

THE AUSLAN CORPUS PROJECT

Sign languages are natural languages that have been developed spontaneously wherever deaf people come together to form a community similar to any spoken language. Often sign languages develop vocabulary and grammar which is different from the surrounding forms of communication.



However, as the bionic ear and new technologies result in greater access to and influence from spoken English in the deaf community, La Trobe University Associate Professor Adam Schembri, Faculty of Health Sciences, and Adjunct Professor Trevor Johnston have launched a project to better understand the ever-evolving sign language.

'Within sign language communities there are dialectic differences for a substantial proportion of the vocabulary and currently we are recording variations in the language across the country. Colours and numbers for example may be communicated differently in places as little as an hour away.'

'Because of these obvious differences in vernacular, the deaf community is very interested in seeing the language better documented for improved dictionaries and sign language teaching resources,' he says.

Dr Schembri collaborated with Dr Johnston on the creation of The Auslan Corpus Project funded by the Endangered Languages Documentation Program within the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London.

The project is in the process of producing and securing a reference archive of Auslan and creating a linguistic Corpus and description of the language both now and into the future. So far, over 1,000 recordings have been made and will soon be added to the Auslan Signbank.

'The Corpus project is a collection of language recordings, a representative sample of the deaf community. The creation of the archive involved recording, collating and describing a set of naturalistic, controlled and elicited signed language samples from deaf native and near-native signers across Australia.'

MORE INFORMATION

Details on the Auslan Corpus Project and Signbank can be found at:

www.auslan.org.au/about/corpus/