A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO AUSTRALIAN SIGN LANGUAGE (AUSLAN)

TREVOR A. JOHNSTON

ADELAIDE 1987
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THE ILLUSTRATIONS

The majority of illustrations in this volume have been taken or adapted with permission from R. Jeanes & B. Reynolds (1982) with the exception of those marked (*). Most other illustrations are acknowledged at the appropriate point in the text. The illustrations on pages 9, 10, 11 (Figure 1.4) and 84 are adapted from B. Moody (1983). The illustration on page 42 (Figure 2.2) was adapted from E. Klima & U. Bellugi (1979).
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### BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES
Research into Auslan (Australian Sign Language) has only just begun. The description of the syntax of Auslan that I undertake here owes an enormous amount to research into ASL (American Sign Language) which has been underway for the past two decades. I have found that many of the grammatical devices used in ASL have direct parallels in Auslan. Indeed, I share the often observed reaction of deaf people who for the first time read or are told about research into their sign language (a feeling of 'but, of course!', 'how true!', or even 'don't people know that already?') because, though hearing myself, I come from a signing family and have numerous signing relatives.

Besides my intuitions and those of signing deaf people in Australia, a preliminary record and analysis of Auslan, on videotape, has also revealed undeniable parallels with ASL, BSL (British Sign Language) and LSF (Langue des signes francaise). This is not entirely surprising. It has been observed that BSL (Brennan 1981:120-135), and LSF (Moody 1983; Woodward 1980;103-118), among other sign languages, display a degree of convergence on the level of syntax which is surprising, despite an extremely wide divergence on the level of vocabulary. Though this has been observed, a full explanation as to why this is the case is yet forthcoming. Besides the historical connections that link Auslan with BSL, and ASL with LSF and the fact that the first three have English as their host languages, it would seem that the common constraints or resources of a gestural and visual language are shared by all and may play a part in the explanation. It may also be a reflection of the fact that analyses made to date are of a sufficient generality to account for data in several sign languages (which may themselves form a family). Further detailed analyses of these sign languages and/or analyses of culturally or linguistically unrelated sign languages may reveal hitherto unsuspected differences.
To reiterate, research into Auslan has only just begun. The observations presented here represent a synthesis of observations made of other sign languages and observations made of Auslan directed in the light of the foreign research literature. This has been considered a valid approach to take for two major reasons. First, as has been mentioned, I am a native signer (though hearing) and a linguist. Furthermore, the truth of some observations from ASL, BSL or LSF are often transparent when applied to Auslan. In others observation and analysis has been used to confirm or deny foreign observations. Second, there has been a lack of research into Auslan. Educators and teachers of the deaf in Australia have until very recently, and then seemingly only in response to pressure from the deaf community, shown a reluctance to assimilate research into sign language conducted in Europe and the United States and to explore its applicability here. From this beginning it is hoped that studies in Auslan will acquire a base from which to work.

Thus the account of Auslan presented here is essentially derivative. The dearth of research into Auslan together with the recent upsurge of interest in signing has made it imperative that information on Auslan, no matter how general, is made available as soon as possible.

There is no doubt that further research will reveal aspects of the syntax of Auslan that have not been described here and indeed that some of the observations made in this first description may need to be qualified.

This volume is intended as a non-technical general introduction to Auslan. Consequently, constant reference to and citation of sources has not been made throughout the text. For those familiar with sign language research it will be obvious that certain seminal works in that literature have inspired this current work. They are, to name only the most obvious, Stokoe (1960, 1975), Newkirk & Battison (1979), Battison (1980), Baker & Cokely (1980), and Moody (1983). As with the present work the final two works cited are intended to teach people about sign language and the selection and arrangement of the data here owes much to their models. Of special note is
the work of Moody which, again like the present paper, draws on linguistic research into ASL and applies the various findings to a foreign sign language. In Moody's case Langue des signes francaise (LSF), and in this case Australian Sign Language (Auslan).

When representing signing this guide I have in most cases opted for the use of English glosses written according to certain conventions (see 'Glossing and Transcription Conventions'). Even though one picture can be worth a thousand words this has been done for two reasons. First, to save space. If all signs had been represented pictorially the present work would be enormous. Second, to save time and money. Hundreds of illustrations would take many hours to complete. Consequently only a few key examples have been illustrated. Where a simple English gloss has been used in an example the reader should refer to the companion dictionary for a description of how that particular sign is made.


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Introduction

What is Auslan?

The short answer to this question is rather straightforward. Auslan is short for AUStalian Sign LANguage and it is a term that I have used for several years. American Sign Language, British Sign Language, Langue des signes francaise (French Sign Language) are all referred to, quite simply, as ASL, BSL or LSF. I have avoided calling Australian Sign Language 'ASL' because of the obvious confusion that this will create with American Sign Language. Though some deaf people have started to refer to Australian Sign Language as 'Auslan' the term has yet to gain wide currency in the deaf community. It is possible that the term 'Auslan' will go the way of 'Ameslan' (which was once often used for American Sign Language, but which appears to be giving way to the preferred term 'ASL'). That is, it will go out of favour or maybe never really catch on at all. Despite this possibility there seems to be no other appropriate name for Australian Sign Language except for the full title itself.

The long answer to defining Auslan is not so straightforward. Though the average person has usually heard of sign language, have observed deaf people signing to each other in some public place, or come across (and maybe even learnt) the manual alphabet, invariably they have a very vague notion of what it is, exactly, that deaf people are doing when they are signing to each other. They may even hold some serious misconceptions about the deaf and about sign language. Defining some terms and dispelling some misconceptions will help to clarify the position.

Fingerspelling

Many people think that fingerspelling is sign language. It is not. Fingerspelling is the technique whereby twenty-six distinct handshapes or
'signs' represent each of the twenty six letters of the English alphabet. (Throughout this introduction constant reference is made to the English language. It goes without saying that the same applies to other spoken languages as well). When one fingerspells one literally 'writes in the air' spelling words out letter by letter.

In Australia there are two fingerspelt alphabets. The most common is the two-handed alphabet which has its origins in Britain. Virtually all deaf people are familiar with this alphabet and use it regularly. The less common is the one-handed alphabet which has its origins in Ireland. Deaf people educated in Catholic schools for the deaf were taught this alphabet, though through mixing with other deaf people during and after their school years most also acquire the two-handed alphabet. The one-handed alphabet is gaining in popularity because of the prestige of American Sign Language which also uses the one-handed alphabet. (There are however slight differences between the Anglo-Irish and the ASL one-handed alphabets.)

Though fingerspelling is an important part of a signing deaf person's manual communication skills virtually no one uses fingerspelling by itself to communicate (except when talking to the deaf-blind). Normally fingerspelling is mixed in with signing and is especially used for spelling proper nouns (place names, people's names), spelling English words which have no direct signed equivalent or spelling English words even when there is a perfectly adequate signed equivalent in order to emphasise some point.

It is important to remember that in rapid fingerspelling not all the letters of a word will be fingerspelt (with or without the signers being aware of this). This is particularly the case with common names and high frequency words.

In Australia fingerspelling is used more extensively by older members of the deaf community (particularly those over fifty years of age). This reflects the educational method, called the Rochester Method, used in the 1930s and earlier both in Australia and elsewhere. Essentially the
Rochester Method was 'total fingerspelling'. Even though such deaf people still use far more signs than fingerspelling in their communication, they are inclined to use a lot of fingerspelling when communicating to a hearing person in order to display their knowledge of English vocabulary and syntax.

In short, fingerspelling is a code for representing the letters of the English alphabet. It is not a language.

Signs

Many people think signs are nothing but gesture and mime. They are not. Gestures are used by deaf and hearing people alike and tend to have a high emotive content. Shrugging the shoulders (a gesture of not knowing), turning the palms of the hands upwards (a gesture of exasperation), poking the tongue out (a gesture of dislike), and nodding the head (a gesture of agreement) are common examples. Though usually culturally specific they are made almost involuntarily and are treated as 'natural' by most people. For example, it may come as a surprise to some people to learn that in some cultures shaking the head signifies agreement. Less emotive gestures are even more culturally specific. Our beckoning gesture (the upturned hand with the bending index finger as in 'Come here') is quite different from that used in parts of Asia (the flat hand facing palm down with all the fingers bending).

Signs are more than gestures in that they are not just expressive of an emotional state. They communicate specific meanings. Though many have evolved from gestures or are quite iconic (ie somehow look like the object, action or concept they refer to), many bear absolutely no relationship to their meaning and are treated as conventional, not natural. Signs have quite specific meanings just like the words of a language. For example, to gesture or mime the meaning 'the day before today' would be quite difficult and each individual (hearing or deaf) would produce a different response.
However, asked to give a word or a sign for that meaning all members of the hearing community would say the same word ('yesterday'), and all members of the signing community would produce the same sign ('YESTERDAY').

For obvious historical reasons many of the signs in Auslan are identical to, similar to or derived from BSL signs.

When two deaf people are communicating the majority of movements they are making involve the production of signs, not fingerspelling.

**Sign Language**

When people talk of 'sign language' they may be thinking of one of two quite different things; neither of which is correct.

The first understanding is related to the idea of 'a language which is being signed' in much the same way as we think of speaking or writing English. In other words 'sign language' means a language be it English, French, Chinese, Indonesian or whatever which is signed, rather than spoken or written.

The second understanding is that 'sign language' is 'a language' in itself, ie it is one language. Just as we have English, German, Japanese, etc., so we have Sign Language. It is just another language.

When we look at what the signing deaf actually use to communicate with each other on a daily basis, we see that neither understanding is actually correct though the second is nearer the truth.

In the first instance what the signing deaf use among themselves is not standard English. This is evident to those who know signing and who are not deaf, and to anyone who has had occasion to read the writing or test the reading comprehension of many (though by no means all) signing deaf people.
The signing is often not at all 'English-like', and the reading and writing skills are rarely 'native-like'. Clearly, such people cannot be seen as signing English.

In the second instance though the signing deaf from Britain are reasonably easy for an Australian deaf person to understand (although not completely), an Australian deaf person and an American deaf person find it almost impossible to communicate except on the most general level, yet ostensibly they 'share the English language'. There are historical links between Australian Sign Language and BSL (due primarily to migration of deaf people and teachers of the deaf) which explains the degree of comprehension between Auslan and BSL signers. Indeed, Auslan can be regarded as a dialect of BSL. There are no such historical links between Auslan and ASL.

Naturally two deaf people will do better at communicating with each other than most hearing people meeting a foreigner who speaks another language. After all the deaf have a lifetime's experience at making themselves understood to hearing people through mime and gesture. Clearly though, Sign Language is not just one language like German or Japanese because all deaf people do not understand each other. There are a number of sign languages. Sign Language, in short, is not universal.

So the truth of the matter is that there exist communities of deaf people who in their everyday communication and interaction in those communities use sign languages which a) are not identical to the host spoken language of the hearing community and b) are not identical to the sign languages of other deaf communities. It is this everyday sign language used by the Australian deaf community which we call 'Auslan'. It is not the same as standard English. It is not the same as American Sign Language or any other sign language.
Pidgin Sign English

However, this needs even further amplification. Most deaf people are born to hearing parents, many are educated orally, and many are taught to denigrate signing as an 'inferior language' or simply 'bad grammar'. In principle, the deaf person is exposed to English all the time, as most parents and many teachers do not sign to them. Moreover, all writing and reading is done in English as Auslan has no written form. The deaf, signing or not, cannot fail to be influenced by the values and language of the people around them.

Thus though Auslan is not identical to standard English, it is undeniably influenced by it. In addition, many deaf people will attempt to make their signing as English-like as possible (ie to the best of their abilities), especially when talking to a hearing person. When one considers that hearing people who know some signing often simplify their English when talking to a deaf person it then comes as no surprise that a lot of signing which goes on is not actually Auslan but rather a mixture of features of Auslan and English. In other words, it is a pidgin and it is referred to as Pidgin Sign English.

One small aside: hearing people are often counselled to simplify their English to make themselves more comprehensible to the deaf. Hearing people are thus often quite dissatisfied with the level of conversation or language sophistication and they project this on to the deaf person and assume it to be his or her 'normal state'. However, English may effectively be a foreign language for that deaf person. It should never be forgotten that where the deaf individuals in question are competent and sophisticated users of Auslan they too must simplify their signing to make themselves more comprehensible to the hearing person. The deaf have the good grace not to project on to the hearing person the latter's temporary loss of language competence and sophistication as their 'normal state'. It is simply a function of not knowing sign language well.
Signed English

Furthermore, in order to increase the deaf person's exposure to English, various methods for manually representing English have over the centuries been devised and used. Some use just twenty-six hand configurations to represent the letters of the alphabet, others use a combination of signs used by the deaf and fingerspelling, others use a combination of deaf signs, fingerspelling and contrived signs. They all have in common the aim of manually representing English, word for word. This is called 'Signed English'.

Signed English is not difficult for a hearing person to learn. However, when one's signing is nothing more than the manual representation of English one cannot properly say that one is using Auslan (or ASL or BSL). One is not really using a 'sign language' but rather a 'sign code'.

One should not expect to be understood by a deaf person with an inadequate knowledge of English simply because one is signing (in English). Something which is not understood when written (in English) is no more likely to be understood when signed (in English).

Where one's deaf interlocutor has a good knowledge of English syntax and a wide English vocabulary then something approaching Signed English may be an appropriate medium to communicate in. But remember, Signed English systems often use signs contrived by educators which are not (yet) part of the sign vocabulary of the deaf community. One's deaf interlocutor may very well know that the past participle of the English verb 'fly' is 'flown' but have no idea that that is what you are signing. Fingerspelling can always be used when in doubt.
AUSLAN: a definition

Auslan is the sign language used among the signing deaf in Australia in their everyday communication with one another. Auslan signers regularly sprinkle their signing with fingerspelt English words and names. Though Auslan can be thought of as a separate language to English we prefer to place Auslan and English at two separate poles on a language continuum. Not only do the signing deaf occupy different relative positions on this continuum according to their educational background and knowledge of English, they also constantly shift along it according to the situation, the topic etc. Refer to Figure 1.

Figure 1: The English to Auslan Continuum

"Adapted from Lilian Lawson "The Role of Sign in the Structure of the Deaf Community" in Hall et al, eds., 1981."
Glossing and Transcription Conventions

The convention that the gloss ('meaning', 'translation' or 'name') of a sign is written in upper case letters has been adopted here. Thus, the sign for the English word 'water' is written as WATER (and sometimes as WATER/TOILET when I wish to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the sign in Auslan can have a different or wider meaning than the one word gloss would imply). Though I try to give the best possible gloss or glosses for a sign the reader should always be aware that the gloss is just a way of referring to a sign and does not define it.

Fingerspelling is written as hyphenated words. Thus 'water' fingerspelt rather than signed would be written as W-A-T-E-R.

Sign-mime is written in lower case hyphenated words. Thus the meaning 'water bubbling down a mountain stream' may be signed as WATER bubbling-down-a-mountain-stream where only 'water' is signed and the rest is 'sign-mimed'.

Classifiers (see chapter three) are written using 'CL', for CLassifier, followed by the code name of the handshape used in parentheses. Thus a flat handshape used to represent a flat surface is written as 'CL(B1):table-top' where the symbol and handshape code name is followed by a colon and a description of that which is represented.

However, the gloss and its substitutes do not tell us much about how the sign is being used or made. As the reader will find through reading this description of Auslan, facial expression, stress, speed and tenseness of execution, location in space, the number of hands used, and directionality are all important aspects of signing. Should it be necessary to add pertinent information like this to the gloss the writing system could quickly become unwieldy. For example, all of the following paragraph would be needed to write down the signed equivalent of "Have you asked him?":

ASK (made with raised eyebrows from the interlocutor, rather than citation tabulation, to a third person located to the right) FINISH (with raised eyebrows also and using both hands, rather than citation form).

Clearly an alternative is required. The transcripts of signing are written on several lines at once, not unlike a musical score.

(1) - facial expression line
(2) [ right handed sign line
(3) [ two handed sign line
(4) [ left handed sign line
(5) - direction, speed and supplementary information line
(6) = translation line
(7) literal translation line (when necessary)

Line (1): on this line is included information about the face and the head. Information is normally self explanatory (eg, 'wide eyes', 'gape', 'squint', 'eyes left', 'head left' etc) though some symbols are used. These include:

?^ - polar (yes/no) question
?v - wh question
() - puffed cheeks
t - topic marker
> - rhetorical question
qt - question topic
! - imperative

Exactly which facial expressions accompany each of these is explained in the description of Auslan.

Line (2): one-handed signs which are made with the right hand (the dominant hand for most people) are written on this line. The vast majority of signs are written on this line.
Line (3): Two-handed signs are written on this line.

Line (4): One-handed signs which are actually made with the left hand (even though the signer may normally use the right hand) are written on this line. Only a few signs occur here and they usually occur simultaneously with signs written on line (2). This is to show if a signer a) reduplicates a sign by making what is usually a one-handed sign on both hands simultaneously b) makes two different signs simultaneously.

Lines (2) and (3) and (4): Glosses are modified to show incorporation of subject and/or object such that ASK, for example, would be written as you-ASK-him where directionality was used. The direction line (Line (5)) would be used to show where the sign moved 'from/to'. Thus the example above would be written as

```
+ you-ASK-him FINISH
```

A gloss followed by a plus symbol (+) indicates that a sign is repeated.

Line (5): On this line is placed information about the direction, speed, tenseness etc of a sign. Information refers to the sign or signs directly above the comment. If the comment is to be understood as operating over several signs then a line is placed above the comment to show which signs are meant. For example, in the following signed sentence
both the signs GO/DEPART and HOME are displaced towards the signer's right (rt), while only the sign HE is displaced towards the signer's left (lf).

One will also notice that the normally one-handed sign FINISH has been made on both hands simultaneously, and that the facial expression appropriate for a polar question has been made throughout the sentence. Directions are always stated from the signer's point of view, thus 'away' means 'away from signer', 'towards' means 'towards signer', 'left' means 'left of signer' and 'right' means 'right of signer'.

Line (6): on this line is written an English translation of the signed sentence.

Line (7): on this line is written a literal sign by sign translation of the signed sentence when it is necessary to draw the reader's attention to some aspect of the structure of the sentence.

Other conventions are explained, where needed, at the appropriate place in the description of Auslan. It should be noted that these spacing conventions are not followed in the companion dictionary because of the limited space available at each entry. Where an example of a signed phrase is given at an entry the glosses are simply written one after the other thus: HE FINISH GO/DEPART HOME? Readers will need to rely on their knowledge of Auslan to know that one needs to do more than simply produce these signs one after the other to produce a question.
Chapter One

Formational Properties

1.1 Introduction

How are signs made? What distinguishes one sign from another? For non-signers who have lazy or untutored eyes, and for native signers who have never thought about their language as a language these questions are easier posed than answered.

Non-signers need to make a leap of the imagination - a leap which requires them to fundamentally re-examine their notions of what, exactly, constitutes a language. Prejudices almost universally shared by those who use speech to communicate - that speech is language; that thought, speech and language are synonymous if not inextricably, even magically, linked; that the body can be nothing but a complement to the 'real' communication of speech - are not easily discarded. The art of mime, as a way of communicating, is perceived as exhaustively definitive of the potential of corporal expression. Bodily expression has no discontinuities, no chasms, no leaps from the natural to the arbitrarily cultural that render another's body unintelligible. According to this perception bodies are transparent: when one smiles, blushes, or weeps one means what one does. It is just as if spoken language itself were judged by some third party, an imaginary outsider, as nothing more than a rather complicated form of music having no more than the expressive range of music. Non-signers need to re-educate their eyes and see that mime is to sign language as music is to speech. Apart from onomatopoeia, speech invests the interplay of tongue, breath and vocal vibrations with arbitrarily assigned meaning. That the 'waving of the hands in space' in sign language should be able to produced conventional
meanings is no more remarkable than that the 'waving of the tongue' in the mouth can produce more than naked emotion or imitative onomatopoeia. What is required for language is simply a medium which allows for discrete units which can be perceived with ease, reproduced at will and which can be combined both simultaneously and sequentially.

Signers need to look at their language anew, if not for the first time. As with the ordinary users of any language the tissue of sign language is, for signers, transparent. They are so attuned to the meaning of an utterance that they are not consciously aware of that which conveys meaning, if it doesn't actually dissolve in the intense light of meaning (1*). There is nothing unusual about this. The denigrators of sign language, and there have been many over the centuries, scored a false and temporary victory when, unwillingly conceding the possibility of a sign language, they quizzed signers as to the rules or grammar of their particular sign language. The lack of a ready reply was taken as proof that 'sign language' was a misnomer and that, really, such 'languages' were nothing more than rather complicated and elaborated forms of mime having no more than the expressive range of mime (2*). In this regard native signers were no different from naive native speakers of any language who may not be able to formulate even the most basic 'rules' of their language. Indeed, they may not even understand the question. Without systematic and prolonged reflection speakers tend to fail miserably at being grammarians or phoneticians. Coupled with the ready acceptance by a minority of the majority's judgement of a stigmatized behaviour (signing), just as European vernaculars were denigrated during the dominance of Latin, we can readily understand the lack, until very recently, of sign language grammars (3*). We can further understand why early attempts search for grammatical features which parallel those of the dominant language form (again, just as Latin grammar was imposed upon the European vernaculars).

So what are these new eyes to look for? What resources does a sign language have to build a language? Let's take two signs, LIKE and FALSE, and examine how they are produced.
In the signing of LIKE a right-handed person places the extended flat hand on the chest with the palm facing the body and the hand pointing to the left. While maintaining a neutral or pleasant facial expression one moves (rubs) the hand in a circular fashion on the chest. Right-handed people use their right hand and left handed people use their left hand. The positionings will be a mirror image of the right hand for left-handed people. Thus the hand will face right, not left for this particular sign for a left-handed person.

To produce FALSE one forms a fist with the little finger extended and places the tip of this finger at the right side of the mouth with the palm facing the body and the hand pointing upwards. While maintaining a neutral to negative facial expression (eg an expression of displeasure) one then moves the hand away from the body while twisting the wrist so that the palm faces away from the signer. As with LIKE, left handed people would use their left hand instead of the right. (Henceforth all explanations will assume the right hand to be dominant).

How do these two signs differ from each other? First the most obvious feature is the different handshapes used in each sign. These are labelled (see Johnston 1984) as B1 and Il respectively. The second most obvious difference is the place where the signing actually happens: the chest or upper trunk for LIKE; the side of the mouth and 'neutral space' (ie somewhere in front of the body, see figure 1.4) for FALSE. Thirdly, the movement in both cases is quite different: a repeated circular movement in
constant contact in the one and a single outward twisting movement in the other.

When these and a multitude of other signs are examined it becomes apparent that there are five major features present in the production of a sign. In addition to the three features listed above (handshape, location and movement) there are two others (palm and hand orientation, and facial expression) which enter into play. These five elements or parameters combine with one another to construct the sign. The alteration of any one of these parameters can serve to produce another distinct lexical sign or to establish grammatical function. The last parameter mentioned (facial expression) is infrequently used to distinguish signs or meanings and the set of minimal pairs differing only in facial expression is small. Facial expression is commonly used to intensify signs (see below) or acts as a suprasegmental feature (ie it carries over the production or signation of a number of signs) and it is of greatest importance in the production and meaning of phrases (see Chapter Four).

