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Two decades of sign language and gesture research in Australia: 2000–2020

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In this article, we provide an overview of the last twenty years of research on Indigenous sign languages, deaf community sign languages, co-speech gesture, and multimodal communication in the Australian context. From a global perspective, research on sign languages and on the gestures that normally accompany speech has been used as the basis for exploring different aspects of linguistic theory. Such research informs debates about the nature of the human language capacity and questions as to whether the diverse range of languages we see in the world share some universal patterns of organisation. We outline some of the theoretical and methodological achievements of scholars working in these interconnected disciplines in Australia, highlight the value of corpus-based approaches to linguistic research, draw attention to research on multimodality in the verbal arts, and discuss community-oriented research outputs guided by collaborative research practices. The article is accompanied by an on-line and editable bibliography of well over 300 publications that is accessible to researchers and others working in these related fields.

1. Introduction Australia is home to a rich and diverse range of communicative practices, some arguably among the oldest expressions of continuous languages and culture in the world, and others the consequence of successive waves of new languages brought to the continent by colonists and immigrants. This article provides an overview of the directions that research on Australian Indigenous sign languages, Auslan, and gesture have taken over a two-decade time span, between 2000 and 2020.[1] Scholars working in this field have built on foundational research from the twentieth century but also have extended it in new ways. In part, this

[1] We acknowledge support provided by the Australian Research Council (DE160100873), the Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language (CoEDL) (CE140100041), and the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AH/N00924X/1). Many thanks to the Auslan research community for checking two decades of references. We thank Trevor Johnston and three anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback and the editors of *LD&C* for their support. We also thank Eleanor Jorgensen and Rui Yamawaki for their editorial assistance.

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has been enabled by increasingly affordable technologies that have transformed the ways that we record, document, and analyse human interaction and communication. Video-recording devices have become part of the fieldwork kit of many linguists (Seyfeddinipur 2012; Meakins et al. 2018). The software ELAN (Wittenberg et al. 2006), developed at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, was first released in 2000 and is now favoured by many researchers of sign and gesture. While such technological changes quickly get taken for granted, many of the opportunities they afford for fine-grained analyses would have been unimaginable to previous generations.

One of the milestones in this Australian collaborative process was a workshop on issues in Australian 'nonverbal' language research held in 2011 at the Australian Linguistics Society conference in Canberra. The workshop examined a range of issues in research on gesture, sign languages, and, more generally, multimodal communication. It brought researchers working on gesture and sign together with the goal of identifying common ground across differing theoretical perspectives and research domains. It was, in fact, the first time that Auslan (the most widespread deaf community sign language used in Australia), Australian Indigenous sign languages, and gesture specialists had engaged in a forum of this kind, and it resulted in a special edition of the *Australian Journal of Linguistics* (Green et al. 2014). This was the first issue of the journal to include articles on both Auslan and on Australian Indigenous sign languages, and some of the collaborations that were seeded in that workshop have continued.

While our focus is on sign and gesture, the approach taken in this overview article is implicitly multimodal and, to some degree, reflects our own theoretical perspectives, where we regard the communicative resources at hand as part of the overall "semiotic plurality of communication" (Ferrara & Hodge 2018).[2] Thus, we do not countenance a strict demarcation between 'sign' and 'gesture,' nor do we seek to sequester modes from each other when we consider face-to-face communication in human interaction (see, e.g., Kendon 2008a; Enfield 2009). However, for convenience, the article is divided into six main sections. We begin with an overview of recent research on Australian Indigenous sign languages (§2). We follow with a review of Auslan-related research during the past twenty years (§3). This section covers research describing Auslan lexicogrammar and use, signed language interpreting and translation practices, deaf education and language teaching, language and community concerns, and theoretical contributions to signed language linguistics. In §4, we look at research on gesture, and then, in §5, we discuss Australian research on sign, gesture, and technology. In the final section (§6), we draw together some of the threads that these research areas have in common and point to particular issues that may inform research agendas in the future. A list of the publications that this review is based on is provided at the end of this article, along with a link to the *Australian Sign & Gesture Reference Library* (Hodge et al.

[2] As the term multimodal may be employed to refer to a broad range of phenomena, it is beyond the scope of this review to include all recent research on multimodal communication in the Australian context.

2021). This online reference library, with a permanent DOI, is a dynamic resource that can be updated as new research in this broad, energetic, and cross-disciplinary field comes to light.[3]

2. Australian Indigenous sign languages Sign languages are an important and valued part of the traditions of Australian Indigenous peoples.[4] These sign languages, used as an alternative to speech when speech is either impractical or inappropriate, have been termed alternate sign languages by Adam Kendon, a pioneer of research on Australian Indigenous sign languages ([1988] 2013) as well as on gesture (2004). Australian Indigenous sign languages vary in terms of their complexity and their relationship to the spoken languages of the communities where they are found. One of their features is that they are not generally the main mode of communication, but rather used alongside other semiotic systems, including speech, gesture, and drawing practices. Reflecting on the state of the field, Kendon (2015) concluded that one of the reasons that these sign languages are of theoretical interest is precisely because of their close relationship to speech.

In everyday conversation, sign is used for particular cultural and pragmatic reasons. Sign is used in certain gender-restricted ceremonies and in other situations where speaking is disallowed; when hunting (in the desert regions of Australia because speaking could scare off prey and in the far north because making a noise might attract crocodiles); to communicate in noisy environments when speech would not be heard; and for communication between interlocutors who are visible to each other yet out of earshot. Using sign may signal the circumspection required of certain topics, and sign is one of the resources drawn upon to mark respect. In some communities, sign is used instead of speech by particular kin in the context of bereavement or "sorry business." Some of the most developed of these Indigenous sign languages are found in regions such as Central Australia and Western Cape York, where speech taboos extended through such periods of mourning (Kendon [1988] 2013). In everyday contexts, sign provides a means of conducting discreet and private side conversations when using speech is not desired or could be regarded as impolite. Sign may also be employed for specific medical reasons (like aphasia) when a person has trouble speaking. For elderly people who lose their hearing or speech, sign can become the most useful communicative resource available to them in later life.

The exact number of Australian Indigenous sign languages, informed either by archival records or by comparative investigations of contemporary knowledge and practice, remains an open question. Scholars of these sign languages and their communities of use have varying approaches, particularly when it comes to formalising names for sign varieties. While everyday use of a limited set of signs is commonplace,

[3] We have done our best to provide a comprehensive overview of relevant research on sign and gesture conducted over the last twenty years. Our time frame includes publications that appear (or are in press) before mid-2021. We apologise for any omissions and welcome new additions to the online reference library (please contact the second author).

