, and whose English language literacy skills were significantly behind that of their hearing peers (James, O’Neill, and Smyth 1990; Mathews and O’Donnell 2018). In recent years the situation has shifted, with increasing recognition of sign languages internationally and nationally (e.g. NCSE 2011).

C30P19 A myriad of social-emotional and educational issues ~~that~~ arose from this context—but our focus here is on the linguistic, which we turn to next.

C30S5

30.3 LINGUISTIC LENSES

C30P20 For a significant period, the study of sign languages was informed by spoken-language linguistics, which sought to apply theoretical frameworks suited to the analysis of languages in the oral–aural modality but inadequate for the analysis of languages expressed in the visual–gestural modality. This is a problem also encountered in the beginning of the study of non-Indo-European languages, for instance in Africa, which did not neatly fit into traditional grammatical categories based on Latin or Ancient Greek. Ultimately, this leads to epistemological biases and restricts our knowledge and understanding of lesser studied languages and their structures. That is why we feel the need to comment on this issue here. Vermeerbergen and Leeson (2011) point to the fact that two distinct traditions can be identified in European sign linguistics work in the 1980s and 1990s that impact on approaches to the description of sign languages. They follow Karlsson’s (1984) approach, labelling these the ‘oral language compatibility view’ and the ‘sign language differential view’.⁴

C30P21 The oral language compatibility view presupposes that most of what comprises signed language structure is in line with what is typically described for spoken languages (i.e. oral languages), which means that while signed languages are expressed in a different modality, they have a great deal of structural commonality with spoken languages. The differential view suggests that signed languages are so

⁴ See also Woll (2003) for a discussion of modern and postmodern approaches to sign linguistics.

unique in structure that their description should not be modelled on spoken language analogies (Vermeerbergen and Leeson 2011: 270).

C30P22 The majority of researchers, taking an ‘oral language compatibility view’ that would be outdated today, emphasized underlying commonalities across spoken and signed languages, adopting theories, methodologies, categories, and terminologies typically used in describing spoken languages. At the same time, characteristics that differentiate sign languages from spoken languages (e.g. non-manual features that function grammatically and the use of simultaneous constructions) often went undescribed or were minimized during this period. A major driver of this approach was the desire to clearly demonstrate that sign languages are natural languages (Vermeerbergen and Leeson 2011). In recent decades, this clear-cut distinction has blurred, with greater recognition attributed to modality differences. Some of the nuance comes from an increase in cross-linguistic work, made possible by the development of digital corpora of sign languages (Fenlon and Hochgesang 2022), including the Signs of Ireland Corpus (Leeson and Saeed 2012). This chapter emphasizes the increased overlap of the two views, showcasing some of the unique features of ISL, while at the same time demonstrating commonalities of ISL and IrE, as well as influences from IrE on ISL.

C30P23 While many have suggested that sign languages appear to be more similar to one another than are spoken languages, Woll (2003: 25) challenges us to explore the reasons why this might be the case. She suggests five possible reasons:

- C30P24** 1. the relative youth of signed languages (including creolization);
- C30P25** 2. iconicity;
- C30P26** 3. a link between sign languages and gesture;
- C30P27** 4. linear syntax intrinsically creates greater differences than spatial syntax;
- C30P28** 5. differences are there but researchers have not noticed them.

C30P29 Considering these points, Vermeerbergen and Leeson (2011) present an overview of a sample of characteristics that illustrate similarity across European sign languages, including the use of space to track reference, simultaneity, non-manual marking (e.g. used for marking *wh*-questions, topic-comment, negation, and conditionals), and the use of ‘classifier constructions’⁵ (though they note that the handshapes that are used to represent concepts such as ‘whole entities’ like vehicles vary across sign languages).

C30P30 The use of simultaneous constructions employing multiple articulators (including the hands, torso, eyes, and mouth) to present a range of different types of information patterns is similar across European sign languages too. Simultaneity can be described as occurring in three general ways: (i) manual simultaneity, (ii) manual–oral simultaneity, and (iii) multi-channel simultaneity involving non-manual articulators other than the mouth.

