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ASL Students' Ability to Self Assess ASL Competency

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Abstract

An interpreter's ability to self assess is a fundamental requirement for determining readiness to accept an assignment and for setting realistic goals for self-guided continuing education. Self assessment is widely used at the university level and viewed as both a tool for learning and a valued outcome of higher education. This study seeks to investigate ASL students' accuracy in self assessing their language competency. Accuracy is defined in this study as a strong correspondence between students' self assessment and instructors' assessment of the students' ASL competency as measured on the Sign Communication Proficiency Interview Scale. Across all ASL classes there was a significant and moderate-strong correlation between students' self-ratings and their instructors' ratings of the students' sign communication proficiency. Students did not improve in self assessment accuracy as they progressed through the ASL course sequence. Self assessment skills should be taught and practiced throughout the course of ASL classes.

ASL Students' Ability to Self Assess ASL Competency

An interpreter's ability to self assess is a fundamental requirement for determining readiness to accept an assignment and for setting realistic goals for self-guided continuing education. The NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct addresses these two issues (RID, 2005). Tenet 2 requires interpreters to possess skills and knowledge for specific situations. Interpreters must be able to assess their skills to determine if they are professionally prepared for interpreting situations before accepting assignments. Tenet 7 requires that interpreters engage in continual professional development, one option being that of independent study. Given that the field expects interpreters to have the ability to accurately assess their own abilities and limitations, *where* and *how* interpreters learn these skills is of interest to the field of interpretation and interpreter education.

Reports indicate that self assessment is widely used at the university level and that "the development of self assessment ability is recognized as a distinct outcome of higher education [Dearing, 1997; Stefani, 1998] and a critical educational tool for learning beyond university education [Taras, 2001]" (Tan, 2008, p. 15). Twenty years earlier, this concept was already forming when Blanche stated "self assessment accuracy is a condition of learner autonomy" (1988, p. 75), a component of self-directed life-long learning. Entering college students do not always have a fully developed self assessment skill set, but "...it is...desirable that it should be developed at earlier stages of education" (Boud, 1995, p. 14). With educators supporting self assessment as a goal of higher education, and the field's stance on the ethical requirement for interpreters to accurately assess their own skills and readiness for work, it is reasonable to assume that post-secondary interpreting students need to either bring to the post-secondary setting, or develop while in school, the critical skill of self assessment.

Within the field of teaching ASL and interpreting, personal assessment of one's skills is often not the focus of early education. Typically, ASL teachers conduct the students' first evaluations rather than the students performing an internal analysis. Later, novice interpreters seek feedback from valued mentors (veteran practitioners, former teachers and peers) to determine errors and gaps in performance (Wise, 2008). It is with experience and certification that the field expects interpreters to be proficient in assessing their own performance. If Boud's statement regarding the desirability of early development of self assessment skills is to be accepted, then beginning ASL classes are an appropriate place to address these skills.

ASL students receive evaluation and feedback in a variety of ways from instructors, peers, mentors, and Deaf community members. Instructors give classroom feedback on a regular basis. Graded assignments and tests of students' ASL understanding and production compared to curricular goals provide students with information on their learning progress. Some instructors use self and peer evaluation as part of classroom feedback; however, no empirical study on the accuracy of ASL student

self assessment has been located. The research questions addressed in this study are:

1. Can students accurately assess their own ASL language competency?
2. Do ASL students' assessment of their language competency increase in accuracy as they progress through their language course sequence?

Accuracy in this study is defined as a strong correspondence between students' assessment and instructors' assessments of students' ASL language competency as measured independently on the same language rating scale.

Review of the Literature

Self assessment is defined as the evaluation of one's knowledge, skills or performance (Matsuno, 2009; Noonan & Duncan, 2005; Ross, 2006; Tan, 2008). This self-directed activity includes the identification of individual strengths and weaknesses in order to monitor and improve learning (Harris, 1995; Klenowski, 1995) or to make decisions about the options available as the "next step" of learning (Boud, 1995). Student self assessment also indicates judgment about one's educational progress, and according to Ross (2006), it has the highest value when teachers and students negotiate the criteria for self assessment and the evidence for judging, and when self assessment is factored into the grade.

The first studies that compared student assessment with teacher assessment date back to the 1930s (Sharp, 2006; Tan, 2008). In more recent years there has been a renewed interest in the topic. For example, in 2009, 213 pre-service primary teachers and 30 faculty members from an Australian university participated in a study of their beliefs regarding self, peer and group assessment practices (Brew, Riley, & Walta, 2009). In this study, 57% of the faculty reported the use of self assessment for grading with "...32% using it more now than in the past" (p. 649). This renewed interest in a student's ability to accurately measure personal progress or skill has not evolved in isolation. Educational emphases on stronger assessment, student-centered learning, and life-long learning have influenced the growing interest in student self assessment (Falchikov & Boud, 1989; Saito, 2009; Yang & Xu, 2008).

