Becoming conference interpreters: the deaf experience

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ABSTRACT

In this article we consider the experience of two traditional 'amateur' Deaf interpreters working at an international conference within the context of the professionalization of deaf interpreters. We explore the themes raised during interviews of the Deaf and hearing interpreters who worked together at an efsli event. The path to becoming a professional deaf interpreter is often mediated by such capacity building opportunities in countries with limited access to formal training and so we note the dynamics of the teams and the professional reflections of the interpreters. We also draw attention to the attitudinal barriers that deaf interpreters face, which can affect the work of deaf interpreters and the ways in which traditional Deaf interpreters adopt strategies of collegiality and resilience to enable their professionalization.

Keywords: professionalization, team working, deaf-hearing interpreting teams, feed interpreting, collegiality

1 INTRODUCTION

Deaf interpreters and translators have been part of the community, probably since its inception (Adam, Carty and Stone, 2011; Stone and Woll, 2008), in the 17th century we have the first reference to a 'sign translator' (Deusingen, 1660 transl. Sibscota, 1670) and to deaf interpreters working (Carty, MacReady & Sayer 2009). This suggests there have always been deaf bilinguals (and multilinguals) who are chosen to work as interpreters. We would also propose that these interpreters often hone their skills and begin to work as 'amateurs' (Wadensjö, 2004) in a variety of domains, e.g. for Deaf people with idiosyncratic or specific language needs, Deaf migrants, Deaf international conference goers, Deafblind people, etc. However, opportunities to become a professional interpreter seem to be mediated by the opportunities afforded these traditional interpreters and how they perform in those moments when they can demonstrate their skills and be supported by hearing peers to become professional interpreters.

Globally, much of the interpreting work undertaken by people functioning as interpreters is performed informally and by untrained people, and in that regard the plight of deaf interpreters is not much different. However, with specific institutions such as the EU or the UN we have seen a trained and professional workforce of spoken language interpreters develop over the last 50 years. Sign language interpreting, however, has followed a similar path to that of community interpreters (Mikkelson, 2004; Pöchhacker, 1999) whereby ad hoc (non-professional) interpreters are engaged to provide interpreting services. In more recent years we have seen a variety of professional and educational expectations that bring about training to ensure that sign language interpreters are well prepared to undertake interpreting work.

Deaf interpreters are often brought in on an ad hoc basis; even though according to Pöchhacker (1999) sign language interpreting has received ever increasing attention from the 1960s onwards, our deaf colleagues have been late beneficiaries of this attention. The collective expectations of education, training and professional interpreter associations for deaf interpreters, alongside employment opportunities have been slow in coming and still varies enormously from country to country and continent to continent. In our study for this project we interviewed Deaf interpreters who worked at an efsli AGM and conference in a country with limited access to training and work for deaf interpreters. By exploring their work experiences,

we can identify how this capacity building opportunity offered by efsli, works effectively for deaf interpreter professionalization and how these opportunities can be improved.

2 BACKGROUND

As noted by Wadensjö (2004):

> Amateurism as related to interpreting can mean both 'not-for-payment' performed interpreting services and interpreting providers having no professional training for the task (p.1)

This is as relevant today as it was when Wadensjö discussed this at the Critical Link 4 conference 2004, or when discussed by other authors (Pöchhacker, 1999, etc.). Deaf interpreters are engaging in profession work on an increasing basis, but anecdotally it is frequently reported that deaf interpreters are not paid or are paid less than their 'hearing' colleagues. Deaf colleagues often do not have access to professional training, either because the negotiations to establish professional training with government representatives (often for government funding) or with education/training providers imagine that deaf people are the receivers of interpreting services rather than the providers of interpreting services. Even so Wadensjö's description of amateurism applies to the traditional role of the Deaf interpreter or 'ghost-writer' (Adam, Carty and Stone, 2011) and so in this context we will consider the transition of 'amateur' traditional deaf interpreter to becoming professional interpreters, being mindful of the structural barriers they face in becoming professionals.

