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Abstract

In the U.S. and other countries, deaf interpreters are increasingly providing professional interpreting and translation services between one or more languages. One outcome of this trend is that deaf individuals are enrolling in educational degree programs in pursuit of training and credentials for signed language interpreters. Interpreter educators whose experience may have only been with teaching non-deaf students are now seeking to create meaningful learning experiences for their deaf students. In this article, we discuss two course assignments modified for deaf students who were enrolled in a beginning translation course at Gallaudet University and we provide the students' perspectives about the efficacy of the assignments. The aim of this article is to share ideas about creating or altering tasks to better address the needs of deaf students enrolled in interpreter education programs.

Keywords: Deaf interpreters, interpreter education, teaching, assignments

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Driving Without Directions? Modifying Assignments for Deaf Students in an Interpreter Education Class

1.   Introduction

> Progress means getting nearer to the place you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turn, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case the person who turns back soonest is the most progressive one.   C.   S.   Lewis (1943)

Increasingly, deaf[2] individuals are enrolling in interpreter education programs with the aim of developing the skills and knowledge to become credentialed interpreters and translators. However, interpreter educators who want to provide meaningful instruction for deaf students may feel as if they are driving on an unmarked country road at midnight without headlights and with a map app that has lost its signal. That is, interpreter educators can feel disoriented and lost when teaching deaf students. In conversations with our colleagues, many express concern that they lack the knowledge and resources to provide deaf students with meaningful classroom instruction. They report that their teaching resembles "driving without directions," an uncertain process based on trial and error. Deaf interpreting is expanding as a profession, but there is limited information on how to teach interpreting to deaf students (for exceptions, see Forestal, 2006; Lai, 2018; McDermid, 2010; National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers, 2016; Rogers, 2016). As C. S. Lewis observes, making an uncharted journey may necessitate turning around repeatedly in order to find the "right road." We offer this brief commentary on how we navigated our own road for teaching deaf students in an entry-level interpreting course.

For most of its history, signed language interpreting has been conceived as a service provided by non-deaf individuals; however, deaf individuals have also provided access to information through interpreting and translation. Historically, bilingual deaf people have long served as ad hoc language brokers for members of the Deaf community (Adam, Carty, & Stone, 2011). Thus, it is a natural progression for bilingual deaf persons to offer their services as professional interpreters. This shift has resulted in deaf individuals seeking educational and professional credentials as interpreters.

Professionalization of the field over the past three decades has shown promising developments in the advancement of deaf interpreting. Boudreault (2005) describes the history of the professional status of deaf interpreters (DIs) in the U.S. as beginning when the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) established the Reverse Skills Certificate (RSC) in 1972. He states that, in the 1980s, U.S. legislation mandated communication accessibility in legal and medical services, which increased employment of DIs. In the late 1990s, RID promoted

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[2] Individuals who study interpretation and translation hold various identities. To avoid making assumptions about identity, the authors use the lowercase form – *deaf* – in instances where cultural identity is not explicitly known, and the upper case form – Deaf – in other instances..

certification for DIs by establishing a provisional certificate as the Certified Deaf Interpreters-Provisional (CDI-P) and in 1998 offered the opportunity for full certification (CDI). Forestal (2011) notes that the RID developed a standard practice paper, *Use of Certified Deaf Interpreters,* that validates and supports deaf interpreting as a viable profession (RID, 1997). Further, Forestal describes how the development of competencies in interpreting by DIs became a primary focus of the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers.

Despite these advances, much work remains to be done. With the growing number of DIs in the field, many interpreter educators are reexamining their program structure, curricula, and assignments so they can meet the needs of deaf students. The presence of deaf students in interpreter education programs yields many benefits, including the opportunity for researchers to consider intriguing questions, such as the value of firsthand Deaf-world experiences on interpreting (National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers, 2016), the differences between DIs and non-DIs (Boudreault, 2005), the types of assignments done by DIs (Adam, Aro, Duetta, Dunne, & af Klintberg 2014), how DIs and non-deaf interpreters prepare together for assignments (Nicodemus & Taylor, 2014), and, critically, the educational structure to effectively support the training of DIs (Lai, 2018). In this article, we add commentary by describing a small case study in which two assignments originally designed for non-deaf students were modified to be more beneficial for deaf students. The experience leads us to add some thoughts on the topic of creating meaningful learning opportunities for deaf students in interpreter education programs.

