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Deaf leaders' strategies for working with signed language interpreters:
An examination across seven countries

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Abstract

In this paper, we report interview data from 14 Deaf leaders across seven countries (Australia, Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States) regarding their perspectives on signed language interpreters. Using a semi-structured survey questionnaire, seven interpreting researchers interviewed two Deaf leaders each in their home countries. Following transcription of the data, the researchers conducted a thematic analysis of the comments. Four shared themes emerged in the data: (a) variable level of confidence in interpreting direction, (b) criteria for selecting interpreters, (c) judging the competence of interpreters, and (d) strategies for working with interpreters. The results suggest that Deaf leaders share similar, but not identical, perspectives about working with interpreters, despite differing conditions in their respective countries. Compared to prior studies of Deaf leaders' perspectives of interpreters, these data indicate some positive trends in Deaf leaders' experience with interpreters; however, results also point to a need for further work in creating an atmosphere of trust, enhancing interpreters' language fluency, and developing mutual collaboration between Deaf leaders and signed language interpreters.

Keywords: **Deaf leaders, interviews, signed language interpreting, strategies**

Studies on signed language interpreters often fail to acknowledge that Deaf[1] people, not interpreters, hold linguistic and cultural knowledge of signed languages at the most deeply personal level (Brace 2015). As a result, the perspectives of Deaf people, including their views regarding interpreters, are often overlooked, rarely collected, and infrequently analysed. We attempt to address this gap by reporting on the thoughts and insights of 14 Deaf individuals, each a recognized leader in their respective country, about their experiences of working with signed language interpreters. Using an interview format, we examine the perspectives and strategies of Deaf leaders across seven countries who work closely with signed language interpreters in their daily lives (See Appendix A for an overview of the countries represented in this paper). We examined the data for common themes regarding the Deaf leaders' experiences with interpreters.

If no shared themes emerged in the data across the countries, it would suggest that Deaf leaders' experiences with interpreters are specific to the conditions in their particular countries. But if shared themes were found, it would indicate a universality of experience among Deaf leaders that transcends the particular country's conditions for interpreter provision. With either outcome, we suggest that the results can assist interpreters, interpreter educators, and researchers in considering how their practice, teaching, and research may address concerns from the communities they serve, within their own country, or globally. We suggest that providing evidence-based information on Deaf leader's perspectives on interpreting and interpreter quality across a variety of countries will better inform interpreting practice, education, and service provision. Before presenting the findings, we first provide a broad overview of signed languages, signed language interpreting as a profession, and interpreting research.

(1) Background

(1.1) Signed languages, interpreters, and research

Over the past five decades, signed languages worldwide have gained increasing recognition as complex linguistic systems, including features of all language sub-systems, such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and discourse (Pfau, Steinbach & Woll 2012; Sandler & Lillo-Martin 2006; Stokoe, Casterline & Croneberg 1965). Furthermore, evidence from neuroimaging studies reveals overwhelming similarities in the

[1] It is a widely recognized convention to use upper case *Deaf* for describing members of the linguistic community of signed language users and in contrast the lower case *deaf* for describing individuals with an audiological state of a hearing impairment (Morgan & Woll 2002).

neural structure underpinning signed language and spoken language functions, with both languages engaging a left-lateralized network. Studies have specifically focused on signed language production (e.g., Braun, Guillemin, Hosey & Varga 2001; Corina, San Jose-Robertson, Guillemin, High & Braun 2003) and signed language comprehension (e.g., MacSweeney, Woll, Campbell, Calvert, McGuire, David, Simmons & Brammer 2002).

As studies in linguistics and neuroscience shed light on the nature of signed languages, legislation that mandates linguistic access for minority language populations has impacted how Deaf people operate in the world. Today, Deaf citizens in many nations have the legally mandated right to an interpreter for various contexts in their daily life (e.g., education, work, judiciary, and cultural events), in order to participate equally in society (e.g., for European countries: Wheatley & Pabsch 2012; for the U.S.: Americans with Disabilities Act 1990). As a result of these shifts, Deaf people are more present in the public consciousness than in the past. Deaf people are now featured regularly on traditional and social media outlets (e.g., television programs, films, YouTube). Courses in signed languages aimed at hearing students interested in learning a second language have become increasingly popular in many countries (e.g., Van den Bogaerde & Schermer 2008; Welles 2004, Wilcox & Wilcox 1997). In addition, Deaf people are securing leadership roles in society at all levels (Napier & Leeson 2015). These developments have led to greater opportunities for members of the Deaf community and, in parallel, increased demand for the professionalization of signed language interpreting (Bontempo 2015).

Since the 1960s, signed language interpreting became professionalized through the establishment of interpreter training courses (Ball 2013; Leeson 2008). For example, in the U.S. short course “interpreting programmes” began springing up in the 1970s (Ball 2013). Somewhat later, in German Switzerland, the Netherlands, and in Australia, formal SLI training were launched in 1986 (Boyes Braem, Haug & Shores 2012; Bontempo & Levitzke-Gray 2009; Van den Bogaerde & Schermer 2008), while in Ireland, ad hoc funding (via the European Union) supported once-off training programmes in 1992 and 1998, with formal, ongoing training not established until 2001 (Leeson & Lynch 2009). In Flanders, Belgium the first official part-time “interpreter for the deaf” training program was founded in 1981, but it was not until 2008 that academic training in SLI began (Van Herreweghe & Vermeerbergen 2006). Before SLI training programmes were established in different countries worldwide, it was primarily hearing people who had grown up bilingually in Deaf families (i.e., acquiring both a spoken and a signed language) who worked as language brokers and ad hoc interpreters, followed by other volunteers including welfare workers, ministers, or teachers

(Cokely 2005; Napier & Goswell 2013). Signed language interpreting is a relatively "young" profession (Napier 2010; Stewart, Schein & Cartwright 2004) when compared to spoken language interpreting, but has emerged rapidly, although not without challenges (Bontempo 2013). Despite a progress in SLI research over the past decades, there is still a lack of it on the experience of Deaf consumers with signed language interpreters.