[4] In this article, we use the term *Indigenous* to refer to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. See https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/australias-first-peoples (accessed 2021-02-22).

detailed knowledge of the extended repertoires of these sign languages is highly endangered. This is partly due to age- and gender-related aspects of sign use and the ways that sign is associated with cultural practices that are changing rapidly. After several decades of relative research inactivity following the publication of Kendon's seminal work, *Sign Languages of Aboriginal Australia*, originally published in 1988 but reprinted in 2013, interest in the Indigenous sign languages of Australia has undergone a revival. Overviews of the less-recent history of research on Australian Indigenous sign languages and observations about gesture use in Australia can be found in Kendon (1988) 2013 and 2008b.

2.1 Documenting sign diversity Between 1978 and 1986, Kendon's fieldwork on Australian Indigenous sign languages was concentrated in Central Australia and particularly in the communities of Yuendumu (Warlpiri), Ti Tree (Anmatyerr), Tara (Kaytetye), Tennant Creek (Warumungu and Warlmanpa), and Elliott (Mudburra and Jingulu). Kendon referred to this broad region as the North Central Desert. In terms of "sign language development," he concluded that this area was "somewhat distinct" (Kendon [1988] 2013: 31–32). The original recordings, archived at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), comprise more than fifty hours of material.[5]

In the last two decades, the geographical focus has been extended, with work on Yolŋu Sign Language (YSL) from northeast Arnhem Land (Maypilama & Adone 2012; Maypilama et al. 2012; Maypilama & Adone 2013; Adone & Maypilama 2014a; 2014b; Bauer 2014; Adone & Maypilama 2015; James et al. 2020b) and investigations of sign used in the north-central Arnhem Land community of Maningrida (Green et al. 2018; Green 2019; Green et al. 2020). A team of researchers investigated colour signs in YSL (Adone et al. 2012). New research has been conducted in Balgo and in the Western Desert (Lempert 2018; Ellis et al. 2019; Jorgensen 2020), in Kalkaringi (Green et al. 2017), and in Elliott (Green et al. 2019). In addition, long-term collaborations between linguists and the Batchelor Institute have resulted in extensive documentation of the signing traditions of the Anmatyerr, Warlpiri, Kaytetye, Arrernte, and Alyawarr peoples from Central Australia. These research materials add to and augment Kendon's original work by broadening the geographic range and by providing perspectives on sign knowledge, three decades on. Although most of this research focusses on the signing practices of hearing signers, some are beginning to investigate the shared repertoires of hearing and deaf signers in Indigenous communities, particularly in northeast Arnhem Land and in Kalkaringi.

2.2 Creating searchable corpora, online and other community resources, and collaborative research practices One of the objectives of this research has been to engage collaboratively with communities and work with Indigenous people and organisations to make resources that support knowledge of sign, guided by principles of ethical engagement that are core to Australian research practice (Meakins et al. 2018:

[5] Kendon's collections can be found at https://aiatsis.gov.au/collections/using-collection/search-collection (call numbers KENDON_A001-A008; accessed 2018-05-04).

28–29; AIATSIS 2020; Gaby & Woods 2020; James et al. 2020a). Some examples of the products of this research include posters with QR code links to demonstrations of signs (Green et al. 2017; Green et al. 2020) and the Mudburra dictionary, which contains a substantial sign section covering 170 signs, making it the first Indigenous spoken-language dictionary to include hand signs (Green et al. 2019: 397–434). An illustrated handbook of YSL from northeast Arnhem Land includes 500 of the most frequently used signs and describes some aspects of the grammar, vocabulary, and structure (James et al. 2020b). Other forms of community engagement and public dissemination of research results, such as the broadcast of edited sign language films on community platforms such as ICTV (Indigenous Community Television), aim to heighten public awareness of these sign languages.[6] In some cases, records of sign made many decades ago have been accessed from archives and annotated in ELAN (Wittenberg et al. 2006) to make them searchable and more accessible to communities and researchers.

Another example of a community resource is the sign website and dictionary titled *iltyem-iltyem*, which is now hosted by the Batchelor Institute (Green et al. 2011; Campbell et al. [2013] 2021; Carew & Green 2015).[7] In the processes of designing a workflow that moved from making field recordings of sign in several Australian languages (Anmatyerr, Warlpiri, Ngaanyatjarra, and some others) to adding sign clips to the website, the researchers were informed and inspired by guidelines developed for the annotation of corpora of deaf community sign languages such as Auslan (see §3.3).

2.3 Forms and features of Australian Indigenous sign languages The first fine-grained description of the articulatory features of any Australian Indigenous sign language was Kendon's (1988) 2013 work on sign from the North Central Desert. Jorgensen (2020) provides a detailed description of the structure of signs used in Balgo (Western Desert) by applying a phonological model developed from analyses of deaf community sign languages. There are partial descriptions of sign action, usually focussed on handshapes, in signing communities in other parts of the Western Desert and in Arnhem Land (Adone & Maypilama 2014a; Bauer 2014; Green et al. 2018; Ellis et al. 2019; James et al. 2020b). A comparison of some features of sign articulation between three language groups (Warlpiri, Kukatja, and YSL) is found in Jorgensen et al. 2021, and an analysis of the use of the "horns" handshape in Australian Indigenous sign is found in Green 2021a.

2.4 The use of alternate sign by Indigenous deaf people In some remote communities, Australian Indigenous sign languages are used by both deaf and hearing people (Maypilama & Adone 2013; Bauer 2014; Adone & Maypilama 2015; James et al. 2020b). This provides a context where traditional sign, widely used gestural practices (§4), and Auslan (§3) may all come together. While a small proportion of

[6] See https://ictv.com.au/video/item/6213 (accessed 2020-05-13).

[7] See http://iltyemiltyem.com (accessed 2021-07-04).

the Indigenous population is deaf from birth, varying degrees of hearing loss are widespread. This may result from otitis media (forms of inflammation and infection of the middle ear) or from age-related hearing deterioration. As is the case for Indigenous populations globally (Coleman et al. 2018), for many years, high rates of hearing loss have been reported for Indigenous Australians and with this can come various degrees of social disadvantage (Howard 2007; Butcher 2015; Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet 2019; DeLacy et al. 2020). Bone et al. (2021) consider the impact of colonisation on Indigenous and deaf peoples in Australia and Canada. Adams & Crowe (2019: 6) suggest that respect for linguistic diversity, including sign, may have positive impacts on the well-being of deaf people in Indigenous communities, although they acknowledge that "the benefits of Indigenous sign language use have rarely been investigated." As Arrernte elder and language expert Margaret Kemarre Turner (OAM) put it, speaking from Mparntwe/Alice Springs in the heart of Australia, "[sign language] is the sacredness of the hand. It's part of respect. When people use sign their spirit feels well" (Green 2021b: 24).