⁵ We note that the use of such terminology has been contested. See Schembri (2003) for an excellent overview.

This may involve the simultaneous production of different complete signs. Another possibility is that one hand holds the end-state of a sign while the other hand continues to produce one or more signs. This allows for a referent to be visibly maintained while something is predicated of it or a (spatial) relationship to the first entity is introduced via the signs produced by the other hand. This can be seen in the example from ISL shown in Figure 30.5, where the signer is recounting a version of the *Frog, Where Are You?* story (Mayer 1969). Here, Fergus D. recounts how a little boy, whose pet frog has escaped during the night, opens a sash window and his dog (with his head stuck in the glass jar that the pet frog had previously been in) jumps out of the open window. In (E), (F), and (G) we see Fergus D. use his non-dominant hand to hold the backgrounded position of the window sill that the dog, presented via a classifier handshape that is commonly labelled ‘CL-LEGS’, jumps over. Also codified here is relative height: From (D) we see that the signer’s eyegaze is downward, towards the ground; in (E), (F), and (G), we see the dog jump from a location that is commensurate with the windowsill (E), into the air (F) and downwards, towards the ground below (G). Across this transition from one space to the other, the signer’s eyegaze remains focused down towards the end-point of the dog’s movement. All of this information is packaged via a synergy of manual–non-manual simultaneity.

			
A. PUSH-UP WINDOW	B. WINDOW	C. (DOG)-HEAD- STUCK-IN-NECK-OF- JAR	D. PAWS-IN- FRONT
			
E. DOG-JUMP-UP- AND-OVER (starting point)	F. DOG-JUMP-UP- AND-OVER (mid point)	G. DOG-JUMP-UP- AND-OVER (end point)	

C31F5 **FIGURE 30.5** Translation: ‘(The boy) opened the window. The dog, with his head stuck in the jar, peered out of the window and jumped’ (simultaneous constructions, Fergus D. (Dublin), **frog** story, SOI)

C30P31 In classifier constructions like this example of CL-LEGS, the handshape can be thought of as phonemic but at the same time meaning-bearing (referring to the dog) in a particular context. This complicates the distinction of word classes in sign languages because of a lack of a clear-cut definition of the morpheme unit (Schwager and Zeshan 2008), especially in iconic signs where formational and functional parameters overlap. In sign languages, additional modality-specific features like mouth actions may therefore support word-class distinctions. In her analysis of word classes in ISL, Mohr (2014) takes this specific criterion into account. She finds that while there is no direct correlation between different types of mouth actions⁶ and word classes, a general co-occurrence of morphologically simpler signs with English-derived mouthings and morphologically complex signs with ISL-inherent mouth gestures can be observed (Mohr 2014: 148).

C30P32 Another aspect of Mohr's investigation which aims at an analysis less informed by spoken language is her overall distinction of word classes. While word classes are considered to be a central trait of human cognition (Rijkhoff 2007; Mohr 2014) and some classes are probably universal, there are considerable cross-linguistic differences concerning their number and character (Sasse 1993). However, given the above-mentioned problems concerning the determination of morphemes in signed languages, in-depth analyses of word classes in sign languages remain few and far between (Schwager and Zeshan 2008). Most studies assume a rather traditional distinction between nouns, verbs, adjectives, and various functional classes. This distinction is problematic, specifically with regard to the verb/adjective distinction: sign languages do not usually have a copula, and property denoting signs like GOOD or HAPPY can be used in the predicate slot of a sentence, thus fulfilling predicative function (Mohr 2014: 134–7), as shown in example (1).

- (1) GIRL HAPPY (ISL)
 girl be.happy
 'The girl is happy/A happy girl'

C30P33 These signs do not, however, take person or direction of movement markers, which is why Mohr (2014: 138) defines this syntactic category as 'bare predicates'. Two lexical classes⁷ can fill the bare predicate slot in ISL sentences, according to Mohr (2014: 144): aktionsart verbs and multifunctional signs. The first are signs like CRY, which can be marked for different aktionsarten like intensive or iterative, the latter are signs like HEARING and DEAF, which can also be marked for person, direction of movement but, as opposed to Aktionsart verbs, can also occur as referential phrases, see example (2).