One exception is Dickinson's (2010) examination of signed language interpretation in the workplace and the development of a collaborative approach between the interpreter and Deaf and hearing consumers. In the U.S. an increasing number of Deaf professionals (e.g., physicians, academics, scientists) has resulted in the development of "designated interpreters" and unique ways of collaborating with Deaf professionals (Hauser & Hauser 2008). These professional working conditions have led to a rise in interpreting assignments that require interpreting from signed language into a spoken language, a direction that has been described by some interpreters as being more difficult than working into a signed language (for example, for German Switzerland: Audeoud & Haug 2013).

A decade ago, a survey was conducted by a Deaf academic in the U.S. to investigate Deaf leaders' (N = 502) experience working with signed language interpreters (Forestal 2004, 2005). Results revealed that 55% of the respondents reported having negative experiences with interpreters. Forty-six percent replied that the primary reason for their negative experiences were due to poor performance in signed to spoken language interpretations. Respondents indicated that the competence of SLIs are an important factor in success, with younger Deaf respondents being less satisfied with interpreting services than the older respondents. Some Deaf leaders in Forestal's study reported negative perceptions of interpreters, due to factors including lag time, late arrival, patronizing attitude, ego-control, lack of training, deficient signed language skills, poor sign-to-voice interpreting, inappropriate attire, lack of facial expressions, immaturity, explaining instead of interpreting, bad attitudes, exaggerated sign production/facial expressions, and getting personally involved in situations (Forestal 2005: 77).

White and Multra Kraft (2014) report on the different perspectives of Deaf individuals and SLIs in the U.S. in characterizing what it meant to be a "strong voicer" (N = 10). In sum, White and Multra Kraft (2014) state that "(…) Deaf individuals emphasize the need for a connection; if they feel there is a good connection between themselves and the interpreter, they have more confidence in interpreter's voicing abilities" (246). Thus, while interpreters are more concerned about the relationship of the Deaf individuals to others in a setting, Deaf

individuals emphasized the importance of their relationship with the interpreters, which included a sense of trust.

Napier and Rohan (2007) reported in a survey (N = 31) and a follow-up focus group study (focus group 1: N = 6; focus group 2: N = 4) on perceptions of working with SLIs in the Australian context. One issue that emerged from the survey (and in the focus groups) was that Deaf consumers have a preference to work with interpreters who they have worked with previously. Napier and Rohan (2007) also asked the Deaf consumers to rank their overall satisfaction with SLIs on a 7-point scale. Deaf consumers who could select their own interpreters reported a higher overall satisfaction rate (M = 6.21, SD = .58, range: 1-7) compared to Deaf consumers who were unable to select their preferred interpreters, which were paraprofessional interpreters (M = 4.94, SD = 1.85, range: 1-7) and non-accredited interpreters (M = 5, SD = 2, range: 1-7). The mean satisfaction rating on the 7-point scale amongst all participants in the study was 5.61 (SD = 1.66).

Taken together, these studies portray a general picture of Deaf consumers' relative dissatisfaction with SLIs across a variety of reasons. These findings motivated us to more closely examine our data in terms of Deaf leaders' experiences at an international level. In the next section we will present the methodology of our study.

(2.) Methodology

(2.1) Overview

The study consists of a cross-institutional qualitative research design. The international research team was drawn from seven nations – Australia, Belgium (Flanders), Ireland, (German) Switzerland, the Netherlands, United Kingdom, and United States.

(2.2) Participants

Researchers in each country recruited two Deaf leaders for participation in the study, using criteria-based sampling parameters developed by the research team. Namely, participants needed to be an experienced consumer of interpreting services; be a fluent signed language user; hold a position of repute in the Deaf community as a leader and/or recognised professional; and be available to participate in a face-to-face interview. It was considered that such criteria would ensure participants bring a representative range of knowledge and experience of the phenomenon of interest, i.e., signed language interpreting, and that they could provide information that was rich in detail and breadth (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood 2013). In sum, the Deaf leaders who participated in the study

were all high-profile Deaf community leaders and/or professionals in their respective nations and were known to the researchers. A total of 14 Deaf leaders residing in seven different countries participated, with two each from Australia, Belgium (Flanders region), Ireland, Switzerland (German speaking region), the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Participants ranged in age from 30-64 years and included six males and eight females. All participants were proficient signed language users and experienced consumers of interpreting services. Not all of the participants were native signers; some had acquired a signed language as a second language. Whilst some of the participants had attended Deaf schools, several had received a portion of their education in mainstreamed school settings. The participants held qualifications across a variety of disciplines, and all had professional lines of work. Most of the participants held management positions in human service or education institutions and many had considerable experience with politics or advocacy roles in the Deaf community. Detailed data on individual participants backgrounds cannot be revealed here due to small sample size, the highly selected population, and the high profile status of these Deaf leaders, which would make them identifiable.

