

“British Sign Language [bfi] (A language of [United Kingdom](#))

- **Alternate Names:** BSL
- **Population:** 77,000 (2014 EUD). L2 users: 250,000 (2013 K. Crombie Smith). 310,000 (2014 IMB).
- **Location:** Scattered.
- **Language Status:** 5 (Developing).
- **Dialects:** Scottish Sign Language, Welsh Sign Language. Deaf community is cohesive so communication good despite regional variation. Signing varies along a continuum from something usually called Signed English (which draws on BSL vocabulary but uses grammatical structure like spoken English) to natural BSL. Different styles of signing used in different situations, and signers vary in terms of how much of the range of signing styles they control. Many structural similarities between British Sign Language (BSL), Australian Sign Language (Auslan) [asf], and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) [nzs] and a high degree of mutual intelligibility. Linguists sometimes use the name BANZSL to refer to them as a group, while still recognizing them as having separate sociolinguistic identities (2003 T. Johnston). Not inherently intelligible to users of American Sign Language [ase].
- **Typology:** Two-handed fingerspelling.
- **Language Use:** Good regional and national organizations for the deaf. Interpreters required in court, and provided in some other situations. Increasing desire to train deaf children in BSL. Organization for sign language teachers. Deaf schools established in the late 18th century.
- **Language Development:** New media. Films. TV. Videos. Dictionary. Grammar. Bible portions: 2011–2014.
- **Other Comments:** In 2003, British Government recognized BSL as a language (2014 J. Lapiak). 780 working sign language interpreters (2014 EUD). Many thousands of people sign BSL as an L2. Numerous helps available to learn language: instruction for parents of deaf children and other hearing people. Christian (Protestant).”

Lewis, M. Paul, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.)

2015. Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Eighteenth edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

Related Readings

Stamp, Rose, Adam Schembri, Jordan Fenlon, Ramas Rentelis, Bencie Woll, and Kearsy Cormier

2014 Lexical Variation and Change in British Sign Language. PloS One. 9(4): e94053.

Cormier, Kearsy, Sandra Smith, and Martine Zwets

2013 Framing Constructed Action in British Sign Language Narratives. Journal of Pragmatics 55: 119-139.

Mann, Wolfgang, and Chloë Marshall

2012 Investigating Deaf Children's Vocabulary Knowledge in British Sign Language. *Language Learning* 62(4): 1024-1051.

Atherton, Martin, and Lynne Barnes

2012 Deaf People as British Sign Language Teachers: Experiences and Aspirations. *Deafness and Education International* 14(4): 184-198.

Sutton-Spence, Rachel

2001 Phonological "Deviance" in British Sign Language Poetry. *Sign Language Studies* 1(2): 62.

Jachova, Zora, Olivera Kovacheva, and Aleksandra Karovska

2008 Differences Between American Sign Language (Asl) and British Sign Language (Bsl). *Journal of Special Education and Rehabilitation* 9(1): 41-54.

Stamp, Rose, Adam Schembri, Jordan Fenlon, and Ramas Rentelis

2015 Sociolinguistic Variation and Change in British Sign Language Number Signs: Evidence of Leveling? *Sign Language Studies* 15(2): 151-181.

Sutton-Spence, Rachel

2007 Mouthings and Simultaneity in British Sign Language. *Simultaneity in Signed Languages: Form and Function* 147.

Sutton-Spence, Rachel

2001 Phonological "Deviance" in British Sign Language Poetry. *Sign Language Studies*. 2(1): 62-83.

Shih, Shui-I, and Matthew W. G Dye

2006 Phonological Priming in British Sign Language. *Laboratory Phonology* 241.

Morgan, Gary, Sarah Barrett-Jones, and Helen Stoneham

2007 The First Signs of Language: Phonological Development in British Sign Language. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 28(1): 3-22.

Mann, Wolfgang, and Chloe Marshall

2012 Investigating Deaf Children's Vocabulary Knowledge in British Sign Language. *Language Learning* 62(4): 1024-1051.

Morgan, Gary, Rosalind Herman, and Bencie Woll

2002 The Development of Complex Verb Constructions in British Sign Language. *Journal of Child Language* 29(3): 655-675.

Clibbens, John

1998 The Development of Spatial Reference in British Sign Language. *Deafness and Education* 22(3): 18-23.

Morgan, Gary, and Bencie Woll

2002 The Development of Complex Sentences in British Sign Language. *Directions in Sign Language Acquisition* 255.

Smith, Sandra, and Kearsy Cormier

2014 In or Out?: Spatial Scale and Enactment in Narratives of Native and Nonnative Signing Deaf Children Acquiring British Sign Language. *Sign Language Studies* 14(3): 275-301.

Day, Linda, and Rachel Sutton-Spence

2010 British Sign Name Customs. *Sign Language Studies* 10(3): 22-43.

Schembri, Adam C, and Donna Lewin

2011 Mouth Gestures in British Sign Language: A Case Study of Tongue Protrusion in BSL Narratives. *Sign Language & Linguistics* 14(1): 94-114.

Quinn, Gary

2010 Schoolization: An Account of the Origins of Regional Variation in British Sign Language. *Sign Language Studies* 10(3): 476-951.

Campbell, Ruth

1992 Forced Choice Recognition of Sign in Novice Learners of British Sign Language. *Applied Linguistics* 13(2): 185.

Mertzani, Maria

2011 Computer-Assisted Language Learning in British Sign Language Learning. *Sign Language Studies* 12(1): 119-154.

Fenlon, Jordan, Adam Schembri, Ramas Rentelis, and Kearsy Cormier

2013 Variation in Handshape and Orientation in British Sign Language: The Case of the '1' Hand Configuration. *Language & Communication* 33(1): 69-91.

Brennan, Mary

2005 Conjoining Word and Image in British Sign Language (BSL): An Exploration of Metaphorical Signs in BSL. *Sign Language Studies* 5(3): 360-382.

Last Updated: May 11, 2015