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 doctoral 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.

The Use of Prosodic Markers to Indicate Utterance Boundaries in American Sign Language Interpretation

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Degree: PhD dissertation, University of New Mexico, 2007

This study examines the characteristics of prosodic markers used at phrasal and sentence boundaries in American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation. Five highly skilled interpreters were videotaped as they interpreted a spoken English lecture into ASL. Fifty deaf participants viewed one of the videotaped interpretations and indicated perceived boundaries in the interpreted discourse. These identified points were then examined for the presence of prosodic markers that might be responsible for the perception of a boundary. This dissertation reports on the characteristics of the markers including their frequency, number, duration, and timing. The examination suggests that the production of markers is limited to a specific inventory of behaviors that occur with varying degrees of frequency. The production of multiple prosodic markers at the boundary locations was the most common pattern and may occur in order to accommodate the perceptual needs of the viewer. Given that often seven or more markers were produced within a two-second interval and that the duration of each was approximately one-half to one second, it was anticipated that most of the markers would be produced in a simultaneous or overlapping manner. In fact, nearly one-third of the markers were produced sequentially, but the precise timing of the production of the markers enabled multiple markers to occur in a short space of time. The duration of the most frequent markers from each prosodic category was from approximately one-half to one full second. The duration may reflect the size of the musculature being used during production or the salience of each marker in cueing the viewer to the location of a boundary. This study provides further evidence that there are universals in prosodic systems across language modalities by demonstrating that chunking language into phrasal and sentence units occurs in a visual language modality, as it does in spoken languages. The "amodal" nature of boundaries across languages provides additional insights into language processing, memory, and the importance of prosodic structure.

Dissertation abstracts

Sign Language Linguistic Proficiency Testing: The Possibilities for Libras Interpreters

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Degree: Masters dissertation, Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos, 2008

This is a dissertation on language proficiency testing as applied to hearing, signed language interpreters at the beginning of their professional careers. Due to the diversity of instruments, proceedings, and conceptions of what must be assessed in signed language interpreters (SLI), an investigation of language proficiency testing and the distinction between translation proficiency and professional certification is needed, as well as when it is the most appropriate time to apply specific testing during the various phases of the interpreters' training and professional practice. The theoretical basis of this work includes (a) the distinction between language proficiency and language fluency, (b) the evolution of the proficiency concept, (c) language testing, and (d) a general view of signed language translation and interpreting. The signed language testing that is examined in this study comprises those explicitly labeled as "proficiency tests" and professional/selection tests that comprise signed language proficiency features, even if they are not named as such. With this in mind, two selection tests used in signed language interpreting training courses have been analyzed. These selection tests were administered in Rio Grande do Sul, and included the National Libras Proficiency Examination from the Education Ministry (Prolibras), and the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) from the United States of America. To investigate the competencies of signed language interpreters that would be evaluated, considering test raters points of view, a signed language selection simulation was done. That simulation pointed to the attributes that potential deaf and hearing raters considered to be relevant in signing as the best proficiency boundary for the beginning of signed language interpreters' professional careers, as well as the features that disqualify test takers based on language performance. Based on the data obtained, proposals are made for the improvements in current signed language testing.

The History of American Sign Language Interpreting Education

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Degree: PhD dissertation, Capella University, 2007

The American Sign Language interpreter education field has a rich history that is largely undocumented. Although other educational programs, such as nursing and teaching, have recorded histories, American Sign Language interpreter education in the United States does not. This study provides a chronological history, drawn from the records of several organizations and dating back as far as the eighteenth century, as well as information obtained during interviews with key practitioners. It also provides the profession of interpreter education a full review of the key theories and practitioners, as well as the social, political, and legal perspectives that have influenced the development of the interpreter education field. Recommendations for changes in curricular design are included.