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Accessibility to Theater for Deaf and Deaf-Blind People: Legal, Language and Artistic Considerations

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Abstract

Without accessibility, theater can be meaningless to the deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind consumers. As part of a larger study conducted by B. Kilpatrick (2007), the authors interviewed 38 participants who have been professionally involved in deaf children's theater as to their opinions related to theater accessibility options. Their responses bring forward for discussion options ranging from English text-based accessibility, the closest to the English language, to shadow interpreting, which provides accessibility closest to the play being delivered in full in American Sign Language. Using historical research methods, semi-structured and structured interviews, open-ended questions, archival materials, and published documents on theater interpreting, the authors provide a descriptive commentary about accessibility options based on legal, language and artistic considerations. Following these descriptions, the authors recommend that interpreter training programs include theater interpretation techniques.

Keywords: theatrical interpreting; script translation; interpreter training; interpreter certification; deaf studies; accessibility; theater; sign language; deaf theater; deaf-blind.

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Accessibility to Theater for Deaf and Deaf-Blind People: Legal, Language and Artistic Considerations

1. Introduction

Many deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf-blind people do not attend live theater performances because they do not find them accessible. We use the term *deaf audiences* to signify these diverse groups: culturally deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf-blind audiences. Even with sign language or English accessibility, oftentimes the entire artistic meaning of the dramatic performance is not conveyed. In this paper, the authors utilize 38 interviews conducted by Kilpatrick (2007). All participants were professionally involved in deaf children's theater in the United States. They commented on the theater accessibility issue for diverse deaf audiences. We have also integrated selected published materials on theater interpreting into our commentary. We have organized our paper around the legal, language and artistic considerations for providing full theater accessibility to deaf audiences. Although discussion focuses on theater interpreting with American Sign Language (ASL)/English interpreters, the issues are pertinent to signed language interpreters worldwide.

2. Legal considerations

In the United States (US), every deaf citizen has the right to accessible theater through the protection of five laws. The following is a review of these laws that are pertinent to our paper.

Public Law 85-905, enacted in 1958, is the act providing for a loan service of films that have been captioned for the deaf. Captioned Films for the Deaf opened its doors to the public one year later.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, enacted in 1973, prohibits discrimination against, and mandates accessibility for, disabled people in employment, education, and in other health, welfare, or social-service programs. The 1978 amendments to this act clarify that for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons accessibility means the removal of communication barriers.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 mandates equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications. Title III of the ADA applies to public accommodations for private entities that are open to the public. These private entities included theaters and cinemas. All theaters are required to provide *effective communication* to patrons who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or deaf-blind.

The Television Decoder Circuitry Act, enacted in 1990, provides government funding for the captioning of public-service announcements. Increasing the audience that was served has led to market expansion, thus increasing the incentive to provide captioning. As a result, captioning became more readily available.

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The Telecommunications Act of 1996, directed the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to implement rules mandating captioning. Whereas captioning can be used by all people, the deaf and hard-of-hearing community is its primary beneficiary.

These laws provide the legal mandates and protections for providing accessible theater. We next discuss language and artistic considerations.

3. Language considerations

As part of a larger study conducted by Kilpatrick (2007), 38 participants who had been professionally involved in deaf children's theater were interviewed as to their opinions related to the various options for theater accessibility. Based on these interviews, which were gathered using historical research methods, semi-structured and structured interviews, open-ended questions, archival materials and published documents, the authors provide a descriptive commentary about theater accessibility.

First, we considered language issues. In theater interpreting for deaf audiences in the US, two languages are used: ASL, either through interpretation or through the deaf actors themselves, or English_spoken (amplified), captioned (English print) or Braille (Grojean, 1998; Ingraham, 2008). Typically, the languages are separated, but they can occur simultaneously, as in the case of hearing actors using spoken English and deaf actors using ASL for shadowing interpretation, a unique artistic theatrical performance. How the languages fit into six accessibility options are described in the following figure.³ *Figure 1* illustrates graphics for the accessibility options.