⁶ These are discussed in more detail in section 30.5.1.

⁷ Mohr distinguishes between syntactic categories and lexical classes, in line with most typological approaches to word class research (see Sasse 1993).

- (2) a. BOY HEARING (ISL)
 boy be.hearing
 ‘The boy is hearing/A hearing boy’
 b. HEARING TALK (ISL)
 hearing talk
 ‘The hearing[person] is talking.’

C30P34 The word classes of ISL as outlined here are certainly not in line with traditional Greek-based distinctions. However, this approach takes the communicative modality of sign languages into account by considering issues such as Aktionsart marking for intensive, iterative, or distributive, as well as marking for person and direction of movement on verbs. In this way, the distinction at least attempts an independent analysis of ISL, more suited to the visual-gestural modality of the language. Irrespective of whether this distinction is most applicable or not, we argue that more attempts at such epistemologically unbiased approaches to sign language analysis are required.

C30S6

30.4 LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS IRISH SIGN LANGUAGE, ENGLISH, AND OTHER FORMS OF SIGNING

C30P35 Language ideologies have been defined as ‘sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use’ (Silverstein 1979: 193). In this way, they mediate between the social practice of language and the socio-economic and political structures within which language(s) occur (Cavanaugh 2020: 52). This tenet is based on the assumption that language is an enactment of a collective order (e.g. Woolard and Schieffelin 1994). In this vein, language ideology functions as a critical point of departure for understanding the intersection between language and various forms of inequality (Cavanaugh 2020: 51), which play a central role in sign language research as well.

C30P36 Ideologies are closely linked to the study of language attitudes. While there has been considerable debate about the definition of the term ‘attitude’, particularly with respect to its impact on behaviour, there is general consensus that, in general, an attitude is ‘a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects’ (Sarnoff 1970: 279). Much language attitude research has focused on multilingual environments, often including minority languages (see e.g. Baker 1985; Giles, Leets, and Coupland 1990), and postcolonial contexts (see e.g. Kamwangamalu and Tovares 2016).

C30P37 There is also some literature on language attitudes towards sign languages (e.g. Lucas and Valli 1991). While there has been some work on ISL as well (Matthews 1996; Burns, Matthews, and Nolan-Conroy 2001; European Union of the Deaf 2001; Grehan 2008;

Leeson and Sheikh 2010; Feeney 2015), there is certainly scope for in-depth work. In this section, we aim at contributing a few recent insights to this field of study.

C30P38 Generally, language attitudes towards sign languages are similar to spoken (minority language) attitudes (Burns et al. 2001), though importantly, attitudes can and do shift over time. For instance, Burns (1998) found that only two-thirds of the deaf participants in her study recognized ISL as a ‘real’ language (see also Burns et al. 2001). This is in line with Conama’s (2020) outline of ideologies towards ISL and the initiatives that supported the recognition of ISL. At the beginning of the campaign, these initiatives were very much focused on the recognition of ISL as a language in its own right. Conama outlines the ISL recognition campaign between 1981 and 2016 with unique personal insight, and discusses in detail the changing ideologies in both the deaf and the hearing Irish population. He reports that the campaign only gained momentum in the twenty-first century, particularly after the rejection of the first bill in 2014. Earlier efforts in the 1980s and 1990s had not been universally accepted (Conama 2020).

C30P39 Further, there are dominant ideologies in place within the deaf community, favouring the Cabra male variety (Grehan 2008; Conama 2020). Additionally, as we have noted earlier (and see Figure 30.3), there are attitudes relating to borrowing of signs from other sign languages, and in particular, British Sign Language.

C30S7 30.4.1 Signed English versus Irish Sign Language

C30P40 As mentioned above, language contact between signed and spoken languages is very much an everyday occurrence, and also applies in the Irish case. This was sometimes referred to as Pidgin Sign Language but ~~was~~ later labelled contact signing, given that it does not meet all criteria of pidgins (see Lucas and Valli 1991). There is a whole continuum of contact signing from which signers may choose, based on several aspects of the speech event: topic, purpose of the communication, and participants (hearing, status, age, gender etc.: Burns et al. 2001). In Ireland, signed English (SE) is noteworthy in this regard.