Recent research has begun to examine some dimensions of shared communicative practices in Indigenous communities where there is a minority deaf population (Saxton-Barney 2010; Power 2013; Green et al. 2017). In the community of Kalkaringi in the Victoria River region of northern Australia, semiotic resources are borrowed and incorporated into the local communicative ecology if, and when, they fit a purpose. One of the resources that entered into local repertoires was a version of Auslan fingerspelling, learned from the pages of a telephone directory by Indigenous mothers keen to assist their deaf children in the context of local education. There are other examples of contact between different sign languages – Indigenous deaf people in far north Queensland use a sign system that they claim is derived from both Australian Aboriginal (mainland) and Torres Strait Islander sign languages (Jackson 2015).

2.5 Sign as part of multimodal practice in the verbal arts Some researchers have looked at the way sign works together with sand drawing, a dynamic and ephemeral narrative practice perfected by women and girls in some desert communities of Australia (Munn [1973] 2016; Wilkins [1997] 2016; Green 2014a; 2014b; Green & Wilkins 2014; 2015; Green 2016; Ellis et al. 2017). In a study of Arandic sand stories, Green (2010; 2014a) developed innovative means for collecting video recordings, both spontaneous and structured, in a remote fieldwork environment. This multimodal study of women's sand stories, which incorporate speech, song, sign, gesture, and drawing, shows how the expressive elements used in the stories are orchestrated in unison, reflecting both language use and cultural practice. Some of this research has pioneered the use of new technologies and devices (e.g., iPads) in the narration of stories that combine speech and drawing (Green & Kral 2020; Kral et al. 2020).

Other research draws attention to several previously undescribed aspects of sign systems. For example, the articulation of some signs may be "modified" in communicative contexts that require particular levels of respect, such as when sign is used to communicate about kin relations who are avoided for cultural reasons (Green

2019). There are other actions in this domain of respect, for example the "elbow" action used in some communities in Arnhem Land (Green 2019; Green et al. 2020; James et al. 2020b) and the "forearm-holding" action used in Arnhem Land as well as in Murrinhpatha communities. Blythe (2012) applies the theoretical framework and methods of conversation analysis to look at the way this Murrinhpatha forearm-holding passing-gesture is used and the way its meanings can be manipulated in the context of an episode of teasing. These studies raise the complex topic of local ideologies about which types of communicative action are regarded as "sign" and which are seen as "gesture."

3. Auslan In this section, we differentiate between research that empirically describes the lexicogrammar of Auslan and research on other aspects of Auslan. It must first be acknowledged that even after twenty years of effort, descriptive work on Auslan has deliberately prioritised analysis of data from deaf people who learned Auslan from birth or early childhood. A central aim of Auslan language description has been to identify Auslan signing benchmarks based on deaf signers who have experienced relatively uninterrupted and intergenerational signed language acquisition, in order to support the development of empirically informed language resources for deaf education, as well as interpreting and teaching signed language.

Less than 3% of profoundly deaf children in Australia are born to parents who can sign (Johnston 2006c). Most deaf children do not have a community of signers around them from a young age and must instead actively seek connections with other signers, during or after transition to adulthood. Consequently, the possibilities for many deaf people to achieve maximal Auslan repertoires are often severely compromised. In many cases, deaf children are still denied access to language during early childhood and therefore experience language deprivation, with lifelong communicative, social, and economic consequences (see Hall 2017). Most deaf signers also tend to live in urban centres close to services for improving communication access and social participation, such as deaf societies with qualified Auslan/English interpreters and community support workers. However, a significant number live in regional or remote areas and are therefore more isolated with respect to social networks with other signers. Auslan is also influenced by high numbers of both deaf and hearing "new" signers who have learned Auslan much later in life (see de Meulder 2019). These factors all affect possibilities for a "standardised" form of Auslan (Johnston 2003). As linguists have repeatedly cautioned, everyday signing used by the majority of signers in the deaf community is therefore much more diverse than descriptions of Auslan based on people signing from birth or early childhood. We do not yet know much about how Auslan is used by Indigenous signers (§2.4), migrants, or refugees; about variation due to deafblindness and other sensory experiences; or about the effects of childhood language deprivation on signing deaf people's communication.

However, researchers have investigated the situations and needs of deaf people from migrant backgrounds living in Victoria (Willoughby 2008); the overall distribution of signers in New South Wales (Willoughby 2009d), Tasmania (Willoughby 2009e), and Victoria (Willoughby 2013); general education and employment outcomes for Victorian signed language users (Willoughby 2009a); and whether signed

language users' education and employment levels are on par with the general Australian population (Willoughby 2011b). Aged care support for deaf and hard-of-hearing Victorians (Willoughby 2011a) and barriers to quality care for signing deaf people in residential aged care facilities (Willoughby 2014) have also been investigated. There have also been studies relating to funding support for deaf people, including a review of the smoke alarm subsidy scheme for deaf and hard-of-hearing Victorians (Willoughby 2009c), and a wider investigation of the economic impact and cost of hearing loss in Australia (Access Economics 2006).

More broadly, the history of Australian deaf communities and Auslan has also been examined. These studies encompass the colonial era (Carty & Thornton 2011), the lives of important deaf leaders (Carty 2000; Thornton et al. 2014), the history of the Western Australian Deaf Society (Bontempo & Hodgetts 2002), the role of deaf women in deaf communities (Hoopman 2011), the role of correspondence for deaf people (Anderson & Carty 2014), and the history of deaf citizens' groups and other community affairs in the early twentieth century (Carty 2016; 2018). More recently, researchers have described common barriers to effective participation in the health care system experienced by deaf people (Beaver & Carty 2021).

3.1 Auslan lexicogrammar There are approximately forty-five publications involving empirical descriptions of Auslan lexicogrammar as used by signers who learned Auslan from birth and early childhood, including six doctoral dissertations. These outputs all make observations about the structure and use of Auslan as a result of original fieldwork, elicitation, experimentation, and/or corpus analysis. Trevor Johnston is the sole or co-author on thirty-six of these publications, including his own dissertation (Johnston 1989b). He also officially or unofficially supervised the five other doctoral dissertations of this type (Schembri 2002; de Beuzeville 2006; Ferrara 2012; Gray 2013; Hodge 2014).