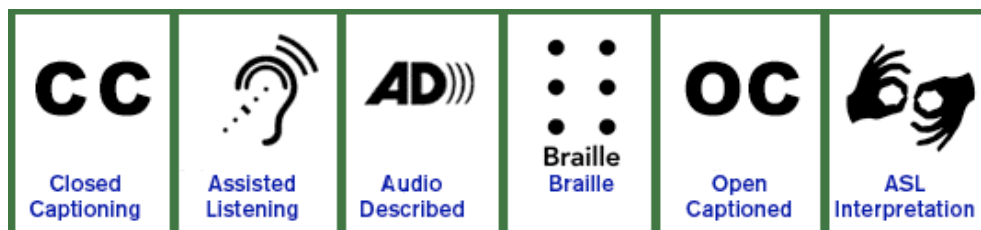


Figure 1. Access symbols and terminology (Cultural Access Consortium, 2006)

3.1. Communication Access Real Time Translation (CART)

One form of English text-based interpreting is through CART, or Communication Access Real Time Translation. This involves a stenographer keying into a machine while listening to a performance. It is similar to court reporting systems.

³ See Kilpatrick (2007) for a full description.

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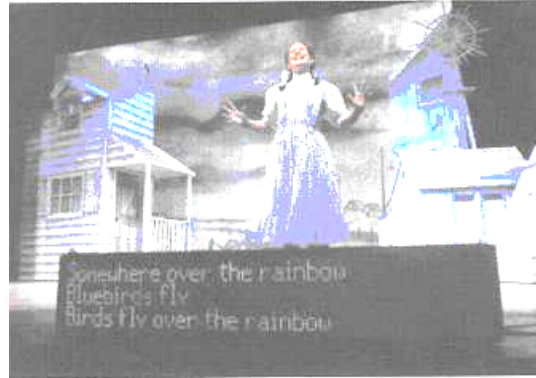
Figure 2. Speaker identification in CART open captioning (Hospital Audiences, 2007)

The CART transcription can be *unscripted*, in which case the English print appears on the screen with a slight delay after the actors have started speaking. Alternatively, it can be *scripted*, in which case the English print is formatted and metered in synchronization with the actors' dialogue (Hospital Audiences, 2007).

Our participants reported that with any text-based option, including CART, drawbacks will occur. While instrumental music can add to the excitement of theater, it can result in inaccuracies in the captioning process. Because of the resonating open space in a theater, the quality, precision, and exactitude of the language may suffer. Another barrier is that the audience itself can block the visibility of the CART display. In addition, voices overlap, making it difficult for the CART operator to provide a literal text. Another problem with captioning is that in order to read the screen, the individual has to constantly shift his/her eye gaze from the stage to the monitor. This creates a "ping pong" effect in that the viewer is forced to switch constantly from one focus to another (Hospital Audiences, 2007).

Another problem reported by our participants is that CART and other text-based options fail to relay emotion the way an actor can. For example, simply typing the words "with anger" does not convey the feeling of the message. The reason we go to the theater is to watch how an actor portrays a character and takes on the emotions of that character. We are not there to read about it on an English caption display. Thus, in some ways, captioning turns the theater experience into a reading experience. Its success depends upon the reading level of the audience. Nationwide, the average reading level of the majority of deaf high-school graduates is fourth grade (Traxler, 2000). Thus, captioning is not appropriate for illiterate or low-functioning deaf persons with low English reading abilities. English captioning also has other obstacles. For example, it is often difficult to understand which character has just given the line or dialogue. In addition, certain characters' emotional display can be very difficult or even impossible to grasp during the performance using an English print display. Furthermore, some hearing persons find open captioning annoying and distracting.

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Wizard of Oz
- Signed Performance in Theaters



Figure 3. Open captioning scenes (*Hospital Audiences*, 2007)

The *open captioning* option places the text on screen in a black reader box at all times. It is available to the entire audience. The advantage of open captioning is that it is relatively inexpensive and it does raise awareness to the public about hearing loss. It also allows the deaf audience to sit at any location in the theater.

Closed captioning superimposes English text captions over video. Closed captions are hidden (i.e., encoded) as numerical data within the video signal emitted by the broadcasting stations and sent to the receivers. This numerical data must then be decoded to be visible as captioning on the screen. Our participants reported that for hearing persons, closed captioning is often preferred because it is less distracting than open captioning. Some view this option as less limiting as it does not relegate deaf viewers to sitting only in designated spots to view the interpreter. Further empirical studies are needed to substantiate the preliminary observations made by the initial respondents to Kilpatrick's (2007) study.

3.2. Amplification systems

Some people with hearing loss may have the ability to hear more effectively when provided with sound amplification devices, such as hearing aids, FM systems and/or infrared systems. These individuals often refer to themselves as being "hard-of-hearing" or "hearing impaired" and many do not use ASL. Theaters typically

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accommodate these users by providing FM or infrared amplification devices that help channel the sound from the theater's sound system directly into the patron's personal hearing aid (McDougall, 2004).