Self Assessment Benefits in Education

Student self assessment has been a topic of interest among secondary and post-secondary educators over several decades (Falchikov & Boud, 1989) with seventy-six percent (76%) of high school teachers using self assessment at least part of the time (Noonan & Duncan, 2005). Likewise, reports indicate that self assessment is widely used at the university level (Tan, 2008), and some proponents of assessment advocate that students should submit a self evaluation with *every* major assignment (Ross, 2006).

Self assessment has reported benefit for students and teachers. It can help students understand the purpose of an assignment and influence students to take responsibility for their learning goals (de Saint Léger, 2009; Orsmond, Merry & Reiling, 1997). Self assessment helps to evaluate and ensure students' understanding of teacher feedback and their grade by seeing the incorporation of feedback into student's work and assessments (Taras, 2001). When students are required to assess personal skills or knowledge, it provides opportunities for them to reflect on their work, give feedback to their instructor, and is generally motivational (Walser, 2009). High self assessment ability increases students' feeling of mastery over a task (Yang & Xu, 2008). "Self assessment produces learners who are more active and focused, and better placed to assess their own progress in terms of communication." (Harris, 1995, p. 12). Accurate self assessment allows students to relinquish total reliance on teacher opinion (Blanche, 1988), increasing student engagement, supporting student attentiveness and interest, and increasing learning when students know they will participate in the assessment process (Ross, 2006). Stated more strongly, "...greater student involvement in assessment translates directly into greater student empowerment" (Tan, 2008, p. 16).

Relationship Between Student Self Assessment and Teacher Assessment

Research conducted on the relationship between student assessment and teacher assessment across domains has produced mixed results (Ross, 1998). In a review of quantitative studies of student

self assessment in higher education, Boud and Falchikov (1989) reported that ‘good’ students tend to underrate themselves, while ‘weak’ students tend to overrate themselves. These authors also reported that upper or advanced university students are more accurate in self assessment than beginning or lower level university students, suggesting that assessing personal skills improves with instruction and practice.

Pakaslahti and Keltikangas-Jarvinen (2000) examined the relationship between peer, teacher, and student self assessments of adolescent aggressive school behavior in Finland. Results indicated that peer/teacher (both observers) assessments were correlated the highest followed by teacher/student self assessment and peer/student assessment having the lowest relationship. This indicated that relationship between teacher/student assessment was lower than the observers-only relationship, but higher than the peer/student assessment relationship. Falchikov and Boud (1989) conducted a meta-analysis of qualitative studies on the topic of student self assessment in higher education. Regarding the relationship between student assessment and teacher assessment:

“Factors that seem to be important with regard to the closeness of correspondence between self- and teacher marks were found to include the following: the quality of design of the study (with better designed studies having closer correspondence between student and teacher than poorly designed ones); the level of the course of which the assessment was a part (with students in advanced courses appearing to be more accurate assessors than those in introductory courses); and the broad area of study...” (p. 395).

The correlation between the teacher and student marks in this meta-analysis has a mean value of $r = .39$ (range = -0.05 to 0.82) (Falchikov & Boud, p. 420). According to Cohen’s (1977) standard, $r = .20$ is small, $r = .30$ is medium and $r = .50$ is large; therefore, the mean correlation is between medium and large. This indicates across all studies evaluated in the meta-analysis, there appears to be a moderate relationship between teacher and student assessment.

Student Self Assessment in Second Language Learning

Self assessment has been a component of research on language testing for some time (Ross, 1998); however, research specifically comparing student and teacher assessment in second language learning is scarce. Research has generally focused on two questions: (1) Is self assessment (SA) a reliable tool?, and (2) What variables affect the reliability of scores? (de Saint Léger, 2009). According to de Saint Léger, “reliability of SA is usually measured by correlating the self assessed performance score with that of the instructor or other external benchmarks...” (p. 159).

Ross (1998) completed a meta-analysis of self assessment in second language testing across four factors: reading, speaking, listening, and writing. The correlation, however, was evaluated between second language factors and content achievement tests, not with teacher rating of students’ level of proficiency. In this case, the strongest correlations were between student self assessment and tests of reading skills followed by student self assessment and listening skills. The authors reported a lower correlation between self assessment and speaking skills, but the authors pointed out that speaking skills are often assessed post-hoc and holistically, rather than against a standard criteria.

