Northeastern University
Center for Atypical Language Interpreting

Using the CALI Language Sample Video Series

A Teaching Guide for Interpreter Educators & ASL Instructors

Purpose of This Guide

The Language Sample Series is a collection of video interviews with individuals who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and DeafDisabled. These specific individuals were interviewed with expressed consent to provide a wide variety of language samples depicting individuals who/whose: language use may have changed due to natural aging processes cognitively and/or physically, experienced language deprivation or delays, learned ASL as an additional language later in life, have navigated systems as immigrants or as refugees, and more. We are grateful to each of these individuals for sharing their life experiences while allowing us the honor to observe their language use in the most natural setting possible. These videos serve to provide exposure to a wide range of linguistic variations that may be used by working interpreters, students of ASL and interpreting, as well as by interpreting educators and mentors. While each student and practitioner also comes with a wide variety of exposure to language variation from within the Deaf, DeafBlind and DeafDisabled communities, what they have not been exposed to may be considered atypical language from their perspective.

The interviews are conducted by Deaf individuals who use natural language discourse to gather information expressively and receptively. While observing the interviewer, consider the strategies used conversationally and how that might be emulated through an interpreted interaction.

These videos provide educators and students access to **authentic linguistic variation**. When used intentionally, they support:

- Increased **self-awareness of ASL receptive skills**
- Greater insight into **interpreter decision-making**
- More effective preparation for working with a wide range of language users
- A shift away from deficit framing toward **language variation as a normal part of human expression**

This guide offers strategies for use in **ASL, linguistics, and interpreting courses** with both novice and advanced learners.

Pedagogical Orientation

Instruction should center on:

A. What the **student is noticing**
B. How the student is **making sense of language**
C. What **decisions and resources** an interpreter may need

Rather than focusing on what a Deaf person does or does not know, instruction foregrounds:

A. The **interpreter's receptive process**
B. **Strategies employed**
C. **Resources required** for effective communication

Language variation is not a problem to fix — it is data to observe.

Our task is to determine how to communicate those observations without attempting to diagnose. Describe not diagnose.

Core Instructional Lenses

1. Receptive Processing

A. What am I understanding?
B. Where does comprehension break down?
C. What features are unfamiliar *to me*?
D. How confident am I in my understanding?

2. Interpreter Decision-Making & Strategies

A. What strategies am I using or considering?
B. What resources are available now?
C. What additional resources would support this interaction?
D. What information supports continuity of care?

Caveat: Receptive and expressive skills often develop differently. Difficulty understanding does not automatically reflect expressive competence.

Differentiated Expectations

Novice / Early Students

A. Identify features descriptively
B. Reflect on comprehension and confidence
C. Practice noticing without solving
D. Engage in guided reflection on assumptions

Advanced Students

1. Analyze strategies and resources
2. Practice professional language descriptions
3. Examine ethical implications
4. Connect observation to decision-making frameworks

Final Framing for Students

These language samples are not about mastery or correctness. They are opportunities to:

1. Practice **noticing**
2. Build **receptive resilience**
3. Strengthen **ethical decision-making**
4. Develop respect for language variation and personal experience

How students learn to engage with variation shapes how they will show up as interpreters.

Use this student-ready handout to prepare your students: Student Handout — Using Language Sample Videos

Step-by-Step Teaching Framework for Language Teaching & Pre-interpreting Skills

Step 1: Identify Language Features & Self- Comprehension

Students observe and name features using **descriptive, non-deficit language**.

Possible Tools

1. Language Analysis Team 2 (LAT2) Report
2. Language Sample Videos.
3. Feature identification (repetition, gesture, timing, spatial use, etc.)*

Guiding Questions

1. What am I seeing?
2. What feels unfamiliar to me?
3. Where am I confident?
4. Where am I uncertain?

**Suggest Language Analysis Videos: #7, #8, #9, and #10*

Step 2: Analyze Decisions & Resources *(without interpreting from the video)*

Focus Areas

1. Comprehension supports: repetition, clarification, pacing, visual mapping
2. Resources that may be needed:
    a. Team interpreters
    b. Deaf interpreters
    c. Preparation time
    d. Continuity documentation
    e. Clear viewing conditions (lighting, background, positioning)

Reflection

A. What do I already bring?
B. What is available?
C. What might I need to request?

Step 3: Identify Assumptions

Students examine how personal experiences influence perception.

