

"Sign Language Corpus Using SignWriting"

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Presented May 21, 2011 at Gallaudet University
"Building Sign Language Corpora in North America Workshop"

A corpus of data is necessary for any thorough research. ASL, along with many other sign languages, has had struggles in establishing a strong corpus for linguistic purpose. Unlike many spoken languages, ASL does not have a standard way of collecting data so that it is, as McEnery, Xiao and Tono stated, representative, comprehensive, accessible, machine-readable and searchable (2006). With the age of technology, video recording has been a great help; however, it is still difficult to make videos machine-readable and searchable. How does one create a search engine capable of searching for a specific feature of a sign especially when it has no standard English description? Many spoken languages have large amounts of corpus in which researchers can draw from, largely because they are written. ASL has also been written for 30+ years through SignWriting (www.SignWriting.org).

SignWriting is a writing system that writes the parts of signs much like the Roman Alphabet is used to write parts of spoken words. This makes it so that features of ASL are represented as features rather than signs as a whole without any building blocks. Search engines can be created to read each feature, thus making a search very plausible even without having to worry about an English description. Because SignWriting is one of the most established writing systems for sign languages around the world with documents ranging from blogs to children's stories and the Bible, it makes it also one of the strongest candidates to be able to develop a corpus covering a wide range of disciplines.

Here are some samples of documents written in ASL using SignWriting:

Why SignWriting?

<http://www.signbank.org/SignPuddle1.5/searchword.php?ui=1&sgn=5&sid=352>

FrostVillage: Blog in Written ASL

<http://frostvillage.com/blog/lang/ase/>

Cat in the Hat in Written ASL

<http://www.signwriting.org/library/children/CatHat.html>

<http://www.signbank.org/SignPuddle1.5/searchword.php?ui=1&sgn=5&sid=357>

Gospel According to John in Written ASL

http://www.signwriting.org/library/bible/Gospel_John.html

SignWriting Wiki for ASL: <http://www.signbank.org/wiki/index.php?title=Category:ASL>