Research Summary Paper 2: Implications of Code Choices and Consequences for

Educational Interpreting

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Due to continuous contact between languages in most multilingual communities,

interpreting exists to mediate linguistic and sociolinguistic variation. As this intensive language

contact occurs, language interference, retaining forms of the source language that impede the

effectiveness of the message in the target language, must be limited to promote linguistic

transference and intentional bilingual behavior to improve message fidelity. Interpreters may

implement code-switching, mixing, and lexical borrowing to achieve this goal. Other

sociolinguistic pressures, such as language dominance, may impose consequences on minority

languages regarding language death or developing pidgins. Interpreters must recognize and

navigate these distinctions to maintain message and cultural efficacy.

ASL-English Language Contact

With visual, aural, and oral channels available for coding linguistic information when

interpreting for signed languages, language-contact distinctions are even more complex.

Typically, as ASL navigates in an English-dominated society and deaf people within a hearing

world, forms of English are more frequent within ASL discourse. However, the contrary also

occurs when ASL is the first language, most commonly in Children of Deaf Adults or some

interpreters. Although viewed by some as a deficit or lack of language acquisition,

code-switching, code-mixing, and lexical borrowing is natural to bilingualism as it is highly

patterned, rule-governed, and valuable linguistic strategies (Davis, 2009). Therefore, interpreters

can transfer cross-linguistic information from the source language using specific tactics without

violating the target language. For example, when interpreting from English to ASL, interpreters

may represent English words using fingerspelling, mouth movements, or literal intent in idioms

(Davis, 2009). Thus, linguistic transference occurs due to an interpreter's bilingualism and conscious effort to provide a clear message not despite their second-language capabilities. However, interpreters must avoid overuse of fingerspelling, mouthing, and literal vs. semantically correct sign choices to prevent language interference.

Interpreting signed-spoken languages is also unique in that interpreters can code-switch simultaneously. Customarily, code-switching may only occur when a complete language switch occurs; however, due to ASL's cross-modality, interpreters may represent sign language and spoken language simultaneously when using Simultaneous Communication (SimCom). Additionally, this simultaneous code-switching may even differ between speech and sign-driven. For example, choosing to sign more ASL or English-based while speaking. This opportunity, unique to interpreters of signed languages, allows concurrent access to multiple languages. However, equal access to both languages using SimCom is often unavailable due to the linguistic differences between ASL and English. Therefore, to avoid language interference, it is more appropriate for interpreters to participate in "code-mixing" behavior rather than "code-mixing." This may be achieved using lexical borrowing, mouth morphemes, lexicalized fingerspelling, or initialized signs to transfer differentiating linguistic material within sentences rather than interrupting discourse.

Lexical Borrowing

Lexical borrowing exists as an aspect of code-mixing rather than code-switching because of the eventual assimilation that prevents a term from being distinguished from the native language. Lexical borrowing occurs within the linguistic constraints of the target language and is the repetition of single words from the target language until they have demonstrated cultural

recognition or acceptance. Additionally, lexical borrowing may only occur due to consistent language contact and the bilingual ability of the user.

Mouth Morphemes

Another example of simultaneous code-mixing is using mouth morphemes in ASL and other sign languages, emphasizing the contact between signed and spoken languages. Rather than code-switching and interrupting communication of one language to continue in another, features can be produced simultaneously to convey meaning in ASL. This may include non-manual markers depicting adverbs or adjectives such as MM, CHA, PAH, etc., or visually representing specific English words such as proper nouns (Davis, 2009). These signs may represent multiple English words in times of emphasis. Non-manual markers differ in that they hold no specific relationship to English, yet all mouth morphemes are rule-governed, patterned, and intentional behavior used to convey linguistic information.

Lexicalized Fingerspelling

Although initially hypothesized to be English-dependent, it has recently been established that fingerspelling is an ASL phonological component. In a pattern similar to lexical borrowing, an English word can be fingerspelled repeatedly until it becomes an ASL sign due to undergoing systematic changes. The word may take on movement or other semantic changes atypical of other fingerspelled words in that the word becomes recognizable by how it is signed rather than each letter. Thus, the word eventually becomes an integral part of the ASL lexicon (Davis, 2009).

