

# Showing the story: Enactment as performance in Auslan narratives

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Language use may be understood as creative and partly improvised performance. For example, during face-to-face interaction, both signers and speakers coordinate manual and non-manual semiotic resources to enact characters, events and points of view. Here we present an early exploration of how enactments—constructed actions and dialogue that are effectively tokens of improvised performance—are patterned throughout Auslan (Australian sign language) narratives. We compare retellings of *Frog, Where Are You?* and *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* that were elicited from native and near-native Auslan signers and archived in the Auslan Corpus. We find commonalities and differences between the two narratives and between individuals that contribute insights into the role of enactment for both signers and speakers. This study aligns with views of face-to-face interaction as a multimodal, highly complex semiotic practice of partly improvised performance.

**Keywords:** Auslan, sign language, enactment, constructed action, performance, corpus

*Selected Papers from the 44<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Australian Linguistic Society, 2013*

edited by Lauren Gawne and Jill Vaughan

## **1. Introduction**

Signed language narratives have often been described in terms of their cinematic qualities (e.g. Stokoe, 1979; H-D L Bauman, 2003; McCleary & Viotti, 2010). Much of this effect is realised through the use of enactment, whereby signers and speakers combine bodily movements, postures and eye gaze to ‘construct’ actions and dialogue in order to ‘show’ characters, events and points of view (Metzger, 1995). During constructed action one enacts a non-linguistic action (“quotes an action”). During constructed dialogue—essentially a sub-type of constructed action—one enacts a language event (“quotes signs or words”). Both signers and speakers use enactment with or without linguistic commentary to demonstrate who did what to whom and how (Metzger, 1995; Liddell & Metzger, 1998; Liddell, 2003; MacGregor, 2004; for similar discussion using different terminology see also Tannen, 1989; Clark & Gerrig, 1990; Winston, 1991, 1992).

Previous studies of enactment in Auslan have investigated the identification of constructed action and dialogue, and the presence or absence of devices to frame durations of enactment in Auslan narratives, such the use of lexicalised signs or shifts in eye gaze (e.g. Ferrara & Johnston, 2012). Studies have also investigated the co-occurrence of enactment with other meaningful expression, and how enactments are semantically and structurally organised within the unfolding linguistic discourse (e.g. Ferrara & Johnston, 2014; Hodge & Johnston, 2014). The use of enactment (often termed “role shift”) by interpreters working from spoken English into Auslan has also been investigated (Goswell, 2011).

Findings from these studies indicate that Auslan signers habitually integrate aspects of language and gesture during their enactments of actions and dialogue. Signers frequently use enactment to elaborate aspects of their narratives that are encoded lexically. Furthermore, signers often rely solely on enactment to show and infer semantic relations between participants and events in a story, instead of explicitly encoding these relations via fully lexicalised manual signs and other conventionalised strategies of morphosyntax.

However, most studies to date have been limited to investigating enactment from a clause-level perspective of analysis. In order to consider how signers use enactment and the role of enactment in the emergence of Auslan lexicogrammar,

it is also important to look beyond clause-level perspectives and investigate the use of enactment throughout unfolding texts. Storytelling has an important status in signed language communities, and enactment is an important storytelling device (Liddell & Metzger, 1998; Mather & Winston, 1998; Rayman, 1999; Janzen, 2004; Goswell, 2011). Thus, we begin this early exploration by investigating Auslan narratives.

To explore how Auslan signers integrate enactment throughout their narratives as a whole, we expanded our scope of inquiry to investigate the patterning of enactment and non-enactment throughout the major event progression of two different narrative texts. In particular, we consider: (1) the patterning of enactment with non-enactment throughout the major event progressions of each narrative (e.g., introduction, main events, climax, conclusion); and (2) similarities and differences between individual signers regarding the patterning of enactments through the major event progressions of each narrative.

## **2. Background**

### *2.1 Language use as creative and partly improvised performance*

The idea that language use may be understood as creative and partly improvised performance is rooted in early twentieth century comparisons of music and language, as well as the study of face-to-face interaction in the ‘ethnography of speaking’ tradition (e.g. Hymes, 1962; R Bauman & Sherzer, 1989[1974]).

Similarities between music and language have long being recognised by ethnomusicologists, linguists, music theorists, and semioticians (e.g. Nettl, 1958; Bright, 1963; Becker & Becker, 1979). In particular, analyses of music and language using the Peircian and Saussurian study of sign systems, and structuralist (mostly formal) traditions of linguistics, have been widely adopted (e.g. Ruwet, 1967 (after Lévi-Strauss, 1955); see Powers, 1980, for extensive review of the “linguistics-based analysis of music”, p. 7).

However, Sawyer (1996, p. 270) argues that many of these structural analyses are problematic because tokens of musical performance and linguistic use are investigated only as static artefacts. This approach does not afford proper

consideration of the moment-by-moment dynamicity and emergence of either musical performance or language use, which is necessary for exploring the vast range of human interactivity (see also Mead, 1932, 1934; R Bauman & Sherzer, 1989 [1974]; Duranti & Goodwin, 1992; Enfield, 2009).

