

DEAF INTERPRETER-HEARING INTERPRETER TEAMS

Unit 4 – The Deaf Interpreter-Hearing Interpreter (DI-HI) Team at work

DI-HI teams can be instrumental in providing communication accessibility for Deaf and hearing consumers. Successful teams are those who prepare together, work collaboratively to co-construct meaningful communication exchanges, and do so in a respectful and professional manner. This holds true for all kinds of interpreting teams whether they are made up of two HI's, two DI's, or a DI and HI working together as a team. There are, however, some unique teaming strategies that are specific to DI-HI teams. Distinctive strategies and practices for preparing, teaming, and debriefing for DI-HI teams will be covered in this unit.

Before the Work Begins: DI-HI Preparation

Preparation is the key to teams working together effectively. Preparing with team interpreters is not simply a nice idea, it is also one of the guiding principles of our profession as stated in the RID Code of Professional Conduct, tenet 5.0, which states, “Interpreters are expected to collaborate with colleagues to foster the delivery of effective interpreting services” (RID, 2005).

Along with the typical team discussions, DI-HI collaboration involves preparation in three key areas: 1) Determination of the language and style of the *feed* (a feed or fed interpretation refers to the work produced by the HI as they listen to the spoken English source and signs or feeds it to the DI), 2) Establishment of agreed upon cues for in-team communications, and 3) Team review of preparation materials.

1) DI-HI Team Preparation: Feed Target language

After receiving the incoming source, the feed interpreter relays (or feeds) this message content to the team who produces a target interpretation. When working from English to ASL, the feed interpreter is the HI. When working from ASL to English, the feed interpreter is the DI. The team must discuss in advance how the feed interpreter will process the source message before feeding it to the team. When working English to ASL, the team may agree that the HI will

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produce a conceptually accurate, English-based feed so that the DI can re-structure the message into a culturally appropriate ASL interpretation. Another option is to have the HI produce a conceptually accurate, ASL-based feed. From this type of feed, the DI would then produce a more native, accent-free ASL interpretation. When working ASL to English, the same considerations must be discussed.

When simultaneously interpreting, it is also critical to discuss the pace and flow of the feed interpretation to the target interpreter based on their preferences. For example, the DI may prefer that the HI produce a fed interpretation that results in a continuous stream of source message output. Another possibility is for the HI to break down the source into smaller conceptual units and to pause between each of the message units fed (also, referred to as *chunking*). Additionally, the DI-HI team may agree on when and where the HI will alter the typical pace and message stream of the feed to meet the needs of the interpreting process and the consumers.

When consecutively interpreting, these same considerations should be given. Additional discussion about note-taking and density of the concepts is required before beginning interpreting. This discussion should also include how much the team is comfortable chunking (memory differences can impact this).

2) DI-HI Team Preparation: Establishing Cues

Communication within the DI-HI team is essential. With the fast-pace, continuous flow of information exchanged in an interpreted interaction, there is little time for inner-team negotiations and communications. By establishing pre-determined cues, inner-team communication can occur quickly and concisely. In doing so, the DI-HI team can be sure that the integrity of the message is not sacrificed as a result of these necessary team negotiations. The following are examples of different cues to be established by the DI-HI team before their work. Cues can be used to indicate:

- A needed clarification.
- A needed repair to the feed or target interpretation.
- Extra-linguistic information like a visual aid that is not visible to both team members, a speaker's nonverbal communication, environmental information, etc.
- The source message about to be fed contains challenging or dense concepts like a poem, a joke, use of figurative language, etc.
- Need for a pause or process time.
- Readiness for the next feed.

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3) DI-HI Team Preparation: Material Discussion

As is the case for all interpreters and interpreting teams, reviewing materials and discussing the general theme, goal, and main points of the exchange are critical to achieving message equivalency. DI-HI teams also review these materials and in addition cover a number of other areas in their pre-interpreting discussions some of which will be explained here.

The DI-HI team, in their pre-conference meeting, will also identify source message concepts that may be challenging to feed or to restructure into a target message interpretation. Together the team can note any source materials and/or concepts that may be particularly dense or have more sound- or visually-based meanings that may pose challenges to the interpretation. Examples of these might be the use of analogies, idioms, figurative language, jokes, or poems. The DI-HI team can pre-determine strategies they will use to negotiate source language structures to retain meaning.

Attention should also be given to technical information, jargon, and/or proper nouns that may involve fingerspelling. Because fingerspelling requires specific attention for preciseness, identifying and becoming familiar with this information in advance will minimize the amount of cognitive load needed for comprehension by the interpreter producing the target interpretation.

Finally, the DI-HI team must agree on how preparation with the consumers will be handled. Because working with a DI-HI team may be a new experience for consumers, the team should decide how the DI-HI process will be explained to the hearing and Deaf consumer(s). If consecutive interpreting will be used, here again, the DI-HI team should agree on how the explanation will be given to all consumers.

Along with determining how the logistics of working with the DI-HI team will be explained, the team should also determine in advance what questions the team has regarding the materials, the situation, and the consumers. Some consideration should be given to how preparation with the consumers will be handled.