We could describe the two signs, LIKE and FALSE thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIGN GLOSS:</th>
<th>LIKE</th>
<th>FALSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>configuration:</td>
<td>flat hand</td>
<td>fist (little finger extended)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>location:</td>
<td>chest</td>
<td>side of mouth (then neutral)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orientation:</td>
<td>palm towards</td>
<td>palm towards (then away)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hand left</td>
<td>hand up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>movement:</td>
<td>circular</td>
<td>away and twisting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facial:</td>
<td>neutral to positive</td>
<td>neutral to negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each sign is thus constructed by the combination of these parameters which are all made at the same time. This degree of simultaneity in distinguishing lexical items and establishing grammatical function is not found in spoken languages (4*). Though it is entirely comparable with tonal languages where tonal contours operate to distinguish lexical items, one finds in sign languages the superimposition of five features which operate lexically and grammatically. Spoken languages rely on the insertion or substitution of morphemes, or the arrangement of word order, both of which are essentially sequential and linear strategies, to achieve the same ends.

It is these five parameters that constitute the building blocks of the cherology (or 'phonology') and syntax of Auslan. Before I go on to examine some of the aspects of the grammar and cherology of Auslan I will first familiarise the reader visually and spatially with these five parameters.

1.2 The Reality of the Parameters in Significant Environments

1.2.1 The Handshape

Though it is possible to isolate fifty-six distinct handshapes which are used in Auslan my analysis has shown that many of these shapes involve only slight modifications of base handshapes. Many of these slight modifications are only effected in specific signing environments for phonological (articulatory), semantic (iconic or mimetic), or alphabetic reasons (see Johnston 1984 for a full discussion). I thus prefer to say that in Auslan there are approximately thirty major hand configurations (or cheremes) which are realised by fifty-six distinct handshapes. Each of these handshapes has been arbitrarily given a name or 'label'. The convention is to enclose the label in two slashes for cheremes and to add a number for the specific handshape; thus /B/ refers to the chereme 'flat handshape' which includes variant handshapes B2, B3, B4, B6 and B7 as well as the most frequent member handshape B1; and /G/ refers to the chereme 'index finger' which includes the variant handshapes G2 and G3. Once again refer to
Johnston (1984) for a full and technical discussion of this point.

Of the thirty cheremes, eight account for the overwhelming majority of signs. Let us examine eight signs which utilize these eight cheremes (moving from the most common to the least common):

/B/
ATTENTION

/A/
BREAK

/G/
WHO

/5/
SIGN

/H/
SMELL

/X/
COME
From these examples one will notice that signs may be made with either one hand (called one-handed signs) or with two hands (called two-handed signs when both hands are different, and double-handed signs when both hands are the same).

It is a fact of Auslan that when signs use two hands they are usually double-handed and symmetrical (ie both hands mirror each other in position and movement as well as handshape). In simple two-handed signs is it usual that only one hand moves whilst the other hand acts as a base or point of reference for the hand which moves.

The eight examples may be defined thus:

One-handed: WHO, COME, SMELL.

Double-handed: BREAK, SIGN, ATTENTION, SCIENCE.

Two-handed: DOLLAR.

The hand used in one-handed signs (the right hand for right handed people) is referred to as the dominant hand and it also is this hand which moves in two-handed signs. The other hand in two-handed signs is referred to as the subordinate hand and it may only assume a restricted number of handshapes which are basically those of the six most frequent cheremes illustrated above (5*).
The complete picture of the repertoire of different cheremes used in signing Auslan includes not only the systematic and significant variations to the most common cheremes illustrated above, but also the more complex and less frequent cheremes which are also found in Auslan. These handshapes are listed in Figure 1.1

**Figure 1.1: The handshapes of Auslan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>B3</td>
<td>B4</td>
<td>B5</td>
<td>B6</td>
<td>B7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes on Figure 1.1**

In this figure, the prime or handshape families are indicated by the use of vertical columns and cheremes, when not identical to primes, are separated by broken lines.

The vertical columns show the various families of handshapes found in Auslan. For most columns, the handshapes under the double lines are variants of the handshape above the double lines. For example, B2 is a variant of B1. These variants appear in specific environments and are normally never paired in significant opposition with another handshape from their column. There are exceptions to this pairing (which is called minimal pairing). For example, A1 is sometimes placed in significant opposition with A3. It is felt however that A1 belongs to the same handshape family as A3. (Further research needs to be done on these handshape families which could perhaps lead to some reclassification.)

Adapted from Klima & Bellugi *The Signs of Language* (1979:44)
1.2.2 The Location

The second parameter designates the places where signs are executed. These may designate actual contact or significant proximity (where it is neither, signs are said to be executed in 'neutral space' which is situated in front of the chest of the signer). These signing places are of two major types: those on or near the body proper (primary tabulation) and those on or near the hands (secondary tabulation). This second type is, of course, applicable only to two-handed and double-handed signs.

As can be seen from Figure 1.2 there are seventeen major places of signing on the body proper.

Figure 1.2: Primary Tabulation

The number of signing spaces increases if the left or right side of the body is specified. As a general rule contact or significant proximity in the head region is on the right side; the left side tends to be used only in some double-handed symmetrical signs (where the left hand mirrors on the left side of the face the activity of the right hand on the right side of
the face). In the body region, contact or significant proximity tends to be on the left side. For obvious reasons, contact or significant proximity in the arm region is always on the left arm for right handed people.

On the hands there are two basic locations - surfaces of the hand (palm side and back side, including wrists) and edges of the hand (little finger side, index/thumb side, and fingertips/knuckles). See Figure 1.3. For ordinary purposes knowing the orientation of the hands and that there is contact or significant proximity is sufficient to determine exactly where the hands meet (or would meet) each other. However one may need to explicity state point of contact, or significant proximity, when other factors such as the signing movement complicate the location which may be changing or multiple.

Figure 1.3: Secondary Tabulation

As mentioned earlier signs in which there is no contact or significant proximity are said to be made in neutral space. Neutral space is located in front of the signer at about chest height (Figure 1.4). It should be noted that two-handed and double-handed signs in which the hands have each other as their place of signing are actually also made in neutral space if they are considered as one single signing unit.
To get a clear idea of how the use of different locations functions to distinguish signs, consider the following signs which have the same handshape but different locations (significant proximity, ie non-contact, is indicated by locations within parentheses):

**top of head**

**AMERINDIAN**

**ear**

**NOISE**
chapter one: formational properties

forehead
GERMAN

from temple
IDEA

from eyes
FIND

can't

from nose

from ear
IGNORE

cheek
PINK
from side of mouth
ORDER (*)

from mouth
SPEAK

chin
BOY

neck
MEAT

right chest
WHITE (*)

chest
I
It will be noticed that some signs move from one particular location to another, such as IDEA, CAN'T, FIND, IGNORE, ORDER, and SPEAK, all of which move away from a particular location into neutral space. In the sign HEARING (opposite of DEAF) the sign movement entails a moving from the ear to the mouth; and in SWEAR it entails a movement from the mouth to the palm surface of the subordinate hand.
1.2.3 The Orientation

The third parameter concerns the direction in which the palm and the hand point. It is essential to know the orientation in order to produce a sign correctly and/or to differentiate it from other signs which share the same signing location, handshape and movement. As can be seen from the examples below it is necessary to specify two orientations – that of the palm and that of the hand (the direction of the (extended) fingertips). Consider for example:

![Weigh/Weight and Balance](image1)

where the two signs are distinguished only by the orientation of the palms.

Or consider:

![Weigh/Weight and Doubt](image2)

where the two signs are distinguished only by the orientation of the hands.

The following three signs all have the same movement, location, and
handshape but differ from each other only in terms of palm and hand orientation:

![Diagram of HOLIDAY, PLAY, and SWIM signs]

When specifying the hand orientation of signs which have handshapes consisting of bent fingers it is important to remember that it is the direction in which the hand as a whole is orientated, not its bent fingers, which is of interest. An example will make this clear. Consider the orientation of the right hand in the signs ROOM and FORWARD:

![Diagram of ROOM and FORWARD signs]

Both dominant hands could be specified as having palm and hand orientation towards the left if one did not ignore the orientation of the fingertips. It is clear that both hands are placed in completely different orientations. The first is 'pointing upwards' while the second is 'pointing away from the signer'.
1.2.4 The Movement

The fourth parameter concerns one or several movements: of the hand and arm, of the wrist, or of the fingers. The first kind are referred to as gross or macro-movements (involving the hand and arm considered as a unit) and may be of two distinct kinds:

MACRO-MOVEMENTS

1. linear
   direct (straight)       compound (curved)       sequential (angular)

   ![THANK](image1)
   ![SHARK](image2)
   ![TABLE](image3)

2. circular
   horizontal             vertical

   ![COFFEE](image4)
   ![RUN (*)](image5)

Those involving the wrist and fingers are referred to as micro-movements. There are four kinds of micro-movements:
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MICRO-MOVEMENTS

1. twisting
twist

2. opening
open

3. closing
close

SHINE
NO
SPEND
LIGHT
HAVE
ORANGE
4. bending  
  bend-fingers  bend-knuckles  bend-wrist  
RABBIT  COME  YES  
wiggle  crumble  
SEVERAL (*)  SOME (*)  

Many signs involve a combination of micro- and macro-movements as in the following two signs:

straight+crumble  curve+bend-wrist  
DRY  HOME
Both macro- and micro-movements can be repeated. In fact, there is a strong tendency towards repeated movements in Auslan:

- **CAKE**
- **DRIP**
- **LOLLY**
- **QUOTE**

The movement may also involve several repetitions:

- **DECORATE**
- **TOUR**
the use of stress:

POUR (*)

GENIUS

or various speeds of execution:

quickly

DRIVE (*)

slowly

FALL-ASLEEP

The movement of the head may also be of fundamental importance:

backwards

OUT-OF-SIGHT (*)

side-to-side

DON'T-WANT (*)
1.2.5. The Face and Head

The fifth parameter is relatively minor in the formation of isolated decontextualized signs but is fundamental in the construction of phrases. I have included the head nod ('yes') and the head shake ('no') in this section though they could equally be considered to be head movements rather than facial expressions. They are included in this section because of the close connection they have with other facial expressions (often used simultaneously) and because of the similarity in the use of the nod and the shake with other facial expressions.

The facial expressions in question are as follows:

Of the head

shake: shaking the head side to side

nod: nodding the head up and down

Of the eyebrows

raised: raised eyebrows with a furrowed brow

lowered: lowered eyebrows with a knitted brow

Of the eyes

squint: eyes almost closed

wide: eyes wide open
Of the mouth

grimace: a cheesy grin
pout: the lips together and slightly protruding
poke: the tongue slightly protruding from the corner of the mouth
gape: the mouth wide open
oh: the mouth open with the lips as for the letter 'o'

Of the cheeks

puffed: the cheeks puffed up with air

The exact meaning of some of these facial expressions is as yet open to question, but a feeling for their role can be gleaned by looking at a few examples where they are functional in individual lexical signs.

For example, the sign LIKE has a neutral to positive facial expression. It will change its signification to 'dislike' or 'unwell' if signed with a negative expression (ie with a head shake side to side):

\[
\text{becomes}
\]

- \text{no}
\]
\]
\]
\]
= "like" = "dislike"
Raising the eyebrows changes GOOD to 'How are you?'

```
-               - ^?
[ GOOD           [ GOOD
[                [ 
[                [ 
-               - away
= "good"        = "How are you?"
```

and it is only puffed cheeks which differentiate 'fat' and 'obese':

```
becomes
-               - ()
[                [ 
[ FAT           [ FAT
[                [ 
-               -
= "fat"         = "obese"
```

It is only the presence or absence of a grimace which differentiates RECENTLY from VERY-RECENTLY/JUST:

```
becomes
-               - ______________________
[ RECENTLY      [ RECENTLY/JUST
[                [ 
[                [ 
-               -
= "recently"    = "very/just recently"
```

or the presence or absence of the pout which differentiates 'smooth' from 'very smooth':
becomes

- pout
[
[ SMOOTH
[
[
[
[
[
[
[
[
[
=
"smooth"

1.3 Summary

There are two main reasons that one needs to be completely familiar with these five aspects of a sign. The first, the most obvious, consists of the knowledge one needs to have to be able to reproduce a sign faithfully. Knowing what to look for as the significant variable in signing enables one to begin the process of re-educating the eyes to be attuned to a visual and gestural language. A similar process of auditory re-education is often required when one learns a spoken language that has a significantly different repertoire of phonemes than one's native tongue.

The second, less obvious to new or non-signers, consists of the knowledge one needs to be able to recognise systematic 'deformations' of signs as being essentially the 'same' sign which has been modulated because of the signing environment (that which precedes or succeeds the 'deformed' sign); because of a desire for iconic or mimetic congruence; and because of grammatical rules which allow for systematic modifications of the citation form of a sign (see next chapter) along any one of these five dimensions, or parameters.
NOTES

(1) Many of the words used to talk about language stem, quite naturally, from the fact the most languages are spoken and the overwhelming majority of people use speech to communicate. The very word 'language' comes from the French 'langue' ('tongue'). Indeed, in English one says 'English is our native tongue'. Though it would be interesting to 'adapt' all such words to the sign language point of view, I will regularly use the words current in English to refer to acts of communication. I will 'speak' of 'utterances', 'talk' of 'intonation', the 'interlocutor' and of what people 'say' or 'said'. However, we will consistently refer to the 'speaker' in a discourse as the 'signer' as this does not require us to coin a new word or invent circumlocutions.

(2) It is a separate question whether the sign languages of various signing communities are 'developed' or 'underdeveloped'. The relatively recent emergence of extended signing communities (dating from the seventeenth century), and the educational practices of the past hundred years (which have discouraged or 'banned' the use of signing) have meant that most sign languages are, in fact, underdeveloped. There is no known reason why, given the correct environment and stimulus, an 'underdeveloped' sign language will not develop a full range of registers and vocabulary commensurate with any host spoken language.

(3) The diglossic situation which tends to evolve between sign languages and their host spoken languages (with the latter, of course, being considered by both deaf and hearing alike as the high form) further complicates the question: many users of a sign language will spend their lives striving to make their signing as 'grammatical' as possible, in terms of the host spoken language. Any description of a sign language such as Auslan must recognize this phenomenon if it is to give a true and accurate picture of the kinds of signing found in the deaf community.

(4) It has been claimed by some sign language linguists (eg Friedman 1977:4) that such simultaneity (apart from the simultaneous articulation of distinctive features in individual phonemes) is absolutely unique to sign languages. However, it is clear from a consideration of tonal languages and the intonation patterns of all spoken languages that this is not, strictly speaking, true. What is remarkable with sign languages is not the fact of simultaneity but rather the number of simultaneous elements.

(5) These two constraints on signing are referred to as the Symmetry Constraint and the Dominance Constraint and were first formulated with respect to ASL by Battison (see Klima et al 1979:63-64). Refer to Johnston (1984) for a discussion of these constraints with respect to Auslan.
Chapter Two

The Implications of Medium

2.1 General Observations

In the previous chapter individual decontextualized signs were analysed and their formational properties described. However, such a presentation of signs, if left there, would be extremely misleading as a description of Auslan for two reasons.

First, the signs in question are all 'citation forms'; that is to say they are all the most common form of signs produced by a native signer in response to the question "What is the sign for such and such?". However, when signed in a genuine signed utterance in Auslan, the citation form of the sign will be seen to undergo significant, if not dramatic, changes along one or more of the five parameters that have been isolated. Thus the configuration, orientation, location, movement, and appropriate facial expression of a sign are not absolute values: systematic deformation will occur as an integral part of the meaning of a signed utterance, as an indication of a sign's grammatical function or as a response to the immediate cherological ('phonological') environment of a sign.

Second, the signs themselves (modified or not) must be put into an appropriate word/sign order to produce correctly formed utterances.

Both these points are, of course, aspects of the syntax or grammar of Auslan. Because Auslan, like other sign languages, is a visual and spatial language and because Auslan, again like other sign languages, combines five independant variables in the production of each sign (Stokoe 1965, 1980;
Woll et al 1981; Klima & Bellugi 1979), or group of signs, word/sign order as such plays a less important role in Auslan than it does in most spoken languages (cf Cokely & Baker 1980a:32-33). This is because the ever-present opportunity to deform a sign along any one of these five dimensions; the ever present opportunity to exploit the spatial dimension to re-present or represent the relationship between things, events or ideas; the ever-present opportunity to resort to deixis (by pointing); and the ever-present opportunity to resort to 'onomatopoeia' (ie iconicity, mimesis and pantomime) predisposes Auslan to convey grammatical relationships through 'inflection' rather than word order.

As with other highly inflected languages this does not mean that word/sign order is unimportant or even capricious in Auslan. Far from it. In fact word/sign order may be considered to be more important in Auslan than in other comparable inflected languages. This is because the inflections (modulations, modifications) of the sign in Auslan are themselves often analogs of the intended meaning. For example, the sign DEFEAT is directional (see Chapter Three - Verb Signs). This means that the movement parameter can be modified to show who defeated whom once one has located subject and object in space (one then produces the sign in the appropriate direction from one to the other). Take the English sentence 'He defeated her' (we will ignore the past tense for the moment). The unmarked word/sign order would be:

(1) -
[ HE/HIM SHE/HER
 [ he-DEFEAT-her.
 [ - rt  lf rt to lf
 = "He defeated her."

Marked but acceptable variants would include:
chapter two: the implications of medium

(2) -
[ HE/HIM SHE/HER.
  [ he-DEFEAT-her
  [ - rt to lf rt lf
  = "He defeated her."

(3) -
[ HE/HIM SHE/HER.
  [ he-DEFEAT-her
  [ - rt rt to lf lf
  = "He defeated her."

Should the participants already be established and allocated locations in the signing space prior to this sentence then the signer would need only sign DEFEAT from the one to the other:

(4) -
[ [ he-DEFEAT-her
  [ - rt to lf
  = "He defeated her."

However, it is completely unacceptable to sign

(5) -
[ SHE/HER HE/HIM.
  [ he-DEFEAT-her
  [ - rt to lf lf rt

and unnecessarily awkward, even ambiguous, to sign
We can see from this that inflection and word/sign order go hand in hand, in Auslan, and that the degree of inflection permits a wider range of acceptable word/sign orders than would otherwise be the case. Word/sign order tends to be constrained as much by logic as by linguistic convention.

When discussing the syntax of a visual and spatial language such as Auslan it is important to remember not only the logical constraints of sight and space but also the physical constraints and advantages of a gestural language compared to those of a spoken language. As explained in greater detail below, the former can charge a single sign with a high degree of information (eg by modifying the citation form a verbal sign can incorporate subject, object, and adverbs of manner and frequency). Thus a single linguistic act in sign will often require several distinct and successive linguistic acts in a spoken language (either by attaching morphemes and/or by selecting appropriate word order) to convey the same amount of information. However this advantage of a sign language is counterbalanced by the speed with which one can emit sounds – the gross motor movements of the hands and arms take longer to perform than do the minute movements of the vocal organs. The end result is, as research into American Sign Language (ASL) has shown (Klima & Bellugi 1979:181-194), that despite the differing strategies employed, on average, it takes about the same amount of time to elaborate propositions in both modes. There is no reason to suspect that the situation is any different with Auslan.
chapter two: the implications of medium

2.2 Iconicity and Mimesis in Auslan

Before any detailed analysis of the syntax of Auslan can be attempted, the fundamental role of iconicity and mimesis in sign languages so far studied needs to be discussed because of the profound influence this has on the syntactic strategies employed by sign languages. The relationship between signifier and signified in a linguistic system is dramatically influenced by the medium or mode used to express and receive meanings in such a system.

It has often been taken as a defining characteristic of languages that the relationship between signifier and signified is completely arbitrary and the 'language-likeness' of non-verbal signifying systems has been measured according to the degree of this arbitrary relationship. Systems in which the signifiers are highly motivated have been suspect and considered to be pseudo-linguistic. Within 'bona fide' linguistic systems onomatopoeia has been considered a special case, occupying the outer fringes of these systems. Their incorporation as true linguistic signs was made possible by the substitution of 'arbitrary' for 'conventional' in the definition of the linguistic sign such that degrees of 'motivation' could be attributed to signifiers. A signifier does not exist in a particular linguistic system 'for no reason at all': there are historical, phonological, and imitative causes which account for why a particular signifier has assumed a particular form in a particular language. Thus historical linguistics explains why a particular signifier, and not another, occurs in a language and together with phonological analysis can even account for the actual spoken realisation of the item. Signifiers which are imitative (onomatopoeic) are likewise clearly conventional though cultural and phonological considerations will often account for their actual realisation as lexical items.

Despite these considerations, the vast majority of those who work with, teach or study language, with the exception of some linguists, still remain uncomfortable with onomatopoeic signs. The relatively infrequent occurrence of such signs in linguistic systems, together with their clear
incorporation within the phonological system of any given language (such that for speakers of other languages they are not perceived as onomatopoeic at all) has rekindled the suspicion harboured towards signifiers which display an overt relationship with their signifieds: are they true linguistic signs?

Such is the case with many of the signifiers of a sign language. It is within this context that the label 'iconic' has been attached pejoratively to the description of sign languages. The high frequency of iconic signs and their supposed intelligibility (transparency) to non-signers only reinforces the feeling that the system itself is 'pseudo-linguistic'. An unbiased interpretation of these facts requires us to compare onomatopoeia with iconicity, to examine their places within their respective language modalities (the verbal and the gestural) and to consider the relationship of the two language modalities to the 'reality' which they describe.

It is true that with both onomatopoeic words and iconic signs one attempts to imitate reality. However iconicity has an influence and importance in sign languages which is far greater than the parallel process in spoken languages (onomatopoeia). This has less to do with the naive notion of hearing people that sign languages are nothing but gesture or mime, but rather it has more to do with the fact that there is a convergence between signifier and signified in sign languages which is not present in spoken languages. The reality around us about which we wish to communicate is fundamentally visual and spatial rather than auditory (cf Fromkin 1978:4-7). That is to say, in 'reality' events and relationships between events often have a spatial-visual dimension which easily lends itself to being represented through the analogs of the hands in the signing space. Even abstract relationships and temporal sequences also lend themselves to spatial-visual representation. Spoken languages also exploit their modality: where possible, spoken languages often use onomatopoeia, but its scope is limited owing to the fact that that which we wish to communicate about often has no auditory dimension. After all, just what is the sound of a leaf falling, the sound of someone peeking around a corner, the sound of a cat licking itself, or the sound of someone reluctantly writing a letter? Thus the degree to which information is processed digitally (using a
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combination of discrete and arbitrary units) rather than analogically (using units which bear a direct relationship to that which is represented) is in part due to the constraints of the medium or mode itself. Speakers are encouraged to 'digitalise' (ie verbalise using the linguistic system) in situations where an analog (ie onomatopoeia or ad hoc onomatopoeia) would be equally possible, because of the prestige of the former system. This is clearly evident in children's language where ceasing to be onomatopeic is part of learning the linguistic system. One can see that this linguistically enculturated distaste for imitative noises is transferred to a distaste for imitative gestures for within this perception just as the one is 'only noise' and outside language, the other is 'only gesture' and likewise outside language.

