

Shauna McCord

Dr. LeWana Clark

Interpreting Practicum DST-203

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Interpreting Practicum Observations, Demands, Controls, and Ethical Decisions

The interpreting practicum site observations provide evidence that in the profession of ASL/English interpreting, interpreters will encounter a varying scale of demands, controls, and ethical decisions. Interpreters, mentors, interns, and students have the responsibility to honor this guiding principle of *Do No Harm* philosophy as required by NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct. Trust, between dDeafDB clients, interpreters, and hearing clients is crucial in this field of work. A seemingly small decision could erode or could build trust between any or all parties involved.

In this live religious interpreting practicum observation scenario, a few decisions made by the interpreter could be viewed as decisions that negatively impacted the interaction between dDeafDB clients, interpreters, and hearing clients. These decisions could also impact the trust between dDeafDB clients and interpreters. This setting for this scenario features a lecture-style format, with lecturing hearing clients, and the audience is composed of hearing, dDeafDB, and live streaming of interpreters during services. [In order to maintain confidentiality for those involved, this scenario site will be referred to as practicum observation site A, and the interpreter involved will be referred to as interpreter Z.]

Interpreter Z at this moment had a slightly longer processing time, a lag with communicating a part of the English source language. Interpreting what the English source language's meaning of the message was, into the target language American Sign Language. At times at this practicum observation site A; the hearing clients intended meaning of their message is not always clear, or straight to the point. Aside from the lack of clarity on the intended message meaning, a few more challenges included light-hearted jokes, pop culture references, and English idioms. Another demand presented is the hearing client's pace of speed in their speech. A couple of sign choices earlier in this live interpretation had made some dDeafDB clients concerned that a hearing client

was currently sick with Covid. This was not the case, and this was quickly repaired by the interpreter at that moment to clarify that this was in the past few weeks, and not that current day.

During the same day at observation site A, with interpreter Z toward the end of one of the last speeches of the live interpreting assignment there was an English idiom repeated by the lecturing hearing client that was directed to the interpreter.

“Blown out of the water. I can’t wait to see how that is signed!”

The audience was laughing at this comment, and it was easily shown on the face of the hearing client lecturing, that they were eager to see the translation for this English idiom. Interpreter Z still was in a lag in their translation of the last few sentences that were said in English before the remark about the “*blown out of the water*” idiom. Interpreter Z was caught off guard by the directed comment to see how that idiom is signed. The reaction by interpreter Z was making eye contact with the lecturer and having one response back which was a single laugh, “HA.” Then interpreter Z shifted their eye gaze back to the dDeafDB clients, producing in ASL the meaning of the last few English sentences. Interpreter Z had forgotten to address the remark about the English idiom which caused laughter for some members of the audience. Interpreter Z was not intentionally neglecting to translate this English idiom. Interpreter Z was unable to translate the idiom, due to the lecturer’s fast pace of speech, and needing to transition to the next portion of the live interpretation.

In my opinion, this scenario could be seen as a negatively impacted interaction due to the dDeafDB clients feeling left out, or a potential possibility that dDeafDB people/culture is the subject of a joke. The dDeafDB clients may have missed out on an opportunity to interact more with the hearing clients by providing their responses in ASL on how to translate the “*blown out of the water*” idiom.

Interpreter Z encountered many demands for this assignment at observation site A. Through applying *Demand-Control Theory to Sign Language Interpreting*; the demands presented are divided into four categories, which are environmental, para-linguistic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Dean, & Pollard, Jr., p. 4). Environmental demands for this assignment included room temperature, lighting, specific setting, the general nature of the assignment, background noise, and visual distractions. The presenter’s communication speed was a para-linguistic

demand. Interpersonal demands included parties' understanding of the interpreter's role and communication directed to the interpreter. Intrapersonal demands included doubts or questions on the interpreter's performance, the dynamic nature, and the intensity of the assignment (Dean, & Pollard, Jr., p. 5).

Observation site A's location where the interpreter stands, has bright lights facing the stage. The interpreter is directly under these lights, which can also increase the perception of the room temperature. Typically, after interpreting in this setting the interpreters are sweaty, parched, and need a moment to cool off from the experience of interpreting on stage. Having a team of interpreters is ideal for enabling breaks, and for supporting each other with feeds when necessary. The lighting, the banter from the audience that is not audible, and at times visual distractions from audience members are some of the most challenging aspects of this setting. The nature of the assignment includes religious source material in English that is difficult to comprehend for even native English language users.

