

# **Preliminary data regarding the development of Auslan handshapes and emerging lexicons in children who are deaf and hard of hearing in Australia?**

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In spoken languages, individual speech sounds are combined to form words. In signed languages, phonology includes the shape of the hand/s when making the sign, the movement of the sign as it occurs, and the location where it occurs in space. At present the sign language phonology of Auslan (the sign language of the Deaf in Australia) has not been studied.

The data that will be presented is based upon a large corpus of 3166 signs gathered from observing young children aged 3-6 years old attending a bilingual Auslan/English program in Melbourne, Australia. The samples were gathered from 2014 to 2016 by Deaf Auslan users using the Handshape Analysis Recording Tool (HART); a method developed by the lead author. The HART was developed to allow for Auslan - which has no written form - to be documented and analysed. The HART method offers a way for Auslan to be tracked over time to examine patterns of emergence of signing phonology.

Samples were gathered from a cohort of 44 children with hearing loss ranging from moderate to profound, and varying levels of experience with Auslan from six months to five years. Children with additional needs or comorbid diagnoses were included in the cohort, as representative of the heterogenous deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) population.

Preliminary analysis of this large signing corpus will be discussed, with a particular focus on the frequency of specific handshapes, and the accuracy of young children's signing overall. The types of word classes used by the children in their documented emerging lexicons will also be discussed.

## **Biography**



Erin West (she/her) is a speech pathologist who has worked in paediatrics for the past 16 years, graduating with a bachelor degree in speech pathology from Flinders University in 2006. Erin specialises in deafness, and post cochlear implant rehabilitation, including working at a school for the Deaf from 2013- 2017. She completed her Masters in Communication Disorders through Macquarie University in 2013.

Erin is currently a PhD candidate through the University of Melbourne. Erin's research is focused on building the repository of knowledge on the development of Auslan (the sign language of the Deaf in Australia). She is particularly interested in the ways that research data collection can be embedded within clinical practice.