It is not really a question of a choice between analog and digital systems, but rather of the degree to which a linguistic system may exploit both strategies of representation. After all onomatopoeic analogs are 'digitalised' through the phonological system of a language, iconic analogs are 'digitalised' through the cheremic ('phonological') system of a sign language. However, one cannot fail to observe that the visual mode allows for a greater penetration of the anological into its system of re-presentation.

It may not be simple idle musing to wonder what form spoken languages would or would have taken if 'reality' was basically auditory rather than visual and spatial. What are spoken languages if not the 'giving of a sound' to things and ideas which have none? In this vein, it may be revealing to consider 'direct quotation' as a special case of onomatopoeia (especially when intonation patterns and vocal mannerisms are mimicked) - where the opportunity to copy the sound of something presents itself, we do so. For sign languages to avoid the 'look of things' would be as absurd for spoken languages to have two distinct vocabularies - one for speaking and one for quoting the speech of others.

In sign languages, visual and spatial aspects of reality will be incorporated whenever possible in the signing act which, of course, will be often. This fact may be realised in two ways. First, the origin of the sign
will be motivated through iconicity. Second, a sign (whether iconic or not in origin), may be systematically deformed in the act of signing should the opportunity or desire to mirror the referent or some aspect of the referent present itself. Sign languages 'directly quote' reality where they can, and when they can, because they can, and not because they represent some form of primitive pseudo-language.

Throughout this section I have talked of iconicity alone. Though this is the convention in the literature on sign language research it may unwittingly create the false impression that signers are drawing a series of pictures of objects in the air during a signed utterance. Nothing could be further from the truth. It would in fact be more precise to distinguish between iconicity, mimesis and pantomime.

An iconic sign is a sign which looks like the thing it represents, a mimetic sign like the action it represents. Thus the term Iconicity (we will henceforth capitalise the general term) as used in the literature actually refers to the selective representation of some aspect of an object or action. Such signs are conventional though highly motivated. That the signs are conventional is clearly reflected in the fact that the representation process is selective (eg part standing for whole), stable in the community (Klima & Bellugi 1979:21), and on the whole inaccessible to non-signers or signers of another sign language.

There is no clear dividing line between an iconic or a mimetic sign such that one could say that iconic signs represent 'things' and thus function as nominals and that mimetic signs represent 'actions' and thus function as verbals. Though this is often the case, a threefold qualification of this statement is needed.

First, not all signs are iconic or mimetic and thus many nominals and verbals have no element of Iconicity in them.

Second, a sign may isolate some aspect of an action which is closely associated with an object and, thus, even though the sign is 'mimetic' it does not, in fact, represent an action but rather an object. That is to
say, a sign may represent an object, by convention, even though the sign may be motivated mimitically: the action as such may be no part of its conventional meaning. For example, the sign CAR (the one common in the 'southern dialect', ie Victoria, and identical to the standardized sign COFFEE) is said to have its origins in the mimetic representation of operating a tram. Its meaning evolved from 'tram' to 'car'. Today this action is totally irrelevant to the sign's meaning and, indeed, there is a separate and unrelated sign for 'tram'. Furthermore, this sign CAR cannot be used in the sense of 'operate or drive a car'. In a similar way many iconic signs can also be understood as verbals.

Third, most nominals and verbals in Auslan are determined either contextually or through a modulation of the movement parameter regardless of the sign's motivation. Thus the distinction itself is not clear cut.

There are, however, certain iconic signs which cannot be used verbally and certain mimetic signs which cannot be used nominally. When a sign is labelled as iconic or mimetic it indicates what motivates the sign, and not necessarily labels its class function as a nominal or a verbal. Unless otherwise stated, iconic signs can be used verbally and mimetic signs can be used nominally in appropriate contexts with appropriate modulation of the citation form.

Pantomime on the other hand consists of the acting out of a meaning, often directly imitating an event, without the use of any conventional signs. It is frequently used in signed narrative discourse especially when the signer wishes to 'directly quote' the actions or behaviour of another person. This is represented diagrammatically in Figure 2.1 (1*).

However, knowing that a particular sign is iconic or mimetic or knowing that sign languages as semiotic systems are judged to be 'highly Iconic' can be a misleading piece of knowledge. This shows only what motivates a sign, its actual use and meaning could be much wider. For example, signs can be used in ways that betray their Iconicity such as when the sign HOUSE is used to refer to a fourteenth floor flat in a highrise. Contrary to what many people are led to expect, relatively few signs or sequences of signs
are intelligible to non-signers and unless a further distinction is made, the qualifiers 'iconic' or 'mimetic' are of dubious worth. This finer distinction can be made if signs are ranked according to the degree that iconicity or mimesis is responsible for the sign itself.

**Figure 2.1: Signs within the dimensions of Iconicity and Conventionality.**

The degree of iconicity or mimesis in a sign can be ranked on a four part scale, based on the perceptions of a non-signer.

1 transparent

2 translucent

3 obscure
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4 opaque

The meaning of a transparent sign is evident to most naive observers who share the same social and cultural background as the community of signers. For example, signs such as RUN, COMB/BRUSH HAIR, NO, YOU, HOUSE and so on. In Figure 2.1 above DRIVE (mimetic: 'turning a steering wheel') and HOUSE (iconic: 'the shape of the roof') are two examples of conventional transparent signs. The number or percentage of transparent signs in the sign lexicon is relatively small.

Some translucent signs may be evident to naive observers (usually only if observed contextually rather than cited), though for most naive observers the meaning will not be apparent. However, the majority of naive observers will understand why the sign is as it is when told the meaning. Thus, once aware of the meaning of a translucent sign most observers will be able to make an informed connection between its form and its meaning. For example, in Figure 2.1 the signs SCIENCE (mimetic: 'pouring liquids from one test tube to another') and DOLLAR (iconic: 'the shape of a note') are placed to the left of DRIVE and HOUSE to indicate weaker Iconicity.

It stands to reason that experienced adult signers tend to regard these translucent signs as actually transparent. This helps account for the fact that one of the features observed in signing communities has been that new, foreign or unknown signs which enter the community are rationalized or explained in terms of real or imagined iconicity or mimesis.

Etymologically or historically speaking, obscure signs do have an iconic or mimetic element. However, this is not apparent even when one knows the meaning of the sign. One needs to be told how the meaning and the sign form are related; for example, in the signs BISCUIT (mimetic: 'breaking a cracker biscuit under one's elbow') or RICH (iconic/mimetic: 'stroking/outlining the fine garments of a rich person'). It has been an observed feature of signing communities that analogs (iconic and mimetic signs) become increasingly digitalised (abstracted) over time such that they lose their transparency. This should not be construed to mean that transparent signs are non-conventional: both the selected features of the
represented object or action and the formational properties of the sign as actually realised are culturally and linguistically determined from the outset. In Figure 2.1 the signs BISCUIT and RICH are placed to the left to indicate a low 'Iconicity'. 'Obscure' signs are also those signs whose attributed iconicity or mimesis is dubious, unable to be verified, or subject to contesting 'etymologies'.

Opaque signs have no known discernable element of iconicity or mimesis and are placed to the extreme left in Figure 2.1.

As can be seen from Figure 2.1 there is a 'direction of modulation' moving from the highly conventional to the 'ad hoc' with increasing degrees of Iconicity. This represents the continuum in sign languages from conventional and/or citation forms to modulated forms and pantomime. It is in this area that the influence of Iconicity on the syntax of sign languages is most apparent. These will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters dealing with the various aspects of the syntax of Auslan.

2.2.1 The Size of the Sign Lexicon

A comment often made by those who have been introduced to sign language for the first time is one that relates to the apparent paucity of vocabulary when compared to a spoken language such as English. I say 'apparent paucity' because the lack which is attributed to sign language in general, or Auslan in particular, is often 'imagined' when it is in fact not present, or 'misinterpreted' when it may be said to be present. The former may stem from an inadequate appreciation of sign language itself, the latter from a restricted view of language generally (where a genuine lack can be located it would appear to have more to do with the uses to which each language is put rather than to some 'intrinsic' worth of spoken languages versus sign languages).

Take the question of the imagined paucity of vocabulary first. In reply to the question 'What's the sign in Auslan for so and so?' one may be offered a sign which is (or appears to be) identical to another sign already
offered as the equivalent of another English word, or one may be told quite categorically 'There's no sign for that in Auslan'. Exactly what the informant offers will usually depend upon his or her own perceptions and knowledge of English and Auslan. Be this as it may, there is nothing unusual about this in that most languages are not commensurate word for word (sign for sign, or word for sign). Furthermore, some languages, like English, are synonym rich while other languages are not. Synonyms often convey more about the speaker, his or her background, his or her relationship to the listener, and the situation than 'naming something different in the real world'. Auslan signers can convey such meanings in three major ways: through the 'quality' of the signing itself (not unlike the once highly-prized "English" accent), through using much of the English language as its store of synonyms (similar to the way in which English speakers draw on French to give them the choice of saying 'mistake' or 'faux pas'), or through using synonymous signs available in Auslan (eg euphemisms for sexual body parts).

Despite it being perfectly reasonable that several English words might only find one signed equivalent in Auslan, it is also the case that often the Auslan equivalents only appear to be identical to the non-signer or novice. They are actually quite distinct for the native signer, varying in stress, amplitude, manner, intensity and duration, and are accompanied by a host of different facial expressions. As clearly as 'lukewarm', 'tepid', 'mild', 'warm', and 'balmy' or, better, 'ample', 'big', 'large', 'bulky', 'huge', 'immense', 'enormous', 'vast', 'monumental', 'colossal', and 'gigantic' form synonyms around one central core of meaning, the sign BIG (or the sign WARM) can be signed in as many different ways as there are English synonyms to convey this continuum of meaning. Thus it is only a half truth to say that Auslan is particularly synonym-poor in terms of having a series of discrete lexical signs in those areas equivalent to that of the English lexicon which are essentially intensifications of a base meaning (along dimensions of size, duration, speed, weight, or even attitude or emotional investment). Such a lack is essentially imagined.

With regard to misinterpreted paucity, it may well be the case that there is 'no sign in Auslan' for a particular English word or concept. The
question is 'why'? The denigrator of sign language wastes no time in asserting that this is indicative of the inferiority of sign language when compared to spoken languages. Setting aside those obvious instances where a lack of equivalences is only imagined, the answer is most likely to lie in an appreciation of the historical background of the signing community, and the individual biographies, educational backgrounds, and employment prospects of the signing deaf (ie the uses to which Auslan has been put) than to any supposed intrinsic inferiority in the language. Where an object, concept, process, etc., is either not a part of the everyday experience of a language user or the language is not used to talk about such objects, concepts or processes it is likely to be judged as 'lacking' when compared with another community or language. In this way Auslan may be compared to some languages of the Third World which may have historical rather than intrinsic inadequacies. Such a lack, when believed to be intrinsic, is essentially misinterpreted.

These observations made, it is not surprising that the size of the sign lexicon may at first sight appear rather modest. Leaving aside inadequate and incomplete research into signing that has left large numbers of signs as yet unrecorded, this modest roll-call really represents base or root signs which may be systematically modified to achieve a wide range of meanings. The medium of sign language (visual, spatial and gestural) allows for a system of iconic and mimetic intensification or modulation not available, or at least not exploited, in spoken languages. (Imagine that raising one's voice was the systematic way of intensifying an adjective rather than a source of supplementary information, or that saying or spelling 'give' backwards was one of the ways of establishing subject and object and meant 'give me', or that saying 'read' quickly meant 'skim'!)
2.3 Spatialisation

In the formation of signs in Auslan where a sign is performed, i.e. on or near various locations on the body or in neutral space, is one of the five significant variables or parameters that constitute a sign. This section deals more closely with this notion of location. What is of concern here is not so much the use of location in Auslan to distinguish one sign from another on the formational level, but the meaningful exploitation of the signing space by a signer: how a sign language invests the spatialization inherent in its medium of expression with meaning.

Unlike spoken languages, the visual and gestural languages of the deaf necessarily unfold in space. The organs of articulation in the latter – the hands, arms, and body, are all plainly seen in the act of producing the language, where as in the former they are, except for the lips, quite invisible. Spatialization is the process whereby sign languages exploit this obvious fact.

The spatial environment of the signing act can be divided up in four ways: 1) the signing space; 2) the signer to interlocutor line; 3) the scene of action; and 4) the time lines.

2.3.1 The Signing Space

Virtually all signs are made in a relatively restricted space in front of the signer. The hands may be placed in any position from just above the head to the waist on the vertical axis, and in any position in front of the signer from fully extended arms away from the signer to bent arms close to the signer or just past the signer on the horizontal axis. Naturally, the elbows are always pointing outwards (left or right respectively) or downwards when the arm is bent. No signs require the elbows to be lifted above shoulder height. In short the signing space occupies a bubble as illustrated below:
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Figure 2.2: The Signing Space.

Only a few semi-deictic signs such as those for body parts or items of clothing are made outside this space and for all intents and purposes the 'floor' of the signing space is treated as if it were actually the 'ground'. For example,

- [LEG
  [  
  -
  = 'leg'

- [SHORTS
  [  
  -
  = 'shorts'
are both made on the upper thigh. However, the following signs, which one might expect to be also made outside the signing space, conform to the vast majority of signs by being executed within the signing space.

One will notice that the signs FOOT, SHOE and THONGS have been metaphorically placed on the floor of the signing space. If in a signed discourse one was describing the action of picking up something which had fallen onto the ground one would NOT bend over to perform the action. Instead the object would be 'picked up' from the floor of the signing space. These constraints of the signing space can be broken during pantomimed sections of a signed discourse.

The degree to which any one individual fills up the signing space will vary. The factors influencing this may be age, sex, personality, social situation and so on. For example, young or inexperienced signers tend to enlarge the space (wave their arms around in excitement or frustration); men tend to sign larger than women though this is by no means an inviolable
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rule; shy individuals tend to compact their signing space; the signing space is enlarged if one is signing to a large group of people; and, finally, the signing space will be reduced when one wishes to 'whisper', say, to avoid distracting a speaker.

The distribution of signs within the signing space is not uniform (2*). In Auslan, for example, only approximately 18% of signs are made in the head region and of these the overwhelming majority are one-handed. This clears the head region of constant obstruction by the hands allowing the observer a clear view of the vital facial expressions. It also means that only relatively few signs require the elbows to be raised from their favoured 'rest' position. When one realises the relative importance of facial expressions and eye contact during signing this observed distribution of signs within the signing space raises the question of how one reads normal signing. In other words, where does one look - at the face, or at the hands? The short answer is, at the face. Let us explain.

Reading Auslan

When reading a person signing one does not follow the hands of the signer as they move around the signing space. Rather one centres one's eyes on the face of the signer and pays due attention to facial expression and the flow from one sign to another. This is not as difficult as it may, at first, appear. First, most handshapes found in Auslan are represented in signs made in the head region where one's visual discrimination is greatest, whereas signs made elsewhere in the signing space, where one's visual discrimination is not as great, use a more restricted range of handshapes. Second, signs made outside the head region tend to be double-handed signs (having the same handshape for both hands), and symmetrical (having the same movement for each hand). Third, the actual signation (movement) of signs outside the head region is larger than those in the head region. All these factors combine to make it quite easy for one's peripheral vision to discern signs without actually looking directly at them.

The act of reading sign language is directly comparable to the act of reading written English, or listening to spoken English - it is a synthetic
act which takes in whole phrases and not an analytic one which proceeds letter by letter, sound by sound, or even word by word. Students of sign language need to adopt the same kind of strategy that any learner of a second or foreign language adopts: listen to/observe the whole communicative act, not its components.

It may be appropriate, at this point, to consider the reading of fingerspelling. As already noted elsewhere (Introduction, ix) fingerspelling is not 'sign language' as such. It is literally 'spelling in the air'. Fingerspelling is read precisely in the way that you are reading the words of this sentence. That is, one is not conscious of each individual letter, rather one is conscious of whole words which are seen as combinations of letters or even as word-shapes. When reading fingerspelling one is conscious of the shape of a word, not its individual letter components. Indeed, many commonly fingerspelt words (especially proper names) are often reduced over time with frequent use to a word shape and are only incompletely spelt. The missing letters are quite redundant. But with either reduced or complete fingerspelling if one was to concentrate on each individual letter it would be virtually impossible to read. Unfamiliar words may lack a familiar fingerspelt 'shape', but if the signer fingerspells naturally and rhythmically, following syllabification, there is no problem in understanding. In normal signing, fingerspelt words are inserted into an otherwise signed text and thus peripheral vision with the aid of context and appropriate lip movements (since by definition a fingerspelt word is English, signers will more often than not simultaneously mouth a fingerspelt word) is normally more than adequate to enable the fingerspelt word to be read. In any case, one never normally looks directly at the hands and fingers, but observes the whole signing act. Only in cases of misunderstanding, when one requests a word or a name to be respelt, will one have occasion to look directly at the hands.

2.3.2 The Signer to Interlocutor Line

The second major use of space is, naturally enough, to define who one is talking to and who or what one is talking about. Unlike spoken languages there can be no communicative exchange in a sign language unless the
interlocutors can actually see each other. (Despite modern technologies such as video or the creation of writing systems such as Sutton Movement Notation virtually all communication in sign language is face to face. It is not possible, say, for two people engaged in a task to chat to each other without stopping.) To all intents and purposes a signer is always facing his or her interlocutor. One can thus postulate an imaginary line, which is always present, linking the signer to the interlocutor. It is this imaginary line which lies at the basis of the pronominal system in Auslan and other sign languages (cf Moody 1983:70; Baker & Cokely 1980a:205-236).

We can represent this visually thus:

**Figure 2.3: The Signer to Interlocutor Line**

![Diagram](image)

**Personal Pronouns**

Thus one simply points to oneself using the index finger, the DEICTIC-INDEX to signify I/ME, to one's interlocutor to signify YOU, and to whomever or whatever one is talking about to signify HE/HIM/SHE/HER/IT. (The deictic index is discussed in greater detail below. See Chapter Three, Deictic Signs). The plural forms of these pronouns are made by either oscillating the index to and fro or side to side depending on the positioning of the
The signs for the singular personal pronouns are simply the act of pointing to the referent:

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
[] & [] & [] \\
- towards self & - towards interlocutor & - away interlocutor \\
= 'I/me' & = 'you' & = 'he/him/she/ her/it'
\end{array}
\]

The plural forms of which are made by inflecting with a sweep:

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
[] & [] & [] \\
- away self & - towards interlocutors & - away interlocutor \\
= 'we,us' & = 'you' & = 'they,them'
\end{array}
\]

One should note here that Auslan is able to make a distinction between an inclusive and an exclusive use of WE/US which is not possible in English. The signer ends the sweeping movement before the interlocutor to signify WE/US-BUT-NOT-YOU, and ends with the interlocutor to signify WE/US-AND-YOU. When WE/US only signifies YOU-AND-I then the deictic index oscillates, in the manner of a compound, between YOU and I.

Thus the signer to interlocutor line forms the basis of the pronominal system of Auslan - it is based on pointing to one's interlocutor, oneself or either side of this line to persons or objects. But what of people and objects which are not present that one may wish to talk about? How can they be pointed to? This brings us to the third aspect of the manipulation of space in Auslan - the scene of action.
2.3.3 The Scene of Action: Localization

The solution to this problem comes through the observation that the signing space and the signing environment represents for the signer a 'scene of action' or a stage. Thus objects and persons that are not actually physically present in the situation can be assigned locations (which represent them) to the left or right of the signer to interlocutor line. Once positioned they can be referred to using the normal conventions of the pronominal system in Auslan. This imaginary placement of persons and objects in space allows, by extension, relationships such as cause and effect, subject and object, or agent and beneficiary to be spatially represented (see 'Directional Verbs' in Chapter 3). Furthermore, quite abstract entities such as ideas or segments of the signed discourse itself may also metaphorically occupy locations in the scene of action (see below Chapter 3, 'Deictic Signs').

The use of the scene of action in this way is not idiosyncratic. Certain commonsense conventions are observed when one 'sets the scene'. First, one positions only those people or things which are essential to the clear understanding of the discourse. Second, one selects positions which are appropriate and maximally distinct from one another. Third, one is consistent in the observation of the significance and relative positionings of particular points in space. Thus what is positioned to the right for the signer will be positioned to the left from the interlocutor's point of view. Fourth, only one referent may occupy any one position at any one time (if another referent is subsequently placed in a location previously occupied it immediately annuls the former). Fifth, one acts on or animates these people or things as if they were actually present or in fact 'real'.

Establishing locations in space

In the following chapter the use of the locative index to position imaginary referents is briefly discussed. However, pointing represents only one possible strategy in Auslan - there are others.
1. **Displace the sign** One common strategy is to displace the sign towards or in the very place that one wishes to become its location. Of course, only those signs which do not have an obligatory body contact or a fixed tabulation with respect to the body can be moved in this way (see 'Locatable Verbs', Chapter 3). For example, in the citation form the signs HOUSE or ARRIVE are made directly in front of the signer as illustrated below:

![Diagram of HOUSE sign]

![Diagram of ARRIVE sign]

These signs could be performed elsewhere in the signing space (typically left or right of the signer) than in the citation form.

It is common to use this strategy when fingerspelling proper names (ie one moves the hands to a new location for each person's name).

2. **Indicate with the locative index (point)** This second strategy is commonly reserved for those signs which cannot be displaced (ie those which have obligatory contact with the body or a fixed signing location, such as GLASSES or BOY). The signer points to its position, after having made the sign for the person or the thing about which he or she is speaking:

(7) -

```
[ GLASSES LOCATIVE-INDEX

[ ]

- if or rt

= 'the glasses, there...'
```
One should note that this structure is not equivalent to the demonstratives 'this' and 'that' or the definite article 'the'. It is used here to position, not to specify. Refer to the section 'Deictic Signs' for a full discussion of this.

For one-handed signs, it is possible for the signer to make a sign with one hand and simultaneously position it with the locative index of the other hand, thus:

(8) -

[ BOY
  
  [ LOCATIVE-INDEX
    - lf or rt
  = 'the boy, there...'

3. Turn the body and look in the direction of the location During the production of the referent sign, one can indicate its position simply by the orientation of one's body and the direction of one's gaze. This strategy is often used for signs which have obligatory body contact or a fixed tabulation such as in CAT.

(9) - eyes lf

  [ CAT
    
    - body lf
  = 'the cat, there...'

4. Modify the direction parameter of the verb Verbs which are directional (ie able to change direction) can also serve to fix a position for the referent as well as show relationships between already established referents. The verb MEET for example can be made towards a particular locality.
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(10) -

[ YESTERDAY    YOUR
[ MEET     BROTHER.
[ -      If
  = 'I met your brother yesterday.

