The Whole Picture: Why Academic ASL Exposure Matters to Sign Language Interpreters

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First, What Is Academic ASL

- Academic ASL is the use of American Sign Language in academic discourse.
  - Levels of discourses (Gee, 2004)
    - Primary - home (includes different homes). Acquired as part of language acquisition process.
    - Secondary - Social Institutions (e.g., Media, Business, Law, Academia, etc.). Learned process.
Academic Discourse

• “Rules of engagement” in:
  • Arguments
  • Agreements and disagreements
  • Supporting your points with data or citation
    – Value is pushed towards being objective
    – Using cited research or theories to support your argument
    – Be mindful of choice of words/signs
• Observed engagement of Lane and Balkany at University of Miami Ear Institute, February 2-3 1996
Academic Societies

• Disciplines/majors in colleges and universities teaches ways of engaging in the discourse of the discipline.

• Professional/Learned societies organize conferences to share new knowledge, network and promote the field and publish journals.

• The robustness of an academic society involves three layers:
  – Academic discipline
  – Professional associations
  – Academic journals
Academic Societies

• These three layers—discipline, organization and journal—play crucial role in the percolation and propagation of academic discourse.

• Academic discourse is also the discourse of a discipline not just colleges and universities or even one college.

• Now the professional disciplines in the domain of ASL:
  – ASL Teaching
  – Interpreting
  – Linguistics
  – Deaf Studies
ASL Academic Societies

• Interpreting
  – Academic Discipline: BA/MA/PHD in Interpreting
  – Professional Organization(s): RID; CIT
  – Professional Journal(s): Journal of Interpretation; International Journal of Interpreter Education

• Linguistics
  – Academic Discipline: BA/MA/PHD in Linguistics
  – Professional Organization(s): SLLS; FEAST
  – Professional Journal(s): SLS; SL&L
ASL Academic Societies

• American Sign Language
  – Academic Discipline: BA and MA in ASL Teaching
  – Professional Organization(s): ASLTA; SASL
  – Professional Journal(s): ?

• Deaf Studies
  – Academic Discipline: BA and MA in Deaf Studies
  – Professional Organization(s): ?
  – Professional Journal(s): DSDJ; Journal of Deaf Studies & Education
Languages of the Journals

• Interpreting
  – Professional Journal(s):
    • Journal of Interpretation - English
    • International Journal of Interpreter Education - English

• Sign Language Linguistics
  – Professional Journal(s):
    • SLS [Sign Language Studies] - English
    • SL&L [Sign Language & Linguistics] - English
Languages of the Journals

• American Sign Language
  – Professional Journal(s):
    • SLS; SL&L; Journal of Deaf Studies and Education - English

• Deaf Studies
  – No Professional Organization
  – Colleges and Universities host conferences: e.g., Utah Valley University, Gallaudet University
  – Professional Journal(s):
    • DSDJ - ASL & English
Languages of the Journals

• The practices of developing academic discourse in ASL via journals are virtually non-existent
  – All in English, how do you expect Academic ASL to thrive? Percolate and Propagate?
  – Conferences - presentation may be conducted in Academic ASL but no uniformity.
  – My experience and difficulty discussing my dissertation in ASL.
ASL Journals

- The Deaf Studies Digital Journal Story (2009)

Department of ASL and Deaf Studies

- dsdj.gallaudet.edu
- Sections: Articles, Commentary, Literature, Visual Arts, Film & Video, Interviews, Reviews, History
(JASLL) is a peer-reviewed, open access, digital journal committed to promoting the nationwide dissemination of original ASL-related research and literature.

ASL Literature reflects the culture and history of the Deaf community. With regard to linguistics, *ASL users will be able to access, read, and understand the research and issues surrounding their primary language in their natural language.*

ASLized firmly believes all scholarly materials that study, research, and discuss ASL should be published in ASL.
ASL in Academia

• No Academic Society published Journal in Signed Languages (only a department and a group of interested professionals)

• ASL in higher education
  – Colleges and universities acceptance of ASL as one of the language requirement - varies and lot of struggles.
    • January 2016 Gallaudet President Cordano declared bilingualism a priority.
ASL in Academia

• Gallaudet addressing the need to deal with Academic ASL
  – Academic ASL Gallaudet
  – Academic ASL Modules
  – GSR 103 Channel
  – Corpus development and ASL Connect
• Scholars discussing and engaging in studies of Academic ASL
  – Raychelle Harris, Maribel Gárate, MJ Bienvenu, Laurene Simms, Trudy Suggs, etc.
Sustained Efforts

• Ongoing researches are attempting to describe and build understanding of what is included in Academic ASL
  – Several features are explored and questioned on whether they are acceptable in academic ASL discourses like the:
    • Use of fingerspelling
    • Use of facial expressions (such as non manual grammatical signals)
  – Researches also survey the academic community to get sense of what is and what is not acceptable
Rehashing Academic ASL

• All the facets need to come together in order for Academic ASL to thrive.
  – Academic institutions - like Gallaudet University
  – Academic Disciplines
  – Academic Organizations
  – Academic Journals
• These levels provide opportunities to solidify academic discourse structures, styles and formats.
Why Exposure Matters

• It matters because:
  – You are in the business of discourse
  – As interpreter you engage in the use ASL and English in various settings and contexts - from personal to academic settings.
• Each setting and context often require changes in discourse strategies
  – Most interpreters probably work in academic settings from K-12 on to College.
Workshop Goal

• View video comparing Academic presentation and storytelling presentation
  – Identifying and describing the differences
• Outline Language Plans for Academic ASL development
• Discuss features of academic language development and discourse of engagement.
• Academic discourse tools, vocabularies and functions
Reference


Suggs, Trudy (2016) Everyday Disempowerment of Deaf People. NADMag | Spring 2016. Silver Spring, MD