Fundamentals of Interpreting (INT 325) is an entry-level, undergraduate course in the Department of Interpretation and Translation at Gallaudet University. The course is a three-credit, one-semester class designed to cultivate basic skills in translation and consecutive interpretation. (See Appendix A for full course description.) The first half of the semester focuses on translating English texts into American Sign Language (ASL), and the second half focuses on ASL-to-English translation. When we taught the course in the fall semester of 2019, ten students – eight non-deaf and two deaf – were enrolled. We utilized five textbooks but relied primarily on Carol Patrie's (2001, 2012) translation workbooks and video materials. Additional texts included *Multiple Meanings in ASL* (Cartwright & Bahleda, 2012) and *Interpretation Skills* (Taylor, 1993/2002, 2017). Each text was used by both deaf and non-deaf students.

In August 2019, the two non-deaf instructors, Danielle Hunt and Brenda Nicodemus, began preparing to co-teach, for the first time, the INT 325 course. They quickly recognized that several assignments in the class would not be conducive to optimal learning by deaf students. Recognizing the limitations in their own knowledge and skills for teaching this population, they invited Margie English, a Deaf doctoral student, to be a teaching assistant in the course.

Danielle and Brenda first held individual meetings with the two deaf students to discuss Margie's engagement, specifically to providing them with support in the class. Upon agreement by the students, Margie began attending class sessions. Throughout the semester, Margie provided supplemental lectures, led class discussions, modeled ASL translations, and lectured on Deaf culture, community membership, and consecutive interpretation for the deaf and non-deaf students. Critically, she met with the two deaf students during in-class lab time to collaboratively create and modify course assignments and to discuss their experiences with the work.

2. Assignment modifications

2.1. *Assignment 1: Translation of an ASL video lecture*

2.1.1 Modification: ASL interpretation of a cooking class

The goal of this assignment was to practice translation skills using a cooking class text from Patrie's instructional materials. In this particular video, a deaf woman used ASL to explain a recipe for making potato soup. Because we were teaching a translation course, all students were instructed to translate the ASL presentation into written English. Students' written English translations were then used to create a spoken English (non-deaf students) or signed translation (deaf students) of the video. When meeting with the two deaf students, Margie introduced the topic of creating an intralingual (ASL-to-ASL) translation. During their initial discussion of the assignment, one deaf student expressed hesitancy about creating a translation, recognizing that DIs typically produce a target text

based on the specific needs of a deaf consumer. As a result, the three instructors agreed to create a profile of deaf consumers based on the specific skills each student wished to develop. One student expressed an interest in interpreting for a DeafBlind person who used close-vision interpreting; the other wanted to interpret for a deaf person who grew up signing a different signed language and who was an emerging user of ASL. Using these preferences, Danielle and Brenda customized the assignment by creating profiles of a mock consumer for each student, which included a photo of the "consumer" (i.e., images taken from the internet) to add more contextual cues. The instructors then provided the students detailed descriptions of their consumers, adapting instructions depending on the student's individual goals. Despite their different consumers, both deaf students were informed that the event they were interpreting for was hosted by a local public library that offered cooking lessons in ASL. They also received a mock flyer to announce the event. (See Appendix B for assignment details.)

2.1.2   Student discussions regarding assignment 1

During their first meeting as part of the in-class lab, Margie asked one of the students (Student 1) to express his goals for the interpretation in which he would be working with an international consumer who had limited ASL skills. He stated,[3]

> For me, as a CDI, my main goal would be to observe how the ASL [in the source message] is signed and then translate it to become clearer. My goal would center around processing the message, not just mirroring it. Would I be using more formal or informal ASL register? That's the question I would have for performing this ASL translation.

Student 1 met with Margie again during the week to discuss this assignment before starting his translation. Initially, he expressed discomfort in completing the translation, saying,

> This assignment is a little different because it's not a live interpretation. Typically, I adjust my signing based on feedback I see with the consumer.

He connected his feeling of being physically removed from the consumer with no opportunities for changes in production based on live feedback. Instead of being able to connect with the consumer by actively responding to her reactions, he had to anticipate her needs based on his prior interpreting experiences. He described his process as follows:

> I would need to build up a schema. I have had experience interacting with international deaf people in [English classes for international students at Gallaudet University].

