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Dissertation Abstracts

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Dissertation Abstracts

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Dissertation Abstracts

In order to inform our readers of current research on translator and interpreter education and training, we will regularly feature abstracts of recently completed theses in each issue. If you have recently finished a Master's or PhD thesis in this field and would like it to be included, please send an abstract of 200–300 words, along with details of the institution where the thesis was completed, the year in which it was submitted, and a contact email address. Submissions should be sent to Dissertation Abstracts Section Editor Carol Patrie at carol.patrie@gmail.com.

Conceptual Blending in American Sign Language Interpretations

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Degree: PhD dissertation, Ball State University, 2011

In this study, the author investigated the conceptual blending processes that occurred during American Sign Language (ASL) interpretations. Using the framework of conceptual blending (Fauconnier & Turner, 1993), the author analyzed six ASL interpretations and found two new mental spaces that are activated during interpretations. Conceptual blending has been used to analyze ASL (Dudis, 2004, 2007; Liddell, 2003) but had not been applied to ASL interpretations until this study. The conceptual blending process of ASL has found several mental spaces that are activated in blends. *Real space* (Liddell, 1995) and *event space* (Dudis, 2007) are two mental spaces that blend in ASL. The linguistic discourse of the six interpreters also indicated that these spaces are blended as well as other spaces that were newly identified through this study.

Narrator space and interpreter space were the two newly identified spaces identified through the linguistic discourse of the interpreters. By analyzing the instances of depiction, which previously have been described as *constructed action* and *constructed dialogue*, elements of *interpreter space* became visible. *Narrator space*, the second newly identified space, was visible through pronoun usage and pausing made by the interpreters. These linguistic constructions made by all six interpreters throughout the 210 minutes of interpreted text clearly indicated the existence of these mental spaces. In addition to the newly identified spaces, that data indicated that ASL interpreters created constructed dialogue in *event space* in much the same way as do signers who are deaf. The nonmanual features that Thumann (2010) identified just prior to or at the onset of depiction were also found in the instances of depiction created by the six interpreters. In this study, the author also found that all six interpreters created instances of depiction—specifically, constructed action and constructed dialogue—when it was not in the English stimulus.

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Sign Language Interpreter Shortage in California: Perceptions of Stakeholders

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Degree: EdD dissertation, Alliant International University: San Francisco Campus, 2010

The purpose of this study was to examine the similarities and differences in perceptions among agency interpreters, freelance interpreters, faculty in interpreter education programs, and members of the Deaf community regarding the shortage of sign language interpreters in California.

This two-phase study was conducted in the *QUAN-qual model*, also known as the *explanatory mixed method design*. In the first phase, the researcher collected quantitative anonymous online survey data from three groups of stakeholders ($N = 124$)—agency interpreters, freelance interpreters, and faculty in interpreter education programs—to address the research questions. In the second phase, qualitative interview data were collected from a small purposive sample ($N = 12$) selected from the same groups of stakeholders and members of the Deaf community in California. Because of the small number of survey respondents, the researcher used Fisher's exact test, when appropriate, to explore relationships between selected characteristics of participants and their perceptions.

The researcher compared results from the analysis of qualitative interview and survey data to identify common themes. Results from qualitative data analysis were useful for expanding and strengthening findings yielded by the quantitative data. The findings revealed in this inquiry add valuable perspectives from stakeholders on the possible reasons for the shortage of interpreters in California. For example, a large majority of respondents (71%) perceived that lack of health care benefits, dramatic expansion of video relay and remote video interpreting and lack of mentoring were the major factors contributing to the current shortage of sign language interpreters in California. Stakeholders further expanded by identifying an additional 11 factors that they believe are affecting the sign language interpreter shortage.

Analysis of the findings identified the current and future needs of sign language interpreters and consumers of interpreting services. The Deaf community urged the establishment of a statewide task force to address current and future needs identified in this study. Recruitment is key to encouraging the growth of the profession, and expansion of current interpreter education programs will provide greater accessibility to the Deaf community.

A Comparison of Deixis in Interpreted Lectures and Signed Language Lectures in ASL: An Exploration of the Structures of ASL Used by Interpreters and Deaf Teachers When Referring to a Visual Aid

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Degree: PhD dissertation, Gallaudet University, 2011

