

Discoursing 'dis course: applying discourse analysis in an undergraduate signed language interpreting course

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore a strategy for teaching undergraduate American Sign Language/English interpreting students about discourse types and genre boundaries. To do so, we describe a project-based learning approach employed with a cohort of second-year students, detail the assessment method, and analyze students' work. Specifically, the project required students to read a scholarly paper in the field of Interpreting Studies and create an American Sign Language video-recorded reformulation of the paper in a different discourse genre (e.g., a television news broadcast or a product infomercial). The findings indicate that, despite exhibiting a concerning lack of American Sign Language proficiency, students demonstrated remarkable creativity and critical thinking abilities. Students created video-recorded reformulations that incorporated salient points from their assigned articles while also applying principles of discourse analysis learned throughout the semester. Taken together, the findings suggest that applied discourse analysis projects and inter-genre reformulation activities can be used as a part of valuable pre-translation and translation training.

Keywords

Discourse analysis, genre, pedagogy, assessment, signed languages, translation.

As any good interpreter or translator will attest, context is key. The ability to analyze language and communication in a wide variety of discourse contexts therefore is a foundational skill not only in the interpreting and translation process, but also in the education of interpreters. Educators who train students for general interpreting and translation work must prepare them for the broad and diverse discourse settings in which they will work. In this paper, we explore a novel approach to teaching discourse analysis to undergraduate American Sign Language/English interpreting students. In so doing, we describe the theoretical backdrop of discourse analysis in interpreter education, provide an overview of the project that students completed, and explore the results of our qualitative analysis of student submissions.

1. Theoretical overview

In this section, we explore discourse analysis and interpreting, discuss discourse analysis in interpreter education, and provide a brief overview of discourse in signed languages. This review of the literature undergirds our overarching research questions: What aspects of learning are evident in students' interlingual reformulations across discourse boundaries, and how do interlingual reformulations contribute to discourse analysis skills?

1.1 Discourse analysis and interpreting

The analysis of discourse is at the very heart of communication. However, the term *discourse*, which is “used in such a variety of fields as to defy a standard definition” bears the burden of being both nebulous and particularly prevalent (Pöchhacker 2016: 54). Despite this, a broader approach may suffice: defined by the structural linguist Stubbs (1983: 1) as “language above the sentence or above the clause”, discourse is the lifeblood of interpretation and translation activity. Regardless of modality, language combination, setting, or specialty area, interpreters engage with discourse on a daily basis. Although many definitions of discourse analysis have been proposed, we suggest the relatively simple one offered by Winston/Roy (2015: 95): “Simply put, discourse analysis is the study of language in use”.

As Nida/Tabor (1982: 102) note, a translator's focus “should be on the paragraph, and to some extent the total discourse”. Despite the comparatively more ephemeral and immediate nature of interpreting, discourse analysis is integral to the work of interpreters. Because interpreters are central to participating in communication with primary interlocutors, an understanding of discourse and discourse analysis is central to effective interpreting (Garzone 2000).

Interpreters work with and within discourse across myriad genres¹ and communication mediums. For this reason, interpreting is – by its very nature – a form of applied discourse analysis. Using discourse analysis to study interpreting, Roy (2000) analyzed an interpreted encounter between a professor and her student. The case study of the discourse in just one interpreted conversation led to a thorough analysis of interpreting as a discourse process, including, for example, an exploration of the various options available to interpreters when managing overlapping talk.² However, discourse is not only relevant in dialogue interpreting; it is part and parcel of all interpreting work.

A key facet of discourse and discourse analysis is linguistic register, a “configuration of meanings that are typically associated with a particular situational configuration of field, mode and tenor” (Halliday/Hasan 1985: 38-39). First proposed by Joos in his *The Five Clocks* (1967), some linguists classify register or styles into five categories: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. However, analyses of register now extend beyond Joos’ notion of five static categories. For instance, Giménez Moreno (2006: 93) notes that the five styles “have not been revised, further developed and made applicable to specific contexts inside the whole spectrum of daily communication”. Instead, Giménez Moreno (*Ibid.*) argues that classifying registers is more nuanced and challenging than it may appear at first glance and suggests a typology of four registers (family, amicable, social, and professional) that accounts for factors including: personal or public life, participants/roles, and communicative setting. Further, register analysis is relevant to research in signed languages and signed language interpreting. For example, Stone (2011: 152) employed register analysis to investigate British Sign Language source language texts in an attempt “to ascertain whether the interpreters are able to match register, discourse type, a variety of stylistic scales, and text function corresponding to the sL [source language] text”.