Without authentic feedback cues from a consumer, Student 1 decided to perform a simultaneous interpretation of the prompt video, rather than a consecutive interpretation in which he could negotiate and co-construct the target message with the consumer.

Student 2 also performed a simultaneous interpretation of the video. The instructors observed that her approach was similar to that of the non-deaf students in the class. She described her thought process leading up to the decision she made about the production of her interpretation of the prompt video:

> My audience is someone who is blind – her vision is not so good – so I need to sit closer to that person. I thought maybe I should also avoid excessive fingerspelling. For example, the speaker in the video fingerspells the word *mushroom,* and I substituted that with the sign MUSHROOM because that's clearer. . . . I tried to do what was the best fit for my audience and not for myself.

Her process demonstrated an understanding of the importance of preparing to deliver a message based on the needs of the consumer, and she approached the task without any fears of experimenting with technology required of the assignment. She discussed her efforts to translate the message while being seated close to the consumer:

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[3]The initial meeting between Margie and the two students was not video recorded, but all subsequent sessions were recorded. All quotes in this paper were originally produced in ASL and translated into written English.

> During filming, I sat closer to my laptop than usual. Unfortunately, I had limited space. That was hard, because I only had a window to work with. That's the only problem I really had.

Her video resulted in an "interpreter-in-a-bubble" effect, with the interpreter in a smaller window, which may have been problematic for a close-vision DeafBlind person. Had she experienced an actual live interpretation for a close-vision DeafBlind person, she might have made a different decision for the set-up of the assignment. The decisions she arrived at around the interpretation provided an opportunity to discuss the outcome during subsequent conversations.

During their next session, Student 2 and Margie, with support from Student 1, discussed the general needs typically shared by a close-vision DeafBlind consumer. Margie asked prompt questions to help Student 1 consider the accessibility of a small video within a larger video, and the compensation required of a deaf interpreter in creating smaller signs. Margie employed coaching and scaffolding methods with the students and shared ideas on techniques that are used in the field of deaf interpreting.

2.2. Assignment 2: ASL-to-English consecutive interpretation of an ASL vlog

2.2.1 Modification: Sight translation of a District of Columbia driver's license exam

For the final assignment of the course, the non-deaf students were to follow a multistep process to create an ASL-to-English consecutive interpretation of an ASL vlog. The assignment was a cumulative project designed to assess what the students had learned during the semester. Danielle, Brenda, and Margie discussed potential modifications of this assignment for the deaf students in order to reflect the work of DIs. They decided that a similar, multistep sight translation from a different stimulus material – a driver's license exam in written English – would be a logical modification for the deaf students. Thus, the deaf students completed a sight translation; that is, they created an ASL version of a written English document. As in the modification for Assignment 1, the instructors provided the students with a profile of a mock consumer: a 16-year-old deaf student taking the driver's test in Washington, DC; the student requested an interpreter in case there were questions that he doesn't understand fully in English, which would then be translated into ASL. (See Appendix B for assignment details and the exam text.)

2.2.2 Student discussions regarding assignment 2

Both deaf students were interested in this assignment and expressed comfort with its difference from the assignment given to their non-deaf classmates. Student 1 stated,

> It is a sight translation. You're translating from what you're reading. So far, we have been working from videos. This assignment is different from other approaches so far. I think it's cool.

Student 2 agreed with her fellow classmate, saying,

> This assignment is suitable to the work they [non-deaf students] do as interpreters, and our assignment is applicable to the work we do as deaf interpreters.

Before starting this task, both students met with Margie to review the terminology within the script from the driver's written examination. A question that used an unusual phrase – "space cushion" – to describe the expanse between cars stumped the students. Student 1 deciphered the meaning behind this phrase, whereas Student 2 associated the phrase with airbags. Both students expressed a concern about "giving away the answer" with their translation. Discussion ensued on deriving meaning from the context by using cues from any part of the language, including phonetics. If non-deaf test takers could draw meaning of a word through the phonetic value of a word or a phrase, deaf test takers should be able to as well. Margie then shared a personal recollection of a previous translation project involving a multiple-choice exam, which required negotiation with a team of non-deaf non-signers to understand the importance of performing an ASL translation rather than a transcode (ASL in English word order). After this discussion, both students began their own translation process.