Henceforth, the brother will be located to the left whenever reference is made to him. As in the next example:

(11) -

[ HE TELL-me YOU
[ ENGAGED.
[ -  If  self
  = "He told me you were engaged."

5. Place the object using a classifier Rather than pointing to a location or displacing a sign one may, after signing the referent, place a classifier which represents the referent to the desired location. For example:

(12) -

[ MAN CL(GL):a person
[ [ rt
  = 'a man, here...'

It is by using these strategies that signers are able to place imaginary persons or objects into the 'scene of action'. Once established they are referred to as if they were actually in the assigned locations.
The use of positionings in conversation

It is incumbent upon the participants in a conversation to respect positionings as they are made. These locations are relative to the entire signing space and not relative to the signer. That is to say, if a signer places something to his or her left then an interlocutor facing him or her will be obliged to point to his or her right in order to refer to the same entity. Should the interlocutor actually point to his or her left then they will be understood as referring to some other entity. For example:

The signer signs,

(13) -
[ YESTERDAY YOUR
[ MEET BROTHER.
[
- If
= 'I met your brother yesterday.

and the interlocutor continues,

(14) -
[ THOUGHT HE/HIM MELBOURNE.
[ STILL
[
- rt
= 'I thought he was still in Melbourne.'

The only location in the signing space which cannot be used for positioning referents is that directly in front of the signer as this is, of course, reserved for referring to one's interlocutor (YOU). Though signers have an enormous freedom in where they choose to locate referents in the signing space, when recounting an event with several actors or objects their positions relative to each other in reality will usually be respected.
2.3.4 The Time Lines

The time lines represent the metaphorical use of space and movement through space to depict time. Unlike ASL and LSF (Baker & Cokely 1980a:176; Moody 1983:73), Auslan can be said to possess several time lines, not just one. In ASL and LSF forward movement signifies 'into the future' and movement towards or past the right hand side of the head of the signer signifies 'into the past'. One could say that along this axis the present occupies the space just before the body (approximately at shoulder height), the past the space towards the back (over the right shoulder), and the future the space in front of the body (again roughly at shoulder height). This time line also exists in Auslan (see Line A in Figure 2.4 below). But Auslan, as with the related BSL (cf Brennan 1983:13), also has three other time lines. They are Line B (a diagonal line forward and backwards along the level forearm of the subordinate hand), Line C (a line left to right in front of the signer), and Line D (a line up and down at the right side of the signer). These are represented in Figure 2.4.

The temporal significance of space is realised only in 'time signs' (for example, AGO or NOW). That is to say, displacing the sign DRIVE forwards does not signify WILL-DRIVE. In Auslan most time signs, though not all, are made with reference to this axis. The use of time signs to fix the time or tense of a discourse (as Auslan does not inflect verbs for time) is discussed in greater detail in chapter three.
Here are some time signs which are made with reference to the time lines:

- [ ALWAYS
  - away line A
  = 'always'

- [ AGO
  - back line A
  = 'ago, before'

- [ YESTERDAY (A3)
  - back line A
  = 'yesterday'

- [ AND-THEN
  - away line A
  = 'and then'

- [ TOMORROW
  - away line A
  = 'tomorrow'

- [ FORMERLY
  - back line A
  = 'in times past'
The time lines are by no means absolute and there some variant signs which appear to contradict it (e.g., YESTERDAY (G1) has a forward movement). Other examples include:

- [ SOON ] [ NOW/TODAY ]
- [ ]
- [ BEFORE-THAT ] [ AFTER-THAT ]
- [ back line B ] [ away line B ]
- 'before/before that' 'after/after that'

Certain signs, like WEEK, become time signs in combination with positions on these time lines:

- [ WEEK ] [ NEXT-WEEK ] [ LAST-WEEK ]
- [ ]
- [ away lines A/B ] [ back lines A/B ]
- 'week' 'in one week/next week' 'one week ago/last week'

It is possible for these signs to feature number incorporation up to 10 as well as being made with reference to the time lines. For example:
For numbers greater than 10 the signer would sign several discrete signs - such as ELEVEN WEEK AGO. It goes without saying that any number above 4, 5 or 6 is usually signed as months rather than weeks. A similar inflection of the sign YEAR is made to produce the meanings LAST-YEAR, TWO-YEARS-AGO, IN-THREE-YEARS, and so on. Refer to dictionary entries for details.

Two other examples using lines C and D.

Because time or tenses are not inflected in the verb in Auslan as they are in spoken English, these time signs assume a special importance as the mechanism for fixing the time or tense of a phrase. For example:

(15) -

\[ \text{YESTERDAY I/ME NOT} \]
\[ \text{WORK.} \]
\[ \text{I didn't work yesterday.'} \]
Not all phrases need to have a time sign to specify tense. Usually the last mentioned time sign in a discourse will be understood unless it is overridden by a new time sign, though often the present is understood if no time sign is explicitly made. Time signs for 'the present' such as NOW or TODAY will usually only be made to re-establish the present as the time frame. For example:

(18) -
[ YESTERDAY I/ME NOT SICK.
[ ]
[ ]
= 'I didn't go to work yesterday. I was still sick.'

(19) -
[ YESTERDAY I/ME NOT NOW/TODAY SICK.
[ ]
[ ]
= 'I didn't go to work yesterday. I'm still sick today/now.'

The use of these time signs is discussed in greater detail in chapter three.
Notes


(2) For a more detailed discussion refer to Johnston (1984) 'Towards a Cheremic Analysis of Australian Sign Language (Auslan)'.

Chapter Three

Types of Signs

3.1 Deictic or Indexing Signs

Signs which are deictic or indexing ('pointing' or 'using the index finger') are of fundamental importance in Auslan, as in any sign language. The use of deixis ('pointing' or 'showing') is so important that it goes to the very heart of the nature of a sign language.

Words in the popular imagination are the names of things, actions, people, ideas and emotions. 'Tree' refers to the object tree, 'eat' to the act of eating, 'John' to the person John, 'impossible' to the idea of impossibility, 'happiness' to the feeling of happiness. The word is in a very real sense a substitute for that which is referred to. In a sign language the situation is, superficially, no different – signs substitute for that which is referred to. After all, it is in the very definition of a language that it consists of a system of such substitute symbols.

Important differences begin to emerge when a signed discourse and a spoken discourse are compared. For example, since sign languages are visual and spatial languages it should come as no surprise that signers are reluctant to 'substitute for that which is referred to' when the referent itself is within sight. Pointing to the object obviates the need to name it; naming may appear as redundant or uneconomical in the presence of the referent.

All languages have lexical and syntactic devices for deixis (pointing) but only sign languages use indexing systematically. Indeed, deixis can be analysed as one particular type of indexing within sign languages.
Indexing, as the name would suggest, entails the use of the index finger (G1 handshape) and may be of three major types: the DEICTIC-INDEX ('the pointing index finger'), the LOCATIVE-INDEX ('the putting index finger'), and the TRACE-INDEX ('the drawing index finger').

3.1.1 Deictic-Index ('the pointing index finger')

In terms of the categories of traditional English grammar, the deictic index (which as a gloss is capitalized as DEICTIC-INDEX) is used in Auslan to fulfil the following functions: as a nominal (DEICTIC-INDEX:gloss), as a pronoun (DEICTIC-INDEX:pro), as a locative (DEICTIC-INDEX:loc), and as a demonstrative (DEICTIC-INDEX:dem). Let's look at each of these in turn.

DEICTIC-INDEX:gloss

The most simple form of signs using the deictic index are, not surprisingly, those 'signs' which refer to body parts. They are always in the presence of the signer, clearly visible to the interlocutor and may be pointed at, usually to the point of contact, quite easily, precisely and without any ambiguity. Here the overlap of deixis and symbol is almost complete: pointing to the thing is the sign.

The sign NOSE is made simply by pointing to one's nose, the sign EYE simply by pointing to one's eye. There is thus a whole range of English or spoken lexical items which are not realised in Auslan by any particular unique signs except of course in so far as the point of reference, the tabulation, varies: DEICTIC-INDEX: eyelash; EYEBROW; DEICTIC-INDEX: nostril; DEICTIC-INDEX: tip-of-the-nose; DEICTIC-INDEX: earlobe; DEICTIC-INDEX: fingertip; and so on are 'named' simply by pointing. For a speaking person to ask the 'name' or sign for such body parts is to fail to fully understand the nature of a sign language.

However, there are some signs in which the deictic index has become lexicalised and an alternative strategy is required. For example, in some dialects of Auslan the sign HEAR is made by pointing to one's ear (in others it is made by cupping the hand behind the ear using the C3
handshape) and thus the sign EAR is made by holding the ear with the X4
handshape to distinguish it from HEAR; or again the sign for HERE is made
by pointing down in front of the signer, and thus the sign FOOT takes on an
entirely different form.

In the accompanying dictionary only the most common of these deictic body
parts are entered as separate lexical items with unique English glosses.
The entry notation makes a note if they are deictic signs. It goes without
saying that a whole range of such signs are not entered separately at all
as the signer improvises such meanings whenever needed simply by pointing.
In principle such a listing would be infinite. Such signs are simply
labelled DEICTIC-INDEX: gloss whenever they are required to be written in
the transcription. Thus for the meaning 'the nail of my little finger' one
would be transcribed as DEICTIC-INDEX: nail-of-little-finger. Common signs,
like NOSE, are given separate entries. (For a related discussion of this
point refer to the section on 'The Size of Sign Lexicon' in Chapter Two).

DEICTIC-INDEX: pro

(I, ME, YOU, WE, US, HE, HIM, SHE, HER, IT, THEY, THEM)

Of course, one does not sign alone - one is always in the presence of an
interlocutor or interlocutors. (Unless, of course, one is talking to
oneself. Signers do sign to themselves!) The pronominal system of Auslan is
based on this very obvious fact: one simply points to one's interlocutor to
signify YOU and to oneself to signify I/ME.

In the accompanying dictionary, only one entry is made at
DEICTIC-INDEX/PRONOUNS/etc for such signs. In the transcription notation
found in examples throughout this description of Auslan this is written
using DEICTIC-INDEX:pro when attention is drawn to the fact that the
deictic index is being used, or using the glosses I, ME, YOU, SHE, HE,
etc., when other aspects of the phrase are important. As Auslan does not
distinguish gender or subjective or objective case in the pronominal system
when one reads the glosses SHE, HIM, ME or whatever it must be remembered
that a more faithful glossing would simply write DEICTIC-INDEX:pro. This is
not done as it makes the transcription system confusing or unreadable without further adding contextual information. Plurality in the pronominal system of Auslan is distinguished through a sweeping or oscillating movement of the Deictic-Index (see the section on 'Plural Signs' in this chapter).

Referring to people in everyday conversation

It is at this point that the significant functional difference in the use of proper nouns in Auslan and in English, or any spoken language, should be mentioned. Proper nouns ('name signs' or fingerspelt names) are almost exclusively used to refer to persons who are not present in the signing situation. They will be used only in the presence of the referent on extremely formal occasions where the use of the deictic index would appear inappropriate or when one does not particularly wish to involve directly the person referred to in the conversation since pointing to the person may alert them to the fact that they are being discussed and thus elicit a contribution. In most cases, to use a proper noun when the person referred to is present or visible would lead to ambiguity: the interlocutor will usually assume that another person of the same name is actually being referred to, rather than the person within sight. Again in contradiction to spoken languages, proper names are never used to address one's interlocutor nor, for obvious reasons, are they used as attention-getters (ie as true vocatives).

The use of proper nouns in this way is entirely consistent with the earlier observation that within Auslan there is a certain reluctance to 'substitute for that which is referred to' when the referent is within sight.

DEICTIC-INDEX:loc

(HERE/S, THERE/S, OVER-THERE/S, YONDER/S)

Naturally one also uses the DEICTIC-INDEX:pro when referring to an object which is within sight (IT, THEY, THEM). However, reference to both persons and objects is constrained by the fact that pointing in a certain direction
towards a person or an object may be insufficient to uniquely define the referent when it is far enough removed from the interlocutors such that the area in question contains several possible referents, or where the object or person in question is being introduced for the first time as a topic of discussion. In such cases it is normal to first sign the referent then to use the deictic index. For example,

(20) -

[ DEICTIC-INDEX:loc   BAD
[ CAR               PARK
[
-  if

'=The car (over there) is badly parked.' ('A car is what we are looking for. It's over there. It's badly parked."

This represents a locative use of the deictic index (DEICTIC-INDEX:loc). Once introduced it is normal to continue referring to the object pronominally using the deictic index (DEICTIC-INDEX:pro). The DEICTIC-INDEX:loc brings us to the use of deixis in sign languages which covers the area traditionally understood by the notion of deixis in spoken languages such as English. For example, that which is understood by the English words 'here' and 'there'.

Not surprisingly, in Auslan one simply points to the ground near oneself for HERE and to the ground near one's interlocutor for THERE. However, because pointing within this spatial frame is essentially an analog, all possible nuances of proximity or distance from oneself and one's interlocutor can be expressed with ease simply by modifying exactly where one points. Despite this observation it is, however, normal in Auslan to refer to one of four major locations which could be glossed as HERE ('near me'), THERE ('near you'), OVER-THERE ('not near either of us'), and YONDER ('a long way from either of us'). When transcribing Auslan, the glosses HERE, THERE, OVER-THERE, and YONDER are normally given. However, on occasion, the gloss DEICTIC-INDEX:loc is used when other aspects of the signing act are important.
DEICTIC-INDEX:dem

(THIS, THESE, THAT, THOSE, THAT-OVER-THERE, THOSE-OVER-THERE, YON)

The spatial deixis discussed above has a direct relationship with the English the demonstratives 'this', 'that', 'these', and 'those'. In fact, the same lexical item - the deictic index sign - is used for both HERE and THIS, THERE and THAT, OVER-THERE and THAT-OVER-THERE, and YONDER and YON, though it is usual for the demonstratives (DEICTIC-INDEX:dem) to be made with greater stress in a shorter sharper movement, and with the facial expression 'grimace'. Thus:

(21) - __grinace__
[ DEICTIC-INDEX:dem! MINE
[    CAR
[     - If

signifies 'This/That/That-over-there/Yon car is mine' depending on the location of the deictic index. The plural form of these demonstratives is made by moving the deictic index about in the area of reference (usually in an oscillating movement to and fro, or side to side, or in a small circle in a horizontal plane). Indeed, the deictic signs HERE, THERE, OVER-THERE, and YONDER may also be said to have plural forms in Auslan. The plurals are formed in the same way or by repetition. For example:

(22) - __gape__
[ hey-LOOK, FIVE HAVE DEICTIC-INDEX:loc
[    r-r
[     - If-arc
= 'Hey, look, "theres" are five Rolls-Royces!"

The fact that the deictic index functions as a demonstrative (determiner) and not simply as a locative deictic is made apparent in the following examples:
(23) — grimace
   [ DEICTIC-INDEX:dem! HAVE.
   [ CAR
   
   - If
   = 'This/That/Over-ther-that/Yon car has.'

(24) — grimace
   [ DEICTIC-INDEX:dem! HAVE BLINKER.
   [ CAR BREAK
   [ BLINKER.
   - If
   = 'This/etc car has broken blinkers.'

(25) —
   [ DEICTIC-INDEX:loc HAVE.
   [ CAR
   
   - If
   = 'There's a car (there).'</n

(26) —
   [ HAVE DEICTIC-INDEX:loc.
   [ CAR
   
   - If
   = 'There's a car (there).']
Sentence (23) is incomplete as a decontextualised proposition in Auslan. It is the equivalent of saying in English 'That car has.' (Of course, in either language if one were disputing if any of the cars one was discussing had or didn't have four wheel drive, one could quite correctly reply through ellipsis 'That car has (four wheel drive).') Thus it would appear that when the deictic index immediately precedes a nominal it is understood as functioning as a demonstrative (determiner) and is usually signed with greater stress and with an 'intense' facial expression ('grimace').

However, because the very act of deixis in sign language subsumes its referent (which is thus often not signed separately) these demonstratives often have a pronominal function and as such are virtually indistinguishable from the pronominal deictic index, especially when signed without stress. For example, in

(28) -

[ DEICTIC-INDEX:pro MY
[
  FATHER.
[ ]
  rt
= 'He's my father. '

(29) -

grimace

[ DEICTIC-INDEX:dem! MAN MY
[
  FATHER.
[ ]
  rt
= 'That man is my father.'
sentences (28) and (30) are identical for all intents and purposes in Auslan. That is, the deictic index could be understood as a second person pronoun or as a pronominal use of the demonstrative. This is of no great worry if one accepts that the categories of Auslan are not identical to those of English. Here is a case where the language mode and the device of indexing makes redundant certain distinctions which are realised in English, though Auslan is able to make similar distinctions when they are considered to be of importance (eg by adding stress or by making the nominal explicit). The following sentence could thus be translated variously according to the context.

(31) -
[ YESTERDAY DEICTIC-INDEX
[ EMPTY/RUN-OUT PETROL.
[ - rt
= 'It/That/That car ran out of petrol, yesterday.'

As with the other deictic signs the way in which a sign is glossed in the transcription will depend on the purpose of that transcription.

3.1.2 Locative-Index ('the putting index finger')

(IMAGINE-HERE/S, IMAGINE-THERE/S, IMAGINE-OVER-THERE/S, IMAGINE-YONDER/S)

In the discussion above it was assumed that the objects and people referred to are actually present in the signing situation, or at least within sight. Of course, this is not always the case. In Auslan and other sign languages (Baker & Cokely 1980:223-236; Wilbur 1979:128-131) the deictic index can
point to real or imaginary persons and objects. These persons and objects are assigned positions in the signing space using the locative index. The locative index (LOCATIVE-INDEX) does not refer to an object or person itself, rather it acts to place understood objects or people in a location so that they can be referred to with the deictic index. It (the LOCATIVE-INDEX) differs from the locative use of the deictic index (DEICTIC-INDEX:loc) in that it does not point to an object or a person which is in a place or to the place itself, but rather points to a place in which one must mentally place a person or an object. Consider the following sentences:

(32) - ___________ topic
[ WOMAN DEICTIC-INDEX:loc, MY TEACHER.
[ NEAR WINDOW DAUGHTER
[ - 1f
= 'The woman near the window over there, she's my daughter's teacher.'

(33) -
[ NO, MAN LOCATIVE-INDEX WHEN ARREST DEICTIC-INDEX:pro.
[ STAND++ POLICE
[ - 1f 1f
= 'No, the man was standing there when the police arrested him.'

As can be seen from the above two examples the functional difference between the two deictic signs tends to be lost if they were both glossed as THERE. Except for the purposes of analysis, this difference is not in fact important and in the transcription glosses such as HERE, THERE, etc., are used for signs which may have distinct functions. Sometimes the sign is glossed as IMAGINE-HERE to make the transcription readable yet to underscore the fact the the locative index is being used.
3.1.3 Trace-Index ('the drawing index finger')

The trace index is used to outline the shape of an object or the boundaries of a scene, rather than placing (locative index) or pointing to (deictic index) an object. However, the place where the tracing is done will become the object's location unless it is immediately placed after tracing. Once outlined the object may be placed and/or referred to. For example:

(34) -
[ OLD ]
[ CAR BEHIND/AT-THE-BACK ]
[ TRACE-INDEX:fins, KNOW.
[ - rtowards rt]
= 'An old car with fins at the back like this. You know what I mean.'

(35) -
[ DEICTIC-INDEX:pro
[ PAY GOLD.
[ - rt-side to side rt]
= 'They were painted gold.'

3.2 Pronoun Signs

Put simply, a pronoun is a sign which substitutes for the sign of a thing (a noun) or the name sign or fingerspelt name of a person or place (a proper noun). There are several different kinds of pronouns in Auslan.

First, there are the personal pronouns which are glossed in English as I, ME, YOU, HE, HIM, SHE, HER etc. In Auslan these include the number-incorporated personal pronouns which are glossed in English as WE-TWO, US-TWO, THEY-TWO, THEM-THREE and so on.

Second, there are the demonstrative pronouns which are glossed in English as THIS, THAT, THAT-OVER-THERE, and YON plus their plural forms.
Third, there are the **possessive pronouns** which are glossed in English as MY, MINE, YOUR, YOURS, HER, HERS and so on.

Fourth, there are the **reflexive pronouns** which are glossed in English as MYSELF, HIMSELF, THEMSELVES and so on.

Fifth, there are the **classifiers** that can function as pronouns in certain environments.

We have already been introduced to the basic principles of the pronominal system in Auslan elsewhere in this general introduction. Personal pronouns, for example, have been discussed in sections dealing with deixis and indexing ('Deictic and Indexing Signs') and the manipulation of space ('Spatialization'). Demonstrative pronouns have also been dealt with in the section on deixis and indexing. Classifiers are described in the section 'Classifier Signs', below. Consequently these kinds of pronouns will not be discussed in depth again in this section.

**3.2.1 Personal Pronouns.**

One needs to recall a few basic facts about the pronominal system in Auslan; namely that it fully exploits spatialization. Essentially, one points to persons or things (whether they be absent or present at the time) for pronominal reference, adding stress or facial expressions for demonstratives. In other cases one incorporates a classifier into a verb (or animates the classifier) such that the pronoun is embedded within the form of the action or movement (see section 'Verb Signs', below).

We have seen that the plural of personal and demonstrative pronoun signs can be made by sweeping the sign in space in the real or imagined location of the referents. There is however another strategy available for personal pronouns which is also not possible in English without circumlocution - the ability to specify the number of persons in a plural.
For example when one wishes to signify WE-TWO, US-TWO (inclusively or exclusively) then the handshape for the numeral two (V1) is substituted for the index hand (G1), and the formation is held upright. Number is thus incorporated into the sign. For example:

\begin{verbatim}
[ US-TWO  ] [ US-TWO  ] [ YOU-TWO  ]
[            ] [            ] [            ]
[ to and fro between ] [ to and fro between ] [ to and fro between ]
[ signer/interlocutor ] [ signer/third person and ] [ interlocutors and ]
[ excluding interlocutor ] [ excluding interlocutor ] [ excluding signer ]
= 'you and me' = 'him/her and me' = 'both of you'
\end{verbatim}

Indeed the numerals up to NINE can be incorporated into personal pronouns in Auslan. They may include or exclude the signer, include or exclude the interlocutor and include present or absent people (see below). Context and the previous discourse will determine the complete meaning. Though not impossible, the numerals above NINE tend not to be incorporated into personal pronouns because the formation of such numerals already requires a movement which is difficult to superimpose on the movement required to make the unincorporated pronoun itself. Some more examples:

\begin{verbatim}
[ US-THREE  ] [ US-FOUR  ] [ YOU-FOUR  ]
[            ] [            ] [            ]
[            ] [            ] [            ]
[ horizontal sweep/circle incl. interlocutor/signer ] [ horizontal sweep/circle incl. third persons and ] [ horizontal sweep/circle excluding signer ]
and third person signer, excl. interloc.
= 'him/her you and me' = 'they/them and me' = 'the four of you'
\end{verbatim}

Possessive and reflexive pronouns denote their referents in precisely the same way as personal pronouns. That is, they exploit spatialization and thus are directed towards the real or imagined location of the referent. These sorts of pronouns are distinguished from personal pronouns in that they both use a distinctive handshape (see below).
3.2.2 Demonstrative Pronouns: facial expression

To express demonstrative pronouns the facial expression is crucial. The eyebrows are knitted, the eyes often narrowed, and the lips tightened and spread as in a grin or grimace or as if one was saying 'eeee'. THIS and THESE are made relatively close to the body and THAT and THOSE are made further way. In either case the index points downwards (a horizontal orientation of the fingers and palm would indicate a personal pronoun). The same principles of pluralization and localization apply here as with other pronouns. Of note is the fact that the upturned flat hand (B1) may be used as a pointer for demonstrative pronouns (refer to accompanying dictionary).