Following the creation of the first Auslan dictionary (Johnston 1987) and the pioneering efforts of Johnston (1989a; 1989b), early descriptive work focussed on lexical description and understanding sociolinguistic variation across this cohort of Auslan signers. Specifically, researchers have questioned how lexemes are defined in a sign language (Johnston & Schembri 1999) and investigated the identification and analysis of noun and verb pairs (Johnston 2001a), verb modification or agreement (Schembri 2002; 2003; Schembri et al. 2005), issues with language standardisation and dictionaries (Johnston 2003), sociolinguistic variation in the use of fingerspelling (Schembri & Johnston 2007), and the place of articulation, or lowering of signs (Schembri et al. 2006). The acquisition of depicting signs (also known as "classifier" constructions) by signing children was also investigated and compared with the visual drawing development of nonsigning hearing children (de Beuzeville 2004; 2006).

These studies all supported the first textbook introduction to signed language linguistics developed for Auslan teachers, interpreters, linguists, and other practitioners (Johnston & Schembri 2007a). Researchers then investigated processes of lexicalisation (Johnston & Schembri 2010), including idiom constructions (Johnston & Ferrara 2012) and lexical frequency (Johnston 2012). They also described issues with lexical gaps in Auslan in applied contexts, such as medical interpreting (Major,

Napier, Ferrara, & Johnston 2012). Others studied how the now-endangered Australian–Irish Sign Language evolved alongside Auslan as a minority signed language used by early Catholic deaf communities in Australia (Adam 2016b; see also Wallis 2016, who offers a history of her deaf Catholic family and their use of this language).

The documentation and ongoing development of the Auslan Corpus (Johnston 2008c) and Auslan Signbank (Johnston & Cassidy 2008) enabled deeper empirical description of aspects of Auslan lexicogrammar based on this cohort of deaf signers. These resources also supported opportunities to test prior claims about signed languages made on the basis of data from very small numbers of signers. These include a study of the ways to teach signed discourse cohesion and reference within story texts (Cresdee 2006); an analysis of the meaningful use of space with indicating verbs (de Beuzeville et al. 2009); the presence or omission of "subject" or "topic" arguments (McKee et al. 2011); the use and role of depicting signs in Auslan (Ferrara 2012); the formational and functional characteristics of pointing signs (Johnston 2013a); the aspectual modification of verbs (Gray 2013); and the perfective grammaticalisation of the sign FINISH (Johnston et al. 2015). Others have investigated the use of English mouthings and conventionalisation of mouth actions (Johnston et al. 2016); backchanneling strategies used by signers (Nekrasova 2017); the role of headshaking for doing clause negation (Johnston 2018); and how signers coordinate different semiotic strategies to do reference (Hodge et al. 2019).

Other studies have described Auslan clause structure, the expression of clause arguments and predicates via different semiotic strategies, and different strategies for linking clauses (Johnston et al. 2007; Ferrara & Johnston 2014; Hodge 2014; Hodge & Johnston 2014). Researchers have also explored how corpus-based research can inform the teaching of Auslan (Cresdee & Johnston 2014). More recently, corpus description has shed light on the question of real or assumed grammatical relations in Auslan (Johnston 2019a). Building on an earlier analysis of the use of "role shift" in Auslan (Goswell 2011), researchers have also used the Auslan Corpus to describe how signers use enactment for functional, creative, and performative effect (Ferrara & Johnston 2014; Hodge & Ferrara 2014) and considered how enactment can be incorporated into the reported speech literature (Hodge & Cormier 2019).

3.2 Tactile signed language practices More recently, researchers have started investigating tactile Auslan practices used by deafblind signers. These studies have taken an interactional and discourse analysis approach to analysing tactile signed language use, focussing on describing how misunderstanding and repair are done (Willoughby et al. 2014), how humour is communicated in conversations between deafblind signers (Willoughby et al. 2019), and how people who are born deaf and lose their sight later in life go about adapting visual Auslan for tactile delivery and reception (Willoughby et al. 2020). These researchers have also contributed an overview of tactile signed languages (Willoughby et al. 2018) and addressed some methodological issues with how tactile signed interactions can be analysed (Iwasaki et al. 2019).

3.3 Auslan Signbank and Auslan Corpus development Early foundations for Auslan documentation and corpus development were laid with lexicography projects and the development of the Auslan dictionary and CD-ROM in the early 1990s (Johnston 1987; 1997a; 1997b; 2001b; Johnston & Schembri 2003). Early testing of how language description could be achieved through creation of a digital language archive and corpus (Johnston & Schembri 2006; 2007b) paved the way for the development of the Auslan Signbank (Johnston & Cassidy 2008) and the Auslan Corpus of deaf signers from five cities in Australia who learned Auslan from birth or early childhood (Johnston 2008c). The Auslan Signbank was also later enriched with the Auslan Medical Signbank, which aimed to bring deaf people and linguists together for language planning led by Auslan signers (Johnston & Napier 2010; Napier et al. 2015). Issues of language ownership in relation to language planning efforts and possibilities for standardisation were also discussed (Adam 2015b; see also Johnston 2003).

Researchers have since pioneered methods for processing signed language corpus data and ensuring the development of digital archives into machine-readable corpora, particularly with respect to tokenisation and lemmatisation processes (Johnston 2008a; 2008b; Cassidy & Johnston 2009; Johnston 2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2014). Australian researchers and their international collaborators have also written about signed language documentation and corpus approaches to signed language research more generally, inspiring many other signed language corpus projects in other countries (Johnston & Schembri 2013; Fenlon et al. 2015).

More recently, researchers have documented and archived a directly comparable corpus of Auslan and the ambient spoken language Australian English, to facilitate holistic comparisons of the face-to-face communication of deaf signers and non-signing hearing speakers (Hodge et al. 2018; Hodge et al. 2019). Along the way, signed language corpus development has also been enabled by creating very specific and precise annotation guidelines (Johnston & van Roekel 2014; Johnston 2019b), further considering what building and using signed language corpora can do for us (Kuder et al. 2018), and identifying best practices for annotating signed language corpora in general (Hodge & Crasborn, 2022).

3.4 Interpreting Research into Auslan/English interpreting includes descriptions and analyses of general interpreting theories and practices, particularly within the courts and health care contexts, as well as experimental investigations of simultaneous interpreting cognition. Research into Auslan/English interpreting practices and theory was initiated by comparing Auslan and BSL (British Sign Language) interpreting (Napier & Adam 2002), understanding who works as professional interpreters in Australia (Napier & Barker 2003), interrogating the existing interpreter code of ethics (Leneham & Napier 2003), and exploring linguistic coping strategies (Napier 2002a; 2005a; 2007; 2016) and omissions produced by Auslan interpreters (Napier 2003; 2004a; Napier & Barker 2004b; Napier 2005c). Early research also looked at linguistic issues in Auslan interpreting in university contexts (Napier 2002b) and how deaf students can access university education via signed language interpreting (Napier & Barker 2004a).