In 2009, researchers compared self, peer, and teacher ratings in *English as a Second Language (ESL)* writing classes. Ninety-one students and four teachers at a Japanese university participated in this study. Results indicated that self-rating was “...rather idiosyncratic and therefore of limited utility as part of formal assessment” (Matsuno, 2009, p. 75). A study conducted in Iran investigated the relationship between student self assessment and teacher assessment as an alternative to language testing (Tavakoli, 2010). Thirty-five university sophomores majoring in English literature enrolled in an English speaking class and participated in self and teacher assessment of oral performance skills. The researcher’s goal was to investigate the relationship between self and teacher assessment of students’ speaking skills within the classroom setting. A Pearson product moment correlation of $.677$ indicated a moderate correlation between student self-rating and teacher rating. According to Tavakoli,

...the obtained correlation [$.677$] between student self-rating and teacher rating was moderate, and it is meaningful at $.001$ level of significance...This moderate correlation can be interpreted

in the sense that student self-rating is a useful strategy which helps the learner toward more autonomy in self-monitoring and self-directing language learning (p. 251).

Unfortunately, no studies were found on the correlation between self and teacher assessment of U.S. university students' second language learning, nor any research specifically addressing the relationship between ASL students' self assessment and teacher assessment of ASL proficiency. This supports Brantmeier's (2006) assertion that there is, indeed, a lack of research focused on U.S. advanced second language (L2) learners. The absence of research on U.S. second language learners, and specifically ASL students' ability to accurately assess their language level, constitutes an area of research interest for the fields of ASL-English interpretation and interpreter education.

Theoretical Framework

Student-centered educators are influenced by sociocultural theory and the work of Vygotsky (Clinton & Reiber, 2010). Sociocultural theory views the act of learning holistically rather than as a set of sequential tasks to be mastered. Learning is accomplished in social interaction that becomes internalized by the learner (Turuk, 2008). According to Vygotsky, individuals learn first with assistance or in collaboration from capable teachers or peers, and then develop the capabilities to learn to do on their own without assistance (Borthick, Jones, & Wakai, 2003). This learning takes place within a *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) defined ZPD as "the distance between a child's actually developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86 as cited in Miller, 2002, p. 377). The ZPD is also applicable to adults: an individual's problem solving capacity is an inherent part of his or her learning capability, and that learning is self directed and transpires in social interactions between people with differing levels of knowledge and skill.

Another concept within this theory is that learning occurs within a framework of *scaffolding*. Teachers initially carry greater responsibility in the learning process; however, they create a framework, or scaffold, that reduces teacher responsibility while allowing the students to increase their responsibility for learning and successfully accomplishing new tasks. Turuk (2008) proposed that Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is applicable to second language (L2) learning. He advocated the "social uses of language according to context" (p. 254) rather than rote, repetitive responses to teacher instructions for L2 learning. Language learning should take place within a relationship between the language being used and the context in which the language naturally occurs.

Student self assessment is nested within sociocultural theory whereby learning begins with assisted learning progressing to independent learning. Initial teacher feedback helps students to understand their progress as measured against stated goals. As teachers give feedback, they also help students develop knowledge and critical review skills so that students learn to assess their own work prior to or independent of teacher critique. In essence, the teacher structures the assessment task within a scaffold (framework). The teacher begins with modeling the desired behavior then gradually shifts the responsibility for assessment to the student. As the student progresses, revisions are made to the scaffold until the scaffold is no longer needed, i.e., when the student has internalized or mastered the task and taken on the responsibility for his or her own assessment (Turuk 2008). In this study, student self assessment ability is believed to be a learned result within the framework of teacher assessment and feedback. Teachers gradually shift from full responsibility for student evaluation to equipping students and future interpreters to accurately assess their own language abilities and productivity.

Purpose and Implication of This Study

This study sought to investigate the relationship between students' self assessment of ASL competency and teacher assessment of students' ASL competency in beginning through advanced ASL students enrolled in language classes within two-year and four-year post-secondary interpreter education programs. If students can accurately evaluate their ASL competency, then teachers can purposefully incorporate student evaluation into the instructional design. If students cannot accurately assess their ASL competency, then ASL programs and interpreter education programs may want to address the development of assessment skills in the curricula. Based on the many benefits

enumerated previously, student self assessment has the potential to positively affect student learning and achievement.

Method

Participants

In 2009, 156 university students in beginning to advanced ASL classes were targeted for a study on interpreting aptitude, which contained the research questions on self assessment that are reported here. These students included 90 ASL 1 (beginning) students and 66 ASL 3 and ASL 4 students (advanced). All students were enrolled in a fall semester ASL class in five colleges and universities offering an AA or BA degree in interpretation.