One of the legal instruments that drives the recognition of sign language interpreters in today's professional landscape is the UN convention on the rights of people with disabilities (the UNCPRD). This legal instrument specifically mentions the notion of 'professional' interpreters without specifying what is mean by this term. In Stone's (2013) study asking UK interpreters what they deem a professional interpreter to be, those surveyed (which included interpreters within professional associations that included deaf interpreters, although none were specifically identified in the survey) would judge an interpreter to be professional:

1. By national registration
2. By the interpreter's observed professional behaviour
3. By the interpreter's engagement with CPD (p.93)

This rank ordered judgement gives us some indication of the challenges deaf interpreters face when working as interpreters and when aiming to be recognised as interpreters who can work within a conference setting. If one's professionalism is judged by being on a national register, but one is not permitted to register or be accredited, for a variety of educational, financial and attitudinal reasons then structurally one is prevented from transitioning from being an 'amateur' to being a professional interpreter.

It is worth noting that even though some deaf people might not have access to training, across Europe different systems require different levels of educational achievement and/or assessment to be considered a professional interpreter whomever that interpreter might be. In some countries there are still limited training opportunities for all interpreters and so short courses and an assessment provide entry into the profession. In much of Northern Europe a degree equivalent qualification is required and upon graduating from these further or higher education courses one becomes a member of the profession and must engage in continuing professional development (CPD). This is often dependent on who is paying for interpreting services and, if most (if not all) interpreting services are paid for by government budgets then this mandates the completion of training via an approved route to be eligible to be in receipt of payment.

Deaf interpreters, as noted, may not have access to these routes and although the work is valuable it is not often recognised such that deaf interpreters are often called DIs or relay interpreters (Collins & Walker, 2006; Stone, Walker & Parsons, 2012). This labelling or rather mislabeling does nothing to improve the status of deaf interpreters and yet the label 'Deaf interpreter' is also problematic for many colleagues

(deaf and hearing). Within the context of conference interpreting it is not uncommon to name the languages that an interpreter can work between, as modelled by AIIC (2015) with the change to the reporting of language combinations "to make the particulars of a member's language combination as it appears in the AIIC Directory clearer to conference organizers and other users". It is possible that such a move for sign language interpreters would enable deaf and hearing interpreters to be recognised for their competencies and potentially facilitate the recognition of the competencies of each other. That is to say reporting ones working languages, e.g. American Sign Language to Danish Sign Language, or German Sign Language to British Sign Language rather than hearing status, at least for conference interpreters could break down some (attitudinal) employment barriers.

Only last year, esfli (2017) passed a motion at our AGM acknowledging the need for "the inclusive notion of sign language interpreters/translators" with recommendations that, regardless of hearing status, interpreters/translators are afforded access to training, the same status and working conditions and treated on an equal basis professionally. This is quite recent considering that Deaf conference interpreters could have been working at some of the Paris banquets in the mid-19th century, and were consistently working in the US from the 1980s and at the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) congresses from 1987 (Russell & Stone, 2014). There are some countries where deaf interpreters have professional accreditation and work in conferences, including between national sign languages and International Sign although not many. There is also some analysis of deaf professional interpreters within this domain (Stone & Russell, 2016) but little attention has been paid to Deaf interpreters beginning to work in conference settings and that documents their experiences. This is a crucial area as we still see many Deaf interpreters transitioning into professional work via capacity building opportunites in conference interpreting and so the importance of these moments for professional recognition cannot be understated. This study will now explore some of deaf interpreter experiences during a capacity building opportunity at an efsli event.

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This case study of four interpreters working at an efsli event looks to explore:

1. What factors, logistical or otherwise, supported Deaf-hearing conference interpreting teams to provide effective interpreting services?
2. How the Deaf-hearing teams could be better supported to provide an effective service?