Both students were required to create simple concept maps, previously practiced in class, for each question asked on the driver's test. They reported finding this exercise helpful in preparing their sight translations. Student 1 created his map on paper, whereas Student 2 used Prezi (an online tool for creating digital slideshows) to map the concepts. Student 1 confirmed that this exercise helped him "remember the details" while performing the translation because "illustrating the concepts helps me conceptualize the relationship between the details." As the final part of the assignment, all students in the class (both deaf and non-deaf) completed a self-analysis of their work identifying features of the target text, areas of effectiveness, and areas needing improvement.

3.   Conclusions

We offer this commentary of our experiences with two deaf students in an introductory baccalaureate-level course in an interpreting program to share our attempts to provide them with a meaningful educational experience. Our overall approach was to include the deaf students in classroom instruction with their non-deaf peers, but also to provide them with separate support by a doctoral student who is a professional, experienced, and certified DI, and an educator. Since this was the first interpreting course taken by new interpreting majors, the non-deaf instructors initially were unaware whether students were non-deaf or deaf. Additionally, the non-deaf co-instructors were assigned to teach the course only a week in advance of the semester. We strongly recommend early preparation and meeting with the deaf students in advance of the course. We recognize that we are fortunate at Gallaudet University to have numerous resources, including several certified DIs on campus, deaf doctoral students, and deaf teaching colleagues who can provide support and models for our deaf students.

Through our experience modifying two course assignments, we discovered beneficial teaching practices that can be applied in any course:

First, negotiate the assignments with the students. Collaborate with the deaf students, rather than merely assigning a set of prescriptive instructions that do not fit their learning needs. Working together will lead to buy-in and enthusiasm from the students about the assignments.

Second, have students identify their preferred audience. In our case, following the students' preference of consumers to work with, in each case targeting particular skills, increased students' engagement in the work. An individualized approach to crafting the assignments, in which the instructors determined the characteristics of the consumers based on student stated preference and their observations of student needs, proved to be motivating with the students reporting being highly engaged in their assignments.

Third, draw on classroom instruction. We found that the deaf students, irrespective of their level of interpreting experience, relied on both the general classroom instruction and their own skills and schemas in the process of creating translations and interpretations. Deaf and non-deaf students worked together well during the classroom activities and understood why certain assignments were being modified to meet the specific learning goals of the deaf students. The deaf students expressed satisfaction with our collaborative approach and expressed appreciation for being engaged with the assignment modifications.

As the instructors, we collectively agreed that the quality of the completed assignments by the deaf students was good to outstanding; however, we note that we did not create a separate assessment rubric for their work. Given more time to prepare for teaching the course, the instructions would have created more formal assessment measures.

We are excited about the interest and the enrollment of deaf individuals in interpreter education programs and are actively pursuing how our program can most effectively serve these students. One idea is to build a shareable resource bank of instructional materials and assignments for deaf students (such as the assignments we describe in this article), so instructors have ready access to them. We also call for more research on deaf interpreting in general and specific educational research on the teaching of deaf students in these programs. Finally, we advocate for the hiring of DI educators as full-time faculty. In the mid-to-late 2000s, Boudreault (2005), Collins and Walker (2005), Forestal (2006), Mathers (2009), Stone (2009), and others wrote about the practices of deaf interpreting.

We suggest that we need to continue to take positive action for the training needs of deaf students by conducting evidence-based research, confirming curriculum standards, and learning from the wisdom of DIs' lived experiences.

If we can point to the greatest lesson we learned in our journey, it is that working as a collective (non-deaf instructors, deaf instructors, and deaf students) reflected a community approach to learning. We suggest this type of collaborative decision making can become the norm in interpreter education as we move forward. We make no claims that we have found the "right road" for guiding deaf students in interpreter education; indeed, we are still searching for the most progressive route. Our aim in this article is to add to the discussion of how to get to the right road for DIs so we can continue our journey together.