In this dissertation, the author explores the types of American Sign Language (ASL) structures that interpreters use to relay information that is both verbal and visual. This research aims to identify how the structure of *deixis* (an indication or reference made in context) in interpreted ASL discourse differs that of deixis in direct ASL discourse. College lectures presented via an interpreter to students who are deaf are inherently different than those presented via a signing teacher who is deaf to students who are deaf. References made to visual aids in interpreted lectures are compared with references made to visual aids in lectures presented directly from fluent ASL users in the postsecondary setting. This study includes an analysis on how the ASL interpreter handles information that is being produced via two modalities: auditory and visual. The hearing speaker may lecture while simultaneously producing a deictic gesture, pointing to different referents on a visual aid such as a chart, map, or overhead projector. Although concurrently receiving information auditorily and visually is not a problem—and is often helpful for students with typical hearing—in an interpreted situation, it presents a challenge for students who are deaf. Given that the student who is deaf may receive information only via the visual modality, the interpreter must use strategies and linguistic structures of ASL to properly relay all information being presented by the teacher. In this study, the researcher compares the structures used in the interpreted lecture with those used in signed lectures given by teachers who are deaf and who use ASL as their primary language. In classrooms where the teacher’s lecture is conveyed directly through ASL—and all information is being transmitted via only the visual modality within one line of vision—the students who are deaf do not miss important gestural information. In this study, the researcher explores the linguistic differences between the two types of classroom settings and, specifically, investigates the use of deictic indices.

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Experiences and Training Needs of Deaf–Hearing Interpreter Teams

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Degree: PhD dissertation, Walden University, 2010

Deaf–hearing interpreter teams are new to the field of interpreting, and little research exists as to the issues that arise for such teams. The purposes of this qualitative phenomenological study were threefold: (a) exploring the experiences of deaf interpreters and the hearing interpreters with whom they work, (b) understanding whether deaf and hearing interpreters felt satisfied with the training that they received in regard to working as a team, and (c) discovering gaps that could be addressed through training that would lead to the establishment of more qualified teams. The three research questions were designed to address interpreters' experiences within teams, to encourage reflection upon preparation and upon training for teamwork, and to elicit recommendations to enhance training and practice. Experiential learning theory and the demand–control schema made up the framework for this study. Interviews were held with 12 interpreters in groups of two. Six deaf interpreters were interviewed by a deaf interpreter, and six hearing interpreters were interviewed by a hearing interpreter. Deaf interviews were translated from ASL into English for a written transcription. A combination of open and a priori coding supported interpretive analysis of the data. Findings included the need for curriculum development for deaf interpreters and deaf–hearing interpreter teams, understanding the roles of the team members, and the need for training on how to work effectively as a team. Salient themes included ethics, the effectiveness of the interpretation, and mentoring. This study contributes to positive social change by increasing the understanding of deaf–hearing interpreter team members' needs. Enhanced preparation and training opportunities can lead to improved interpretations and effective services to clients of these teams.

Negotiating the American Sign Language Maze: Examining the Status of ASL in Virginia

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During the last 20 years, American Sign Language (ASL) has grown in academic offering and acceptance as both a foreign language and as an academic elective. In this mixed-method study, the researcher analyzes the academic acceptance of ASL in two parts. The first part of the study consists of a survey administered to determine the academic acceptance of ASL at all 39 Virginia public postsecondary institutions. This survey replicated a survey conducted by the State Council on Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) in 2000, expanding the inquiry in two ways: (a) delineating between ASL and other sign courses and (b) including the 24 two-year institutions in the data. The results show that advances have been made in the following ways: (a) a majority of 4-year institutions accept ASL to satisfy the foreign-language requirement; (b) all 15 public higher education institutions have an ASL policy; and (c) a majority of 2-year Virginia postsecondary institutions both offer ASL courses and accept ASL to satisfy the foreign-language requirement. The second part of this study compared the outcomes of five semesters of ASL study by 36 students in secondary and postsecondary environments in Virginia. The results indicate that there is no significant difference in outcomes after five semesters of ASL study between students in the high school and community college settings. However, statistically significant differences were identified during comparisons between student outcomes after five semesters of ASL study in the university setting and the previous two settings. Specifically, on the sign vocabulary portion of the SLPI—ASL assessment—students who study ASL for five semesters in the university setting typically outperform high school students; likewise, the same university students scored higher in the area of sign vocabulary than did their 2-year counterparts.

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The Relationship Among Beginning and Advanced American Sign Language (ASL) Students and Credentialed Interpreters Across Two Domains of Visual Imagery: Vividness and Manipulation Complexities of K–12 Interpreting

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Given the visual–gestural nature of American Sign Language (ASL), visualization abilities may be one predictor of aptitude for learning ASL. In this study, the researcher tested a hypothesis that visualization abilities are a foundational aptitude for learning a signed language and that measurements of these skills will increase as students progress from beginning ASL students to advanced language learners and, ultimately, to credentialed interpreters.

Participants in this study consisted of 90 beginning and 66 advanced ASL students in five interpreter education programs in four southern states along with 68 credentialed interpreters. Students and interpreters were administered the *Vividness of Visual Imagery Questionnaire (VVIQ)*, which is a self-report questionnaire and the objective *Mental Rotations Test, Version A (MRT-A)*. All ASL students and their instructors were asked to rate students' sign language competency on the *Sign Communication Proficiency Interview Rating Scale (SCPI)*. All participants completed demographic questions regarding their age, gender, ethnicity, parental hearing status, number of years using ASL, number of years working with professionals who are deaf and who use ASL, and their interpreting credential(s).