Let us now move onto how the data was collected and analysed.

4 METHODOLOGY

In this case study we interviewed four interpreters who worked at an efsli AGM and conference. Efsli provides opportunities for deaf interpreters to be employed to work at its conferences both by providing International Sign (IS) interpreting and by encouraging the local organising team to also employ deaf interpreters as part of their conference team within their national sign language interpreting service. For this event two teams of deaf-hearing interpreters were recruited to provide an IS interpreting service with the hearing interpreters working from spoken English to the national sign language (NSL) and the deaf interpreters working from the NSL to IS.

The interpreters were recruited and asked to consent to being interviewed to explore the working environment, and to explore what worked well and what could be improved for conference interpreting provision that includes Deaf interpreters. The interviews were semi-structured (Spradley, 1979; McCurdy, Spradley & Shandy, 2004) with some questions being asked regarding whether or not the interpreters had worked at an efsli AGM and conference, were familiar with efsli, whether the logistics of the conference supported the Deaf-hearing teams and how the situation could be improved.

The two hearing interpreters (HI1 and HI2) were interviewed by one of the Deaf interpreters (DI2) in the NSL; DI2 had also worked at the conference (the other Deaf interpreter (DI1) interpreted the interview into IS). The interpretation into IS gave access to the researchers in a mutually shared language.

The Deaf interpreters then interviewed each other using IS. The goal of the team being interviewed by other team members was to enable an action research methodological approach such that those within the same community of practice could reflect upon the logistics of the event and bring about "an improvement in their own practice" (Birley and Moreland, 1998, p.34) from a participatory research approach (Wurm & Napier, 2017).

Each interview lasted 20-30 minutes, the interviews were video recorded and then thematic analysis was undertaken to understand the differences between more experienced Deaf interpreters (or at least those given a higher professional status as described in Russell & Stone, 2014; Stone & Russell, 2016, 2013) and the experience of these less experienced Deaf conference interpreters. Whilst these interpreters are not amateur with respect to the quality of their work, the respect afforded them in terms of access to training, professional associations and payment could mean that the interpreters fall within Wadensjö's (2004, p.1) definition. For us however, the goal is to describe the transitioning of the traditional Deaf interpreter into the institutional professional space of conference interpreter.

5 DISCUSSION

The analysis of the interview data revealed several themes, some of which parallel the experiences of experienced Deaf interpreters (who have in some ways transcended the structural barriers albeit in necessarily creative ways) faced by Deaf interpreters and traditional Deaf interpreters navigating those challenges. Other issues raised may have been specific to the teams working at this event. We shall now present the data and discuss the issues raised.

5.1 Deaf conference interpreters

Both of the Deaf interpreters (DI1 and DI2) had traditional interpreting experiences. Although this was the first time they had worked at the efsli AGM and conference they had worked at other conferences and with feeders, i.e. co-interpreters (CI) working from the spoken language of their country to their national sign language. DI1 and DI2 have worked from their national sign language to either, idiosyncratic language use of their national sign language, International Sign (IS) or American Sign Language. As one of the Deaf interpreters says:

> at efsli working professionally and being paid that was my first time [at efsli] … for some time I have worked for example in the courts when a hearing [colleague] asked me to attend court as there was a Deaf person with unusual language that the hearing interpreter could not understand the court case was postponed and I was brought in … I have worked as an interpreter from time to time over the last ten years for example if there is an American visitor [to my country] then I interpret between American Sign Language and XXXX Sign Language [the national sign language]… within Deaf schools if the teacher is not clear then I interpreter for the students … supporting communication … (DI1)

However, eflsli was the first opportunity for paid work that the Deaf interpreter had undertaken. This is also true of the second Deaf interpreter:

> this was the first time in my life I have been paid for my interpreting work (DI2)