3.2.3 Possessive Pronouns

(POSSESSIVE–PRONOUN: MY, MINE, YOUR, YOURS, HIS, HER, HERS, ITS, OUR, OURS, THEIR, THEIRS)

Possessive pronouns are made with either the fist hand, A2 handshape, or the flat hand, B1 handshape. In contradiction to personal pronouns, they point to the referent not with the tip or tips of the fingers, but with the palm. That is to say it is the surface of the palm which is directed or pointed at the referent in possessive pronouns. Typically, the handshape is bounced in the direction of the possessor though it may be made with one forceful movement in the direction of the possessor for extra stress. Not surprisingly number incorporation is not possible with possessive pronouns as it is with personal pronouns because of the nature of the handshape involved. However, plurality is signified in the same way: that is, by a repetition (bouncing) of the sign as it sweeps, or by the sweeping action alone. Specific number may be indicated by first signing a number incorporated personal pronoun followed by the appropriate possessive pronoun.
The most neutral and 'accurate' gloss for these signs would be the simple descriptive POSSESSIVE-PRONOUN, which is used on occasion. However, since this would require the notation system to make explicit other aspects of the signing act (direction, presence or absence of plural sweep) and the context (referent/interlocutor male or female) the more English-like glosses MY, YOUR, HIS etc is preferred for easy reading. Remember that subjective and objective case is not made explicit in Auslan so MY is indistinguishable from MINE. Though this is sometimes included in a double gloss, like MY/MINE, to remind the reader, usually the most appropriate form, in terms of English structure, is used in this notation.

As I have mentioned above, certain pronouns may be signed inclusively or exclusively. In certain cases the plural sweep may be omitted if a location is occupied by, or has been assigned to, a group of people, since the singular form will be understood plurally when made towards that location.

For emphasis, clarity or to specify number it is quite acceptable to sign a plural pronoun first:

(36) -

[ THEY/ THEM THEIR/ THEIRS
[ |
[ ______________________
- 1/r
= "their/ theirs"
('those people there, it's theirs').

(37) -

[ THEN-FOUR THEIR WOMAN THERE
[ MOThER
[ ______________________
- 1f      rt
= "The woman over there is their mother."
('Those four people there, their mother is the woman over there.')
From what has been observed of Auslan signers to date it appears that the possessive pronoun may appear either before or after the noun in a phrase. Thus the following are all equally acceptable sign orders:

\[(38)\] -
[ YOUR/YOURS
[ CAR
[ = "your car"

\[(39)\] -
[ MY/MINE
[ BATHERS
[ = "my bathers"

\[(40)\] -
[ SHE/HER HER/HERS
[ FRIEND J-O-H-N
[ 1/r
[ = "John's her friend."
('The female there, her friend is John.')

3.2.4 Reflexive pronouns

(REFLEXIVE-PRONOUN: ITSELF, MYSELF, YOURSELF, HIMSELF, HERSELF, OURSELVES, THEMSELVES)

Reflexive pronouns are made with a modified fist or index hand (E1 and G3 respectively) which is flicked open with a bouncing movement at the end of
the sign ending in the 5l handshape. The El form 'points' with the palm, the G3 may point with the index finger or the palm, though in both cases the end position with the 5l handshape requires the palm to be facing the referent. In plural pronouns the plural sweep is usually followed by the flick, however in emphatic phrases the fingers can flick repeatedly as the hand is swept in an arc.

Though reflexive pronouns in Auslan have been observed to occur both before and after the verb it would appear that the normal position tends to be after the verb. The reflexive pronoun commonly occurs before a verb in questions. For example (as with other pronouns, though the most appropriate gloss for the context is chosen this does not always imply a formationally distinct sign):

(41) -

[ YESTERDAY I            MYSELF.   CL(G1):fall-from-surface-to-foot.  
  [                CUT-on-the-foot    KNIFE
  [                                      CL(B1):flat-surface-table.
   = "Yesterday I cut myself on the foot. A knife fell from the table."

(42) - ___________   "?"

[ YOURSELF WRITE-on-paper       THAT.  (YES)       GOOD.
  [                                VERY
  [                         CL(B1):flat-surface-paper
   = "Did you write that yourself?" (Yes) "It's very good."

These reflexive pronouns can be used in the same way as their English equivalents. However, when they have the sense of 'by myself' (ie alone, or without anyone else) as opposed to 'I cut myself' (true reflexive) then the sign ALONE with appropriate modulations tends to be used. For example:
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(43) -
[HE/HIM    ADELAIDE    ALONE
[            0
[          
- If        If
= "He went to Adelaide by himself."

3.2.5 Pronoun Positions and Usage

In fluent signing the subject (and hence the pronoun) of a phrase is often left understood and is not signed explicitly. This is especially the case when the series of recounted actions, thoughts, comments etc can only logically be attributed to one person. Even in more complicated narratives, the subject is likely to be left understood where one has recourse to a number of directional verbs whose common 'point of origin' in the signing space is sufficient to keep the subject coherent over a longer piece of text. Generally speaking though, without clear contextual clues an omitted subject is almost always understood as 'I'.

Though it is difficult to say with any high degree of certainty (without further research) it would appear that where a phrase has no object (i.e. where the action in question does not or can not 'carry over' to some person or object) then it is common for Auslan signers to be quite flexible in the placement of the pronoun sign for the subject. Indeed, there is a strong tendency to repeat the pronoun both at the beginning and end of the phrase. For example,

(44) -
[HE/HIM   HE/HIM
[          
- If       If
= "He's deaf."

(45) -
[HE DRINK++ HE.
[       A-LOT
[          
- rt      rt
= "He drinks a lot."

(46) -
[I/ME KNOW I/ME.
[          
= "I know."
Other examples:

(47) -
[ HE/HIM DEAF

(48) -
[ HE/HIM

(49) -
[ HAVE I/ME

[ FAT

[ CAR

- = "He's deaf."

[ "He's fat."

- = "I've got a car."

3.3. Plural Signs

In two previous sections ('Spatialization', 'Pronoun Signs') briefly touched on pluralization with respect to pronouns. This section reviews these methods of pluralization as well as introduces as yet undiscussed strategies of pluralization.

Though there are several ways to express plurality in Auslan not all of them are able to be used with all signs. Let us first look at these various strategies before mentioning limitations on their use.

3.3.1 Sign a numeral

When the number of referents is known or of importance, the most common procedure is to sign a precise number before or after the noun. For example:

(50) -
[ HAVE TWO I/ME.

[ CAR

[ -

= "Yes, I do have two cars."
3.3.2 Sign an indefinite quantity

When the exact number is either not known or not of importance one may sign an indefinite quantity sign before or after the noun to simply indicate the magnitude. For example:

(51) - ______
      [ no
      [ WORRY NO/NOT. HAVE I/ME
      [ BOOK
      [ TWO.

      = "Don't worry. I've got two books."

(52) - ______
      [ WILL HAVE THERE.
      [ INTERPRETER, SEVERAL
      [ 

      = "There will be several interpreters there."
      ("Interpreters, several will be there.")

(53) - ______
      [ THAT.
      [ HOUSE MANY LIKE
      [ 

      = "Many houses are like that."

(54) - ______
      [ LOT PEOPLE SAY
      [ SAME.
      [ 

      = "A lot of people say likewise/that/the same."
3.3.3 Sign a plural pronoun

One may sign a plural pronoun as the explicit subject of a verb after establishing its referent as topic. For example:

(55) - \( t \)
\[
[ \text{TEACHER, THEY/THEM DON'T-KNOW SIGN.} \\
[ \\
- \text{if}
= "The teachers don't know sign."
( 'Teacher(s), they don't know sign.' )
\]

3.3.4 Locate several referents

One may use the deictic index to locate two or more referents in space after establishing it as the topic. For example:

(56) -
\[
[ \text{GIRL THERE+ MY IN CLASS.} \\
[ \\
- 
= "The girls (there) are in my class."
\]

(57) -
\[
[ \text{BOY THERE+ DEAF.} \\
[ BOY \\
- 
= "The boys (there) are deaf."
3.3.5 Sign a plural sign (noun or classifier)

A few noun signs have separate singular and plural forms (CHILD, CHILDREN; PERSON, PEOPLE) which are used when available. In other instances a plural classifier, a sign similar to a pronoun in that it stands for or replaces the referent, can be signed after establishing the referent (see the next section, 'Classifier Signs' for more details). Many other signs (nouns and classifiers) regularly form the plural by repetition of the sign (MAN, MEN; WOMAN, WOMEN; BOOK, BOOKS; CL(X3):photo, CL(X3):photo++) in the same location.

Note that repetitions of the classifier can also serve to locate persons or things on the signer's stage. Thus, in the last example the signer will most likely localise the classifiers (photos on a page, photos on a wall etc).

3.3.6 Repeat or Reduplicate the sign (noun or classifier)

As noted many signs can be repeated to form a plural. Indeed, many one-handed signs may be simultaneously repeated on the subordinate hand (reduplicated) with the same effect. However, there are many signs that cannot be repeated or reduplicated in one location without creating a verbal effect or intensifying the sign. In these cases the sign must be repeated in several locations as if placing the various referents in space (see the next chapter for classifiers). For example:

(58) -

[ YOU-KNOW KEY DEICTIC-INDEX:to mid finger other hand
[ [ SHELF+++ IN KITCHEN, ON
[ [ 
- thrice downwards

= "The key's on the middle shelf of the three shelves in the kitchen."
('You know the three shelves in the kitchen, the key's on the middle one.')
If the sign SHELF (either the standardized or Auslan forms) was repeated without displacing it a verbal effect is created and it implies 'levelling' or 'smoothing' something. Where there is a spatial relationship as in the above example then displaced repetition is fully adequate for pluralization. However, take the sign PAGE/TURN-A-PAGE which cannot be repeated either 'on the spot' (implies 'turning pages'), or 'displaced' (implies 'pages all over the place') without creating particular meanings. In such cases one would use a specific numeral or indefinite quantity sign.

Or consider, for example, the sign SPOON/EAT-WITH-A-SPOON. If repeated 'on the spot' would signify an adverbial comment on the eating. It cannot be displaced (located) because it has a fixed tabulation (ie it is a 'non-locatable' sign). Should one attempt to displace and repeat the sign one would most likely produce the sign SING.

Thus, which of the various strategies for pluralization is used depends on the context and the sign. As has been seen certain signs cannot be repeated without a change in meaning, ie without becoming different signs. Generally speaking one could say that noun/verb sign pairs cannot be repeated without creating a verbal effect, and if repeated for the plural must also be displaced. However, some signs have fixed tabulations and cannot be repeated in various locations without changing the signification or creating a nonsense sign. These signs are restricted to interpolating a specific numeral or quantity sign for pluralization.

3.4 Classifier Signs

To restate an earlier observation, it is no surprise that a visual language makes appeal to signs which represent the visual aspects of things. There exists in Auslan signs which describe and represent an entire class or family of objects having a shape, height, size, texture or thickness in common. These signs are called classifier signs, or classifiers. Classifiers systematically exploit and modify the parameters of movement, location and orientation to convey a variety of meanings. In fact, what distinguishes classifiers as a class of signs from other signs is that, among other things, classifiers have no true 'citation form': apart from the handshape (and even this can be modified) the value of the parameters of movement, location and orientation is largely context dependant.
The classifiers have several functions.

First, they function descriptively or adjectivally. They occur immediately after a nominal and tell us something about its shape, size, texture etc and also, sometimes, its relative location. See examples (59) to (64) below.

Second, they function substitutively or pronominally. Though in this case the primary function of the classifier is to substitute for a noun, the choice of the classifier itself conserves something of the form of the referent. They are in a sense 'super-pronouns' (1*) because they may be signed in such a way as to show not only the relative location of the referent (thus also function as locatives), but also its actions or displacement (thus also function as verbs), and its manner of action (thus also function as adverbs). See examples (65) to (68) below.

Third, they substitute mimetically or iconically for the citation form handshape in certain verbs. See examples (69) to (71) below.

Fourth, they function as the second member in certain compounds where they are immediately preceded or followed by a specifying sign which effectively narrows the semantic field of the classifier down to an unambiguous referent. See the example of FIREPLACE in section 3.4.5 below.

Fifth, they may also function as lexical signs in themselves. See the examples of WALL, TABLE, WINDOW, etc., in section 3.4.6 below.

Sixth, they can function as the mimetic or iconic base within signs which have a high Iconic element. Though true lexical signs (as opposed to free mime) most highly Iconic signs have one or two classifier handshapes embedded in the sign. Sign modulations will exploit these. See the examples in section 3.4.7 below.
Like the Trace-Index (see above, 'Deictic and Indexing Signs') the most common way to move a descriptive classifier is as if it was moving along the surface or tracing the edges of the object it is describing. When the classifier is held stationary it is usually the configuration of the hand, or of two or three fingers, which represents the outline or part of the outline of the object. With substitutive classifiers the movement of the classifier normally represents the movement and change of location of the object or person it is substituting for. When classifiers are incorporated into verbs the movement in question is that which is required to sign the verb itself with or without modulations. Let us look at each of these classifier functions in turn.

3.4.1 Descriptive Classifiers

In the notation 'CL' stands for classifier. This is followed in parentheses by the code name of the handshape used. For example, a classifier that uses the flat hand with the thumb extended would be written as 'CL(B1)'. This is further followed by a description of the classifier in lower case letters. It is quite impossible to give a consistent gloss for a classifier as its signification is so highly context dependent. Thus, the following is a typical full entry for a classifier in the transcription – CL(Cl):large cylindrical.

Describing Surfaces: CL/B/ and CL(51)

To describe kinds of 'flat' surfaces the signer can use various forms of the flat hand, the /B/ chereme, or the spread hand, the 51 handshape. The 51 handshape implies roughness. /B/ may be realised as B1 for extended flat surfaces, B2 for bounded or defined flat surfaces, B3 where the signation requires the /B/ handshape to contact a surface along the index finger edge of the hand, and as B4 where the signation requires a particular orientation of the hand (eg high surfaces). If the 51 handshape is used then roughness may be emphasized by wriggling the fingers.
The handshape is placed, placed several times, or moved in a plane or planes depending on the context. Should the handshape be moved it must be moved perpendicular to the axis of the forearm as a movement longitudinally along the length of the axis of the forearm describes the movement of a vehicle, and not a surface, and is then a substitutive classifier, (see below, CL(B2):vehicle).

That is to say the surface classifier must move

![Diagram](image)

It will be the context which determines just how the classifier will be executed and if one or two hands are used. The orientation of the surface described will determine the orientation of the palm and the direction of the movement. Undulating surfaces will be reflected in a gentle twisting motion as the hand moves in a plane. Uneven surfaces will be reflected in a rapid twisting motion as the hand moves in a plane. Extremely smooth surfaces require one to make the facial expression 'pursed lips' throughout the signation. As it implies roughness, the 51 handshape cannot be used in the classifier for extremely smooth surfaces because this would obviously involve one in a contradiction.

Using one or two hands one is thus able to describe the texture, shape, and size of a surface or surfaces, or of an object with flat surfaces.
Some examples:

(59) -
[COUNTRYSIDE FAR-AWAY, CL(B1):flat-surface.
[
[ CL(B1):flat-surface.
]
= "The countryside there is flat."

(60) - purse lips
[ TABLE
[ ]
= "A very smooth table..."

(61) -
[ CL(B3):top-of-pile.
[ RUBBISH
[ CL(B3):top-of-pile.
[
= "A pile of rubbish about so big."

(62) -
[ T-V CL(B2):box
[ BUY NEW
[ CL(B2):box
[
= "I bought a new TV about so big."
Describing Thickness: CL(B6)

In addition to using two CL/B/ or CL(51) hands moving in parallel to describe the thickness of an object one may also use the B6 handshape with one or two hands. It may be placed or moved in any fashion to reflect the shape and length of the actual object. Though the handshape may be opened up to reflect degrees of thickness, and the cheeks puffed for emphasis, extremely thick objects would usually be signed using two CL/B/ hands. This classifier is often used to describe the thickness of objects such as books, planks of wood, window frames and so on. For example:

(63) -
   [ CL(B6):thick-rt
   [ TABLE
   [ CL(B6):thick-lf
   -
   = "A table with a really thick top..."
Describing Size, Shape and Length: CL(F2)/(O2), CL(G2), CL(L1)

These classifiers move on a continuum from very small (right) to large (left) and are used for showing the size, shape or length of an object. Essentially the relative distance between the tips of the thumb and the index finger indicates the size of the object. The G2 and L1 forms may also be used to indicate thickness when held static. When both shape and length are important, two hands are normally used with the relative distance travelled when the hands separate indicating the length of the object. Of particular note with these classifiers is that the G2 and L1 forms are commonly used to delineate the shape of a rectangle by double-handed versions separating then closing to the O4 handshape as if tracing around the edges of such an object. For example:

Describing Circles, Disks and Cylinders: CL(F1)/(O1), CL(C1)/(X2)

The F1 and X2 classifiers typically delineate flat circular objects (coins, buttons, disks etc), and the O1 and C1 classifiers typically delineate short cylindrical objects (cups, vases, etc). However, both forms will
describe (long) cylindrical objects if performed with two hands that are separated from each other or moved along parallel paths (the distance travelled indicates the length of the object). An example adapted from Baker & Cokely (1980a:310) is informative here:

= "narrow cylinder" = "medium cylinder" = "large cylinder"

Remembering that a classifier describes an entire class of objects, this last classifier, CL(C1):large cylindrical, could equally describe a huge column if signed after BUILDING, or an air-conditioning vent if signed after AIR, or a tree trunk if signed after TREE. Therefore signers must specify what they are speaking about for a classifier to have anything more than the most general meaning. Over time such pairs may obviously develop into stable compounds (for example, SWIMMING-COSTUMES).

Describing Spheres and Hemispheres: CL(02), CL(52)/(54)

The 01 classifier may also be used to describe a small spherical object, while the 52 and 54 classifiers are used to describe larger spherical objects. Normally when the latter two are used, two hands are required to indicate the size of the sphere in question. The signation of such classifier signs often requires a twisting of the hand. For example:
In a signed exchange where there are subsequent references to the described object, the descriptive classifier may function pronominally in much the same way as happens in English. For instance consider CL(B1):smooth in the following example.

(64) -
[ HAVE TWO ONE CL(B1):smooth, CL(51):rough.]
[ WORK DIFFERENT PHOTOCOPY PAPER. OTHER ]
-
-
-
-
-
-
[ CL(B1):smooth ?/ WHY. Touch-the-paper-and-the-ink-comes-off. ]
[ NO-GOOD. ]
[ CL(B1):sheet-of-paper ]
-

"There's two different kinds of photocopy paper at work. One is smooth, and the other is rough. The smooth (one) is no good. Why? Well, because if you touch it the ink comes off on to your fingers."
3.4.2 Substitutive Classifiers

These classifiers are usually realized by a smaller set of handshapes than descriptive classifiers. Their primary function is to substitute for the noun, rather than describe it, and to show its relative location and actions (i.e., movements), if any.

**Person/Object/Animal**

![G1 Handshape](image)

The index finger handshape, CL(G1), is used as a classifier for a person, object or animal. The handshape is held in any orientation appropriate to the meaning. The upright handshape implies the referent is standing or upright, horizontal implies the referent is reclining. For persons or animals, the tip of the index finger represents the 'head region' and thus the handshape is normally held with the fingertip facing upwards especially when the classifier is displaced to show movement. For example:

(65) -

[ YES, I SEE YOUR PEN. ]

[ CL(G1):pen on table top ]

[ TABLE KITCHEN, ]

[ CL(B1):table top ]

= "Yes, I saw your pen. It's on the table in the kitchen."

(66) -

[ I/ME ]

[ MAN OVER-THERE, LOOK-at-me ]

[ CL(G1):weaved his way towards me ]

[ IN SHOP ]
[SAY HELLO. DON'T-KNOW WHO.
[I/ME

"I was in the shop and, a man over there, he looked at me then weaved his way through the shop over to me and said hello. I didn't know who it was."

Flat Object/Vehicle

Any flat object is represented by the CL/B/ classifier held in any orientation appropriate to the context. This classifier, CL(B2), also represents vehicles (cars, trucks, etc) and when it does the direction of the movement of the hand is normally along the longitudinal axis of the forearm (see above). The palm orientation would be turned up only in those rare occasions where one wishes to show that a car 'turned over', and the hand would move sideways only to show the result of a 'collision' with the another car (the other hand). Sideways movement would also be possible to locate several cars in a row (see below). For example:

(67) - ______?" (interlocutor nods)
[ CL(B1):lifted up, turned over and blew away.
[ NEWSPAPER. WIND
[ -

"The newspaper? (Yes) Oh, the wind blew it away."
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(68) - ____________________________ ?

[ SEE THIS MORNING, TWO CL(B1):hit in the side

[ ACCIDENT CORNER CAR

[ CL(B1):front hit other car

- = "Did you see the accident at the corner this morning? One car hit another in the side."

3.4.3 Puralization of Classifiers

Though pluralization has already been dealt with above (see 'Plural Signs') it is necessary to repeat that discussion in order to explain some features of classifiers. In Auslan, pluralization is achieved in four major ways a) enumeration (TWO HOUSE), b) use of a quantity sign (MANY CAR), c) repetition of the sign (LIGHT LIGHT), d) number incorporation (US-TWO).

The last two strategies are of particular interest with respect to classifiers.

**Number incorporation:** the classifier, CL(G1), representing a person, animal or object may incorporate specific numbers up to five. Thus the handshape may be modified for two, CL(V1), three, CL(W2), four, CL(53), or five, CL(51) people, objects or animals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V1</th>
<th>W2</th>
<th>53</th>
<th>51</th>
<th>52</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="handshape.png" alt="V1" /></td>
<td><img src="handshape.png" alt="W2" /></td>
<td><img src="handshape.png" alt="53" /></td>
<td><img src="handshape.png" alt="51" /></td>
<td><img src="handshape.png" alt="52" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When used in double-handed signs the CL(53) and CL(51) forms signify an indefinitely large number of people, animals or objects, and unlike the other classifiers of this family they need not be held upright when used this way and displaced to show movement. For example one may sign the following to signify "a lot of them (people, animals etc) went there"
One will notice that the CL(51) handshape may also be modified by bending the fingers to the CL(52) handshape without any change of meaning, or may be intensified by a wiggling of the fingers.

