Effectively Teaching Discourse to Sign Language Interpreting Students

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This paper explores discourse features of Australian Sign Language (Auslan) and the need for sign language interpreting students to acquire an understanding of, and skills in, a range of discourse genres in Auslan in order to effectively carry out the work required in their profession. Discourse features of spoken English are outlined and compared with those of signed languages, and an overview of the curriculum and effective teaching approaches used for exploring discourse with sign language interpreting students at Macquarie University is given. The pedagogical process will be detailed in order to convey how Auslan interpreting students analyse, discuss and experience different discourse genres and relate them to their work as interpreters. By engaging in this process, Auslan interpreters are able to develop the necessary skills to effectively negotiate their way in the Deaf community and better understand its language and culture, and provide deaf people using a minority language with access to the majority language and vice versa.

doi: 10.2167/lcc318.0

Keywords: sign language, interpreting, discourse, teaching, contrastive analysis

Linguists only 'discovered' signed languages as indigenous languages in the 1960s, after Stokoe (1960) identified that American Sign Language (ASL) was not just a visual representation of spoken English on the hands. He discovered that ASL had a completely different grammatical structure and should be considered as a language in its own right.

Soon after, other countries conducted research on their own signed languages and noted the same. It was at this time that it was understood that signed languages are different all over the world, in the same way that spoken languages are different, and that sign language is not 'universal'. Signed languages are natural languages – unique to every country. Signed and spoken languages have different structures and modalities (Meier *et al.*, 2002). When we refer to modality, we mean that spoken languages are linear languages (i.e. one word is produced after another), and signed languages are visual-spatial languages (i.e. use the modality of three-dimensional space, where more than one sign can be produced at the same time due to having two hands). Signed languages have their own complex grammatical structures, vocabulary, sociolinguistic variation and discourse rules (see Johnston, 1998; Lucas, 2001; Sutton-Spence & Woll, 1998).

0790-8318/06/03 251-15 $20.00/0
LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND CURRICULUM

Vol. 19, No. 3, 2006

Australian Sign Language (Auslan)

As a consequence of further research in the area, more positive attitudes towards signed languages as real languages have developed (Burns *et al.*, 2001), with the official recognition of signed languages in many countries (Krausneker, 2000). Australian Sign Language (Auslan) was indirectly recognised by the federal government in the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (Dawkins, 1991). The first Auslan dictionary was published in 1989 (Johnston, 1989), and a range of Auslan research publications have appeared since that time (e.g. Johnston, 1991, 2001, 2003a; Schembri, 1996, 2002; Schembri & Johnston, 2004; Schembri *et al.*, 2002).

The majority of Auslan users are severely and profoundly deaf people who are members of the deaf community. This group is comprised of native signers (deaf people born to deaf parents) and non-native signers (deaf people who learn a signed language as a second language later in life). A common reference found in the literature refers to the statistic of 1 per 1000 of the average population being deaf sign language users (as opposed to the general hearing impaired population, who might not all use sign language). As a result of a survey using the 'snowball technique' Hyde and Power (1992) stated that there were almost 16,000 deaf people in Australia using sign language as their first or preferred language. More recently, Johnston (2003b) estimates that there are now only approximately 6000 deaf sign language using people in Australia, and that this minority language is threatened due to evolving technologies such as the cochlear implant and genetic engineering.

Hearing people also use sign language. Some may have deaf parents and therefore grow up as native users of a signed language. These people are often referred to as CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults) and grow up to be bilingual and bicultural (Preston, 1994). Other hearing people that use sign language are relatives, partners, friends and work colleagues of deaf people, who inevitably learn a signed language in order to better communicate with them. The final group of hearing people that use sign language are those professionals that work with deaf children and adults, such as interpreters.

Due to the fact that deaf people cannot access spoken English, interpreters are needed to facilitate communication between deaf and hearing people in a range of different settings. Signed language interpreters can be found working in educational, legal, medical, employment, conference, meetings and theatre environments, to name but a few (see Bidoli, 2004; Metzger, 1999a; Russell, 2002; Seal, 1998; Turner & Pollitt, 2002).

Traditionally, interpreting for deaf people worldwide was an inherent part of the role of welfare workers for the deaf (Scott Gibson, 1992), and the majority of these workers were CODAs. Over time, however, the role of sign language interpreters has been professionalised (Pollitt, 1997), in order to separate the need for help and the need for access to information through sign language. This shift has led to greater numbers of people who did not grow up in the deaf community being attracted to the profession, that is, those who have learnt sign language as a second language. This professionalisation process has led to the establishment of sign language interpreting associations all

over the world and codes of ethics for sign language interpreters, and the development of interpreter training programs.