The 156 students were evaluated in eleven ASL classes with ten different instructors. Of the eleven ASL classes, instructors who are deaf taught five classes, and hearing instructors who were either state and/or nationally certified interpreters (CSC, NIC Master, CI and CT, CI, Texas-BEI-4, Texas BEI-5) taught six classes. The class sizes ranged from a high enrollment of 24 students (ASL 1) to a low of four students (ASL 4) with an average student-teacher ratio of 12:1.

With Institutional Review Board approval from the supporting institution and signed participant consent forms, these ASL students and their instructors were asked to independently rate the students' ASL communication abilities. The intent, within the larger study, was to evaluate whether there were significant differences between beginning and advanced ASL students according to their sign language communication ability as rated by both students and instructors, and to determine if there was a correlation between students' and instructors' ratings.

Instrument

The ASL students' and teachers' assessments of students' language competency were conducted using the Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) Rating Scale (Newell, Caccamise, Boardman, & Holcomb, 1983). The SCPI is an 11-item construct-referenced test of language skills that was adapted from the U.S. Foreign Service Institute and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Language Proficiency Interview Rating scales. Following the SCPI format, test-takers participated in a structured conversation with a deaf interviewer. Trained raters evaluated the language produced according to specific criteria resulting in a descriptive rating from *No Functional Skills* (lowest) to *Superior Plus* (highest). (See Appendix A for Rating Scale descriptions). Language ability was evaluated on competencies such as knowledge and use of conversational ASL, variety of vocabulary understood and produced, accuracy and clarity of language production, rate and grammatical variety of language production, and language comprehension. After 1986, the title was changed to the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI), although the 11-level language description scale remained the same.

Reliability is considered high for this scale. A study by Caccamise and Samar (2009) produced an 87% inter-rater reliability rating providing "clear evidence that the SLPI 3-rater team procedure results in reliability and valid official ratings" (p. 42). The scale consists of categorical descriptions of sign language communication proficiency from a low of one (no functional skill) to a high of eleven (native-like skills). The scale was designed for use by a trained rater team watching a recorded interview conducted by a trained, deaf interviewer.

It must be noted that the SCPI (or SLPI), while still in use, has generally been replaced by the American Sign Language Proficiency Interview (ASLPI). This instrument rates candidates structured conversation on a scale of 0-5, a rating system modeled on the Foreign Service Institute of the U.S. Department of State. While the levels have functional descriptions, the ASLPI instrument was not widely available in 2009. Furthermore, the SCPI 1983 scale with 11 descriptive categories provides more skill divergence than the ASLPI five-category scale that is proprietary to Gallaudet University.

The SCPI procedures do not provide a self assessment component. However, the SCPI Rating Scale was chosen for this study because it has experienced wide use, the researcher is a trained SCPI rater familiar with the tool, and the scale provides sufficient language levels with concise, yet clear, descriptions for instructors and students to rate student competency without training. Additionally the scale is free and widely available on the internet. The use of this tool in this study does not follow

the standard testing procedures; however, the intent of this study was not to provide psychometrically derived SCPI levels for the students. Rather, it was designed to determine self assessment accuracy as measured by the correlation of student's rating with their instructors' ratings. Due to the use of the instrument in a non-standard manner, the inability to generalize the results constitutes a limitation of this study.

Procedure

Students were asked first to provide demographic data about themselves. Demographic variables included gender, ethnicity, parental hearing status, age, years of prior experience with ASL, and years of prior experience with deaf persons who use ASL. The data were analyzed to evaluate any significant differences among the student groups.

Students assessed their ASL ability by reading the levels of the SCPI Rating Scale and self-identifying their skill level by marking an "X" in the box next to the level that they felt best described their current ASL proficiency. After students completed their self assessments, their instructors were asked to rate the ASL proficiency of each student in the class using the same SCPI Rating Scale. Students never learned the instructor's ratings and the instructors were not privy to the students' self-ratings. Only the researcher had access to both the students' and instructors' ratings of ASL communication proficiency.

Results

Student demographic data were analyzed to determine if there were any significant differences between beginning and advanced students other than ASL competency. No significant differences were expected between the students regarding age, ethnicity, and parental hearing status; however, it was expected that there would be a significant difference between beginning and advanced students regarding prior years experience using ASL and experience with deaf people who use ASL.

Age, Ethnicity, and Parental Hearing Status

A Chi-Square test of independence was used to analyze categorical descriptive data on gender, ethnicity, and parental hearing status. There was no significant difference reported between beginning and advanced ASL students regarding gender, ethnicity, or parental hearing status. The students were predominantly female, White, with hearing parents (see Table 1).

