
American Sign Language and Interpreting

Currently, worldwide, there are over 100 different sign languages that vary between regions and cultures. In the United States, ASL (American Sign Language) is usually used, however, it is completely different from the English language because it has its own set of rules in grammar and context and is visual, not spoken.

Similar to most sign languages, ASL is conveyed through hand movements and shapes, as well as body language and facial expressions. Comparable to most languages, sign language is always introducing new vocabulary and phrases due to alterations in culture and advancements in technology.

Currently, over one and a half million deaf people in the United States and Canada use ASL. Unfortunately, several areas in America discourage deaf people from using ASL because they feel that these individuals will be more successful in life through lip-reading and speech development. However, users of ASL associate this language with their culture and identity and refuse to stop using it.

Another idiom that uses sign language is JSL (Japanese Sign Language). Similar to ASL, JSL has its own set of rules for grammar and movements that separate it from the spoken and written language of Japanese. JSL has made a tremendous impact in Asia and has even influenced Korean and Taiwanese sign languages with comparable movements and rules as JSL.

JSL is still evolving and incorporating new signs and rules and is considered to be one of the newest forms of sign language yet still manages to influence other Asian sign languages due to its modern vocabulary and style.

Unlike JSL, ASL employs more of a variety of finger spelling and uses initial letters of the English language in order to differentiate between each word, whereas JSL uses more of the mouthing techniques and "air writing" in order to deliver its message through communication, especially when discussing the names of people and places.

Even though sign language is not universal, people who use its different forms are able to communicate better than those who speak a different language due to similar rules and techniques of the hand movements.

Some other popular forms of sign language in the world are BSL (British Sign Language), DSL (Danish Sign Language), RSL (Russian Sign Language), and SSL (Spanish Sign Language).

Fortunately, there has been an increase in sign language interpreters, especially within the school system, in order to help others to communicate and develop a better understanding of their surroundings. Sign language interpreting involves similar training to spoken language interpreting such as being fluent in English or any other language pair that is spoken and written. Sign language interpreting is also geared towards the spoken language in order to interpret to the deaf individual what the speaker is trying to convey. Also, sign language interpreters are trained and educated in areas such as public speaking, the role of interpretation, as well as gaining an understanding of culture and sensitivity towards the deaf population.

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