As is often the case, 'hearing' interpreters act as gatekeepers for Deaf interpreters to work. As the country where the conference was hosted has piecemeal interpreter training and this is not open to Deaf interpreter we also see the professional reflection:

> it was at efsli that I learnt the term feeder previously I did not think of the interpreter as a feeder I just rendered the language from the hearing interpreter accommodated for the Deaf person's needs (DI2)

Thus, while working at efsli the Deaf interpreter was engaging in the kinds of professional behaviours and reflections that one would expect of a conference interpreter. However, in most established professions

one would expect some level of knowledge to be acquired before working. This lack of access to knowledge (via pre-work training) seems to be one of the barriers that Deaf interpreters face and is more common than is often reported across Europe, although thankfully this is changing with the Developing Deaf Interpreting project contributing to that change.

5.2 Team preparation

One of the issues raised by all of the interpreters was logistics. It is normal for interpreters to ask for preparation materials so that they can better understand the information being presented, understand the timetable and when they will be working (efsli, 2012). This also enables further preparation and internet searching to be undertaken to ensure that the background of speakers, the organisation (in this case efsli) and other institutional expectations are understood (Stone & Russell, 2014). All of the interpreters were aware of this, demonstrating their professionalism (cf. Stone, 2013). However, one of the hearing interpreters mentioned that:

> this was the first time in XXXX [their country] that Deaf and hearing interpreters were working together in this way … and my first time working as a feed interpreter (HI1)

As such, there was a greater need for preparing not only individually but also as Deaf-hearing interpreting teams. The hearing interpreter went on to say:

> I wanted a week so that we could prepare our co-working strategies, use of eye gaze, speed of sign language delivery so we were well prepared… there was no preparation for co-working strategies between me and the Deaf interpreter (HI1)

This appears to have been further compounded by the interpreting teams not being assigned until the very last minute. This resulted in the hearing interpreter adopting a strategy that she hoped was successful but one which was not necessarily so and whose efficacy she was unable to judge:

> I tried to make sure I signed clearly for the Deaf interpreter but I do not know how good my signing was for her work (HI1)

When exploring the work of professional interpreters Russell & Stone (2014) note that their data, from professional Deaf interpreters with at least ten-years' professional experience:

> suggest that conference organizers should allow DIs to select their own CI to work with. These DI-CI teams come as a single unit with established practices and should not be arriving at an event and forming a team as they work inasmuch as the novelty of their interaction affects the effectiveness of their work and ultimately the audience's experience in accessing the material via interpretation (p.154)

Clearly the issues experienced by the Deaf-hearing teams at this efsli conference event is not only something that transitioning Deaf interpreters experience but also something that longstanding professional interpreters experience as noted above. This suggests a continued structural barrier for Deaf-hearing interpreters to provide appropriate professional service. If the interpreters are not able to demonstrate the professional behaviour (Stone, 2013) of providing an appropriate interpreting service then this will further compound the professionalization of Deaf interpreters – it is a catch 22 situation possibly established due to attitudinal barriers. The Deaf interpreters need to be able to choose their team so that they can demonstrate their professional expertise as an interpreter and then be welcomed into the profession as a professional conference interpreter.

There was also a larger notion of team that extended across both Deaf-hearing interpreter teams especially when work practices were problematic. Deaf interpreter one said:

> the programme of work given to me by the conference coordinator detailed who my feed interpreter would be so I knew I would be working for three days with the same interpreter …

> when problems popped up I knew my Deaf interpreter colleague was struggling with their
> feed interpreter so I unreservedly swapped feed interpreters with them (DI1)

This act was both collegial, i.e. to support a struggling colleague so that the interpreting service that was provided was appropriate for the audience, but also served the goal of professional development, as the Deaf interpreter continued:

> [I also swapped] because I wanted the experience… I knew that I was happy working with my
> feed I wanted my Deaf colleague to also experience a positive working relationship with a
> feed interpreter and to see what they had experienced with their feed interpreter it was a
> good challenge… by having that experience I could then improve my skills

Clearly there is a sense of supporting colleagues, sharing experiences and engaging in skills development. These appear to be the learning experiences that traditional Deaf interpreters engage in to transition to conference interpreters. By engaging in collegial behaviour, extending ones experience and improving ones skills the Deaf interpreter was demonstrating the professionalism that should ensure acceptance as a professional conference interpreter.