Table 1: Description of Participants by Gender, Ethnicity, and Parental Hearing Status

| Demographic Variables | Beginning ASL Students | | Advanced ASL Students | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------|-----------------------|--------|
| | N | % | N | % |
| Number of Participants | 90 | 58% | 66 | 42% |
| Gender | | | | |
| Male | 17 | 19% | 13 | 20% |
| Female | 73 | 81% | 52 | 80% |
| Ethnicity | | | | |
| White | 75 | 84% | 51 | 77% |
| Black/African American | 10 | 11% | 08 | 12% |
| Hispanic/Latino/Latina | 00 | 00% | 03 | 05% |
| Asian/Pacific Is./Hawaiian | 01 | 01% | 02 | 03% |
| American Indian/AK Native | 03 | 03% | 02 | 03% |
| TOTAL | 89 | 99%** | 66 | 100% |
| Parent(s)' Hearing Status | | | | |
| Mother Hearing | 90 | 100% | 63 | 95% |
| Mother Deaf | 00 | 00% | 02 | 03% ** |
| Father Hearing | 87 | 99% | 63 | 97% |
| Father Deaf | 01 | 01% | 02 | 03% |

**Note: One participant did not indicate gender, ethnicity, or mother's hearing status. Three participants did not respond to father's hearing status.

Age, Years Prior Experience with ASL, and Years Prior Experience with Deaf Persons who Use ASL:

Age

Students' ages, number of years of prior experience with ASL, and students' number of years with deaf persons who use ASL were also analyzed. Age was analyzed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) (see Table 2). There was no significant difference between the mean ages of beginning and advanced ASL students (26.76 and 29.35 years respectively).

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation for Age and Prior Experience with ASL

| Level | N | Age | | Prior Experience with ASL | | Prior Exp. Deaf Persons Use ASL | |
|------------------|----|-------|----------|---------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|----------|
| | | Mean | Std. Dev | Mean | Std. Dev | Mean | Std. Dev |
| Begin ASL | 90 | 26.76 | 10.29 | 1.89* | 10.58 | 3.63 | 17.87 |
| Adv ASL | 66 | 29.36 | 11.03 | 9.35* | 23.97 | 9.14 | 24.88 |

* $p < .0001$

Prior Experience with ASL

Analysis of variance indicated that there were significant differences in years of prior experience with ASL between beginning ASL students and advanced ASL students. Post hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD criterion indicated that class status was associated with the number of years of prior ASL experience (see Table 2). Students in the advanced ASL classes had more years experience with ASL than beginning ASL students.

Prior Experience with Deaf Persons Who Use ASL

A significant difference was not apparent between beginning ASL students ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 17.87$)

and advanced students ($M = 9.14$, $SD = 24.88$) on the years of prior experience with deaf persons who use ASL (see Table 2). It may be that the time between ASL 1 and ASL 3 and 4 is not sufficient to provide significantly more experience with deaf persons who use ASL. High standard deviations for all three variables indicate that each group contained some students who varied considerably from the mean. Some students were older, some had more prior experience with ASL and some had more prior experience with deaf persons who use ASL (e.g. children with deaf parents).

In summary, beginning and advanced ASL students presented no significant differences with respect to age, gender, ethnicity, parental hearing status, and prior experience with deaf persons who use ASL thus presenting a rather homogeneous group of students. There was, however, a significant difference between the two groups with respect to prior ASL experience with the advanced ASL students demonstrating more experience with ASL than the beginning students. This is not surprising given the high percentages of students with hearing parents who most likely learned ASL as a second language and had little prior experience with the language before ASL 1. For these students, progression through the ASL course sequence would increase students experience with ASL. While there were no significant differences in five of the six categories, the high standard deviations indicate the presence of student outliers whose demographics differed considerably from the means such as ASL students who have deaf parents.

Class Status and Students' Self-Rating of Competency on the SCPI Scale

Students were evaluated to determine if there was a significant difference between beginning ASL students' SCPI scores and advanced ASL students' SCPI scores. A t -test was conducted on the two groups of students' SCPI scores (see Table 3). A significant difference was reported between the two groups of students $t(154) = 10.81$, $p < .0001$. The advanced ASL students rated themselves significantly higher than the beginning ASL students with beginning students' mean self-rating at the *Novice Plus* level and the advanced students mean self-rating at the *Intermediate* level on the SCPI Interview Rating Scale (see Appendix A). Results support the proposition that the advanced ASL students in these programs have higher language competency skills than the beginning ASL students, at least as self-rated. Effect size was relatively large, calculated as $d = (5.88 - 3.03) / (2.15) = 1.33$.