Here are some suggestions for preparing with consumers:

1) The hearing consumer:

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The DI takes the lead explaining the interpreting process and gathering answers to the pre-determined team questions while the HI functions as the interpreter. There are a number of benefits to having the DI lead in this capacity. First, this helps to equalize the imbalance of power that may exist between the hearing consumer and the DI and/or Deaf consumer. The Deaf consumer may gain a sense of empowerment from observing the leadership role of the DI and it also heightens the amount of respect the hearing consumer may have towards the interpreting work.

2) The Deaf consumer:

The DI takes the lead as outlined above, or the DI and HI together explain the interpreting process and gather answers to the pre-determined team questions. This approach is beneficial in that the DI-HI team physically exhibit a unified front with shared goals and responsibilities in the interpreting process.

On the Job: Techniques for Being an Effective DI-HI team

Not only is there a difference in how teams prepare to work together when they are part of a DI-HI team, the actual work itself differs from what interpreters are accustomed to doing. HIs and DIs must make adjustments in how they work when producing a feed interpretation in order to accommodate the DI-HI process.

Research conducted by Ressler (1999) has noted that there are differences between a HI's product when working with a DI as opposed to when the HI works independently to produce the target interpretation.

Some of the differences noted were that HIs working in DI-HI teams:

1. Paused differently than those working independently,
2. Used eye gaze differently than those working independently,
3. Used head nods as a way to visually support/monitor the DI's work, and
4. Used fewer signs per minute but fingerspelled more.

Each of these areas will be explained further below as based on Ressler's (1999) study.

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1. Effective feeding techniques: **Pauses**

Pauses occur when an interpreter is not actively signing and their hands are at a rest position. There are also other kinds of pauses when an interpreter holds the final position of a sign beyond the standard customary length of time before moving to produce the subsequent sign. The length of time a HI paused (using either type of pause) when working with a DI in a fed interpretation was found to be three times longer than the time they spent pausing when they worked independently. Seemingly, this extended time spent pausing and not feeding the source created time for the HI to pace how much information was fed to the DI and allowed for monitoring and in-team communications.

2. Effective feeding techniques: **Eye Gaze**

Interpreters shift the focus of their eye gaze during their interpretation for a number of reasons. When comparing the focus of an interpreter's eye gaze working with and then without a DI, differences were observed. When working independently, the HI's eye gaze was normally focused downward while pausing. However, when feeding a DI, the HI's eye gaze when pausing was focused directly on the DI. The HI continually watches the DI to monitor and check for feed and communication clarification.

3. Effective feeding techniques: **Monitoring Head Nods**

Monitoring head nods are head nods that are not part of the source or target language. When observing HIs working with and without DIs, monitoring head nods were observed only in the feed interpretation. They only occurred during times when the HI paused while holding the final position of a sign. During each of these instances, the HI's eye gaze was directed at the DI providing support, affirmations, and watching for requests for additional feed information.

4. Effective feeding techniques: **Signs vs. Fingerspelling**

When comparing the number of signs produced per minute in a HI's fed interpretation with their interpretation without a DI, the HI used 24 less signs per minute when feeding a DI. At first glance it might be assumed that the integrity of the message may be compromised with DI-HI teams because information from the source is being omitted. That however is not the case. Rather, the HI may often fingerspell a concept to the DI creating an opportunity for the DI to produce the

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target language equivalent meaning by using a conceptually equivalent cluster of ASL signs. This cooperative approach efficiently makes use of both interpreters' time and abilities.

After the job: DI-HI Debriefing

In every teaming relationship there are opportunities to grow and learn. One way to continually improve and build a stronger, more effective DI-HI team is to engage in a reflective discussion about the DI-HI work after its completion. There are a number of specific points of discussion that a DI-HI team covers in their debriefing time to help them grow as individual interpreters and as members of a DI-HI team.

These questions include:

1. Which pre-established cues were effective and/or ineffective? And, what situational factors led them to being effective or not?
2. What alternative strategies could have been used to resolve problems that occurred?
3. What alternative strategies might have been used to enhance team dynamics?
4. How effective were the strategies the interpreters used to feed?
5. What corrections/clarifications to the interpretations occurred and were they effective?
6. What went differently than expected?
7. What were the content and/or team challenges that were faced?
8. Was the process collaborative? Why or why not?
9. Was mutual respect of each other's interpreting work achieved?
10. Were power dynamics identified and did they impede or enhance respect of each other's work?
11. What have both interpreters learned from one another?

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Successful DI-HI teams often do not just happen. These teams are created as the two interpreters adapt and merge their independent processes and skills of preparation, interpretation, and reflection to create a single functioning unit. By applying these necessary adjustments in how DIs and HIs approach their work before, during, and after an interpreted event, the DI-HI team can be confident in the accuracy and integrity of the work they produce.

References

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Suggested Resources

Bentley-Sassaman, J. (2010). *Experiences and training needs of Deaf and hearing interpreter teams*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Walden University, Minneapolis, MN. Retrieved from http://www.diinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Bentley-Sassaman_DoctoralStudy.pdf

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