FM systems are portable and have a large coverage and transmission range. They function in the same way as radios, capturing radio waves characterized by certain wavelengths.



Figure 4. FM assistive device (Centrum Sound Systems, 2007)

Infrared amplification systems are also portable. They are based on infrared light transmission technology, and they offer certain advantages compared to FM systems. The infrared signal does not penetrate through walls, thus offering security for sensitive transmissions. This advantage is particularly valuable in courthouses but also in other multiplex facilities such as movie houses. All receivers can operate on one identical system and can be used in any one auditorium without interference or signal pickup from adjacent rooms.



Figure 5. Infrared hearing enhancement system by Phonic Ear (Centrum Sound Systems, 2007)



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Figure 6. Lightweight infrared earphone (The National Theater, 2007)

The authors found little information about how individuals who use assistive devices perceive the theatrical experience. Anecdotal evidence collected by the senior author, who has had more than 30 years experience with deaf theater, suggests that some deaf theater-goers complain the systems are not always functioning. However, as with any engineering problem, this issue can be solved if the theater makes sure to check the functionality of its equipment before each performance. More studies are needed to survey the use of these amplification devices for hard-of-hearing theater patrons, especially in light of the growing numbers of baby-boomers who are losing their hearing in their later years.

3.3. Theatrical arts interpreting

There are two types of signed-access performances for theatrical arts interpreting: sign-language performance and sign-interpreted performances, both of which affect theater appreciation for deaf audiences.

The first, *sign-language performances*, are those in which all the characters, whether played by deaf or hearing actors, use sign exclusively, without voice. Any voicing is performed offstage by a performance-art interpreter who voices for the signing that is occurring on the stage.

Some deaf people will support theater arts by attending interpreted “hearing” plays, even if they do not agree entirely with this idea. Written by hearing playwrights, these plays do not use deaf culture or ASL as themes and are simply English presentations that are interpreted into sign language. Many deaf people may not enjoy such a play as much as they would a deaf theater performance or just reading the script before/during the performance and watching the actors. This may detract from their enjoyment. They may continue to attend interpreted plays and may miss out on the experience of deaf theater created for and by deaf people.

The second signed-access performances are *signed-interpreted performances*. A relatively new art form, this involves more than simply translating words; it is creating a work of art. The goal is to re-interpret the director’s vision. In the process, it creates a different, more pictorial, staging of that vision. It implies a realization that while there are many ways interpreters can physically relate to the stage, they all require acting. It involves acting, but it uses a different language and style to communicate the story (Gebron, 2000).

Many theater producers are not aware that providing quality theatrical interpreting requires additional linguistic preparation and rehearsal time with the actors. For many interpreters who accept a theatrical interpreting assignment, usually as a last-minute request, the job is frantic because they lack the necessary preparation time. Moreover, community interpreters of a more general professional orientation are called on occasionally to interpret performances, as there is no specific theatrical interpreting specialization. Consequently, a theatrical performance can run the risk of being interpreted inaccurately and being aesthetically unpleasing, ultimately detracting from its artistic quality.

Our participants reiterated that one of the main issues in sign-language performances is the sign-language comprehension level of the audience. A minimal-language member of the audience may not comprehend some of the more advanced concepts presented in a performance. ASL is a complex natural language that has all the linguistic properties of language: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Valli & Lucas, 1995). Some deaf people acquire it late in life and others have minimal language skills (Newport, 1990). Even fluent users of ASL may have difficulty following a theater performance because actors may take artistic license in creating or translating a sign message and may use a different sign lexicon. Thus, it is an issue of ASL competency, as well as the medium and the translation process itself, that is critical for comprehension.

Shadowing is a style of theatrical interpreting that places the interpreter directly on stage, near the actors. When done well, this can be a linguistically rich and artistically enjoyable experience for the deaf community. But shadowing is costly and can be a complex process to execute. To maximize the deaf viewers’ visual sensations, the shadowed style of interpreting allows them to avoid the placed and zoned style of interpretation (McDougall, 2004).

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Shadowing was first developed by Debra Brenner, a certified performance arts signed language interpreter and teacher of the deaf, as a technique in which the signing actors follow the blocking of the speaking actors to maintain as close a proximity to them as possible during the signed performance. They act as “twin” actors, in which both actors represent the same character (Morris, 1983). This eliminates the ping-pong effect. Often the interpreters have to become involved to the point where they must take on the same physical characteristics and enthusiasm as the actors. The interpreters actually echo or *shadow* the actors’ every line, movement, and even their emotions. Of all the accessibility options, shadowing requires the most effort from the entire cast. However, it also allows the most visually enjoyable experience for the deaf viewer (McDougall, 2004).

