

BEYOND CORRECTION AND CRITIQUE: WORKING IN TEAMS*

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Just the other day, a radio interview with actor Matthew Broderick caught my attention. I was half-listening, cooking supper with one eye cocked on my six-year-old daughter, when Terry Gross asked about working beside Marlon Brando in the movie "The Freshman." Broderick said that on the soundstage, Brando was unassuming, had a greater penchant for rehearsal than the younger actor had expected, and was friendly. The interviewer paused, then asked, "How was it to act with him?" "He would change lines in minor ways," Broderick began, and then told of the ease of working with this movie legend. He felt he had the complete attention of the older actor, even at moments when Brando himself had no lines. Brando's face, gestures and cue lines supported the performance in ways that Broderick, left to himself, may not have discovered.

The interview led me to think once again about our goals when we work in pairs, as teams. It's a topic I've talked about with many colleagues in recent years. We've moved away from the machine-like, half-hour shift followed by thirty minutes at the back of the room, newspaper folded discreetly, or the run for the pay phone. The expectations for team interpreting have changed as our understanding of the task has deepened and the models for interpretation have evolved. With these changes, many of us have had to reconsider how we work together, talk to each other, and support the interpretation.

A number of us have come together, formally and informally, to foster a sense of common purpose as professionals. Along with this commitment is a great desire to build a stronger bridge between interpreters and the Deaf community in our state. Our wish is to uphold the goals that the Deaf community sees as pivotal in order to bring about greater choice in their lives. As part of that challenging ideal, we have realized the importance of seriously assessing how we work together in the

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particular, and how we might support each other when providing services to the community. With the help of Betty Colonos, MJ Bienvenu, and members of the local community, we are looking at how we talk about our work, how we provide feedback to each other, and what the true goals of interpreting entail.

In the past, some interpreters have thought the goal was to be the fastest, slickest, most accurate, "handles bizarre idioms with a smile and a twist of the wrist" interpreter to ride into town—and if one happened to handle classifiers with a certain aplomb, that was something to be admired. With an eye toward the product, the team/feed interpreter was left to either nod in approval, or offer critique on sign choices and the direction the interpretation was headed. This could quickly deteriorate to an "I could have done better" attitude that isolated interpreters from each other and had an impact on the quality of services that Deaf and hearing people received from our interpreting teams. And worse, when the feed interpreter would lean toward the target interpreter with knitted brow, both Deaf and hearing parties would quickly assume that something terrible must be occurring, and adjust to that possibility, thus skewing the dynamics of the situation all the more.

Would Brando have done it this way? Interpreting teams hope for clear communication, a shared vision, and support for the interpretation that might resemble how successful actors, attorneys, architects or co-authors work together. A certain degree of error is inescapable in any simultaneous interpretation, and critique and correction will always be part of the role of the secondary or feed interpreter to some extent. But how might we move beyond correction and critique, and the defensiveness they engender, to a new model of how we interact with each other as teams? What lessons can we learn from each other and from other professionals working in tandem toward a common goal?

A textbook could be written (and should be) about the many and varied factors that determine effective team interpreting. One must consider the training of each of the interpreters, their respective strengths and weaknesses, how they complement each other, and their understanding of the roles of target interpreter vs. feed interpreter. The effectiveness of how one "feeds" information is affected by timing, the form it is "fed" in, and logistical considerations such as positioning of team mem-

bers in the room and "volume"—whether the "feed" be in ASL or spoken English. Further, team members should develop a strong sense of how to balance the autonomy of the primary or target interpreter, who is engaged in the task of actively interpreting into one language or the other, vs. the ability of the secondary or feed interpreter to monitor the context and dynamics of the environment, as well as the interpretation itself.

A conversation I had with a colleague, Sharon Caserta, shed new light for me on how all of the above might be addressed. We talked of how certain "feeds" are received and included in the process of developing an accurate interpretation, because they function as enhancements to the process and performance, rather than corrections or disruptions. It's as if the feed interpreter was saying, "Yes! and..." instead of the classic, "Yes, but...." The target interpreter's process is buoyed by the additional information fed by the second, and guided to a more accurate and conclusive interpretation. It actively supports the overall performance, and assures those receiving services that they can continue without undue concern for the interpretation.

How this prospect of enhancement works with each pairing will express itself individually, from team to team and setting to setting, taking into account the factors listed above. But it begins with an overall sense of respect and trust for each other's desire to provide accurate interpretation and actively working in an affirmative and constructive fashion to do so. Any interpreter who takes the role of target interpreter needs, as one poet has said:

...Something the lonesome ear,
the starved eye, can take in
like nourishment from the other world
in which, now and then, we've lived.

from "Something", by Stephen Dunn (quoted by
permission of the publisher)

When our work as team interpreters enhances our performance by adding to the interpretation instead of criticizing it, we find new edges to the work, and closer approximation to the stories of people's lives we are interpreting. And when we support each other, we create a foundation on which hearing and Deaf players can stand to get their business done. Like Brando

and Broderick, no matter where we find ourselves, as active or feed interpreters we will enhance the quality of each other's work, and the communication between those we serve.

REFERENCES

- Dunn, Stephen. 1994. New & Selected Poems 1974-1994. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.