While completing the Observation of Language/Communication Features Form (Handout) ask students to pay attention to what assumptions arise while watching the Language Sample Videos.

Prompts

A. What surprised me?
B. What assumptions arose?
C. What do I think I know about people who ___?
D. What questions remain?

Applying the Framework in Practice

Purpose: The following sections are intended to deepen the activities introduced in the step-by-step framework through various “strands” as they naturally arise during your lesson. They are optional and may be used for certain courses, levels and lengths of time.

ASL Classroom Activity — Receptive Noticing & Self-Awareness

Purpose: To build students’ receptive awareness and comfort with language variation.
Suggested Activity: Activities: ASL Receptive Skills Improvement

1. Watch a short language sample clip
2. Identify visual features noticed (movement, facial expression, pacing, space, repetition)
3. Capture the overall idea or emotion rather than individual signs
4. Note what felt clear vs. uncertain and personal confidence level
5. Briefly share one observation and one comprehension insight
6. Emphasize neutral description, curiosity, and growth — not correctness or interpretation

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Interpreting Classroom Activity — Collaborative Transcript

Purpose: To operationalize the Step Framework in a concrete way.
Suggested Activity: Activity: Collaborative Transcript

1. Divide class into groups
2. Assign short time-stamped segments
3. Develop a shared transcript
4. Identify complex or unfamiliar moments
5. Use these as discussion anchors

Students generate 1–2 **content-based comprehension questions**.

Worksheets can be shared across class levels (e.g., 2nd year → 1st year).

Grammar, Meaning & Ethical Decision-Making

Purpose: To help interpreting students move from “What did I see?” to “What choices would I make and why?”
Suggested Activity: Assignment: Self-Reflection and Awareness in Interpreting Practice
Suggested Activity: Assignment: Ethical Decision-Making in Meaning Construction

Language samples may include:

A. Basic sentence structures
B. Incomplete or unconventional grammar
C. Non-linear discourse

Students consider:

A. How do I construct meaning when expected markers are missing?
B. When is “filling in blanks” appropriate?
C. What information must be conveyed to hearing providers?
D. How do I avoid over-interpreting or erasing linguistic differences?

Describing Language Use for Continuity of Care

Students practice **professional, descriptive language** rather than evaluation.

Purpose: To teach students how to describe communication needs respectfully and consistently so future interpreters or service providers are supported.
Suggested Activity: Assignment: Decision-Making/Continuity of Care

Continuity of Care in Interpreting

Continuity of care means making sure communication stays consistent and supported over time, even when interpreters change.

In practical terms, it involves:

A. Passing along beneficial information about how a person prefers to communicate
B. Noting strategies that worked well (or didn’t)
C. Requesting resources that support access, such as team interpreters or preparation time
D. Using respectful, descriptive language so the next interpreter is not starting from zero

The goal is **not** to label the Deaf person or judge their language.
The goal is to **reduce guesswork, prevent misunderstandings, and provide smoother communication from one appointment, class, or event to the next.**

Key Skills:

A. Shared professional terminology
B. Creating language profiles/avatars for consistency
C. Communicating relevant information to agencies and colleagues

Focus remains on:

A. What supports communication
B. What resources enhance efficacy

Final Reflection — My Growth as a Language Observer

Students reflect on how their noticing skills, mindset, and engagement with language variation have developed over time.

Purpose: To strengthen self-awareness, receptive resilience, ethical awareness, and respect for language variation rather than accuracy or perfection.
Suggested Activity: Assignment: Language Focused Student Reflection
When to Use: End of lesson, unit, semester, or after revisiting a previously viewed video (5–15 minutes)

Students Reflect On:

1. What they notice now that they did not notice earlier
2. Moments of partial understanding and what helped them stay engaged
3. Assumptions or internal reactions that arose while watching
4. One intention for approaching unfamiliar signing styles in the future
5. Comfort and confidence levels from beginning to the present
6. What the Language Sample Videos revealed about variation in communication

Instructor Notes:

A. Emphasize growth over correctness
B. Accept brief, visual, written, or signed responses
C. Use as a self-awareness checkpoint rather than a graded task
D. Repeating the reflection later helps students see their development

Key Focus: Curiosity over correction, resilience over perfection, and respectful engagement with language variation.

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