Resource for Interpreters

Working with a Deaf Academic & Researcher

Working in a university setting with a Deaf Academic & Researcher can be new to many interpreters. Our lack of exposure to this setting can lead to certain levels of stress when taking assignments. This stress can arise from the unknowns of interpreting with a Deaf Academic & Researcher, the university culture, or the content of the information. To assist in mitigating stress the resources laid out here will, hopefully, help interpreters feel better prepared to interpret in this environment.

Before an Assignment

Preparation for an assignment not only includes the specific assignment content, it also includes getting an understanding for the overall setting and its culture. Dr. Campbell has contributed to the research on Deaf Academics working with interpreters and these two articles are valuable reads:

- [Equitable representation of deaf people in mainstream academia: Why not?](#)
- [Academic and Educational Interpreting from the Other Side of the Classroom: Working with Deaf Academics](#)

More research is being conducted around Deaf professionals and interpreters working in professional and academic settings. It is encouraged to search out publications to glean what experiences others in these settings have experienced and strategies for working more effectively.

Another valuable preparation activity would be to read about current university affairs and specific research being done by the Deaf Researcher. For Dr. Campbell, her lab website contains overviews of their work and additional resources. [Click here for her website](#).

The Assignment

Introducing the Interpreters

Generally Dr. Campbell will introduce the interpreting team and interpreting process at the beginning of the meeting during the round table introductions, at the start of her presentations, etc. The interpretation into English of the statement typically is: "We have interpreters working with us today and they are interpreting between ASL and English for everyone." It is important to ensure the interpretation into English doesn't skew the message to say "the interpreters are here with me", or "the interpreters are here to help". By framing that the interpreters are here to work with everyone to ensure accessibility can

prompt the non-signers to realize that they need the interpretation as well, not just the Deaf person.

Interpreter Demeanour

The dynamics of working with a Deaf Academic & Researcher are different than working with a Deaf student or typical community interpreting. The power dynamics are such that the Deaf Academic has authority in the space and because of this the interpreters' role will shift – interpreters are working primarily for the non-signers so they can receive the information from the Deaf person. As well, the Deaf Academic will typically have more control over the interactions happening within the space (e.g. during their classes, lab spaces, committee meetings). It is vital then that interpreters be prepared for this in order to be effective.

Some examples of being effective:

- In the moment Dr. Campbell is setting up for a presentation or meeting (e.g. at the podium plugging in her presentation) it is best not to interrupt for questions about the material or room set up. These items should be dealt with beforehand or if needed after the set up is complete. Sometimes these small interruptions can distract from mentally preparing.
- If it's necessary for the interpreters to introduce themselves to the presenter (e.g. a public event / presentation) be sure to explain where we will be set up and why, and that we're here to work with the presenter. Getting away from the language of "we're here for the Deaf audience member" can help reframe our purpose in the space for the non-signers.
- If the non-signer tries to engage an interpreter to ask about signing, interpreting, or something else politely redirect the conversation back to the moment or if that doesn't work allow the Deaf person to explain that the interpreters are working and can't be involved in the conversation.

Teaming with the Deaf Individual

The Deaf Academic & Researcher is an active part of the interpreting team. Interpreters working in this setting are encouraged to team with Dr. Campbell during assignments, here are a few examples.

- Informing her of when they missed information from ASL or English source. If the missed information was from ASL then be as specific as possible about when / which piece is missing for a feed. Sometimes, for example, the source ASL will then be provided in more English-like sign gloss and English order, or missed

vocabulary will be spelled or written on the board. There are multiple strategies for clarifying missed ASL source materials, therefor it is important to keep Dr. Campbell in the feedback loop so these strategies can be utilized. If the information was missed from the English source inform her and she will decide whether or not to seek an interruption. Sometimes an interruption is not warranted either because she got what the message was or an interruption may throw off the speaker (e.g. a student giving a presentation).

- If the English interpretation needs to be corrected the interpreters should briefly say "that was an interpretation error" and continue with the accurate interpretation.
- On occasion the interpreter not actively working may provide Dr. Campbell a clarified sign or intent of the message instead of feeding the working interpreter, and will make a note of it in the feedback book.
- Including environmental noise in the communication process (e.g. the hallway is quite loud and the noise is coming into the classroom, there is an odd noise coming from somewhere in the room, it sounds like a drone is somewhere close by, etc.). The interpreter who is not actively working can convey this information as well.
- Working together with room set up for the interpreting team; and following her lead when asked to move (e.g. in a lab space).

A prominent factor of interpreters working in this setting is that the majority of us do not have a PhD (in this situation in an environmental discipline) and may not have any academic experience outside of the interpreting training program. This is a challenge for the team since it requires an additional workload and mentorship factor of the Deaf Academic. There will be multiple instances when the source message is not comprehended by the interpreter and still needs to be interpreted in an accurate manner. It is important then to recognize this and accept feeds from Dr. Campbell or the non-signers (this does happen!) and incorporate them as best as possible. It's also key not to assume to know the message intent as this can lead to misinterpretations by as simple as adding a different tense suffix, adjective, or filler word (e.g. the, a, and). One strategy for mitigating English misinterpretations in the moments when the source message is unclear is to simultaneously put signs to the English words being said so Dr. Campbell is aware that the interpreter is unsure and can be more attentive to the interpretation to ensure accuracy. Feedback loops (actively teaming and communicating during the interpreting process) are a useful strategy to utilize in this setting.

Other Resources

Further information and resource documents can be found on the SMU Deaf Academics & Interpreters webpages. Please click here to be directed to the homepage.

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