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Confidence Intervals for Students' Status and Self-Rating of Language Competency on the SCPI Scale

| Level | N | Mean | Std. Dev | 95% CI (mean) | df | t-value | p |
|--------------|-----|------|----------|---------------|-----|---------|--------|
| Begin ASL | 90 | 3.03 | 1.56 | 2.71, 3.36 | 154 | 10.81 | <.0001 |
| Adv ASL | 66 | 5.88 | 1.71 | 5.46, 6.30 | | | |
| All Students | 156 | 4.24 | 2.15 | 3.90, 4.58 | | | |

Class Status and Instructors' Competency Rating on the SCPI Scale

Instructors also rated students' language competency on the SCPI scale. A t -test was conducted on the instructors' SCPI scores for the two groups of students (see Table 4). A significant difference was reported between the two groups of students $t(154) = 8.13$, $p < .0001$. The instructors rated the advanced ASL students' language competency significantly higher than the beginning ASL students' language competency with instructors' mean rating of beginning students near the *Survival* level and the instructors' mean rating of the advanced students at the *Intermediate* level on the SCPI Interview Rating Scale. These results are similar to the differences in the students' self-reported SCPI scores and further support the proposition that the advanced ASL students in these programs have higher language competency skills than the beginning ASL student. Effect size was relatively large, calculated as $d = (5.98 - 3.50) / (2.25) = 1.10$. It should be noted that none of the teachers rated both beginning and advanced ASL students.

Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Confidence Intervals for Students' Status and Teachers' Ratings of Language Competency on the SCPI Scale

| Level | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | 95% CI (Mean) | df | t-value | p |
|-------------|-----|------|-----------|---------------|-----|---------|--------|
| Begin ASL | 90 | 3.50 | 1.81 | 3.12, 3.88 | 154 | 8.13 | <.0001 |
| Adv ASL | 66 | 5.98 | 1.99 | 5.50, 6.47 | | | |
| All Teacher | 156 | 4.55 | 2.25 | 4.20, 4.91 | | | |

Relationship Between ASL Students' Self-Rating and Instructors' Rating of Students' Language Competency on the SCPI Scale

Each beginning and advanced ASL class was evaluated to determine if there were any significant differences in student's self-ratings of sign language competency and their instructors' rating of their sign language competency. For individual class statistics, see Appendix B. The mean and standard deviation for both students' self-ratings of competency and instructors' rating of student competency are reported (see Table 5).

Table 5: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation Between Students' Self-Ratings and Instructors' Ratings for All ASL students

| | | Student | | Instructor | | Correlation |
|---------------|-------|---------|------|------------|------|-------------|
| Student Level | N | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | |
| Beginning | N=90 | 3.03 | 1.56 | 3.50 | 1.81 | 0.44** |
| Advanced | N=66 | 5.88 | 1.71 | 5.98 | 1.99 | 0.37* |
| All students | N=156 | 4.24 | 2.15 | 4.55 | 2.25 | 0.62** |

* Correlation is significant at the $p < .01$ level.

** Correlation is significant at the $p < .0001$ level.

Correlation between the students' self-evaluation of their sign language competency and the instructors' evaluation of students' sign language competency was analyzed using the Pearson product-moment correlation co-efficient which is appropriate when both variables are assessed on an interval or ratio level (Hatcher, 2003). Correlation strength is interpreted as: .00 = no correlation, <-.20 = weak correlation, <-.50 = moderate correlation, <-.80 = strong correlation, and <-1.00 = perfect correlation (Hatcher, 2003). Results indicate a moderate and significant correlation between beginning ASL students and their instructors on the SCPI rating scale, and a weaker, yet significant, correlation between the advanced students and their instructors on the SCPI rating scale. A moderately strong correlation was reported between the ASL students as a whole and their instructors, suggesting ASL students and their instructors generally rated similarly the students' language communication competency skills.

Discussion

If today's ASL students are to become tomorrow's working interpreters, then it is imperative that they learn the skills necessary to self assess their strengths and weaknesses beginning with their ASL competency. While instructor feedback is critical for student understanding and growth, student-centered pedagogy supports self assessment as an important source of analysis along with instructor and peer critique. Studies have been conducted in multiple countries on university students' ability to self assess across subjects including second language learning. There is, however, no body of information investigating whether American Sign Language students can accurately assess their own language competency.

Are Students Able to Accurately Assess Personal ASL Competency?

This study asked ASL students and their instructors to independently rate students' sign

communication proficiency using the Rating Scale of the SCPI. Accuracy in this study is defined as a strong correspondence between students' and instructors' ratings of students' ASL language competency on the eleven-item SCPI Rating Scale. One limitation of this definition is that the assessment is based on both the students' and the instructors' self-report of perceived student ASL competency. Self-report instruments are widely used in social science research; nevertheless, they do have reported limitations. Some limitations include the influence of perceived social desirability, that is, the tendency for persons to want to "look good" and score accordingly; challenges in measuring individual differences to the same stimulus (ASL competency level description); over-reporting and under-reporting; and acquiescence (responding just to respond) (King & Bruner, 2000; Razavi, 2001). Despite the possible limitations, self-report measures are considered appropriate and are used in a variety of studies of social sciences and human behavior (Haefel & Howard, 2010), including second language proficiency (Marian, Blumenfeld, & Kaushanskaya, 2007).

In this study, correlation between student and instructor assessments of ASL communication fluency showed a wide variation when analyzed by class (-.28 – 0.69). Given the difference in class size of the 11 classes (low of 3 students to a high of 26 students) it is difficult to meaningfully analyze such small units. Therefore, it is more meaningful to analyze at the course level (beginning and advanced). Beginning students as a whole had a marginally moderate (.44) and significant relationship between their self assessment and their instructors' assessment of their ASL communication competency. The advanced students (ASL 3 and 4) and their instructors had a weaker correlation of .37.

Holistic results are more encouraging. Advanced students demonstrated higher language competency than beginning students as rated by both the students and their instructors. As a whole, ASL students' rating of personal competency moderately and significantly correlated with their instructors' ratings. Across all groups there was a significant, moderate-strong correlation (0.62) between students' self-ratings and their instructors' rating of students sign communication proficiency. It would appear that students do have moderate ability to assess their ASL competency similarly to their instructors and that self assessment should be at least considered as a tool for evaluating student performance in ASL classrooms. However, it is not known how well student assessments compare to other evaluation tools such as standardized tests, peer evaluation, or criterion-referenced instructor/student goals. It is also debatable whether *moderate* correlation is sufficiently strong enough to warrant more use in the classroom. Students may need more instruction in how to assess their own work, and/or more experience to improve their skills. Caution should be used when evaluating these results, but it does raise the potential for classroom application and inclusion in curricular design.

Do ASL Students' Self Assessment of Their Language Competency Increase in Accuracy as They Progress Through ASL Course Sequences?

Results of this study did not support the hypothesis that students' ability to self assess their ASL communication competency increases as they progress through their post-secondary education and their ASL course sequences. In fact, results of this study indicate that these advanced ASL students were less likely than the beginning ASL students to accurately assess their competency. It is possible that these results are idiosyncratic, and further testing might produce different results. Another possibility is that there is a difference between the two groups of students regarding their previous experience with, or instruction on, self assessment that was not investigated nor was evident in this study. A longitudinal study of ASL students designed with an experimental group receiving self assessment training would be a preferred method of measurement than the concurrent design of this study. The lack of stronger correlation for the advanced students' self and teachers' assessment of ASL proficiency is contrary to Tan's summary that self assessment is an outcome of education (2008). It may be that if students are taught how to self assess, accuracy may increase as they progress through their educational experience. Additionally, the results of this study do not support the socio-cultural theoretical framework in which it was nested; that is, learning takes place when students are exposed to teachers and mentors within social interactions (assisted learning) where learning becomes internalized, propelling the student to acquire increasing knowledge (independent learning). That is not to say that the theoretical framework is without merit. It is more likely that limitations of the design of this study are impacting the results. Further study is necessary to evaluate the growth of self assessment skills of university students, particularly ASL students. Additional research can also

examine the theoretical framework in which this study was nested.

The issue of increasing self assessment accuracy, or the lack thereof, is integral to the interpreter's requirements to self assess fitness and readiness for accepting assignments and to participate in ongoing and life-long learning. Interpreters must develop self assessment skill, whether in university settings or through in-service or self-directed learning. Further research is needed to evaluate whether or not students are acquiring the ability to accurately self assess their skills in university interpreter education programs and how this skill is being acquired. Enabling students to conduct accurate assessments is critical to their continued growth and professional development as interpreters and to their ability to make critical decisions expected of all effective practitioners.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that these ASL students were moderately capable of assessing their own language competency when analyzed as a whole. This result cannot be generalized, but it can stimulate thinking among ASL teachers and interpreter educators regarding the systematic teaching of self assessment skill and its role as a measurement tool in ASL classrooms. This, in turn, may contribute to the development of the skills needed when these students are working interpreters making judgments regarding readiness for particular assignments and participation in specific continuing education activities.

Additional research is needed to determine if self assessment can serve as an accurate measurement of student learning and progress. The incremental nature of learning to accurately self-assess needs more investigation and theoretical thought. Further study can investigate the correlation between ASL students' self assessment not only to teacher assessment, but also to other instruments such as ASL standards that are in development, curricular tests, and peer evaluation. Given the proposed benefits of self-evaluation as presented earlier, researchers may want to investigate factors other than self assessment that contribute to students' heightened engagement in learning, motivation, increased feelings of mastery, and empowerment. Lastly, research should focus on a more accurate, valid, and reliable tool with which students can self assess their progress in learning and mastering ASL.

