Interpersonal demands
It’s good to be aware of how you interact with your clients and co-interpreters while working in the leisure domain. Increased diplomacy, as well as a potentially heightened need to culturally mediate, may become additional responsibilities. If you are working within a team, try to determine how the work will be split to ensure breaks are managed. This is particularly important when eating and drinking, so that both interpreters are not caught with a mouthful of food or hands full, and unable to sign.

People will often try to engage you in conversation, so it’s good to strike a balance of politely responding to a question but making it clear that your primary purpose at the event is to work. The event may also be aimed at a particular gender, so consider this before accepting the job.

Paralinguistic demands
Many of the paralinguistic demands placed upon us are linked to the environment and the people we work with. The more alcohol people drink, the more relaxed their signing becomes, voices become distorted and pace can quicken, which can all affect our understanding of what is communicated. There may be jargon that can, hopefully, be researched beforehand. If you have had to travel to a region you’re unfamiliar with, there may be an issue with local accents and regional sign. If the event is aimed at children, bear in mind the differences between the language formation of children and adults.

Intrapersonal demands
In any interpreted event, there are factors affecting your ability to interpret and these should be controlled as much as possible. You should think about the effect you are having on the relationship-building within the event. This is particularly relevant in a networking event for business purposes...

The leisure domain can be a difficult area to work in and commands flexibility because of the diversity of the clients and events. However, like all interpreting assignments, preparation is key. If this is done extensively, it can make leisure interpreting an interesting and rewarding area in which to work.

REFERENCES

‘We are at another transition stage’

Brett Best talked to Professor Jemina Napier about professionalisation, research and reconnecting with the Deaf community

I recently sat down for an interview with the renowned interpreter, researcher and interpreter educator, Professor Jemina Napier. She has experience working with spoken English and BSL, Auslan, and International Sign (IS) and is credited with over 80 publications related to sign language, pedagogy and multiple aspects of interpreting. The opportunity to mine her expertise and experience in an interview promised to illuminate a breath of rich and varied topics. I chose to focus on the development of the interpreting profession and the role of research.

BB: You’ve been practising as a sign language interpreter since 1988. What would you see as the most significant developments in the profession in those 26 years?

JJN: When I started working, a registration system was just beginning to be established in the UK, so I was not accredited by any means. My only assessment was that I had passed the CACDP Stage 3, which is, I believe, equivalent to the current Level 6 NVQ. I passed this when I was sixteen, and then I was on a register of trainee interpreters. The first register was created with people who had the CACDP Stage 3, and those that took a crash course in interpreting were then considered qualified, so I didn’t have any interpreter training. I was a CODA with high language fluency, and I came through at the time when people were saying to me, “you are a good signer; you should be an interpreter”. I was lucky that I was right on the cusp of the start of the new era of interpreting. My generation wasn’t part of the welfare, CODA era of interpreting where there was no training. For my generation, training quickly became available, so I did a Master’s at Durham University, and when I learned about linguistics and interpreting theory I began to understand what I was doing with interpreting.
and why I liked it. I then went on to pursue it more formally with a PhD.

I think that the biggest shift in the profession is that the route to becoming a professional interpreter is very different. Dennis Coke, Chris Stone and I have written about how interpreters were previously chosen by the Deaf community. Now, 26 years later, we see a shift through professionalisation. There are many formal courses and routes to qualification. In the UK there is the NVQ route. In Australia, it is through NATTI (National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters). In America, it is through the RID (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf). There are now also university training programs and people can self-select. They can decide that they want to become an interpreter, take courses, and go to university to train even if they have never actually met a Deaf person before.

I think that research is also an important part of it because research has helped us to explore and examine in more detail the role of the interpreter, the interpreting process, personalities of interpreters and many more areas. This means that the more we understand, the better we can teach, and that in turn leads to better graduates. I think that the standards are higher now. People expect more. Before, they were just so grateful to have someone who can sign, but they have become more scrupulous. I think that interpreting graduates are of a higher standard and interpreters are working at a higher standard because we understand better what it is that we need to do. Previously, the train of thought was: you can hear; you can sign; you can be an interpreter. Now we understand that it is not that simple.

