Designated or preferred? A deaf academic and two signed language interpreters working together for a PhD defence: A case study of best practice

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Abstract

In this paper we present an appreciative inquiry case study of our work together in a PhD defence, which we believe demonstrates a best practice in the field of signed language interpreting. We call into question the meaning and relevance of the 'designated interpreter' model, examining whether there is a 'perfect formula' for deaf academics and interpreters working together, not only in PhD defences, but also in academia more generally. We also challenge the very system for the provision of interpreter services as an institution creating structural inequalities, because it is heavily based on privilege. We argue that what is

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key is preference (i.e. the ability to exercise real choice) and familiarity, rather than the assignation of a 'designated' interpreter, and that simply achieving a degree in interpreting cannot guarantee that an interpreter will be prepared to meet the needs of deaf professionals. We also argue that sign language interpreter education needs to focus more than it does now on training to work into English (and/or other spoken languages in non-English-speaking countries), on performing visibly comfortable language work, and on specific specializations linked to deaf professional access and continuing professional development.

Keywords: sign language, signed language interpreting, academics, deaf, PhD defence, designated interpreter model.

> *View video examples online*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

This paper presents a descriptive, 'appreciative inquiry' case study (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) – a presentation of best practice based on a PhD defence[2] experience with one deaf academic and two signed language interpreters, which took place in December 2016 at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. The paper will document three stages of the defence: the preparation, the in-situ defense itself, and post-defence reflections. In the process, it aims to discuss how deaf academics, through their collaboration with interpreters, can ensure that the defence of their PhDs is successful. This is a significant question, since an increasing number of deaf scholars are gaining PhDs and are engaging in signed, spoken and written academic discourse, such as writing articles, presenting at conferences, and networking (Kusters, De Meulder & O'Brien, 2017). Outside of specific contexts where there is an academic signing environment, much of deaf academics' face-to-face engagement with academic discourse takes place through interpreters.

   Crucial in the process of working as an academic is having cognitive academic and linguistic proficiency and actively engaging with academic discourse. However, for deaf academics who have a signed language as one of their academic languages, their linguistic experience is a specific one: their written representation might be their own, but in many cases when presenting and networking they are interpreted by signed language interpreters to academic peers who may or may not know their written academic style.

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[2] The culmination of the PhD process typically ends with the student 'defending' their dissertation to external examiners by answering questions about the research study. The logistics of this varies across countries and according to different university traditions, and can involve a more informal conversation between the student and examiners, or a formal public presentation. This is referred to either as a 'defence', a 'viva' or a 'public examination'. In this case study we use the term 'defence' which is more common.

The first benchmark in the process of becoming an academic is the PhD thesis submission and defence. In Finland, a PhD defence is a public event open to anyone but typically attended by family, friends and colleagues. A PhD student only gets permission to defend the dissertation after two external reviewers have approved it. The defence is thus largely a ritual, but its public and formal nature make it a high profile event that presents specific interpreting challenges. This PhD defence in particular was special because it was a multilingual event (including British Sign Language, International Sign, Finnish Sign Language, spoken Finnish and spoken English).

Our goal in presenting this example of best practice of our work together in this PhD defence is to provide an overview of an effective interpreting process. We call into question the relevance and meaning of the 'designated interpreter' model, examining whether there is a 'perfect formula' for deaf academics and interpreters working together, not only in PhD defences, but also in academia more generally. In this paper, we will also challenge the very system for the provision of interpreter services as an institution creating structural inequalities, because it is heavily based on privilege. In doing so, we hope to generate new and on-going conversations about signed language interpreting as a professional practice and as a social and political institution (De Meulder & Haualand, submitted). Like any institution, it should be studied and analysed critically.

1.2. Deaf professionals and interpreters working together

Studies of deaf professionals, leaders and academics have explored how they ensure that their professional and leadership identities are appropriately re-presented through interpreters by having careful selection criteria for those interpreters and working in close collaboration with them (Miner, 2017; Napier, Carmichael & Wiltshire, 2008; Napier et al., 2017; Haug, Bontempo, Leeson, Napier, Nicodemus, van den Bogaerde & Vermeerbergen, 2017).

Studies have identified the misperceptions of deaf people by hearing people that can occur when deaf people are being interpreted and/or when interpreters do not adequately match the personality or intent of the deaf signer in important workplace contexts (Feyne, 2015; Napier et al., 2017). For example, misunderstandings might arise because an interpreter is female and the deaf person is male (or vice versa), because hearing people are confused about the roles of deaf person and interpreter and over who is actually talking (see e.g. Napier & Kusters, 2018). Hearing people might not trust that interpreters actually re-present a deaf person's voice or, if an interpreter is not adequately conveying a deaf signers' meaning, might make assumptions about the deaf person's intent, personality or intelligence (Napier, et al, 2017, in press; Young, et al, in press).

The national shortage of signed language interpreters in almost every country (de Wit 2016) means that choice is limited. In most countries, signed language interpreters need to work in many different settings such as kindergarten and primary, secondary and higher education, employment settings, community settings, health care and legal settings with limited opportunities to specialize. This means that among signed language interpreters, even within one country, there is significant variation in terms of levels of skills and proficiency to work in different settings. Although one route to qualification for interpreters is through university programs, in many countries a university degree is not required. In many cases, signed language interpreters thus have a lower level of education than deaf academics. For example, not many sign language interpreters have an MA or PhD.[3]

This significant variability in skills and proficiency, and the specific profiles of deaf professionals, including academics, has led to the emergence of a designated interpreter model (Hauser, Finch & Hauser, 2008). In this model – which is mostly practiced in United States (US) contexts – deaf professionals work with one or two designated interpreters on a regular basis so interpreters can, it is claimed, more appropriately match and re-present deaf professionals' particular expertise and skills. Often, the deaf individual will also work with the same interpreters in contexts outside of their professional context.