Because language use is central to how people are perceived and perceive one another, interpreters must consistently and accurately analyze register in interpreted encounters. A competent interpreter’s language production will vary, for example, between an interpreted medical appointment and a conversation between close friends on an interpreted phone call. Although it has been suggested that interpreters generally prioritize understanding over preservation of register in the process of interlingual transfer (Hatim/Mason 1990), register cannot be overlooked as a key dynamic in the intersection of language use and communication. Indeed, as Hale (1997: 52-53) noted in the context of court interpreting, issues with register across source and target language can have “very negative implications” for participants, pointing to the need for interpreters to “be made aware of the significance of linguistic choices, not only in terms of accuracy of

- 1 In this paper, we adopt the definition of genre offered by Fairclough (2003: 65): “the specifically discursive aspect of ways of acting and interacting in the course of social events.” For an in-depth review of genre and interpreting, see Kellett Bidoli (2012).
- 2 The four options for interpreters that Roy (2000) identified were: 1) stopping a speaker or speakers, 2) ignoring overlapping talk until the end of a turn and then interpreting it, 3) disregarding overlapping talk, and 4) ignoring overlapping talk momentarily and then offering a turn to one of the speakers.

content but also in terms of importance of communicative style in forming impressions and – ultimately – deciding the fate of a witness in court”. As a feature of language across all discourse genres and communicative encounters, register variation is not unique to court interpreting; rather, an understanding of discourse analysis and register is critical for interpreters working in a wide variety of settings. To illustrate this, in the next section, we explore the value of discourse analysis more broadly in interpreter education.

1.2 Discourse analysis in interpreter education

Teaching discourse analysis to interpreters and interpreting students is not a novel idea. In fact, discourse analysis has a rich history in interpreter education and has been applied in a variety of ways. For example, Napier (2004: 49) describes an approach to teaching discourse analysis to postgraduate students encompassing register, discourse, genre, and text types in spoken English and Australian Sign Language (Auslan), with activities and discussion centered around identifying relevant discourse features, with the aim of students “identifying features of, and developing skills in, Auslan”. Winston and Monikowski describe the use of discourse mapping in interpreter education, with the goal of identifying specific discourse features within a text and creating a “meaningful visual representation” (2000: 17). By identifying structures, mapping them visually, and eventually translating them, students become more familiar with textual cohesion within and across languages. These approaches – and the value of teaching discourse analysis and discourse features – need not be language-specific to Auslan/English interpreters and interpreting students. Of the sixteen bachelor’s degree American Sign Language/English interpreter education programs accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (CCIE),³ three offer coursework specifically on discourse analysis, with several other programs offering parallel coursework (e.g., comparative linguistics).

Discourse analysis has also been explored in the context of translator training under the auspices of *textual* analysis. For example, in a course for translators explored in the Danish context, advanced translation students engage in “detailed analyses of texts before translating, which is a luxury rarely possible in ordinary translation classes because it is too time-consuming” (Trosborg 2000: 185). Trosborg (*Ibid.*) contends that a thorough approach to the analysis of the source text (ST) and discourse “gives the translator a thorough overview and the possibility of maintaining or adapting the ST in a conscious way to meet the demands of the target text (TT) skopos”.

3 A list of programs accredited by CCIE is available at <<http://www.ccie-accreditation.org/accredited-programs.html>>.

1.3 Discourse in signed languages

We have already hinted that the analysis of discourse does not apply solely to spoken and written languages. As natural human languages, signed languages likely number 150 or more across the world.⁴ In the decades since the pioneering work of William Stokoe (1960/2005), signed language linguistics researchers have explored the mechanics and nature of language, and many linguists have taken up interest in discourse and discourse analysis in signed languages.

Signed language discourse has been examined at the level of turn-taking (Baker 1977; McCleary/de Arantes Leite 2013), discourse markers and constructed action (Roy 1989), depiction (Metzger 1995; Thumann 2011; Dudis 2011; Halley 2020), sentence and utterance boundaries (Fenlon *et al.* 2007; Nicodemus 2009), eye blinks (Wilbur 1994; Herrmann 2010), politeness (Hoza 2007; Roush 2007; Hoza 2011), body leans (Van der Kooij *et al.* 2006), and prosody (Winston 2000; Brentari/Crossley 2002; Dachkovsky/Sandler 2009; Pfau/Quer 2009), to name a few. For a thorough review of the principles of discourse analysis and their application to the study of signed languages, see Metzger/Bahan (2001), Roy (2011), and Winston/Roy (2015).