For new interpreters, exposure to the linguistic, cultural and discoursal elements of the deaf community can be difficult, as hearing people are often treated with suspicion as they are not a member of the language minority group and are regarded as 'outsiders'. Interpreters from non-deaf backgrounds represent hearing people who have historically been the 'oppressors' of deaf people in society (Baker-Shenk, 1986). Deaf people and interpreters find themselves at the potential site of discoursal conflict, as they rely on each other. In order to effectively access information, deaf people need sign language interpreters. In order to effectively do their job, sign language interpreters need deaf people to share aspects of their world view, their language and culture. The training of interpreters plays a huge part in imparting some of this information, and provides opportunities for trainee interpreters to develop their language skills in a safe environment, rather than 'experimenting' with deaf people in the work place.

Training courses for Auslan interpreters are available at community colleges throughout Australia for people to become accredited to work at paraprofessional level. Until recently, however, there were no university programmes available for sign language interpreters in Australia to train to professional level. With changing attitudes towards the professional status of sign language interpreters, the demand for a university programme for Auslan interpreters grew. In response to this demand, a new Postgraduate Diploma in Auslan/English Interpreting was established at Macquarie University in Sydney in 2002, under the auspices of the Linguistics Department, and within the Translation and Interpreting programme.

The Postgraduate Diploma in Auslan/English Interpreting

The Diploma is targeted at working Auslan interpreters who have attained their paraprofessional accreditation from the National Authority for the Accreditation of Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), with at least two years post-accreditation interpreting experience. Therefore a prerequisite to entry is an undergraduate degree, Auslan fluency and basic interpreting experience.

Students enrolling in the Diploma are required to complete four core units: Linguistics of Signed Languages, Discourse Analysis of Auslan Skills, Interpreting Techniques and Interpreting Practice; plus a further three electives choosing from applied linguistics, translation and interpreting subjects. This paper focuses on the pedagogical approach taken in the unit 'Discourse Analysis of Auslan Skills'. The outline and learning outcomes of the unit can be seen in Figure 1.

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the discourse research on spoken English and signed languages, and to introduce the pedagogical approach that is used to teach Auslan discourse to interpreting students enrolled in the unit 'Discourse Analysis of Auslan Skills'. The course has been designed to combine various language teaching theories and assessments and feedback from students has demonstrated that the process is effective. Thus the goal of this paper is to share the effective teaching approach for

> In this subject students develop discourse analysis skills and explore their own Auslan production in different contexts, for the purposes of interpreting. This unit provides students with the opportunity to analyse the discourse features of Auslan texts, by contrasting with equivalent English texts. In particular, the course draws on discourse analysis in spoken languages and other signed languages, and applies them to the description and production of selected Auslan texts. Students are encouraged to consider how Auslan is used in different contexts of situation to identify different discourse features in relation to register, style, form and function. Various discourse types, genres and registers are analysed, with students applying theoretical discussion to the practical development of their own Auslan skills. This unit provides students with the fundamental language analysis skills needed in interpreting, as well as language skill development itself.

Figure 1 Course outline – discourse analysis of Auslan skills

other spoken and signed language interpreter educators to consider, in terms of imparting language and culture in the curriculum.

Previous Research

The notion of 'discourse'

'Discourse' refers to extended samples of spoken, written or signed texts, and to different types of language used in different sorts of social situation. The relationship between language, communicative interaction and context influences discourse types. Goffman (1981) and Schiffrin (1994), among others, have identified that language and culture influence discourse conventions. Discourse analysis has focused on the production of utterances in context, which have led to the identification of various types of discourse, or 'forms of talk', in spoken languages. The key distinction between different discourse types is whether they are planned or unplanned, and the level of formality. This distinction influences the type of communication that takes place and the ensuing interaction.

Austin introduced the notion of Speech Act Theory (Searle *et al.*, 1980), whereby utterances are seen to have power. Speech acts serve different functions, and can be either direct or indirect, incorporating context-appropriate politeness strategies. Alternatively, Joos (1967) discussed the notion of a language 'register', whereby discourse can be categorised according to level of formality, of context and familiarity between interaction participants (frozen, formal, informal, consultative, intimate). However, 'the inherent fuzziness of registers . . . can be misleading' (Hatim & Mason, 1990: 51), so it is important to consider the multifunctional nature of texts as speakers can shift register within spoken texts.