The presenter's communication speed, a paralinguistic demand combined with the interpersonal demand of communication directed at the interpreter were a recipe for swift decision-making! Interpreter Z, or any interpreter has a limited amount of working memory available. In this scenario, Interpreter Z was still retaining the message that was relayed before the comment directed at them. This was an unexpected moment for Interpreter Z.

Within this moment, the intrapersonal demands become more apparent. With the interpreter on stage, there is a larger audience viewing the interpreter. In addition to the stage, these interpretations are live-streamed. This creates pressure placed on the interpreter that there are more people viewing their interpreting work. I noticed Interpreter Z, was looking toward another member of the interpreting team at the end of their interpretation. The worried look on their faces seemed like Interpreter Z had doubts and questions about their interpretation.

The skill sets Interpreter Z presents include knowledge of ASL, formal interpreting education, interpreting experience, and preparation for this assignment. The source language material is provided to the interpreting team Wednesdays before Sunday's service. This involves extensive prep work of the source material. The interpreting team works collaboratively and will discuss choices for signs before interpreting and during our debriefing sessions after interpreting. Interpreter Z has interpreted during other services in this setting and in other similar religious

settings. Having previous experience interpreting in a religious setting allows Interpreter Z to have a more successful interpretation. The religious terminology used becomes more familiar. The presenters become more familiar in terms of how they communicate, which allows the interpreter to feel more confident in their interpretation. Within analyzing Interpreter Z's available controls for this assignment, they could improve on the following skills. Interaction management, preparation for the assignment regarding discussions with hearing clients, and following up with both hearing and dDeafDB clients. I think Interpreter Z would have had a more interactive interpretation if they could have asked the dDeafDB clients in the situation how to sign the English idiom "*blown out of the water.*" Understandably, during this moment it was hard to manage the interaction of the presenter's directed comment. Another way this situation could be repaired would be to follow up after the services were over with the dDeafDB clients and presenter. The presenter is receptive and willing to take the interpreting teams' feedback which is another control that could be practiced more for future services.

In a different practicum observation site, in which I was granted "hands in the airtime" I made an unethical decision within my interpretation. In this scenario, which will be referred to as practicum observation site B; there was myself, another interpreter, a Deaf client, and a hearing client with some ASL knowledge. There were some moments when the hearing client was signing directly to the Deaf client, and I was not needed in those moments to interpret. The Deaf client was trying to decide between picking out a vest in either a size medium or a large. The Deaf client was asking all of us in the room which size looked better on them. They were feeling indecisive and asked again for opinions from all of us in the room. All of us were agreeing with the Deaf client that either size seemed to fit them. The Deaf client was still hesitant to pick which size they wanted. I decided to chime in with my opinion about how there might be a possibility that the vest could shrink in the dryer and that maybe the large size might be a better option.

My opinion-based response directly influenced the choice of the Deaf client. They decided to proceed with purchasing the large-size vest. The vest did not have a price difference between the sizes; however, I now fully comprehend how it could become seriously harmful to provide an opinion while in an interpreter's role. In this scenario, I violated NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct, Tenet number two "*Interpreters possess the professional skills and knowledge required*

for the specific interpreting situation.” Illustrative behavior number two point five “*Refrain from providing counsel, advice, or personal opinions.*” (NAD-RID CPC)

The consequence of providing an opinion has the potential impact of influencing someone else’s decision-making. Disempowering an individual from making their own decisions, is another consequence. In this experience at Observation Site B, I would consider my decision to be unethical in the sense of doing too much. It would have been more appropriate for me to handle the situation by deflecting back to the Deaf client as to which vest, they think is best for them. To refrain from giving my opinion, even when it is not intended to be harmful.

Within every interpreting assignment, the responsibility is heavily relied upon the interpreter assigned to make the appropriate ethical decisions, while managing the available controls and specific demands that arise. Through the utilization of *Demand Control Schema*, proper self-reflection, and feedback with other colleagues in this field, while adhering to confidentiality as required by NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct; interpreters can minimize the potential for unethical decisions, and behaviors in the profession of ASL/English interpreting.

Works Cited

Dean, Robyn K., Pollard, Jr., Robert Q., Application of Demand-Control Theory to Sign Language Interpreting: Implications for Stress and Interpreter Training, *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, January 2001, P. 1-14,

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