This dissertation reports on a linguistic investigation into the use of depicting signs in Australian Sign Language (Auslan). Depicting signs are analyzed as partly lexical signs, composites of linguistic and gestural elements (Johnston & Schembri, 2010; Liddell, 2003a). The occurrence of these signs within clauses, or rather, clause-like-units, is investigated in order to (1) describe their use in context and (2) explore how signers integrate language and gesture to construct meaning (cf. Enfield, 2009).

The internal structure of depicting signs has received much attention over the years (e.g., Cogill-Koez, 2000; Schick, 1990; Supalla, 1978), but research on the behavior of these signs in context, and across many instances, has been largely neglected. This corpus-based study addresses this substantial gap by examining depicting signs in naturalistic Auslan conversation and narratives from a cognitive linguistics perspective. Analysis is based on 15565 sign tokens across 5649 clause-like units, and represents a dramatic increase in the size and quality of datasets usually reported in the signed language linguistics literature.

Findings from the study offer a partial description of depicting signs in Auslan. The focus is on the function of depicting signs within clause-like-units, but there is also a description of their sign-level characteristics and their presence in other types of constructions. The interaction of depicting signs with constructed action is also described.

The data and analysis support the conclusion that the contribution made by non-linguistic behavior to meaning construction needs to be recognized and appropriately integrated into a description of Auslan grammar, and perhaps, by extension, other signed languages - a position similar to several Australian signed language researchers, such as Johnston (1996), Cogill-Koez (2000), Schembri (2001) and de Beuzeville, Johnston & Schembri (2009).
Personvernklæring