Halliday (1994) takes a functional approach to discourse, identifying that language use takes place within context of situation, within context of culture, and that text can typically be identified as conforming to a discourse structure type (narrative, recount, information report, discussion, explanation, exposition, procedure).

Other discourse 'genres' have been identified, which incorporate typical patterns of language use in terms of lexicon, lexical density, pausing, sentence structure, intonation, hedging, volume, etc. These include monologues and

dialogues (Longacre, 1983), lectures (Goffman, 1981), narrative (Chafe, 1980), jokes (Sacks, 1974) and conversations (Tannen, 1984).

Interactional sociolinguists such as Tannen (1984) and Gumperz (1982) have focused their research on the investigation of naturally occurring conversations in relation to the purpose of a language event, and have found that people adapt their conversational style depending on the person with whom they are talking. By conducting conversational analysis, Ochs *et al.* (1996) identified conversational turn-taking structures (the use of openings, closings, asides and interruptions).

Taking an ethnographic approach, Hymes (1967) explored the notion of 'communicative competence' and the need to identify the participants, goal and context of a speech event (such as a lecture) and its inherent speech acts (such as asking questions) in order to make sense of discourse conventions. Grice's (1975) 'cooperative principle' incorporates the maxims of quantity, quality, manner and relevance as being necessary for the creation of basic meaning. Other meaning is created by 'breaking' one (or more) of the maxims.

Discourse types in signed languages

So do these discourse types/genres/forms of talk apply to signed languages? Can signed language discourse be categorised in the same way? In terms of general signed language research, the majority of research has focused on American Sign Language (ASL), with some studies on British Sign Language (BSL), Auslan and other European signed languages. Signed language research has tended to follow the linguistic philosophy of the institution where the research is being conducted, with some researchers arguing that spoken and signed languages are different in structure, with others asserting that there are similarities between spoken and signed languages.

Researchers who adopted the Hallidayan functional approach to analysing signed languages include Frishberg (1976), and Deuchar (1984) who identified that signed languages are 'topic dominant' languages, typically taking on a topic-comment structure (similar to Chinese); as opposed to 'subject dominant' languages (such as English), which adopt a subject-verb-object structure.

Studies conducted by Metzger (1999a), Roy (2000) and Zimmer (1989) were influenced by interactional sociolinguistics, and focused on turn-taking strategies used by ASL users and ASL interpreters, ASL register and discourse/topic markers.

Baker and Padden (1978), Coulter (1979) and Padden (1976) completed seminal research on ASL from an ethnographic perspective – observing ASL users' strategies for attention-getting, use of eye gaze, interruptions, politeness, use of rhetorical questions and 'holding the floor'. Bahan and Petitto (1980) identified the notion of 'role shift' in ASL; Bahan (1996) analysed the use of eye gaze in ASL, and Supalla (1982) explored the use of 'classifiers' in ASL.

Research on signed language discourse has found that there are similarities between discourse types and conventions used in signed and spoken languages (Metzger & Bahan, 2001). Signed languages do appear to have formal and informal language use, although established discourse genres tend to be more influenced by the dominant spoken language in formal settings, such as court, and university lectures. Identification of discourse features in

signed languages tend to focus on eye gaze, eye blinks, non-manual features (facial expression, eyebrow and cheek movement, and head, shoulder, and body movement), mouthing, patterns of footing shifts, spatial shifts, signing size ('volume'), prosody and pauses. Similarly, Gee and Kegl (1983) conducted a study of ASL narratives by breaking down the elicited texts into semantic or information units. They found that particular patterns of prosody and pause structure are used in ASL narratives.

Mather and Winston (1998) and Winston (1995) investigated the use of spatial mapping and footing shifts in ASL, and the use of conceptual and referential space, 'scaffolding' to structure information, and the relationship between 'internal' and 'external' contexts and the use of space in signed language text. Further research on turn-taking has been conducted by Martinez (1995) and Coates and Sutton-Spence (2001) in looking at openings and closings, and pausing in conversations.

The notion of 'constructed action' has been heavily debated in signed language research, in the same way that constructed dialogue (reported speech) has been discussed in spoken language discourse research (Tannen, 1984). In signed language discourse, constructed action incorporates the use of role-shift, pantomime, gesture, and 'acting' (Liddell & Metzger, 1998).