C30P41 For educational purposes, an artificial sign system called signed English (sometimes, ‘signed exact English’ or SEE) or ‘methodical signing’, was created in the nineteenth century to support teachers in oral education in Ireland (Foran 1994; McDonnell 1997; Ó Baoill and Matthews 2000). This built on a direct translation of the French approach to oral education used in Caen, adapted to the Irish context by Father John Burke with some modifications to support the teaching of English (Foran 1994). The vocabulary used draws from an LSF-influenced ISL base, with additional signs created to reflect markers of spoken (Standard) English grammar,⁸ such as verb inflections. While the grammatical basis of SEE, i.e. morphology and syntax, seeks to reflect English, the linearity of

⁸ ~~As mentioned earlier,~~ the impact of specific Irish English grammatical forms on ISL remains unstudied.

SEE utterances makes the system difficult to adhere to rigidly, given the ‘natural desire to consider context and meaning when articulating one sign in meaningful visual relationship to another referent’ (Ó Baoill and Matthews 2000: 18). This emphasizes the impossibility of transferring a linguistic system from the oral–aural modality to the visual–gestural one without considering the unique possibilities for expressing meaning visually. SEE was considered the target for educated deaf people, and into the 1990s, there was a significant push-back against the use of ISL in educational settings; SEE was preferred. However, today, we see wider acceptance of ISL, with greater visibility of the language in professional and public spheres with commensurate reduced visibility of SEE. The change in attitudes might be due to increased lobbying for sign languages in Ireland, for instance, by institutions like the Irish Deaf Society, as well as official recognition of several national sign languages in many European countries. Conama (2020) outlines the ISL recognition campaign between 1981 and 2016, presenting a unique personal insight as a Deaf academic and activist. He discusses the changing ideologies prevalent in both the deaf and hearing Irish population in detail. He reports that the campaign for ISL recognition only gained momentum in the twenty-first century, particularly after the rejection of the first bill in 2014 (Conama 2020: 261–2).

C30S8

30.4.2 Irish Sign Language in the media

C30P42

As Figure 30.1 shows, the 1970s saw the beginning of ISL’s presence on national television, when deaf presenters were recruited to present the ‘news for the deaf’ as it was then labelled (now ‘news with signing’). In the 1980s, the magazine style programme ‘Sign of the Times’ was produced, featuring for the first time deaf presenters. Initially, there was a tendency to present information in signed English, which, as we have noted, was then considered a prestige variety. However, over the years, and certainly by the time that ‘Hands On’ replaced ‘Sign of the Times’, there was a push back from the Deaf community, demanding that ISL be used. Today, there is no regular magazine-type programme with signing on our screens, but the daily news with signing and weather forecasts are presented in ISL on RTÉ by deaf presenters. A small percentage of programming must be made available with ISL translation under the Broadcasting Act (2009), and increasingly we see deaf translators performing this work. Furthermore, across 2018–20, we have seen an increase in ISL on national broadcasts as part of government emergency responses to public emergencies (e.g. Storm Ophelia, COVID-19) (Leeson 2019; 2021).

C30S9

30.5 LANGUAGE CONTACT PHENOMENA

C30P43

Deaf people are typically multilingual, and use multimodal resources, i.e. sign, writing, and speech, for communication in their everyday lives (Quinto-Pozos and Adam 2013). This is due to the fact that most sign languages are minority languages, and Deaf signers

are exposed to majority languages in educational settings. Consequently, Deaf signers develop varying degrees of bilingual (often multilingual) competency across language modalities (signed, written, sometimes also spoken), and trans-languaging is common (Baker and Van den Bogaerde 2008; Mohr 2012; de Meulder et al. 2019).