Sign repetition and reduplication: the sign may be repeated in one of three ways. First, by simply copying the singular classifier on to the other hand one is able to show the locations and actions of two referents. Second, one may repeat the singular classifier several times in various locations. Third, one may repeat the singular classifier several times in various locations using both hands with alternating movements.

When the second option is chosen one may show an ordered or unordered arrangement of referents. In addition to the actual placement of the referents in space, an unordered arrangement can also be expressed using alternating movements of both hands.

3.4.4 Classifiers Incorporated within Verbs

As has been shown, substitutive classifiers can function pronominally, verbally and adverbially at one and the same time. They do this by becoming 'animated' to show the action and the manner of the action performed by the classifier (i.e., displaced to show movement). The actions in question are almost always exclusively various types of displacement (approach, move away, cross, meet, go straight ahead, pass, overtake, ascend, descend etc) and the classifier is understood as the subject of the said action when it moves and the object or complement of the said action when it acts as the point of reference for the classifier which does move.
From a different perspective one could therefore say that instead of becoming animated to function as a verb that the classifier has been incorporated within the verb as the subject. It is this second perspective of incorporation rather than animation which is more appropriate to describe the status of classifiers which are understood as the object or complement of a verb and which are not a point of reference for a hand which does move.

In these cases the verb loses its habitual configuration, the citation form, in order to incorporate the classifier. Consider, for example, the sign EAT/FOOD which uses the O2 handshape. If one was offering a plate of sweets around at a party one would sign:

```
(69)  - __________________ ?
      [ WANT EAT/CL(F2):small-sweets.
      [ ]
      -
      = "Would you like (to eat) one of these (small sweets)?"
```

Here the O2 handshape is replaced by the CL(F2) handshape which signifies something very small. With the use of the classifier 'very small' one knows that the object eaten is something very small. The exact meaning is given contextually, as above, or by interpolating an explicit sign. For example:

```
(70)  -
      [ I EAT/CL(F2):very-small NUT.
      [ LOVE
      [ ]
      -
      = "I love eating nuts."
```

The sign EAT can incorporate various classifiers depending on the context: CL(C1):medium-sized-and-round, to signify eating a piece of fruit such as an apple; CL(B4):thick, eating a sandwich; CL(X2):flat-circular, eating a tart etc.
It is impossible to give a full listing of the various verbs and their potential incorporations. The underlying principle is that where the verb by its very nature lends itself to iconic or mimetic deformation and where there is an appropriate classifier to replace the citation form, most signers will take advantage of it.

One more example using the verb PUT which normally uses the O2 handshape.

(71) - [PLEASE PUT/CL(C1):cup] [ ] [ ] - If = "Please, put the cup there (to the left)."

3.4.5 Sign+Classifier Compounds

Some noun classifier pairs become established over time as compounds. They are distinguished from improvised descriptive noun classifier pairs in two ways. First, the signing flows from the first element to the second without the slightest hesitation. Normally the descriptive classifier is added to the noun after a slight delay during which the signer selects the appropriate description and/or the noun itself is topicalized. Second, there may not be clarity in the choice of classifier such that on occasions a second, descriptive classifier needs to be added. For example, FIREPLACE/CHIMNEY is an Auslan compound of FIRE+CL(B2):chimney and hearth. Should one wish to describe a fireplace that was particularly large it would not be unusual to see the following sequence signed: FIRE+CL(B2):chimney and hearth CL(B2):sides of a large fireplace.

Without the specifying sign, the noun, the classifier alone would be vague, ambiguous or even unintelligible. However, it is usual that in subsequent instances in a discourse the classifier will function pronominally and, hence, not require that the noun be repeated. Such noun/classifier compounds are often mentioned in the dictionary, but rarely as separate
lexical items. Though entry notation indicates how the compound is composed, the specifying sign is treated as if it always preceded the classifier. Thus FIREPLACE/CHIMNEY is located at FIRE in the dictionary, not at CL(B2).

3.4.6 Lexical Classifiers

One can see that a whole family of signs are made with the classifier CL(/B/) (WALL, TABLE, WINDOW, ROOF, CLIFF, WAVE, SMOOTH, etc). This is because some frequently used classifiers become independent signs and do not require specification to be understood. For example, CL(B3):flat-smooth-surface-at-waist-height is invariably understood as TABLE without prior specification, or, CL(B1):vertical-flat-surface, in certain locations and orientations, invariably signifies WALL. I call such signs 'lexical classifiers' and they are entered in the dictionary as separate lexical items. Entry notation indicates when a classifier is being used lexically. Such signs have a greater freedom in the signation orientation and location than other lexical signs.

3.4.7 Signs Motivated by a Classifier

Signs which are motivated by a classifier have a high Iconic element. They are distinguished from lexical classifiers in that the classifier handshape is usually only an element contributing to the meaning of the sign, rather than the sign itself being a frequent occurrence of a classifier which requires no further specification. For example, the signs BEE and BAND use the CL(F2) handshape because 'smallness' is a part of their meaning. In the first case, the smallness of the bee's stinger which pricks one on the forearm. In the second case, the smallness of the conductor's baton which is held and waved in front of the signer. The signs DICTIONARY, POETRY and PROGRAMME use initialisation on the dominant hand while the subordinate hand assumes the CL(B2) handshape representing a flat surface (a book or a sheet of paper). The sign BALL uses the CL(52) handshape on the dominant hand swivelling on the index finger of the G1 handshape of the subordinate hand. As has been seen above the CL(52) handshape signifies a sphere.
3.5 Verb Signs

3.5.1 Noun and Verb Signs in Auslan

Before examining some of the main features of verb signs in Auslan it is first necessary to look at the difference between noun and verb signs.

First of all there are those signs that can only be understood verbally or nominally: they cannot function as both. For example, the signs RADIO, MEN, THONG, THIEF, COUSIN, among others are all nominals and cannot function as verbs. Then there are the verb signs which can never function as nominals, though they are much fewer in number: BEWARE, BOIL, and so on (2*). This simply means that there exist noun signs which have no related verb, and vice versa.

Second there are those signs which can function as nominals or verbals depending on either a) the context or b) the manner of execution of the sign, or both. That is to say they exist as noun-verb pairs.

A. The contextual clues can relate to the signing environment, what is being talked about, or the actual signs which precede or succeed it in a given phrase. Compare, for example, the following where the sign MAKE/MADE is only distinguished as a verb or a noun contextually:

(72) - ________?v
     [ WHO
     [    MAKE CAKE.
     [   
   = "Who made the cake?"
Within a phrase itself should a sign which may be understood either way be preceded by a possessive or demonstrative pronoun, or an adjective, it would be understood as a nominal. Similarly, verbal signs are identified by the presence of time signs, adverbials, and explicit subjects.

Contrary to what was thought in the early days of sign language research (3*) it is rare that purely contextual clues will determine whether a sign is to be understood as a nominal or a verbal. In most cases, the signation (movement) of such a sign will also distinguish it as being a noun or a verb.

B. Generally speaking, in any given noun/verb pair, such as DRINK v./DRINK/CUP n., the signation of the noun tends to be reduced with a certain amount of tension (short and sharp) whereas that of the verb to be ample and freer flowing (long and continuous). The pairs CHAIR n./SIT v., FOOD n./EAT v., PEN n./WRITE v. are typical examples of this process.

Research into ASL has revealed that the movement parameter itself needs to be further subdivided into three components (frequency, directionality, and manner) if the subtle differences in production between these noun/verb pairs is to be clearly seen (4*). Noun/verb pairs such as those cited above have been found in Auslan which parallel and confirm the observations made in ASL. The differences between certain nouns and verbs is better able to be codified if consideration is given to these three components of the signation first identified by Supalla & Newport (1978).

In any one sign the value of these three aspects of the signation vary. The frequency of a sign may be 'single' or 'repeated', the directionality (5*)
of a sign may be 'uni-directional' or 'bi-directional', the manner of a sign may be 'continuous', 'hold' or 'restrained'. These values are difficult to illustrate and some are more easily grasped by the non-signer than others. For example, whether the movement of a sign is single (eg SMOOTH) or repeated (eg CLEAN) or uni-directional (going in one direction, eg CUT-finger) or bi-directional (going back and forward, eg KNIFE) is usually straightforward and unproblematic. However, continuous, hold and restrained movements are a good deal more subtle. Suffice it to say for the moment that a continuous movement is ample and flowing with a constant character throughout (eg PUSH), a hold movement is one in which the sign is held in space, usually at the end of the movement, for a fraction of a second (eg STOP) and a restrained movement is one which is short and sharp with a certain amount of tension (eg YOUR).

Looking at the corpus of signs in Auslan, on the whole where a noun/verb pair does exist in the majority of cases the noun will be restrained and the verb continuous or hold. Nevertheless, as the examples above show, there are pairs which are also distinguished by one or other of the two components. In many cases the noun and verb signs are distinguishable in more than one dimension with the noun being single and restrained, and the verb being repeated and continuous.

Consideration of the movement parameter as suggested by Supalla and Newport is not only of importance when considering noun/verb sign pairs. This is because verb signs are particularly rich in the number and variety of modulations they may undergo to convey a variety of meanings. A verb sign in Auslan, taking its citation form as its base, is capable, in some cases, of being modulated such that all five parameters undergo significant changes. Thus once the base form of a verb sign is clear, the dimensions along which it may be modulated to change its meaning can be specified. These modulations can be grouped thus: direction and location modifications (directional and locatable verb signs); handshape modifications (classifier verb signs); various signation modifications (adverbial verb signs). A naive observer may not recognize such modulated form to be, essentially, still the same sign.
In previous sections and chapters some of the modifications that verbs undergo have already been exemplified. For example, the direction of the signation to incorporate subject and/or object or to locate actions and agents in space (see examples (1), (2), (3)). Examples have also been seen which show how the handshape may be modified to incorporate a classifier as subject or object of the verb (see example (69)).

This section will review these modulations as well as examine other modulations as yet undiscussed (adverbials of frequency, manner, indicators of duration).

3.5.2 Directional and Locatable Verb Signs: direction and location modification

As with noun signs, within the class of verb signs there are two major types: those with fixed tabulations and those without fixed tabulations. The second type also has signs which may be described as locatable or non-locatable.

a) Verbs without fixed tabulations

Such verbs are able to exploit the spatialization of Auslan to invest the direction of the signation of the verb meaningfully with respect to subject and object of the verb. Or to put it another way such verbs are able to incorporate personal pronouns (I/ME, YOU, SHE/HER, THEY/THEM etc) by moving from the subject (or the location of the subject) to the object (or the location of the object). This has already been seen with the sign MEET (see example (10)). Another example:

(74) -

[       ASK

(75) -

[       ASK

[       [       

- towards interlocutor

= "I ask you."

- interlocutor to signer

= "You ask me."
And so on. Notice that directional verbs may also incorporate the plural sweep:

(78) -
[ ASK
 [ ]
 [ ]
 - away sweep
 = "I ask (all of) you."

(79) -
[ ASK
 [ ]
 [ ]
 - lf/rt to sweep towards
 = "He asks us."

(80) -
[ ASK
 [ ]
 [ ]
 - rt/lf to lf/rt-arc
 = "He asks them."

The signer may also specify plurality by signing a separate plural pronoun. In such cases the verb tends to lose its directionality though it may be maintained for emphasis:

(81) -
[ HE ASK US
 [ ]
 [ ]
 - 1/r
 = "He asks us."
Other examples of verbs of this group include LOOK, JOIN, DROP, MEET, INVITE, SIGN, etc. In the dictionary they are labelled as 'directional' signs.

Some verbs may be limited by a fixed tabulation only at the beginning or at the end of the signation. The sign TELL, for example, only has a fixed initial tabulation (the side of the mouth) thus it can only incorporate as a subject the first person singular, I. However, its final position can be determined by its movement towards the object or the location of the object. For example:

\[(82) \quad \text{I-TELL-you} \quad \text{to interlocutor} = \"I tell you.\"
\[83\quad \text{YOU TELL-her} \quad \text{to lf/rt} = \"You tell her.\"\]

The sign ADD, on the contrary, has a fixed final tabulation (on the palm of the subordinate hand) thus it can normally only incorporate in its directionality the subject but not the object. For example, by beginning the movement of the dominant hand from the subject or the location of the subject one is able to show 'who added', but placing the subordinate hand towards or in the location of the object and consequently modifying the directionality of the sign does not show 'what was added'. Rather, it tends to convey the meaning of 'where the adding occurred'.

In addition to modifying the direction parameter to show subject and object, many verbs may be located in space in much the same way as signs for persons or things (ie noun signs). As with all other signs, those which have a fixed tabulation on the body are not locatable through displacement of the sign itself and must thus use the locative index (see above, 2.3.3 Localization). This limitation does not apply to two-handed and double-handed signs whose tabulation is the other hand because as a unit the sign can be said to occur in neutral space. In the following phrase, for example, the double-handed sign FIGHT is displaced towards the left
which has become established as the location of the two men (they may be a real or imaginary referents).

(84) -
[ TWO MEN THERE,
[ FIGHT.
[ - if if
  = "The two men (there), are fighting (there)."
]

The signs ARRIVE and ADD are also of this type. In

(85) -
[ I ARRIVE-there
[ SIX-O'CLOCK.
[ - subord. if
  = "I arrived (there, in Melbourne) at 6 o'clock."
]

the position to the signer's left has already been assigned to 'Melbourne' in the conversation, so that the signer is able to shift the subordinate hand to the left in order to show 'where the arriving occurred'. Likewise in the next example the position to the right of the signer is actually occupied by a list of expenses. A committee member has tried to 'reimburse' themselves for more than five dollars worth of petrol as agreed.

(86) -
[ DON'T SLY YOU, I SAY-you FIVE
[ you-ADD-there DOLLAR ONLY.
[ - inter. to rt
  = "Don't be sly. I said for you to add five dollars only to the expenses."
]

Most signs which do not have a fixed tabulation can be displaced in the signing space so that the location 'means' something. Signs of this type are labelled in the dictionary as 'locatable'.
b) Verbs with fixed tabulations.

These verb signs cannot modify their direction in order to indicate 'who does what to whom' because they have a fixed tabulation which cannot be changed without producing a different or nonsense sign (in many cases they have no 'direction' to speak of in the signation; being simply placed, held, twisted, wiggled, etc., in a specific location). Such verbs are called nondirectional and thus the subject and the object must be explicitly and separately signed except where understood from the context. For example:

(87) -
   [ HE LOVE FOOTBALL ]
   [
   [ - lf
   = "He loves football."

(88) -
   [ SHE KNOW I/ME ]
   [
   [ - rt
   = "She knows me."

Other verbs of this group include: SPEAK, INTERPRET, HAVE/TO BE THERE, REMEMBER, DISLIKE, HATE, LEARN, WEAR, LIVE, PLAY, WASH-UP. In the dictionary all signs are to be understood as in this class (ie, 'non-directional') unless otherwise labelled as 'directional'.

There is a special class of signs within this category which has significant fixed tabulations on the body. These signs, like CUT, WASH, OPERATE and INJECT incorporate the object as that part of the body where the sign is executed. For example:
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(89) - (90) - (91) -
[CUT-finger] [CUT-lip] [CUT-neck/KILL]
[ ] [ ] [ ]
[ - on finger - on lip - on neck]
= "Cut on the finger." = "Cut on the lip." = "Cut on the neck/Kill."

As can be seen from the last example some significant locations have become lexicalized: CUT-neck (if done in a certain way – see dictionary entry for KILL) has come to mean KILL even if a knife or the neck is not involved.

(92) -
[ SHE EAT-CL(F2):tablet KILL HERSELF.
[ [ ] ]
[ - ]
= "She took a tablet and killed herself."

With such signs there is usually a tabulation, that found in the citation form, which is normally understood as neutral. In the dictionary such signs are labelled as having 'significant locations', rather than as simply 'locatable'.

3.5.3 Classifier Verb Signs: handshape modification

Verb signs of this type have been almost fully dealt with in the previous section ('Classifier Signs'). One will recall, for example, how substitutive classifiers such as CL(G1) and CL(B2) can become 'animated' so that they simultaneously function as pronouns, verbs and adverbs, and how this process can be equally viewed as verb signs which have incorporated a classifier or as classifiers which behave as verbs. In these cases we prefer to speak of the classifier becoming animated rather than a verb sign incorporating a classifier because the modifications are so great and so context dependent that the underlying verb form is almost completely annihilated in the process (even if one can be said to exist in the first place). However, again as we saw, this is not quite the case with verbs
that incorporate a classifier as the object. Despite modifications, such
signs still conserve much of the form of the base verb.

There are nevertheless several observations we can make regarding this
process of classifier incorporation within verbs.

First of all, 'verbs' which incorporate classifiers as subjects are almost
invariably verbs of displacement (approach, move away, cross, meet, go
straight ahead, pass, overtake, ascend, descend, etc). We do not capitalize
these definitions as we do for all our glosses because, for the most part,
these verbs do not exist in a citation form without an incorporated
classifier - the relative movement of the classifier/s is precisely the
kind of displacement which is signified. Thus instead of writing APPROACH
we write CL(B2):one-car-approaches-the-other. There are however some
exceptions to this. Just as some descriptive classifiers have become
lexicalized so too have some substitutive classifiers. We write for example
MEET as a gloss for a commonly used classifier verb sign.

Second, verbs which incorporate classifiers as objects are almost
exclusively verbs of grasping or verbs for acts which require grasping.
These objects are things which cannot move by themselves and one must
therefore TAKE, MOVE, CARRY and GIVE them. In order to EAT, WRITE, and
DRINK one needs to hold an object of a certain size or shape. See the
previous chapter on classifiers for some examples.

3.5.4 Adverbial Incorporating Verb Signs:

signation modification and facial expression

a. Adverbs of manner: Modifications of the movement, always accompanied by
appropriate facial expressions, can, and normally do, incorporate the
adverb in the verb:
The examples we could give here would be endless. The essential fact to remember is that in Auslan, and other sign languages studied to date, the normal strategy while signing is to incorporate into the manner of the production of the verb, whenever possible, any adverbial comment one may wish to make about the said action. Though this is no longer necessary where an adverbial sign (such as ANGRY/LY, QUICK/LY, SLOW/LY, CAREFUL/LY and so on) is interpolated into the phrase most signers will continue to appropriately modulate the sign and add facial expression even if they use an explicit adverbial. In fact, the adverbial sign itself may also be signed in the manner of its meaning. Difficult to codify as they are, the facial expressions used are those discussed in Chapter 1, 1.2.5 'The Face and the Head'.

(93) - wide eyes
   [ he-LOOK-at-me!
   [ ]
   - towards
   = "He stared at me rudely."

(94) - up & down
   [ I LOOK-at-her
   [ ]
   - up, up & down
   = "I looked her up and down."

(95) - dreamy
   [ WORK
   [ ]
   - slow
   = "I was working, my mind elsewhere."
b. Adverbs of frequency and duration.

As with adverbs of manner, specific adverbial signs of frequency and duration also exist in Auslan. For example, we have the signs REGULARLY, CONTINUOUSLY, ALWAYS, OFTEN, FEW/SELDOM, LOT, TOO-MUCH, FOR-A-LONG-TIME, AGAIN and so on. These explicit time signs are discussed in the next chapter. In this section we wish to examine those modulations of the signation of a verb that can, by themselves, convey frequency and duration. Again as with adverbs of manner, incorporation or modulation of the base verb is the preferred strategy for conveying these meanings though they may be used with explicit time signs, or even be replaced by them.

For the untutored eye, the modification of the signation of a verb to convey various degrees of frequency and duration appears to be quite simply this: repetition. Though this is essentially true, the sign is repeated, it is more than just that and there exist subtle differences between types of 'repeated' signs. That is, the manner of the repetition is itself important. Studies into ASL suggest that least four basic modulations can be identified in that sign language. Observations to date confirm that at least two of these also exist in Auslan with the same signification.

Although we reproduce descriptions and illustrations of these four inflections taken from Baker & Cokely (1980a:404) the reader should be aware that many Auslan signers are only aware of two, which we could simply gloss as "frequency" and "duration". The "frequency" modulation is essentially a repetition of the sign equivalent to "regularly" in Baker & Cokely's analysis below. The "duration" modulation is essentially the sign repeated with a circular movement and is equivalent to "over time" in Baker & Cokely's analysis. Though I am confident that that all four of the ASL modulations are also to be found in Auslan one must at the moment err on the side of caution until systematic analyses of video-taped data can be made.
(a) "over time" (continually; regularly; for a while)
This inflection is made with a repeated, circular movement.

(b) "regularly" (frequently; repeatedly; a lot; with active focus)
This inflection is made with a repeated, small (non-tense) straight-line movement.

(c) "long time" (for a prolonged period of time)
This inflection is made with a slower, repeated, elliptical movement - composed of a rounded 'thrust' and 'return'.

(d) "over and over again" (prolonged, repeated focus)
This inflection is made with (a) a repeated cycle-composed of a tense straight-line movement (short 'hold' at end of 'thrust', followed by an arc-like transitional movement back to the starting place) and (b) a forward rocking motion of the body and/or head with each 'thrust'.

Naturally it is each individual signer’s perception which determines just which inflection he or she will use to describe any given event. The meaning and use of these inflections have been summarized by Baker & Cokely (1980a:405) thus:

“Native Signers feel that the inflections for temporal aspect described in (a) and (b) are more like a simple reporting of an event (e.g., going somewhere, crying, working) — with the first one (a) focussing on the duration of the event, and the second one (b) focussing on the frequency of the event. However, the third and forth inflections...described in (c) and (d), indicate that the duration or frequency is more unusual. Signers use the inflection described in (c) to show their feeling that the event lasted for a long time. Signers use the inflection described in (d) to show their feeling that the event occurred unusually often, with a 'break' (period of time) between each repetition of the event. This fourth inflection is often used when the Signer has a negative feeling about the event - like having to do something again and again that is hard to do.”

Consider some examples using the sign WAIT:

(96) - _______?^
     [ YOU      I/ME.
     [    WAIT
     [      ...
     = "Are you going to wait for me?"

(97) -
     [ I (ALWAYS) YOU.
     [   WAIT"regularly"
     [     ...
     = "I always wait for you."
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(98) - ____________________ t
[                              YOU, I FED-UP.
[ WAIT"over and over again"
[                   
= "I'm fed up with always waiting and waiting for you."
("Waiting and waiting for you always, I'm fed up with it.")

Or the sign VISIT:

(99) - __________ t
[             MELOURNE, I I.
[ VISIT"over time"
[                   
= "I visit Melbourne regularly."
("Melbourne, I visit it regularly, I do.")

Not all verb signs can incorporate these adverbial modulations of frequency and duration. For example, those signs whose movements are short and sharp, complex, or involve a bounce or a repetition do not lend themselves to such modulations. With such signs one tends to repeat the sign several times adding an explicit adverb of frequency or duration.