(2.3) Procedures

Using a qualitative heuristic approach (Kleining & Witt 2000), the participants individually engaged in a dialogue with the researcher residing in their home country, with the initial goal of discovering their views on language direction asymmetry in signed language interpreters. The interviews also elicited participants' introspective thoughts on signed language interpreter quality. The interviews were semi-structured (Spradley 1979) and took approximately one to one and a half hours to complete. Interviews were conducted by the researcher in each nation and were video recorded. The research team used a standardised background questionnaire document to collect demographic data from each participant. For the researchers from Belgium, the Netherlands, and German Switzerland, the English questionnaire (and the interview questions) was translated into the respective national written languages and, in some cases, double-checked by a Deaf researcher (e.g., the Netherlands). The interview was conducted in the national signed language of the participant and researcher. To create the transcriptions of the interviews derived from participants in these three non-English speaking countries, a translation was created from the national signed language (1) into English, or (2) into the national written language and then into English. These

translations were then reviewed and approved by Deaf researchers with a high command of the national signed and written language, and of English.

The interview followed a format of open-ended prompt questions, and also integrated several Likert scales for ranking (1) the participants' own linguistic proficiency, (2) confidence in interpreters, (3) interpreter quality, and (4) perception of interpreter competence in each language direction. As the interviews proceeded, participants engaged in a dialogue that often extended beyond the prompt question framework, revealing unexpected insights and further depth to the initial research questions. Researchers were open to the new direction some dialogues took, adjusting the questions accordingly, and recognizing the accumulation of information-rich knowledge and experience being shared.

Interviews took place in private rooms, typically at the office of the participant in most instances and, in some cases, in a quiet room at the researcher's institution or at the Deaf participant's home. After providing introductory information about the study (which was also scripted and shared amongst the research team), participants completed the background questionnaire in writing. The interviews were then filmed. Most interviews took approximately one hour. The anonymised and transcribed interviews were uploaded to a secure server, where they could only be viewed by the members of the research team, as per ethics approval.

All interviews were transcribed into written English. In some instances, Deaf research assistants worked with the researchers to create either the preliminary translation for secondary review by the researcher, or to monitor and check the researcher's preliminary translation. Not all researchers were in a position to access the support of a Deaf research assistant due to institutional constraints or because the task required translation into written English, it was difficult to find a Deaf research assistant sufficiently skilled in English to perform the task. In some instances, the interviews were transcribed by a trained and experienced hearing SLI.

(2.4) Analysis

Each researcher conducted a thematic analysis of their interview data. Thematic analysis is a useful and highly flexible approach to analysing data, commonly used in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke 2006). This method of analysis required familiarization with the transcribed data then coding the interviews to discover and explore patterns of themes at both the explicit and implicit level. Data was categorized, succinctly labelled, and interpreted not on the basis of semantic frequency, but on an inductive basis, with an

awareness of the literature and integrating this with the latent themes that appeared throughout the interviews. These themes were recorded, with specific quotes drawn from the data of each participant to illustrate the theme. Collectively the researchers then reviewed the overarching themes across all 14 participants to identify the most common themes. This was a recursive process, requiring a return to the dataset on multiple occasions, and findings were discussed online and via teleconference. Documentation was shared amongst the researchers to ensure collaboration and agreement on the common themes and key factors of interest raised by study participants in response to the research questions. The final themes were then named and extracts from the narrative data were used to support the analysis, as outlined in the following results section.

(3.) Results

A thematic analysis of the interview data of the 14 Deaf leaders revealed four primary themes, which are discussed further below: (1) variable confidence level in interpreting direction, (2) criteria for selecting interpreters, (3) judging the competence of interpreters, and (4) strategies for working with interpreters.

(3.1.) Theme 1: Variable confidence level in interpreting direction

The Deaf leaders (N = 14) were asked to rate their confidence in SLIs' directionality, i.e., whether interpreters produced superior interpretations when working from a spoken language into a signed language or vice versa. Based on prior surveys of Deaf professionals and the ease of monitoring an interpreter's signed language production, we predicted that the Deaf leaders would rank signed language interpreting as being superior to spoken language interpreting; however, the results did not bear out the prediction. In fact, there was no clear pattern in the directionality ratings (in either interpreting direction) by the Deaf leaders. The scores ranged from "1" to "4" for signed to spoken language and from "1" to "5" from spoken to signed language (on a scale from "1" = "not confident" to "5" = "very confident"). Thus, the Deaf leaders reported both high and low levels of confidence in the interpreters' language production when working into signed *and* spoken language, however, a slight trend toward higher confidence was noted when the Deaf leaders rated the interpreters' performance into a signed language. See Table 1 for the rating results.

Table 1

Rating Scores for Directionality in Both Language Directions ("1" = "not confident"; "5" = "very confident")

Number of Participants (N = 14)	Signed to Spoken Language	Number of Participants (N = 14)	Spoken to Signed Language
N = 1	1	N = 1	1-2
N = 3	2	N = 1	2-3
N = 2	2.5	N = 2	3
N = 2	3	N = 1	3.5-4
N = 1	3-4	N = 3	4
N = 2	4	N = 1	4.5-5
N = 1	2-4	N = 2	4-5
N = 1	unsure	N = 1	5
N = 1	no data	N = 2	no data

(3.2.) Theme 2: Criteria for selecting interpreters

During the interviews the Deaf leaders were asked to discuss the criteria they used when selecting interpreters. The comments varied, but the most frequent criterion given amongst the Deaf participants was that the interpreter must demonstrate "good sign to spoken language interpreting skills" (4/14); with the second most frequent criterion being "good sign language comprehension skills" (3/14). One Deaf participant also stated that it is important that interpreters have strategies to ask the Deaf person when they do not understand her signing:

> I need to know that the interpreter will understand me, this means, that I can trust the interpreter and that she signs fluently, and at the same time I know, that the interpretation is working well. When the interpreter does not understand something, she will let me know. It's not a kind of "trial and error", trying to get through somehow, with the hope that at the end it will be all right. I prefer it the straight way, that if the interpreter does not understand something, she will let me know immediately. I need interpreters to work this way.