As a result of these various studies, Ingram (2000) has identified six major discourse types in signed languages: narrative, procedural, explanatory, argumentative, hortatory and conversational. He stated that features such as ordering of signs, rate of delivery and pausing, use of space, mood and register; and other characteristics including role shift, use of classifiers, use of rhetorical questions and incomplete sentences, are used differently according to the discourse type.

Further studies of the effectiveness of interpretation between English and ASL have been carried out in relation to appropriate use of such discourse features (e.g. Armstrong, 2003; Stone, 2001; Winston & Monikowski, 2003).

To date, no wide-scale research has been carried out on Auslan in order to identify discourse types. However, a small-scale basic study carried out by Thornton (2003) for the purposes of Auslan teaching curriculum development, verifies that Auslan discourse types are very similar to those identified for other signed languages. The only major linguistic study of Auslan interpreting was carried out by Napier (2002), which analysed the linguistic strategies used by interpreters to convey meaning, and whether the language was used appropriately to the context of situation.

Thus the general literature on spoken and signed language discourse is used as a theoretical foundation to explore how Auslan is used in various contexts. The pedagogical approach used has been developed specifically to ensure that Auslan interpreting students acquire knowledge about the discourse and communication genres of Auslan, and relate this knowledge to their work through the practical application of knowledge and development of Auslan skills. Metzger (1999b) has emphasised that Goffman's work, and an understanding of 'forms of talk', is the foundation of interpreting, especially in dialogic settings.

Interpreters may be present at the interface of any type of communication, between deaf child and teacher, deaf employee and boss, deaf presenter and conference audience, deaf applicant and interviewer . . . the list goes on. Thus it is imperative that interpreters are exposed to, and are made aware of, how

language use shifts in various contexts in order that they can incorporate appropriate discourse features into their own Auslan production when interpreting.

Towards a pedagogy for adult learners

Higher education teaching philosophy is now focused more on meeting needs of students generally, especially professionals undertaking vocational-related courses, such as those taking the signed language interpreting diploma.

Knowles *et al.* (2005) advocate for an androgogical approach to adult education. They define androgogy as 'the art and science of helping adults learn', adopting a process-based, rather than content-based, approach to teaching and learning. Teaching is guided by students' self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning and motivation to learn. Vella (2002) outlines 12 principles for effective adult learning: (1) learners providing assessment of what needs to be learned, (2) safety in the environment and learning process, (3) a sound relationship between teacher and student, (4) sequence of content and reinforcement, (5) action with reflection, (6) respect for learners as decision-makers, (7) recognition of ideas, feelings and action related aspects of learning, (8) immediacy of learning, (9) clear roles and role development, (10) teamwork and use of small groups, (11) engagement of learners in what they are learning and (12) accountability.

A constructivist approach to learning highlights the importance of reference to the student's own experience and embodies the notion of active learning, wherein the main interest is in the process by which the learner reaches an understanding of the structure of the learning tasks. Wilson (1981) supports the consideration of the nature of the learner's individual experiences, and how he or she interprets those experiences, in the teaching and learning environment. Thus in order to constructively encourage students to derive meaning from the learning process, it is necessary to establish a good learning atmosphere with varied teaching strategies (Druger, 1996). According to Arendt (2003: 2), 'Constructivism is ... a theoretical framework for carrying out didactically effective second language teaching ... [which] recognizes the importance of didactic procedures enabling students the application of most successful learning strategies and techniques'.

The notion of collaborative learning supports an active learning approach, by allowing students to work together where they can be immersed in challenging tasks. By recognising that learners are diverse, variable collaborative learning tasks can be set for students which require them to explore or apply the new concepts they have been introduced to, in a search for understanding, deriving meaning and consolidation of learning (Leigh Smith & MacGregor, 1992). By combining a variety of interactive exercises, this caters for a range of student learning needs, and enables them to learn from each other as well as the teacher.

In order to achieve realistic active learning, the interface between higher education and the workplace needs to be responsive to the real learning needs of individual students. Increased interaction between higher education and working life, with the integration of theory and practice, is more evident from four viewpoints: (1) student learning and development of expertise, (2) educational institutions and staff, (3) working life organisations, (4) society and the system of education (Tynjälä *et al.*, 2003). In order to maintain

and enhance the link between professional education and work-based experience and ensure the success of higher education programmes, some kind of practicum experience is critical (Valo, 2000). This is particularly important in sign language interpreter training, as it provides students with an opportunity to relate theory to practice, and application of their learning in the development of their professional practice skills.