The idea behind this model is that by working with the same interpreter(s) over a longer period of time, the deaf professional and the interpreter develop familiarity with one other; become accustomed to each other's signing style and manner of thinking and expressing themselves; learn each other's preferences; and build a relationship of trust and mutual respect (Blankmeyer Burke, 2017). The notion of trust between deaf people and

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[3] The interpreters for this specific PhD defence are a notable exception.

interpreters has previously been identified as a significant component in ensuring collaborative working practices (Haug, et al., 2017; Napier, 2011; Napier, et al, 2017, in press). An important foundation for building trust and respect, argued by these authors, is the shared professional space in which both the deaf academic and the interpreter approach the interpreted event (and the process of preparing for it) as a joint collaborative project.

Haug et al. (2017) found that deaf professionals use a variety of strategies to collaborate effectively with interpreters, including adapting signing style (e.g. repeating), making regular eye contact, giving feedback, and engaging in vocabulary preparation. They found that deaf leaders are not passive recipients of interpretation but instead manage interpreted events and collaborate with interpreters before, during and after mediated interactions. They do not just "sit back and listen", but put effort into the co-creation and comprehension of meaning in an interpreted event.

Using Llewellyn-Jones and Lee's (2013) interpreter role-space model, which focuses on how the interpreter utilizes his or her role-space during interpreting assignments, Haualand and Ringsø (2014) give an account of the interpretation of a PhD defence of a deaf academic in Norway, recounting how the deaf academic and interpreter co-constructed a role space. They describe some of the mechanisms and strategies involved for "grooming" an interpreter to work with a deaf academic and how this led to a successful signed-to-spoken language interpretation during a PhD defence. On the part of the interpreter, Ringsø, this entailed continuing professional development. For example, she studied for an MA in Applied Linguistics while working with Haualand and made herself familiar with publications from Haualand's discipline (anthropology). During assignments, Haualand managed role space by using humour and meta-communication about interpreters and how to work with interpreters (not trying to make them "invisible"). She also did "extra talk" and made efforts to align herself with the interpreter before starting a real argument (e.g. repeating the name of the previous discussant, repeating crucial concepts or ideas, providing written notes with key names). After several years of working together, the role-space changed. During the PhD defence, Haualand did not need to align herself as much to the interpreter as in the beginning of their collaboration, and did not involve herself as much anymore in how the interpreter managed her role space. This gave her more opportunity to concentrate on replying to the examiner's questions. The difference between this situation and the case under discussion in this article is that Haualand and Ringsø were used to working with each other, having done so from the start of Haualand's PhD studies. This could be described as a 'designated interpreter' model.

1.3. Challenges of working with interpreters

Most academic institutions such as universities and research centres are still hearing-dominant spaces working with dominant modes of language (O'Brien & Emery, 2014). This creates specific challenges for deaf academics working in these spaces. Kusters et al (2017) present an overview of these challenges, based on the published accounts of deaf scholars. For example, they mention that deaf academics often have to spend a great amount of time organizing access, such as booking interpreters or other language/communication support, which eats into their work time (Woodcock et al. 2007; Stapleton 2015; Haualand, 2017). Blankmeyer Burke (2016, 2017) states that deaf consumers' preferences are often overlooked and dismissed when booking interpreters, even though interpreters working in these contexts have to be able to work with specialized academic vocabulary (see Hauser et al., 2008; Blankmeyer Burke & Nicodemus, 2013).

Collaboration between deaf academics and interpreters is an increasingly discussed topic in deaf academic discourse as found at various workshops and conferences (e.g. Haualand and De Meulder 2017), as is the agency of signed language interpreters and how they can leverage their position of power and privilege as an agent of change (Boudreault & Gertz, 2018).

International mobility is a key aspect of academic life and an inherent part of many deaf academics' lives, especially those living in transnational regions like Europe, as in both their personal and professional lives they use different languages and modalities continuously. To publish and engage in written conversations (e.g. via e-mail) with deaf and hearing colleagues, deaf academics communicate in a range of ways. Some primarily use written English or one of their written national languages while others primarily communicate their work in a signed language (for example in Brazil and the US). To network, discuss, and present in international deaf academic contexts, they use one of the signed languages often used in those contexts such as American Sign

Language (ASL), British Sign Language (BSL) or International Sign (IS). International Sign is a complex multilingual translanguaging phenomenon where individuals draw upon their sign language, language and gestural repertoires to engage in communicative 'foreigner talk.' In some contexts this develops as a more stable lingua franca, for example with deaf academics in academic contexts, who often use a more conventionalized form of IS.