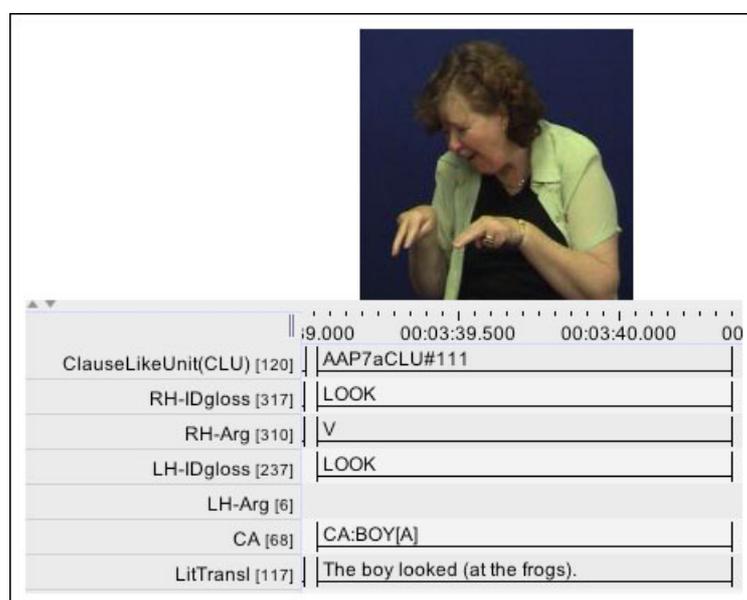
Sawyer instead describes improvised musical performances and face-to-face language use as “forms of creative improvisation” that are “inherently creative” (1996, p. 272). We extend this description to other contingently emergent and meaningful bodily actions such as enactment. All are types of semiotic practice during which interactants engage and negotiate with each other meaningfully, and during which there are elements of reciprocity, expectation (and the subversion of expectation), and originality.

## *2.2 Enactment in signed and spoken languages*

The phenomenon of enactment has been reported in the literature on both spoken and signed languages (e.g. see Tannen, 1989; Clark & Gerrig, 1990; Cameron, 1998; Buchstaller & D’Arcy, 2009; Park, 2009; Fox & Robles, 2010; Rodríguez Louro, 2013, for spoken languages; Engberg-Pedersen, 1995, for Danish Sign Language; Winston, 1991, 1992; Metzger, 1995; Liddell & Metzger, 1998; Dudis, 2004; Quinto-Pozos & Mehta, 2010, for American Sign Language; and Cormier & Smith, 2011; Cormier, Smith & Sevcikova, 2013; Cormier, Smith & Zwets, 2013; Earis & Cormier, 2013, for British Sign Language).

Ferrara & Johnston (2014) provide examples of signed utterances involving enactment that were observed in retellings of *Frog, Where Are You?* (Mayer, 1969) by native signers of Auslan (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

In Figure 1, the signer uses the fully lexicalised Auslan sign meaning ‘to look’ to prompt a conceptualisation that something is being looked at by someone. At the same time, the signer uses her face and the rest of her body to enact who is doing the looking. By taking on the boy’s facial expression and tilting her body, she shows her interactant her interpretation of how the boy looks at the baby frogs. The signer thus recruits a lexicalised manual sign to contextualize the enactment on her face and body.



*Figure 1. An example of an Auslan signer recruiting a lexicalised manual sign during a partial body enactment (Ferrara & Johnston, 2014, p. 203 © The Australian Linguistic Society, reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd, [www.tandfonline.com](http://www.tandfonline.com) on behalf of The Australian Linguistic Society)*



*Figure 2. An example of an Auslan signer engaging in a full body enactment (Ferrara & Johnston, 2014, p. 202 © The Australian Linguistic Society, reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd, [www.tandfonline.com](http://www.tandfonline.com) on behalf of The Australian Linguistic Society)*

In Figure 2, the signer engages his body in a full enactment of the boy holding onto a pair of long thin vertical objects (see the first image on the left in Figure 2). In constructing this action, the signer relies solely on enactment to show what the

boy is doing. The signer thus assumes his interactant will interpret prior narrative information to contextualize the enactment on his face, body and arms. The context of the ongoing narrative contributes to the dynamic interpretation of this enactment: first we understand the boy to be holding onto the branches of a tree, then immediately afterwards we find out the branches are actually the antlers of an irate deer. The signer's use of enactment in his retelling also helps to re-create an element of the suspense and surprise experienced by the boy during his adventure.

Spoken language linguists provide examples of spoken utterances involving enactment (which Buchstaller & D'Arcy, 2009, term "mimetic re-enactment") from speakers of American and New Zealand English:

- (1) a. And I *was* just *like*, '[making a face]'. (Blyth, et al., 1990, p. 217)
- b. I got out of the car, and I just [demonstration of turning around and bumping his head on an invisible telephone pole]. (Clark & Gerrig, 1990, p.782)
- c. And then she rings up, Ø 'I've been cut off.' [pitch raised] (Buchstaller & D'Arcy, 2009, p. 297)

In 1a and 1b, the speakers use conventionalised English expressions to explain that they did some bodily action at some point in the past. Each speaker then relies solely on enactment to demonstrate what they did with their body (an action we can only imagine here), thus producing a token performance of a previous action of their own for their interactant. In 1c, the speaker uses conventionalised English expressions to describe the actions of another person and what that person said. However, the speaker also adopts a different 'voice' to perform the dialogue of the other person thereby enacting how the other person produced her utterance. The speaker thus elaborates the utterance attributed to someone else with an enactment of voice quality.

