Journal of Interpretation

Volume 25 | Issue 1 Article 5

2016

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Hensley, Jennifer S. (2016) "Blurred Boundaries: Interpreters as Researchers in Cross-Cultural Settings," *Journal of Interpretation*: Vol. 25: Iss. 1, Article 5.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/joi/vol25/iss1/5

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Blurred Boundaries: Interpreters as Researchers in Cross-Cultural Settings

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of ambiguities and tensions that occur within the role of the bilingual/bicultural researcher in an ethnographic study. This manuscript presents an analysis of three instances from two interviews in a study on the acculturation of deaf students in deaf kindergarten classrooms in Japan and the US. This is an auto-ethnographic analysis of conflicts found in fluctuating between multiple roles: research assistant, interpreter, cultural mediator, and sociolinguistic consultant. In these examples my bicultural knowledge allowed me to identify "hidden" meanings overlooked by other members of the research team. However, my interpreter role at times made it awkward to contribute my insights to the research team. The findings of this study show that interpreters who are linguistically and culturally in-between the researchers and researched play a crucial but delicate role in cross-cultural studies.

INTRODUCTION

Removing our shoes at the edge of the tatami mat, our group of seven Japanese and American Deaf[1] researchers, educators, and interpreters discuss the logistics for the interview that is about to begin. Sitting cross-legged in a semi-circle, the hearing interpreters flank the deaf. The plan is for two American Deaf researchers to interview two Japanese Deaf informants. There are three interpreters: one working between Japanese Sign Language (JSL) and spoken Japanese, another interpreting between spoken Japanese and English, and I am responsible for interpreting spoken English and American Sign Language (ASL). Everyone present has experience working with interpreters, but there is still some nervousness. The first question is asked in ASL, which I translate into English, which is then translated into spoken Japanese, and finally, into JSL. This is no small task as there are no simple questions being asked or answers being given. As I notice misunderstandings, I teeter between my role as researcher and interpreter.

This article reports on the findings from a study, which explored the blurred roles and boundaries interpreters face while working for researchers in cross-cultural, cross-linguistic research projects. It tells the story of my experience working as an interpreter at first and then increasingly more as a member of the research team on an international study of deaf kindergartens. Ethnographers and other social scientists that study cultural groups outside their own often seek the services of cultural and linguistic insiders to interpret, provide insider information, and mediate between the researchers and researched. The deaf kindergarten project required such interpretation and mediation not only among researchers and informants from three

[1] I use the term "Deaf" with a capital D to denote a cultural identity, rather than a physiological status, which would be represented with a lower-case d, as "deaf".

cultures (Japan, France, and the United States), but also between the speaking and signing, hearing and Deaf members of the research team. On our project team, I assumed the roles of interpreter, cultural mediator, sociolinguistic consultant, and researcher. As I transitioned between each role, new complexities arose for the research team and me.

This is a study of one aspect of the methodology of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic research, the interpretation, and the interpreter. As I reviewed documentation from the larger study, I began to question and identify specific instances of challenge while interpreting and researching across cultures, as well as uncover some of the complexities that impact studies with Deaf and hearing individuals. The research questions of this micro-study led me to present these findings and significant background to individuals who have implications for similar studies. The following provides the context to my role as the interpreter and researcher, as situated in this study.

As a hearing child of two culturally Deaf parents (a child of deaf adults, Coda[2]), my childhood was bilingual and bicultural. "Deaf" is used here to refer to members of a culture that is a linguistic minority community; one that identifies membership by a shared signed language, educational experience, and barriers to the American mainstream culture (Croneberg, 1965; Woodward & Erting, 1975). Growing up in a Deaf family in a largely Deaf community, my first language was American Sign Language (ASL), my enculturation was into the cultural practices of Deaf culture, and I viewed people who spoke rather than signed as outsiders.

I brought to this study not only my bilingualism and interpretation skills, but also what LeVine (1973) describes as a bicultural perspective and bicultural knowledge that can be a powerful tool in ethnographic research. On the other hand, this background brings with it the risk of not being conscious of things that I take for granted as a member of the culture. In addition to being a Coda and a graduate student working as a research assistant on this project, I am a professional ASL/English interpreter, whose personal interest in deaf children's acquisition of language and culture led me to combine the profession of being an interpreter with my graduate studies in educational anthropology.

Beyond hearing status and signing fluency, there are deeper cultural differences between the Deaf and hearing worlds, differences which members of both cultures often are not fully aware. Like the children in our study, ASL is my native language. Unlike the Deaf members in the team, who grew up with hearing parents unfamiliar with Deaf people, my parents introduced me to signing, the Deaf community, and Deaf culture. In my early exposure to Deaf ways of being, I internalized the normality of this state. As Harlan Lane (2008) explains, for members of the Deaf community, Deafness is not a deficit; "Deaf people have their own language and culture, and such ideas are culturally constructed… different meanings, positive ones, are embedded in the term *deaf* in Deaf Culture" (p. 284).