Initialized Signs

Rather than fingerspelling entire words, individual letters may also be used to "initialize" an ASL sign with the first letter of its corresponding English term, which is most often used in specific settings. However, like with any code-switching strategy, overgeneralization and

overreliance on initialized signs may contribute to language interference. For example, when other users or interpreters outside of the specific constraints in which an initialized sign was created are expected to understand the meaning of the initialized sign. This can be especially dangerous in educational settings as interpreters often serve as language models for deaf students and must prepare students to learn successfully throughout life using different resources rather than just their current environment. Educational interpreters must also be aware of how sign initialization is used within the Deaf Community.

Implications of Varying Conditions and Choices for Educational Interpreters

Although community interpreters enter a variety of settings, encounter limitless topics, and must interpret for individuals from diverse backgrounds, educational interpreting is unique in that interpreters may be tasked with interpreting any teaching-learning topic along with units of math, writing, science, etc., in a span of six hours. Additionally, as deaf adults may have diverse backgrounds, deaf students also emerge from varying cultural, economic, educational, and sociolinguistic backgrounds. Deaf children also differ in their type/severity of hearing loss, family background, language development, language access, and English literacy, which an educational interpreter must be aware of at all times. Also of notable impact are the environmental, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and paralinguistic demands the interpreter must attempt to control. Environmental demands refer to any setting-specific condition that may impact learning or interpreting as interpersonal demands describe any relationship or interaction within the current environment, intrapersonal demands include personal thoughts, feelings, distractions, etc., that may inhibit the ability to interpret effectively, and paralinguistic demands reference anything that may impact the source message such as the speaker's tone, volume, etc. Adding to this complexity is the variation of what intended product in the target language is

required of an educational interpreter. Within educational settings, an interpreter may be asked to transliterate using a range of English-based coding systems, communicate signed and spoken language simultaneously using SimCom, or translate frozen visual texts into ASL. Each of these requirements may vary depending on the setting, the student for which they are interpreting, the goal of the lesson, requirements of the IEP, etc and frequent with opportunity. Therefore, the scope of practice for an educational interpreter is all-inclusive and requires constant management, decision-making, and strategic navigation to avoid linguistic interference.

Transliteration

Most commonly found in educational settings, transliteration is the attempt to visually represent English words and grammar. Developed by a committee and enforced by educational policy, signed systems are unnatural as they do not demonstrate language acquisition patterns within a community. Instead, these systems are artificially created, assuming that deaf children will learn to read, write, and speak English by seeing it manually. However, when English grammatical structures are converted to a visual form, children have difficulty learning functional categories and English morphology and can only produce them in fragments (Davis, 2009). This is likely because ASL is morphologically complex in ways English is not. Interestingly, through a generation that has been taught using English-based sign systems, literacy scores of deaf students have not improved since the implementation of these systems three decades ago (Davis, 2009).

MCE Systems in Education

Variation of the representation of English through sign systems by educators and transliterators due to philosophical reasons and inadequate language skills also threatens deaf students. For example, transliteration using sign systems has been found to exist as sign-driven,

which incorporates more ASL features focused on providing meaning, speech-driven, which is frequent with English features of mouthing, initialized signs, English word order, etc., or hybrid in which transliterators switch between signing more English or ASL dominant. Additionally, specific manually coded English (MCE) systems exist within these sign and speech-driven categories. This includes total communication, which is speech-driven and represents English with a sign corresponding to each spoken word. Although this system borrows heavily from the ASL lexicon, ASL signs are often altered or initialized to maintain English grammatical structure at the expense of ASL morphology and semantic meaning (Davis, 2009). SimCom is another example of an MCE system; however, it attempts to provide spoken English and sign simultaneously. This system has been found to often bypass the linguistic, syntactic, and semantic patterns of signed language due to frequent omissions, misrepresentations, or misuse of signs critical to the meaning of the message.

Despite the frequency of MCE systems in deaf education, deaf children taught MCE with little or no exposure to ASL often develop ASL features such as classifiers, verb agreement, and use of space, demonstrating properties instrumental to visual languages. However, although the resilience of this skill development is remarkable, the lack of a solid ASL linguistic foundation is critical. Unfortunately, as MCE systems are primarily educationally based, deaf children of hearing families are often unable to communicate with other members of the Deaf Community because they do not have access to the development of a natural language. Therefore, not only do deaf students not learn English through sign systems, but they are also actively obstructed from developing necessary language and communication skills. This calls into question the efficacy of MCE systems and the intentions of those who encourage and teach these methods as linguistic models for deaf children.

