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From Intercultural Encounters to Interprofessional Development

Osa valtakunnallista YAMK-koulutus vahvaksi TKI-vaikuttajaksi -hanketta

A part of national network project
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USHERING IN A NEW PARADIGM: FOSTERING TRUST IN RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DEAF AND HEARING INTERPRETERS

While one may think of a sign language interpreter as an individual who is able to hear (hereupon referred to as "hearing") and who works between a signed and spoken language, the phenomenon of Deaf interpreters – a Deaf person called upon to work professionally with the hearing interpreter to facilitate an interpretation process – is an increasing occurrence. Considerations of intercultural communication are highly relevant to an exploration into the working relational dynamics between Hearing and Deaf sign language interpreters, as Deaf and Hearing cultures are disparate, distinct cultures with differing values and norms (Padden and Humphries, 2009). Indeed, this is one of the reasons why a Deaf interpreter may prove particularly advantageous in certain situations, as a skilled Deaf interpreter may be able to further facilitate linguistic and cultural mediations. The extent to which this is possible, however, depends on how effectively the Deaf and Hearing interpreters are able to work together. It is, therefore, particularly important that as the linguistic and cultural intermediaries, Deaf and Hearing interpreters are able to work together effectively in order to achieve accurate, successful communication for all parties involved in an interpreted interaction. While the working relational dynamics between these professional interpreters is a multifactorial process, an integral intercultural consideration is the level of trust between the Deaf and Hearing interpreter. This paper will explain the importance of professional trust in these types of interpreting scenarios and recommendations for enhancing it.

Deaf Interpreters, a New Paradigm

The professionalisation of signed language interpreting has made tremendous advancements in the past several decades, resulting in higher quality services for both Deaf and hearing consumers of interpreting services. This professionalisation process has focused primarily on the establishment of professional criteria for hearing people working as signed language interpreters, mediating communication between a signed language and a spoken language. Historically, however, certain Deaf individuals have periodically been called upon to work with a Hearing interpreter to facilitate the interpretation process by applying enhanced skills in visual-gestural language, culture, or other extra linguistic knowledge (NCIEC, 2009). The unique skillset these Deaf interpreters contribute to the interpreting process is becoming more recognized, thus the demand for Deaf interpreters is growing. Hence some researchers such as Napier (Best, 2015) have stated that the professionalisation of signed language interpreting is entering a new era as the recognition and demand for Deaf interpreters grows. The emerging professional paradigm of Deaf
interpreters (Forestal, 2014) deserves further study and attention in order to better understand the advantages offered to all by this paradigm shift and devise avenues to smooth and encourage the transition.

**Trust**

In literature on interpreting, the importance of trust is often mentioned (e.g. Edwards, Temple, & Alexander, 2005; Hsieh, Ju & Kong, 2010; Napier, 2011). Even though it is mentioned often, it seems difficult to pin down one definition of ‘trust’. This is shown by McKnight and Chervany (2001), who compared the definitions of ‘trust’ in three ordinary dictionaries, finding 17 different entries. This number is surprisingly high compared to concepts related to trust (e.g. cooperation, confidence, predictable), which have an average of 4.7 entries. In addition to the dictionary study, they reviewed 56 articles on trust, from which the following four main themes regarding trust were identified: benevolence, integrity, competence and predictability. McKnight and Chervany (2001) propose the following definition: “A trustee who is consistently (predictable) shown to be willing (benevolent) and able (competent) to serve the trustee’s interest in an honest, ethical manner (integrity) is indeed worthy of trust” (McKnight & Chervany, 2001: 36).

This means that a trustor is willing to rely on another person, even though he cannot control this person, therefore negative outcomes are possible (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Apart from trust in personal relationships, the concept of institution-based trust is worth noting, which means “[that] one believes, with feelings of relative security, that favorable conditions are in place that are conducive to situational success in a risky endeavor or aspect of one’s life” (McKnight & Chervany, 2001: 37).

This concept focuses on trust in situations or institutions, opposed to trust in other people. This is especially interesting to take into account in sign language interpreted settings, since deaf people have relatively negative experiences with the broader hearing community; (e.g. Bauman, 2008; Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan, 1996), which may influence the way a deaf person trusts the (hearing) interpreter.

This consideration of how a hearing interpreter, as a member of the majority which many Deaf people may have had negative experiences with, may be viewed by Deaf clients and interpreter colleagues, also relates to what Sako (1992: 38) refers to as goodwill trust. This type of trust is defined as “a more diffuse kind and refers to mutual expectations of open commitment to each other”. Goodwill trust arguably may be born out of two of McKnight and Chervany’s (2001) foundations of trust – benevolence and integrity. It is worth considering that a hearing interpreter – as a member of a majority is often found to exert negative experiences for members of the Deaf community, and regardless of their shared linguistic ability and expected knowledge of cultural norms – may immediately be granted less goodwill trust by both Deaf colleagues and clients who have had negative experiences with hearing people in the past. This may make it challenging for Deaf and hearing interpreters to immediately grant one another goodwill trust and form a trusting working relationship, particularly if they are working together for the first time.

As two professionals working together to bridge a linguistic and cultural divide, however, it is especially important that the working relational dynamics between the Deaf and hearing interpreter is not fractured. Trust between the Deaf and hearing interpreter is therefore the cement in the bridge that is constructed to cross the linguistic and cultural gap between participants in an interpreted interaction.

