Adam Schembri: *Quantitative Approaches To Analysing Sign Language Corpus Data*

Adam Schembri is an Australian Sign Language/English interpreter, a researcher and lecturer. Currently, he is also an Associate Professor in the Linguistics program in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia.

Originally from Sydney, Australia, he earned his Ph.D. in Linguistics at the University of Sydney in 2002.

During 2006-2010 he worked in UK at the Deafness Cognition and Language (DCAL) Research Centre, based at University College London, where he initiated and led on the BSL Corpus Project. In 2011, he moved back to Australia but remains involved in a number of DCAL-associated projects (particularly the BSL Corpus Project).

In 2007, he co-authored with Trevor Johnston the first comprehensive introduction to the linguistics of Auslan, the sign language of Australia - a book entitled ´Australian Sign Language (Auslan): An introduction to sign language linguistics´.

Research interests: Classifier Constructions, Corpus-based Approaches to Signed Language Research, Gesture and Sign Language Studies, Grammaticalization, Language Assessment, Lexical norming studies, Lexicography, Sociolinguistic Variation and Change, Typological Issues

<u>Abstract</u>

Work within variationist (socio-)linguistics often has implications for linguistic theory in general, as the quantitative approach to the study of corpora can be used to test any linguistic theory. The application of variationist quantitative approaches to the study of sign languages was pioneered by Ceil Lucas and her colleagues in the early 1990s on American Sign Language (ASL), and over the last decade, have grown to include work on sign languages in Australia, New Zealand, Italy and the United Kingdom. In this presentation, I describe some recent studies that have involved drawing on sign language corpora, with a focus on work on phonological, lexical and grammatical variation in BSL (British Sign Language) and Auslan (Australian Sign Language). Quantitative analysis has shown that the factors that drive sociolinguistic variation and change in both spoken and signed language communities appear to be broadly similar, but has also demonstrated that some factors involved in variation in sign languages are distinctive. In this talk, I will discuss how the data in such studies have been coded for quantitative analysis, and how the coding is analysed using Rbrul software, a multivariate statistical package designed specifically for (socio-)linguistic

studies of large language samples. I will then discuss how to interpret the statistical results, and what conclusions can be drawn about the nature of variation and change in these studies.