In all of the examples discussed above, the durations of enactment and individual tokens of constructed action and dialogue are meaningfully integrated with the lexicalised elements and conventionalised organisation of these Auslan and English utterances. These are just a few strategies by which signers and speakers integrate aspects of language and gesture during their enactments of actions and dialogue.

In this way, both signers and speakers use enactment to ‘show’ meaning in addition to—or sometimes instead of—‘telling’ by encoding meaning via conventionalised expressions (for further discussion and examples of showing and telling, see Clark & Gerrig, 1990; Holt, 2000; Heath, 2002; Sidnell, 2006, for spoken languages; and Liddell, 2003; Mulrooney, 2009; Cormier & Smith, 2011; Ferrara, 2012; Cormier, Smith & Zwets, 2013; Ferrara & Johnston, 2014; Hodge & Johnston, 2014, for signed languages). As suggested above, this use of enactment may be seen as creative and at least partly improvised performance.

### *2.3 The semiotic unification of enactment and language*

The integration of language and gesture to show and tell meaning can be understood as a semiotic unification, central to which is the notion of the “composite utterance” (Enfield, 2009). Composite utterances are communicative moves, or turns, in face-to-face interaction during which fully conventional semiotic signs combine with non-conventional signs (such as tokens of enactment) and symbolic indexicals (such as tokens of pointing actions) to create unified utterances that are interpreted holistically. In this way, face-to-face linguistic interactions develop as shared and constantly negotiated symbolic artefacts between two or more interactants (Enfield, 2009; Givón, 2005, 2009).

While initially emerging in specific spatio-temporal and communicative contexts, frequent and routine use of embodied semiotic resources leads to richly indexed conventions across diachronic, synchronic, and ontogenic domains (Givón, 2009), and even the enchronic domain (the experienced real time during which utterances are exchanged) (Enfield, 2009). This happens regardless of form across all aspects of multimodality and can be investigated in both spoken and signed languages by applying a modality-free distinction between language and gesture (Okrent, 2002).

The interpretation of durations of enactment is a particularly emergent aspect of semiotic unification, as it depends upon interactants recognising an enactment as a token of a non-conventional sign that is primarily contextualised within the moment-by-moment unfolding of the discourse. These tokens of non-conventional signs are “singular events” during which interactants enchronically

interpret a form as “standing for” a meaning in the context of the interaction (Kockelman, 2005).

For example, in the communicative move transcribed in example 1b, the speaker constructed an action of his own for his interactant. He did this by enacting his original bodily action as it occurred in the first instance of getting out of his car. In the communicative move shown in Figure 2, the signer constructed an action of the boy for his interactant. He did this by enacting the boy’s bodily action as it was depicted in *Frog, Where Are You?* illustrations. These enactments are essentially tokens of non-conventional signs that come to have a standing-for relation in the context of the communicative event between the signer or speaker and their interactants. These tokens of enactment are framed by the fully conventional semiotic signs of the English and Auslan utterances, which symbolically index (i.e. point to) the subsequent constructed action.

Furthermore, these tokens of enactment may remain active or peripheral for the participants in these interactions, to the extent that they may be used recurrently during subsequent communicative moves—either within the same interaction, or during later interactions. When this happens, each recurrent token of enactment comes to symbolically index both the initial event and all subsequently performed events. Within the interactional micro-context, these tokens of enactment may become increasingly meaningful for participating interactants over the course of the interaction.

This sense of semiotic unification contributes to the notion of enactment as creative and partly improvised performance because it considers the moment-by-moment dynamicity and emergence of language use. It also prompts the question of how the emergent and recurrent use of tokens of non-conventional signs contribute to the co-construction and conventionalisation of semiotic unification within signed and spoken face-to-face interactions (see also Johnston & Ferrara, 2012; Cormier et al., 2012; Johnston, 2013b).

### 3. Method

This study explored how signers use enactment (i.e. tokens of creative and partly improvised performance) throughout Auslan narratives. This investigation was

undertaken using a multimodal corpus of twenty retellings each of *Frog, Where Are You?* (Mayer, 1969, an illustrated source text) and *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* (a written English source text, see Appendix 1) that were elicited from adult native or near-native signers and archived in the Auslan Corpus<sup>1</sup> (see Johnston, 2008).

The annotation and analysis of this study corpus enabled a preliminary analysis of: (1) the patterning of enactment with non-enactment throughout the major event progressions of each narrative (e.g. introduction, main events, climax, conclusion); and (2) similarities and differences between individual signers regarding the patterning of enactments throughout the major event progressions of each narrative.

### *3.1 The study corpus*

Twenty re-tellings each of *Frog, Where Are You?* and *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* (“the study corpus”) were enriched with annotations to investigate enactment and narrative structure. The two sets of narratives each contain four re-tellings by signers from Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. In total, the study corpus represents thirty-four male and female signers of different ages across forty re-tellings (six signers participated in both elicitation tasks).