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Appendix A

Fundamentals of Interpreting (INT 325) course description

This course focuses on the foundation skills required for effective translation and interpretation. The course includes critical analysis and application (a) for systematically analyzing interactions and texts in order to ascertain where meaning lies, and (b) of understanding and developing the cognitive skills for translating and interpreting. Students will be introduced to and practice intralingual translation and interpretation text analysis techniques through main point abstraction, summarization, paraphrasing and restructuring a message while retaining its meaning. Discussions will address theoretical aspects of translating and interpreting techniques as well as specific issues related to interpreting skills. This class focuses specifically on analysis and restructuring in interactive settings e.g., ASL-spoken English interaction, ASL-TASL interaction, and intermediary interpreting teams. This course will help students increase their range of proficiency, comprehension and production of the ASL language, and use of contact signing for interpretation and shadowing techniques.

Appendix B

Instructions for modified assignments

Assignment 1 modification: ASL interpreting for a cooking class

Close-vision interpreting

Your client is a 35-year old deaf female, Claudia, who lives in the DC metro area. Claudia has impaired vision and when she uses an interpreter, she prefers close-vision interpretation with the interpreter sitting about one foot in front of her. One afternoon, Claudia was in her local library and noticed a flyer about a cooking class in ASL. Claudia contacted the library by email, explaining that she would like to join the cooking class and would require close-vision ASL interpreting. You have been assigned to work with Claudia for this assignment. How would you

create a meaningful translation for Claudia based on the presentation of making creamy potato soup? Please video record your interpretation and submit it to the instructors.

Interpreting for emerging signer

A 45-year old female deaf Syrian refugee, Rima, has moved to Washington, DC, with her husband, Farid. Both Rima and Farid are native users of Syro-Palestinian Sign Language and have only rudimentary fluency in ASL. Rima is interested in learning the basics of American cooking, as well as increasing her ASL vocabulary. One day when she was in the downtown library, Rima noticed a flyer that offered cooking classes in ASL. Rima contacted the library by email and, in her basic English, explained that she would like to join the cooking class with the support of an interpreter. The librarian and Rima decided that having the lesson interpreted by a CDI would be helpful. Rima stated that she wanted both to learn the recipe as well as acquire some ASL vocabulary. You have been assigned to work with Rima for this assignment. How would you create a meaningful message for her based on the ASL lecture about making creamy potato soup? Please video record your interpretation and submit it to the instructors.

Assignment 2 modification: Sight translation of District of Columbia driver's license exam

You are interpreting for a deaf student at the Model Secondary School for the Deaf. He is 16 years old and taking the driver's test in D.C. He requested an interpreter in case there are questions that he doesn't understand fully in English, which would then be translated into ASL.

Directions: The District of Columbia driver knowledge examination tests your knowledge of traffic laws, road signs, and driving safety rules. It determines whether you are prepared to operate a vehicle in accordance with DC law. The test can be interpreted into American Sign Language. Audio assisted tests are also available for those who need assistance with reading.

Respond to each question with one answer.

1. When changing lanes:
    a. Check your side mirror and look over your shoulder to make sure the lane is clear.
    b. Check the inside rearview mirror.
    c. Slow down.
2. You are driving when it begins to rain. You should:
    a. Drive faster than surrounding traffic.
    b. Drive at the maximum posted speed limit.
    c. Slow down.
    d. Drive closely behind the vehicle in front of you.
3. It is best to keep a space cushion:
    a. Only in back of your vehicle.
    b. Only on the left and right sides of your vehicle.
    c. Only in front of the vehicle.
    d. On all sides of the vehicle.
4. A driver's license is required for which of the following? (Pick a, b, c, or d)
    1. Sitting in the driver's seat of a car while the engine is running.
    2. Steering a car while it is being pushed or towed by another vehicle

a. 1 only

b. 2 only

c. Both 1 and 2

d. Neither 1 nor 2

5. You will lose your license if you are convicted of:

    a. Driving without a license

    b. Passing a stopped school bus

    c. Failing to yield the right of way

    d. Speeding more than 75 mph

6. If you refuse a legal chemical test issued by a law enforcement officer, the Division of Motor Vehicles is required to:

    a. Place you on probation

    b. Wait for a court decision before taking action

    c. Assign you to a Driver Improvement Clinic

    d. Revoke your driver license for at least 12 months

7. You will lose your license if you are convicted of:

    a. Driving without a license

    b. Passing a stopped school bus

    c. Failing to yield the right of way

    d. Speeding more than 75 mph

8. This sign represents:

    a. Two-way traffic

    b. Lane shifting

    c. Low clearance

    d. Added lane