Researchers have also examined perceptions of signed language interpreter competencies (Bontempo 2005; Napier et al. 2005; Napier & Rohan 2007; Napier 2011a), compared interpreter competencies with deaf signers (Napier 2006a), and investigated interpreter training, testing, and accreditation possibilities (Napier 2004b; 2005b; 2005d; Bontempo & Napier 2007; Bontempo & Hutchinson 2011). Practitioner researchers (i.e., signers who work across applied as well as academic and research contexts) have explored the professionalisation of signed language interpreters (Bontempo 2013; Napier & Goswell 2013) and deaf interpreters in Australia (Bontempo et al. 2014).

More recently, researchers have commenced cross-linguistic comparisons of how interpreters use communication practices such as fingerspelling (Nicodemus et al. 2017), as well as the strategies deaf leaders have developed for working with signed language interpreters (Goswell et al. 2008; Napier et al. 2008; Haug et al. 2017).

Practitioner researchers have united interpreter theory and practice (Napier et al. 2006; 2010; Adam & Stone 2011; Napier 2011b; Bontempo 2015; 2016; Napier & Leeson 2016; Napiet et al. 2018) and described interpreter education and mentoring practices (Napier 2006b; 2006c; 2006d; Bontempo & Levitzke-Gray 2009; Bontempo & Napier 2009; Nelson et al. 2009; Napier 2010; Pearce & Napier 2010; Judd et al. 2013). In particular, the development and benefits of self-reflective practices have been highlighted (Goswell 2012; Judd 2015; Dangerfield & Napier 2016).

Researchers have investigated interpreter dispositions (Bontempo, Napier, Hayes, & Brashear 2014) and the role of personality and emotional stability as a predictor of interpreter competence and aptitude (Bontempo & Napier 2011; Bontempo 2012; Bontempo & Napier 2014). The role of multilingualism and language-brokering skills for developing signed language interpreter expertise has also been outlined (Napier 2017).

Experimental research on signed language interpreting has focussed on evaluating the efficacy of simultaneous interpreting, mainly by investigating and comparing the bilingual working memory capacity of interpreters and deaf signers (Wang & Napier 2013) and the relationship between working memory capacity and simultaneous interpreting performance (Wang 2013a; 2013b; 2016). This has led to deeper understandings of the cognition of simultaneous interpreting, including what strategies are involved and what quality can be achieved (Wang 2020; 2021). These researchers have also investigated directionality in signed language interpreting and how to measure working memory (Wang & Napier 2014; 2015). They have also designed rubrics to assess signed language interpreting performance (Wang et al. 2015).

3.5 Interpreting in legal and health care contexts Research about Auslan interpreting in the courts was initiated by the debate about whether deaf people have the right to serve as jurors in Australia (Napier & McEwin 2015; Spencer, San Roque, Hale, & Napier 2017) or if their exclusion constitutes a breach of human rights (Spencer, San Roque, Napier, & Hale 2017). Researchers have explored how deaf signers can potentially participate in the jury process (Napier & Spencer 2007; 2008; Napier et al. 2019), such as through professional signed language interpreters (Hale

et al. 2018) or the testing of direct versus interpreter-mediated comprehension of jury instructions (Napier & Spencer 2017).

Researchers have also investigated the working conditions, perceptions, roles, and responsibilities of signed language interpreters in court (Hale & Napier 2016; Napier & Banna 2016) and the training of legal interpreters who work with deaf jurors (Napier et al., in press). The feasibility and assessment of remote video signed language interpreting in legal contexts has also been explored (Napier & Leneham 2011; Napier 2012a; 2012b; 2013).

Many deaf people in Australia also face significant barriers to accessing health care information (Napier & Kidd 2013; Napier & Sabolcec 2014). Research about Auslan interpreting in health care contexts has described the challenges of mental health interpreting (Cornes & Napier 2005) and the dynamic roles that interpreters undertake when working with health care professionals (Napier & Cornes 2004; Major & Napier 2019). Researchers have examined how nonsigning nurses describe health care procedures (Major & Holmes 2008) and how a Medical Signbank may support health care interpreting practices (Napier et al. 2011). Researcher practitioners have also analysed how to clarify and ensure accuracy of information in these contexts (Major & Napier 2013; Major 2014), how to use authentic interactions in discourse training for health care interpreters (Major, Napier, & Stubbe 2012), and how to avoid the risk of vicarious trauma in health care settings (Bontempo & Malcolm 2012).

3.6 Translation research Early translation research has investigated ways to create effective educational resources for children (Conlon & Napier 2004) and how to apply existing translation approaches and methodologies to the translation of written English into Auslan (Bridge 2009). The model of the signed language interpreter as translator (Leneham 2005) and the dynamics of power and ethnocentrism in signed language translation were also explored (Leneham 2007). The role of deaf translators in the deaf community has since been illuminated (Adam et al. 2011). Researchers have also investigated the quality of English-into-Auslan translations available online (Hodge et al. 2015b) and developed technical guidelines for improving the production of signed language translations (Hodge et al. 2015a). This research has supported deeper interrogation of what signing diversity and translanguaging practices mean for the development of effective Auslan translations for deaf signing audiences (Hodge & Goswell 2021).

3.7 Learning Auslan Teaching Auslan as an additional language is a booming industry in Australia, but research into teaching practices and processes is limited. For example, only one review of Auslan training and delivery in one state has been undertaken (Willoughby 2012b). Researchers have considered an action research process for teaching signed language to parents of deaf children (Napier et al. 2007), analysed errors and feedback in beginner Auslan classrooms (Willoughby et al. 2015), and investigated what hearing students of Auslan are doing outside of the classroom to support their learning (Willoughby & Sell 2019). More recently, the National Australian Curriculum for Auslan has been published (ACARA 2016).

Our understanding of language development and signed language assessment for diverse deaf children also remains limited, and it is a hugely challenging area. One doctoral thesis examines debates about deaf education and signed language from 1970 to 2000 (Dillon 2015). Researchers have investigated principles and practices of literacy development for deaf signers (Power & Leigh 2000; Power et al. 2008), the modes of communication of children with cochlear implants and the role of signed language in their lives (Hyde & Punch 2011), young deaf people's use of the World Wide Web (Matthews et al. 2010), and the impact of signed versus written questionnaires on deaf adolescent psychopathology (Cornes et al. 2006). Researchers have also examined language choices and heritage language maintenance in migrant families with deaf children (Willoughby 2009b; 2012a), the pressing issues faced by deaf children and young people from refugee backgrounds (Willoughby 2015a), and the role of professional advice in shaping language choices in migrant-background families with deaf children (Willoughby 2015b).