(CH01, p.1)[2]

As noted in previous studies (Forestal 2005; Napier & Rohan 2007; White & Multra Kraft 2014), the topic of trust in interpreters arose here as a criterion for selection (2/14):

> Actually, the most important thing is trust, that I have a pleasant contact with the interpreter.
> (NL02, p. 1)

> For me to have confidence in that person and for that person to have confidence in me, that person needs to trust me as well. That is the path to success.
> (AU01, p. 5)

Another topic related to selection criteria was the Deaf leaders' expectation that the interpreter would provide contextual information to the Deaf consumer while interpreting (1/14), as well as be familiar with the setting and technical terms needed for the assignment (3/14):

> I want the interpreter to provide me with information about whether a speaker is angry, or information about where a speaker is from…do they have a German accent, if the speaker is foreign, and so on. I want to know this kind of information. But some interpreters don't provide this and I'm left uncertain about how to interpret what is being said.
> (IE01, p. 2)

In another response, a Deaf leader listed several criteria for selecting interpreters, including expertise interpreting in both language directions, a specific knowledge set, and familiarity with the consumer:

[2] We used the country abbreviation and numbers to identify the study participants, i.e., "CH01" represents Participant Number 1 from Switzerland. The country abbreviations are indicated in Table 1. The country abbreviations are taken from http://sustainablesources.com/resources/country-abbreviations/)

> (…) such as language use for voicing, awareness of different sign languages, understanding of the topics I will be covering, knowing each other/familiarity between us and within the team. If an interpreter has all these aspects, I find I will generally immediately bond with that person.
> (AU01, p. 2)

Three Deaf leaders emphasized the importance of the interpreter knowing the Deaf consumer's way of thinking as a selection criterion, as illustrated in the comment below:

> I mean, that our ways of thinking, our brain structures, need to be compatible, so that I can watch the interpreter in a relaxed way and understand without a big effort on my part.
> (CH01, p. 1)

One Deaf leader commented on working with his/her preferred interpreters:

> If I had the choice, I would rather use my regular interpreters and go off with them anywhere around the UK, the world.
> (UK01, p. 2)

The theme of having set criteria for selecting interpreters was pervasive among the participants and most often related to (a) an interpreter's expertise in language comprehension and production; (b) a sense of trust in the interpreter; (c) an interpreter's knowledge set and willingness to provide contextual information; and (d) familiarity with the Deaf consumer. Other issues regarding the selection of interpreters included: (1) being flexible with scheduling, e.g., availability in the evening and on weekends (1/14); (2) demonstrating quality of interpretation in both directions (2/14); (3) working with little preparation (1/14); (4) knowing other (spoken) languages (1/14); (5) facilitating fast interactions with consumers (1/14); (6) transmitting information as close as possible to the source text (1/14); (7) showing a positive attitude (2/14); (8) having training as an interpreter (1/14); (9) not interrupting

while interpreting (1/14); (10) understanding the message (1/14); (11) having native language skills, e.g., being a Coda[3] (2/14); and (12) being involved in the Deaf community (1/14).

(3.3.) Theme 3: Judging the competence of interpreters

The participants in this study were asked how they judge the competence of SLIs' work when they are working from a signed language into a spoken language and from a spoken language into a signed language. Their responses regarding judging competence in each interpreting direction are presented separately below.

(3.3.1) From a signed language into a spoken language

Deaf participants report a range of means for assessing spoken language interpretations. One Deaf leader judged the quality of the interpretation after the communication event by reviewing transcriptions of the communication, when available:

> (…) the quality of interpreting from sign language to spoken language. It is however hard for me to assess that, it's even impossible. In Parliament we have this report system that I can use to see if the interpreting was correct. I use this from time to time, especially when I addressed an important topic. The report is made on paper and within 48 hours, I can write down my comments or adjustments on them.
> (BE02, p. 1)

Another participant discussed monitoring the interpreters' performance as it was produced "live", through speech-to-text systems (2/14), such as:

> (…) in my class, I have a CART[4] monitor, so it's easy to assess the interpreter by looking at the monitor to see what was voiced for me.
> (US02, p. 6)

[3] CODA is an acronym for Children of Deaf Adults, an international membership organization and some interpreters who learned ASL natively from their Deaf parents or caretakers use the word "Coda" as their identity and place in the Deaf community.
[4] CART is an acronym for Communication Access Real-time Translation, a system that is used to convert speech into text and can occur in real-time as the event (e.g., courses, conferences) is unfolding.

