

Negation in two related signed languages: British Sign Language and Auslan

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Auslan (Australian signed language) is part of the British Sign Language (BSL) family. BSL and Auslan seem largely mutually intelligible and overlap considerably in lexicon (McKee & Kennedy, 2000) but less is known about how they compare grammatically. Here we compare negation in Auslan and BSL. Zeshan (2004) proposed a typology of signed languages with respect to negation: (1) manual dominant signed languages, whereby negation is primarily conveyed via lexical signs, and (2) non-manual dominant signed languages, in which negation is primarily conveyed via non-manual expression (typically head movements) during the production of the negated constituent. These generalisations were based on a mix of sources of data, but generally not on large samples of spontaneous data. Johnston (under review) recently explored the application of this typology for Auslan using corpus-based methodology. He found that Auslan signers most frequently use manual lexical signs to convey negation, often also with non-manual behaviour including English mouthing or mouth gestures and/or headshakes. Indeed, the corpus dataset highlighted the role of headshake as a non-manual marker of clause negation in Auslan. Regardless, it is extremely rare for Auslan signers to rely on headshaking alone to negate clauses – only 3 tokens out of a dataset of 600 negated clauses (spread over 89 ELAN files) are unequivocally headshake-only negated clauses.

How do these Auslan patterns compare to BSL, one of its most closely related signed language varieties? Here we share results from a large dataset of conversations between pairs of signers from different regions in the UK archived in the BSL Corpus, in order to provide evidence for similarities and/or differences between BSL and Auslan with respect to negation. Preliminary results from a pilot investigation of negation in BSL from one region using the same methodology as the Auslan study suggests that, as with Auslan signers, most of the time these BSL signers use one or more manual signs to convey negation ($n=60/82$). Negation conveyed using only non-manual behaviour is less frequent ($n=22/82$). However, these early findings do suggest the rate of non-manual-only clause and constituent negation may be higher in BSL than for Auslan, which may indicate grammatical differences between these two closely-related varieties. We also consider what this means for the role of manual and non-manual activity in the domain of negation in signed languages, sociolinguistic variation in BSL, and semiotic diversity in both signed and spoken languages.

Johnston, T. (under review). 'The role of headshake in negation in Auslan (Australian sign language): implications for signed language typology and the gestural substrate in signed languages'. *Linguistic Typology*.

McKee, D., & Kennedy, G. (2000). Lexical comparisons of signs from American, Australian, British and New Zealand Sign Languages. In K. Emmorey & H. Lane (Eds.), *The Signs of Language revisited: An anthology to honor Ursula Bellugi and Edward Klima* (pp. 49-76). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Zeshan, U. (2004). 'Hand, head, and face: Negative constructions in sign languages'. *Linguistic Typology*, 8: 1 – 58.