Johnston (2004) tested and analysed the signed language proficiency of signing children in a bilingual Auslan/English education program. The acquisition of depicting signs by signing children was also investigated and compared with the visual drawing development of nonsigning hearing children (de Beuzeville 2004; 2006). There is only one standardised assessment tool (i.e., normed on data from deaf children who have acquired sign since birth or early childhood) available for assessing some deaf children's receptive and productive Auslan skills (Herman et al. 2014). There is also one unpublished report summarising early intervention strategies used in primary schools that offer Auslan to deaf children in Victoria (Hodge et al. 2013).

3.8 Theoretical contributions There are many other Auslan-related publications that summarise or recontextualise observations previously made elsewhere, yet the new knowledge is either a new theoretical framework and/or reinterpretation of already observed and published phenomena. This includes publications on the ethics of deafness and deaf people's human rights, language contact and the sociolinguistics of signed languages, and the semiotics of signed languages and linguistic theory.

Researchers have written about several aspects of the ethics of deafness, including the cultural construction of deaf people as disabled (Branson & Miller 2005); the ethics of deaf people wishing to have deaf children of their own (Johnston 2005); the future of the deaf community given advances in genetics and population decline (Carty 2006; Johnston 2006a; 2006c); the ethics of cochlear implantation and the rights of deaf children and their families (Sparrow 2005; Hyde & Power 2006); and issues with policies and funding for genetic testing for deafness that result from medical approaches to deafness and disability (Sparrow 2010).

Other publications have discussed the integration of fully conventionalised with less conventionalised semiotic strategies in Auslan and other signed languages. Early theoretical work considered the application of Systemic Functional Grammar to Auslan as a way to address this integration (Johnston 1996), and analysed "classifier predicate" constructions as visual representations rather than linguistic structures (Cogill-Koez 2000a; 2000b). Claims about signed language morphology based on the morphology of spoken languages were also tested and challenged (Schembri et al.

2002; Johnston 2006b). More recently, linguists have turned to semiotic approaches for analysing signed language use, in part to support better comparison with other face-to-face communication practices (Johnston 2013b; Ferrara & Hodge 2018).

In the majority of published articles, the age, nature, and size of the signing community have been cited repeatedly as important factors influencing the shape and evolution of Auslan. Researchers have discussed signed language bilingualism and language contact (Adam 2012; Quinto-Pozos & Adam 2013; 2015; Adam 2016a; Quinto-Pozos & Adam 2020) and language variation and change in signed languages (Schembri & Johnston 2012; 2013; Bayley et al. 2015). The sociolinguistics of signed languages has been extensively discussed in relation to Auslan and related signed languages such as BSL and NZSL (New Zealand Sign Language), focusing on cohorts of deaf people who have acquired sign from birth or early childhood (Cormier et al. 2008; Schembri et al. 2009; Schembri et al. 2010). This work has contributed to broader sociolinguistic understandings of deaf communities (Schembri & Lucas 2015). More recently, researchers are looking beyond traditional sociolinguistics into the translanguaging literature to better understand the full extent of signing diversity in Australia, especially signing variation resulting from early childhood language deprivation and the fact that most signers learn Auslan during or after transition to adulthood (Hodge & Goswell 2021). Researchers have also considered how corpus linguistics and linguistic ethnography methods may be combined (Hodge & Goico 2022).

Diversity across signed and spoken languages (Cormier et al. 2013), implications for language universals (Cormier et al. 2010), and sociolinguistic typology (Schembri et al. 2018) have been discussed. Researchers have also considered the dissemination and transfer of knowledge to the deaf community (Adam 2015a) and investigated the local ideologies of communication practices used with and around deaf signers during an artistic collaboration (Hodge 2020).

4. Gesture The many and varied relationships between sign and gesture have been a central topic in studies of multimodal communication, including several recent articles that address questions of the similarities and differences between various co-speech gesture and signing practices (e.g., Kendon 2008a; Johnston 2013b; Vigliocco et al. 2014; Goldin-Meadow & Brentari 2017; Ferrara & Hodge 2018; see Müller 2018 for a recent overview). Delineating the differences between "sign" and "gesture" remains a complex issue, although primarily one that occupies linguists rather than speakers or signers of these languages. As Kendon (2004: 98) has written, it is important to recognise "that 'gesture' is a term that covers a multitude of diverse activities." In the Australian Indigenous context, local communities may be agnostic as to the difference and simply refer to both "sign" and "gesture" as "action." Avoiding terminologies that have become somewhat outdated and too proscriptive in their connotations, and paying attention to the metalanguages used by communities to delineate their communicative practices, is part of the tool kit employed in the momentum to move forward. Underlying this, however, are serious empirical questions as to what kinds of "action" resources are deployed, what their purposes are, and how they are combined with other semiotic resources found in local ecologies of

communication. Such considerations have been central to work in Australia, with researchers from these domains coming together for the 2011 workshop mentioned in §1.

The inaugural meeting of the International Society of Gesture Studies (ISGS), held in 2002 in Austin, Texas, brought together an expanding community of scholars studying gesture and nonverbal communication across varied disciplines, methods, and theories. Several Australian researchers presented papers on a broad range of topics. Barbara Kelly presented on infant gesture development. Maurice Nevile gave a paper focussing on gesture in the airline cockpit, a study that is unlikely to be replicated since the data were collected prior to the 9/11 terror attacks (see Nevile 2002). Alexis Tabensky gave a paper on the gestures of foreign language speakers (see Tabensky 2002). These broad-ranging papers in linguistics and related fields are indicative of the types of subsequent gesture research being carried out in the Australian context. In focussing on Australian gesture studies here, our discussion will highlight work on Australian English and on Australian Indigenous languages. In the following sections, we draw attention to research across five main areas, some of which intersect: language, cognition, and semiotics; gesture use by speakers of Australian Indigenous languages; child language and gesture; gesture and neurodiversity; and gesture in performance.

4.1 Language, cognition, and semiotics Not surprisingly, many studies on gesture use are interdisciplinary in nature. From a linguistic perspective, we see research reflecting some of the more pressing questions regarding the role of gesture in communication and how gesture interacts with dynamic grammatical, lexical, semantic, and semiotic systems in spoken language communication. In discussions about the relationship between sign and gesture, many gesture researchers have focussed on the ways in which gesture and speech are interrelated within a communicative system. As this burgeoning field of gesture studies has developed, researchers have created ways of analysing and categorising meaningful bodily actions.