Duration in the past

Duration in the past is expressed precisely as above. Where in English two distinct verb forms may be used to contrast two past states (was doing/did) the same contrast is easily achieved in Auslan by 1) using a time sign to situate the action (eg LAST-NIGHT) 2) modulation of the continuous verb ('was doing!) 3) signing the interruption or action (did) significantly shorter and with greater tension then the first verb. For example:
3.5.5 Summary

Undoubtedly verb signs in Auslan are complex and rich. This confirms once again the capacity of Auslan (and all sign languages) to concentrate in a single sign a large amount of information. In verb signs we have seen that the verb sign may contain the subject and/or the object by a change in the direction of the sign; contain the adverb of manner by a modification of the movement and with an appropriate facial expression; contain the adverb of frequency and duration by a particularly way of repeating the sign; contain the subject of a verb of displacement by a classifier incorporated into the verb; and contain the object of a verb of grasping by incorporation of a classifier.

3.6 Time Signs

3.6.1 Introduction

Auslan uses specific time signs to establish the temporal aspect of verbs. These specific time signs are made either at the beginning of the phrase, at the end of the phrase, or, sometimes, adjacent to the verbal sign. The positioning of the time signs depends in part on whether the actions or events described occur at a definite or an indefinite time, occur during a period of time, or occur repeatedly or habitually.

As with several aspects of the grammar of Auslan that we have been describing in these pages we find that certain patterns found in ASL and LSF are also common to Auslan (Baker & Cokely 1980a:Chapter VII passim; Moody 1983:122-131). However, these observations relate to a tendency to
find certain patterns rather than to hard and fast rules that cannot be broken. Further research into Auslan may clarify the position further but as with any language the 'rules of grammar' are as much constructions of the observer as they are features of the language which is being described. These qualifications notwithstanding, the reader may feel confident that the following observations are a faithful account of the signing practice of most native signers in Australia.

Generally speaking we may say that time signs tend to occur at the beginning of the phrase if the time of the action is definite, and at the end of the phrase or adjacent to the verb if the time of the action is indefinite. It is important to note that it is these time signs which establish the time frame as past, present or future as verbal signs in Auslan are not inflected for time as they are in English. Furthermore, their role is to establish the time frame and thus, once done, there is no need to repeat time signs each time there is an event or action. A time sign governs all that follows it until it is overridden by another time sign.

3.6.2 definite time

Actions which take place at a definite time are signalled by a sign or signs which explicitly state that time. They are placed at the beginning of the phrase so that the interlocutor knows from the beginning when the action takes place. Besides explicitly stating the date or time alone (J-A-N 30, HALF-PAST-SEVEN) with context directing this to the past or future, the definite time signs commonly used include: YESTERDAY, TOMORROW, IN-THREE-YEARS, LAST-WEEK, TWO-YEARS-AGO, NOW/TODAY and so on. They may be used in conjunction with dates and times (LAST-YEAR J-A-N 30, TODAY HALF-PAST-SEVEN etc).

Most of these signs are made with respect to the time lines which we have already discussed (see Chapter 2, 2.3.4 'The Time Lines').

The time sign used fixes the time reference for all of which follows in a conversation until a participant uses another time sign. However, this
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Qualification may be overridden if, for example, a particular participant's contribution is perceived as an aside or trivial and thus insufficient to shift the time reference of the ongoing conversation or, for example, where logic itself would demand that certain verbs be understood in another time frame. Consider, for example, the following sentences as a part of two adult signers' conversation:

(101) -

[ NOW I LIVE      I GROW-UP MELBOURNE. LIVE
  SYDNEY.       LOVE SYDNEY.
]

= "I live in Sydney, but grew up in Melbourne. I love living in Sydney."

The second verb sign GROW-UP must be understood in the past tense as the signer is now an adult, and the third sentence must be understood in the present tense because of the first sentence. Some other examples (adapted from Moody 1983:123) of definite time signs ('A' refers to one signer, 'B' to the other):

(102) -A-

[ YESTERDAY I GO
  THEATRE, CHILDREN LESS GOD . I INTEREST
  Tilt Forward
]

= "Yesterday I went to the theatre and saw 'Children of a Lesser God'.
I was very interested."

The established time frame, YESTERDAY, is understood by the interlocutor and needs not be repeated in the resulting exchange:

(103) -B-

[ YOU CAN
  CAN.
]

= "You could understand the American Sign Language?!"
Here the interlocutor changes the time frame by signing TOMORROW and this will become the new time reference henceforth for all intents and purposes. For example, the response may be: WHO YOU GO-TOGETHER? ("Who will you go with?") or I THINK PEOPLE CL(51):lot-of-people-go-there ("I think there will be a lot of people going there tomorrow.") which will, of course, be understood in the definite future time (tomorrow). However, the response may be to return to a previous topic such as: YES, I SURPRISE HAVE INTERPRETER ("Yes, I was surprised they had interpreters.") in which case the past time frame will still be understood as operating.

3.6.3 indefinite time.

Other time signs are used to simply establish a time frame with respect to the present without specifying the exact time. Events in the past, for example, may be described by signs such as PAST, BEFORE, FINISH, NOT-YET, RECENTLY and in the future by signs such as WILL, and FUTURE. These signs may be modulated to convey various shades of meaning. Though more often than not indefinite time signs appear after the verb, they may also be found before the verb. For example:
or sometimes before the verb:

(109) - ________ ?
[ EAT YOU. 
[ NOT-YET
[ 
= "Haven't you eaten yet?"

One will have noted that the usual facial intensifiers can be used with some of the signs together with a tense reduction of the sign (RECENTLY) or an amplification of the sign (FINISH). With one-handed signs the signer also has the option of intensifying the sign by making it a double-handed sign.
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Context will determine if the sign FINISH is to be understood as an indefinite time sign (perfective marker signifying that an action was completed sometime in the past) or as the verb FINISH. When used without another verb in the phrase and/or with another indefinite time sign it is itself the verb and not an indefinite time sign. For example:

(110) - grimace

[ I FINISH HIGH-SCHOOL RECENTLY
[ ]

= "I finished (completed) highschool just recently."

or:

(111) -

[ ]

[ NOT-YET FINISH READ BOOK
[ ]

= "I haven't yet finished (completed) reading the book."

3.6.4 Duration.

Some time signs tell us the duration of the action (the time during which an action takes place) without indicating the time frame during which the action takes place. They include such signs as MINUTE, HOUR, TWO-HOUR, DAY, LONGTIME, WEEK, THREE-WEEK, etc. As well as regularly being placed after the verb some of these time signs have a different form than those which indicate time past and time future. These are indicated by slightly different glosses. For example, taking the sign WEEK as the base form, we have the past form, LAST-WEEK (ONE-WEEK-AGO), and the future form, NEXT-WEEK (IN-ONE-WEEK). These forms can also incorporate number resulting in, for example, the signs: TWO-WEEKS, TWO-WEEKS-AGO, IN-TWO-WEEKS respectively (see Chapter 2, 2.3.4 'The Time Lines'). We thus have
(112) -
[ I
[ LEAVE/GO TWO-WEEKS HOLIDAYS.
[ -
= "I am going on holidays for two weeks."

(113) -
[ I
[ THREE-WEEKS-AGO LEAVE/GO HOLIDAYS TWO-WEEKS.
[ -
= "Three weeks ago I went on a holiday for two weeks."

(114) -
[ I
[ NEXT-WEEK LEAVE/GO HOLIDAYS THREE-WEEKS.
[ -
= "Next week I'm going on holidays for three weeks."

Or again, compare:

(115) -
[ US-TWO
[ SEPARATE THREE YEAR.
[ -
= "We have been separated for three years."

(116) -
[ US-TWO
[ THREE-YEARS-AGO SEPARATE.
[ -
= "We separated three years ago."
Ignoring such differentiated forms we can say generally that when there is duration during a defined time, the sign which fixes the moment in time comes first in the phrase, and the sign of duration comes after the verb:

(117) -

[ YESTERDAY I
[ STUDY THREE-HOURS
[ -

= "Yesterday, I studied for three hours."

It is not necessary to sign the equivalent of the English word "for": the fact that these signs of duration come after the verb indicates already the duration of the action. However, in Pidgin Sign English the sign FOR will almost always appear. These observations notwithstanding, the reader should be aware that many native signers are in doubt as to whether a final position for a time sign is sufficient for it to unambiguously imply duration ('for such and such a period of time') and in their own signing they rarely omit the explicit manual sign FOR. It is fairly well accepted though that an initial position does establish the time frame. Newcomers to Auslan can safely produce a explicit manual FOR in these environments without fear of it appearing awkward.

3.6.5 repeated or habitual action

In order to signify the regularity or habitual nature of an action a signer has several devices at his/her disposal in Auslan. First, the signer can interpolate into the phrase the adverbial frequency signs REGULAR, OFTEN, or ALWAYS. Second, the sign for the action or the time sign (SUNDAY, TWO-WEEK, YEAR, etc) is repeated and displaced along the time line implicit in the sign REGULAR (ie, time line 'c'). Third, the sign ALWAYS/EVERY may be added to the time sign (EVERY SUNDAY, etc). Lastly, the signer can incorporate the repeated or habitual aspect of the action into the verb sign itself, by repeating and modulating the sign several times. Often, this second option is combined with the first in the same phrase.
We will examine here only those strategies which require the interpolation of a time sign or signs or the modulation of time signs. Modulations of the verb sign itself have been considered in the previous section dealing with verbs.

First option: REGULAR, OFTEN, ALWAYS.

At least one of this family of adverbial frequency signs needs to be used in phrases where the sign for the action does not lend itself to repetition. An example:

(118) -
[ HE GO AFTERNOON
 [ REGULAR CLUB SUNDAY
 [ - 1/r
 = "He (regularly) goes to the club on Sunday afternoons."

Or used in combination with verb modulation:

(119) -
[ I VISIT+
 [ REGULAR
 [ - rt
 = "I visit him all the time."

Second option: repetition of the time sign.

(120) -
[ WE
 [ PLAY-CARDS TWO-WEEKS+
 [ - displ.to rt
 = "We play cards every two weeks."
Third option: ALWAYS/EVERY.

(121) -

[I WATCH ALWAYS/EVERY NIGHT
[TV SUNDAY
[

= "I watch TV every Sunday night."
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Notes

(1) Moody (1983:110) uses the description 'super-pronoun' to refer to classifiers, especially those we have termed 'substitutive classifiers'.

(2) I am talking of the use of these signs within Auslan. Of course, one could use any of these signs as direct equivalents to English words (ie in Signed English) though not without potential confusion and misunderstanding.

(3) See Stokoe, Casterline, & Croneberg (1965) where it is maintained that nouns and verbs are formally identical in ASL.

(4) This detailed analysis is not required for signs which are semantically related but have formationally unrelated signs. For example, FISH (noun) and FISH (verb) have totally different forms. The former is motivated iconically (the waving tail and fins of a fish) and the latter mimetically (holding a fishing rod) and do not resemble one another in any way.

(5) Directionality in this particular analysis refers to the number of directions required to cite the sign, the base form. This is not to be confused with the direction of the verb with respect to referents and their locations. Such verbs are referred to as 'directional' verbs.
Chapter Four

Types of Sentences

4.1 Introduction: three basic sentence types

As was mentioned in the discussion of the formational properties of Auslan, it is the systematic deformation of one or more of the five parameters or aspects of a sign which constitutes the essence of the morphology and syntax of Auslan. It was seen in previous sections that the manipulation of space is an extremely important element in pronominalisation, localisation, and temporalisation. It was also mentioned that the facial parameter is of little importance in the production of isolated decontextualized signs, but is of great importance in the construction of phrases and clauses. This chapter will examine one section of the grammar in which facial expressions play an extremely important role.

In order to keep the examples in previous chapters clear, simple affirmative declarative sentences have been used almost exclusively. However, in real life language use, simple positive statements of fact (affirmative declarative sentences) form a relatively small part of linguistic behaviour. We spend a large part of our talking time questioning people and expecting answers (and even questioning them when we are not expecting an answer) denying things, telling people to do things, insisting on something, and creating hypothetical worlds not only in the present and the future but also in the past.
The three basic kinds of sentences, which may be affirmative, negative or emphatic, are known as statements (declaratives), questions (interrogatives), and commands (imperatives). This chapter deals with these three basic sentence types first before examining two other related patterns: conditional sentences and topicalized sentences.

For all types of sentences Auslan either uses markers made with the head and with the face that serve a grammatical function and/or uses specific lexical signs. In some cases signs can be inserted into the sentence to reinforce the facial markers, in others it is necessary to insert such a sign with or without a facial marker, and in others it is also necessary to change the unmarked order of signs within the sentence.

The fact that head and facial markers are used by all the deaf to express grammatical function does not mean that all head and facial markers are being used as systematic markers. The face and head of a deaf person signing is almost always animated and as with the voice of a hearing person it conveys information about the emotional state of the person (eg happy or sad). Though they convey the signers attitude they cannot be said to be grammatical in the same way as the markers to be discussed in this section can be said to be grammatical.

On a first reading of this chapter it may appear that the small and subtle movements of the head, the eyes and the eyebrows combined with the act of signing itself must be devilishly difficult both to do and to read. But this is not true. Any reflection on English grammar and intonation patterns makes one marvel that people are able to speak at all let alone do it effortlessly and virtually unconsciously. The facial expressions discussed here are, within our cultural context, quite natural and shared by both hearing and deaf people. Animated speakers of English, especially raconteurs and actors, use many of them in much the same way as a deaf person: the only important difference being that what is systematic and obligatory in Auslan as a grammatical signal is usually only an alternative in spoken English.
4.2 Declarative Sentences (Statements)

Before examining the other major types of sentences, I will first examine the simple process of negation on a declarative sentence. This is instructive for two reasons. First, there are no specific markers to signal an affirmative declarative sentence in Auslan (though sometimes a head nod may be added, see below 'Assertive Statements'). It is literally the 'unmarked' form, the most basic sentence type in Auslan (cf. Baker & Cokely 1980a:122), and hence it is easy to see negation working in such a pure environment. Second, negation is simply superimposed onto the other types of sentences and this may not be clear when one simultaneously tries to consider, say, both negation and interrogation operating on a declarative sentence.

4.2.1 Negative statements

As one would expect from the discussion of the 'direction of modulation' (see Chapter 2, 2.2 'Iconicity and Mimesis') one is able to negate a sentence or a segment within a sentence by a simple shaking of the head. This marker may be considered mimetic because it imitates (or, rather, is an actual instance of) a natural gesture which although not universal is extremely common in many cultures. In general, one makes a negative sentence in Auslan by shaking the head during the time that the negated sentence is being signed. This is written in the transcription as a 'no' on a bar placed above the sign or signs during which the head shake operates. For example:

(122) - no
[ I/ME. ]
[ ]
[ ]
= "Not I/me."

(123) - no
[ ]
[ I-MEET-him ]
[ ]
- to base if
= "I didn't/haven't meet/met him."
(124) - ___no__
[ SHE/HER LIKE WINE.
[ [ - 1/r
= "She doesn't like wine."

In other cases a manual sign of negation may be inserted into the sentence to accompany the head shake. For example, compare:

(125) - ___no__
[ YOU/YOUR HAVE THERE.
[ BROTHER
[ [ - 1/r
= "Your brother isn't there."

which uses only the head marker, with

(126) - ___no__
[ YOU/YOUR NO/NOT HAVE THERE.
[ BROTHER
[ [ - 1/r
= "Your brother is not there."

which uses both the head marker and an inserted negative sign segment. The negation is slightly more stressed in the second version than in the first.

A more simple example taken from above:

(127) - ___no__
[ I/ME.
[ [ - 
= "Not I/me."

(128) - ___no__
[ NO/NOT I/ME.
[ [ - 
= "Not I/me."
Auslan also uses other negative signs: NOT-YET, NEVER. For example:

(129) - no

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{HE/HIM} \\
\text{HE/HIM.}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{NOT-YET ARRIVE} \\
\text{1/r}
\end{array}
\]

= "He has not yet arrived."

and

(130) - no

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{I MEET NEVER SHE/HER.} \\
\text{1/r}
\end{array}
\]

= "I (have) never met her."

In many instances when a negative element is inserted it usually occupies the same position within a sentence as it does in its English form. However, the influence of English grammar notwithstanding, there is a tendency in Auslan to place the negative signed segment at the end of the sentence (cf Moody 1983:88). For example, the following are perfectly well formed and commonly seen structures in Auslan:

(131) - no

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{I/ME SMOKE NO/NOT.} \\
\text{1/r}
\end{array}
\]

= "I don't smoke."
(132) - no
[ I/ME SEE NO/NOT.
[ -
  1/r
  = "I don't see him/her."

(133) - no
[ NO/NOT.
[ BOther
[ -
  = "It's no trouble."

(134) - no
[ (I)WORRY NO/NOT.
[ -
  = "I'm not worried."

(The sign WORRY can be made with or without head contact. In the example there is head contact and thus the head negation no only extends over the period of the sign NO/NOT as it is awkward to shake the head and execute a sign on it at one and the same time.)

4.2.2 signs which incorporate negation

Besides the negative signs discussed above there exists a class of signs for which the negation is incorporated or understood within the sign. Some bear no obvious semantic relationship to any other sign within the lexicon, such as DOESN'T MATTER, while others exist as the negative of a pair of related signs. Usually the negative member of the pair is signaled by a modification of movement - usually a reversal or change in direction - while in some cases it is signalled by a change in handshape as well as a modification in the movement. For example, in the negative
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In signs where negation is incorporated into the sign itself the sign of head negation is optional, though it is usually added.

4.2.3 assertive statements

Assertive phrases, in English, are often signalled by the words "No, really....", by intonation and stress patterns, by the use of the emphatic (as opposed to the interrogative) auxiliary "do" and its variants, or by a combination of any of these elements: "I can do it", "I do speak Chinese," "No, really, he does love her." This insistence usually occurs when one's interlocutor expresses doubt or disbelief. In Auslan, these assertive phrases are made with a nod of the head (the habitual affirmative head signal for both hearing and deaf people) which is given the name "yes" in the notation. For example:
(135) -  yes  
[ YES I/ME CAN CAN  
[ DRIVE  
[  
= "Yes, I can drive."

(136) -  yes  
[ SWITCH-OFF-LIGHT  
[  
[  
- high  
= "Yes, the light is switched off."

This head nod often accompanies answers to questions expressed with a doubt (see below for a full discussion of such questions):

Question:

(137) -  ?v(doubt)  
[ SHE/HER KNOW  
[ DOCTOR SIGNING  
[  
- 1/r  
= "The doctor knows how to sign?! (I don't believe it)."

Answer:

(138) -  yes  
[ YES SHE/HER KNOW SHE/HER  
[ SIGNING  
[  
- 1/r 1/r  
= "Yes, she does know how to sign."
4.3 Interrogative sentences (questions)

Now that the ways of turning an affirmative declarative sentence into a negative one and of adding assertive emphasis have been examined, the interrogative sentence presents less of a problem.

In this case Auslan once again uses two strategies. First, it systematically uses a widespread natural gesture - the quizzical look that involves primarily the eyes and the eyebrows but also the entire head - to signal a question. Second, it has a class of manual signs which alone can also signal a question. The distinction made in traditional grammar between polar questions ('yes/no questions') and information questions ('wh-questions') is reflected in this fact. The quizzical look alone always signifies a polar question whereas information questions are always accompanied by the insertion in the signed sentence of an explicit question-sign (e.g. WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW, HOW-MUCH, HOW-OLD, etc) - though they are also usually accompanied by a quizzical look.

4.3.1 Raised eyebrows ('?') and lowered eyebrows ('?v')

The quizzical look that normally accompanies a polar question is different from that which usually accompanies an information question. The one involves the raising of the eyebrows and often a slight tilting of the head forwards towards the interlocutor (polar questions), and the other involves the lowering or knitting of the eyebrows and often a slight tilting of the head forward or even back (information questions). In both instances the eyes are opened wider than normal. The quizzical look for polar questions is written in the transcription as '??' on a bar placed above the sign or signs during which the quizzical look operates. For information questions it is represented as '?v'. The arrow represents the eyebrows moving up or down. For example:
4.3.2 facial expression and intonation.

It is important to note that a quizzical facial expression alone always signifies a polar question even if the one which is normally associated with information questions is actually used. It is also the case that an information question may (rarely) lack any facial marker whatsoever, or may use the quizzical facial expression which is normally associated with polar questions. When a 'marked' facial expression is being used, additional information regarding the signer is being given.

Let us explain by comparing Auslan with written and spoken English. Written English signals polar questions by word inversion ("Is it...?" or "Have you...?") or by the introduction of an auxiliary and modification of the verb ("Does he smoke?" "Did you go?") and signals information questions by the use of a question word with or without word inversion ("Who is your father?" "Where have you been?") or with the use of an auxiliary and modification of the verb ("Who did you speak to?" "Why did he say that?"). However, in spoken English a third possibility (among others) is also available and frequently used - polar questions may be marked by intonation alone. For example: "You're reading this book?" with a rising intonation.
Auslan uses the facial equivalent of this intonation pattern as the normal way in which it signals a polar question. In short, one makes a polar interrogative sentence in Auslan by making the former of the quizzical looks (with raised eyebrows) during the time that the interrogative sentence is being signed.

However, facial expressions, as with intonation patterns in English, do much more than just mark a sentence as a question: they react to, or are a function of, our emotional state and general attitude. The question intonation itself (whether facial or verbal) is commonly understood across many cultures as signalling open-ended 'curiosity'. When this 'curiosity' is replaced, or superimposed, by another expression such as 'surprise' or 'doubt' the situation is further complicated. For example, we can say in English: "You're reading this book?" with an intonation of disbelief meaning "I don't believe it!" Or say, "You're reading this book?" with an intonation of suprise meaning "You and not someone one else as I had thought." And so on.

Just as the voice reacts almost involuntarily to our emotional state and attitude, so does the facial expression of the deaf person. In Auslan this supplementary information has the effect of changing the normally associated quizzical look for either a polar question ('?') or an information question ('?v') to the one which is not normally associated with it - the marked one. In addition other facial features which are not as easily codified are brought into play (opening or closing the mouth, puffing the cheeks, moving the entire head etc). Compare, for example, a neutral polar question to a marked polar question:

(142) - ?^ [ HE/HIM YOUR [ BROTHER.] [ ] [- 1/r = "Is he your brother?/ He's your brother?"

(143) - ?v(doubt) [ HE/HIM YOUR [ BROTHER.] [ ] [- 1/r = "Is he your brother?/ He's your brother?" ("I don't believe it!")
We transcribe this marked polar question by reversing the arrow (which represents the eyebrows), by placing the word 'doubt' in parentheses after it, and by adding an appropriate comment or underlining in the translation.

4.3.3. polar questions (yes/no questions)

To reiterate, the facial expression '?' is made throughout the production of the sentence to signal a polar question:

(144) - ?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YOU OVERSEAS YOU.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

= "Are you going overseas?"

(145) - ?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HE/HIM GO.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

= "Is he going?"