**BB:** How do you see the profession continuing to develop?

**JN:** I think we are at another transition stage. We are now beginning to bring Deaf people back into the profession, either as interpreters themselves or as interpreter educators. I think we are seeing another shift. We are beginning to correct the formal training, which is producing good graduates in terms of their technical skills but not necessarily in terms of their personal skills and their connection to the community.

That connection to the community has been lost in the previous transition to professionalisation. So we have started to explore how we can reconnect with the Deaf community. Service learning, for example, is a concept that we are beginning to use at Heriot-Watt in our undergraduate program to encourage students to develop relationships with the Deaf community, so that there is the reciprocity that we seem to have lost. We are reconnecting and involving more Deaf people in the process itself as interpreters, and not just as sign language educators but as interpreter educators. So we are beginning to develop more of a collaborative approach. We needed the first transition of professionalisation to establish ourselves as a profession, but now we need to reconnect with the community. I think that is how we will see the profession continue to develop.

There will be some challenges ahead as we explore the nature of the interpreting that Deaf people do and how it is the same as or different to that of interpreters who can hear. We need to ascertain whether or not we need to train Deaf and hearing interpreters together or separately, and I think that we need to debunk some perceptions around Deaf interpreters automatically being better interpreters than hearing people. So this is an interesting time for us, and I don’t think it will be easy. I think there will be some tensions around that, but it is a necessary process.

**BB:** That answer leads into my next question. What do you think may be the biggest challenges facing our profession going forward?

**JN:** I think it will be finding that ‘happy marriage’ between Deaf and hearing interpreters working in the profession. There are many of us who want a collaborative approach. Of course, without Deaf people, hearing people can’t work, but without hearing people, Deaf interpreters can’t work either. We all need each other, but there are some tensions and different attitudes as well as different assumptions – from both Deaf and hearing people – about what it is about, what makes a good interpreter, and what kind of training Deaf interpreters need as opposed to hearing interpreters.

Now we have the infrastructure, we need to look at how it works for Deaf interpreters. We don’t need to reinvent the wheel, but we do need to assess how this all works. There will be challenges, but I am confident that we will all come out the other side of it very happy.

**BB:** Some of your research has focused on video remote interpreting, particularly in courtrooms. Do you anticipate this technology being used more in other realms, and if so, what are the most important considerations interpreters working with this technology need to keep in mind?

**JN:** Good question. I have been involved in looking at video interpreting in courts in Australia, and at the moment I am involved with the INSIGN project where we are considering both video relay service and video remote interpreting for Deaf people to be able to contact their EU institutions. I think that we will see video technology used more for the provision of interpreting services for many reasons. First of all, service providers are seeking efficiency, expediency and cost savings. We are already seeing it used for medical appointments, meetings and a range of different things. Many times this is because it saves money. Rather than paying the costs to transport an interpreter to the location and pay a two-hour minimum, it is only necessary to pay for the half hour that the interpreter actually works. The availability of interpreters is another consideration. In Australia, for example, there are no interpreters in rural areas. To transport an interpreter to certain areas cost a fortune. It is less of an issue in the UK, but it is still a consideration.

I think that what interpreters need to take into consideration – and what we are seeing from research both in Australia and here – is that the conduit model doesn’t work. Interpreters are participants in an interaction. Current research is showing that because there is a 2D screen and a proximal distance with video interpreting, interpreters have to work even harder to facilitate rapport with people. Things such as attention-getting, turn-taking, back-channeling, palm orientation, cueing turns, are all very different to how they are in face-to-face interpreting. We need to do more training for interpreters in this context.

**BB:** In one of your most recent publications on sign language interpreter personality, ‘openness to experience’ – also described in the article as ‘intellectual curiosity’ – is
recognised as an important indicator of interpreter competence. This quality of intellectual curiosity seems that it would lend itself well to research. So it seems that we interpreters may naturally be an intellectually curious bunch of people. Do you think that the same qualities that make a competent interpreter are similar to the qualities necessary to successfully conduct research?

JN: That's a really good question! No one has ever asked me that before. I am a very strong advocate for interpreters as researchers. I have written and presented about the fact that research doesn't have to be done only by researchers in an academic context or by academics. Research can be done by interpreters who have a curiosity about their work or about something that they've observed.