### *3.2 Annotating the study corpus*

Each retelling was annotated using ELAN<sup>2</sup> software (Crasborn & Sloetjes, 2008). All of the Auslan Corpus ELAN files for these retellings contained annotations enriched during earlier investigations (e.g. Johnston, 2012; Ferrara, 2012; Ferrara & Johnston, 2012; Hodge & Johnston, 2014). Annotations for the current study were tagged on tiers that use or build upon these earlier annotations and the conventions outlined in the Auslan Corpus Annotation Guidelines (Johnston, 2013a). Two major tiers were used for this study: Narrative Structure and Constructed Action.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://clar.soas.ac.uk/deposit/johnston2012auslan>

<sup>2</sup> <http://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/>, Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, The Language Archive, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

The main narrative events of each re-telling were annotated on the Narrative Structure tier using the tags outlined in Appendices 2 and 3. These narrative events were identified by the authors following content analysis of the Auslan re-tellings in the study corpus. Twenty-one narrative events were identified in the *Frog, Where Are You?* re-tellings (see Appendix 2). Eleven narrative events were identified in *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* re-tellings (see Appendix 3). An *r* symbol was suffixed to tags of Narrative Structure that were essentially repairs.

Not all signers included all identified events in their re-tellings. For example, in the lead up to Main Event 9 in *Frog, Where Are You?*, there are four other identified events where the boy and dog look for the frog (i.e. M8a, M8b, M8c and M8d). Signers did not always re-tell all of these events; one or more events were often omitted, probably because they are incidental events that centre around the theme of searching for the frog, and it was not necessary re-tell each event in order to effectively contribute to this theme.

Durations of enactment were annotated on the Constructed Action tier. Enactments were identified by recognising demonstrations of actions, utterances, thoughts, attitudes and/or feelings of a referent other than the narrator (Metzger, 1995; Cormier & Smith, 2011). Tokens of constructed action or dialogue were tagged as CA and CD respectively.

Following the initial annotation of Narrative Structure and Constructed Action tiers, all tiers were reviewed by both annotators a number of times. During each review, the authors checked and revised annotations of: (1) the Main Events, and (2) CA and CD. A question mark symbol was suffixed to tags of CA and CD that were uncertainly identified because: (a) it was unclear if a segment of signing definitely co-occurred with enactment; (b) it was unclear if a segment of signing is recognised as CA or as CD (it was sometimes difficult to differentiate these two sub-types of enactment); and/or (c) the annotators disagreed. This relatively small subset of uncertainly identified durations of CA and CD were analysed separately to the certainly identified durations of CA and CD.

These conventions enabled us to identify and quantify durations and type of enactment with respect to narrative event, and to quantify uncertain analyses. All annotations were exported using the Annotation Overlaps Information function

in ELAN. Data were then explored quantitatively and visually using Excel and mosaic plots<sup>3</sup>.

#### 4. Findings and analysis

The total study corpus constitutes 83.58 minutes of narrative data, of which approximately 60% are re-tellings of *Frog, Where Are You?* and 40% are re-tellings of *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* (see Table 1). It also constitutes 32.61 minutes of enactment data: approximately 37% of *Frog, Where Are You?* and 42% of *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* co-occurs with enactment, i.e. 39% of the total study corpus narratives co-occurs with constructed action or dialogue. Roughly 3% of these identifications were uncertain. All signers used enactment in their re-telling. This suggests that these Auslan signers make extensive use of enactment in re-tellings of both illustrated and written texts. This accords with observations from earlier studies of Auslan and other signed languages (e.g. Earis & Cormier, 2013; Ferrara & Johnston, 2014).

<i>Narrative</i>	<i>CA</i>	<i>CA?</i>	<i>CD</i>	<i>CD?</i>	<i>Total enact</i>	<i>Non-enact</i>	<i>Total</i>
Frog	15.84	1.30	1.28	0.01	18.44	31.32	49.76
Wolf	9.21	0.24	4.50	0.23	14.17	19.65	33.82
<i>Total</i>	<i>25.05</i>	<i>1.54</i>	<i>5.78</i>	<i>0.24</i>	<i>32.61</i>	<i>50.97</i>	<i>83.58</i>

**Table 1.** Total duration (in minutes) of enactment and non-enactment in the study corpus

In order to explore the use of enactment in the study corpus more intuitively, mosaic plots of the total durations of enactment and non-enactment in the main events in the two narratives were computed (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). This enables us to compare the durations of enactment and non-enactment visually.

Looking at each mosaic plot, the surface area of the boxes represents the temporal contribution of each event to the total duration of the twenty re-tellings, i.e. the greater the total duration of the event, the greater the surface area of the box. Each box is further divided into the temporal contributions of enactment