Another means identified by Deaf leaders to assess an interpreter's competence when working from a signed to a spoken language is to observe the reactions and responses of the audience (4/14). One respondent stated:

> If I have a meeting with a small group, I can easily detect that from their responses, [or if they seem confused and say what, what?]. That person should know about my culture and their culture, if something was missed … I can tell you something about one interpreter, who I thought was really good. I was signing and they were voicing. Then the response I got back wasn't relevant. At the same time they indicated that the interpreter had missed my central point [idea]. So I corrected them and went back…Later I was reflecting on it. At the break I went and checked and they told me [the interpreter] had missed stuff. So was that my fault? There were three of us there, so where did it go wrong? (UK02, p. 9)

The Deaf leaders cited several ways of assessing the spoken language output of interpreters. Strategies included: (1) observing the facial expression of their colleagues (1/14); (2) asking other interpreters their opinion about the interpreter's skill (2/14); (3) making eye contact with the audience when giving a talk (1/14); (4) asking the hearing people if they understood the Deaf consumer (1/14); (5) asking other people about the quality of the signed to spoken language interpretation (1/14); (6) seeking confirmation if the interpreter really said what the Deaf consumer signed (1/14); (7) identifying interpreter error based on response of other participant/s in an interaction (1/14); (8) observing body language of the interpreter (2/14); and (8) lip reading the interpreter (2/14).

(3.3.2) From a spoken to a signed language

When participants were asked about how they would judge the competence of SLIs when interpreting from a spoken language into a signed language, some reported drawing on their own fluency in signed language, especially based on their knowledge of the topic and content. For example:

> On the basis of their signing. It also depends on what I know of the content, if I can ascertain the accuracy between what is being presented and what I am seeing signed to me. If it is a subject that I know well, then I can judge on the

> basis of content. But, in terms of assessing if they match the ‘voice’ of the speaker - I have no way of doing this. I just don’t know. Sometimes an interpreter can be a bit naïve, like I say…it can be mild in most cases. But you need to be aware of this.
> (IE01, p. 15)

Another participant emphasized judging competency based on indicators produced by the SLIs that marked them as being fluent in signed language

> (...) ‘real sign language’: facial expression, intonation, their posture, should be reflective of the speaker, if they are signing neutrally, that doesn’t work for me. That is a big part of the translation; they should include all that, so that you get the feel of what is being said. It should all be in the package!
> (NL02, p. 10)

Similarly, two Deaf leaders mentioned that they judge an interpreter’s signed language fluency based on the “flow of signing”. For example:

> (…) by looking at their shoulders, the placement of hands, the motion of the hands – the flow of signing.
> (US01, p. 12)

Another reports assessing interpreters’ signing ability by the sense of comfort felt while working with them:

> I mean I [rate] some interpreters as good because I’m really comfortable watching them. It doesn’t matter what they’re receiving.
> (UK2, p. 11)

Other factors mentioned as means of judging competency in spoken to signed language interpreting were: (1) making comparisons with other interpreters (1/14); (2) comparing their output to text being projected to as screen (1/14); (3) assessing incidents in which unrelated questions are raised by listeners (1/14); and (4) noting when the interpretation into a signed language is following more of a spoken language grammar (1/14).

(3.4.) Theme 4: Strategies for working with interpreters

In the interviews, the Deaf leaders discussed the strategies they employ when working with SLIs. While a number of strategies were given, we highlight the primary six strategies below.

(3.4.1) Adapt signing style

One of the most frequent strategies discussed by the Deaf leaders (5/14) was to adapt their signing style in an interpreted situation in order to make sure that they are being understood by the interpreter. Two Deaf leaders commented:

> I have to be honest and say that I often adapt my signing to the interpreters' skills. I sign slower, I take more time and I try to be very clear so that the interpreter will understand me.
> (CH02, p. 6)

> I backtrack and repeat myself. Sometimes I repeat my fingerspelling.
> (US02, p. 8)

Other strategies given by the Deaf leaders for adapting their sign style were (1) repeating sentences before going on in signing (1/14); (2) slowing down signing pace (1/14); and (3) adapting signing style because the interpreter does not understand (1/14).

(3.4.2) Monitor interpreters

A second strategy that the Deaf participants (3/14) reported was making regular eye contact with the interpreter to assess if the interpreter is able to follow the discourse in a signed presentation. Two examples are provided below:

> Usually I will look at the interpreter and check in every 20 seconds to a minute of signing.
> (AU01, p. 11)

> I switch between looking at the audience and the interpreter while signing. Sometimes I see that the interpreter is not following and I go back and say ‘I meant this.’ And then I go on.
> (NL02, p. 7)

(3.4.3) Give feedback

Providing feedback to interpreters was mentioned as another collaboration strategy by the Deaf leaders (1/14), as illustrated in the following quote:

> Well, I see a lot of problems and I will give the interpreter feedback and tell them what the issues are and discuss how we can resolve them.
> (BE01, p. 7)

In another instance a Deaf leader stated that giving feedback depended on the interpreter’s openness to receiving input:

> It depends on the person. How sensitive they are. If they are thin-skinned, then I forget about it, as it could just lead to war and I don't want that. There are some who would accept it though. It’s not like I’m out to kill them or anything… I just want to give them some feedback, some advice and I wouldn’t be harsh with it. Really, I would do it for their benefit.
> (IE01, p. 19)

In sum, the Deaf leaders had numerous strategies for working with interpreters in the mediated communication environment. Other strategies that emerged during the interviews were (1) supporting interpreters in the beginning, but then giving up because problems happened too many times (1/14); (2) calling the agency for a replacement (1/14); (3) giving feedback and discussing solutions with the interpreters (1/14); and (4) giving direct feedback followed by not requesting the interpreter again for an assignment (1/14).