Students and their instructors rated students' sign communication proficiency similarly. Beginning ASL students were rated significantly lower than were the advanced ASL students by both instructors' rating and students' self-rating.

No significant relationships were reported (a) among beginning and advanced students and credentialed interpreters with respect to either the VVIQ or the MRT-A or (b) among the students' VVIQ and MRT-A scores and instructors' ratings on the SCPI. Suggestive evidence showed an increase in mean VVIQ scores from beginning ASL students to advanced ASL students to credentialed interpreters, but not to a significant level. When advanced ASL students and lower level state-credentialed interpreters were removed from analyses, a significant difference in visual vividness was reported. Nationally certified interpreters scored significantly higher than did beginning ASL students on the VVIQ but not on the MRT-A.

For this research, three interpreters working in fifth and sixth grade classrooms at three school sites were videotaped and interviewed to explore what interpreters do in the course of their work, and to illuminate the factors that inform their decisions.

This study reveals not only five primary tasks that interpreters perform, but describes in detail what interpreters do as they strive to optimize visual access, to facilitate the learning of language and content, and to cultivate opportunities for participation. Data indicate that even qualified interpreters are not always well-equipped to meet the essential needs of Deaf and hard of hearing students in K-12 settings. Results of this study contribute to our understanding of the complexities of interpreters' decisions in light of multiple and competing demands. Findings highlight the need for further research and serve as a call to action to improve the educational experiences of mainstreamed students.

Identifying Depiction in American Sign Language (ASL) Presentation

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The impetus for this study—in which the author examines what she refers to as *depiction* in American Sign Language (ASL)—came from the author's work as an instructor in an interpreter education program. The majority of ASL/English interpreters are second-language learners of ASL, many of whom find some features of ASL challenging to learn. These features are linked to what has been referred to as *role shifting*, *constructed dialogue or constructed action*, *classifiers*, and *referential use of space*. Following Dudis (2007), the author refers to these features as *depiction*.

This dissertation takes a first step in the analysis of depiction, focusing on the identifying information just prior to and at the onset of instances of depiction. Using a text analysis approach in conjunction with ELAN transcription software, the author analyzed four presentations from the *About Teaching ASL* series produced by the American Sign Language Teachers' Association. The author identifies changes in the signers' head position, eye gaze, facial expression, and body position. The author also reports on (a) the occurrence and co-occurrence of these nonmanual changes that aid in identifying depiction and (b) information that aids in distinguishing between switches in depiction and recurring depiction. In addition, the author proposes a method of text analysis, using ELAN, as a means of drawing students' attention to the linguistic features of depiction. With an enhanced understanding of depiction, second-language learners may be better able to comprehend ASL and to incorporate depiction into their own language use.

The proposed approach of using ELAN for text analysis provides a strategy to guide second-language learners as they practice identifying depiction. In this study, the author provides a starting point for working with second-language learners to help them recognize, understand, and produce depiction in discourse. This study also provides interpreter educators and teachers of ASL a better understanding of depiction and offers an important framework for training interpreters to analyze and understand ASL texts.

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Audience Effects in American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreting

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There is a system of English mouthing during interpretation that appears to be the result of language contact between spoken language and signed language. *English mouthing* is a voiceless visual representation of words on a signer's lips produced concurrently with manual signs. It is a type of borrowing prevalent among English-dominant bilingual-bimodal sign language interpreters who use American Sign Language (ASL) and spoken English when interpreting for consumers who are deaf (Davis, 1989; Weisenberg, 2003). It is distinct from other systems of grammatical mouthing observed in native deaf signers. Bilingual-bimodal interpreters have the advantage of simultaneity: The two channels of expression are distinctly different—one being a visual-gestural channel, the other being an oral-aural channel. When sign language interpreters organize abstract oral English discourse into a concrete visual-spatial form, they borrow from their dominant language, English. This study tested audience effects during interpretation from spoken English to ASL. Interpreters shifted their style to accommodate their addressees. A style shift was measured by the rate of English mouthing. Based on an analysis of variance (ANOVA), $F(1, 3) = 6.25, p = .08$, the study demonstrates that the perceived cultural identity of the audience has more of an effect on English mouthing than the topic, $F(1, 3) = 0.046, p = .84$. A pattern of mouthing reduction was also discovered. At least two experimental contexts contained technical terminology that was repeated. When there were no manual equivalents in ASL, interpreters interpreted these terms by overlapping mouthing with a manual sign of approximate meaning. Once they had expressed the combination, the mouthing was reduced or removed completely. In this study, the author confirms what is a commonly held notion in audience design—that speakers adjust their language in reaction to their addressees—and also opens an inquiry to the use of the sign language interpreting context as a means of examining neologisms and language variability.