

Interpreting by Design: a study of aptitude, ability and achievement in Australian Sign Language interpreters

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is comprised of a series of thematically linked work that explores and investigates factors that may be predictors of interpreter performance. The research study (i) identifies the skills, knowledge and abilities deemed necessary for competent performance as a signed language interpreter, (ii) measures perceived competence in interpreters, (iii) gathers data on the skills gaps of interpreters and a range of personality constructs, and (iv) applies this potentially predictive data. The application of the findings of the research study includes (i) piloting interpreter education program admission screening procedures, (ii) establishing a diagnostic skills analysis and performance management process for educational interpreters, (iii) documenting the risk associated with interpreting in traumatic settings, and (iv) introducing strategies to enhance the personal coping skills of interpreters working in such environments.

The data gathered from this unified corpus of research and the efforts outlined to apply the findings in purposeful ways in a series of practical projects will contribute to the field of interpreter education by increasing the body of knowledge about interpreter aptitude, ability and achievement. Knowing which qualities may be predictive of successful performance in the profession may lead to (i) the development of more effective screening tools for assessing occupational suitability for interpreting, (ii) the potential for better predicting achievement in programs of study, (iii) improved capacity for addressing skills gaps in interpreters, and (iv) better training opportunities and safeguards for working practitioners. It will also provide direction and guidance to interpreter educators, employers, and practitioners themselves, in regard to (i) curricula, (ii) staff supervision and support, (iii) interpreter performance management, and (iv) individual awareness of the aptitudes and abilities recommended for effective interpreting practice. The results of the study have implications for both spoken and signed language interpreting fields in regard to research, pedagogy and practice.

KEYWORDS: aptitude, performance, personality, sign language interpreting, skills gaps.

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