

Indigenous sign languages protected in online dictionary

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A University of Melbourne researcher has helped develop the first online dictionary of sign languages used by Indigenous communities across central Australia.

The [dictionary](#) includes several hundred videos of hand-signs and other sign-actions used by Anmatyerr speakers from Ti Tree in the Northern Territory, and by the Ngaanyatjarra people in the Western Desert of Western Australia.

Dr Jenny Green—from the University of Melbourne's Research Unit for Indigenous Language —said signing was a crucial but endangered style

of communication in Indigenous communities.

"Sign is used in various contexts. In some communities sign is used as a respectful form of communication to replace speech during times of mourning. Sign is used when hunting, and when people are at a long distance from each other," she said.

"For some hearing-impaired individuals sign may be the primary form of communication.

"This new web-dictionary includes traditional signs as well as signs for modern things, and will safeguard the practice for [future generations](#)."



The website is named *Iltyem-iltyem*, which means 'signalling with hands' in the Anmatyerr language. It was developed in collaboration with the Indigenous communities and [linguists](#) from the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (NT).

The team spent several years in Indigenous communities across central Australia researching and recording sign language.

"This website should prove a valuable resource for people who want to teach and learn Central Australian sign languages," Dr Green said.

"It will also help people learn spoken language, as many of the video clips contain sign language and speech together."

Provided by University of Melbourne

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