To network, discuss and present in international contexts which are predominantly hearing and non-signing (i.e. most international conferences), they use their national signed languages, or one of the academic sign language lingua francas (IS, ASL, BSL) via signed language interpreters who work into English or another signed or spoken language, depending on the context. Sometimes they also make use of captioning or speech-to-text services to access informational content or contribute to discussions during meetings by writing or typing and having a colleague or palantypist voice it. However, many deaf academics are not able to bring interpreters of their national signed language to participate in conferences. Even if they can, those interpreters often do not have the necessary skills to work in academic settings and might not have enough English proficiency to work into academic English. Similarly, conference organizers may refuse to provide interpreting in a national signed language when IS, BSL or ASL interpreting is already provided, even though not all deaf academics master these academic sign languages well enough (yet).

International Sign is now used in a range of institutional contexts, including by deaf academics at conferences, in order to cater to the international nature of academia (de Wit, 2010; Hiddinga & Crasborn, 2011; Supalla, Clark, Neumann Solon, & Müller de Quadros, 2010; Rosenstock & Napier, 2016). There is an emerging body of research on interpreting between IS and English (McKee & Napier 2002; Best, Napier, Carmichael & Pouliot, 2016; Rosenstock, 2004; Stone & Russell, 2014), but apart from descriptions from a practitioner perspective (e.g. Moody, 2002) very little is known about IS interpreting. At present there is no formal educational program to train as an IS interpreter, but there is a program that introduces experienced national signed language interpreters to the concept of IS and to translating and interpreting between IS and English: EUMASLI (Hessman, et al, 2011). As IS is increasingly used as a method of delivering information, IS interpreters are increasingly expected to work from IS into spoken English (Whynot, 2016). Although it is true that IS might satisfy administrators' and event organizers' needs to reduce costs by providing a single language combination, there is tension with deaf academics as some may prefer to use a national language to engage in academic discourse.

1.4. The elephant in the room: Interpreting from a signed language into a spoken language

In the specific setting discussed in this paper (a PhD defence of a deaf academic using IS and BSL), the majority of interpreted renditions were from IS or BSL into spoken English. Interpreting from a signed into a spoken language can be the 'elephant in the room,' as signed language interpreters often perceive that this is their weakest working language direction (Napier, et al, 2005). Given that signing deaf academics typically have to have their signed utterances interpreted into a spoken language, it is crucial that interpretations in this language direction are of high academic quality. Indeed, Haug et al. (2017) found that when selecting interpreters, deaf professionals perceive the ability to interpret into a spoken language as an important criterion. At the same time, however, trusting that an interpreter can produce an accurate and effective rendition can be a 'leap in the dark' since most deaf academics do not have a direct, real-time mechanism to monitor how they are being interpreted, even if they are able to read and write to an appropriate academic standard in that language.

There is actually very little research on interpreting from a signed into a spoken language. There are some studies that have noted the expansion and compression strategies used by interpreters to deal with the structural differences of signed and spoken languages (Feyne, 2015; Finton, 2005; Finton & Smith, 2004; Hema, 2002), and a study of the perceptions of listeners of a spoken interpretation that featured disfluent pauses (Fitzmaurice & Purdy, 2015). In addition, we review here three studies that have focused on the team work strategies that have enabled successful spoken interpretations.

Firstly, in a pilot study of teamwork strategies between two interpreters working from ASL into English, Cokely and Hawkins (2003) found that the interpreters had particular cues for giving and receiving support to each other, including leaning towards each other, tapping on a leg or arm to request support, or making eye contact. Napier et al. (2008), in their case study of a deaf professional working with two interpreters for a formal presentation in Auslan that was rendered into spoken English, identified particular cues used by all three

participants to ensure that the interpretation was produced smoothly and had the impact on the audience that the deaf presenter intended. These primarily included maintaining eye contact, pausing, and nodding or signalling to each other throughout the interpreting process. Lastly, in a descriptive linguistic case study of strategies utilised by two professional sign language interpreters working simultaneously in an interpreter-mediated classroom environment, Best et al. (2016) found that interpreting from IS into spoken English can present complex challenges for interpreters as there are even fewer direct equivalents between IS and English than between a national signed and spoken language. The interpreters in their case study utilized various strategies to produce a fluent interpretation including preparation, team work, pausing to buy time to receive or process adequate information to produce a coherent English sentence, expansion, reduction, strategic omission, application of personal knowledge, compression strategies corresponding to reiteration, and couching (i.e. adding background or contextual information to clarify a concept).

So when we consider the challenges for deaf academics working with interpreters, the challenges of IS interpreting, and the strategies needed for interpreting from IS into spoken English, this case study will make an additional contribution toward understanding the measures necessary for a deaf academic to effectively deliver a PhD defence through signed language interpreters, and indeed, the measures necessary for any successful interpretation from a signed into a spoken language.

2. Methodology

In this paper we present an appreciative inquiry case study, which we believe demonstrates a case of best practice. Appreciative inquiry as a theory studies "the best of what is, in order to identify what could be" (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). It commonly refers to "an action research process that studies something from the positive side […] to create a new kind of conversation among people as they work together to improve a group or organization" (Bushe & Avital, 2009, p.48), and focuses on narratives and experiences of "best of" stories. These stories can lead to conversations, which in turn lead to "the collective design of alternative and preferred futures."

2.1. Data

Our data for this article consist of various texts and artefacts: Maartje's PhD thesis and publications[4]; her written opening presentation and PowerPoint; the opponent's written comments and questions; the briefing information Jemina and Christopher received from the Finnish interpreters; Jemina and Christopher's preparation notes; film footage of the defence; notes before and after the preparation meeting the night before and in the morning; reflective entries of the three authors and conversations between the three authors taking place during the year after the defence.