C30P44 The abundance of language contact with ambient spoken languages results in a plethora of contact phenomena, including the borrowing of spoken words via ‘mouthings’ (e.g. Mohr 2012), code-blending of sign and speech (e.g. Emmorey, Borinstein, and Thompson 2005), code-switching between different sign languages (e.g. Quinto-Pozos 2009), and use of fingerspelling and initialized signs, formed with the handshape of the first letter of the sign’s meaning in the ambient spoken language (e.g. Quinto-Pozos 2007; Leeson and Saeed 2012; Leeson et al. 2020). Generally, the structure of these phenomena is rather complex due to the different sequencing of linguistic material in two modalities, and the possibility of simultaneous sequencing in the visual-gestural modality in particular (Grosjean 2008; Mohr 2012). In ISL, many of these contact phenomena have been shown to be closely linked to gender and age variation, brought about by separate schooling and different educational practices in Irish deaf schools until the end of the twentieth century (see section 30.2). In the following, the structure and use of two central language contact phenomena, mouthings and fingerspelling, are outlined in more detail. As mentioned before, the impact of IrE grammatical structures on ISL, among both deaf (native) signers and hearing L2 learners, remains unstudied and cannot be considered here.

C30S10 30.5.1 Mouthings

C30P45 Mouthings are part of the larger category of mouth actions in sign languages, which in turn are one type of non-manual marker (Boyes-Braem and Sutton-Spence 2001; Crasborn et al. 2008; Bank, Crasborn, and van Hout 2011; Mohr 2012). Mouth actions are generally subdivided into mouth gestures (a sign language-inherent category of mouth movements usually accompanying morphologically more complex manual signs) and mouthings (which are derived from the ambient spoken language). Some items, like CAKE and SCONE, are distinguished by mouthings alone. In this way, mouthings might also slightly change or add to the meaning of a sign, as shown in Figure 30.6, where the sign CUP-OF-TEA is accompanied by a mouthed ‘cappuccino’ changing the manual sign’s meaning.⁹

C30P46 Mohr (2014: 92–3) presents a six-part typology of mouthings in ISL. These form part of three larger groups, viz. (1) one-to-one matches of mouthings and signs, (2) mouthings and signs that do not match completely but are formally or semantically related, and (3) mouthings and signs that are not related in any way. The relation between these larger groups and the six sub-categories is illustrated in Table 30.1.

⁹ Note that there is also a lexical sign CAPPUCCINO which also takes the mouthing ‘cappuccino’.



C31F4 **FIGURE 30.6** Manual sign CUP-OF-TEA accompanied by mouthing ‘cappuccino’ (Marian (Dublin), personal stories 16, SOI)

C30T1

Table 30.1 Mouthing categories and subcategories		
One-to-one matches of mouthings and signs	Mouthings and signs that do not match completely but are formally or semantically related	Mouthings and signs that are not related in any way
<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Subcategories</i>
(1) One-to-one matches of mouthings and manual signs	(2) Mouthings semantically related to the manual sign (3) Verb mouthings with particularities a) accompanying what would be prepositional verbs in English b) accompanying ‘classifier constructions’ (4) Inflected verb/noun mouthings (5) Reduced mouthings	(6) Mouthings that do not directly correspond to the meaning expressed by the manual sign: (a) simultaneous compound or modifier mouthings (b) spread mouthings (c) relating to overall discourse/conversation

C3oP47 One-to-one matches of mouthings and signs or ‘standard mouthings’ (Bank et al. 2011) are semantically equivalent. For instance, the sign GOOD might be accompanied by a mouthed ‘good’, CHAIR by ‘chair’, etc. In this vein, the category is seemingly straightforward. However, it should be noted that equivalence, from a translation theoretical perspective, is a difficult issue in itself (Munday 2001). A classification of one-to-one matches thus depends on the availability of a translation in the target language on the one hand, on the other, the decision of what the source and what the target language is in these cases. These difficulties are reflected by some of the unwieldy category titles in Mohr’s typology.