(3.4.4) Vocabulary preparation

Another strategy mentioned by two of the Deaf leaders was to provide interpreters with the required technical terminology in their signed language. One Deaf leader stating that

she always tries to give the interpreters a full text for preparation purposes. One Deaf leader went so far as to create a website for the interpreters:

> So I made a website where you can see me talking in sign language about my work and the different topics concerning computer engineering, radiology … If there is a new interpreter who will work with me, I always direct him/her to this website. The aim is that the interpreter will have a look at this website at home, before coming in for an interpreting assignment. This way he/she can see how I sign certain things. So this is a sort of preparation in order to get to know me.
> (BE01, p. 9-10)

(4.) Discussion

In this study 14 Deaf leaders were interviewed about their perspectives on working with signed language interpreters. Four themes constitute the "core" of the results, including (a) variable confidence level in interpreting direction; (b) criteria for selecting interpreters; (c) judging the competence of interpreters; and (d) strategies for working with interpreters. These themes expressed by Deaf leaders emerged across all seven countries, although we note that sub-topics discussed within these themes did not reveal a clear single pattern or "trend".

For example, we predicted that the Deaf leaders would show a clear pattern of dissatisfaction with signed to spoken languages interpretation; however, the data did not fully support this prediction. There may be a number of reasons for this result. Some Deaf leaders in the study held positions that required frequent participation in public forms with non-signers and thus, needed highly skilled interpreters to work from signed into spoken language. Whereas, other Deaf leaders in the study held positions in institutions where signed language was the primary language of the workplace, and thus used interpreters most frequently to access information at external conferences and training events. As a result, the needs and settings in which Deaf leaders assessed interpreters' signed and spoken language output differed. It is worth noting that some Deaf leaders prefaced their comments on directionality by distinguishing between "their pool of preferred interpreters" vs. interpreters in general, suggesting that the interpreters they typically worked with were more highly skilled than the wider interpreting population. It is also possible that there has been an improvement in the level of education and skill amongst interpreters overall in the last decade, potentially impacting on consumer confidence in interpreters, and increased use of the "designated

interpreter" model by Deaf professionals and Deaf leaders. This shift may have also contributed to the mix of positive and negative ratings about interpreting direction, compared to the findings of previous studies. Whatever the reason, it was heartening to find that there was not a dominant trend of dissatisfaction among the Deaf leaders with regard to interpretation in either language direction.

Regarding interpreter selection, the Deaf leaders highlighted several criteria which underpinned how they selected their SLIs, with some leaders emphasizing the critical importance of competence in signed to spoken language interpreting, while others seeking interpreters who had strong interpersonal skills, flexibility, openness, and a demonstrated commitment to the Deaf community. These and other factors were described by the Deaf leaders as crucial for developing a sense of trust in the interpreter. Interpreter educators are increasingly recognising the importance of practitioners having well-developed "soft" skills as well as "hard" skills, and identifying ways to bolster interpersonal skills and attributes, in training programs, in parallel with refining the necessary technical knowledge, and linguistic skills (Bontempo et al. 2014; Bontempo & Napier 2014).

The third theme about judging the competence of interpreters demonstrated that Deaf leaders have a number of ways that they assess both signed and spoken language output. Some Deaf leaders mentioned using a written output control (live or recorded) when a transliterated speech to text form was available as a means to judge the SLIs' interpretation or to observe the responses and reactions from the audience. Judging the signed output of the SLIs, the Deaf leaders reported paying attention to the "flow of signing", the use of "real sign language" by the SLI or double-checking the signed message of the SLI with their own background knowledge of the content of the interpreted message. In both directions, the Deaf leaders reported being active participants in interpreter-mediated situations, applying different methods to judge both the signed and the spoken language output of the interpreters.

Perhaps the most revealing result from the data regards the strategies used by the Deaf leaders. Rather than being passive recipients of interpretation, the Deaf leaders reported a number of ways in which they manage an interpreted event, collaborating with interpreters, before, during, and after mediated interactions. These reports corroborate some of the strategies documented in a previous case study of a Deaf professional cooperating with two interpreters in the delivery of a seminar presentation (Napier, Carmichael & Wiltshire 2008) and in a description of interpreting in a postsecondary classroom (Burke & Nicodemus 2013).

Before an interaction, two participants noted they typically provide SLIs with materials for preparation, including online tools they developed using their respective signed

languages. One of the most frequent strategies applied during an interaction is that Deaf leaders adapt their signing style to the SLI, particularly if there is any suspicion that the SLI may not understand them. Further, the Deaf leaders monitor the interpreters by keeping close eye contact with the SLI when being interpreted into a spoken language. The Deaf leaders stated that they employ these strategies based on their experiences, and in an effort to actively contribute to an interpreter-mediated situation, with the ultimate aim of a successful outcome.

In our study, Deaf leaders report that when they are on the receiving end of the communication, i.e. when the interpreter is working into a signed language, they do not get to "sit back and listen"; instead, they are actively working with the sometimes incomplete, not fully formed, or not fully correct target text presented by the interpreter. Deaf leaders also report that they are working to infer a fuller understanding of the message presented, predicated on their world knowledge, their specialist knowledge as it relates to the context in question, and their bilingual skills (when the target text is influenced by the spoken language of the source message). When we consider this feedback, and put it alongside reports of other Deaf participants in other studies (e.g. Leeson, Sheikh, Rozanes, Grehan & Matthews 2014), the idea of effort expended by Deaf recipients of interpreting services – and asymmetrical effort, at that – is striking. It also offers a mechanism for considering the interpreter's effort within the context of an interpreting assignment, with participants also having to put effort into the co-creation and comprehension of meaning in an interpreted event (for discussion of intersubjectivity, see Janzen and Shaffer, 2008).