The three-hour-defence was filmed throughout, both Maartje's signing and Jemina's and Christopher's interpretation in both directions. The spoken language interpretation was subsequently transcribed verbatim. This gave Maartje retrospective access to a written rendition of the spoken output, although despite being able to read Christopher's and Jemina's words, she still did not have access to how they sounded, e.g. prosody, pronunciation, sound of voice. This gave us an opportunity to analyse not only the collaborative strategies we used, but also the interpretation output.

2.2. Participants

As the authors, we are the three main participants in the case study: Maartje, the deaf academic, and Jemina and Christopher, the two signed language interpreters. Maartje is from Belgium. Her PhD thesis was in the domain of

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[4] As is now increasingly customary, Maartje's PhD consisted of published articles.

sign language policy and planning, more specifically the legal recognition of signed languages and the aspirations of deaf communities. After gaining her first MA degree in Belgium, she lived in the UK for one year where she obtained an MSc degree in Deaf Studies at the University of Bristol and learned BSL. Her personal and professional life is inherently mobile and transnational, so she often uses IS in different contexts. She first worked with Flemish Sign Language interpreters while studying for her MA in Belgium (2000-2005) and has worked with signed language interpreters since then, in multiple settings. She has experienced this as a process of trial and error and over the years has gained an increasing awareness about strategies vis-à-vis working with interpreters.

Maartje was able to choose the interpreters for her PhD defence, who were paid by the University of Jyväskylä. She asked for Jemina and Christopher for this specific assignment because, although she had not worked with them before, she had seen them presenting and/or working as interpreters on various occasions. Because they are both also academics familiar with academic Deaf Studies and language policy jargon, and because BSL and IS are among their working languages for interpreting, she felt they were most suited for this assignment. Also, and importantly, from the few occasions she had engaged with them, she felt there was a match, not only on a deaf professional/interpreter level but also on a personal level. This situation was thus unusual in that all three, both the deaf academic and the interpreters, were academics in related fields and with similar professional interests. This turned out to be an important aspect of our work together.

Jemina is an interpreter and academic in interpreting studies from the UK and has expertise and experience working with deaf professionals, including academics. She is accredited as a BSL, IS and Auslan interpreter and regularly works as an IS interpreter at conferences attended by deaf academics. She accepted the opportunity to work with Maartje as she had seen Maartje presenting at other conferences was familiar with her scholarly work and felt they would be able to work together. She has participated in many PhD defences but had never interpreted one before, especially with the language combinations IS/BSL/English. Although she had not interpreted for Maartje before, she felt that the common interests, and the fact that they both knew BSL and IS, would be conducive to a positive work experience.

Christopher, also from the UK, has a similar profile as an interpreter (accredited in BSL, ASL, and IS) and as an academic who had a bilingual PhD defence himself (BSL and English). He had interpreted seven other PhD defences with deaf PhD candidates, some with deaf examiners and some with both candidate and examiner using BSL, IS and ASL depending. He studied his PhD at Bristol where he first met Maartje and has since interacted with many of the same academic peers as she in Europe and the US. He was familiar with Finland (although not with the Finnish PhD process), having lived there for a short time. He had successfully worked as a BSL/IS interpreter with Jemina previously and felt they would be an effective team in re-presenting Maartje's academic discourse..

2.3. The context

In Finland, a PhD defence is a public event, and friends and family are invited, as well as colleagues and collaborators. Some fifty people attended this PhD defence, a diverse audience of deaf/hearing and signing/non-signing people of different nationalities, but mostly Belgian and Finnish. One or two official "opponents" are invited to discuss the dissertation.

In this case, the opponent was Finnish professor Pirkko Nuolijärvi. The "custos" (a professor at the specific university, in this case professor Ritva Takkinen) acts as a chair and begins the defence by welcoming the audience, and briefly introducing the "disputant" (the PhD student) and the opponent. The disputant then delivers his/her introductory lecture for the public to give a general overview of the study's background, aims and methods. The opponent then gives a few general remarks, after which the actual discussion of the doctoral dissertation begins.

During the discussion, the disputant and opponent sit at facing tables at the front of the room (see Figure 1). This specific discussion ranged from questions about the wording of the title, to validity of the research, informant sampling, research questions, theoretical framework, choice of terminology, methodology, data analysis and researcher positionality, to future research directions. Once the opponent is finished with the questions, he/she stands up to give a statement about the overall quality of the dissertation and defence and makes a recommendation as to whether to pass the disputant. (In this case, the recommendation was positive.) The

disputant then thanks the opponent and asks the audience if anyone has additional questions or comments. In this case, there were no questions. The custos then declares the defence closed. Maartje's whole defence lasted approximately three hours from start to finish.

Figure 1: Setting of the PhD defence

One week before the event, the university asked Maartje in which language she would present so they could advertise this on their website. This was a tricky question, because Maartje's signing would be IS with a very strong BSL 'accent' or at least a higher level of BSL vocabulary than might be seen more widely in academic IS. Similarly, there would be ASL fingerspelling in order to convey appropriate academic terminology, as is customary in academic IS but not in more unconventionalized uses of IS. Maartje knew that just putting 'BSL' or 'IS' would not describe her languaging practices well and would give people (especially the deaf audience) incorrect expectations about whether they would be able to understand her. She asked the university to list 'BSL/IS'. This quandary is representative of the language choices that deaf academics often have to make in recent years. For example, Christopher has often interpreted in academic settings where the advertised 'language' is IS/ASL. Maartje's BSL/IS was interpreted to spoken English by Jemina and Christopher and this was then re-interpreted into Finnish Sign Language by two interpreters hired by the university.