Shadowing interpreters must be skilled at characterization, movement, and all other skills belonging to actors. This makes them, in essence, “sign language actors or performers.” Shadowing is not just one person translating for an actor. It is creating a double image in which two different mediums convey the same message. Good shadowing interpreters don’t crowd the stage; they bring it to life (Jackson, 1986).



Figure 7. Shadow interpreting scenes (Kilpatrick, 2007)

From the perspective of deaf actors, theater teachers, and members of the deaf community, another critical issue is theater appreciation by the deaf community. Neither theater producers and interpreters nor the deaf community

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itself has a clear perspective on theatrical education. The theater profession simply lacks knowledge of how to provide theatrical experiences where deaf people can participate, exchange ideas, and enrich themselves without feeling isolated, even looked down upon, as disabled people.

In general, a theatrical interpreter's job is to provide access. Training an interpreter to become a qualified theatrical interpreter includes a combination of translation and performance instruction (Gebron, 2000). Rico Peterson, an experienced performing arts interpreter, states that theatrical interpreting involves performing as well as interpreting (cited in Timm, 2001).

3.4. Interpreters' placement

Interpreter placement is important for one obvious reason: the interpreter must be visible to the deaf audience. Commonly, theatrical interpreting uses either the zoned style on stage or the platform stage, placing the interpreter outside the acting space (see *Figure 10*).

With *platform placement*, theater interpreters hold one stationary position during the performance, often to the side of the stage or below the apron. One of the drawbacks of this form is the previously mentioned ping-pong effect. This leads the deaf audience to shift focus between the interpreters' signing and the action on stage rather than concentrating on the content of the play itself.

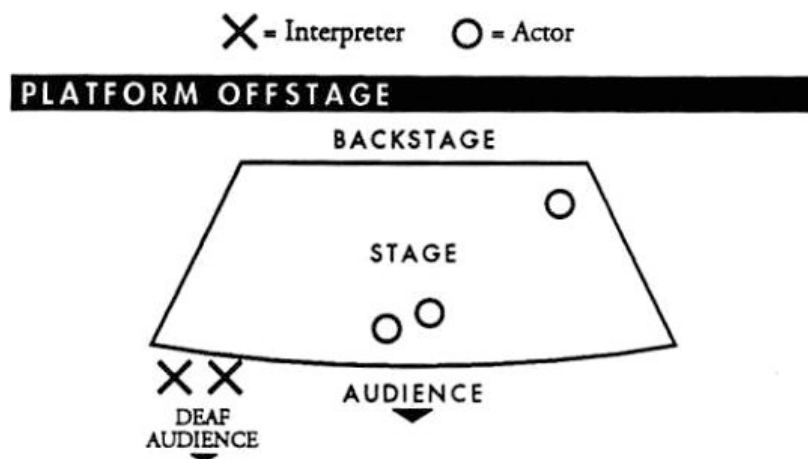


Figure 8. Platform interpreter placement (Gebron, 2000)

Brenda Schertz, a deaf professor of ASL and Deaf Studies at the University of Southern Maine, considers that a better interpreter placement is for the interpreter to stand partway up in the main aisle or on a raised platform above the stage (Inglis, 2003). In both situations, the interpreters are placed out of the actors' space. This placement allows the deaf audience to watch both the play and the interpretation at the same time.

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Figure 9. Platform interpreting scenes (McDougall, 2004)

Sightline interpreting is basically platform interpreting; the only difference is that interpreters are placed on the stage, or near the stage, to bring together the visual foci of the stage action and of the interpreters' rendition. Their position remains stationary throughout the performance. The best position for the deaf audience is four or five rows away from the stage, on the side of the auditorium closest to the position of the interpreters. Another sightline placement, used for amphitheaters in which the seating is raised from the level of the stage, is for the interpreters to stand on the stage or on a platform at the back of the stage. In this case, the best position for the deaf audience is in the back rows, well above the stage (Gebron, 2000).