In this article, I describe and analyze three events where I used my bicultural knowledge, in-between positionality as a Coda (Mudgett-DeCaro, 1996), knowledge of ethnographic research methods, and interpretation skills to mediate interactions between D/deaf and hearing researchers and informants (Hensley, 2010). My close reading of transcripts from these

[2] The term "Coda" is used throughout rather than contemporary terms, Interpreter with Deaf Parents (IDP) or Deaf-parented interpreter, as the emphasis is personal identification, not professional identification.

interviews reveals the process of interpreting in cross-cultural research, and the findings show the complex nature of language and cultures, as well as the implications of researchers that are inside or outside of that culture.

DEAF SOCIAL IDENTITY

Preston (1994) analyzes the process of cultural transmission from deaf parents to their hearing children and the unique identity position this gives the children. Hearing children of deaf parents are "in-between" cultures. Padden & Humphries (1988) describe this unique predicament: "Hearing children of Deaf parents represent an ongoing contradiction in the culture: they display the knowledge of their parents – skill in the language and social conduct – but the culture finds subtle ways to give them an unusual and separate status" (p.3). Growing up in a Deaf family surrounded by a larger mainstream, hearing culture, I turned to people outside my family and community to learn how to perform "hearingness,"[3] when I needed to do so. Reactions of these outsiders to my family's deafness alerted me to the power of what Goffman (1983) calls "normative expectations." Goffman explains how we come to expect what others expect of us and thereby turn a "virtual social identity" into an "actual social identity" (p.2). The more I was exposed to the normative expectations of society outside of the Deaf-world, the more this outside perspective became part of my "actual" social identity.

I learned as a child to recognize the differences between the Deaf cultural and linguistic worlds to the larger, dominant society and to code switch between the two languages and cultures. While these are different cultures, they are also intertwined and interdependent (Preston, 1994). Like Preston (1994, p. 9), I am interested in "what happens when cultures collide," as they frequently did in this cross-cultural study, often with me at the center of the collisions.

ROLES: INTERPRETER AS ETHNOGRAPHER

In *Argonauts of the Western Pacific,* Malinowski (1922) describes an ethnographer as an outsider to a culture using first-hand observations and interviews with insiders mixed with interpretations. The ethnographer acts as a culture's chronicler and explicator. The ethnographer's responsibility is to report and explain beliefs and practices of insiders in their own terms, from their own (emic) perspectives. It is the native informants who are the true authorities on their culture. Much of the ethnographic work of our project involved translation of emic terms and categories, translated both across Japanese, French, and American cultures, and between Deaf and hearing cultures.

Like an ethnographer, an interpreter deals with multiple meaning systems and practices. Both the ethnographer and interpreter must consider cultural beliefs and practices, positionalities, and language norms. According to the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID, 2007), a professional interpreter "makes communication possible between people who are deaf or hard of hearing and people who can hear." A good interpreter's interpretations, in both directions, are necessarily informed by and incorporate cultural information. This notion of incorporating cultural information is only mentioned briefly in the RID standards practice paper, but I suggest it is a key practice of skilled interpreters. Current coursework in most interpreter preparation

[3] This concept refers to consciously behaving in ways that mirror the majority culture of individuals that hear that differs from the author's native community of culturally Deaf individuals; this type of behavior may include following more individualistic values, rather than communal – as seen in the larger American Deaf community.

programs include not only advanced courses in ASL, but also the norms and beliefs of Deaf culture.

In many ways, the role of the interpreter inherently mirrors the role of the ethnographer. The separation of the roles lies in the explicit nature of interpreters' codes of ethics and professional conduct practices. Professional interpreters are expected and trained to maintain a level of separation and anonymity that makes them least intrusive in the settings where they work. Any sort of direct participation is discouraged outside of situations that deem it necessary for facilitation of communication, like cultural misunderstandings or infractions. At times, this refrain to participate can be challenging if there are strong feelings about the discourse interpreted and there is a will to opine. The ethnographer is concerned with comprehension of the research to accurately share the voice of the informant to others at a later time through presentation, interpretation of data, and/or publication. The interpreter is more concerned with the discourse that takes place during the period in which they are hired, and only recently have long-term implications of interpretation been purposefully identified in the field of professional interpreting.

Translations and interpretations of words and concepts done by native versus non-native users of the spoken and signed languages can have a significant influence on the outcome of the research. Studies demonstrate that Deaf communities suffer when they employ lay interpreters or bilinguals who lack professional training as translators and interpreters (Jentsch, 1998; Esposito, 2001). Researchers aware of these limitations realize the need for back translation of the original translations or for the use of teams of interpreters (Jentsch, 1998; Esposito, 2001). A significant difference between the two roles, ethnographer and interpreter, is the approach. The interpreter serves a function and specific role that is needed to support communication; the other parties involved do not always have a choice that the interpreter is present. Whereas, the ethnographer has gained permission of those involved, and there is choice to allow the researcher to gain access and entry into this insider view of people's lives.