**Current Situation**

Deaf Interpreters have reached varying levels of professionalisation in different countries. An important part of professionalisation is the establishment of jurisdiction, which Skaten (2012) defines as, ‘[The] profession’s right to define the work, to decide who is to be a member on which criteria, and to draw boundaries to other occupational groups or professions’. While the overall professionalisation of signed language interpreting is shifting toward a new paradigm of greater incorporation of Deaf interpreters in interpreted events, there is a
concurrent professionalisation process specifically for Deaf interpreters. Some of the friction that is occurring in the profession may be due to the professionalisation process mentioned by Skaten (2012) as both hearing and Deaf practitioners struggle to define the roles, criteria, and occupational boundaries of each group.

In England, there are pathways for Deaf individuals to gain professional qualification as a Registered Sign Language Translator (RSLT), and Deaf professionals with such qualifications are accepted, along with their hearing colleagues, as members into the Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI). Deaf interpreters in England have also delineated their occupational group as a distinct and separate group within the sign language interpreting profession by establishing the Deaf Interpreter’s Network, a group which held its own conference exclusively for Deaf interpreters with only a few selected, pre-approved hearing interpreters allowed to attend. This certainly has its benefits for networking, support, and sharing best practices amongst Deaf interpreters, but it is also important that the entire profession – both Deaf and hearing – remains collectively active, open to, and cognizant of the importance of fostering teamwork with all colleagues. In other countries, such as the Netherlands and Denmark, the national associations for sign language interpreters do not accept Deaf interpreters as members yet, citing a lack of formal qualifications – though none currently exist – and despite their professional experience. In the Netherlands, a committee of the Deaf association is now working on stimulating the profession of Deaf interpreters and determining how to set up a training programme that fits the desires of all parties involved, e.g. the government (who is responsible for paying interpreters), the Deaf interpreters themselves, but also the hearing interpreters. Desires are somewhat different with regard to the level and duration of the Deaf interpreter programme (compared to the hearing interpreters programme) and how to register with the national registry for sign language interpreters with a lower qualification.

Many of these occurrences are indicative of friction accompanying the paradigm shift, arguably due to weak foundations of trust between the two groups. Hearing interpreters, who likely lack an understanding of the beneficial contributions Deaf interpreters can make to the interpreting process, due to the dearth of training regarding their work (Forestal, 2005, 2006), may not trust that their livelihoods are safe if they welcome Deaf interpreters into their ranks. They may not trust that the skills they are able to bring to a situation, such as spoken language fluency and a deep understanding of hearing culture, will be valued by the Deaf interpreter and that they will not simply be judged by the Deaf interpreter as sorely lacking in other skills that the Deaf interpreter may possess more of, such as visual-gestural linguistic ability and Deaf cultural knowledge.

Forestal (2014) explains that hearing people have historically made decisions about interpreting, so Deaf interpreters may not trust that they will be given a fair chance to demonstrate their abilities, be taken seriously as equal professional colleagues, or be called upon as appropriate, thereby putting their livelihoods at risk. Indeed, Forestal (2014) posits the dissonance hearing interpreters may feel as Deaf people are no longer solely in the role of client, but are now also expected to be equal colleagues, and Morgan and Adam (2013) state that ‘Deaf interpreters are often treated differently and accorded a lower status than Hearing interpreters’. Professional boundaries are being drawn on both sides, but Forestal (2014) reminds us all of the importance of working together to achieve the best possible interpretations for consumers. Adam (2014: 7) states that ‘Deaf interpreters and Hearing interpreters are situated differently with respect to their habitus’. This is precisely what
makes them both necessary in certain situations for an accurate interpretation. In order to work together, we need to recognise the unique skillsets both groups possess by respecting one another as equal colleagues. When we open the doors to better interpretations by opening the doors to each other, we demonstrate professional integrity. Integrity, as McKnight and Chervany (2001) state, is an indispensable stepping stone on the pathway to mutual trust.

**Recommendations**

Researchers McKnight, Liu, and Pentland (2012) explain that for trust to even begin to develop, experience is necessary. Unfortunately, Forestal (2005, 2006) reports that training opportunities instructing practitioners how to work in Deaf-hearing interpreting teams are limited. Hence the experience necessary for establishing the foundations of trust between Deaf and hearing interpreters is lacking. In order to build the experiences necessary to foster trust, interpreter training programmes need to incorporate formalized training on how to work in such teams, and workshops offering this information need to be made widely available to currently practicing professional interpreters.

McKnight, Liu, and Pentland’s (2012) requisite of experience for building trust ties in closely with McKnight and Chervany’s (2001) requisite of predictability. Experience creates predictability. By familiarizing both Deaf and hearing interpreters on what to expect in a co-working situation with one another through formalized training that creates an experience with this kind of work, a level of predictability ensues, leading to greater trust of one another when co-working in such situations.

Other aspects of the importance of formalized training are relevant to other foundations of trust mentioned by McKnight and Chervany (2001), such as the significance of competence. In order to ensure competence of both Deaf and hearing interpreters, there needs to be established and recognized career pathways into professional interpreting for both groups. Both Deaf and hearing interpreters should be expected to have undergone cultural, linguistic, and interpretation training on an equivalent or comparable level. When both members of an interpreting team share the same body of professional knowledge and training, then they are able to put trust in one another’s understanding of their roles as professionals and the interpreting process.

**Conclusion**

The signed language interpreting profession in developed countries is currently undergoing a shift toward greater incorporation of Deaf interpreters in the interpreting process. Mikkelsen (1996) reports that one of the main benefits of professionalisation is that it results in better quality services for consumers, and by utilizing a team of professionals which possess unique and complementing skillsets, such as Deaf and hearing interpreters working together, there is an increased potential for optimal interpreted communication. In order for us to advance as a profession, it is important that we work together with one another. Establishing and fostering trust through formalized training for both groups of practitioners in order to raise awareness about the skillsets of each and learn how to best work together is of paramount importance going forward.
References:


