
American Sign Language

What is American Sign Language?

The term “sign language” has traditionally been used as a generic term for different varieties of sign communication, but there is an important distinction between American Sign Language and other varieties of sign communication. American Sign Language, referred to as ASL, is a natural language. It is different in structure from the sign systems heavily influenced by English which go by different names: Sign Exact English (SEE), Pidgin Sign English (PSE), manually coded English, and sign supported speech.

American Sign Language is a distinct language. Many ASL signs don't translate perfectly to English. There is no equivalent for many specific words and the syntax is completely different. ASL has its own grammatical structure and syntax, as a language it is not dependent nor is it strongly related to spoken English. ASL uses hand shapes, positions, movements, facial expressions, and body movements to convey meaning. ASL uses an alphabet (finger spelling), sign representing ideas, and gestures. ASL is an independent language that has its own grammar and syntax; it is not simply a manual version of English.

There is no universal sign language. Different sign languages are used in different countries or regions. Sign Languages vary from country to country in exactly the same way that spoken languages vary from country to country.