C3oP48 These problems are also exemplified when looking at the other categories in more detail. ‘Mouthing variants’ refers to a semantic relation of similarity without total equivalence of two concepts (Bank et al. 2011). Examples of this are the manual sign BIG accompanied by a mouthed ‘massive’ or the ‘cappuccino’ example in Figure 30.6. These mouthings further specify the sign or even substitute a concept for which the signer might know a lexicalized sign (see also section 30.5.2 on fingerspelling). The third category of mouthings are similar to the second in that they present a general semantic relation between mouthing and sign but differ with respect to the kind of information provided. These mouthings provide less information than the sign, often due to the modality difference; that is, the ‘additional’ information in the sign is expressed by movement or directional patterns. An example of type 3a is the sign GO-IN accompanied by the mouthed word ‘go’ and the sign, MEET-PERSON, accompanied by the mouthed ‘meet’. Mohr (2014: 74) suggests that these mouthings hint that the verbs are the most salient part of these constructions. Inflected noun or verb mouthings are once again similar to categories 2 and 3 in that semantic similarity is central. However, they too express more information than the sign in isolation. For example, we see mouthings like ‘photos’ that express pluralization and ‘said’ to express past tense. Congruence (see Baker and van den Bogaerde 2008) is crucial as well. For example, while ISL nouns may be marked for number in a range of ways including iteration, and temporal marking can be periphrastic (realized by an adverb), individual items may be inflected in spoken English. For example, the sign YESTERDAY will typically co-occur with the mouthing ‘yesterday’. Finally, we also see reduced mouthings, with examples like BRILLIANT accompanied by ‘brill-’ or LANGUAGE accompanied by ‘l-’. In this last category, the mouthings do not correspond to the meaning expressed by the sign in any way, but relate to the broader discourse and usually function to further text coherence. Thus, simultaneous compounds (Vogt-Svendsen 2001) like STRIPES-ON-TOP-OF-SHOES accompanied by ‘brown, beige’ are unique phenomena of the visual-gestural modality. Mouthings that spread from an adjacent sign (type 6b above) often link pronouns and content signs or establish prosodic links (see also Mohr 2011; 2014). Such spread mouthings are quite frequent in the ISL corpus. Mouthings relating to the larger discourse as a metalinguistic remark are particularly intriguing. Mohr (2014: 81–2) mentions an example from the

SOI (Signs of Ireland Corpus), in which the mouthings ‘fuck, shit’ accompany the sign HOLD-OBJECT-AND-HANDBAG:

- C30P49** [In her story t]he signer was keen to take a stone she had found back home to her garden. In order to do so, she needed to put the rock in her handbag, which was too small and full with other things. So she took some items out of the bag but the stone still did not fit. The mouthing was uttered at the moment when she realized that the stone did not fit [...]
- C30P50** Such mouthing relates to the overall story and thus adds information simultaneously. This further emphasizes the unique character of cross-modal language contact phenomena. Finally, it should be mentioned that isolated mouthings, i.e. mouthings not accompanying a sign, also occur in ISL, albeit rarely. The question remains as to whether such mouthings should be analysed as instances of code-blending or considered a part of ISL.
- C30P51** Another issue that must be mentioned is the relationship of mouthings to macro-social factors such as gender and age. As outlined above, educational policies, specifically oralism, had a major influence on the use of English mouthings in different groups of Irish Deaf people (see also Ó Baoill and Matthews 2000; Mohr 2012; 2014; Fitzgerald 2014). Given that widespread oralism was implemented relatively late in Ireland, and possibly also given the fact that more isolated Deaf community spaces like Deaf clubs have decreased in number over the past decades, leading to increased sign language-spoken language contact, younger signers generally use more mouthings than older signers (Mohr 2014: 102). For instance, Mohr (2014) reports that signers born in 1957 and before, and who were the oldest cohort in the dataset she considered, used the smallest number of mouthings, while those in the youngest age group (born between 1969 and 1989) used mouthings most frequently. Further, due to the fact that oralism was introduced earlier at St Mary’s School for Deaf Girls than at St Joseph’s School for Deaf Boys, women use mouthings considerably more frequently than men (Mohr 2014: 99–100): the number of mouthings used by the women in Mohr’s study was twice that of the men.¹⁰ In these ways, gender and age can be shown to be interrelated with respect to usage of mouthings.