We contend that the degree of effort brought to bear on the part of Deaf conversants who use a signed language is asymmetrical to the effort put in by their hearing, non-signing conversants. The asymmetry occurs because the Deaf leaders have the bilingual, bicultural, and context-specific knowledge to potentially (re-)construe a message based on what an interpreter presents. The hearing audience member does not have this bilingual advantage, and is potentially more dependent on the interpreter. Because of this Deaf leaders may be found to trade off good spoken language skills against less competent signed language usage.

While the Deaf leaders interviewed in this study can put in the effort required to "bridge the gap", we raise concern that not all Deaf signed language users will experience equal success in this endeavour. For example, what takes place for Deaf people with lower levels of signed language proficiency? Or those who are in contexts that they have little or no familiarity with (e.g., hospitals, police interviews, or court settings)? Questions also arise as to the effort expected from Deaf children who are accessing their education via interpretation.

Thus, the issue of effort required to actively and successfully engage in an interpreted interaction is one that deserves further attention.

After an interpreted event, Deaf leaders reported providing feedback to SLIs to discuss how problems may be resolved in the future, though worryingly, several leaders reported that they "choose their battles wisely" in offering feedback to interpreters, as it is not always well received. In brief, the Deaf leaders stated that they are actively engaged with SLIs before, during, and after interpreted interactions, but often withhold their remarks.

Despite the positive collaborations described in several interviews, some Deaf leaders also expressed that, in certain situations, they had to accept a less-than-ideal interpreter:

> If there are no other interpreters available then I just have to put up with that. I don't really have a choice and just go along with it.
> (UK01, p. 7)

One Deaf leader discussed his personal policy of only giving one "do-over" to interpreters. As he stated:

> I will give them another chance, but if that fails – never again!
> (AU01, p. 16)

The results of this study are illuminating regarding shared themes that emerge from Deaf leaders in seven different countries. However, every study has limitations. Here, it was possible that researchers' subjectivity affected the interviewing and transcription processes. This was mitigated somewhat when researchers shared the interview transcriptions with participants for feedback (and in some cases having a Deaf research assistant undertake the translations). Further, although thematic analysis is a common approach in qualitative research studies, this type of analysis can be perceived as lacking rigour (refuted in the literature around qualitative research). Again the researchers ameliorated this issue to an extent by having multiple researchers cross-review the data for over-arching themes and findings. In addition, there were slight disparities in the research methods in this study (e.g., variable access to Deaf researchers, variation in checking back with participant to ensure accuracy of transcription), but they were not deemed to be significant to the results. Finally, the Deaf leaders in this study were from different cultural and linguistic contexts, and represent a small sample size; therefore we are cautious about advancing any generalisations

from our data. However, we contend that the results provide an important, and previously largely overlooked Deaf leaders' perspective, on a range of topics relevant to working SLIs and also for SLI training purposes.

This information is enlightening for those of us who teach interpreters, so we can better emphasize that Deaf people are active participants in interpreted discourse, rather than passive recipients of interpreting services. Further, the data demonstrates that Deaf leaders have an understanding of the challenges in signed language interpreting and a willingness to collaborate with interpreters. Increasingly, there is a call for transparency in the work of interpreters, so consumers may see more clearly that mediated communication requires the cooperation of all of the parties involved. One suggestion has been to use an "open processing" model of interpreting (Forestal & Clark 2014).

The results reiterate that Deaf people do a great deal of work in ensuring the success of an interpreted event by selecting their most compatible interpreters for specific contexts, assessing interpreters' performance, providing feedback, altering their own signing style, and monitoring the language use in situations in which an interpreter is present. It has been suggested that these tasks require considerable additional "effort" from Deaf individuals in order to maximise quality communication (Bontempo et al. 2014). Having this information is useful to members of the Deaf community, interpreters, interpreter educators, and researchers in our shared efforts of quality interpretation for all.

(5.) Conclusion

To our knowledge, this is the first transnational study that investigates Deaf leaders' strategies for working with signed language interpreters. Four themes emerged in the 14 interviews, which revealed a shared experience with interpreters by the Deaf leaders, despite differences in each of the countries' hiring practices, training opportunities, and credentialing mechanisms for interpreters. Some findings were encouraging; for example, the ratings by the Deaf leaders did not indicate a strong disparity in quality when interpreters worked into a spoken language or into a signed language. The findings also suggest that Deaf leaders may have greater control over the selection, preparation, and dismissal of their interpreters than they had in the past (and, we suggest, in contrast with contemporary "grass-roots" members of Deaf communities). In addition, the Deaf leaders in this study expressed a willingness to work collaboratively with interpreters, an encouraging trend for the co-construction of meaning in an interpreted encounter.

At the same time, much work remains to be done in the provision of interpreting services across the countries. As we progress, our goal should be a reduction of required effort and coping strategies on the part of Deaf leaders. This may occur by developing shared and standard practices for transparency and expectations in communication events that are interpreted. Ways of developing trust between Deaf people and interpreters must be further explored. As Deaf people increasingly attain leadership roles in various professions, honest conversations about how to work collaboratively and provide, and receive, feedback is necessary and important. Deaf leaders are more mobile than ever before and utilize a variety of communication approaches in their professional lives, including the use of designated interpreters, video relay interpreting, International Sign, Deaf interpreters, captioning and text services, CART, and multi-lingual interpreters. We seek to better understand the Deaf perspective on how to best provide each of these services. Our aim is to continue to direct attention to interpreter quality, as perceived through the lens of Deaf people, to guide us all in our shared goal of communication equity.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Generic information on participating countries

