

Cambridge Elements

Elements in Sign Languages

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ASL SIGNBANK

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Abstract: Language documentation of the American Sign Language (ASL) communities is essential to preserve and share our language use and interaction, something we cherish. Yet there is no conventionalized written system that can be used, instead we've been using video. Currently these videos are mostly not accessible in a way we can search the contents for language expressions. The ASL Signbank, an empirical-based resource-driven database, labels ASL use in transcripts time-aligned to ASL videos along with a set of annotation conventions to make the data machine-readable. ASL Signbank is a cloud-based annotation tool built over twenty years from the models of extant signbanks and their organizing principles. To create a database requires many choices and ongoing labor, which is detailed in this Element – from what ASL Signbank is to why it exists and how to use it. This Element is also a reflection on these choices.

Keywords: (ASL) Signbank, signed language annotation, signed language documentation, signed language corpora, signed language linguistics

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