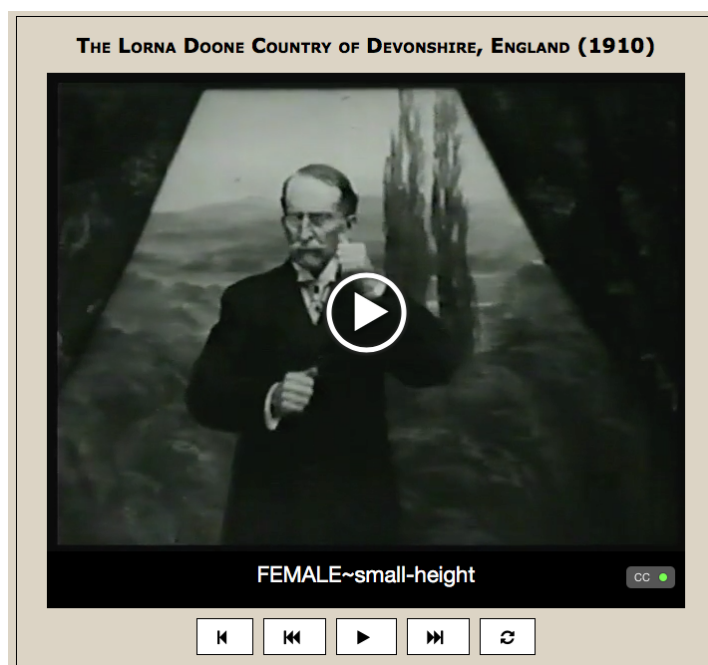


Sign Language in Action: Remembering, Revitalizing and Documenting the Ephemeral



Lorraine Leeson
Trinity Week 2016
“Language Homelands” Symposium



Centre for Deaf Studies

Who are you?



It is important that we know where we come from, because if you do not know where you come from, then you don't know where you are, and if you don't know where you are, you don't know where you're going. And if you don't know where you're going, you're probably going wrong.

— Terry Pratchett —

AZ QUOTES



Centre for Deaf Studies

1880 - Milan





Critically:

- Resolutions:
- (1) The Convention, considering the incontestable superiority of articulation over signs in restoring the deaf-mute to society and giving him a fuller knowledge of language, **declares that the oral method should be preferred to that of signs in education and the instruction of deaf-mutes.**
- (2) The Convention, considering that the simultaneous use of articulation and **signs has the disadvantage of injuring articulation** and lip-reading and the precision of ideas, declares that the pure oral method should be preferred.



Centre for Deaf Studies

George W. Veditz - “Preservation of the Sign Language” (1913)





Hand Talk : Indian Sign Language Council 1930



Strange Owl, Cheyenne,
contributes an anecdote.



The formal features of the
council over, the visitors relax.



General Scott opens the
council with a brief statement
of its object.



Tom White Horse, Arapahoe, tells
of things "heard but not seen" by
radio.



Ireland - early footage (c. 1937)



Sign Languages: Ephemeral



- Sign Languages are languages without written form.
- They are languages that were unrecognised by linguists until the 1950s.
- They remain unrecognised (legally) in many jurisdictions - as here in Ireland.

Centre for Deaf Studies

20th Century

- Technology:
 - Analogue: VHS!
 - The Digital Revolution begins!
 - Sign language on television
- Politically:
 - Resolutions passed recognising SLs: European Parliament (1988, 1998)
- Educationally:
 - Shifts in discourse from 1970s - 2000





Centre for Deaf Studies

21st Century

- Digital Data
 - Searchable corpora
 - Video data is ubiquitous
- Bio-medical shifts
 - A new eugenics?
 - Cochlear implants
 - Genetic Screening
- Sign Languages Endangered?

The screenshot shows the 'Australian Sign Language' page on the Endangered Languages Project website. The page has a blue header with the title 'Australian Sign Language' and a subtitle '[aka Auslan]'. Below the header, there is a navigation bar with tabs: 'Description', 'Resources', 'Activity', 'Bibliography', 'Suggest a Change', and 'Subscribe'. The main content area is divided into two sections. The first section, 'Language metadata', contains a table with the following information: 'ALSO KNOWN AS' (Auslan), 'CLASSIFICATION' (Sign Language, Australian), 'CODE AUTHORITY' (ISO 639-3), 'LANGUAGE CODE' (asf), 'DOWNLOAD' (As csv), and 'MORE RESOURCES' (OLAC search). The second section, 'Language information by source', features a quote from Trevor Johnston (2004) about the 'Corpus of grammar and discourse strategies of deaf native users of Auslan (Australian Sign Language)'. Below the quote, it states 'Threatened' with a '20 percent certain, based on the evidence available' progress bar. It also shows '6,500 Native speakers worldwide' and a quote about the language's decline in the mid-1990s. The page is for Australia.



