



NC STATE
LINGUISTICS

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WATCH THIS!

DOCUMENTARY :
SIGNING BLACK
IN AMERICA

BLACK ASL ★ (BASL)

DID YOU KNOW?

Sign language is **not** universal. In fact, there are **several hundred sign languages** around the world!

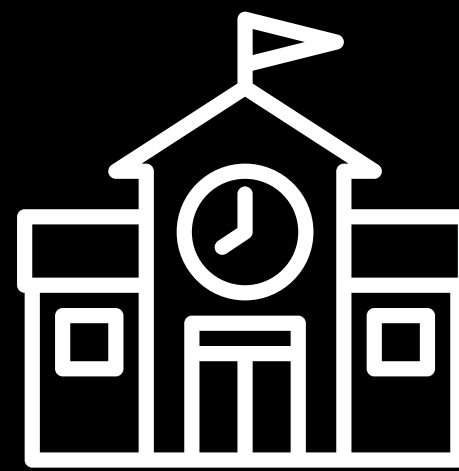
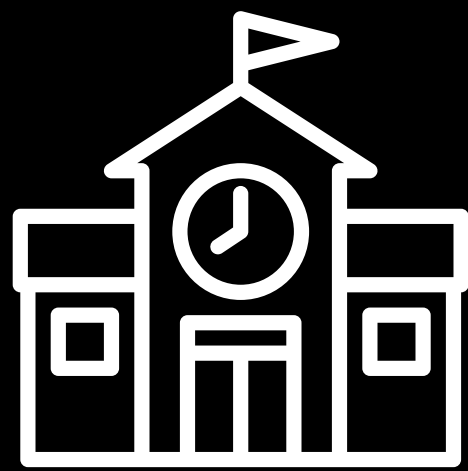
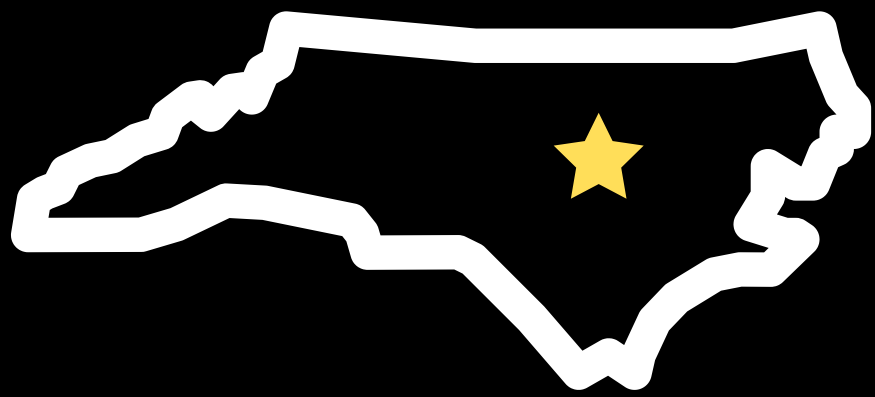
WHAT IS BASL?

Black American Sign language, also called **BASL**, is a distinct variety of American Sign Language (ASL) used by many Black Deaf communities across the United States. BASL is a **spectrum of features, signs, and styles** that vary for each signer and in different situations. It has a long history and, **like all languages, is still constantly developing and changing.**

DID YOU KNOW?

"**Little d deaf**" refers to the condition of hearing loss.
"**Big D Deaf**" refers to someone who identifies with the Deaf cultural community.

HISTORY



"IT'S SOUL; IT'S UNITY; THERE'S HISTORY; THERE'S CULTURE. ALL OF THAT IS ENCAPSULATED INTO THIS THING WE CALL 'BLACK ASL'"
- SHENTARA COBB, STUDENT

1869: 1st Black Deaf school opens in Raleigh, NC

Segregation and **linguistic isolation** in schools leads to the emergence of BASL, a variety distinct from existing forms of ASL

1954: Brown v. Board of Education

The **integration** of Black and White Deaf schools begins but is not complete until decades later

Today: BASL continues to evolve

BASL is still diverging from Mainstream ASL, in part due to its importance to Black Deaf **identity**

CODE-SWITCHING

There is a **myth** that Mainstream ASL is better than Black ASL. In reality, Mainstream ASL and BASL are just different but equally effective ways of communicating. Linguists agree that no language or dialect is actually "better" than another.

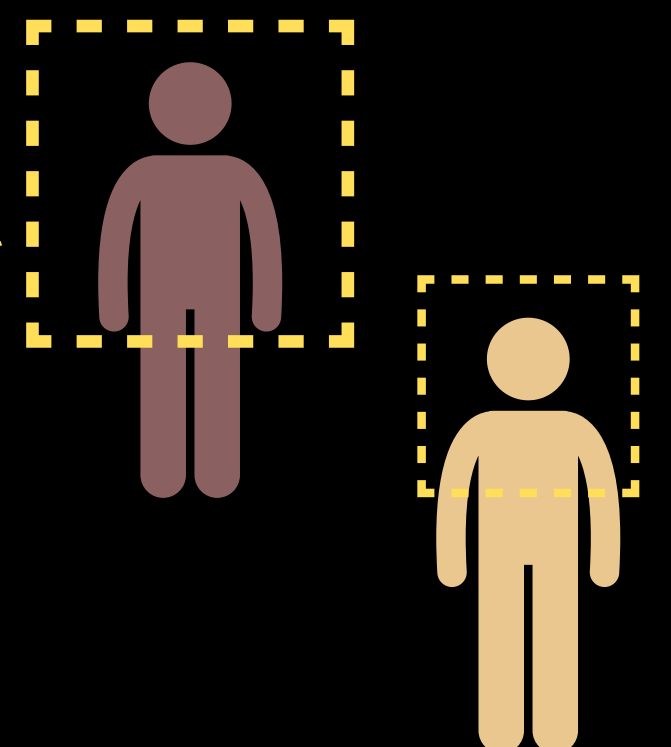


Partially because of this negative perception, BASL signers often alternate, or **codeswitch**, between BASL and ASL when outside of Black Deaf spaces.

FEATURES

Some distinctive features of BASL include:

- Vocabulary differences
- Incorporation of African American English (AAE) forms into signs
- Maintenance of two-handed signs*
- Some signs remain higher on the face*
- Less mouthing of words*
- Repetition of signs*
- Larger signing space*



*These features may also be exhibited by non-Black signers, but less frequently

REFERENCES

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Wolfram, W. (Executive Producer), Hill, J., Lucas, C., McCaskill, C. (Associate Producers), & Cullinan, D., Hutcheson, N. (Directors). (2020). *Signing Black in America [Documentary]*. USA: Language and Life Project.