3. Strategies: what worked and why?

3.1. Preparation

Jemina and Christopher planned to arrive in Jyväskylä the evening before the defence to meet with Maartje, but they had already undertaken preparatory work involving different strategies. Drawing on their previous personal and professional experience of the PhD defence process, they read and re-read articles published by Maartje that contributed to the PhD dissertation, summarized the dissertation and noted key points, read and highlighted the

dissertation and wrote out key terminology and author names that they expected to come up frequently in the discussion (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Preparation notes including key terminology

Maartje had also prepared. She went through the process of the defence with her supervisors, asked colleagues for advice on how to prepare for the discussion, re-read her PhD articles and summary, and practiced signing her opening lecture. Still, with the date of the defence coming closer, she had ambiguous feelings about working with interpreters. Because the opponent did not know any sign language but had English as a shared language, Maartje dreaded working with interpreters and wished she could address the opponent directly.

The first actual preparation session took place the night before the defence. A glitch in flight plans that prevented Christopher from being present in person did not stop preparation of the full team; Christopher participated via Skype. One FinSL interpreter also attended the preparation session, to further familiarize herself with the discourse. All interpreters had received the PowerPoint slides, the questions from the opponent beforehand (to which Maartje did not have access), and the full text of Maartje's opening lecture. Jemina and Christopher had also received photographs of the room from their Finnish interpreter colleague in order to better understand the physical space and layout, should that need to be taken into consideration when interpreting.

First, we went over some specific terminology, to discuss how some key concepts and specific academic jargon would be presented. For this, we drew upon a variety of linguistic resources using BSL lexicon, IS strategies, and one-handed (ASL) fingerspelling. This entailed finding a way of successfully indexing the English academic terminology especially in areas where there is no established lexicon in BSL. This was not about being prescriptive but about finding strategies that would work. For example, we established how Maartje signed specific concepts (or co-agreed a specific sign) and which English words she preferred for them, e.g. vitality, group-differentiated citizenship, endangerment, policy, politics, self-determination, discourse, hegemony, maintenance and legitimate. We also agreed on which signs we would use for several similar concepts (e.g. claims, arguments, stakes, demands) as well as how Maartje would sign several English expressions such as "catch-all phrases", "white noise", "lip service". For several concepts we decided to stick with (one-handed)

fingerspelling, e.g. separatist, instrumental, deficit, scrutiny. Lastly, we went over the names of several key authors that we expected to be highly cited in the discussion.

After that, we practiced Maartje's opening lecture, which entailed Maartje signing the full 20 minute-lecture while Jemina, Christopher, and the FinSL interpreter watched, without interpreting. This gave Maartje the space to present and engage with the interpreting team as she wished rather than being driven by the interpreters interrupting and clarifying. This space gave the interpreters a better sense of Maartje's discourse style and her academic voice. We established that they would watch Maartje's signing and interpret from there and not read Maartje's text aloud, because it would allow Maartje to improvise should she want to and not restrict her to having to adhere to the script. This was possible because of Maartje's trust in the interpreters to accurately re-present her in that moment. We also discussed strategies for working to re-present the English questions from the opponent, mindful of the English surface form. We established that the questions – as per Maartje's' request – would be interpreted in a more literally 'English form driven' way , staying closer to English word order and with mouthed and fingerspelled English vocabulary for Maartje to be able to access the English and mirror specific terminology used in her answers, if needed.

We agreed that Jemina would interpret the full 20-minute opening presentation so that Maartje would have a female (academic) 'voice', and then Jemina and Christopher would alternate working from and into English or from and into BSL/IS for the discussion session, each interpreter only interpreting in one direction for that turn to ensure that overlapping of opponent and discussant could occur. After having gone through the full presentation, we established some clues for unobtrusive clarification and discussed strategies to ensure smooth collaboration between the interpreting team and Maartje. For example: how would Jemina and Christopher let Maartje know that they were behind and needed some time to catch up? How would Maartje let them know that she did not understand something? This preparation meeting and the opportunity to practice with Maartje helped Jemina and Christopher to consolidate their reading and understanding of her work and her presentation style.

3.2. *During the defence*

About one hour before the start of the actual defence the next morning, Maartje, Jemina and Christopher met Maartje's supervisors and the opponent to discuss logistics, formalities and go over the process of the PhD defence. Then they went to the venue and met the Finnish interpreters and others to check logistics, microphones, layout, seating, sightlines and to agree where everyone would be seated and when.

Then Maartje's opening lecture began. During this lecture and during the subsequent discussion, Maartje maintained regular eye contact with Jemina and Christopher, who were seated in front of the stage between her and the opponent. She also paused now and then to make sure the interpreters could keep up.

During the opening presentation and the discussion, Jemina and Christopher had their papers laid out in front of them. Christopher held the speech notes while Jemina worked into English for the formal presentation. Throughout the session, they maintained eye contact with Maartje and supported each other and sometimes whispered prompts, which tended to be to capture terminology or phrasing. Sometimes this whispering was also to tell each other that they had captured a point excellently in their spoken interpretation, maintaining a sense of team cohesion and a positive working environment.