Different teaching strategies can be used to engage students in critical thinking about their own skills, experiences and knowledge, and establish a safe environment for them to experiment and develop their skills base. Students learn better when courses are experiential in nature (Druger, 1996; Wilson, 1981), so content can be introduced by relating to students' own experiences and understanding, so all discussions and exercises are meaningful and relevant. Nonetheless, students must take some responsibility for their own learning (Small & Lankes, 1996), thus they should be encouraged to engage in discussions by contributing from their own experience, which contextualises the learning and facilitates independent learning. By considering the students' perspective when planning teaching programmes, the learning experienced can be enhanced (Ramsden, 1992).

Higher education promotes critical thinking and reflective practice, which works most effectively within an active learning framework. Videotaping exercises which can be reviewed to reflect on learning outcomes either in a collaborative group discussion, or independently outside of the classroom is an effective active learning strategy (Van Gulick & Lynch, 1996), particularly for interpreter training, as interpreting students can analyse and reflect on the effectiveness of their interpretations.

In evaluating the literature, the following points are crucial to ensuring effective pedagogy: (1) active learning, (2) student-centred learning, (3) experiential learning, and (4) interface between learning and professional skills development (i.e. demands of the workplace).

Teaching Auslan Discourse

The 'Discourse Analysis of Auslan Skills' unit is offered in distance mode using a blended approach, combining study guides and reading packages with online discussions and on-campus intensive teaching blocks. Students are provided with a book of readings and lecture notes to introduce theoretical components and a series of tasks and reflection questions to complete each week. Students attend two on-campus sessions, each for three days. These sessions focus on the application of theory to practice, which is the focus of this paper.

Students enrolled in this unit have already acquired Auslan to a reasonable level of fluency and are expected to develop their sophistication in the language use as a result of the course. It is not therefore a conventional second language teaching course focusing on the development of vocabulary, but rather a course in exploring and enhancing understanding of the use of Auslan, and development of communicative competence in different discourse genres and text types.

Drawing on linguistics and second language teaching theories, students are exposed to discourse analysis (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Riggenbach, 1999),

contrastive analysis (Chesterman, 1998), language shadowing (Ilg & Lambert, 1996), language output and input (Shinichi, 2002), and negative feedback and positive evidence (Iwashita, 2003).

Initially students are introduced to theoretical concepts of register and discourse through reading and discussing literature on spoken English discourse (e.g. Schiffrin *et al.*, 2001), and then exploring the relationship to signed languages (Metzger & Bahan, 2001). Students then engage in the identification of registers, discourse genres and text types in Auslan based on their own observations of, and experiences of using, Auslan as interpreters.

The aim of the unit is to focus on a range of discourse types that interpreters typically encounter in their everyday work, especially in educational settings as high numbers of Auslan interpreters are employed to work in classrooms with deaf children and adolescents. The discourse types include: formal and creative text (songs, poetry), narrative (child and adult), informal text (jokes), formal text (lectures, conference papers), interaction (conversation, interview).

The pedagogical process then concentrates on each of these discourse types/genres, and follows the same ten step approach (Napier, 2004), which draws on the work of Winston and Monikowski (2000):

(1) Discussion of relevant readings (e.g. Rayman, 1999) (group). This provides students with an opportunity to explore the theoretical perspective of discourse, which provides them with a foundation for practical application.
(2) Brainstorm of discourse features in spoken English within the genre (e.g. use of terminology, use of pausing, use of colloquialisms) (group).
(3) Brainstorm of discourse features in Auslan within the genre (e.g. use of spatial mapping, use of fingerspelling, size of signing space) (group).
(4) Watch example(s) of Auslan text in this genre (e.g. a conference paper presented in Auslan) (group).
(5) Discuss any key discourse features noticed (group).
(6) Watch text again with students shadowing signing (individual). This allows students to 'feel' the discourse features that are being used kinesthetically, which makes them more tangible and more easily noticeable. For example, a deaf native Auslan user may use a certain discourse marker that a student has never thought of using before in that context.
(7) Discussion regarding how it felt – reflection on key discourse features which are then compared with those identified in the brainstorm (group).
(8) Students work to produce their own Auslan text within the genre (e.g. a children's narrative) (pairs).
(9) Presentation of text to the rest of group. Students then receive feedback from the teacher and other students on the discourse features used and their appropriateness for the genre, with suggestions given for improvement through positive role-modelling.
(10) Discussion of implications for interpreting in different contexts through identification of hypothetical interpreting situations (group). For example, 'Imagine you are interpreting for a deaf child at storytime in kindergarten. What have you learned from this process that would impact on your linguistic decisions when interpreting?'