C30S11 30.5.2 Fingerspelling

- C30P52** Fingerspelling is considered a contact phenomenon resulting from sign language-written language contact (Quinto-Pozos and Adam 2013). In general, fingerspelling has been analysed in the theoretical framework of borrowing (Wilcox 1992; Sutton-Spence 1994; Brentari and Padden 2001). These studies argued that fingerspelling is non-native

¹⁰ However, Mohr (2014: 100) mentions that there are considerable differences between individual signers.

to sign language lexicons, but may undergo adaptation processes like lexicalization (Quinto-Pozos and Adam 2013) or nativization (Brown and Cormier 2017). Generally, fingerspelling co-occurs with mouthing—in ISL, the mouthing is typically of the target word rather than the individual letters articulated (e.g. ‘dog’ rather than ‘d.o.g.’).

C30P53 Fingerspelling is based on a sign language’s manual alphabet, which is used to spell out a word in the ambient spoken language; in the case of ISL this is usually English. Fingerspelling is used when there is no lexical sign for the concept referred to, when a dialectal variant exists, or when the **degree lexical** density is too great (see Sutton-Spence 1994; Quinto-Pozos 2007; Fitzgerald 2014; Leeson et al. 2020). Fingerspelling is most frequently used to reference proper nouns. In the case of lexical gaps, new words may be fingerspelled. Figure 30.7 shows the ISL alphabet, which differs significantly from the two-handed BSL manual alphabet (cf. Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999).

C30P54 Fingerspellings can also be lexicalized (Battison 1978). Ó Baoill and Matthews (2000) call these items ‘fingersigns’, which develop from regular use. For example, many place names are fingerspelled with ellipsis of some of the letters of the name, e.g. #L-K (Limerick) and #G-W-Y (Galway). The signs for some months are lexicalized fingerspellings, e.g. #J-A-N, #F-E-B. In these lexicalized fingerspellings, ‘[t]he individual letters are articulated using less space and the articulation of each segment is reduced.’ (Ó Baoill and Matthews 2000: 19). Interestingly, lexicalized fingerspellings are no longer perceived as spelling, as children are reported to ask for the spelling of these lexicalized items, indicating that they are conceived of as ‘monolithic’ signs (Ó Baoill and Matthews 2000: 19). This is confirmed by studies into the processing of lexicalized fingerspellings and lexical signs, which show that they are indeed processed similarly, and differently as compared to other linguistic material like written language (Waters et al. 2007).

