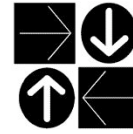


Conference of Interpreter Trainers



CIT POSITION PAPERS: INSTRUCTIONAL CLASS SIZE

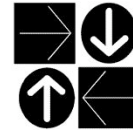
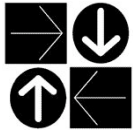
AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE COURSES

American Sign Language (ASL) is a visual, rather than spoken, language. Because of this, all students in an ASL class must be able to see the instructor, as the language is modeled/introduced, and to see each other as language drills and dialogues take place. This precludes the traditional classroom arrangement in which students sit in rows behind one another. Classroom facilities must be large enough to allow students in ASL classes to sit in a semi-circle. The visual nature of the language also necessitates slightly more time for turn-taking in classroom activities as all must turn to make eye contact with the next speaker in order to "hear" (see) what is being said.

Further, ASL has no written form. For this reason, written assignments in the traditional sense (e.g. drills and compositions) are impossible in the ASL classroom. The language cannot be practiced on paper. This means student work must be done in the classroom with the teacher present and attending or on videotape in order to receive feedback, correction, and critique. This necessitates frequent in-class recitations as a part of methodology. A hypothetical class having only 15 students with each student receiving only 10 minutes of individual attention per week would consume three hours per week in recitation alone.

In order to make effective use of videotape feedback, appropriate recording facilities and playback equipment must be available. This includes playback units with freeze frame and slow motion capabilities. A certain number of activities each academic term should be done on videotape allowing students to see their performance and to facilitate self-correction in production errors. It is recommended that all graded items be done on videotape in order to provide full and appropriate feedback to students. Grading a ten minute videotape test given to the same class of fifteen students cited above would take thirty to forty-five minutes per student - a total of seven and one-half hours compared with the relatively short period of time required to grade the same number of exams in paper and pencil format. This does not include the time needed to sit down with each student individually, watching the videotape and pointing out the correct and incorrect items noted.

It is for these reasons that the Board of the Conference of Interpreter Trainers recognizes that teaching American Sign Language is not strictly analogous to teaching auditory language and therefore recommends a class size of 8 -12 students per section.



INTERPRETER TRAINING COURSES

As in ASL instruction, effective teaching of interpretation and transliteration skills mandates very small class size. In addition to using a visual language (ASL) or visual coded form of English (MCE or PSE), courses require extensive individual instruction, critique and modeling due to the extremely complex nature of the task. Ideally, students have developed bilingual/bicultural skills prior to entering a course of study in interpretation or transliteration. However, this is rarely the case due to the time restrictions imposed by colleges and universities. It is therefore necessary for instructors to provide feedback on the general linguistic performance of students, specifically in the areas of semantic selection, grammatical correctness and complexity of sentence structure, and register of utterance. This applies to both English and ASL.

In addition, skills in interpretation and transliteration must be taught. Extensive individual instruction, critique and modeling are required due to the extremely complex nature of the task. Drills must be conducted in the area of visual and auditory closure, prediction, perception, and discrimination; visual/auditory short and long-term memory must be developed and refined; text analysis must be taught enabling the reproduction of the source language message into target language. In each of these steps, one-half of the process takes place in a visual rather spoken language or code. It is essential that students be able to see each other, as well as the instructor. Use of hands and upper torso should not be restricted by tables or other fixed objects in the room. Lighting in the classrooms must be maximal, eliminating facial shadows.

Class size must be small to allow an appropriate amount of individual instruction and skills development. As the medical student must have hands-on practice to perfect surgical procedures, the interpreter training students must have maximal hands-on experience in developing interpreting and transliterating skills utilizing a variety of texts appropriate to a variety of clients. Videotaping must be used extensively, allowing students to analyze their own performance and to compare their performance to that of several models. This mandates the availability of camera(s) and multiple playback capabilities, which have freeze frame and slow motion capabilities.

It is for these reasons that the Conference of Interpreters Trainers recommends a class size of 6 - 10 students for interpreting/transliterating classes.

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