Whether studying a signed language, signed language linguistics more generally, or interpreting and/or translation, students across a wide variety of backgrounds – including the students discussed in this paper – study the principles of discourse and discourse analysis in signed languages. In the present paper, we report on work produced by a cohort of undergraduate American Sign Language/English interpreting students in a discourse analysis course.

2. Method

Because there was no interaction with participants, this project was deemed exempt by the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Florida. In this study, we used a qualitative design to explore student learning. To do so, we analyzed student submissions for a discourse analysis project.

2.1 Background

The students whose submissions we analyzed were in their second year of a four-year undergraduate American Sign Language/English interpreting program accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (CCIE). Students were enrolled in Discourse Analysis, a sophomore-level course with the following course description:

This course introduces discourse analysis to deepen student awareness of and appreciation for various discourse norms and strategies used in English and Amer-

4 There is no official list of signed languages. However, the *Ethnologue* (Eberhard *et al.* 2022), widely considered to be the most authoritative report of world languages, lists 137 signed languages.

ican Sign Language (ASL). Students will study general discourse types, including conversations, presentations, and narratives specific to ASL and English. Students will study speech act theory and pragmatics in order to identify features of cohesion, coherence, politeness, and powerful/powerless language in oral, written, and signed texts. Students will learn how to identify the function of intent, discourse markers, rhythm, prosody, and space. Discourse structures and genres, gender differences, and framing will also be addressed. The course emphasizes relevance to meaning-based cross cultural communication.

The following main topics were addressed in the course, aided with the course textbook *Discourse Analysis* (Johnstone 2017) and additional readings, which primarily reflected a cognitive grammar approach: semiotics, construal, language and culture, grounding, speech acts, dynamicity and path, cohesion, discourse mapping, power and privilege, language and gender, contextualization, narrative structure, discourse and medium, the interpreting process, and interpreted interactions. The course was taught by one of the co-authors. The instructor's credentials include national certification as an American Sign Language/English interpreter and undergraduate and graduate degrees and coursework in interpreting and linguistics. Their graduate-level training included three courses in cognitive linguistics that emphasized discourse analysis techniques.

Prior to enrolling in the course, students were required to pass three semesters of American Sign Language coursework (ASL I, ASL II, and ASL III).⁵ In addition, students were enrolled in a translation course (English-to-ASL Sight Translation) as a co-requisite to Discourse Analysis. Objectives of the translation course included, among others, “perform[ing] pre-translation tasks” and “apply[ing] translation models to textual analysis, message reformulation, and meaning transfer”. In the translation course, students began with intralingual (English–English and ASL–ASL) exercises before moving to interlingual work.

The Discourse Analysis course built directly on fundamental linguistic concepts of American Sign Language and English taught in the preceding semester. With these concepts as a foundation, students were guided through analysis of larger texts of a variety of types. Special attention was paid to recognition of the context, medium, interlocutors, and positionality of each discourse interaction. In-class lectures and practice were supplemented with assignments that encouraged a practical approach to analyzing real-world discourse. Students were prompted to be attentive to discourse patterns in their daily lives and reported weekly on personal examples of course topics that they experienced during the week between class meetings.

The data we analyzed were comprised of student submissions for the final project in the course. The project required students to create an interlingual re-

5 We wish to note that this course was taught in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, many of the students had never taken a face-to-face American Sign Language course or spent significant time in authentic interaction with deaf people. We suspect these limitations negatively affected student language acquisition and fluency. For an overview of shifts in signed language interpreter education during the pandemic, see Halley *et al.* (2022).

formulation of an academic paper from the field of Interpreting Studies. Students were divided into four groups, and each group was assigned a different paper to reformulate. All papers were written in English, and students were instructed to create their reformulations in American Sign Language. Prior to reformulation, students provided a summary in written English as well as a visual representation of the content (discourse mapping). Students learned principles of discourse mapping according to Winston and Monikowski (2000). The purpose of these exercises and in-class discussions of the papers was to ensure and reinforce comprehension prior to interlingual activities. After exploration of the academic papers in their source language, students were instructed to reformulate their assigned papers into a different discourse genre and were provided with multiple examples of genres (e.g., dramatic representation, TikTok video, podcast). Students were also required to outline the genre they chose and demonstrate the discourse features and patterns that marked their reformulation as belonging to that genre. For the assignment guide that was provided to students, see Appendix A – Assignment Guide. All videorecorded reformulations were submitted on GoReact, an online recording and assessment software frequently used in signed language interpreter education.⁶