5.3 Professional reflections on the conference work

The interpreters engaged in different types of professional reflections: language work and team work which will now be discussed.

5.3.1 Language work

Many of the professional reflections considered the language work of interpreters. Working in a language combinations that was new or unpractised by the hearing interpreters affected the delivery of interpreting services:

> In the AGM my problem was having to work directly from English I didn't know if there was
> interpretation into spoken XXXX [the national spoken language] … it was the first time I had
> worked directly from English… I had not prepared to hear the English vocabulary for an
> AGM so that was hard for me to understand… this meant that I interpreted a much reduced
> message which was further reduced by the Deaf interpreter … so we worked less as a pair
> during the AGM then had a normal work load during the rest of the conference… when I
> worked directly from my spoken language to my sign language the work our work improved
> greatly (HI2)

Here we see that the logistics were such that, within the team of interpreters working at the AGM, two of the interpreters were experienced working with English as a source language, but the Deaf-hearing team was not. While it might seem that this mean the complete team provided a service and thus this was unproblematic, what we see is that the Deaf interpreter is not given an equal opportunity to work and demonstrate their competence in these moments and this cannot benefit from this capacity building opportunity.

As discussed above, these moments potentially hold more significance for deaf interpreters transitioning to being professional interpreters in countries where interpreter training in general is less codified (see efsli's interpreter training recommendations 2013a; 2013b). These work opportunities enable Deaf interpreters to either transition as professionals or to be continue to be viewed as 'amateur' and then not be deemed appropriate for further professional conference interpreting work. This is often decided by non-Deaf interpreters who also organise conference interpreting, creating systemic barriers for Deaf interpreter professionalization.

The Deaf interpreters also reflect upon the different characteristics of interpreting for the AGM, plenary sessions and workshops. One Deaf interpreter notes:

> the AGM, conference plenary and workshops were all difficult all of them but in their own
> ways (DI1)

This also includes some reflection on the language combination as well. In this regard one of the issues is due to the nature of international sign itself, where this "communication … heavily relies on the inferential processes of the watcher to understand the lexical narrowing or broadening of the sign presented. Strings of actions and descriptions are presented from an experiential perspective for interlocutors to understand context-specific meanings" (Stone & Russell, 2016, p.70). The Deaf interpreter observes that:

> the efsli event it is specialist … my job is to sign International Sign but it is easy to drift to
> American Sign Language… I aimed to use International Sign and not American Sign Language
> but to do that well you must be able to take your time as International Sign takes time to
> produce well and the speaker [speaking English] speeds ahead (DI1)

This appears to be an audience accommodation matter. By trying to engage in audience design (Bell, 1984, 2001) and establishing that the audience requires something (International Sign) which is rooted in Deaf communities' and networks' in-group communication this places a level of pressure on the (audience facing) Deaf interpreter and consequently their feed interpreter. By not having the opportunity to establish clear team-working strategies this does appear to be a negative factor in providing an effective interpretation and demonstrating professionalism.

There is also the issue of specialist terminology although for the Deaf interpreter this is less to do with understanding the source language terms (as seen above by the HI2) and more to do with presenting them in International Sign in a way that is understood by the audience. As the Deaf interpreter says:

> the AGM is specialist and one should investigate how Deaf people talk about efsli AGM specific
> things … it was my first time at the efsli AGM I would feel more confident if I had attended
> several efsli AGMs but as it was my first time that added to the difficulty (DI1)

Even though IS is something that often constitutes ad hoc *in situ* translanguaging (Creese & Blackledge, 2010), the "organizational use of an established lexicon and international signing strategies differs from [this] gesture-rich interaction" (Stone & Russell, 2016, p.66). Again, we see sophisticated professional level reflections demonstrated by the traditional 'amateur' Deaf interpreters understanding that the International Sign language accommodation one might engage in for the audience attending the efsli AGM, i.e. conference interpreting, differs from that of "migrants refugees" (DI1), etc.