The process scaffolds the students learning so that they reflect on each stage of the process, and apply theoretical discussion and observation to the practical development of their own Auslan skills.

All discussions about English take place in English, and all discussions about Auslan take place in Auslan in order to get students thinking and analysing in the language on which they are focusing. At the very end of the last on-campus session, students work in small groups to develop their own 'model' of Auslan register and discourse types, which consolidates all of the discussion and practice they have experienced during the course.

Assessment

Assessment involves four key tasks.

(1) Students keep a reflective journal of their skills development, commenting on the lecture notes, readings and practical tasks – an effective process for students to 'learn through assessment' (Woodward, 1998).
(2) Students write a research report based on the discourse analysis of five minutes of naturally produced signed or spoken text. They are required to record and transcribe the text and analyse certain discourse features, and relate discussion to the literature.
(3) Students produce three discourse-specific presentations and a critique. At the first on-campus block, students are required to select a genre and text type (e.g. a lecture) and prepare a short presentation to be shown in front of the class. A deaf native sign language user and teacher is present and gives immediate feedback on the appropriateness of discourse features used. The presentation is also videotaped, and the deaf person takes away the tape and provides detailed written feedback based on a template assessment criteria. This process is repeated at the second block, where students select a different genre (e.g. children's story). For the final assessment, students must choose one presentation to re-do and submit – incorporating the feedback received and highlighting the features that have been addressed. They must also complete a critique and response to the feedback received for the other presentation, addressing what they would do differently if they were to re-film the presentation.
(4) Students must respond to three discussion questions online, which relate to either the practical tasks or the readings.

Effectiveness

This pedagogical process has proven to be effective in getting interpreting students to concentrate on identifying features of, and developing skills in, Auslan (which is invariably their second language), before exploring the impact on their interpreting. The ultimate goal is to ensure that interpreters are producing Auslan discourse features appropriate to the context when interpreting from spoken English into Auslan. Examples of evaluation comments from students in response to the question 'What I found most useful/interesting and why' can be seen in Figure 2.

- Discussion of the different approaches to discourse analysis as it linked with the reading and explained the concepts.
- Shadowing signed texts provided opportunity to pick out discourse features more so than watching the text.
- Opportunity to see examples of a variety of discourse types in Auslan.
- Watching and shadowing the videos.
- It was a learning curve for me and I will now go away and do lots of reading to consolidate it all and apply it to my signing abilities.
- Analysing video texts and applying what was learnt in theoretical discussion.
- Great to have the opportunity to 'perform' and receive feedback.
- I think the analysis of existing texts and relating to the brainstorming session was most useful as it gave us an opportunity to apply the theory.
- I have really enjoyed the whole course and feel inspired about interpreting/exploring/analysing Auslan.
- Analysis of sample texts and then analysis of our own Auslan production helped relate theory to practice.
- Feedback on presentations.
- Designing model of Auslan discourse/register – helped to consolidate everything I have learned.

Figure 2 Student evaluation comments

Conclusion

This paper has explored discourse features of Auslan as compared to spoken English, and has outlined the effective pedagogical process used to enhance the Auslan skills of sign language interpreting students in relation to the identification and use of appropriate discourse features. The pedagogical approach used draws on linguistic, second language teaching and educational research and theory. Interpreters are communication professionals, and the education of interpreters in Auslan discourse is essential to ensure their linguistic skills and professional competence. In doing so, interpreters develop an understanding of appropriate discourse features to use in different contexts when conversing with, and interpreting for, deaf people. By demonstrating appropriate linguistic, cultural and discoursal behaviours, Auslan interpreters can effectively negotiate their way in the deaf community and its culture, and empower deaf people to access wider society by providing effective interpreting services.

This 10-step pedagogical approach can be utilised by teachers of other signed languages, and could also be adapted for the purposes of teaching discourse to other spoken language students.

It should be recognised, however, that although effective, the pedagogy relies on research and literature from other spoken and signed languages. There is a severe dearth of research on Auslan discourse, and in order to improve the theoretical foundations of this educational approach it is imperative that further research is conducted. Similarly, more research is needed on Auslan interpreting, in order to benefit interpreting students with a greater understanding of the linguistic process involved in interpreting in different discourse environments.

Acknowledgements

Thanks go to Associate Professor Trevor Johnston, Dr Adam Schembri, Dr Debra Aarons, Darlene Thornton and Stephen Nicholson for their input into the course.

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