

Understanding Registers of Language Consecutive Interpreting

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1) Where did the term or concept of “register” come from? How is it defined?

- Most of our understanding and application of register in relation to English and ASL originates from Dutch sociolinguist Martin Joos. In his book *The Five Clocks of Language* (1967), Joos was the first to refer to a continuum or spectrum of register. Later, Halliday (1968), while not referring specifically to ‘register’ or any of Joos’ variations, posits that understanding the who, what, where, when, why, and how of a discourse defines a similar ‘register’ notion.

- Register is the use of language (lexicon, syntax, intonation, semantic intent) and specific content that creates a *social and psychological distance* between the speaker and the audience. It reflects the degree of that social distance we wish to have with others in specific settings.
- Social distance establishes and maintains objectivity, sustains order in given situations, and may clarify the status of participants.

2) What are the five registers of language?

- *Intimate*: used to establish maximum intimacy among people who interact regularly. Most information is linguistically and topically assumed and implicit.
- *Casual/Informal/Conversational*: used to establish a familiarity and remembrance of shared experiences and attitudes. Information is somewhat linguistically and topically implicit.
- *Consultative*: establishes and maintains a neutral and task-oriented distance from people. Very little information is assumed or implied.

- *Formal*: used to maximize social distance and often used to assert a position of power or prestige. Used to impart knowledge without much social interaction. Speaker must make intentions explicit.
- *Frozen*: involves language forms that are fixed, formulaic, and cannot be altered or changed. Typically prescribed by law, ritual, or custom.

Register is rarely formulaic and is more fluid in nature; that is, speakers typically, depending on intent or message, may move in and out of registers or purposely violate register for effect.

3) What are the varieties of participants, situations, settings, signer behaviors, and interpreting challenges in the registers of language?

If register relies on linguistic variables, it follows that there are contingent cultural variables as well. As the nature of register is to create a social and psychological distance between participants, their relationships and related situations will vary. Each of these situations has a common set of features and resultant set of behaviors that are appropriate—and inappropriate.

The goal of interpreting is to negotiate an opportunity for a successful communicate interaction (Cokely 1999) and render an equivalent message (Colonomos 1989, 1997). As such, interpreting must take register into consideration. As a result, interpreters face challenges to rendering the equivalent message. Some of these participant, situational, behavioral, and interpreter challenge varieties are shown on the next page.

| | Intimate | Casual/Informal/ Conversational | Consultative (*most work happens here) | Formal | Frozen |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| Participants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> used by friends, spouses/partners, family | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> no status differential: peers, family members in social or casual encounters and conversations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> used in an unequal status: teacher/student, boss/employee, doctor/patient | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> used by experts, scholars, professionals, politicians, doctors in presentations, not in conversation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> used in official situations or instances and/or languages of prestige and power |
| Examples of Situations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> phone call with parents, siblings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> family reunion restaurant side conversation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> meeting with bishop or pastor PTA meeting with teacher doctor appointment purchasing a car | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> legal proceeding class/conference paper presentation lobbying to a political organization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> national anthems AA 12 steps Miranda warning ABC stories Deaf school songs |
| Settings and Features | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> private; idiosyncratic; in close relationships; tied to shared knowledge and background (pet names), experience; use of ellipsis or gaps Special meanings for speakers only | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> parties, at home, at work, at school, most social situations, informal gatherings; spontaneous familiarity: peers/family language assimilation and blending ("didja," "gweet," "gunna") narratives, stories; humor, touch, emotion involved | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> classrooms, Q&A, workshops, technical discussions, seminars, counseling sessions, doctor's offices, department or staff meetings, ecclesiastical discussions Used in platform or podium interpreting need to have information about the topic; expectations need to be managed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> monologues, formal presentations, panels, debates, lectures, introductions, TV/news reporting most psychological distance planned text(s) with script/notes; time is restricted; features an introduction; precise articulation standing position; dress is formal, robes, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> memorized, fixed, archaic, or symbolic language state affairs: nat'l anthem, pledges, parliamentary processes, courtrooms; religion: churches, weddings, ceremonies, liturgy, scriptures no real audience; ritualistic and group-driven ("I belong to the group") not interpretable |
| Signer-specific Linguistic Behaviors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASL mouthing Use of "buzz words," acronyms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signs are more assimilated and less formed Signer uses a more centralized signing space Less eye contact during text More sign play, lexicalized fingerspelling, use of non-manual behaviors More discourse overlap | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signer continually scans group and addressees for eye contact Allows more for response time Normal-to-less fingerspelling Sentence structures may be mixed, depending on group language preference and use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signs produced at a slower pace Uses a larger signing space Signer scans for eye contact Use of WH-q/RH-q (rhetorical questions) and full sentences Use of metaphors Tendency to sign more English-like Less fingerspelling | |
| Interpreting Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> quality/type of relationship affective personal mediated by looking away(?): imply non-addressed language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> preparation? role boundaries: all parties typically need to be acknowledged cultural differences social protocols | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> power & alliance issues (D, H, I): where are <i>we</i>? preparation and education: prior and personal 1-on-1 situations: seating arrangements so as not to create ally perception | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (own) language experience and competence possible media (TV, video) or technical aspects sitting or standing? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> form/meaning; not the goal to provide ASL equivalent, but more to create group cohesion; express core group values lack of equivalents music/visual art |