Finally, we note that because this course is situated within an undergraduate American Sign Language/English interpreting program accredited by CCIE, the curriculum is designed to adhere to rigorous evidence-based standards of excellence in interpreter education. Accordingly, this iteration of project-based learning aligns with standards set forth by CCIE (2019), including that students engage in “Reading, understanding, and critically evaluating research on interpreting”. Specifically, reformulating research on interpreting challenged students to engage with critical evaluation of the papers in novel and creative ways. Essentially, the project was a form of summative evaluation that required students to demonstrate a) comprehension of literature in Interpreting Studies, b) application of discourse features across various genres, c) synthesis of discourse features in American Sign Language production, and d) rudimentary interlingual translation and reformulation skills. Our analysis therefore focuses on these dynamics of their submissions.

2.2 Analysis

We employed a qualitative analytical approach to identify thematic patterns (Creswell/Creswell, 2018) in the students’ reformulations. To ensure inter-rater reliability, we each independently reviewed, coded, and analyzed student submissions. This process led to the generation of several themes that encapsulated the learning outcomes apparent in the submissions.

6 GoReact allows for live video, text, and audio peer and instructor feedback on student submissions. For more, see <<https://get.goreact.com/>>.

3. Findings

In this section, we describe the results of our qualitative analysis of student submissions. First, we report a holistic overview of the submissions in Table 1, which details the assigned academic papers and various genres students chose for their reformulations.

Table 1
Student reformulation genres for each assigned paper

Assigned scholarly paper	Reformulation genre
Shaw <i>et al.</i> (2004)	Breaking news television broadcast Children's science television program/Malaprop Drag show Podcast interview Product infomercial Television fundraising commercial
Metzger (2000)	Breaking news television broadcast Breaking news television broadcast Children's story Children's television program (In the style of <i>Mister Rogers' Neighborhood</i>) Mockumentary Public Service Announcement (PSA)
Winston/Monikowski (2000)	Cooking show Informational webinar Military recruiting video Product infomercial Product infomercial
Napier (2006)	Nightly news television broadcast Product infomercial Soap opera <i>Star Trek</i> parody TikTok video (classroom skit) TikTok video (Put a Finger Down Challenge) ⁷

We wish to draw readers' attention to two relevant observations apparent from Table 1. First, note the diversity of genres apparent in the students' self-selected reformulation mediums. Scholarly papers were assigned to students, but they were given latitude in selecting genres for their reformulations. Second, we also wish to note that, despite the diversity of genre selection, there was some overlap, even within assigned papers. For example, two students reformulated Metzger's (2000) paper on the pedagogical theory and practice of interactive role-plays into breaking news television broadcasts.

7 The Put a Finger Down Challenge is a TikTok trend in which users create a 'duet' split-screen response video to a prompt from another user. For more, see <<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/put-a-finger-down>>.

3.1 Features consistent with discourse genre

As mentioned above, students produced reformulations classified according to a wide variety of discourse genres. Of note is that some of the discourse genres do not exist in mainstream American Sign Language formats. For example, while there are numerous well-known deaf content creators on platforms like TikTok,⁸ there are – to our knowledge – no mainstream American Sign Language military recruiting videos. However, students demonstrated remarkable creativity in their American Sign Language reformulations of their assigned articles, even when few or no examples of natural discourse in their chosen genre were available.

Further, students were not explicitly taught discourse features of all genres. While the course covered content on a variety of discourse types, numerous students produced reformulations in genres not explored in the curriculum (e.g., drag shows, military recruiting materials). Despite this, students demonstrated critical thinking and creative approaches to analyzing typical discourse features across these genres, as well as producing them in their reformulations. For example, the reformulation of a drag show included exaggerated linguistic affect. These features are consistent with not only drag shows performed in English,⁹ but also in American Sign Language drag shows, such as the viral sensation *Deafies in Drag*. See Figure 1, below, for an example of exaggerated affect in the context of a drag show in American Sign Language.



Figure 1: Image captured from a *Deafies in Drag* YouTube video (2019) entitled “Worst Interpreter: Personal”. In the image, a deaf person in drag signs ‘TWO’ in the phrase “TWO MONTHS?!” with highly exaggerated facial expressions (e.g., wide mouth aperture, raised eyebrows). Video available at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XSuH2qYwrM>>.

8 Examples of deaf TikTokers include Patrick McMullen and Big Ben (@patrickandbigben), Phelan Conheady (@signinngwolf), and Scarlet Waters (@scarlet__may.1).

