



Introduction

British Sign Language or BSL for short is the name of the sign language which is used in England and the United Kingdom. It is the first language of approximately 150,000 deaf people in the British Isles. There are also many thousands of people who are not deaf who use BSL such as employers of Deaf people, relatives/friends and interpreters.

British Sign Language is a visual-gestural language without a conventional written form which has its own grammar utilising facial expressions (non manual features), hand shapes and upper body movements to convey meaning. BSL is a spatial and visual language and a lot of beginners think it is similar to mime (which it is not). The important thing to remember is that the grammar used in BSL is completely different to that used in everyday English.

Even though Britain and the USA speak English as the first language of their respective countries, British Sign Language is different to American Sign Language, also known as ASL. Again it is also the same difference with BSL and Irish Sign Language (ISL) and Northern Ireland Sign Language (NISL). This fact demonstrates that even though these countries have English as the first language the sign language used varies from country to country.

Just as in the English language, British Sign Language also has regional dialects. As an example, some signs used in the Northern parts of England may be different in the South of the country and vice versa. Within some regions you will also find 'local signs' that can be classed as slang. And just like local slang in any town or city, new phrases and words come in and out of fashion or just evolve over time.

British Sign Language users successfully campaigned the government of the United Kingdom and made BSL into an officially recognized British Language back in March 2003. British Sign Language is now recognized on the same level as other languages of the United Kingdom such as Scottish, Welsh and Gaelic.

Throughout the videos in this series you will find demonstrations of how to formulate the signs and there will be sections with and without text. This is going to be useful for you so that you can see how you are progressing and as you go further and further through the series you will find that you are able to understand the signs that are without text.