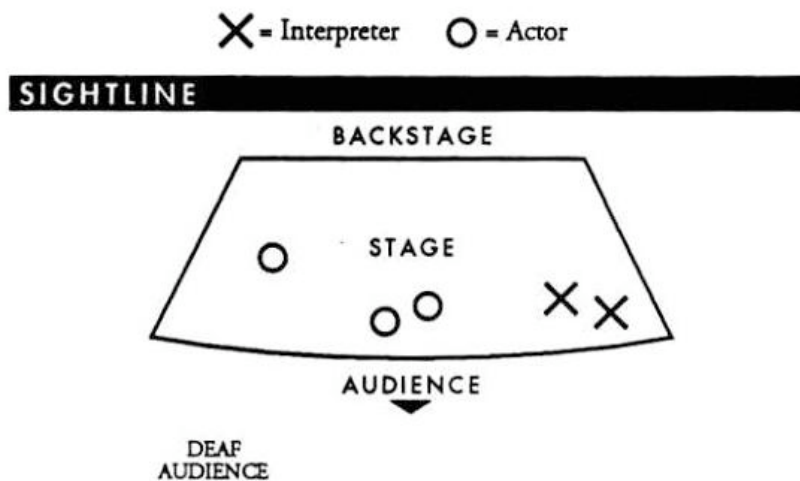


Figure 10. Sightline interpreter placement (Gebron, 2000)

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The *zoned style of interpreting* brings the interpreters' placement even closer to the stage focal point. The interpreters are assigned zones in which they can move, and they interpret for whichever character happens to approach their part of the stage. The interpreters are often placed in stage-left and stage-right areas (Gebron, 2000).

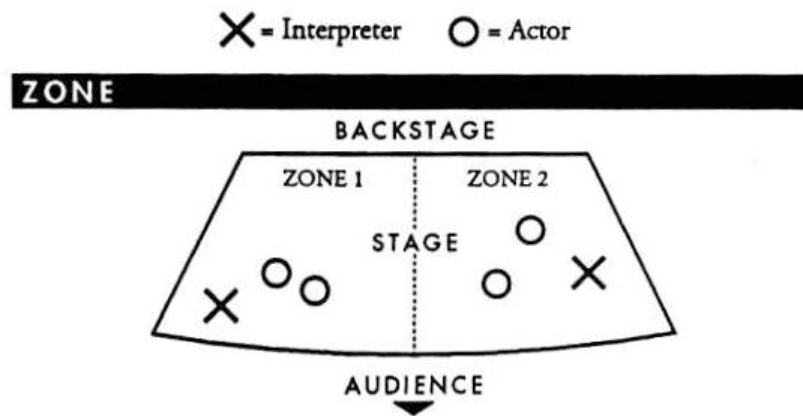


Figure 11. Zoned interpreter placement (Gebron, 2000)

Although this arrangement assures the best placement of the interpreters, in the deaf audience's direct sightline toward the action on stage, it loses accuracy in interpretation. The deaf audience has to mentally infer which character is given the line in the rendition of each interpreter, according to the position of the character on stage. Also, when there are more than two characters on stage, the two interpreters can alternate between characters and their interactions, which subjects the audience to a "ping-pong" effect (Gebron, 2000). In addition, the difference in the time span between the English spoken line and the ASL interpreted line usually implies a non-concordance of the interpretation with the movement of the actors on stage.

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Wild Swan Theatre "A Thousand Cranes"

Figure 12. Zoned Interpreting Scene (McDougall, 2004)

3.5. Interpreting for people who are deaf-blind

The language backgrounds of people who are deaf-blind may vary considerably. Some deaf-blind persons are hard-of-hearing and partially sighted. Others live in total deafness and blindness. Some experience tunnel vision. Some have poor night vision only. Some are born only deaf or hard-of-hearing and experience a progressive loss of sight throughout their lives. A smaller minority are born deaf and blind. Some people with limited vision may be able to see ASL at a close range (Gebron, 2000; Ingraham, 2008).

A satisfying theatrical experience is available for deaf-blind people. However, they must be provided with specially trained interpreters, close-up seating, and an opportunity to experience sets, costumes, and props through touch prior to opening night (Gebron, 2000).

Interpreters for deaf-blind audience members are often deaf themselves and rely on ASL as their source language. They craft their tactile or close-vision⁴ translation of the performance. The interpreters also assist the production department in determining the need for any arrangement of auxiliary lighting. Their job does not consist only of interpreting the performance but also preparing for the pre-show tour when audience members who are deaf-blind have the opportunity to walk around the stage and feel the props and costumes. It is important that

⁴Tactile signing is a method of communication through which the interpreter uses ASL signs or fingerspelling on the hand or hands of the deaf-blind person. Close-vision interpreting can be used when the client still has some sight. The interpreter signs in a very close proximity to the client, uses smaller, more compact gestures and any other accommodations (clothing, lighting, etc.) to maximize the ability of the client to see the interpreter as clearly as possible (Dynamic Language, 2008).