Inaccuracy of the Pidgin Signed English Label

In 1973, "Pidgin Signed English" was coined to describe the variation of code choices and usage of ASL-English bilinguals (Davis, 2009). A pidgin results from adults who use mutually unintelligible languages to achieve a mutual goal. Using pidgin is restricted to specific purposes, such as trade or improving socioeconomic status, not to learn another language. Once removed from the situation requiring pidgin, adults return to using their first language. However, "PSE," the combination of English word order, prepositions, English expressions, the mouthing of English, ASL non-manual markers, role shifting, and ASL use of space, is due to the intensive contact between English and ASL. This system has continued throughout multiple generations and is linguistically complex; therefore, it exists as a creole and is better described as contact signing. Some researchers also refer to contact signing as an interlanguage in the progression of mastery in the target language as it often contains grammar borrowed from the source language, overgeneralizations, inappropriate lexicon, and may lack usage rules.

Despite the inaccuracy of the label "pidgin," the term "PSE" is still frequently used today to refer to contact signing. Additionally, contact signing is most often used by ASL-English bilinguals. It is specifically prevalent in educational settings as a "default" for students who do not sign ASL or have a complete grasp of an MCE system. This is due to the teachers, interpreters, and other deaf educators who lack proficiency in ASL yet are responsible for often language-deprived students. Therefore, the term "PSE" is primarily used to justify the ill-prepared and unethical educators who do not possess the language skills to provide language-deprived deaf students with adequate access to language and education.

Conclusion

Cross-linguistic and cross-modality differences between ASL and English and the variety of educational coding approaches make discerning the impacts of the contact between these languages extremely difficult. It is natural for bilinguals to vary in their mixing of languages due to this language contact; however, it is bound by spoken language generally being the primary language and the constraints of attempting to interpret simultaneously into their second language, ASL. There is also an extensive range of sign systems and coding choices to represent English visually; many of these systems are problematic for linguists as they deviate from natural language-acquisition patterns created by educational committees and enforced by policy. However, it is more complex than labeling systems as natural or unnatural due to the intensive contact between signed and spoken languages. What is not ambiguous, though, is the false assumption that these systems were created so that deaf children will learn English by seeing it manually. This is untrue, as deaf children learn English through text and require intensive teaching in this area, not through MCE. It is also important to note that interpreting is not nor should be expected to be equivalent to direct ASL instruction due to the demands of simultaneous interpretation, the variation of deaf students in their ASL and English competencies, and the inability of visual languages to represent specific literacy-learning techniques available in oral languages (Davis, 2009).

Although not a replacement for direct instruction, qualified educational interpreters are a necessity to promote the education and development of deaf students. However, one of the most significant challenges of interpreter programs is selecting and preparing students who are truly ASL-English bilingual. This is primarily due to the short time frame of formal interpreting education. Within this short time frame, priority is allocated to language acquisition and learning of the role of interpreters. Additionally, most programs focus on a specific specialization and

instead encourage students to become "interpreting generalists." This means that interpreters often enter a specific setting unprepared and acquire the necessary specialized skills in the field. This reality is especially threatening when considering that most interpreters begin in educational settings where they work with vulnerable children who are often language-deprived. Most interpreter educators recognize the importance of mentoring and field observation supervision before entering the field full-time to limit the consequences of inadequate preparation. For interpreting programs that offer specialized instruction in educational settings, educators are faced with the challenge of to what extent interpreters should be prepared to use sign systems. Due to the variation of sign systems available, it is difficult to determine which systems interpreters may be asked to utilize. Therefore, it is critical that interpreters be aware of the educational objectives that led to the creation of these sign systems and their unnatural existence.

The inarguable variation of linguistic and sociolinguistic factors and situation-dependent pressures exerted on educational interpreters pose challenges to interpreters and interpreting education. The main shortcomings of educational interpreting are due to the time and processing constraints of simultaneous interpreting, inadequate and unequal first language development of deaf students, and the difference between signed-spoken modalities (Davis, 2009). Each component provides the opportunity for language interference and must be recognized to implement strategies and strive for the highest degree of language transference, access, and fidelity.

References

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