

LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF SIGN INTERPRETING FROM ENGLISH INTO UZBEK LANGUAGE

Absamatova Gulkhayo Bakhodirovna

*Associated professor of Samarqand branch
of the Kimyo university in Tashkent*

Abstract. Sign interpreting between English and Uzbek languages represents a unique intersection of cross-linguistic and cross-modal translation. Unlike spoken translation, which remains within the auditory – vocal modality, sign interpreting operates between auditory – vocal and visual – gestural systems, introducing complex linguistic challenges. This article explores the “linguistic features of sign interpreting from English into Uzbek sign language (UZSL)”, focusing on grammatical structure, word order, spatial representation, lexical equivalence, idiomatic expressions, and cultural adaptation. Drawing on research from interpreting studies, linguistics, and Deaf studies, the paper outlines the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic differences between English and Uzbek sign language, and how interpreters manage these through reordering, compression, expansion, and visualization. The article concludes with implications for interpreter training and linguistic research in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: sign interpreting, uzbek sign language, linguistic features, syntax, modality, cross-linguistic transfer, interpreter training

Language is a vehicle for human thought, identity, and culture. The task of interpreting across languages and modalities requires not only linguistic competence but also cultural and semiotic sensitivity. When interpreting from “English into Uzbek Sign Language (UZSL)”, the interpreter operates across two linguistic systems that differ in “modality (spoken vs. signed)”, “structure (linear vs. spatial)”, and “cultural context (Anglophone vs. Uzbek Deaf communities)”.

Sign interpreting is not a direct, word-for-word conversion. It is a “dynamic, multimodal re-creation of meaning”. While spoken interpreting deals mainly with words and sounds, sign interpreting deals with “handshapes, movement, spatial arrangement, facial expressions, and non-manual signals”.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the “linguistic features” that influence sign interpreting from English into Uzbek Sign Language, to describe typical “strategies used by interpreters”, and to identify “linguistic patterns and challenges” that arise in the process.

Sign interpreting is the process of transferring meaning between a spoken and a signed language. It requires simultaneous understanding of linguistic structure, visual presentation, and pragmatic intent.

“Uzbek Sign Language (UZSL)”, sometimes referred to as “O‘zbek imo-ishora tili”, is a natural language used by the Deaf community in Uzbekistan. Although under-researched, UZSL shares some similarities with Russian Sign Language (RSL) due to historical contact but maintains distinct lexical and grammatical features that reflect Uzbek culture and social norms (Karimova, 2020).

English, on the other hand, is a “linear, analytic language” with subject–verb–object (SVO) order, while UZSL is “spatial and topic-prominent”, relying on non-manual features such as facial expressions and body movement to indicate grammar and meaning.

When interpreters translate from English into UZSL, they must manage differences in “word order, morphology, modality, and culture”, while ensuring “communicative equivalence”.

Interpreting from English (auditory–vocal) into UZSL (visual–gestural) involves a “cross-modal transfer”. This transition requires interpreters to:

1. Comprehend the auditory message,
2. Mentally re-encode it in visual-spatial form, and
3. Produce signs that convey the same meaning in UZSL.

The “modality shift” changes how linguistic information is processed. Spoken English uses “sound patterns and intonation”, while UZSL expresses information through “movement, space, and simultaneity”.

According to Napier and Leeson (2016), cross-modal interpreting requires greater “cognitive flexibility” because interpreters must synchronize auditory input with visual output while maintaining comprehension and fluency.

Gile’s (1995) “Effort Model” explains that interpreting involves four simultaneous processes: listening, production, memory, and coordination. In sign interpreting, there is an additional “visual coordination effort”, since interpreters must manage eye contact, body positioning, and signing space.

English typically follows the “Subject–Verb–Object (SVO)” pattern:

“The student reads a book.”

In contrast, Uzbek Sign Language tends to use “Topic–Comment” or “Subject–Object–Verb (SOV)” order, which is consistent with spoken Uzbek structure:

STUDENT BOOK READ

Thus, when interpreting from English into UZSL, interpreters often “restructure the sentence order”, moving the object before the verb.

Ellipsis and Omission

Signed languages often omit articles, auxiliary verbs, or pronouns when the meaning is clear from context or spatial reference. For example:

“She is going to the market” → “SHE MARKET GO”

This omission reflects linguistic economy and visual efficiency rather than loss of meaning.

Spatial Grammar

UZSL uses “spatial referencing” to indicate grammatical relationships. Interpreters assign locations in signing space to represent subjects or objects. For instance:

“John gives a pen to Mary” → (point right) JOHN (point left) MARY PEN GIVE (right→left movement).

Spatial grammar replaces prepositions and sometimes verb inflections in English.

“Simultaneity”

English syntax unfolds linearly, while UZSL can express multiple pieces of information “simultaneously”. Facial expressions can mark tense or modality while the hands sign lexical content. Interpreters must learn to layer information efficiently, combining manual and non-manual elements.

Morphological and Lexical Features

“Morphology in UZSL”

Unlike English, UZSL is “non-concatenative”; it does not use affixes but modifies meaning through “movement, repetition, direction, and facial expression”. For example, intensity can be shown by repeating a sign or enlarging its movement.