Analysis of the video footage shows only a few instances where clarification was needed. This was mostly the case with fingerspelled words which sometimes needed some minor clarification either on the part of Maartje or the interpreters, e.g. "deterministic," "Tatar," "modest" or author names such as "May" and "Kymlicka". Other strategies we noted included prompts from the interpreters to Maartje to control the flow of information, or supporting strategies for seeking and giving information between the interpreters. For example, in Figure 3 Christopher subtly signed (index finger raised in the lower area of signing space and a body lean towards Jemina) to Maartje that Jemina was still interpreting her last concept and was 'catching up' and Maartje needed to go give her time to finish the rendition.
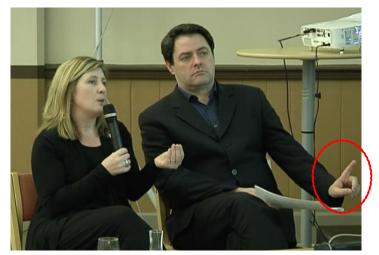
Figure 3: Christopher prompts Maartje.

Alternatively, Figures 4 reveals how Christopher provided information for Jemina when she sought to confirm that Maartje had signed "Scottish Gaelic" (microphone out of the speech stream and visible to Maartje as not being used with lean in to Christopher), and at the same time he signalled (again using a low index) to Maartje that Jemina needed time to complete the interpreted rendition.

Figure 4: Christopher supports Jemina and prompts Maartje.

Figure 5 shows another example of interpreter support strategies, where Jemina prompts Christopher to add something to the interpretation, which he accepts.

Figure 5: Jemina prompts Christopher.

In Figure 6, we can see how Christopher provided reassurance to Maartje. She had just given the sign for 'essentialism' but quickly, and after that fingerspelled (one-handed) "e-s-s-e-n-t-i-a-l-i-s-m . . . e- . . . ." ". Jemina leaned over to Christopher to check and ask 'essentialism?' He confirmed and then made a thumbs-up sign to Maartje to show that the term had been understood and interpreted.

Figure 6: Christopher reassures Maartje.

Figure 7 reveals a combined strategy from both interpreters. Jemina had just finished interpreting a question from the opponent, who was asking something about the third point in Maartje's slide. Jemina interpreted the question accurately into BSL, but Maartje missed which point she meant (i.e. the first, second, or third). Christopher noticed this as he was waiting to interpret Maartje's response into English, and signed "THIRD" to Maartje (see fig. 7). Jemina saw this signed not only in her peripheral vision but also on the screen. Seeing this, she signed a different variant of "third" (see fig. 7) and quickly but calmly repeated the question, which Maartje then went on to answer. This all happened in the space of a few seconds and likely was not even noticeable to the audience, however it was critical in ensuring Maartje's prompt and appropriate response to the opponent.

Figure 7: Christopher and Jemina use a combined strategy to assure clarity.

To give an impression of the spoken output and how this reflected Maartje's discourse, we selected a few excerpts that Maartje felt were good examples of how her signed academic discourse was reflected in the spoken English target language (TL). These represented the type of talk that a prospective member of the academy should be demonstrating. They also represented the academic style that Maartje has developed through her PhD studies. The signed version of the excerpts below can be accessed through this link. To give context, the content is also shown before and after the specific excerpt. This is indicated as such in the video.
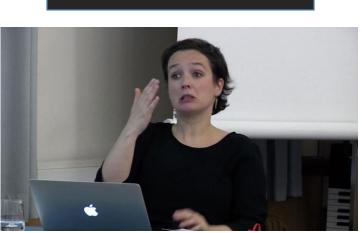
View video examples online.

Figure 8: Maartje responds to question on research questions (Click image to view video examples.).

In response to the question about which of the research questions were the most difficult to answer:

> Christopher: " … when you look at the different recognitions occur, the different languages, the different people, to try to actually disambiguate some of the information that was quite tricky to do, the typological issues made it quite complex."

About d/Deaf terminology:

> Christopher: "So, I follow that convention in terms of the fact that "small-d deaf: is about being a deaf person and in some ways "big D" and "deaf d" is quite antiquated and not positive and it tries to take a simplistic approach to the lived reality of deaf people. We have multiple identities, we

have multiple ways of being in the world at different moments, so it does not really deal with the notion of intersectionality in some ways."

About key authors:

Jemina: "So any recognition of sign language has to take into account the multilingual practices of deaf people and the fact that there is linguistic diversity within signing communities."

About the role of participant observation as one of the research methods:

Jemina: "… because I perhaps could go at a conference and see somebody present a paper and say 'yes we have sign language recognition in my country', but when I examined the actual paperwork, the legislation I was able to see exactly what level of recognition they were talking about and enabled me to draw down to a deeper level to find out exactly what kind of legislation exists across different countries."

About the limitations and opportunities of specificity and universalism:

Jemina: "You can't assume that sign language recognition functions on an international level because you have to take into account the language policy, the political system, the government framework, the legislative history, the infrastructures that are available within each respective country in order to implement any kind of sign language recognition."

About vitality of sign languages:

Christopher: "It's also important for us to not see that as a risk of sign languages changing, but actually as a positive process and part of natural languaging processes."

Thus it is evident that even though Jemina and Christopher were not designated interpreters the preparation and interaction with academic discourse prior to this defence enabled an accurate representation of Maartje's academic style.