9 For interesting analyses of the language used by drag queens, see Barrett (1998) and Mann (2011).

Finally, we note the non-linguistic features that contributed to students' discourse analysis and reformulations within their chosen genre. For instance, one student reformulated Metzger's (2000) paper into a children's television program in the style of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. The program, a popular and award-winning series that aired from 1968 to 2001, was hosted by Fred Rogers, an American author and Presbyterian minister. In the show, Rogers was known and beloved for – among other things – his kind nature and omnipresent cardigan sweater. In their project, the student who created a video in the style of Fred Rogers' show donned a red cardigan. The student also incorporated visual aids and props, consistent with discourse produced in the original children's program. While this example may appear trivial at first glance, it is demonstrative of students engaging in critical thinking about the cross-cutting nature of discourse and genre. In addition to non-linguistic features, the student submitted a list of discourse features they intended to include in their reformulation: 1) speaker signs/talks in a slow calming way, 2) refers to audience as 'Neighbor,' 3) first person language, 4), ask questions, wait for answer, and 5), framed as a conversation where the audience is the second participant. Each of these features appeared in their American Sign Language reformulation and aligned with typical discourse features in an episode of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

3.2 Discourse analysis vs. discourse production

Student misunderstanding of content in their assigned papers was paralleled with misalignment of theoretical knowledge of linguistics and discourse analysis with actual language proficiency. Specifically, the data point to numerous instances in which students' theoretical grasp of discourse analysis dwarfed their ability to produce discourse in their reformulations. Although assessing language proficiency is outside the scope of this paper, we note a general pattern of student misperceptions of their ability to produce discourse. These instances go beyond mispronunciation and indications of vocabularies in need of development (e.g., a student who confused the word CORRECT with SISTER and the word ONE-ON-ONE with INTERVIEW, or another student who mistook the word RUIN for JOKE).¹⁰ To illustrate, we focus on two patterns of discourse anomalies apparent across student submissions: register lapses and unnatural prosody.

To begin, we note that shifts in register in the reformulations were expected. The register and type of language used in a drag show, for instance, would not generally align with the formality in a scholarly publication. However, students frequently demonstrated two register errors and inconsisten-

10 These errors were articulation errors (e.g., movements or hand configurations) that led to the apparent inadvertent production of incorrect words. For instance, the word RUIN has a forward movement, while the word JOKE repeats the forward movement twice. Such mispronunciations were common and highlight the need for students to both demonstrate a strong language foundation and engage in continuous language enhancement during interpreter training.

cies within their reformulations. The first persistent error was related to the location of the hands, and the second was related to the number of hands used when producing a word. For instance, while one would generally expect to see formal language use in a television update from a meteorologist, one student demonstrated an atypical register shift due to the location of their hands while discussing the weather in their news broadcast reformulation. The American Sign Language word WILL is generally produced beginning at or above the signer's nose and consists of a straight outward movement. However, some American Sign Language words are marked for their level of formality according to their starting location; generally speaking, the higher a sign's starting location, the more formal the register (Liddell/Johnson 1989). Instead of producing WILL at or above the nose, the student produced it just below their cheek. Producing the word in this way implies a highly informal use inconsistent with discourse that viewers would expect to see in a televised weather broadcast. Another instance of an unexpected register shift occurred in a student's reformulated infomercial. Although they generally used formal language throughout their reformulation in a way that aligns with expected discourse in infomercials, they produced the sign KNOW on the lower cheek, rather than at the temple; producing KNOW in this way suggests a downward shift in formality.¹¹

One way in which register is marked in American Sign Language that may cause students to exhibit atypical shifts in register is in the number of hands used in the production of a word (see Zimmer 1990). For instance, the word READY is generally produced with two hands in formal or semi-formal contexts, but it can be produced with one hand to denote a highly casual tone. In a student's television fundraising commercial reformulation, they produced the word with just one hand. Examples of apparent register lapses – whether due to intentional shifts or unintentional articulation errors – suggest that despite learning about register in their coursework, students lack the ability to accurately and consistently produce register-appropriate discourse.¹²

In addition to their final video reformulations, the assignment guide noted that students were required to submit “a description of some of the features of [their] genre and how [they] will incorporate them in [the] final project”. These written plans allowed us to compare students' perceptions and intentions with their actual production in the reformulations. In many cases, students' reformu-

11 We note that because ethical review of this study did not allow for interviews with the students or any interaction after the completion of the semester, we were unable to ascertain specific reasons for these production errors. It is therefore not entirely clear whether these were indeed register shifts (intentional or not), or rather production errors that inadvertently shifted the style and level of formality. Further, it is unclear whether students had developed the requisite level of metalinguistic awareness to know the difference.

