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Brief CV:
See page 2

Language of presentation:
English

Conference presentation or workshop:
Presentation, although I am also open to the idea of this becoming a workshop

Title:
The relevance of sign language linguistics for sign language interpreters: some recent research on Auslan and BSL

Abstract:
Colleagues in linguistics are definitely a group of allied professionals who can assist interpreters in navigating the difficult straits between increasing professional requirement to understand sign language structure, use and acquisition and the relative lack of an evidence-base to support this knowledge. Sadly, sometimes what sign language research can offer appears to be lost on students in Auslan/English interpreting programmes who might wonder why sign language linguistics often forms a core component of their training. Admittedly, there is theoretical work in sign language research that might not seem immediately applicable to the day-to-day role of a sign language interpreter, but there is also much that has a great deal of direct relevance. For example, why do interpreters’ omissions reflect difficulties identifying ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ (i.e., who does what to whom) in sign language texts? And given variation and change in sign languages, how can interpreters be better prepared to adjust their sign language vocabulary choices depending on the background of their client? With regards to the first question, new data from sign language corpus projects can begin to shed light on some of these issues. Recent research on Auslan and British Sign Language (BSL), for example, shows that (a) nearly two thirds of clauses in narratives do not contain overt subjects, and (b) that even when a subject pronoun is present, the handshape used often undergoes assimilation, making it more difficult for the interpreter to identify. As for the second question, recent studies of lexical variation and change in Auslan and BSL support (a) the perception that decreasing amount of fingerspelling is used across different age groups in the deaf community, (b) shows that younger signers use more lowered variants of signs than older signers, and (c) that heritage vocabulary for numbers, colours and countries is changing, but at different rates in different subgroups within deaf communities.