A Case Study of a Deaf Interpreter
Teaching Interpreting Process Courses

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Rationale
City University of NY-LaGuardia’s ASL-English Interpretation Program

☐ Prior to admission, students must have AA degree, show fluency in ASL and English, and pass application and screening process.

☐ Faculty: All Adjunct

☐ Two tracks:

☐ Track 1: Interpreting Process courses: I-VI

☐ track two: theoretical courses such as ethics, interpreting in educational settings, ASL discourse, etc.
Interpreting Process Courses with a CDI

- Interpreting I: 2016 - Present
- Interpreting III: 2013, 2014
- Interpreting V: 2015 - Present
Participants in the study

- 22 respondents (out of 55 students)
- 72% (16) female
- 3 respondents had Deaf family members
- Most were from Class of 2015 (6), 2017 (7) and 2018 (5)
Main Study

Theme 1: Student’s anticipation and expectation of having a Deaf interpreter instructor

Theme 2: student's perception on interpretation assessment in both ASL and English

Theme 3: student’s perception on learning and discussing theories in ASL

Open Ended responses
Theme 1: Student’s anticipation and expectation of having a Deaf interpreter instructor
Q6: Prior to taking the interpreting process courses I, II, and/or V, how did you feel about having a Deaf instructor
Participant 1 responded, “Not about them, only at my ability to comprehend.”

Participant 2 responded, “I was concerned that my receptive skills would not be up to par for the pace of the course and that I would miss much content. But I actually was able to build more mental and receptive endurance at the same time as building my active academic language.”
Q7: “After taking the interpreting process course (interpreting I, III, and/or V), how did your perception change from having a Deaf interpreter instructor?”

Chart 2

- Much worse than expected
- Worse than expected
- About the same
- Better than expected
- Much better than expected
Participant 1: “I had good expectations and those expectations were met; so there was no change, because my assumptions were affirmed positively”

Participant 2: “I was privileged enough to have a Deaf instructor who was so knowledgeable about the course content and who was and still is active in the interpreting community. This gave me a unique insight into how they approach modern day interpreting scenarios. Having a Deaf instructor was very beneficial for my ASL language development because they are language models who’s (sic) primary language is ASL.”
Theme 2: student’s perception on interpretation assessment in both ASL and English
Q8: How confident did you feel about the Deaf instructor’s assessment of your ASL to English interpretation?
Q9: How confident did you feel about the Deaf instructor’s assessment of your English to ASL interpretation?
Theme 3: student’s perception on learning and discussing theories in ASL
Q10: How was your experience learning interpreting theories with a Deaf instructor?
Q11 I feel equally comfortable discussing interpreting theories in ASL and English with a Deaf instructor (either through discussions or assignments).
Open Ended Questions and Responses
Q12: What were the benefits of having a Deaf interpreter instructor?

1. Really appreciated his perspectives as both a regular practitioner and consumer of interpreting. Both social/political perspective and linguistic perspective.

2. Working with a Deaf interpreter as an instructor brings a unique insight into the interpreting process, as they have experienced both sides of the interpreting world in a way that hearing interpreter instructors have not.

3. Our language development gets better, we have insider knowledge about both the interpreting field and Deaf culture, having a CDI as a professor could inspire more Deaf to want to pursue this career (we need more Deaf interpreters out there), and its just so important to have Deaf people involved in interpreting programs since we will be working with them.

4. Having a Deaf, native user of ASL critique our work. Having the perspective of someone who uses and relies on interpreters daily was valuable and crucial to my development as an interpreter, both for my interpreting skills, and morally/ethically. It forced us to always communicate in ASL and improve our skills.

5. To me, the benefits were invaluable - absolutely essential. Our field is ASL-English Interpretation, and it seems to me a no-brainer that there would be one course - at the bare minimum - taught by a Deaf interpreter instructor. To have the cultural perspective, the native language model, and the interpreting expertise of one half of all the communication events we deal with feels like a necessity.

6. Having an instructor who is intimately familiar with the interpreting process, and can speak to both the interpreter and consumer perspective. The instructor also very often worked with other hearing interpreters, and so could speak to what he observed (both positive and negative) as helpful feedback for the class. Also, I liked having a class fully led in ASL, so also got to continue to improve my fluency.

7. Having a language model during the courses allowed me to increase my receptive and production skills substantially. Also having a Deaf perspective on different scenarios and topics lends to a deeper understanding of the course material through various lenses.

8. He spoke from his experience as a professional and as a consumer

9. Exposure to a Deaf perspective in all facets of interpretation. From fellow terp to consumer perspectives. Also ASL academic language exposure.