12 We note that atypical register shifts in student work did not appear to impact the coherence of their reformulations. Unexpected register use is still intelligible, if somewhat jarring.

lations did not align with the very discourse features they had studied throughout the semester, learned to analyze, and outlined in their draft assignments.¹³

For instance, a student who reformulated their assigned paper into a nightly news broadcast noted the need to portray a “positive tone” in the reformulation. In this way, the student demonstrated an awareness for conventional discourse from reporters working on “feel good” stories. However, throughout their video reformulation, the student frequently produced affect that appeared strained (e.g., gritted teeth). Regardless of the cause, the student’s strained production in the reformulation did not align with the self-described “positive tone” they intended to portray. The visible incongruency between expected discourse norms and the student’s production appears to be rooted in a lack of proficiency. As the student attempted to reformulate the content and produce discourse in real time, they visibly struggled to recall vocabulary and produce language for the broadcast. For example, at one point during the broadcast, the student described a series of ideas using a *list buoy* (Liddell 2003). In American Sign Language, a list buoy may be produced by a signer to refer to a list of entities. Signers may modify their handshape according to the number of entities shared in the list. Once an entity is associated with a particular finger in the list buoy, a signer may refer to it again by indexing the same finger. An example is provided in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Image of a signer producing a depicting list buoy. The signer uses the FOUR hand configuration and is indexing the middle finger, indicating that they are referring to the second of four entities in the list.

- 13 The reformulation assignment was devised for this course and presented to students for the first time. We now note the potential value in revising the guidelines to elicit further analytical thinking from students. For instance, students could be required to specifically outline discourse features they intend to incorporate in their reformulations, as well as make connections to literature supporting their rationale.

In the above example of the news broadcast reformulation, the student alternated between the THREE and FOUR hand configurations. The student, noticing the apparent misnumbering issue at hand,¹⁴ averted their gaze and briefly produced a sour face, with pursed lips and reduced eye aperture.¹⁵ This lapse in positive tone and affect was repeated multiple times throughout the reformulated broadcast. For instance, seconds after the challenges of producing the list buoy, the student said, INTERPRETING PROCESS. However, immediately following the word 'INTERPRETING,' they paused momentarily, inconsistent with typical clausal boundaries (Fenlon et al. 2007; Nicodemus 2009). As they then produced the word PROCESS, they lowered their eyebrows and reduced their eye aperture, suggesting an intense or contemplative thought that did not align with the context of their news broadcast.

Students also exhibited atypical prosodic features when marking utterance boundaries. For example, fluent American Sign Language users employ eyeblinks for syntactic purposes and to mark utterance boundaries (Baker 1976; Wilbur 1994; Herrmann 2010). However, students regularly exhibited eyeblinks in ways that were not productive on a discourse level. For instance, in a reformulated television news broadcast, one student assuming the role of a news anchor said, NOW INTERVIEW STUDENT BOTH SCHOOL. [English translation: *We will now interview students from both schools.*] A fluent American Sign Language user would typically blink once at the end of this phrase, to mark the utterance as complete. However, the student blinked four times while producing just five words. To those viewing the reformulation and those like it, it would appear as though the student were pausing briefly after every two or three words, causing distraction and making the discourse difficult to follow without increased cognitive effort.

3.3 Interlingual inter-genre reformulation as pre-translation

As we noted earlier, students were enrolled in this course at the same time as a translation course (English-to-ASL Sight Translation). Students' reformulations of academic papers for this project exhibited many features of translation they were learning about in their translation course, offering opportunities for reinforcement of foundational processes in translation.

One way the courses aligned was in the considerable time and energy in the translation course devoted to cohesion and structure across source and target

14 This is just one example of a student's reformulation not displaying expected linguistic features that contribute to coherent and cohesive discourse. For instance, in their reformulation of Winston/Monikowski's (2000) paper into a military recruiting paper, a student introduced a list buoy with three entities to be discussed. After referencing and describing the first entity, the student then referred to the second entity by saying NEXT-TOPIC, rather than referring to the already-established list buoy. Breaking this discourse norm leads to ambiguity about the entities being discussed.

