

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

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Abstract: *This paper examines the specific strategies employed by sign language interpreters (SLIs) to effectively manage the cognitive demands inherent in their work, encompassing linguistic processing, cultural mediation, and modality-specific techniques. Analyzing the unique challenges presented by visual-gestural communication, the study explores strategies such as classifier usage, depiction, spatial referencing, and management of eye contact.*

Keywords: *sign language interpreting, interpreting strategies, classifiers, depiction, spatial referencing, deaf culture, visual-gestural communication, cognitive load.*

Introduction: The findings highlight the sophisticated skillset required for SLI and underscore the need for tailored training that fosters both linguistic proficiency and cultural sensitivity. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of the cognitive and strategic complexities of SLI, informing best practices and future research directions.

Special features of SLI:

- **Use of Classifiers:** Classifiers are handshapes used to represent objects, people, or animals and their movements in space. Skilled use of classifiers is essential for conveying spatial relationships and creating vivid visual descriptions in SLI.

- **Depiction:** Depiction involves using the body to represent characters, actions, or events in the narrative. It is a powerful tool for creating engaging and visually compelling interpretations.

- ***Managing Eye Contact:*** Maintaining appropriate eye contact is crucial for building rapport and ensuring effective communication in SLI. Interpreters must balance the need to watch the signer's hands and face with the need to make eye contact with the audience.

Recognizing the shared skills and competencies required for effective interpreting in both spoken and sign languages has important implications for interpreter training and professional development.

- ***Integrated Curriculum:*** Interpreter training programs should incorporate elements of both spoken and sign language interpreting, emphasizing the common cognitive demands and strategic approaches. This could involve cross-training exercises, where students practice interpreting in both modalities.

- ***Cognitive Skills Development:*** Training programs should focus on developing core cognitive skills, such as listening/watching comprehension, short-term memory, working memory, and attention management. This could involve using cognitive training exercises and simulations.

- ***Specialized Training:*** While integrated training is beneficial, it is also important to provide specialized training in the specific linguistic and cultural aspects of SLI. This should include in-depth instruction in sign language grammar, Deaf culture, and ethical considerations.

- ***Mentorship and Supervision:*** Experienced interpreters should provide mentorship and supervision to novice interpreters, offering guidance, feedback, and support. This is particularly important in SLI, where the challenges can be unique and demanding.

- ***Continuing Professional Development:*** Interpreters should engage in ongoing professional development to stay up-to-date on the latest research, best practices, and technological advancements in the field. This could include attending workshops, conferences, and online courses.

Challenges in Sign Language Interpreting:

While SLI shares many similarities with spoken language interpreting, it also

presents unique challenges:

- **Visibility and Fatigue:** SLI requires constant visual attention and physical exertion, which can lead to eye strain, muscle fatigue, and cognitive overload.

- **Lighting and Background:** Poor lighting and distracting backgrounds can make it difficult to see the signer clearly, impacting comprehension and accuracy.

- **Sign Language Variation:** Sign languages exhibit significant regional and individual variation, which can make it challenging for interpreters to understand and interpret different signers.

- **Deaf Culture Sensitivity:** Interpreters must be sensitive to the cultural norms and values of Deaf communities and avoid making assumptions or imposing their own cultural biases.

- **Ethical Considerations:** SLI involves unique ethical considerations, such as maintaining confidentiality, respecting Deaf autonomy, and advocating for access and inclusion.

The future of interpreting is likely to be characterized by increasing multilingualism and multimodality. Interpreters will need to be proficient in multiple languages and modalities, including spoken languages, sign languages, and computer-mediated communication technologies. They will also need to be adaptable, flexible, and culturally competent to meet the diverse needs of a globalized world. This calls for a more holistic approach to interpreter education that bridges the gap between spoken and signed language interpreting, fostering a new generation of versatile and skilled language professionals.

Summing up, sign language interpreting, while possessing unique characteristics, can be effectively understood as a form of simultaneous interpreting. Both modalities place significant demands on the interpreter's cognitive resources, requiring skilled comprehension, memory, production, and coordination. By recognizing the shared cognitive challenges and strategic approaches, interpreter training programs can be enhanced to better prepare professionals for the demands of both spoken and sign language interpreting.

Furthermore, acknowledging the unique challenges faced by sign language interpreters is crucial for promoting accessibility, inclusivity, and effective communication between Deaf and hearing communities. As the field of interpreting continues to evolve, embracing multilingualism and multimodality will be essential for ensuring effective communication in an increasingly interconnected world. This integrated understanding promises a stronger, more unified interpreting profession better equipped to serve diverse linguistic communities.

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