5.3.2 Team work

An issue identified by the Deaf and hearing interpreters was the division in the larger team. Those interpreters working with Deaf interpreters had a strong sense of collegiality and of being a team, while those interpreters not working with Deaf interpreters separated themselves from this larger team. As one of the hearing interpreters said:

> Five of us worked very closely together as a team but the other two distanced themselves (HI2)

This is the most striking example of a structural barrier for Deaf interpreters transitioning from being tradition to professional interpreters. Without interviewing the other interpreters in the team we can only speculate on the motivations for this apparent split in the team. Even so the symbolic nature of this acts calls in to question whether the other interpreters accept the role of the Deaf interpreters in the team.

We also see that the experience of team working and looking to the future:

> some feeders did not know how to feed (DI1)

> this was the first time I had worked with a feeder … this was not someone I had worked
>
> with before … the feeder was very half-hearted (DI2)

future goals a workshop here so that we can discuss how we work together (HI1)

Both Deaf and hearing colleagues see feeding as an something in which they need further training. The experience of working together highlights the strengths and weaknesses and that within this context, where Deaf interpreters do not have formal training, this does appear to be a positive one. It also highlights that within interpreter training this issue is not addressed currently and so this gap also institutes the different statuses of Deaf and hearing interpreters. By adding this to training it will ensure that Deaf interpreters are seen as part of the professional landscape.

5.4 Attitude

As noted above some of the larger team members did not engage with the Deaf-hearing teams at all. This attitude expressed by distance was noted by all of the interviewees and unfortunately establishes the feeling of first and second-class interpreters within the larger team. But there were also issues between the Deaf interpreters and hearing interpreters within the Deaf-hearing teams:

> some feeders did not know how to feed ... I knew their work ... I was surprised they we chosen to work in efsli (DI1)

> I felt lost and my feeder do not reach out to me before the event ... so that we could build rapport (DI2)

The feeders need to be willing to work with Deaf interpreters and in this case it does seem some of the feeders were disingenuous. One of the issues for Deaf interpreter performance is related to working with a feed interpreter who is willing and able to ensure that the Deaf-hearing team can provide a good service. This was noted by the Deaf interpreters:

> the quality of my work went downhill [because of no rapport with my feed] and the audience noticed I feel ... the other hearing interpreter [in the team] seated next to my feed was not happy to support me either (DI2)

Within the conference setting typically the hearing 'feed' interpreter (or co-interpreter) tailors their interpretation for the Deaf interpreter in a variety of ways (Russell & Stone, 2014). And it is normal for a working interpreter in the team to support their colleagues (Hoza, 2010). However, in this instance we see that neither the feed interpreter nor the co-worker actively engaged in supporting their Deaf colleague. Nor did the feed interpreter seem to feel they had any agency:

> when I asked the feed if they did not like working with my they shrugged their shoulders and said it's best you talk with the coordinator not taking responsibility ... I felt subjugated (DI2)

The lack of agency by the hearing feed interpreter thus removed some of the agency that the Deaf interpreter had. If interpreters are supposed to show professional behaviour (Stone, 2013) and one of these traits is collegiality then this lack of solidarity causes mistrust in the team. The Deaf interpreter was aware that she had less experience than the hearing feed and was expecting support from her more experienced/senior colleagues to her a junior colleague, but this was not her experience. Again, it was felt that better logistics and a pre-meeting would have remedied this.

