

Sign Languages

Languages

Full natural languages, and the myths that persist about them.

Natural languages using the visual-manual modality, with their own phonology, morphology, syntax and regional variation — acquired by children on the same timetable as spoken languages.

SIGN LANGUAGES
300+

UNIVERSAL ONE
none

ASL RELATED TO
French SL

- There is no universal sign language; there are hundreds.
- BSL and ASL are unrelated and mutually unintelligible.
- ASL is historically related to French Sign Language, not English.
- Signs have internal structure: handshape, location, movement, orientation.
- Grammar uses space, facial expression and timing.
- Deaf children acquire sign on the same developmental schedule as hearing children acquire speech.

LOOK FOR IT

Facial expression is grammar in sign languages, not emotion — it marks questions and clause types.

Signed English is not a language: it is English encoded manually. ASL and BSL are languages in their own right.