4) Linguistically, how does formal and informal register differ?

- Again, register uses language (lexicon, syntax, intonation, semantic intent) and specific content to create *social and psychological distance* between speakers.

There is marked difference between the way formal and informal English and ASL look and sound. Here are some linguistic characteristics of the two:

| | American Sign Language | | English | |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| | Formal | Informal | Formal | Informal |
| Production | Pace/speed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • slower | Pace/speed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • faster | Pace/speed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • slower | Pace/speed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • faster |
| | Sign size <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • larger | Sign size <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • smaller | Articulation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear enunciation, redundant information | Articulation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less clear enunciation |
| | Sign parameters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more fully articulated | Sign parameters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less fully articulated | Contractions/abbreviations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fewer: "I can not," "television," "psychology" | Contractions/abbreviations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fewer: "I can't," "TV," "psych" |
| | Body movement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduced movement | Body movement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhanced movement | definitions and explanation of terms: intention of giving facts, information | non-linear, narrative, reconstructed speech, intention of giving experience |
| Phonological (The smallest parts of a language: English = sound units; ASL = smallest parts of signs [parameters: handshape, location, orientation, movement]) | Conventional use of sign parameters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • location • movement • palm orientation • hand configuration • non-manual behaviors | Flexible use of sign parameters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • location • movement • palm orientation • hand configuration • non-manual behaviors | | |
| | Number of hands used <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more 2-handed signs | Number of hands used <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more 1-handed signs | Dropped phonemes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • none: "I am going to leave," "He would have gotten it" | Dropped phonemes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • often: "I'm gonna leave," "He'd've gotten it" |
| | Fingerspelling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearer, slower, more articulated | Fingerspelling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • faster, more lexicalized | Polished, completed delivery, prepared script | Colloquial, breaks in delivery, "um," "well," "so" |
| Morphological (The smallest meaningful units in the composition of a word: English = word [cat], prefix/suffix [pre-, -ing]; ASL = sign [CAT], part of compound sign [SISTER = GIRL + SAME]) | Classifiers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used less often | Classifiers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used more often | Polysyllabic words <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "lexical" • "phenomenal" • "flabbergasted" • "that's terrific" | Monosyllabic words <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "word" • "great" • "blown away" • "you rock" |
| | Temporal aspect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used less often | Temporal aspect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used more often | Swearing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited/none: "furious" | Swearing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • often: "pissed off" |
| | Non-manual behaviors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not used without signs | Non-manual behaviors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used without signs | Slang, idioms, jargon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "refrigerator" • "wonderful" • "incredible" | Slang, idioms, jargon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "fridge" • "killer" • "wicked" |
| | ASL mouthing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not used | ASL mouthing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used more often | Ellipsis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited: "The coffee is cold," "Are you leaving?" "Have you seen John?" | Ellipsis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited: "Coffee's cold," "Leaving?" "Seen John?" |
| Syntactic (Syntax rules govern how word phrases are formed or signs are combined to form sentences) | Topicalization; topic/comment for emphasis | Topicalization less used; more negotiated | Interrogatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Do you want to leave?" | Omitted interrogatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Wanna leave?" |
| | Rhetorical questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used often for transitions, emphasis | Rhetorical questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not used | | |
| | Listing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used more often | Listing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used less often | Voice: more passive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The report was read." (absolves responsibility) | Voice: more active <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "He read the report." |
| Semantic | Lexical "sandwich structure or pairing (sign > fs > sign)" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used more often | Lexical "sandwich structure or pairing (sign > fs > sign)" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used less often | | |