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the interpreters obtain copies of the script approximately one month prior to the performance so that they can practice for the performance. Interpreters should be allowed to view as many rehearsals as possible (Gebron, 2000).

The Deaf-Blind Theater Access Project created guidelines for theater staff, production departments, box-office staff, stage managers, front-of-the-house managers, and marketing teams to follow in providing access to deaf-blind patrons (Deaf Equal Access Foundation, 2007). This project advises theaters to hire ASL consultants who can (a) assist with the coordination of the interpreters, (b) provide cultural information to the actors about the deaf and deaf-blind communities, (c) give linguistic feedback to the other interpreters during the rehearsals, and (d) act as liaison to the deaf-blind patrons, introducing them to the script and the name-signs used for the characters (Berk & Cogen, 1999).

Interpreters for a deaf-blind patron can sit in the aisles on folding chairs placed across from or next to the patron. Or, the two interpreters can sit on either side of the deaf-blind patron. The deaf-blind patron should be consulted on where s/he would like the interpreters to sit.

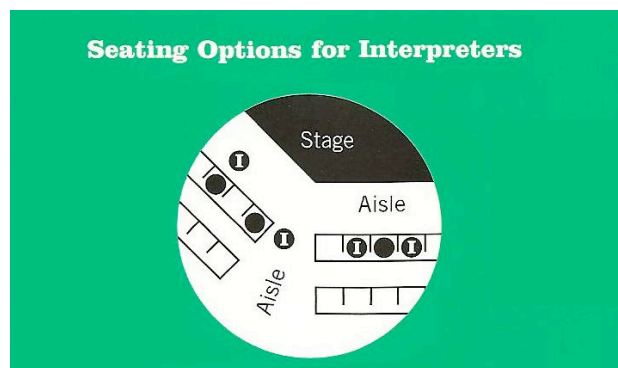


Figure 13. Seating options for interpreters for deaf-blind people (Berk & Cogen, 1999)

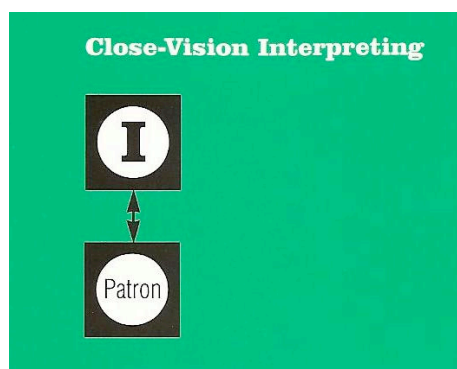


Figure 14. Interpreter placement for deaf-blind people with close-vision (Berk & Cogen, 1999)

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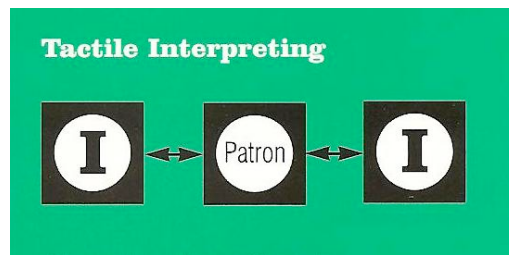


Figure 15. Interpreter placement for deaf-blind people using tactile signing (Berk & Cogen, 1999)

4. Artistic considerations

Accessibility, as discussed above, does not mean providing only some sort of written English script or simply providing interpreters. But when the latter is chosen, the interpretation can itself become a rendition of the work of art if ASL consultants are hired to bridge the two performances (i.e., the actors on stage and the interpreters) from both linguistic and cultural standpoints. Furthermore, through the rendition-interpretation, the vision of the work of art has to be preserved, and, as in any art field, the audience plays an important role in deciding how this vision will be communicated (Kilpatrick, 2007).

4.1. ASL Interpretation

ASL interpreted performances are designated performances during which ASL interpretation is offered for deaf and hard-of-hearing audience members. Seating for these patrons at each ASL interpreted performance is typically located in the orchestra, house left. Some theater companies provide their deaf patrons with the script of the performance. But even when knowing or having read the script of the play, deaf people find it difficult during the performance to follow simultaneously the actors' performance on stage and the interpreters' renditions.

Typically, interpreted plays are far from being the perfect way to accommodate the deaf audience, keeping in mind that most plays do not incorporate deaf cultural themes or ASL into the performance. They are a window into the hearing culture because they concentrate on the mainstream focal points, ranging from political views to simple humor, and they do not include the focal points of deaf culture. Deaf theater is based on situations unique to deaf people, expressing deaf values and norms or illustrating oppression of the deaf minority by the hearing majority. Deaf theater is generally performed in a realistic or naturalistic style, using ASL in a visually creative manner, sometimes without voice narration (Bangs, 1994).