15 We suspect this lapse in affect and prosody may be explained by excess cognitive effort exhausted in lexical retrieval. For more, see Gile's (1995) Gravitational Model of language availability.

texts. Although students completing this project were not required to create an ‘equivalent’ reformulation of their assigned academic article,¹⁶ they used a variety of discourse features and strategies to present their reformulations in coherent and cohesive ways. One such strategy was the indexing of real and blended space in managing conceptual referents (see Liddell 2003). A student reformulated one paper as a cooking show, referencing the ‘ingredients’ (i.e., requisite steps) for discourse mapping. To establish these referents, the student created paper mock-ups of the ingredients that were incorporated into their signing by physically picking them up, indexing them, and buoing them while describing their function. Students who reformulated into conversational genres used consistent spatial placing in referring to the other person (e.g., a podcast interviewee), even when that conversational ‘other’ was themselves in a separate scene. Each character was positioned so that they were facing one another, and directional verbs were indexed toward the location of the verb’s object, which mirrors typical uses of constructed action (Roy 1989).

By engaging in interlingual inter-genre reformulation activities, students bolstered the pre-translation tasks and skills they were developing in adjacent coursework, such as English-to-ASL Sight Translation and Linguistics for Interpreters. Instead of being assessed on their ability to produce *equivalent* translations, students were assessed on their ability to think critically about complex ideas and express them in novel ways.

4. Discussion

We now provide some brief commentary on the findings, exploring their interpretation and application to the classroom. We focus our discussion on two key areas: a) student ability to critically analyze and synthesize scholarly content, and b) the duality of disfluency and discourse analysis during interpreter and translator training.

4.1 Student (mis)understanding of scholarly papers

Although it has likely been misattributed, many quote Albert Einstein as having said, “If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough”. Whether the famed German-American physicist ever uttered these words, they resonate with the students’ work in this project. The task of distilling the complex ideas expressed in scholarly papers to non-academic genres like children’s television programs and drag shows necessitates a level of simplification and summarization or – to apply work from Bloom’s (1956) pioneering pedagogical work – *synthesis*.

16 While the original function of each assigned article was to inform readers, reformulating into a different genre implies a different function in the new genre. For example, a reformulation in the form of a TikTok video would likely function to both inform – by conveying the gist of the original article – and entertain viewers, rather than provide a functionally equivalent translation.

However, we note that – generally speaking – students’ reformulations captured the essence of their assigned scholarly papers. While details and nuance inherent in academic writing were omitted or otherwise altered in the inter-genre reformulations, students generally succeeded in expressing the primary themes explored in the papers. In other words, students did not misrepresent the heart of the scholarly papers they reformulated.

With this said, despite considerable clarification from the instructor and reinforcement of the material, there were numerous instances in which students failed to fully grasp the content expressed in the scholarly articles. For example, one student’s reformulation of the Metzger (2000) chapter was a video just under two minutes long that conveyed the process of learning interpreting through role-play as “practicing acting with friends” and soliciting their feedback. This reformulation suggested an oversimplification of Metzger’s (2000) central proposition: that role-plays are a pedagogically sound technique for teaching students the complexities of managing human discourse.¹⁷ Difficulties in digesting complex ideas expressed in scholarly papers is not surprising, particularly when considering that the students were only two years into their degree of study and had taken just one course acclimating them with the foundations of interpreting (Introduction to Interpreting, a first-year course). Significantly, this finding highlights the value of interpreters continuing to develop expertise in their native language across a wide variety of discourse types, including in academic writing. Further, students engaged in a variety of reformulation exercises of varying difficulties throughout the semester. However, interpreter and translator trainers developing similar activities for students might consider using texts that are more straightforward and written for general audiences, rather than academic papers intended for educated readers.

4.2 (Dis)fluency during interpreter and translator training

In this paper, we have suggested that by instilling in students a deep understanding of discourse and a strong foundation in discourse analysis techniques, students are well-placed to continue their training and skill development post-graduation.¹⁸ However, we wish to note a challenge faced by many interpreter and translator educators that complicates the work of teaching advanced critical thinking processes like discourse analysis: student disfluency. Because institutions of higher learning place demands upon educators and students alike for

17 This represents just one example of oversimplification on the part of a student, and we suggest that further investigation is necessary to determine how best to incorporate scholarly reading into undergraduate interpreter training.

18 Further, we suggest that skill development outside the classroom is predicated upon students developing strong critical thinking skills, including self-regulatory processes and the ability to self-assess. However, we note that fostering these abilities is challenging for interpreter educators because “accurate self-evaluation is linked with high experience”, something that is difficult to attain in time-constrained training programs (Hild 2014: 141).

timely graduation and relatively short degree-completion timelines – typically four years for an undergraduate program of study in the United States – and students frequently begin their studies as monolinguals, bilingual fluency upon graduation is atypical.¹⁹ Instead, interpreter educators are placed in the unenviable position²⁰ of being both language teacher and interpreting coach. Faced with the equivalent of teaching cardiothoracic surgery to students still mastering basic anatomy and physiology, interpreter educators all too frequently fail to adequately prepare students for meaningful work.