10. We could get the perspectives of a Deaf client and a working interpreter all in one professor

11. Many...exposure to ASL from an instructor who was also an experienced, skilled interpreter. I was learning interpreting theory and interpreting, but I was also having a model of how to communicate clearly in ASL. I also thought it was extremely valuable to get a Deaf perspective on the whole interpreting process.
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Q13: What issues came up for you while having a Deaf Interpreter as your instructor

1. None; N/A; No issues (this was the common response, 8 out of 22 had similar responses)

2. The complicated process of captioning your work or writing transcripts for our English interpretations, but again these are minor issues to deal with in exchange for all the great benefits

3. We captioned our video assignments, but it wasn’t a bother.

4. Probably just not understanding something (signing too fast, fingerspelling, or a sign I’ve never seen) at first; but all of the professors always let us know that it’s okay to ask them to repeat themselves.

5. The perspective of one Deaf instructor may not be the perspective of all Deaf/HOH people who use interpreters to communicate.

6. One difficulty was feeling intimidated by my instructor’s native ASL skills - and insecure about my own. Sometimes it was hard for me to relax and do my best with my English to ASL interpretations.

7. A lot of internal questioning and doubting as to if I am understanding everything correctly and keeping up with the dialogue.

8. My initial issue with having a Deaf instructor was how to manage taking notes while receptively taking in the lecture. I was able to create a system where I would write short notes in between the lecturing. As a hearing person who went through the school system with hearing teachers it was an initial shock.

9. I do not think we should discuss the work in our second language and this is the case when working with a Deaf instructor.

10. At times I would feel uncomfortable voicing and not providing access when interpreting from ASL to English.
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Q14: Anything else you would like to comment on or add about having a Deaf interpreter as instructor for your interpreting process course(s).

1. I didn’t have expectations about how it would “go,” but I’d consider Deaf interpreter instructors important in an interpreting program, especially because part of our learning has been about how the field is growing into itself (the role of an interpreter, who is doing the interpreting, and how those interpreters are trained).

2. I feel like working with a Deaf interpreter as an instructor should be mandatory for all interpreting programs.

3. It was an amazing experience because they know both sides of the process, as interpreters and as consumers.

4. It just makes perfect sense! Interpreting and Deaf go hand-in-hand.

5. I feel grateful that I was able to have at least one Deaf interpreter as an instructor for my interpreting courses. I think ideally, it would be great to have a Deaf interpreter instructor for more than one course. Since as interpreters, we are working with two languages and two cultures, it seems logical that the faculty for any interpreting program should be compromised of both Deaf and hearing. I also had two other instructors who are CDIs that taught other classes in the program. I am working in the field as a free lance interpreter, and all of the classes taught by CDIs I have found applicable to my work.

6. We need more Deaf instructors sharing their expertise and points of view.

7. It also brought the concept of DIs front and center (ie you couldn’t leave the class without a basic understanding of DIs). It also ensured at least one Deaf presence/perspective in all interpreting conversations, which felt important.

8. I truly like that the professors are currently in the field and can present fresh and up-to-date perspectives on real life interpreting scenarios. I also think having that language model and Deaf perspective is also important.

9. Also good resource for learning what attributes CDI’s are looking for in their hearing interpreter co-workers (2 similar responses)
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Discussion

- DI as instructor has additional benefits:
  - Addressing issues of working/teaming with Certified Deaf Interpreters;
  - Perspective of a Deaf consumer discussing interpreting process;
  - Deaf interpreter instructor can bring in authentic case scenarios to the classroom.
- Experience first hand how Deaf students learn through ASL
- Students still process information in English through:
  - Required Readings
  - Online discussions
  - Essays and journals
- Sign Language Interpreter Space
  - Conference language and “Deaf Heart”
To become a successful interpreter and a successful program graduate, the student must possess a wide range of knowledge and skills not limited to language fluency, knowledge and sensitivity to the diverse Deaf community, being able to successfully interpret between two languages in immediate successions.

(see for example Shaw & Huges, 2006; Bontempo, Napier, Hayes & Brashear, 2014; Gómez, Molina, Benitez, & de Torres, 2007 cited in Hunt & Nicodemus, 2014).
Group Discussion

- Discuss ideas and concerns within your program
- Create some kind of action plan or recommendations for your own programs
Some Strategies

- Videos with English Transcripts
- Creating transcripts
- Captioning for English exercises
- Communication rules for activities in the lab
- Co-Teaching
Thank You

Many Thanks to the students who participated in the study

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