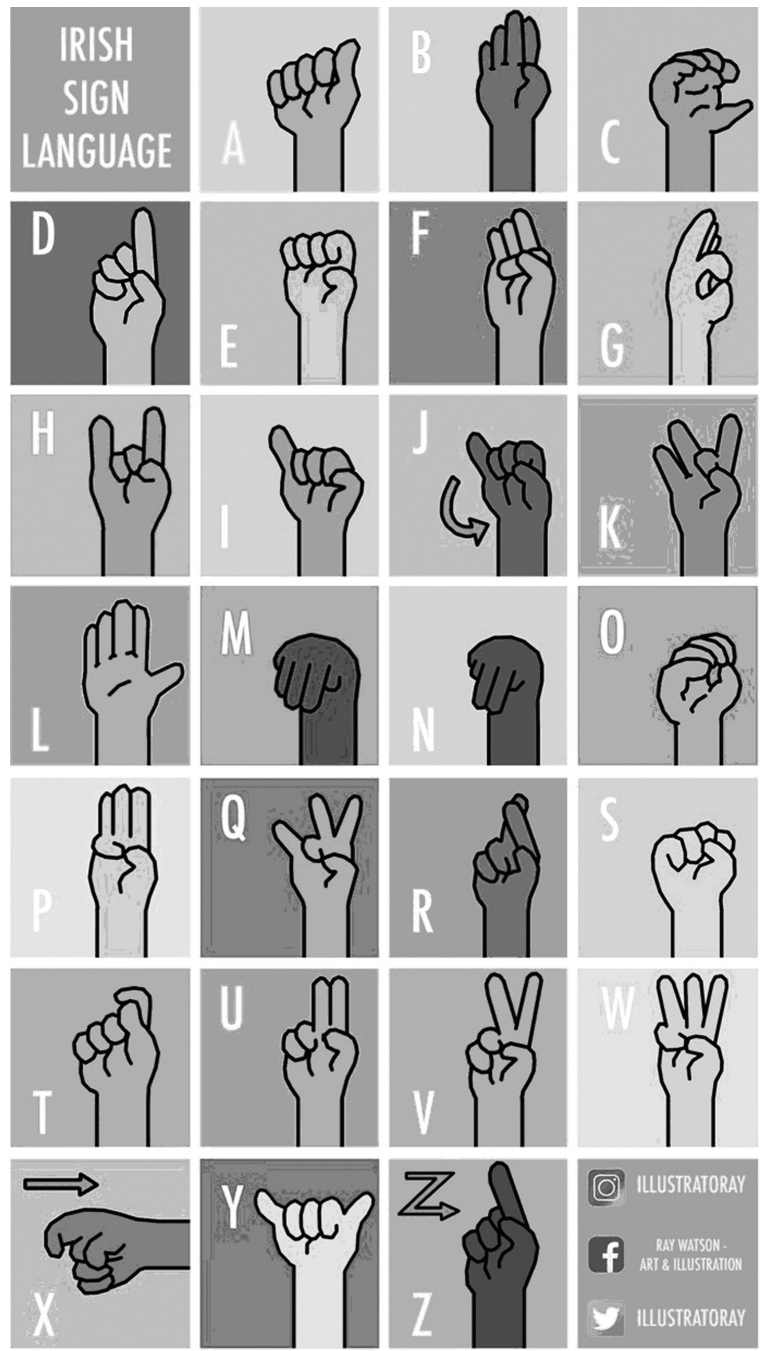
C30P55 Initialized signs are similar phenomena in that they can be considered to be a kind of lexicalized fingerspelling (Quinto-Pozos and Adam 2013), and usually use the first letter of the concept denoted by the sign as handshape (Padden 1998). ISL examples of initialized signs include the male variants of the signs for the days of the week shown in Figure 30.4.

C30P56 Finally, Padden (1998) also mentions so-called ‘abbreviation signs’, which exhibit influence of some letters of the corresponding spoken-language words. One example is **WORKSHOP**, formed with the W and S handshapes (see Figure 30.7; see also Quinto-Pozos and Adam 2013).

C30S12

30.6 WHERE TO NEXT?

C30P57 In this chapter we have shown that ISL has been influenced by many different sources—other sign languages, spoken languages, and different stakeholders, particularly in educational contexts. This has affected both the status and use of the language, as well as its structures. However, the developments outlined here are only those that are historically



C31F7 FIGURE 30.7 ISL manual alphabet (with permission of the illustrator, Ray Watson)

documented; others might have gone unnoticed. Given the recent official **acknowledgement** of ISL in the Irish Sign Language Act, greater presence in the media, and higher awareness of the language, more change can be expected.

C30P58 Recent years have seen several focused vocabulary development projects. These include the STEM glossary project, funded by the Science Foundation Ireland at Dublin City University,¹¹ ~~and the development of a series of terms linked to the COVID-19 emergency by a collaborative group including representation from the Irish Deaf Society, the Centre for Deaf Studies at Trinity College Dublin, and the Council for Irish Sign Language Interpreters (CISLI)~~¹². Interestingly, the COVID-19 group made a conscious decision to avoid initialized signs in their work: their goal was to maximize iconic representation of concepts where possible (Teresa Lynch, personal communication, August 2020).

C30P59 While the body of research on ISL has grown, especially since the establishment of the Centre for Deaf Studies at Trinity College in Dublin in 2001, there are many features and contexts of ISL use that remain unexplored across the broad sweep of linguistics, sociolinguistics, and applied linguistics (Leeson and Murtagh 2020). There is much work yet needed in documenting Ireland's third official language.

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¹¹ <https://www.dcu.ie/islstem>

¹² <https://www.irishdeafsociety.ie/irish-sign-language-for-covid19-related-vocabulary/>

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