

Chapter 0 - The Metachapter

“The Key to Education is to Trick People into Teaching Themselves.” - 1998 BC

0.0 The Overview

OK, so you’ve never heard of a “Chapter 0” before and you’ve never seen anything called a “metachapter” either. But if you know enough about language and how English words combine to create new meaning, you can predict that this chapter is a chapter about chapters. Indeed, it is exactly that. Most books call it a preface, but as linguists, we know about languages, and we can use pieces of words to make new words with the hope that they stimulate a little interest in the reader. If you are a working interpreter, or an advancing student of interpreting, then you *are* a linguist. You might not feel comfortable with that label yet, but I hope that once you have read through this book, completed the suggested activities at the end of each chapter, and used the ideas here to improve your own interpreting then you will feel perfectly comfortable calling yourself a *linguist*.

The key to self-improvement is having self-motivation. This means that you should have a sense of *what* you need to learn and some ideas about *how* you will learn it. *You* are always the one guiding your own education. Even if this book is required reading for a course you are taking, *you* still determine how much of it you are exposed to. If you aren’t interested in reading any more about how the book is organized, then you can go ahead and skip to Chapter One... it’s OK, you don’t even need my permission. You are the reader, therefore you can read the book any way you want to. Read the summaries first, or read the book randomly, just open to a page and start reading anywhere; you’re in charge! Of course, you might have a quiz or an exam on specific parts of the book, so following your teacher’s (or independent study coordinator’s) syllabus might be to your advantage, too.

So this metachapter is where I get to tell you what I was thinking when I wrote this book. Many times I have been reading a book or article and wondered to myself “What on Earth was this guy thinking?!!” ... so here is my explanation of my vision for this book. It begins with who I am and how I got here. Interpreting is that way too. Success as an interpreter very much depends on WHO you are and WHAT life experiences lead you to becoming an interpreter.

0.1 The Author

My name is Brian Cerney. I came to the profession of interpreting through the side door. What I mean is that I wasn’t exactly born into the Deaf community (my entire family is hearing). Most deaf people I know were not born into the Deaf community either. But I am not deaf... well, not completely. I sometimes refer to myself as Left Deaf. In audiological terms I am monaurally deaf, which (for me) means I am deaf in my left ear: 100%. No one could really measure it accurately because when the audiologists cranked up the volume (on the left side of the headset) toward 100 dB, my skull would transmit the sound vibrations to my right ear and I could “hear”.

In societal terms being left-deaf means people never even suspect this audiological fact about me unless they are within three feet of my left ear and attempt to converse with me through spoken language. If you have a sharp eye for details, you’ll notice that the right side of my mouth (the side closest to my “good” ear) is a little more flexible than the left side of my mouth. Growing up left-deaf gave me a permanent curiosity about the Deaf community. I had deaf classmates in high school and in college, but I never learned sign language (my high school classmate was “oral”) until my sophomore year at the University of Rochester. Of course, Rochester, NY has a very active Deaf community, and I happened to be in a pretty good place to begin exploring my “left” side.

I understood before I began learning ASL that I was not culturally Deaf. I had seen the stage play “Children of a Lesser God” twice before I began my excursion into ASL and the Deaf community. At each performance I was in the balcony and below me was a sea of moving hands. I knew I would some day get involved with this community, but I also knew that I needed to be invited in, I didn’t have a full birthright to it.

I have met many other monaurally deaf people, some left-deaf, some right-deaf. Most of them don’t care to talk about their “condition.” Perhaps they see themselves as impaired in some way. I always drew strength from the fact that I was different from nearly everyone else. Before my family knew that my deafness was centered in the cochlea of my left inner ear, they expected that I would have middle-ear surgery to correct my condition. At the Center of Science and Industry (COSI) in Columbus, Ohio, there was a permanent exhibit on the ear. Part of this exhibit showed a videotape of middle-ear bone-

replacement surgery. Many times we would get to that floor of the museum and see that exhibit and my mother would remind me that I would be having that surgery when I got older. I am sure many other kids might have been thrilled at the prospect of fixing a problem... but I just saw the surgery as a way to change who I was... I did not look forward to having it.

Finally the time came to see if I was a candidate for the surgery. My examination results indicated that surgery would not correct my condition – I was relieved and pleased with these results. I didn't feel any need for correction, and finally I knew I would be allowed to stay the same person I had always known myself to be. When I later learned that most members of the Deaf community don't want to have surgery to change themselves, I understood completely. The change isn't really for your benefit; it's for the benefit of other people who get frustrated with your "differentness."