Centre for Deaf Studies



Grid
Text
Subtitles
Controls

☐ Lexical Gloss

Nr	Annotation	Begin Time	End Time	Duration
45	AND	00:00:29.980	00:00:30.840	00:00:00.860
46	INTEREST	00:00:32.680	00:00:33.340	00:00:00.660
47	EVERY	00:00:33.340	00:00:33.820	00:00:00.480
48	DAY	00:00:33.830	00:00:34.100	00:00:00.270
49	DIFFERENT++	00:00:34.110	00:00:35.370	00:00:01.260
50	LIKE	00:00:35.560	00:00:35.960	00:00:00.400
51	OFFICE	00:00:36.127	00:00:36.737	00:00:00.610
52	BORING	00:00:36.767	00:00:37.317	00:00:00.550
53	SAME++	00:00:37.337	00:00:38.437	00:00:01.100
54	BUT	00:00:38.467	00:00:38.847	00:00:00.380
55	INDEX+fl	00:00:38.867	00:00:39.347	00:00:00.480

00:00:36.011 Selection: 00:00:00.000 - 00:00:00.000 0

⏮ ⏪ 1 ⏩ ⏭ ⏴ ⏵ ⏶ ⏷ ⏸ ⏹ ⏺ ⏻ ⏼ ⏽ ⏾ ⏿

⏮ ⏪ ⏴ ⏵ ⏶ ⏷ ⏸ ⏹ ⏺ ⏻ ⏼ ⏽ ⏾ ⏿

0
00:00:32.000
00:00:33.000
00:00:34.000
00:00:35.000
00:00:36.000
00:00:37.000
00:00:38.000
00:00:39.000

Translation

Notes

Lexical Gloss

Mouthing

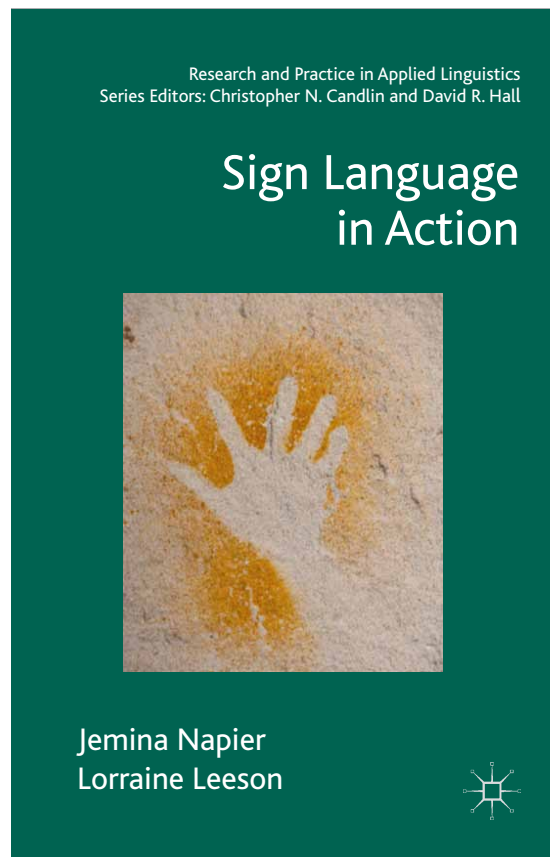
Dominant Hand

Non-Dominant

Eyebrows

Eye Aperture

Memory and Sign Languages



- **Some questions:**
- Can we remember the undocumented?
- Can we (*post-hoc*) recognise what was unrecognised?
- Can we re-visit data that is not properly archived?
- Can we re-patriate data to communities who were disenfranchised?
- Can we future-proof and curate such data?



Making Citizenship





Dear Hearing People...





Centre for Deaf Studies

References

- David, Jeffrey E. (2010) *Hand Talk : Sign Language among American Indian Nations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dear Hearing People: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JY4uof7vvZk>
- HandTalk: <http://pislresearch.com/videos.html>
- Making Historical Sign Language Materials Accessible. Georgetown University, Sign Language Lab: <http://hslldb.georgetown.edu/films/>
- [Milan Congress \(1880\) http://america.pink/second-international-congress-education-the-deaf_3962713.html](http://america.pink/second-international-congress-education-the-deaf_3962713.html)
- RTE: Hands On (Archives)
- <http://www.rte.ie/tv/handson/archive.html> RTE: Sign of the Times
<http://www.rte.ie/archives/2014/0515/617444-irelands-first-television-magazine-programme-for-the-deaf/>
- RTE: These Walls Can Talk. <http://www.rte.ie/player/ie/show/these-walls-can-talk-30003600/10546350/?ap=1>
- 1916 Proclamation in ISL: <http://www.ireland.ie/news/1916-proclamation-launched-irish-sign-language>