

I want to talk about the concept of Extra Linguistic Knowledge, ELK. Extra means outside, linguistic means language, and then we have K for knowledge. The question is how do interpreters benefit from having extralinguistic knowledge? How do consumers benefit from interpreters who use ELK? Why is it important?

A researcher by the name of Daniel Giles in 1995 started thinking about the concept of ELK and how it is used in spoken languages, at that time. Now I want to share this concept with you.

There is a knowledge of language or KL and then there is extralinguistic knowledge. Interpreters may have an understanding of English and ASL, that is linguistic knowledge. To describe ELK I'm going to use a formula $KL \text{ (linguistic knowledge)} = C \text{ (understanding of the whole)}$. $KL + \text{analysis} = C$. How does this work? Linguistic Knowledge + ELK (background knowledge, schema, world life knowledge, real life experiences, and understanding of visual cultures) = BONUS. Adding ELK to your linguistic knowledge is key for interpreters. Adding ELK to the interpretation is powerful in helping the Deaf consumer have a complete understanding of the English concept.

Hearing interpreters can pass along the English message to a DI. The DI take that English message and add ELK to it, expanding the concept into a rich and complete message that can be received by the Deaf consumer. This is critical. To gain ELK does this mean you have to go to school to study, analyze, engage in heavy discussions, and put in a lot of hard work to learn about ELK? No. All you need do is think about your experiences.

Some of you have this knowledge growing up observing family, friends, and communities, being exposed to culture, shared language, and witnessing life experiences. This knowledge is in you. Some have attended formal schooling, taking classes and studying, learning subjects such as biology, chemistry, math, world history, anthropology and culture studies. If you don't have a basic understanding of the subjects, take classes, and increase your knowledge.

With this life experience and formal education, you now have a foundation of understanding. Now use this foundation in your interpreting. You will have a hearing team that will feed you the "English" message. Take that English message, build on that using your life experience and formal education to expand the concept into a robust ASL message.

Let me share with you another example of how to use ELK...suppose you were assigned to interpret in a hospital. Your patient has been diagnosed with Diabetes, this could be either Type I or Type II. Knowing the difference between the two will be a huge benefit to you. You will be able to describe what both look like. If you don't know the difference, then do your research. Do a little bit of studying about the differences between Type I and Type II diabetes. You can ask friends and family members. You can read online articles, watch videos, and do a little bit of homework.

When it comes time to interpret, you already have the knowledge necessary to expand the concept of Diabetes. If this was the first time the Deaf patient has learned about Diabetes they might be feeling a little overwhelmed trying to understand the difference between the two types. Because you have that knowledge already, you can explain the difference with ease. The doctor may describe the need for shots and medications. They will explain how often they will need to take their medication as well as test their blood sugar levels, etc. You will be able to describe what blood sugar means and what different levels look like, because you have the ELK. If you don't have the ELK, you won't be ready to

describe what all of the medical terminology means. It may be confusing for you in the moment while you are trying to interpret. The Deaf patient may become even more overwhelmed in the moment at well. This is why ELK is so critical.

Let's look at another example of ELK being used in interpreting work. What if you were assigned to interpret for a press conference. You show up to the assignment with excitement. You quickly feed stumped once you learn that the topic of the press conference is a recent hurricane, including evacuation plans, flooding, what damage has occurred, and what the landscape now looks like. Before accepting the assignment of the press conference do some homework. Do some research about hurricanes, what does the damage look like, what does the evacuation plan look like, what does the flooding look like, what safety plans are in place, etc.

When you show up for the assignment you are already prepared. You won't resort to simply passing on the English message, but you will be able to use the English messages, expand on those and create rich ASL concepts. The Deaf audience, watching the press conference, will be at ease because they understand the message and it was easy to follow. ELK is critical! Schema is critical! Having that understanding of culture and world knowledge in you, plus the knowledge of how to match language to your consumers is huge! Having ELK allows you to attach important details for emphasis to the message. I hope you learned something about ELK.