After graduating high school I left Ohio and its two-dozen colleges and headed out of state to Rochester, New York to study chemical engineering. My dad was a physician and my sister and two brothers had all gone to college with the intention of entering the field of professional medicine. My sister is the one who got closest to it: she's a mental health therapist. My oldest brother pursued chemistry as his pre-med focus. He's now an investment analyst. My other brother pursued biology. He's now a songwriter in Nashville. So I pursued chemical engineering because I figured I could always focus on engineering, chemistry, or go on to med school. The one big problem with that grand scheme was that I really didn't like chemistry and beyond that, I really had no particular interest in any kind of engineering.

What I actually did enjoy was taking English courses: Shakespeare, Chaucer, and a few other authors. I also enjoyed psychology, computer science, education, and related explorations into the human experience (or simulations of the human experience through artificial intelligence: computers). I was all set to pursue a degree in cognitive science when I discovered American Sign Language. At first I had merely learned some vocabulary in a YMCA non-credit course taught by some NTID interpreters: no course syllabus, just a group of students who asked the interpreters how to sign English words. When we were done, we all thought we knew how to sign; but I hadn't even talked with a Deaf person yet!

One of my fraternity brothers, majoring in Electrical Engineering, was taking "Sign Communication I" as an elective which was "totally unrelated to Electrical Engineering," and asked if I wanted to come along. He was one of a handful of people who was aware that I was left-deaf (not a fact that I advertised very much at the time) and for over a decade he was the only person I knew on this planet who would move to position himself so as to be on my right side before I could begin to make those maneuvers myself. I went to his "Sign Communication" class with him, found that a Deaf person was teaching the class, and that auditing the class would not be permitted. I was interested in learning more and so I dropped a film class in order to make room for "Sign Communication I."

Dorothy Wilkins ended up teaching all three of my sign courses at the University of Rochester. They were offered through the Medical Center and had originally been intended for hospital staff to improve their communication skills. When I took the courses, they had been "discovered" by the River Campus students and I never had a hospital employee as a classmate after "Sign Communication I" was finished. It was during "Sign Communication II" that I began to learn about ASL structure. Finally in "American Sign Language I" we explored grammatical structures in ASL, having already achieved pretty good fluency in making sign vocabulary.

Somewhere during these courses I learned about Gallaudet College¹ and decided that I wanted to attend the linguistics program there after I graduated from the University of Rochester. I also applied for the Basic Interpreter Training Program (BITP) at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf and was admitted into one of the last classes of that intensive summer training program. By today's standards it seems bizarre (and perhaps in reality it truly was bizarre) but thirty people came into that program in June of 1985 and only eight weeks later, thirty people had graduated with certificates in Interpreting. By September of 1985, I had moved my worldly possessions to Washington, DC, and was beginning my graduate studies in Linguistics, living with Deaf people as roommates and throughout the dorm, learning to live without a phone, and learning more about the Deaf community than any course or library of videos and books can ever reveal.

While I was at Gallaudet I attempted to find work as an interpreter. After all, I had just graduated from the BITP and even though my instructors had told me (as they had told all of my classmates) that we needed to gradually improve our skills, I believed that I knew better. I marched right over to Gallaudet

¹ Now known as Gallaudet University.

Interpreting Services (GIS) and requested an interview for employment. William Isham was kind enough to allow the interview to take place. It began with a demonstration of my skills: interpret two out of the three deaf people on the videotape from ASL to English. I looked at the first segment for a few moments and then, without having even attempted to interpret any of it, I asked to see the next segment. After a few moments I realized I would not be working for GIS any time soon, but I asked if I could see the third segment, just out of curiosity. Like the previous two segments, I had not the slightest idea what the Deaf people were saying; therefore I couldn't even begin the process of interpreting. Bill gave me a copy of one of his articles and some encouraging words on how to develop my skills and I left the GIS offices determined to keep working so that some day I could come back, try again, and succeed.

I find it interesting in retrospect that while I kept telling myself over and over that I did not intend to become a professional interpreter, things kept happening which pushed me in that direction. I had applied to the BITP only because I had completed all of the University of Rochester's available credited courses in sign language and knew that I needed to get better before I went to Gallaudet. I applied to GIS because I needed money while I was at school. I applied to the Dorm Communication Center (DCC) for the same reasons. At the DCC we took messages for students (phone service was very restricted in those days, only a few ground-floor students had their own phones), lent TTYs to students who didn't have their own, and interpreted phone calls (local or long distance) because the concept of telephone relay services was not yet widespread or well funded. At the DCC I was finally earning money, at least in part, as an interpreter.

