

customary in the past, producing, for example, 'somere' (in the summer), 'aprile' (in April), 'skribe' (in the written form). He, perhaps under the influence of Esperanto adverbs, created a new English one.

I found this book a pleasure to read. It deals with a neglected but worthwhile area of linguistics. We all have a lot to learn about word order, grammatical regularity, the role of redundancy and ambiguity, and linguistic universals from studying planned languages. If I have one quibble, it is that there was no attempt to compare a planned auxiliary language such as Esperanto with an unplanned auxiliary language such as the Pidgin English of Nigeria. All linguists have something to learn from interlinguists but perhaps interlinguists have something to learn from creolists, who study languages which permit interethnic communication, the very thing that planned languages were created for. I am not against man-made or woman-made languages but, having read this book carefully, I find myself agreeing with Alfred de Saint-Quentin (1872: lviii-ix):

"Une analyse sérieuse m'a convaincu d'un fait qui paraît paradoxal. C'est que si l'on voulait créer de toutes pièces une langue générale qui permit, après quelques jours d'étude seulement, un échange clair et régulier d'idées simples, on ne saurait adopter des bases plus logiques et plus fécondes que celle de la syntaxe créole."

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Adam Kendon, *Sign languages of Aboriginal Australia. Cultural, semiotic and communicative perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. xv + 542 pp. £ 30.00 (hardb.); US \$ 59.50 (hardb.).

Reviewed by Gunter Senft*

If I were a gifted cartoonist I would start this review with a kind of cartoon

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depicting the following action: the cartoon would show a person and his/her two hands – one hand moving towards this person while in contact with the other hand. Moreover, I would indicate that this action is done twice. If, by chance, an Australian Aboriginal would glance through this edition of the *JoP*, it is highly probable, especially if the Aboriginal is a woman or a speaker of Warlpiri, that this Aboriginal would decode this cartoon as the sign for *rdakardaka* ‘sign language’ – thus realizing immediately that this review deals with the topic this sign refers to. Unfortunately I am a rather lousy cartoonist; therefore, I have to start my review of Adam Kendon’s book in a more conventional way.

I presume that all anthropologists and linguists interested in Oceanic languages who are familiar with Kendon’s research especially of the last 10 years were waiting rather impatiently for his monograph on *Sign languages of Aboriginal Australia*, a book Kendon announced last in 1987 as being ‘in preparation’ (Kendon 1987: 28, 68). A year later the monograph was published. There are a few pioneering publications on (openly and secretly) spoken and signed languages in Oceania, especially in Australia, that are landmarks in the more recent Oceanic linguistic research history; I would like to refer the interested reader in this context to some of the publications of the Pacific Linguistic Series, to some publications of the University of Hawaii Press, and to the publications of researchers like Dixon (see e.g., 1971, 1972, 1980), Hale (1971), Kuschei (1974), and Wurm (see e.g., 1972). Adam Kendon’s monograph is a masterpiece of linguistic, anthropological and semiotic research that can lay claim to be mentioned in this illustrious series of publications – and rightly so.

In the preface of his book, Kendon briefly mentions the history of his research, emphasizes that he still considers his work preliminary because he judges his data as insufficient, and states “further work would be worthwhile, if such is still possible” (p. xii). Everyone familiar with the rapid changes taking place in Oceania these days will understand this scepticism only too well. After the preface Kendon presents a brief and exact description and definitions of his orthographic conventions and descriptive terms.