Lack of flexibility was also seen as an attitudinal barrier to produce good work:

> bad attitude like the feeder not making eye contact maybe they were not trained well ... missing Deaf culture ... not accepting me as a colleague ... the good feeder has good attitude accepted me as a colleague made good eye contact and was supportive was well prepared and chunked the information well ... with commas pauses clear introduction of new topics ... the feed meant I could use my eye gaze [peripheral vision] well (DI1)

Some of this attitude manifests in the way that the language is created, with inappropriate prosodic marking (i.e. the equivalent of commas, etc., Stone 2009). Some of this attitude was also in respect to enabling the Deaf interpreters to use their enhanced peripheral vision (Codina, et al., 2011) to create an appropriate target language text where their eye-gaze was used in a linguistically appropriately in the International Sign whilst also glancing at the feed interpreter to ensure that the source language was comprehended.

In one of the interviews a follow-up question was asked regarding how attitudes could be changed or at least improved. The suggestion made was:

> I think it would be best to meet before [the event] … for example if we all fly in … and meet as a group have discussions introducing who we are who is a feeder who we are to each other then we can build rapport (DI2)

And in many ways, this was echoed in a comment made by one of the hearing interpreters:

> Deaf and hearing interpreters must work on an equal footing (HI2)

Although one of the Deaf interpreters reflecting on the experience observed that:

> as an interpreter you must self-reflect and know that you can work and are ready for conference interpreting… roll-up your sleeves [get stuck in] engage with your feed interpreter … if the feed it not appropriate then you need to be adaptable and resilient … I think experience is important … (DI2)

Here we see that as a tradition 'amateur' interpreter transitioning to become a professional conference interpreter there is the need to understand that the conference setting will be taxing. As an interpreter one's experience prepares you for the trials and tribulations of the conference environment and the attitudinal barriers you as a Deaf interpreter might face. Experience will give you strategies to cope with these barriers. Even so there is a need for fairness and equality or non-discrimination within the conference interpreting team and the experiences here highlight that for some Deaf interpreters in some contexts this is not the case.

6 CONCLUSION

Deaf interpreters are part of the interpreting landscape and have always been so but in recent years there have been greater opportunities for traditional 'amateur' Deaf interpreters to transition to professional community and professional conference interpreters. This professionalization includes being paid and being treated as part of the interpreting team on an equal footing to other colleagues, as well as an expectation that they will demonstrate appropriate professional behaviour.

In this qualitative case study, we adopted a participatory action research approach to ensure that answers could be provided from those undertaking the work. We have seen in the interviews of the Deaf and hearing interpreters that often traditional (Deaf) interpreters bring a depth of experience to their first paid conference interpreting job as they have often have a variety of experiences interpreting within different sectors of their Deaf communities as well as with other signed languages.

We have also seen that Deaf interpreters understand the need to prepare for the job but one of these aspects is structurally overlooked. The Deaf interpreters in this case were not given the opportunity to select their co-interpreter (see recommendations in Stone & Russell, 2013) and this affected the quality of work that the team was able to produce. Furthermore, this appears to highlight an underlying attitudinal barrier that Deaf interpreters face and begs the question of whether transitioning traditional Deaf interpreters are set-up to fail. We clearly see that Deaf interpreters aim to engage in collegial professional behaviour both with with each other, their feed interpreters, and with the wider team but that non-Deaf interpreters do not always reciprocate this collegiality.

The experiences that the transitioning traditional Deaf interpreters bring to bear enable a detailed reflection on the language work required for conference interpreting and for appropriate preparation work and team work. This experience also gives the Deaf interpreters the resilience to provide an appropriate service in sub-optimal circumstances and find appropriate solutions to serve the interpreting needs of their audience. However, it also highlights that for traditional Deaf interpreters to transition to professional conference interpreters some work is needed to be done by the interpreting profession to ensure that attitudinal barriers, be they direct or indirect discrimination, are addressed.

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