2.1: Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of Interpreting

Interpreting is fundamentally linguistic and cultural analysis. Linguistic and cultural knowledge are fundamental to the work of the interpreter. Ideally, interpreters are balanced bilinguals, who are capable of transferring meaning between language and culture. Interpreting students should demonstrate bilingual competence in both Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Competency (CALP) (Cummins, 1979). The linguistic competency of interpreting students is expected to develop over the course of their education. In this section, the linguistic concepts needed to function as an interpreter will be addressed. Proficiency in BICS and CALP are requisite to working as an interpreter. Students tend to learn BICS in their ASL classes and among their Deaf community contacts. BICS may be mastered/acquired in 3-5 years, while CALP tends to be learned in 5-7 years. Most interpreter education programs are only 2 or 4 years. Few, if any, require complete bilingualism before entering the interpreting program; thus, interpreting students are learning how to interpret while they are still learning their second language (Mayer, 2015). CALP is more academic language that tends to be more specialized and be learned later.

Most students in interpreter education programs are learning ASL as a second language and are native users of English. However, there is a growing number of interpreting students who are heritage users of ASL, or they have a Deaf parent or parents and grew up using ASL. There are also a growing number of Deaf interpreters who consider ASL their dominant language. In order to effectively include these students in interpreter education programs, bilingualism upon entry into the interpreting classes should be required. In this way, all students and their instructors could be using the shared languages (i.e., ASL and/or written English) as the language for teaching and learning.

For this section of the OER textbook, linguistic and cultural aspects of interpreting will be explored. As this section develops, contributions will include the following topics:

- Interpreting and its application to general linguistics, including phonology, morphology, discourse analysis, first and second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, comparative linguistics, sign systems, modality, and transcription; and
- Culture, such as cross-cultural and interpersonal communication, multicultural competencies, languages and...
cultures in contact, and cultural and linguistic brokering.

Definition of terms

When the terms “linguistic,” “bilingualism,” are used, they are used generally and encompass both ASL and English, as well as other signed and spoken languages. When we are referring to one language, the language will be specified.

Section overview

In this section, three contributions have been made. They include Orientation to the interpreted interaction by Jones, The triple T’s for interpreting English grammar classes: Theories, Tips, and Tools by Bowdell, and Developing curriculum for competent and confident DeafBlind interpreters by Chambers, Moore, and Ramey.

In Orientation to the interpreted interaction, Jones (2019) discusses the importance of orienting the consumers to the work of the interpreter. She addresses what happens when consumers are not oriented to the interpreters, why consumers need orientation, and who should conduct the orientation. She also explores the reasons why best practices have not been developed for orienting the consumer to the work of the interpreter. She offers the FEI model of orientation, the Function of the interpreter, Expectations for what the interaction will be like, and Inclusion for all parties. She offers sample statements that may be used when orienting the consumer to the interpreted event. Finally, she provides several activities to practice orientation.

In The triple T’s for interpreting English grammar classes: Theories, Tips, and Tools, Bowdell (2019) provides the landscape for English Language Learners (ELL) in the U.S. and addresses the issues that arise when a Deaf student is placed in a classroom with other ELL students. She provides an overview of theories and methods in regard to Second Language Acquisition. She offers practical suggestions for preparing for interpreting in the ELL classroom, as well as an explanation of basic grammatical concepts of English. She provides appendices with worksheets to record and reflect upon observations and grammatical features.

In Developing curriculum for competent and confident DeafBlind interpreters, Chambers et al. (2019) provide an introduction to conditions that result in becoming deaf and blind, to communication and linguistic systems used with DeafBlind individuals, a comparison of what it is like to work with sighted Deaf consumers and working with DeafBlind consumers, the connection between confidence and competence, strategies for self-care when addressing the demands of working with DeafBlind consumers, and resources and training opportunities available for those interested in developing their own knowledge and skills in working with members of the DeafBlind community.

This section will provide the reader with materials, activities, and worksheets on topics relevant to language and culture in the interpreting context.

References