The first four chapters introduce the reader to the conception, scope, and topic of the monograph. Here the terminology used is clearly defined and the basic differentiation between primary sign languages – or sign languages proper, like American Sign Language (ASL) or British Sign Language (BSL) – and alternate sign languages like the system used by the Aboriginals of central Australia that are “developed by people already competent in some spoken language” (p. 4) and which “do not rely upon written forms of language in any systematic way” (p. 5) is explicitly made. These introductory chapters also review the history of the studies on Aboriginal sign languages and present a concise geographical review of the distribution of the sign languages, discussing their different degrees of development and their functions. With respect

to the development of sign languages Kendon emphasizes that these processes are associated either with the imposition of speech taboos or even speech bans on females as parts of mourning rituals or with speech taboos imposed on males in initiation ceremonies, or, though to a far lesser degree, with the need for silent communication while hunting. Moreover, Kendon discusses the differences between sign language and 'special language' like secret, respectful, avoidance, and mystic language and then provides the necessary ethnographic and ethnolinguistic background for 7 groups living in the North Central Desert (NCD) area; also, he lists the various contexts of sign language use, and presents the methods of data gathering pursued in his studies.

Anyone not experienced in field-research her himself gets a vivid idea of the hardships a field-worker accepts; however, the reader may also feel the field-worker's satisfaction in presenting results that are based on sound data and that are even controllable - a good compensation for the toils and vicissitudes one has to overcome in the field.

The study of the sign languages of the NCD proper starts with chapter 5. Here Kendon describes the sign structure, i.e., he discusses how signs are presented and what features distinguish one sign from the other. Kendon's observation that there is "almost no use of facial action in sign formation" (p. 100) is one of the surprising findings here. This chapter also presents some basic principles for the analysis of these sign languages, especially an explication of the notation system Kendon developed on the basis of Stokoe's ASL notation system (Stokoe 1960, 1978) for the needs of his studies. Appendix I lists these 'sign notation symbols'. The system demands some getting used to; however, once the system is understood, the reader can only approve of Kendon's candor and ingenuity in adopting and modifying Stokoe's system for his own needs.

The monograph continues with the discussion of the relationship between sign form and sign meaning and outlines a framework for grasping and analyzing the "processes by which signs come to have the forms they do" (p. 191).

After this discussion Kendon compares the sign organization with the phonology and especially the morphology of the spoken language; it is shown that "the morphological structure of the spoken language ... has the greatest influence on the organization of signs" (p. 223).

Moreover, the author discusses how aspects of spoken language grammar like grammatical endings, semantic case endings, derivational suffixes, enclitics, person, space and time are represented in sign. It becomes quite clear that signs in no way represent spoken language morphology completely. Among the main findings here we note that only the lexical items of the spoken language are represented in signs.

Chapter 9, an altered version of Kendon (1988), examines and compares discourse in sign and speech. The transcriptions of the fascinating data analyzed here are presented in Appendix II. Here Kendon emphasizes once

more that "these alternate sign languages are not fully autonomous systems but are built up as gestural representations of the semantic units provided by the spoken language" (p. 296).

Chapter 10, an altered version of Kendon (1987), investigates what happens when Aboriginals are signing and speaking simultaneously. Kendon shows that in "co-speech signing ... we observe a close match between signs and spoken lexical units" (p. 325). This redundancy, however, seems to be useful, for it ensures a thorough understanding of the message sent; moreover, telling a story and signing its meaning simultaneously adds another dimension to the production as well as to the perception of the text. In this chapter Kendon also elaborates the distinctive differences between signs and gestures.

After that, Kendon examines signs for kinship within the data from the NCD and from corpora found in the literature for other parts of Australia. The signs – almost all of them are body-part pointing signs – within the NCD sign languages "show a high degree of uniformity, but are substantially different from kin signs in other places" (p. 364). Kendon's important contribution to the discussion of the Aboriginal conception of kin relationship emphasizes the importance of the "different ways in which different kin are related to in interaction" (p. 363).

In the next chapter Kendon compares the vocabulary samples of aboriginal sign languages and discusses their differences, which are mostly due to geographical distance and not to spoken language differences. The comparison emphasizes the high degree of distinctiveness of the NCD languages, which Kendon refers back to the range of functions these sign languages fulfill. Moreover, he concludes that the NCD sign languages may be a relatively more recent development than signs found elsewhere in Australia.