3.3. After the defence

After the defence, each of us reflected on how well we felt the process had gone.

Maartje: After the defence, people approached me to ask if I had been working with Jemina and Christopher for a long time. When I told them it actually was the first time, most people reacted surprised. Also, my parents (who are hearing) approached me to say that sometimes they forgot I was being interpreted and that it was like they heard me speaking, both in terms of lexicon as well as intonation, tone of voice, etc. This got me thinking about the designated interpreter model. In fact, Jemina and Christopher were "ad hoc" interpreters I selected for that specific setting, not my designated interpreters. I guess this was a "match. "While they did not really know me well and I did not work with them before, they knew people "like me", and were familiar with the issues, the topic, discourse and academic jargon.

Jemina: I was elated. I felt so proud of Maartje for what she had accomplished and had a real feeling of privilege to have been a part of it. I was impressed by how Maartje had conducted herself in her defence and was full of admiration for her. I was particularly pleased when she told me her parents said it 'sounded just like she would if she spoke', which made me feel like I re-presented her well during her presentation. I actually felt that we had both re-presented her well throughout. Basically – she nailed it – and we nailed it! I really enjoyed the work and would like to do it again. In fact I was slightly surprised that it worked so well –I had not worked with Christopher a lot and had never interpreted for Maartje before. Others asked if we'd worked a lot together. So it feels like this situation actually contradicts and/or complements the designated interpreter model. Trust is such an important part of the working relationship, and in this instance we trusted our familiarity with academic discourse, PhD processes, deaf studies current theories, and being generally up to date with literature really helped too.

> Christopher: I remember feeling that we had not let Maartje down. She had been able to engage in her PhD defence without us 'getting in the way'. Of course this was not something that happened without preparation, both the career-long preparation before this job and the specific preparation for the job on all our parts. That Maartje trusted us and that we trusted each other enabled us to have the privilege of representing Maartje's argument and her engaging in academic discourse with her opponent and witnessed by her colleagues, family and friends. It was a little overwhelming too because you're proud of Maartje and her achievement and glad to have been a small part of it, but also proud of your work and the interpreting team.

The last formal event involved a dinner with the opponent, supervisors, and one other colleague. During this dinner, some formal rituals are required to be followed, such as expressing gratitude to each supervisor and to the opponent, who then also gives a short speech after which small presents are exchanged.

> Christopher and Jemina: Dinner was a watershed – a historical professional and life moment – Maartje was the first deaf PhD graduate in Finland. Being a part not just of Maartje's PhD completion, but also having agency in effecting change – seeing the potential impact for other deaf academics as Maartje will have impact through her position, status and on-going research work – was humbling. We think we used this agency well.

4. Discussion

4.1. Interpreting as a performance?

As has become clear, interpreting is more than language work. Along with the other kinds of work (preparation, etc.) there is a performance element to providing an interpretation. Maartje effectively engaged with the interpreters to ensure that she could perform and be re-performed in an appropriate way by them, i.e. as an academic. As seen in the figures above there are instances where there was visible interaction between Maartje, Jemina and Christopher. However, when looking at the video of the defence, much of the time it is not obvious that Maartje was being interpreted; she did not significantly change how she presented, notwithstanding the moments where clarification was sought and the interpreting process became visible.

Similarly, in the video of the defence you often cannot see from Jemina's and Christopher's body language or posture that they are interpreting. Part of this visible comfort in performing interpreting is that both interpreters brought many years of experience to the task. Although the situation of a Finnish PhD defence was novel, other aspects of the task were familiar to the interpreters. This familiarity allowed for the interpretation to be a performance approaching natural speech rather than marked as an interpretation (Ahrens, 2005, Wadensjö, 2008). This is also reflected in Maartje's parents' comment that Jemina "sounded just like Maartje would if she spoke", with the same tone of voice, intonation, word choice, etc. This is significant, since Maartje's parents know her way of speaking Dutch but not English. What does it mean that this kind of quality of someone's 'voice' is transferred even across languages, through an interpreter? This might also point to an influence of gender and personality, which brings us to the next point.

4.2. Re-presentation?

After reading the transcript, while Maartje found that Christopher and Jemina both re-presented her content equally well, she sensed that Jemina's register was closer to the one she herself would use. For example, the use of the verb "disambiguate" or the expression "quite antiquated", as used by Christopher, while known to and understood by Maartje, would not come naturally to her. This raises the issue of re-presentation on two levels. On the one hand, Maartje as an academic wants the interpretation to demonstrate her engagement with academic discourse generally, but on the other hand this representation is ideally a re-presentation of her own style.

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This difference in style could be a gender issue (i.e. men's talk versus women's talk) although there is little exploration of the differences between interpretations by men and women (Morgan, 2008). When reading this, Christopher did wonder whether it would have been better when preparing to (re-)read Maartje's journal articles, speaking them out loud to better entrench Maartje's voice in his spoken English prior to the defence. It could also be that Christopher was unconsciously aware of Jemina's longer experience as both an interpreter and an academic and this influenced his choices to ensure academic re-presentation. Jemina, on the other hand, as a senior academic and interpreter in her own right, with her own well-established academic voice, was perhaps less conscious of needing to re-present an academic voice and could be more sensitive to re-presenting Maartje's own voice. For Maartje, when choosing interpreters for her PhD defence, the most important reasons to choose Jemina and Christopher were that they were academics in related fields, with similar professional interests, had BSL and IS among their working languages, and because there was a match. For her, given the limited choice of interpreters for this kind of setting, having an interpreter with the appropriate skills was more important than the interpreter's gender.