4.2. Theater interpreting for children versus adults

Interpreting theater performances for children is fundamentally different than interpreting for adults. For one, the language level of the interpretation has to correspond with the language levels of the children in the audience. In addition, theatrical performances should have more dramatic action in order to keep the children focused and interested. Third, the story plots have to be explicit in order for children to be able to comprehend them. Young children may not be able to understand ironies or subtleties (Gebron, 2000; Kilpatrick, 2007).

If the audience is composed of children under the age of seven, their writing and reading skills are minimal. Therefore they may not have had an opportunity to read the story that they will be viewing in a theatrical setting. (Kilpatrick, 2007).

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For children ages eight through twelve, it is more likely that they will be viewing a classic story that has been adapted for the stage. In this case, there are usually plenty of materials available for the teachers and parents to share with the children before they attend the show (Gebron, 2000).

Children have a difficult time attending to the interpreter. They would prefer to watch the actors engaged in action on the stage. Many young deaf children do not have either the attention span or the proficiency in ASL to use the interpreter sufficiently to get all the information from the interpreted play (Kilpatrick, 2007).

In his dissertation, Kilpatrick interviewed directors, actors and staff from six deaf children's theaters. He found that deaf children prefer deaf theater to interpreted theater from an entertainment perspective, and that deaf theater, together with full ASL plays, better support the development of their first language. In turn, their first language constitutes a more solid foundation for the acquisition of their second language, English. Also, deaf theater provides social and psychological support for deaf children from a cultural perspective (Kilpatrick, 2007).

4.3. *The role of the ASL consultant*

Creating a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural translation of an artistic performance requires the time, dedication, and talent of a team of interpreters, both deaf and hearing. They must have an understanding of the different languages and cultures and also a personal awareness of artistic expression. It is this combination of talent and skill that makes an interpreted theatrical production successful and meaningful to the targeted audience (Timm, 2001).

Adapting a play for ASL is a challenge beyond merely translation. This is especially the case for plays written in, or about, a historical time period. For example, concepts need to be adapted visually to the way objects looked during the period concerned. Bove, a nationally known deaf actress on stage and on TV has given the example of not using the current ASL sign for "time," as the reference is to a wristwatch, which is not relevant prior to the 20th century (cited in Cheak, 1997).

ASL consultants are an important part of the performance. They are able to analyze critically both the English and the ASL renditions of the artistic performance and, based on knowledge of the specific work of art, decide which translation would be most appropriate, while providing a similar cultural, character and performing arts choice (Gebron, 2000).

Whether it is a children's show, a musical, or a play by Shakespeare, a script needs to be translated into a signed form of communication. Most often, the theatrical translations lean towards Pidgin Signed English (PSE).⁵

ASL lends itself beautifully to any production, especially to scripts that include a lot of imagery and poetry. It takes more time to translate a script into ASL than into Signed English and the translation often benefits from the assistance of a sign-language consultant or coach (Gebron, 2000; Ingraham, 2008).

4.4. *Deaf audience preference*

Considering interpreted, shadowed, and full ASL plays, according to interviews and anecdotal reports gathered from deaf people (Kilpatrick, 2007), most prefer plays performed fully in ASL (i.e., deaf theater), as they are a fully visual work of art, created by and for deaf people. More studies are needed to substantiate this claim.

Our participants commented that deaf actors in a theatrical production, either in an ASL play as independent performers, or in a shadowed performance as shadows of hearing actors, bring to the audience a more artistic and live theatrical experience. They are also representatives of deaf culture and are able to naturally and artistically portray the theme of the production in an appropriate linguistic manner, while adapting the underlying cultural

⁵ When two languages meet, occurs the contact phenomenon: lexical borrowing, interference, code switching, pidgins, creoles, and mixed systems (Valli, 1995). PSE (Pidgin Signed English) is the result of the contact phenomenon between ASL and English and can range from being more ASL based to being more English based depending on what the client is more comfortable using (Dynamic Language, 2008).

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concepts to the deaf perspective. In an ASL play, this adaptation is only necessary if the script of the production belongs to the hearing culture.

In the case of shadowed performances, this adaptation is critical to achieving the dynamic equivalence of the theatrical experience for the deaf audience. The deaf audience feels more immersed in the theatrical experience of a shadowed play than that of an interpreted play. The facial expressions and body language of the shadowing actors are the connection to the world of ideas conveyed in the play. But this artistic expression and visual imaginary world is brought from behind the hearing actors. Hence, the deaf audience has the feeling that the stage is crowded and that the hearing actors are a sort of visual noise that interferes in the process of connecting with the acting on stage.