Chapter 13 discusses Australian Aboriginal sign languages and other semiotic systems like primary sign languages and other alternate sign languages like the sign language among the Plain Indians of North America, monastic sign languages, and oral, acoustic, and graphic language codes. This discussion clearly reveals that for "a given semiotic system ... medium of expression, function, and relationship to other semiotic systems interact in a complex way in shaping its character" (p. 439).

In the last chapter Kendon attempts to answer the question "why signing appears to be such a widespread practice among Aborigines" (p. 12), relating Aboriginal interaction to Aboriginal sign languages. Based on a sound review of the basic characteristics of Aboriginal sociality as well as on an accurate description of the special features of Aboriginal co-present communicative interaction, Kendon works out that

"... signing appears to be a medium of communication well fitted to many of the interactional circumstances of Aboriginal life. It can be used with a great deal of discretion, making private exchanges possible even in quite public circumstances; it can serve usefully as a mode of

communication for people who are much of the time visually copresent but often at considerable distances from one another, nevertheless: it can be varied in the explicitness of its performance, and so is useful as a vehicle for tentative communications: it has a less personal, more objective and neutral character, and may thus be suitable for conveying messages in a more anonymous, objective style." (p. 460)

These functions and characteristics of the *sign* languages described are found in *verbal* varieties of a number of other Oceanic languages as well. These verbal varieties represent cases of 'ritual communication' which can be defined as "a type of strategic action that serves the function of social bonding and of blocking aggression, that can also ban elements of danger which may affect the community's social harmony within the verbal domain just by verbalizing these elements of danger and bringing them up for discussion" (Senft in press). In serving these functions sign languages like the systems described by Kendon are at least as "well fitted" (p. 456) as spoken language varieties with respect to their function to ritualize many communicative situations and thus to safeguard and secure the respective speech communities' common social construction of reality.

The book ends with the two appendices to chapter 5 and chapter 9, a bibliography, an index of signs described in the monograph, and a helpful general index.

I would also like to mention that the footnotes to the 14 chapters are small bonanzas of information for linguists and anthropologists, and that to the reader's pleasure the number of typographical errors is very small (I only counted 10 cases!). With respect to these errors I only want to correct the following cases: p. 296 footnote 1: read Vol. 58 for Vol. 59 (reference to Kendon 1988); p. 374: read 12.1.1 for 12.2.1; p. 395, Fig. 12.2: 'Palmer River' (North Queensland) is not indicated on the map presented; p. 430: read 3.14 for 3.15; p. 436: read 13.6 for 13.7.

To sum up, Kendon's monograph is not only a pioneering and fascinating contribution to the research on Australian Aborigines, but also a landmark in the research on non-verbal communication that establishes a high standard to measure other contributions to the field against. Kendon convincingly demonstrates that basic research on nonverbal communication demands the same linguistic expertise as research on verbal communication. Moreover, his monograph is a perfect example of the fact that research on such topics forces the linguist to go beyond the boundaries of her/his discipline and to prove her/his competence as an anthropologist as well. The book is excellently planned and the precise and clear examples, figures, and tables make it easy for the reader to follow the development of the arguments. It is a must for linguists interested in sign languages and nonverbal communication, for anthropologists, human ethologists, and semioticians, and, if a rather personal remark may be permitted, it was a pleasure to review such a work. I am sure that I am not the only one who is again waiting rather impatiently for the

announced separate monograph in which Kendon plans to present in "a more detailed way" (p. 262) his analyses of the two narratives recorded in sign language and in speech which he briefly discusses in chapter 9 of the monograph reviewed here.

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Reviewed by Marcella Sale Musio*

The book under review presents a non-traditional approach to the problem of the history of American English. Historians of American English have traditionally studied it as a variety of English, arising from the development of the regional dialects that the British immigrants brought to the New World, Dillard proves that there is no well-grounded foundation to this type of

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