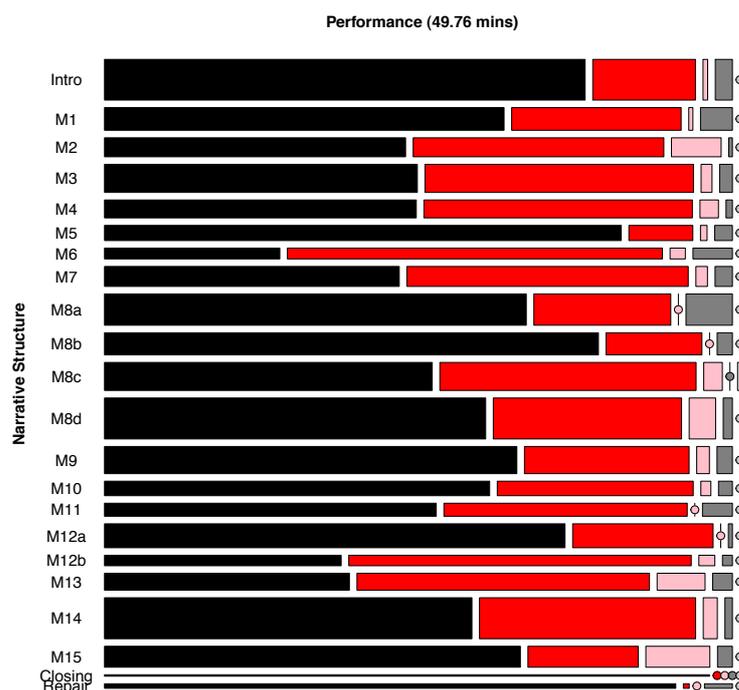
<sup>3</sup> All mosaic plots were computed with R 2.14.0 using RStudio 0.97.551 and the vcd package (see R Core Development Team, 2013).

and non-enactment for each event. We stress that this is a very preliminary exploration that aims to identify interesting patterns in the data, which may in turn shape further investigations.

#### *4.1 Frog, Where Are You?*

Visual inspection of the mosaic plot for *Frog, Where Are You?* suggests that the duration of most of the Main Events identified in the twenty re-tellings are roughly proportionate to each other, and that the co-occurrence of enactment varies between 20—80% of a given Main Event (see Figure 3).

However, there are some interesting outliers. Three Main Events (i.e. M6, M10, M11) and Closing appear to contribute fewer minutes overall than most other Events, because not all signers included these events and/or these events can be re-told comparatively quickly. Signers tend to end their re-tellings with an enactment of the boy walking off while waving to the parent frogs, which aligns with the final illustration in the picture book, rather than a personal comment or a conclusion to the overall story. The Introduction and three other Main Events (i.e. M8a, M8d, M14) appear to contribute more minutes than most, because most signers included them in their re-telling and/or these events take comparatively more time to re-tell because they involve fairly complex scene-setting or actions and consequences.



Key: Non-enactment=black, CA=red, CD=pink, Uncertain CA=dark grey, Uncertain CD=light grey.  
Circles represent null observations.

**Figure 3.** *Patterning of enactment and non-enactment in the study corpus of Frog, Where Are You?*

Figure 3 also suggests a few generalisations regarding the overall patterning of enactment in the *Frog, Where Are You?* re-tellings. Firstly, enactment that was certainly identified co-occurs with 34% of the total duration, with CA more frequently observed than CD (a roughly 16:1 ratio). Conversely, 63% of the total duration does not co-occur with any enactment. The remaining 3% represents durations of signing that were uncertainly identified as CA or CD. Overall, more than a third of this subset of the study corpus involves signers performing and showing their story via enactment, which is improvised within the context of the narratives. Upon further investigation, we found that these durations of enactment usually occur simultaneously with other lexicalised expressions and less frequently as full body enactments with no lexicalised expression.

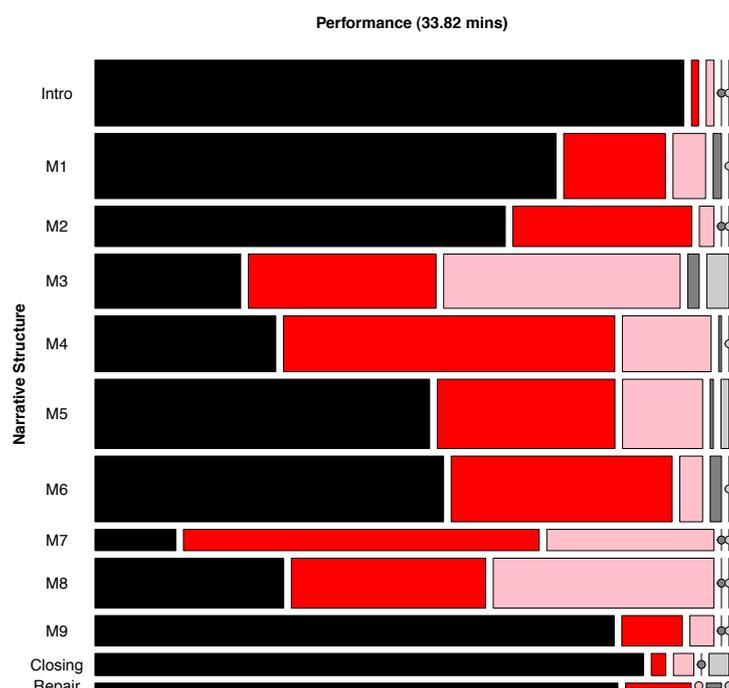
Secondly, while all events (bar Closing) co-occur with some form of enactment, some Main Events appear to be more heavily enacted than others. There are peaks of enactment during M6, M12b and M13, which could be an effect of the comparably shorter durations observed for these events and/or the fact that these events require comparatively less ‘telling’ because the unfolding narrative provides

enough context for interpreting the enactments of these events. For example, during M13, signers simply show the boy picking up the dog, or gesturing for the dog to be quiet. They can do this because the boy and dog have already been introduced lexically and/or via a characteristic enacted performance. These Main Events in particular need not be extensively ‘told’ because the characters are clear from the scene-setting that occurs in earlier Main Events.