However, supplementary information (for example: doubt) will systematically alter this facial expression:

neutral question question with doubt

(146) - ?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHE/HER FRENCH.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEARN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

= "Is she learning French?"

(147) - ?(doubt)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHE/HER FRENCH.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEARN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

= "She's learning French!?"

(I don't believe it.)

In the second case the signer could also express his or her doubt by adding a sign such as "(I)DON'T-BELIEVE(it)". For example:
(148) - _______ ?v _______ no 
[ HE/HIM I-BELIEVE-it. 
[ FAIL EXAM. 
[ - 1/r 
= "He failed his exam? I don't believe it."

Or again compare the neutral question:

(149) - _______ ?^ _______
[ HE/HIM KNOW HE/HIM. 
[ SIGN
[ 
- 1/r 1/r
= "Does he know how to sign?"

signed with an expression of doubt:

(150) - _______ ?v(doubt) _______
[ SHE/HER KNOW
[ DOCTOR SIGNING.
[ 
- 1/r
= "The doctor knows how to sign?! (I don't believe it.)"

An emphatic version of this last example, as opposed to the explicit signing of NOT-BELIEVE in the earlier example above, may add the sign NO/NOT or CAN'T at the end of the sentence:

(151) - _______ ?v(doubt) _______ no
[ SHE/HER KNOW NO/NOT.
[ DOCTOR SIGNING,
[ 
- 1/r
= "The doctor really knows how to sign?"
('The doctor knows how to sign?. No, it's not so.')
Refer to the following sections for a more detailed treatment of emphatic forms in Auslan.

4.3.4 Information questions (wh-questions)

The facial expression '?v' is made throughout the sentence:

(153) - ?v

[ WHAT WANT DRINK YOU WHAT
[ [ [ -
= "What do you want to drink?"

Or, rarely, it may be omitted completely.

(154) -

[ WHAT PLEASE.
[ [ TIME,
[ [ -
= "What's the time, please?"

With or without the facial expression '?v' an information question must always have a question sign explicitly inserted into the signed sentence.

I am unable to say with any certainty at this stage of research into Auslan just where in a signed sentence is the preferred location for question
signs. Research into ASL suggests that, in that language, they generally occur at the end of a sentence (Baker & Cokely 1980a:128) though they may also occur at the beginning. To date, it appears that in Auslan both positions are equally possible and occur with equal frequency. In either position the sentence is unmarked, unlike in English where a final position is a highly marked, emphatic form. For example, in English "You said what!" is possible but highly marked. Whereas the Auslan YOU SAY WHAT is equivalent to WHAT YOU SAY and even WHAT SAY YOU. Furthermore, there is a strong tendency to repeat the question sign in Auslan. So frequent, in fact, that the form is not particularly emphatic. For example WHAT YOU SAY WHAT is a perfectly well formed common structure in Auslan. As in English, a question sign cannot be inserted inside a nominal group. Thus YOUR WHO TEACHER is ill formed, whereas WHO YOUR TEACHER or YOUR TEACHER WHO are perfectly well formed.

Looking at the influence of supplementary information, let us compare a neutral information question with the same question signed with an expression of surprise:

neutral | surprise
---|---
(155) - ____ | (156) - ?*(surprise)
| PAY HOW-MUCH. | PAY HOW-MUCH.
| [ | ]
| [ | ]
| - | -

= "How much did you pay?" = "You paid how much!?"

We have seen how the question WHEN? made in a neutral manner is made with the eyebrows knitted because the question asks for specific information. But when the signer poses the question with enthusiasm he/she will naturally raise the eyebrows. Compare the following two sentences:
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(157) - ?v
[ WHEN THEY/THEM GO
[ PARTY.
|
| = "When are they going to the party?"

(158) - ?"(enthusiasm)
[ WE/US GO WHEN.
[ PARTY
|
| = "When are we going to the party? (I like parties)."

4.3.5 negative questions

When the signers want to pose a negative question, they simply superimpose the negative head sign (shaking the head side to side) discussed above. Look at the following example:

(159) - ?" no
[ YOU REMEMBER I/ME.
|
| = "Don't you remember me?"

An explicit manual negation sign may also be given:

(160) - ?" no
[ YOU NO/NOT REMEMBER I/ME.
|
| = "You don't remember me?"
An explicit manual negation sign may or may not be added. Its addition tends to make the sentence more emphatic. With or without it, the head negation should always be made, throughout the sentence. (Compare this last example, to example sentences given in the section on question tags below).

Now compare the same negative question with an intonation of doubt (with the manual negation sign as the sentence by its very nature is emphatic):

(161) - ______ ?v(doubt) no ______  
[ YOU NO/NOT REMEMBER I/ME.  
[  
-  
= "Don't you remember me? (How can that be!)

4.3.6 Question tags

Questions may also be formed in Auslan, as is common in spoken English, by the addition of a question tag at the end of a declarative sentence (eg, "She's going, isn't she?").

The declarative sentence may be affirmative or negative but if it is affirmative, a head nod, which is normally absent except in 'assertive' sentences (see above), is added to the sentence which will receive the question tag. This has the effect of saying "What I am saying is true" to which the question tag "isn't it?" is added. To negative sentences the normal head shake is added with the opposite effect. There are several signs which may operate as question tags. They include RIGHT, NO/NOT, YES, TRUE/REALLY. In these cases the English gloss for the sign shows its true limitations. For example:
(162) -  yes  ?
[ SHE/HER YOUR SISTER ,
[ TRUE/REALLY.
[ - 1/r
  = "She's your sister, isn't she?)"
  (That she is your sister is true, isn't that true.)

or using other signs:

(163) -  yes  ?
[ SHE/HER YOUR SISTER ,
[ RIGHT.
[ - 1/r
  = "She's your sister, isn't she?"

(164) -  yes  ?
[ SHE/HER YOUR SISTER ,
[ YES.
[ - 1/r
  = "She's your sister, isn't she?"

(165) -  no  ?
[ YOU NO/NOT REMEMBER I/ME
[ RIGHT.
[ -
  = "You don't remember me, do you?"
  (It's not true that you remember me, isn't that right?)

Though further research is required on this point, it appears that the head nod ('yes' or 'no') needs to be maintained throughout the sentence otherwise the meaning will be transformed:
(166) -         ?**(surprise)**
   [ SHE/HER YOUR SISTER ,
   [ TRUE/REALLY.
   [
   - 1/r
   = "Is she really your sister?"

4.3.7 false or rhetorical questions

Rhetorical questions are questions which do not require a response from the interlocutor. For this type of question the signer already knows the answer and the question is asked only to attract the attention of the interlocutor. In making such a question one raises the eyebrows and often inclines the head towards the interlocutor or even slightly backwards. There also is a slight holding of the final sign in the rhetorical question and a slight anticipatory pause between the posing of the question and the giving of the answer. The cancelled question mark "?" is used in the notation to indicate such false or rhetorical questions.

(167) -         ?
   [ WHEN , TOMORROW.
   [ FINISH WORK
   [ -
   = "I finish work tomorrow." ("When do I finish work? Tomorrow.")

Or again:

(168) -         ?
   [ YOU KNOW HOW-MUCH PAY , FIFTY!
   [ DOLLAR!
   [ -
   = "Do know how much I paid for it? Fifty dollars!"
In this last example included exclamation marks to show that the final two segments are in some way stressed. This may include one or more of a complex of signals which are difficult to codify but include: opening the mouth, puffing the cheeks, moving the head forward, amplifying the signation of a sign so that it occupies more space (equivalent to raising one's voice), intensifying the signation of a sign, and so on. Individual signers have different preferred strategies and idiosyncrasies but in all cases a segment signed 'with an exclamation' clearly stands apart from a signer's normal signing style.

This discussion of stress quite naturally brings us to the third major class of sentences, the imperatives.

4.4 Imperatives sentences (commands)

With an imperative phrase the signer demands that the interlocutor do something. In Auslan the imperative is indicated by an insistent gaze on the interlocutor and a firm forward and down movement of the head with stress on the verb: the hand configuration is held with greater tenseness than is usual and the sign is made more rapidly, and ends more abruptly than normally. From the discussion of nominal and verbal forms in Auslan it may appear that superficially, at least, a verbal form in the imperative resembles a nominal. Though it is the case that as far as the dimension of manner of movement is concerned, nominals tend to be restrained (ending abruptly) and verbals tend to be continuous (flowing movement) or hold (ending with the end position held slightly) when tenseness, eye contact, head movement, speed of execution and directionality involving the interlocutor are taken into account the imperative is seen to be clearly distinguishable.

In the notation the symbol '!' is used to indicate the imperative. It stands, as usual, on a bar above the signs to which it applies. When the symbol '!' appears adjacent to a gloss in the notation it simply denotes that the sign in question is executed with a particular amount of stress (more than is usual in the citation form of the sign).
Some examples:

(169) - !
[ ]
[ SIT ]
[ ]
- = "Sit down!"

(170) - !
[ ]
[ LOOK ]
[ ]
- self = "Look at me!"

(171) - !
[ LOOK ]
[ ]
[ LOOK ]
- self
= "Both of you, look at me!"

(172) - !
[ ]
[ OPEN-WINDOW ]
[ ]
- self
= "Open the window!"

Negative imperatives.

Unlike declaratives and interrogatives the only method of negation in an imperative sentence is by the insertion of the negative sign NO/NOT/DON'T immediately before the verb. The superimposition of the negative head shake would not only destroy the clarity of the clear sharp movement forward and down of the head towards the interlocutor, and disturb the eye contact, it would also be physically difficult to perform both simultaneously. For example:

(173) - !
[ NO/NOT/DON'T LOOK ]
[ ]
- l/r
= "Don't look (at it/there)!"

(174) - !
[ NO/NOT/DON'T ]
[ OPEN-WINDOW ]
[ ]
- = "Don't open the window!"

During the production of the sign NO/NOT/DON'T it is possible and normal to turn the head sideways once to the right following the direction of the
NO/NOT/DON'T (ie half a shake) before moving forward and down with the verb in one continuous movement.

Should a full head negation be given on the first segment and it is followed by a slight pause before the verb the result is as follows:

(175) - no !
[ NO/NOT/DON'T,
[ SIT-DOWN.
[ = "No (don't do that). Sit-down (instead)."

That is, the negation is perceived as operating on a prior understood segment and not on the following verb.

4.5 conditional sentences

The construction of 'hypothetical worlds' (imaginary situations, alternative outcomes) is as much a part of language behaviour as talking about the world, finding out about the world and acting on the world. One way that we are able to construct such hypothetical worlds is through the two propositions of a conditional sentence: one which poses the condition and the other which poses the result. In English grammar the structure is essentially 'If (the condition happens), (the result will happen)' or '(The result will happen), if (the condition happens)' with the condition being signalled by the word 'if' as well as by the use of appropriate tenses. For example, in written and spoken English we have:

**Condition:** If you tell your father, **Result:** he'll be furious.

or

**Result:** Your father will be furious, **Condition:** if you tell him.

Though conditionals in Auslan are also made in two stages the condition is often not marked by a separate segment such as 'if', nor as a consequence are the condition and result reversible as in the example above. In Auslan
when no explicitly manual signal of the condition is made then the condition must precede the result and both are marked by distinct changes in facial expression.

First, one signs the condition with a raising of the eyebrows, often accompanied by a slight tilting of the head to one side, or a slight shrug of the shoulders.

Second, after a slight pause and an abrupt return of the eyebrows to a neutral position, one signs the result.

If one recalls the previous chapter one can see that essentially, in Auslan, one poses the condition as if it were a question and the result as a statement. Though the resemblance is undeniably there, I prefer to mark the condition in the transcription of Auslan as an 'if' written on a bar over the sign or signs during which this facial expression operates, rather than as '?', so as to clearly distinguish its function within conditional sentences from its function as a question marker. Between the condition and the result, there is a slight pause (which appears in the notation as a comma, thus ','). For example:

(176) - _______ if _______ no 
[ TOMORROW RAIN , I'ME GO ] 
[ ] 
[ - ] 
= "If it rains tomorrow, I won't go."

The hypothetical world expressed by this conditional is a real possibility in the judgement of the signer. However, there also exists in Auslan another kind of conditional which is produced in three stages. This conditional is especially used to express impossible conditions (that is conditions in the past) though it can be used for improbable conditions and results for which the signer does not think the condition will be realised. The three stages are:
First, one signs the actual or past state of affairs in a neutral manner.

Second, after a slight pause and with a clear and marked raising of the eyebrows usually accompanied by a marked tilting of the head to one side, one signs the condition (the alternative state of affairs).

Third, after the eyebrows have returned to a neutral position, one signs the (alternative) result with or without the 'will/would' of intent (rather than as a marker of the future) which is glossed as WILL. In the notation the 'will/would' of intent is accompanied by the symbol '()' which represents puffed cheeks.

If translated into English they would appear thus:

THE ACTUAL STATE OF AFFAIRS: I had no money. I don't have any money.
THE CONDITION: If I had had some money, If I had some money,
THE RESULT: I would have bought it. I would buy it.

Time signs or the signing context will determine which of these two conditionals is intended. An example:

\[
(177) - \quad \text{no} \quad \text{if} \quad () \\
\quad [\text{HAVE NO/NOT} \quad \text{HAVE} \quad \text{WILL} \\
\quad [\text{MONEY} \quad \text{MONEY} \quad \text{BUY} \\
\quad \] \\
\quad = \text{"If I had the money, I would buy it."}
\]

Or with an explicit time sign (or where the context of the discourse indicates the past):
Note that it is not necessary to sign the word 'if' because it is already understood in the facial expression which I have called 'if'. However, many native signers introduce the condition with a fingerspelt 'if' or signs for 'if' when they sign to hearing people who do not yet know how to read facial expressions, when they wish to be especially emphatic, or where the situation demands a form of Signed English. Many others systematically use an explicit manual sign for 'if' (fingerspelt or otherwise). As is mentioned in Appendix Two, the sign language used in Australia exists essentially on a continuum from 'pure' Auslan through Pidgin Signed English to Signed English. One will regularly see the same individual using alternative forms.

Conditional sentences are often introduced by the signs SAY/FOR-EXAMPLE, PRETEND or SEE which have the effect of announcing and accentuating the hypothesis. For example:

(179) -  
[ SEE  
[ SUNDAY RAIN, CANCEL BARBEQUE.  
[  
= "If it rains on Sunday, the barbeque will be cancelled."

or
chapter four: types of sentences

(180) -  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>if</th>
<th>?v(doubt)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
[ SAY WIN | TOMORROW  
[ YOU,    | STILL     
[ YOU     | WORK      |
[        |           |
= "Say you win Lotto tomorrow, will you still continue to work? (I doubt it!)

(181) -  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>no</th>
<th>if</th>
<th>?v</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
[ YOU    | HE/HIM. | PRETEND | HE/HIM, WILL | HE/HIM. |
[ MARRY  | RICH    | MARRY  |
[        |         |        |
= "(You didn't marry him. But, imagine) If he had been rich, would you have married him?"

As in English the use of an explicit lexical item to signal the condition allows one the possibility of rearrangement. Take (180) again:

(182) -  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>?v(doubt)</th>
<th>if</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
[ FUTURE    | YOU, SAY, WIN             
[ STILL     | TOMORROW                   
[ YOU      | WORK                      
[         | L-O-T-T-O                 |
[         |                           |
= "Would you still continue to work if you, say, won Lotto tomorrow?"

One can see from these last two examples that it is not only statements that can be put into the conditional, but also questions. The result is posed as a question following the patterns already explained for question formation in the previous chapter. There is a clear break between the condition and result during which the face momentarily returns to a neutral expression. Though once again more research is required it would appear that questions posed in the conditional are frequently introduced by signs such as PRETEND, SAY/FOR-EXAMPLE, or SEE.

One more example:
Finally, a conditional may of course also terminate in an imperative. For example:

(184) - if !
[ YOU FINISH BEFORE PLEASE LOCK LOCK.
[ FIVE-O'CLOCK, CLOSE CLOSE
[ arc arc
= "If you finish before five o'clock, please close the doors and lock up."

4.6 Topicalized Sentences

Two earlier sections of Chapter Two ('Deictic and Indexing Signs' and 'Spatialization') dealt with they way in which a visual and spatial language such as Auslan exploited its modality (medium) to the fullest extent by simply pointing to referents should they be present or by allocating a location to referents should they be absent or imaginary and then pointing to them. This is a fundamental feature of Auslan and other sign languages. Also discussed was the way in which signers directed the gaze of their interlocutors by first signing what to look for before pointing in its direction, or by first signing what to locate before locating it. This is only logical. Imagine how totally uneconomical it would be to be asked to look in a general direction, wonder what was being referred to, look back to one's interlocutor for clarification, then be forced to look back again to find the thing or person that one would have undoubtedly missed the first time. Should there be in fact nothing to look at because the referent was actually imaginary, one's patience would be seriously tried.
These mechanisms are used for establishing the 'scene of action' and, in Auslan, one must first establish the scene before commenting on it. For example (we have indicated the topic with a 't' placed on a bar over the sign or signs which constitute the topic. There are appropriate facial expression which mark a topic and they are discussed below):

(185) - t
\[
\text{[ WOMAN OVER-THERE, MY/MINE TEACHER. ] }
\]
\[
\text{[ NEAR WINDOW DAUGHTER ] }
\]
\[
- \text{If}
\]
= 'The woman near the window over there, she's my daughter's teacher.'

The need to clearly establish the topic is particularly important when the comment one wishes to make is precisely the spatial relationship between two or more things. For example:

(186) - t t
\[
\text{[ SECOND DRAWER THERE, YOU/YOUR THERE. ] }
\]
\[
\text{[ GLASSES, IN ] }
\]
\[
- \]
= "Your glasses are in the second drawer over there."
('You see the second draw there? Well, your glasses, they're in it."

And especially when classifiers (see next chapter) are used:

(187) - t t
\[
\text{[ THERE, THERE, CL:VEHICLE. CAN'T SEE. ] }
\]
\[
\text{[ POLICE CAR TREE HIDE ] }
\]
\[
- \text{cl:tree}
\]
\[
- \text{rt} \text{lf rt approaches lf}
\]
= "The police car was hidden behind a tree. I couldn't see it."
('The police car here, and the tree there, the car was hidden behind the tree. I couldn't see it.')
Now it may or may not be the case that because deixis, indexing and localisation are such fundamental and common features of Auslan and other sign languages that they have evolved a 'topic-comment structure' overall even when deixis and localisation are not operating. Whatever the reason for this may be, it is clear that what has been established as a feature of ASL and LSF (Moody 1983:101) has been found, once again, to be equally applicable to Auslan:

"ASL Signers (like speakers of mandarin Chinese and Tagalog) tend to indicate first what is the thing they want to talk about (called the topic) and then to make some statement(s), question(s), etc., about that thing (called the comment)." (Baker & Cokely 1982:156).

When signers wish to signal the principal topic of their sentences, they put the sign(s) of the topic first in the sentence with a marked raising of the eyebrows, and hold the last sign of the topic momentarily, producing a pause during which the facial expression returns to neutral, and then sign the comment. This is called 't', for topic, in the notation. In the transcription they are separated (as with parts of a conditional sentence) with a comma which also indicates that there is a slight pause between topic and comment.

Let us compare a non topicalized sentence such as

(188) - no
     [ WINE NO/NOT
     [ EXPENSIVE.
     [ = "Wine is not expensive."

with the same sentence topicalizing WINE
In these examples the sign order is identical to the English word order. However it is important to note that topicalization is, for reasons explained above, extremely common in Auslan and that the second example is not to be construed as a particularly emphatic form. Hence identical translations have been given for both.

Nevertheless it is frequently the case that this process will result in a sign order which is significantly different from the normal standard English form. For example,

Once again, it needs to be stressed that the existence of the diglossic continuum from Auslan to English will mean that in some situations topicalization will be consciously or unconsciously avoided where it produces a word order significantly different from standard English in order to preserve what signers consider to be the 'correct' (English) word order.

Within certain constraints, the signer is free to choose what he or she wishes to be the topic of a sentence. One of the most important of these
constraints, as in English, is the context in which the sentence is made, ie what has been said prior to the new sentence tends to determine what we shall topicalize. Example (185) above, for instance, would be appropriate in a context where the signers had been identifying various people at a function. However, if the discussion had been about teachers the signer may have wished to topicalize TEACHER, thus:

(191) - __________ t
[ TEACHER MY/MINE WOMAN OVER-THERE.
[ DAUGHTER, NEAR WINDOW
[ -
= "My daughter's teacher, she's the woman near the window over there."

Or if the participants had been talking about their children, the signer may wish to topicalize DAUGHTER, thus:

(192) - __________ t
[ MY/MINE, HER TEACHER WOMAN OVER-THERE.
[ DAUGHTER, NEAR WINDOW
[ -
= "My daughter, her teacher is the woman near the window over there."

The signer's freedom to choose is however quite great since topicalization can be as much a reflection of the context (the subject matter), as a desire to establish a new one. It all depends on what the signer wishes to communicate (emphasize or focus on).

Finally, the signs KNOW and KNOW-YOU (or YOU KNOW) are frequently used to introduce a topic (cf Baker & Cokely 1980a:161). When used in this way the sign KNOW is normally repeated several times. Used with the facial topic marker, the raised eyebrows, these signs normally signal the introduction of a new or unexpected topic in the conversation (usually though not exclusively people) which the signer is sure the interlocutor is familiar with. For example:
(193) - \( t \)
\[ \text{KNOW-YOU VIDEO, YESTERDAY.} \]
\[ \text{NEW STEAL} \]
\[ \]
\[ = "The new video was stolen yesterday." \]
('You know the new video, it was stolen yesterday."

(194) - \( t \) \( \text{surprise} \)
\[ \text{KNOW+ P-A-U-L,} \]
\[ \text{MARRIED!} \]
\[ \]
\[ = "Paul has got married!" \]
('You know Paul, he got married!"

However, should the signer feel that the interlocutor may not be familiar with the topic then these signs are used with a topic marker with lowered eyebrows, rather than raised eyebrows, or with a squinting of the eyes. Such a structure parallels that of a polar question posed with doubt, and the signer holds the last sign of the topic while he or she awaits confirmation from the interlocutor before proceeding. These topics posed as questions are marked 'qt', for 'question-topics'; for example:

(195) - \( \text{qt} \)
\[ \text{KNOW+ (interlocutor nods),} \]
\[ \text{J-O-E B-L-O-W PUT-OFF WORK.} \]
\[ \]
\[ = "You know Joe Blow? (Yes), he's been put-off." \]
Select Bibliography/References

Not all works consulted in the preparation of this document have been included in this bibliography as this would have made the listing too long. Many of these works represent papers brought together and published in one volume. I have sometimes cited both the volume and the individual paper separately where I wish to draw attention to the individual paper or where the paper has been cited in the text. However, only a minority of papers have a separate entry and the reader should assume that where a collection of papers is listed that all the works therein have made some contribution to this document.

The Australian Federation of Deaf Societies (1982). Conversation with the Deaf. Published by the Australian Federation of Deaf Societies.


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