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Appendix A: Sign Communications Proficiency Interview (SCPI) Rating Scale

| RATINGS | DESCRIPTIONS |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Superior Plus | Able to have a fully shared and natural conversation, with in-depth elaboration for both social and work topics. All aspects of signing are native-like. |
| Superior | Able to have a fully shared conversation, with in-depth elaboration for both social and work topics. Very broad sign language vocabulary, near native-like production and fluency, excellent use of sign language grammatical features, and excellent comprehension for normal signing rate. |
| Advanced Plus | Exhibits some superior level skills, but not all and not consistently. |
| Advanced | Able to have a generally shared conversation with good, spontaneous elaboration for both social and work topics. Broad sign language vocabulary knowledge and clear, accurate production of signs and fingerspelling at a normal/near-normal rate; occasional mis-productions do not detract from conversation flow. Good use of many sign language grammatical features and comprehension good for normal signing rate. |
| Intermediate Plus | Exhibits some advanced level skills, but not all and not consistently. |
| Intermediate | Able to discuss with some confidence routine social and work topics within a conversational format with some elaboration; generally 3-to-5 sentences. Good knowledge and control of everyday/basic sign language vocabulary with some sign vocabulary errors. Fairly clear signing at a moderate signing rate with some sign mis-productions. Fair use of some sign language grammatical features and fairly good comprehension for a moderate-to-normal signing rate; a few repetitions and rephrasing of questions may be needed. |
| Survival Plus | Exhibits some intermediate level skills, but not all and not consistently. |
| Survival | Able to discuss basic social and work topics with responses generally 1-to-3 sentences in length. Some knowledge of basic sign language vocabulary with many sign vocabulary and/or sign production errors. Slow-to-moderate signing rate. Basic use of a few sign language grammatical features. Fair comprehension for signing produced at a slow-to-moderate rate with some repetition and rephrasing. |
| Novice Plus | Exhibits some survival level skills, but not all and not consistently. |
| Novice | Able to provide single sign and some short phrase/sentence responses to basic questions signed at a slow-to-moderate rate with frequent repetition and rephrasing. Vocabulary primarily related to everyday work and/or social areas such as basic work-related signs, family members, basic objects, colors, numbers, names of weekdays, and time. Production and fluency characterized by many sign production errors and by a slow rate with frequent inappropriate pauses/hesitations. |
| No Functional Skills | (May be) Able to provide short single sign and “primarily” fingerspelled responses to some basic questions signed at a slow rate with extensive repetition and rephrasing. |

*Appendix B: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation Between Student Self-Rating
and Instructor Rating for Beginning and Advanced ASL Classes*

| Beginning ASL Classes | | | Student | | Instructor | | Correlation |
|------------------------|--------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| | | N =90 | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | |
| Class 1 | ASL 1 | eleven | 2.55 | .069 | 3.36 | 1.43 | .49 |
| Class 2 | ASL 1 | 23 | 3.26 | 1.89 | 3.52 | 1.99 | .26 |
| Class 3 | ASL I | 24 | 3.58 | 1.99 | 4.88 | 1.68 | .63 |
| Class 4 | ASL I | 12 | 3.00 | 0.85 | 3.33 | 1.07 | .10 |
| Class 5 | ASL 1 | 20 | 2.40 | 0.88 | 2.00 | 0.86 | -0.28 |
| <i>All begin class</i> | <i>ASL 1</i> | <i>90</i> | <i>3.03</i> | <i>1.56</i> | <i>3.50</i> | <i>1.81</i> | <i>.44**</i> |
| Class 6 | ASL 3 | eleven | 4.55 | 1.44 | 5.45 | 1.63 | -0.12 |
| Class 7 | ASL 3 | 26 | 5.73 | 1.66 | 5.92 | 2.19 | .46 |
| Class 8 | ASL 3 | 15 | 6.40 | 1.72 | 6.13 | 1.60 | .65 |
| Class 9 | ASL 4 | 03 | 6.67 | 0.58 | 7.67 | 2.08 | .69 |
| Class 10 | ASL 4 | 07 | 5.71 | 0.49 | 6.43 | 1.40 | .21 |
| Class eleven | ASL 4 | 04 | 8.25 | 1.50 | 5.25 | 3.59 | .60 |
| All adv class | ASL 3 & 4 | 66 | 5.88 | 1.71 | 5.98 | 1.99 | .37* |
| All classes | ASL 1, 3, 4 | 156 | 4.24 | 2.25 | 4.55 | 2.25 | .62** |

* correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

** correlation is significant at the .001 level