

11.00 – 11.30

Trevor Johnston: *Corpus-based SL Research: The Case of Mouth Actions in Auslan (Australian Sign Language)*

In this talk I give an example of corpus-based research. I describe a recent study of one type of non-manual in signed languages (SLs) — mouth actions. I examine the distribution and characteristics of mouth actions in Auslan (Australian Sign Language) to gauge the degree of language-specific conventionalization of these forms. I describe the coding schema for those non-manuals that are mouth-centred. All signs and all mouth actions are examined and the state of the mouth in each sign is assigned to one of three broad categories: (i) mouthings, (ii) mouth gestures (both of which we have already briefly characterized), and (iii) no mouth action. The data in this study has been drawn from the Auslan corpus of native or near-native signers. Fifty video clips were selected from the corpus, representing 38 individuals, 3 text types (monologue, dialogue, and elicited) during 5 hours and 58 minutes of the corpus, representing c. 17,000 manual sign tokens. The texts consisted of 25 monologues (narratives of which there were 25 retellings of two Aesop's fables); 10 dialogic texts (free conversation or responses to a series of interview questions); and 15 sessions of 40 elicited picture descriptions. Mouth actions that invariably occur while communicating in SLs have posed a number of questions for linguists: which are 'merely borrowings' from the relevant ambient spoken language? which are gestural and shared with all of the members of the wider community in which signers find themselves? and which are conventionalized aspects of the grammar or lexicon of some or all signed languages?