Country	# Total population	Spoken language(s)	Estimated number of Deaf SL users	Signed language(s)	Sign language interpreter training(s)	# of SLI
Australia	23.9 million	No official language/s; however English is the de facto national spoken language (approximately 80%). A number of endangered Aboriginal languages are used by a very small minority of indigenous people. Several spoken languages used by migrants (most common: Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic, Italian and Greek).	Estimates vary from 6,500 (Johnston 2004) to approximately 15,400 (Hyde & Power 1991).	Australian Sign Language (Auslan)	4-5 entry level (Diploma) programs run annually in vocational colleges around Australia (One-year part-time programs). No undergraduate/ Bachelor programs situated in universities. One Advanced Diploma program. One postgraduate university degree program. Generic Masters in T & I is an option; PhD in linguistics is also an option.	Figures from NAATI correct as of 2015: 912 Auslan-English interpreting accreditations issued by NAATI – 719 at paraprofessional level; 190 at professional level. Three accreditations held at Conference Interpreter level. Many of these are not practicing interpreters (e.g. working as teachers, other roles in Deaf organizations). Approximately 350-400 practitioners considered ‘active’, based on employer information and ASLIA membership. Approximately 37 Deaf interpreters certified by ASLIA/NABS or TAFE. NAATI recognition only started in Nov 2013 for Deaf interpreters – 11 Deaf interpreters approved so far.
Belgium, Flanders	6.35 million (in Flanders only)	In Flanders: Dutch; in Belgium: Dutch, French and German	6,000	Vlaamse Gebarentaal (VGT – Flemish Sign Language)	Two part-time programmes (3 years), both at a CVO (“centre for adult education”); since 2008: academic SLI training: Flemish Sign Language integrated in the Bachelor in Applied Language Studies (3 years) + Master in Interpreting (1 year) + Postgraduate in Conference Interpreting (1 year) at KU Leuven, Faculty of Arts, Campus Antwerp.	In 2014, 165 SLIs were paid by the interpreting agency CAB; however, some of these only for one or very few assignments. Almost all interpreters work freelance and part time, often combining SLI with another part time or even full time job. Most hearing interpreters who are active today, graduated from the part-time training programmes in Ghent or Mechelen; at the time of this writing, only two interpreters are former KU Leuven students. All hearing interpreters are trained to work between Dutch and VGT, although some also work between VGT and English or (fewer) between VGT and French. Since 2012, “Karrewiet”, a news journal for children, is interpreted to VGT on a daily basis. This is done by Deaf interpreters, working from an auto cue. There are a few other people with some experience working as a DI, mostly working between VGT and ASL or VGT and IS. At present there is no training for DIs.
Ireland	4.6 million in Republic of Ireland	English, Irish (Gaelic)	5,500	Irish Sign Language (ISL)	Four-year Bachelor in Deaf Studies with specialist pathway in interpreting at Trinity College Dublin (first cohort completed BDs (interpreting) in 2013. Previously, a two-year Diploma in ISL-English interpreting (last cohort	Approximately 100 trained interpreters (ISL-English of whom approximately 65-70 actively work). Additionally, there is a small pool of ISL-English interpreters who have not had any extended formal training but who have satisfactorily completed an “accreditation” assessment run by a government- funded agency (SLIS). There is also a small pool of Deaf Interpreters, most have not had any formal training and are on SLIS’s register (approximately five). Further, there are some Deaf people who are not trained or accredited who do TV-based interpreting/translation work/work as de facto interpreters in

					graduated 2009). National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 6 available through one registered training centre (Galway – on the west coast). No cohorts have yet come through this programme at this writing.	schools, but there are no reliable figures regarding this.
Netherlands	17 million	Dutch, Frisian	Estimates are from 5,000 to 17,500. Most estimates are between 5,000-8,000.	Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT)	BA program at Hogeschool Utrecht, University of Applied Sciences (4 years)	Almost 600 SLIs registered with the Registry, but it is unknown how many are actually active as SLIs. There are a few interpreters who work from Dutch or English to/from ASL and IS; also only a few who interpret from English to NGT or vice versa. In the past two years, a few Deaf (uncertified) SLIs are available.
Switzerland	8 million	German, French, Italian, Retoromanic	German-CH: 5,500 French-CH: 1,700 Italian-CH: 300	Swiss German SL (DSGS) French Sign Language (LSF) Italian Sign Language (LIS)	Three-yearr BA program, German Switzerland, HfH Zurich	DSGS-German: 70 LSF-French: 30 LIS-Italian: 10
United Kingdom	63 million	De facto official language is English (spoken by 95% of UK population). In Wales, Welsh is the official language. Polish is the third most-spoken in England and Wales. BSL recognized as language by government in 2003.	Estimated between 15,000 (2011 census) to 122,000 (Government Department of Health GP Patients Survey)	British Sign Language (BSL)	Four-year BA and MA program Heriot-Watt University, BA (three-year) program Wolverhampton University, PG Diploma & MA University of Central Lancashire, PG Diploma Durham University, (BA Bristol University & MA Leeds University just closed down)/ National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 6 available through registered training centres.	800 interpreters registered with National Register of Communication Professionals for the Deaf, 80 registered with Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters
United States	314 million	No official language at federal level – English 80%, Spanish 12.4%, other Indo-European 3.7%, Asian and Pacific Island languages 3%	Estimated between 250,00-500,000	American Sign Language (ASL)	Approximately 140 programs across the U.S. offering AA, BA, MA, and PhD degrees	Approximately 8,500 certified ASL-English interpreters