In many ways, telephone interpreting is an ideal way for a developing interpreter to enter the profession. Consecutive by nature, telephone interpreting allows clarification of each source text before presenting the target text. It allows for significant pre-conferencing prior to placing the call (an essential element for successful pizza orders) and it reveals the different levels of patience and cooperation between people who know the deaf person (such as friends and family members) and people who don't (such as taxi dispatchers and auto mechanics). It was through a coworker, after we had both graduated, that I actually entered the world of simultaneous interpreting in 1987. Rhonda Jacobs asked me to help interpret a rather fast-paced graduate-level course and I agreed to help out as best as I could.

In those days, team interpreting meant "you read your book while I interpret, then I'll read mine while you interpret." I got a surprising amount of reading done while being paid to interpret. As I worked with many different interpreters at the University of Maryland I saw that we all understood the same principles: work in half hour shifts, don't pay too much attention to the working interpreter during your "break" and don't talk about the work too much when you're done.

A few years later, Richelle Hammett, the new coordinator of interpreting at the University of Maryland, was scheduled as my interpreting team member. I expected that she would probably start with a review and assessment of my skills. On the first night of our work together I volunteered to interpret the first "shift" and she had her notepad out and wrote throughout that first half hour. Each time she put the pen to paper I wondered what I had just done wrong. I really tried to do my best, my most complete and accurate, interpreting. She just kept writing. Then after the first thirty minutes were done we switched, but she had left her notepad sitting on the desk. I tried not to look at it and then I noticed that at the top it said "Hi Brian!" I kept reading and the first page or so was just a nice note to me about how she was glad to be working with me and "isn't this an interesting class?" and so on. The rest of her notes were more of a loose outline of the topics discussed, occasionally with questions about the meaning of a technical term, but with very little feedback about how to improve my interpreting and no indication that I had done anything wrong. When I was done reading, I realized that I needed to keep up the same kind of notetaking; I wasn't going to be reading the book that I had brought with me!

Soon after this introduction to true team interpreting I had a different assignment with another "enlightened" interpreter. Eric Deemer helped me understand some of the finer points of team interpreting. I came to understand that perhaps instead of working for strict time periods, we should instead work until we *needed* to switch. This meant that we had to pay attention to each other's work: we had to monitor whether the interpretation was accurate and whether the message was still being produced with clarity. We might go forty minutes each, at the beginning of a three-hour class, and be switching at fifteen minute increments near the end. When the class session was over, we would sit and discuss the work we had just completed – sometimes for forty-five minutes or more. These were revolutionary ideas to me at the time; and they also represented my first steps into true professionalism.

Around this time I took and passed the RID certification exams for interpreting (CI) and "transliteration" (CT). I continued to work as I had for several years at Gallaudet: teaching English to undergraduates and working as a Research Associate with the Gallaudet Research Institute. I eventually

stopped the teaching part during the last year of the GRI research project. Then the research project ended and I was among eight research associates looking for new research projects. I didn't find one; and so in October of 1990, after all of those years of trying not to be a professional interpreter, I had actually come to the point in my life that that's exactly what I had become because all my other labels of professional status (teacher, researcher) had disappeared.

From 1990 until 1994 my primary profession was interpreting. During those years my wife, who had graduated from Gallaudet with a masters in Deaf Education, and I adopted three deaf children. I continued my studies and completed a variety of coursework at the University of Maryland, Georgetown University, and more courses at Gallaudet. I taught remedial English to international students at the Northern Virginia Community College. In 1993 I completed my second masters degree (in Education and Human Development from the University of Maryland) and started looking for other opportunities to serve the interpreting profession. By August of 1994 I had moved my family to Pittsburgh, PA to begin coordinating and teaching at the Interpreter Training Program at the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC).

0.2 The Book

Shortly after I began teaching interpreting at CCAC, I found that I needed to develop a significant amount of my own material for my students; there were no existing books that accurately described linguistic principles in an appropriate way for undergraduate students studying the interpreting process. After many years of working on committees with RID, I had come to understand many of the principles of RID's national certification exams and worked toward clear descriptions of the process. The definitions of interpreting versus "transliteration" in particular required intensive comparisons of the expectations for each exam.

Prior to 1995, RID certification candidates for the CT exam were told to refer to Frishberg's *Interpreting: An Introduction* for a definition of the process of "transliteration." Frishberg's definitions included the use of Manual English Codes, signed English, and English-like signing:

"Sign language interpreters have used the term 'transliteration' to refer to the process of changing an English text into Manually Coded English (or vice versa). An interpreter who transliterates, also called a 'transliterator,' gives the viewer English in a visually accessible form." (Frishberg, 1990:19).