Although language proficiency is a prerequisite for a high-quality interpreting product, we hope that developing mastery in discourse analysis and the interpreting process will prepare students to one day provide excellent interpreting services. However, despite the remarkable initiative demonstrated by students in their reformulations, we would be remiss if we did not express our grave concerns about a nearly ubiquitous lack of proficiency. While reviewing the data, there were numerous instances in which we – proficient L2 speakers of American Sign Language – were unable to decipher students' unintelligible expressions. This underscores the need for students across interpreter education programs to demonstrate not only theoretical and practical knowledge, but also a level of proficiency sufficient for future work as interpreters. While we are heartened by student creativity and effort apparent in the data, we remain alarmed by language disfluency and the repercussions it may have for interpreting service users.

Finally, we suggest that, taken together, these data point to a fundamental question that warrants further investigation: have interpreting students developed linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness to a level necessary for meaningful discourse analysis and translation or interpreting tasks? Due to the ethical constraints in this study, we were unable to collect data from students after the semester about their metalinguistic awareness. However, Fitzmaurice (2020: 12) demonstrated that “educational interpreters experience a Dunning-Kruger Effect²¹ in that the interpreters who score lower on the EIPA [Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment] overestimate their anticipated score on the test, whereas interpreters who scored higher on the EIPA underestimated their

19 A recent report released by a Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT) task force on language fluency concluded that “foundational (basic and intermediate) language learning cannot, and should not be a primary focus of interpreting education” (CIT, 2022, p. 3). Instead, bilingual fluency should be a requirement of students prior to program admission. The recommendations align with Gile's (1995: 212) observation that “It does not seem reasonable to admit into professional schools students whose command of their working languages is not good enough to allow them to become interpreters at the end of their program”.

20 It should go without saying that the position of deaf people receiving subpar interpreting services is far more unenviable.

21 The Dunning-Kruger Effect refers to the psychological phenomenon in which individuals with the lowest level of skill in a given task are most likely to overestimate their abilities. For more, see Kruger/Dunning (1999). However, there have been challenges to the construct. For example, Magnus and Peresetsky (2022: 11) argue that the effect is not psychological and “does not reflect human nature”, but is rather a “statistical artefact”.

scores". Students in the present study were not asked to provide a self-evaluation of their proficiency, discourse production, or ability to reformulate across genre; however, we question whether the students had the metalinguistic awareness to recognize their own deficits. This is an area of interest for both future research and potential inclusion in teaching approaches.

5. Conclusions

The ability to think critically about discourse and produce coherent and cohesive language is a hallmark of a well-versed interpreter. In this paper, we analyzed undergraduate interpreting student work to explore their application of discourse analysis. Taken together, the findings suggest that, despite demonstrating disfluency in American Sign Language, students exhibit remarkable creativity and critical thinking about discourse and discourse analysis.

Snell-Hornby (1988: 69), argues that "for the translator the text must also be seen in terms of its *communicative* function, as a unit embedded in a given *situation*, and as part of a broader sociocultural background" (emphasis in original). It is our contention that this maxim holds true in both interpreting and interpreter education, and that a critical approach to discourse analysis can guide students toward a deeper understanding of the sociocultural and contextual backgrounds in which they work. By teaching students to be better discourse analysts, they can – we hope – be better interpreters.

Transcription conventions

In this paper, we have followed standard conventions for transcribing signed language data. American Sign Language data have been glossed in capitalized text (e.g., RESEARCH) with their closest written English equivalent.

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Appendix A – Assignment Guide

For your final project, you will create a reformulated presentation of the article you mapped for Analysis 2. The reformulation must be in ASL and in a different genre than the source (i.e. not academic writing). The only requirement is that you include the main points of the article and any important details. This will not be a re-telling of the entire article, but rather more a type of summary.

The final project will be submitted in GoReact and should not be longer than 5 minutes. You will briefly present on your project in ASL during our final two class periods.

For this assignment, you should select what genre you would like to use for your project. It can be any genre you'd like – a dramatic representation, a TikTok meme, a podcast, whatever you'd like! Select your genre and submit that with a drafted outline/script that you will use to record your project. You can also submit a draft recording for feedback. Along with your draft, include a description of some of the features of your genre and how you will incorporate them in your final project.

For your in-class presentation, you should identify the article, genre used, features of that genre that were incorporated, and how the structure of the video matches the selected genre.