#### 4.2 *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*

Visual inspection of the mosaic plot for *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* suggests that the duration of the Main Events identified in these twenty re-tellings are more proportionate to each other than those of *Frog, Where Are You?*, but that the co-occurrence of enactment varies more greatly between 5—90% of a given Main Event (see Figure 4).

There are also some interesting outliers. Two Main Events (i.e. M7, M9) and the Closing appear to contribute fewer minutes overall than most other events, yet all signers included M7 and M9 in their retelling, and most signers included Closing. Three other Main Events (i.e. M1, M5, M6) and the Introduction appear to contribute more minutes than most, perhaps because all signers included these in their re-telling. However, it is also possible that these events take comparatively more time to describe because they involve fairly complex scene-setting or actions and consequences. It is also apparent that as these retellings unfold, there is a slow increase in duration to M7 followed by a sudden decrease: M7 is the story’s climax, whereas M9 and Closing are both post-climatic events.



Key: Non-enactment=black, CA=red, CD=pink, Uncertain CA=dark grey, Uncertain CD=light grey. Circles represent null observations.

**Figure 4.** *Patterning of enactment and non-enactment in the study corpus of *The Boy Who Cried Wolf**

Figure 4 also suggests a few generalisations regarding the overall patterning of enactment in these re-tellings. Firstly, enactment that was certainly identified co-occurs with 41% of the total duration, again with CA more frequently observed than CD (yet with a much smaller 2:1 ratio). These enactments usually occur simultaneously with other lexicalised expressions and less frequently by themselves. Conversely, 58% of the total duration does not co-occur with any enactment. The remaining 1% represents durations of signing that were uncertainly identified as CA or CD. Again, more than a third of this subset of the study corpus—nearly half—involves signers performing and showing their story via enactment, which is improvised within the context of the narratives.

Secondly, while all Main Events identified for this narrative co-occurred with some form of enactment, it seems that these signers enacted some Main Events more heavily than other Main Events. There are peaks of enactment during M3, M4 and M7, which could be an effect of these events primarily involving actions of the boy, the villagers or both, all of which can be fully or partly shown via

enactment, e.g. signers simply show the boy tricking the villagers or the villagers coming and getting annoyed.

However, compare events M3 and M4 with M5 and M6. Events M5 and M6 are basically a repeat of M3 and M4, yet there is a clear drop in the co-occurrence of enactment that may not necessarily be explained by the marginally longer durations of M5 and M6. We hypothesise that M5 and M6 contain elements of M3 and M4 (including previously enacted elements) that signers simply index rather than fully re-enact (e.g. as if to say “the boy did that crying wolf thing again”). Signers also tended to begin the M6 event by contextualising the time and circumstance of the impending event rather than depicting characters and actions.

Finally, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* contains a very dramatic climax (i.e. M7). As all signers included this event in their re-telling, we can infer from Figure 4 that this climactic event was almost entirely enacted by all signers. There was very little co-occurring ‘telling’ narration. This suggests that signers preferred their interactant to witness this frantic event ‘first-hand’, rather than to just tell them about it. This performative crescendo helps to emphasise the moral of the story (i.e. Closing).

### 4.3 Comparison of narratives

Preliminary analysis of the patterning of enactment with non-enactment throughout the event progression of each narrative indicates there is comparatively less use of enactment to introduce and conclude re-tellings than to narrate the main events, and that enactment is interwoven with non-enactment throughout all main events. This is similar to what Mulrooney (2009) found for personal narratives in American Sign Language.