When interpreting from English, interpreters must often convert “morphemic markers” into “visual modifications”.

Example:

“He is walking quickly” → SIGN “WALK” with rapid, repeated motion.

Lexical Gaps

Some English words have no direct equivalent in UZSL, especially abstract or culturally specific terms (e.g., “democracy”, “psychology”, “online learning”). In such cases, interpreters use:

- Explanation (describing the concept),
- Fingerspelling, or
- Borrowing from Russian or international sign vocabulary.

Polysemy and Contextual Meaning

Many English words have multiple meanings depending on context (e.g., light, run, bank). UZSL expresses these using “distinct signs” for each meaning, so interpreters must disambiguate quickly from context.

Semantic and Pragmatic Features

Information Structure

English relies on syntax and intonation to mark emphasis (e.g., “He gave the book to HER!”). In UZSL, interpreters use “facial expressions, body lean, or repetition” to highlight focus or contrast.

Idioms and Figurative Language

Idiomatic expressions are among the most challenging aspects of interpreting. For example:

“Break the ice” → cannot be signed literally; it must be rendered as “START COMMUNICATION EASY” or “TALK COMFORTABLE BEGIN”.

Similarly, Uzbek idioms (e.g., “ko‘ngli to‘lmoq”, meaning “to be satisfied”) have culturally bound meanings that interpreters must adapt appropriately.

English politeness is often expressed lexically (“please,” “thank you”), while UZSL uses ****intonation, facial expression, and reduced sign size****. The interpreter must adjust ****register and tone**** to suit the cultural norms of Uzbek Deaf communities, who value directness and clarity.

UZSL discourse is organized by “topic–comment sequencing”, where the main subject (topic) is established first, followed by commentary.

Example:

“About school, children study math, reading, writing.”

→ SCHOOL, CHILDREN STUDY MATH, READ, WRITE.

This structure differs from English narrative progression and requires interpreters to reframe long sentences.

Cohesive Devices

English uses conjunctions (and, but, because) to link clauses. In UZSL, “facial shifts, pauses, and spatial transitions” mark cohesion. An interpreter may shift eye gaze or body orientation to indicate clause boundaries instead of using explicit connectives.

Use of Repetition

Repetition serves a cohesive and emphatic function in UZSL discourse. For example, repeating a sign may indicate continuity or emphasis, while repeating a phrase in English might seem redundant.

Cultural and Linguistic Adaptation

Interpreting between English and UZSL is not merely linguistic but also “cultural”. Many expressions in English carry cultural values (e.g., individualism, directness) that differ from the collectivist norms in Uzbek society.

Interpreters must mediate these cultural elements sensitively. For instance, English speakers often use self-praise (“I’m proud of my achievement”), which might sound boastful in Uzbek cultural norms. Interpreters often adjust the tone to maintain cultural appropriateness.

Moreover, “non-verbal communication norms” differ: in Uzbek culture, prolonged eye contact may be impolite, but in UZSL, eye contact is essential for grammatical clarity. Interpreters must educate hearing speakers about maintaining visual communication cues with Deaf participants.

Challenges in English–UZSL Sign Interpreting

1. Lack of standardized lexicon in Uzbek Sign Language.
2. Limited training resources and interpreter education programs in Uzbekistan.
3. Lexical borrowing from Russian or International Sign that may not be familiar to all Deaf users.
4. Technological barriers in remote interpreting (camera quality, lighting, etc.).
5. Societal awareness - hearing people's limited understanding of Deaf culture may hinder effective communication.

Addressing these challenges requires institutional support, research investment, and formal recognition of UZSL as a national minority language.

Pedagogical and Professional Implications

Interpreter training in Uzbekistan should emphasize:

- Comparative linguistics of English, Uzbek, and UZSL;
- Practical exercises in spatial grammar and simultaneity;
- Development of bilingual–bicultural competence;
- Exposure to Deaf community interaction;
- Use of modern interpreting technology (video relay, captioning).

As Napier (2002) and Russell (2005) note, linguistic training must be combined with ethical and professional standards to ensure accessibility and accuracy in public life.

Interpreting from English into Uzbek Sign Language represents a complex, multimodal linguistic task that involves managing “syntactic, morphological, semantic, and pragmatic differences” across two distinct language systems.

For Uzbekistan, developing research and professional training in sign interpreting is essential for promoting accessibility, inclusion, and the linguistic rights of Deaf citizens. Future studies should document UZSL grammar systematically, create bilingual corpora, and establish interpreter certification standards aligned with international best practices.

Ultimately, the linguistic richness of Uzbek Sign Language reflects the diversity and creativity of human communication across modalities and cultures.

LITERATURE

1. Gile, D. (1995). *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
2. Napier, J. (2002). *Sign Language Interpreting: Linguistic Coping Strategies*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
3. Napier, J., & Leeson, L. (2016). *Sign language in action*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
4. Russell, D. (2005). Consecutive and simultaneous interpreting: Similarities and differences. *Journal of Interpretation*, 15(1), 19–35.

5. Stone, C. (2009). Deaf Interpreters at Work: International Insights. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press.
6. Karimova, N. (2020). Linguistic characteristics of Uzbek Sign Language. Tashkent Linguistic Studies Journal, 3(2), 45–58.