"Certificate of Transliteration (CT): ability to transliterate between signed English and spoken English in both sign-to-voice and voice-to-sign." (Frishberg, 1990:96).

"Transliteration Certificate (TC): ability to transliterate between English and an English-like signing." (Frishberg, 1990:97).

In 1995 a pool of RID performance examination raters were asked to generate a definition of interpreting and "transliteration" based on the performances of passing and failing candidates for both performance exams. The results of their work was finalized in December of 1995 and published in the February, 1996 RID Views:

What is "Transliteration"?

Many candidates for the RID Certificate of Transliteration (CT) examination have requested guidance in an effort to understand the goal of the English-to-sign portion of the exam. Raters have reviewed the minimum standard in addition to various performances of passing and failing candidates, and have agreed upon the following description of rating criteria for the current performance evaluation for the Certificate of Transliteration.

The three broad categories of variables that Raters evaluate for the English-to-sign portion have been described: Grammar and Vocabulary, Processing, and Mouth Movement Patterns.

Grammar and Vocabulary

- Use of space for role taking (characterization)
- Use of space for subject-object agreement and verb inflections
- Conceptually correct sign choices (based on meaning rather than form)
- Some amount of "initialization" but only to the extent that initialization is used by deaf adults (not to the extent of Manual English Codes).

Processing

- Lexical to Phrasal level[s] of processing, e.g. ranges from “word meaning for word meaning” to “more than words, less than sentences”
- Some restructuring or paraphrasing for clearer conveyance of meaning
- Some additions of ASL signs which enhance the clarity of the visual message (modals, [such as CAN, WILL, and MUST placed at the end of sentences], classifier constructions, indexing, and listing structures)
- Detailed English morphology (e.g. manual English coding of “ing,” “ed,” and the copula) which is conveyed on the mouth but not with manual signs.

Mouth Movement Patterns

- Cohesive English sentences are visibly presented on the lips, either as exact words from the original text or as English paraphrasing of the original text.

Finally, overriding all of these details is the requirement that the target message resulting from the transliteration process remains true and accurate with regard to the source text. There should be no substitutions (missing a concept from the original and replacing it with a different concept) and no significant omissions (all of the main points and nearly all of the supporting details of the source text should be reflected in the target text).

In order to gain further guidance, the RID Raters recommend that candidates for testing read Elizabeth Winston’s article, “Transliteration: What’s the Message?” [Winston, E. 1989. In *The Sociolinguistics of the Deaf Community*, Ceil Lucas, Ed. San Diego, CA: Academic Press] The description of transliteration in this article is determined to be an accurate description of the performance of a successful candidate for the Certificate of Transliteration performance examination. (RID Views, February, 1996:24)

It takes a long time to write a book. I’ve revisited every chapter many times. Every Unit in the book has expanded and shrunk multiple times as I juggled ideas within and between chapters, sometimes pulling information out into two chapters, then reconsidering and putting the two pieces back into one. In the end I decided that four units, each with six chapters would provide some sort of balance which would allow a fairly comprehensive overview of the profession of interpreting while allowing teachers the flexibility to figure out which parts of the book would usefully apply to their courses.

Units three and four are published as a separate text and they cover self-improvement techniques and working in specialized settings. The first twelve chapters are presented in this text. The first unit, containing six chapters, provides the essential elements of linguistics for successful interpreting. The second unit (chapters seven through twelve) reviews the essentials for interpreting and related work. I hope these first twelve chapters present an organized and uncomplicated explanation of linguistic principles and interpreting. If you don’t think it does, please let me know... I consider this work as perpetually “in progress.”

0.3 The Summary

This text was made possible by encouragement from the RID home office, particularly Clay Nettles, Deb Stebbins, and Stuart S. Nealy. Thanks go also to my parents, Charles and Phyllis Cerney, for their support in so many ways; and to my wife, Janet Cerney, and our children, Tasha, Anna, and Alosha, who allowed me the time to do revisions at home and at work. I also appreciate the comments of my students, the first guinea pigs of this effort, who helped me to clarify and improve the text as I handed out chapters to them one by one and then handed out quizzes which tested them on each chapter as part of their course grade (please accept my apologies). To you, the reader: no book can ever completely encompass any topic... please take advantage of the suggested activities at the end of each chapter and check out the readings in the bibliography to more fully explore the topics raised within these pages.