I do think good interpreters have a sense of intellectual curiosity, and they need to be analytical to their approach in the way that they work, question what things are and why to make sure that they find equivalence linguistically and culturally. But I don't think necessarily that all interpreters can be good researchers. There are other things that are important as well. Good time management, for example, is a very important factor in research. Organisational skills and the ability to plan ahead are also very important. Deb Russell has written about the importance of seeing

where you want to be and then working back from that so that you can see what needs to be done in order to achieve those goals. Being a freelance interpreter, however, also requires the time management and organisational skills. So I suppose that the skills an interpreter needs, especially freelance interpreters, would probably translate to being a good researcher although I don't necessarily think that being a good interpreter makes a good researcher or vice versa. For example, I know some people involved in interpreting research who don't practise anymore or aren't considered to be the best practitioners, but produce really good research. I have seen really good interpreters who don't necessarily produce good research. It is difficult to equate. It depends on the kind of training. Ideally, you need good research training to be a good researcher.

BB: You recently co-authored a book with Sandra Hale entitled Research Methods in Interpreting. What is the importance or value of interpreting practitioners conducting research? In other words, do you think that practitioners are able to offer unique insights?

JN: Absolutely. They can bring a different lens to the research. People often think that research has to be objective. Pure, positivistic, scientific research needs to be objective when there are studies conducted in laboratory conditions and there are controls when attempting to prove or disprove a theory. In the kind of research that typically happens in interpreting, there are often problems or questions we want to ask and we aren't really sure what the answer is. We just delve into it and figure it out as we go along. This is called iterative research. You go in with an open mind and see what you find. It is a much more organic process where one participates in the research process, engages with the data, and then analyses it. So the themes and ideas emerge from the data gathered. In this way, I think that interpreters can bring a unique perspective to research because when presented with data about your own or someone else's interpreting, you can engage with that data because you can say, 'I have been there. I have done that'. You can 'interpret' the data based on your own experiences. You have insights that a researcher who is not an interpreter wouldn't have.

Researchers in the medical field, for example, are often ex-medical doctors. Researchers often come from a professional practitioner background because they have the experience that has allowed them to develop questions. Don't get me wrong. I think there is a place in our profession, in the research field, for researchers who are not practitioners. There are many linguists, applied linguists, and sociologists and people who have an interest in interpreting from a linguistic or psychological point of view. There is definitely a place for people who aren't practitioners to be doing research interpreting, but I think that interpreters themselves have a very important place in interpreting research.

BB: It seems that there may be a trickle-down effect for research results reaching current practitioners. This requires practicing interpreters to stay on top of research findings as par of their continuing professional development. What are the top three resources you would suggest to interpreters wishing to remain abreast of recent developments and research findings?

JN: Great question! The International Journal of Research and Practice in Interpreting, published by John Benjamins, is good. This includes spoken language research, and they feature a lot of sign language-specific research as well. The quality of what they publish is really, really good as well. It is always cutting-edge. This is one that I always read, and it is good to stay on top of the most recent research for both spoken and sign language interpreting.

For something more sign language-specific, Karen Bon tempo in Australia, whom I have published with and who is the Chair of the Interpreters' Trainers' Network, has an email list serv. She sends out regular updates and bulletins with lists of information with training resources, interesting articles, facts about interpreting, new research articles that have been published and where you can get them. She is a mine of information. She must be on every subscription list available, and she compiles it all into a digest. It's a great resource. I tend to flick through and then check out some of the resources that she suggests. I would definitely recommend that to people.

The last resource I would suggest at the moment is Street Leverage at www.streetleverage.com. It started out by featuring some really good articles that I was getting my students to read. All the articles are written by practitioners. I do, however, feel that the last few articles are becoming more opinion pieces and I particularly like the earlier, more theoretical, articles. I would also like to see more international contributions because it is still predominantly American. That is okay, there are more interpreters there and is started there, and maybe it will begin to open up over time. It is, however, a good resource for people to read to learn what the current discussions and debates are about. So I would recommend this as a resource but would encourage people to read it with some level of objectivity, a critical eye.

BB: Thanks so much for your time. Your answers have been very insightful and illuminating!