"American Sign Language [ase] (A language of United States)

- **Alternate Names:** ASL
- **Population:** 250,000 in United States (Mitchell, Young, Bachleda et al. 2006). Population total all countries: 271,550. L2 users: Used natively by many hearing children of deaf parents, and as L2 by many other hearing people.
- **Language Status:** 5 (Developing).
- **Dialects:** Black American Sign Language, Tactile ASL (TASL). Some lexical variation across the United States and much of Canada, but intelligibility is high among all dialects called ASL. Black American Sign Language developed in schools for African-American deaf people due to segregation in the southern United States. It contains some distinctive vocabulary and grammatical structure. Tactile ASL (TASL) is used throughout the United States by and with deaf-blind people, especially those with Usher's Syndrome, concentrations of which are found in Louisiana and Seattle. TASL uses ASL vocabulary and grammar, except (1) the deaf-blind person receives signs through touch by feeling signs in the palms, and (2) minor syntactic modifications to compensate for the deaf-blind person's lack of access to the signer's facial expressions. Some deaf-blind people learn Braille for reading English. Dialects or closely-related languages derived from ASL, are used in many other countries. Lexical similarity: 58% between modern ASL and French Sign Language (LSF) [fsl] on a comparison of 872 signs (Woodward 1978). Although the 2 are historically related, ASL has undergone substantial creolization (Woodward 1975; Woodward 1976).
- **Typology:** One-handed fingerspelling system derived from French Sign Language [fsl]. SVO, topic comment structures; adjectives, numerals, genitives, question word initial or final, relative clause after noun head.
- **Language Use:** Interpreters required for many legal and civic situations. Lingua franca of the deaf world, used widely as L2. Reportedly used in many countries other than those listed here. However, such reports must be viewed with caution. In many cases, although ASL may have been introduced in the country at some time in the past, the actual sign language that has developed out of it is not mutually intelligible with standard ASL as used in North America. Conversely, in other countries, the sign language may be mutually intelligible with standard ASL, but for nationalistic reasons is given a name based on the name of the country. Used as L2 by Hawaii Sign Language [hps], Plains Indian Sign Language [psd].
- **Language Development:** Literacy is almost always based on English rather than ASL. Deaf people's English varies from highly literate to illiterate, but the average deaf student graduates from high school with a 3rd or 4th grade reading level. TV. Videos. Dictionary. Grammar. NT: 2005.
- **Other Comments:** American Sign Language is different from Signed English, which refers to a range of signing registers that reflect considerable influence from English. At the extreme end are Signing Exact English (SEE) and Seeing Essential English (SEE2), artificially-constructed systems that attempt to match English word order and morphemic structure exactly. English-influenced signing that does not follow English grammar exactly is generally called contact signing or Pidgin Signed English. Deaf schools and interpreters in mainstreamed educational settings may use any of these sign varieties."

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