Full ASL productions are the most natural way for the deaf audience to dive into the theatrical experience. In these performances, the deaf actors choose the linguistic level of the play that is best suited for their audience. In addition, deaf actors are proof of professional excellence, thus being considered role models by the deaf community. If the play is addressed to an adult audience, then the linguistic level will be adapted as a function of the characters and ideas contained in the play. In contrast, if the play is a children's play, then the linguistic level of the play will be brought to match the linguistic level of the young deaf audience. This is the main reason why deaf children prefer full ASL plays. Shadowed plays based on children's stories usually employ a higher linguistic level than that of the young deaf audience because, often times, for the translation of the script, being precise is more important than achieving dynamic equivalence. Therefore, the young deaf audience may miss the actual world of concepts conveyed by the play and only enjoy the movement and facial expressions that appear on stage.

4.5. *Recommended additional training and the Performing Arts Interpreter Certification*

Scant evidence exists on deaf persons' preferences for theater interpretation. Our commentary only touches on the complexity of deaf access to the theater. It skims the surface of the real need for specialized performing arts training in the interpreting profession.

In 1979, there were fifteen interpreters attending the five-day training held at Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Connecticut, by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). The program was a joint effort between the National Theater of the Deaf and RID and was supported by a grant from the National Endowments for the Arts. The interpreters all had extensive training in translation to thoroughly understand the script and match the translation to the actors' interpretation. In addition, they participated in many rehearsals. They learned to include the interpretation in the whole theatrical experience by shifting the focus of the audience, as needed, from the stage to the interpreter and from the interpreter to the stage. At the end of the program, ten of the fifteen interpreters were granted the Performing Arts Specialist certification.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has forced the performing arts to open up more for deaf people, and this category includes concert halls. More interpreters are concentrating in this area, audiences are increasing, and training opportunities abound. There are only ten interpreters who have held the specialist certificate since 1980, as that certification process was offered only one time (Bailey, 1998). Although RID was queried about this certification, the authors could find little information on this certification process except that RID theater interpretation certification lasted only one year and was discontinued, most likely due to lack of funding.

Funding reductions nationwide for the theater arts is a reality. The total government funding has declined at the Federal level because of other social needs such as healthcare. Financial resources have been felt principally by mid-sized non-profit organizations so now the performing arts must utilize multiple strategies to deal with financial demands (McCarthy, Brooks, Lowell & Zakaras, 2001).

Universities can play a role in providing of training for deaf theater arts. Kilpatrick (2007) outlines how interpreter training programs can provide coursework or continuing education workshops on how to make of theater arts accessible to the Deaf and deaf-blind communities, especially for children and youth. A selection of topics and skills for such a course are not limited to but may contain the following (Kilpatrick, 2007): 1) translating English scripts for young deaf and hard of hearing audiences with different levels of English and ASL abilities; 2) teaching the signs for theater terminology such as *stage*, *director*, *script* and so on; 3) reading biographies of famous deaf actors such as Bernard Bragg, Linda Bove, and Adrian Blue, the deaf playwright and

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director; 4) positioning the interpreter on the stage; 5) analyzing scripts and translating them from English to ASL; 6) understanding the difference between stage interpreting and shadow interpreting. Informed on these issues, theatre interpreter may know more information, resources, and referrals to provide his hearing, deaf, and deaf-blind consumers in case the need arises. Also, the educational interpreters would be prepared in case theatre arts become integral part of deaf children education. (Kilpatrick, 2007).

5. Conclusion

Steps towards acknowledging the complex, difficult, and unique nature of signed language interpreted play productions have already been undertaken by interpreting agencies, freelance interpreters who have theater arts experience, and some deaf theaters. Their purpose is to provide quality services and the necessary access, in view of the issues faced in the performing arts interpreting field.

Drawing on data from interviews with 38 participants and existing research, the authors have provided a descriptive commentary on providing access to live theater for deaf audiences. More studies are needed: (a) to identify a national list of skilled theatrical sign interpreters, (b) to identify theatrical interpreting skills needed to be acquire by interpreters in training and embed the competencies into interpreter training curricula, and (c) to poll larger and more diverse groups of deaf theater-goers to determine what access form they prefer in order to increase their theater enjoyment experiences. Further discussion of theater interpreting is needed on an international level to determine principles, practice standards, and implementation into signed language interpreter education and professional development.

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