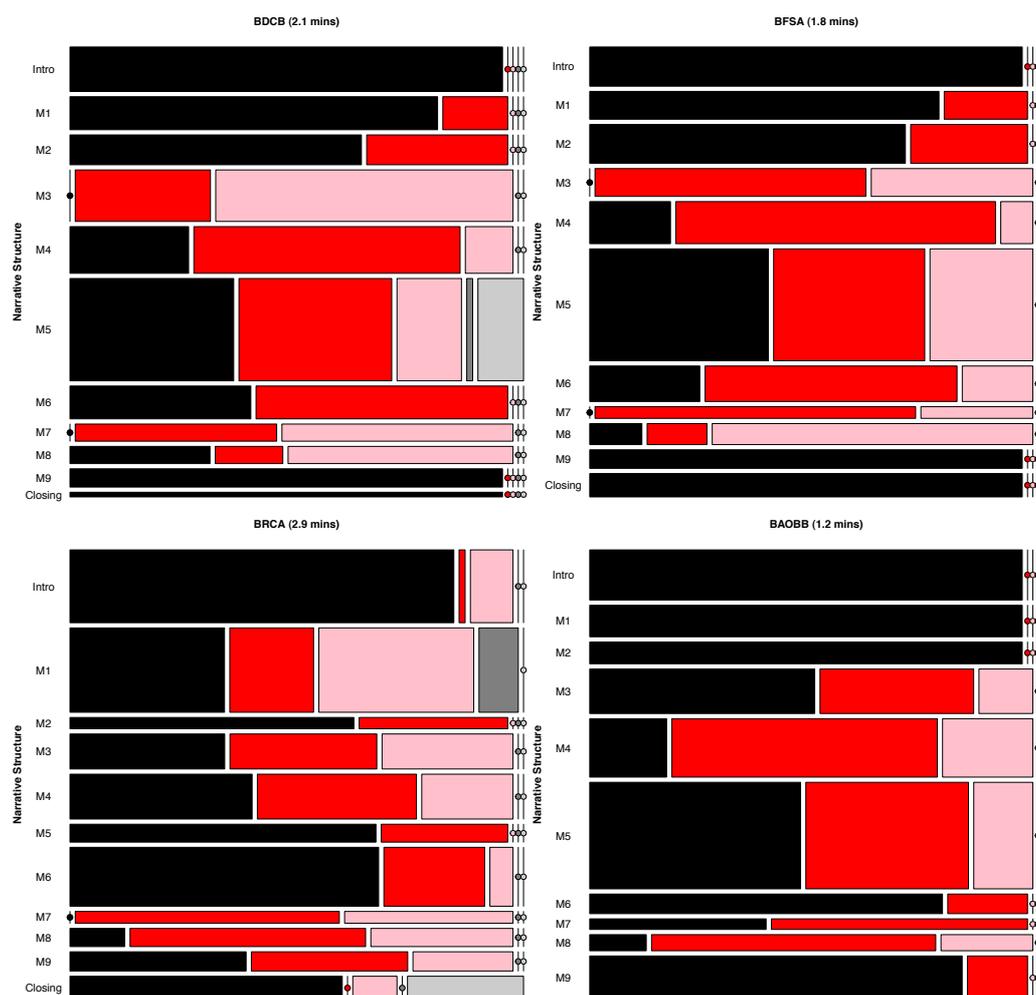
In both narratives, it was more common for enactment to elaborate the linguistic commentary rather than replace it. A greater range of enactment was observed for the events identified in *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* (5—90%) compared to *Frog, Where Are You?* (20—50%). There was less use of constructed dialogue compared to constructed action in both narratives, although there was much greater use of constructed dialogue in *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* (13%) compared to *Frog, Where Are You* (3%). These observations may be attributed to the different elicitation texts. For example, the written English source text of *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* itself

contains tokens of constructed dialogue (e.g. the villagers shrugged their shoulders and said to each other: “He has played this game too often!” (see Appendix 1), but the illustrated *Frog, Where Are You?* does not.

#### *4.4 Variation across individual signers*

While the patterning of enactment with non-enactment can be investigated using the forty re-tellings in the study corpus, it is also useful to compare individual signers. Visual inspection of mosaic plots for just four individual re-tellings of *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* illustrates that while there are many commonalities between signers, there are also important differences to consider. Individual signers varied widely in the time they spent re-telling each identified event and their use of enactment throughout these events, even when re-telling the same narrative (see Figure 5 below).

We hypothesise that this variation could result from any number of factors, ranging from idiosyncratic preferences, storytelling experience, and sociolinguistic effects such as age and education, to the degree of social intimacy with their interactant (e.g. the more familiar and comfortable one is with one’s interactant, perhaps the easier it is to relax and perform), and how they were feeling on the day of the task.



Key: Non-enactment=black, CA=red, CD=pink, Uncertain CA=dark grey, Uncertain CD=light grey. Circles represent null observations.

**Figure 5.** Patterning of enactment and non-enactment in the individual re-tellings of *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* by the four Brisbane signers included in the study corpus

## 5. Discussion

This early exploration indicates that enactment is prevalent throughout re-tellings of both elicited narratives, sometimes co-occurring for more than half a re-telling. We have seen that signers incorporate more enactment during their re-telling of the main events and climax of the story, and very little during the introduction and conclusion. This practice seems to frame the many tokens of enactment identified in each re-telling within the larger, completed act of each re-telling. This

bears comparison to the framing devices observed in signed language narratives investigated from a smaller, clause-level perspective of analysis (e.g. Ferrara & Johnston, 2012; Cormier, Smith & Zwets, 2013). From both perspectives of analysis, we observe that signers tend to introduce the topic or referent before enacting it, in order to easily facilitate their interactants' interpretation of the token enactment.

However, we have also seen that enactment does not necessarily pattern consistently throughout each identified narrative event, even if an event includes characters, events and points of view. The decrease in the use of enactment during repeated events (such as observed in re-tellings of *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*) suggests it is worthwhile exploring the recurrent use of tokens of enactment in individual narratives and subsequent interactions, rather than considering each instance of enactment as a newly emergent singular event. By stepping back and investigating narratives in terms of their event progression, it becomes more apparent that the unification of semiotic resources for showing and telling shifts as the interaction unfolds.

There are also clear differences in the use of enactment between the two narratives, and by individual signers. While the differences between narratives is likely a consequence of the written versus illustrated source text, variation between signers is far less clear-cut and presents an interesting avenue for further exploration. The variation between signers observed here suggests that the use of enactment is not an obligatory grammatical device, but rather adds an element of idiosyncratic performance to a story. This type of variation could be further investigated by comparing data from the six signers who contributed re-tellings of both narratives.