Gawne & Kelly (2014) present a study on gesture categorisation, building on observations that people generally have a consistent attitude towards what constitutes "significant action." They asked research participants to conceptualise their own categories of gesture and then analyse a short video that contained a predetermined variety of bodily movements. They found that those who were not experienced in gesture categorisation had a wider conception of what constituted "gesture" than analysts did.

Gesture also contributes to the processing of language. Murteira et al.'s 2019 study on the role of cross-modal gesture priming on verb retrieval in a picture-naming task shows that a congruent gesture can facilitate lexical retrieval. Of course, speech and gesture are not always temporally aligned, and their contributions to the meaning of an utterance may be partially overlapping or complementary – gestures carry their own social and cultural meanings. Tipton's 2008 study on the "thumbs up" action in Australia highlights cultural differences in its understanding, when it occurs without speech and across different Australian English speech communities. As part of their considerable research on human communication systems, Nicholas

Fay et al. (2014) at the University of Western Australia studied adult gesture perception and argued that in some scenarios, gesture alone may be a more successful means of communication than gesture and speech together. Questions regarding the distribution of meaning across speech and gesture "ensembles" are fundamental to studies of gesture in Australian languages.

4.2 Gesture use by speakers of Australian Indigenous languages In some of the earliest descriptions of Australian Indigenous spoken languages, there is discussion of gesture and body movement. A regular feature in later studies on gesture and bodily actions in Australian languages is that the work is often based on data sets of naturalistic or seminaturalistic language in interaction, which may then be augmented with experimental data.

Studies of Australian Indigenous languages have been crucial in extending and challenging findings at the intersection of language, culture, and cognition that have been established in other languages and cultures. One instance is work investigating pointing gestures. In the field of gesture at large and particularly in child language, debates have abounded regarding the primacy of index-finger pointing as a universal communication tool and thus a key aspect of general species-specific human development (Butterworth 2003). This position was challenged by Wilkins (2003), who investigated the pointing gestures of speakers of Arrernte, a language from Central Australia. He found that the forms and functions of these actions are culture-specific and include some previously little-described variants of one-finger pointing. For example, a cohort of young children used their middle finger for pointing, indicating cultural variation in the practices of what had previously been regarded as a developmental universal.

Other research on pointing highlights gesture use in Indigenous Australia, building upon Haviland's 1993 work on Guugu Yimithirr. In a thesis on place reference in conversations in Gija, an Indigenous language from the east Kimberley region, north Western Australia, de Dear (2019) looked at multiparty conversational data and investigated how spatial relationships are expressed through talk and pointing gestures. Similarly, Blythe et al.'s 2016 study showed the commonplace use of gestures for directional marking in Murrinhpatha, a language spoken in the Northern Territory. Rather than using spoken-language directional terms (e.g., *ahead* or *behind*), and in the absence of words such as *north*, *south*, *east*, and *west*, speakers refer to locations using named landmarks, demonstratives, and pointing. Building on a culturally prescribed avoidance of saying the names of certain places, Blythe et al.'s study reports on the deployment of multimodal resources for giving directions and highlights further cultural and linguistic differences to findings reported in other parts of the world. A comparison between locational pointing in two Australian Indigenous languages (Murrinhpatha and Gija), and in Australian English spoken by non-Indigenous residents of a small town in north Western Australia, was made by de Dear et al. (in press). They found that pointing behaviour is remarkably similar across the three groups, with all participants displaying a capacity to point accurately towards geographic locations regardless of linguistic frame-of-reference options found in their spoken languages.

Mapping the flow of time along various spatial axes or relating times of day to the position and path of the sun are common time-reference strategies the world over. Additional perspectives have arisen through studies of time conceptualisation and representation of bodily actions by speakers of Australian Indigenous languages. Boroditsky & Gaby (2010) and Gaby (2012) researched the nonverbal expression of time in Pormpuraaw on the Cape York Peninsula in Queensland. Based on research conducted in the Ngaanyatjarra community of Tjukurla between 1987 and 1992, Jacques Montredon and Ngaanyatjarra linguist Elizabeth Marrkilyi Ellis (2014) collaborated to analyse gestures relating to time and space.

4.3 Child language and gesture Child language studies are the most widespread areas of research in Australian studies of gesture in communication. Longitudinal studies of gesture development in twelve- to thirty-month-old toddlers have focussed on the emergence of spoken language and gesture use through interaction with adult carers (Kelly 2006; 2011; 2014) and the continued use of gesture in preschool age and beyond (Filippi 2009). There have also been several experimental studies on Australian children's capacity to use and understand gesture communicatively. These include Bavin et al.'s 2008 study on predicting vocabulary at one and two years on the basis of gesture and object use; Cattani et al.'s 2019 study on cross-linguistic and cross-cultural word-learning in Italian, British English, and Australian English; and Quinn & Kidd's 2019 study showing gesture use in eighteen-month-old children's play.

Contributing new perspectives and challenging the assumptions of research built upon major world languages becomes particularly important when designing tests of language development. Jones et al. (2020) constructed a parent vocabulary checklist for children growing up in the Katherine region of Northern Territory, with a focus on gestures as well as spoken words. As their research highlights, situating language testing in multimodal and culturally appropriate ways ensures children are measured on the basis of what they *can* do rather than from the perspective of a deficit model of what they "lack." It thereby accounts for radically different conceptualisations of language and communication development compared to those used in most dominant monolingual English-focussed settings. Acknowledging the role of gesture in communication is crucial here and in the broader domain of early language development.

4.4 Gesture and neurodiversity While many studies have concentrated on neurotypically-developing children, other studies in Australia have focussed on gesture and communication used by neurodiverse children, primarily autistic children. Some focus on gesture and emotion (West et al. 2020). Also prominent are studies of aphasia in older speakers (e.g., Beattie & Shovelton 2006; Rose & Sussmilch 2008; Sekine et al. 2013), including a systematic review indicating research that supports gesture and spoken language treatment for lexical production in some individuals with aphasia (Rose et al. 2013).

4.5 Gesture in performance In the very different domain of gesture in music, theatre, and dance, Naveda & Leman (2010) examined the spatiotemporal representation of dance and macro-level whole body movements they characterised as "basic gestures," extending well beyond the gesture spaces generally examined in other gesture research reported here. Later work on whole body movements and gesture has suggested that these movements can aid in facilitating and understanding the physiological functions of singing (Nafisi 2014) and can assist in children's understanding of digital literacy in a film context (Ngo 2018). Extending music-focussed work that crosses linguistic, semiotic, and cognitive domains, Parton (2014; 2020) used distributed cognition and ethnography frameworks to examine the semiotic resources deployed in orchestral conducting and investigated the ways in which the gestures of a conductor are situated, embodied, and cognitively distributed in interaction.