4.3. Designated interpreter?

The account of this PhD defence calls into question the meaning and relevance of the 'designated interpreter model' (Hauser et al, 2008). The model is based on the idea that familiarity is important and leads to better outcomes. It is indeed understandable within a work context where greater exposure to workplace talk and workplace institutional knowledge prepares the interpreter to work for that client with minimal specific preparation. The designated interpreter model as we know it now is also rooted in a primarily U.S. context, where the legislative and policy environments make it possible to engage interpreters in this way, and for interpreters to specialize rather than to remain generalists.

But do all deaf academics want the same interpreter? And do they want that interpreter for all their professional (conference, office, networking, etc.) and private situations? Not necessarily. Familiarity with each other is important, but for deaf academics other factors seem to be more important in professional settings: primarily familiarity with academic discourse, the PhD process, and in this specific case familiarity with new theories in Deaf Studies, language policy and planning terminology and discussions. For example, Jemina's and Christopher's own research and teaching overlaps with, or can be situated within, Deaf Studies and applied linguistics, which seemed to be relevant for the interpreting process during the defence. Thus, what is key is preference (i.e. the ability to exercise real choice) and familiarity, rather than working with a 'designated' interpreter.

Not only are the needs of deaf professionals and deaf academics changing, but the faces of the interpreters are changing too. Although this is still a very slow process, signed language interpreters are achieving higher levels of academic qualifications such as an MA or PhD. For example, Jemina was the first UK-born sign language interpreter to achieve a PhD, and Christopher the first to achieve one from a UK institution. This means that deaf academics are able to make choices other than having to engage in a workplace apprenticeship model such as the designated interpreter implies, and that interpreters achieving a degree in interpreting alone is not enough to meet the needs of deaf professionals.

4.4. Interpreting system creating inequality

The account of this PhD defence also calls into question the systems of interpreting provision as a social and political institution. Signed language interpreting provision in general, and in academic settings specifically, is a system that is heavily based on privilege. A deaf academic who works into English and has the privilege to be able to use one of the academic signed languages such as BSL, ASL, IS or a combination of these, has more choice of better-qualified interpreters than a deaf academic who does not, or who works in a language other than English. This structural inequality is because the same interpreters who are qualified to work as IS interpreters and/or who are BSL/ASL interpreters working in academic contexts are also in many cases native English speakers.

These deaf academics also have more control over the selection and preparation of interpreters than deaf people without this privilege. It takes a great effort to actively and successfully engage in an interpreter mediated-interaction (Haug et al., 2017). This effort is not equally distributed and is more easily achieved by deaf people including most deaf academics, who have English in their language repertoires and context-specific knowledge. As a result, not only might there be a widening gap between deaf academics and other professionals who have the linguistic capital and skills to gain more out of interpreter-mediated interactions than deaf people without this capital and skills, but such a gap might also be developing between deaf academics themselves. This is because it is easier for deaf academics who work in Deaf Studies or sign language linguistics, the areas that have traditionally had a critical mass of deaf people and therefore interpreters working within the domain, to find interpreters who can undertake high quality interpreting into spoken English. This is virtually impossible for deaf academics working in non-deaf related fields as there are far fewer interpreters who have academic exposure to these fields, and far fewer who have a degree in those domains and have seen sign language being used in those domains. This is how the system of interpreting could potentially be actively creating inequality.

5.   Conclusion

5.1.   Identify what could be

After the defence, several deaf audience members and academic colleagues told Maartje that they thought this situation was like a dream: being able to choose which interpreters to work with, being lucky that they were available at all, having interpreters with a PhD themselves and even familiar with the specific academic discipline, having the university pay for them, etc. In reality, this is indeed a situation that unfortunately does not occur frequently, because of the general educational level of interpreters, the limited availability of specialized interpreters, and budget constraints. As this paper clearly identifies "the best of what is, in order to identify what could be" (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), it calls us to enter into on-going conversations among and between deaf academics and interpreters, and to design alternative futures.

The number of deaf academics who make use of these interpreting services is steadily increasing, but the pool of qualified interpreters, especially those with English as a working language, does not expand at a similar pace. It is arguable whether this situation is sustainable in the long term, and deaf academics will need to think about how to widen the pool of interpreters who are available to them. Perhaps this is where the apprenticeship-like model of designated interpreters could be further explored; that is, opportunities could be provided for interpreters and deaf professionals to build relationships based on trust and to give interpreters increasing exposure to domain-specific linguistic and cultural capital. This ensures that expertise is not concentrated with only one or two individuals but instead is shared to create a more broadly available resource upon which deaf academics can draw.

This vision of the future involves redressing the structural inequality in interpreter provision and improving not only interpreter education but encouraging interpreters to gain degrees in subjects other than interpreting. This may require a greater number of masters-level interpreter programs that recruit students with specific undergraduate degrees that meet the needs of deaf professionals and academics. Sign language interpreter education needs to focus more than it does now on training to work into English, in addition to another spoken language in non-English speaking countries, on becoming visibly comfortable with performing language work, and on specific specializations linked to deaf professional access and continuing professional development. A broader education than just an interpreting degree will allow interpreters to be better matches for deaf academics.

Designated or preferred?

Acknowledgments

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