Overall, we interpret signers' use of enactment as contributing creative and partly improvised performance—originality—to the collaborative act of re-telling a story. These enactments are richly contextualised by their integration with the conventionally linguistic elements of co-occurring narration, and by their pragmatic interpretation.

Prior to Sawyer (1996), R Bauman and Sherzer noted that, “the deepest problem in the social disciplines [is to understand] the dynamic interplay between the

social, conventional, ready-made in social life and the individual, creative, and emergent qualities of human existence” (R Bauman & Sherzer, 1989 [1974], p. xviii). We agree that analyses of language use need to consider both conventionality and individuality as it emerges within differing social contexts. As the interpretation of tokens of enactment is heavily dependent on the contextualisation of the unfolding discourse, the investigation of enactment offers extensive opportunity to explore both the conventional and the creative in signed and spoken language use.

## 6. Conclusion

This study supports previous empirical observations that Auslan signers rely on a large degree of pragmatic and enacted expression in their face-to-face communication (e.g. Johnston, 1996; Ferrara & Johnston 2012, 2014). It provides further insight into how signers use themselves and their surrounding physical space to prompt and co-construct meaning, and how signers interact within their signing ecologies more generally. These findings also highlight two important sources of variability that must be considered when exploring language as performance: text type and the idiosyncratic creativity of individual signers.

Furthermore, as storytelling constitutes a conventional ‘script’ of expression for many Auslan signers across many communicative domains, we argue that enacted performance is ubiquitous within these signed language ecologies. Thus, rather than performance involving specialised use of language, this study illustrates that performance is tightly integrated with language use in at least one robust domain of face-to-face signed interactions, and as such it aligns with perspectives of human interaction that consider language use as partly improvised performance (e.g. Sawyer 1996).

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**Appendix 1.** Written English elicitation text *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*

Once upon a time there was a shepherd-boy who had to watch after all the sheep from the people in his village. Every morning he picked them up and brought the whole flock to the hills where they could graze all day. Every evening he drove them together and took them back home.

Sometimes it was very nice out there in the hills and time passed by very quickly. At other times the boy was extremely bored and had enough of the sheep nibbling grass from early in the morning until late in the evening.

One day he decided to play a little game. “Wolf! Wolf!” he cried out loud. “There is a wolf trying to catch my sheep!”

All the villagers came out of their houses to help the boy with the wolf—only to see him crying with laughter at seeing their angry faces.

The boy played this trick over and over again, and again and again the villagers left their houses to help him. However one winters night, the boy was just starting to drive the sheep together, the wolf truly did come at last. The first thing the boy heard was the frightening bleat of the sheep, and then all of a sudden he saw a big, grey figure coming out of the dark.

The boy trembled with fear since his shepherds’ stick was all he had and the wolf looked really dangerous. He ran to the village crying: “Wolf! Wolf! There is a wolf chasing the sheep.”

Yet this time the people did not come out of their houses. Only two looked up when they heard the screaming, but they shrugged their shoulders and said to each other: “He has played this game too often.”

And before the boy could find anyone to help him, the wolf had killed and eaten all the sheep.

Moral (lesson): You cannot believe a liar, even when he is telling the truth.

**Appendix 2.** Identified narrative events of the Auslan retellings of *Frog, Where Are You?*

Introduction	A boy and a dog are looking at frog in a jar.
Main Event (M) 1	They go to sleep, and during the night the frog escapes.
M2	The boy and dog wake up to find the frog has gone.
M3	They search for the frog in the bedroom, and the dog puts his head in a jar.
M4	They call for the frog from the window.
M5	The dog falls out of the window and breaks the jar.
M6	The boy jumps down and picks up the dog.
M7	They start looking for the frog behind the house.
M8a	The dog sees a beehive and plays with it.
M8b	The beehive falls and the bees chase the dog.
M8c	The boy calls into a hole in the ground and a cross possum pops out and bites him on the nose.
M8d	The boy climbs a tree and looks into another hole. An angry owl lashes out and the boy falls back.
M9	The boy climbs a rock and looks out holding onto deer antlers.
M10	The boy falls onto the antlers.
M11	The deer runs the boy to the cliff and the dog follows.
M12a	The deer catapults the boy over the cliff into a pond and the dog follows.
M12b	The boy and the dog are in the pond and see a log.
M13	The boy gestures to the dog to be quiet. He hears something.
M14 (climax)	They look over the log and see their frog is there with a lady frog and baby frogs.
M15	The boy and dog leave with one of the baby frogs.
Closing	Any further comments.

**Appendix 3.** Identified narrative events of the Auslan retellings of *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*

Introduction	Signers tell the title of the story, introduce the villagers and boy, explain that the boy's job is to look after the sheep.
M1	The boy brings the sheep up and down the hill every day and night to eat.
M2	The boy finds this job boring.
M3	The boy thinks of an idea to joke with the villagers and cries wolf.
M4	The villagers come, but discover the boy was joking. He makes fun of them.
M5	The boy cries wolf again (i.e. repeat).
M6	The wolf really comes.
M7 (climax)	The boy cries "wolf!".
M8	The villagers don't come, although the boy is adamant he's telling the truth.
M9	The sheep are eaten by the wolf.
Closing	Comments on the moral of the story.