5. Sign, gesture, and technology There was some early research on automating machine recognition of Auslan (Holden et al. 2005), but Auslan-based technology development has mostly focussed on creating tools for children and adults learning Auslan. Researchers have designed mobile video games to support young deaf children learning Auslan (Korte et al. 2012) and explored the use of the Leap Motion controller (Potter et al. 2013) and the potential of motion capture in the Microsoft Kinect gaming console to give feedback to learners about whether a sign has been produced correctly (Fisher et al. 2014; Ellis et al. 2015). Researchers have also collaborated on the development of software to support Web-based dictionaries of signed languages (Carew & Green 2015; Cassidy et al. 2018).

In technology-oriented research across engineering and computer sciences, there are several foci in human computer interaction and gesture. One prominent area of gesture technology research in Australia is the broad field of gesture recognition. The availability of high-quality recordings and of movement-tracking technologies has allowed researchers working in areas such as computer-generated imagery (CGI) to develop tools for recognising (Perera et al. 2019) and tracking (Cook et al. 2015) fine-grained gesture movement, such as finger actions, in digital environments involving human avatars. Although this work draws upon related gesture work regarding the semiotic significance of gesture, it has little overlap with the other research considered here.

6. Conclusions Finally, we draw together some of the threads that research on Australian sign and gesture have in common and point to particular issues that may inform research agendas in the future. As is the case globally, studies on gesture and on sign languages – historically marginalised in linguistics and other communication sciences – are finally gaining greater recognition. Such research is vital for informing many different aspects of linguistic theory, including debates on the nature of the human language capacity. It advances our understanding of why languages differ and helps to address the question of whether the diverse range of languages we see in the world today share some universal patterns of organisation (see, e.g., Evans & Levinson 2009). Studies of signed languages are crucial for broadening our

knowledge of human communication, thus moving beyond dominant epistemologies of spoken and written language use – what Braithwaite (2019: 161) has termed "widespread modality chauvinism." As it is widely recognised that gestures appear to occur whenever people communicate, the study of co-speech gesture leads to a greater understanding of human communication and cognition (Kendon 2004; see also Johnston 1996). It is crucial that these global scientific enterprises draw on as broad a selection of languages as possible. In this respect, Australia – as home to a rich diversity of both spoken and signed languages – has much to offer. Australia provides fertile ground for researching the broad repertoire of human communication practices, thus raising bigger questions about the shape and evolution of human languages in general.

As our review of the first two decades of the twenty-first century demonstrates, researchers who study Australian Indigenous sign languages, Auslan, and gesture have offered important contributions to the goal of understanding "language" in its broadest sense. They have developed innovative methodologies for documenting these practices that are well adapted to fieldwork conditions in Australia (see Meakins et al. 2018). The importance of documenting and developing well-structured, machine-readable corpora cannot be overstated, and Auslan researchers have been pioneers in this regard (see Johnston 2010b). The benefits of this approach have been demonstrated by research on Auslan using the Auslan Corpus, which has shown that many earlier claims about deaf community sign languages need to be re-interrogated. As discussed above, researchers of signed languages and gesture in Australia have benefitted enormously from new technologies and computer software and approaches to video annotation that have been shared across disciplines.

Where do we go from here? The broad view of language implicit in this review article points to new avenues for research in both applied and theoretical contexts. Our review highlights the need for further descriptive work, especially that with an emphasis on the use of sign and gesture in interaction. Other lesser-studied aspects of language, including everyday language and communication phenomena that have traditionally been marginalised or neglected altogether in linguistics, also require attention – for example, to date, there is little research in Australia on the role of vocal gesture. There remains much work to be done to understand language change, contact phenomena, multilingualism, and multimodality by including a wider range of speakers and/or signers. The need to broaden our perspectives applies also to topics such as how deaf and hearing children and adults learn Auslan and the many factors influencing signing diversity in general. Links between language and mental health, often cited as a factor integral to building resilience and health within Australian Indigenous communities, also apply to deaf people's lived experiences and mental health, especially with regard to their access to language.

While Australia is rich in linguistic diversity, the need to support Australia's fragile heritage of languages and communication practices is acute. Australian Indigenous spoken languages are highly endangered, with only an estimated twelve of Australia's original 250–300 spoken languages regarded as "strong" enough to be transmitted intergenerationally (Australian Government 2020). Although it is very difficult to do so in a principled fashion, sign is seldom factored into these calculations, even when

it may be the primary mode of communication for some and used as an alternative to speech or alongside it by others. Adams & Crowe (2019) argue that diversity of languages should be seen as an indicator of the health of social ecosystems and that these metrics should include sign languages. This situation extends to the compromised vitality of Auslan, with generations of signers having to continuously agitate for access to sign language as a human right. There is an urgent need to prevent language deprivation in deaf children who have no access to languages such as Auslan, and to support the many programmes and policies required to mitigate the cumulative impact of decades of poor education outcomes for deaf Australians. The systemic pressures affecting people, communities, and languages are extreme. For example, there is only one normed assessment tool to assess deaf children's Auslan receptive and productive skills, but the standardised scores for this assessment may only be applied to deaf children age four to eleven who do not have cognitive and/or physical disabilities. Much of the signing population remains underrepresented in all aspects of Auslan research. The signing of deaf signers who learned Auslan after childhood or later in life has been the focus of very little research, and they need to be included without detracting from the importance of the unfinished work of describing Auslan as used by deaf or hearing people who have been signing from birth or early childhood. This is necessary if we are to accurately describe the entire signing deaf community.

As is the case globally, the Australian context also highlights the need for attention to issues of social equity in research; to consider the roles of Indigenous researchers, deaf researchers, and practitioner researchers; and to adopt research methods that are both sustainable and accountable. There is a growing need to recognise nonacademic expertise and local epistemologies, since such collaborations may be the only way to avoid continuously "reinventing the wheel" with respect to social equity and other issues. While some progress has been made, there is a long way to go before the imbalance between "insider" and "outsider" linguists is addressed. This also raises the issue of appropriate and accessible design for resources that can support knowledge and learning of Australian sign languages, including the sign languages of Indigenous Australia and Auslan.

The attempt to move away from modality-defined silos when it comes to the focus of research can lead to exciting research that challenges previously drawn boundaries and, in broader terms, requires us to "rethink the margins of language" (Dingemanse 2018). Further investigation of sign languages and gesture in Australia will lead to better understandings of human communication overall and of the ways different combinations of semiotic signalling between people with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds manifest in everyday interactions. This will, in turn, provide rich insights about what this semiotic diversity says about human language, communication, and cognition.

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