



WHAT IS AUSLAN?

Auslan is the language of the Australian Deaf Community. Auslan is a portmanteau, a word made up by combining the words **Australian Sign Language**.

Auslan or Australian Sign Language has been used in Australia since the 1900s. Whilst it is hard to pinpoint the date when Auslan was first used, there is evidence of signing Deaf people in Australia going back to 1820s.

Compared to other sign languages, Auslan is not very old, however it does have roots in much older sign languages.¹

Older sign languages that are connected to Auslan include British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language. These sign languages were introduced to Australia when deaf convicts arrived and Auslan grew from this foundation.

In Australia, there are many Indigenous Sign Languages that have been used for thousands of years, which follow Indigenous spoken languages and are culturally bound.

Auslan has not been influenced by Indigenous Sign Languages, however Auslan is starting to include Blak Auslan signs shared by First Nations people.²

All languages have their own grammar and linguistic features and Auslan is no different. Many people think that Auslan follows the English language structure, but it is a unique language with its own syntax and grammar. This is what makes Auslan a legitimate language that is unique to the Australian Deaf community.

The awareness of Auslan in the hearing communities has increased because of the presence of Auslan interpreters on our TV screens during bushfires, floods and COVID press releases.

^[1] Auslan: an introduction to sign language linguistics, pg 55 3.2 The origins of Auslan

^[2] <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-06-19/australian-indigenous-sign-languages/100185504>; <https://aiatsis.gov.au/blog/yolnu-sign-language>; <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/speaking-my-language-indigenous-deaf-sign>; <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26190846>