In this study, I began in the role of professional interpreter, but after consultation with the project principal investigators (PIs), I began to transition to the role of research team member. Some of the motivation for making this shift was the fact that I was having too many observations and analytic insights to adequately stay in the role of the neutral, professional interpreter. I found myself feeling more kinship with the graduate assistants on the project, who brought their own interests to the study, understood the central research questions and the logic of the researcher's methods, and shared a sense of rapport and camaraderie with the PIs, which resulted in a comfortable exchange of ideas and input after the interviews with informants. This transition did not happen all at once, but rather, was a gradual switch to me as a member of the research team. This article explores how I balanced being a researcher on the project, while attempting to follow the standards of professional interpretation.

METHODS

This study is part of a larger project, which investigated how children learn to be members of Deaf culture in deaf kindergartens in France, Japan, and the United States (Valente & Graham 2011; Graham 2011; Horejes 2012). The larger project employed a version of Tobin et al (1989 & 2009) video-cued, multi-vocal method, soliciting responses and reflections of videos showing a typical day in three deaf preschool classrooms. The conceptual framework of

the larger project and this micro-level study both posit Deaf culture as nested within the larger, national cultures and also as intersecting identities. There is not a single Deaf culture – there are many. Deaf culture in the United States is both like and unlike the Deaf cultures of Japan and France.

Following Geertz's (2003) model of ethnography as "thick description" and cultural interpretation, this article combines a presentation of what happened on this project in the interactions between researchers, informants, and interpreters, along with my thought process at the time of the interactions, as well as my post-hoc reflections on these events. The data I draw on are video recordings of these events, memos I wrote at the time of the interviews, and the notes made while reviewing the videos later. The focus of this study is on three particular instances, two that occurred in an interview our research team conducted in Japan, and one that was drawn from an interview that occurred in the United States. I explore these cases by viewing the data collected, not as a "rote act" but rather, "a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he [she] must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render." (Geertz, 2003 p. 150). These examples were chosen for analysis because they were distinctly different from each other and they provide insight into the personal complexities I experienced, which are not exclusive to this study alone.

POSITIONALITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR DUAL ROLES

As an ethnographer, I am bound by the standards set by the Intuitional Review Board (IRB) of my university and the ethics of good research. The standards of IRBs vary from university to university and provide practice guidelines based on previous studies and precedents. The ethical considerations are in place as liability protections to the subjects and the universities. As a professional interpreter, I am interested in the protection of my consumers and adhere to the Code of Professional Conduct established by the collective members of the RID. In both roles, both as interpreter and ethnographer, I am required to do no harm and to keep consumers/participants fully informed. My constant dilemma is balancing my dual roles when, where, and if they contradict one another. The professional code of interpreters calls for a minimum of interjection, explanation, and influence. I became increasingly aware of the potential to compromise my position as a neutral interpreter as I became more active in the research.

At the same time, I found it difficult to depart from a firm adherence to the codes of professional interpretation. One solution I used to address this struggle was to refrain from asking questions while interpreting. Then, when the formal interview ended, I would ask questions of my own of the informant. Later, I would offer my own perspectives on the interview to the rest of the research team. These post-interview discussions sometimes happened immediately after interviews with informants. When this was not possible, I made notes of issues to bring up later. It finally became too complex and tiring to maintain these separate roles, and I abandoned my role as professional interpreter, began to manage only one position on the project, that of a researcher.

Just as a responsible researcher tries not to wield power over the researched, the interpreter aims to act as an ally to the D/deaf people for whom she interprets and to not use her ability to hear as well as to sign as a way to control information. Positionalities and stations need

to be considered by both ethnographers and interpreters. Deaf people are a linguistically and culturally oppressed minority group. In the United States, D/deaf people must rely on the Americans with Disabilities Act[4] to safeguard rights of equality. This oppression of D/deaf individuals by mainstream society needs to be at the forefront of the minds of both the interpreters and the researchers in interactions with Deaf clients and informants.

THE CODA'S AMBIGUOUS POSITIONALITY

Although I grew up as insider to the Deaf community, I refrain from identifying myself as culturally Deaf. As Patricia Mudgett-DeCaro, another Coda wrote: "I may be Deaf in many ways, but I am not Deaf" (1996: 283). Having grown up in a Deaf family, I employ a visual sense of the world, and I am not fully a member of the mainstream, hearing, culture. For example, similar to my Deaf relatives, I often require eye contact with the people I converse with; ASL is my preferred mode of communication; and I carry awareness of having been born into a culture of which I could never be a full member. My hearing status combined with my signing and Deaf cultural fluency position me as a sort of immigrant to both communities. Mudgett-DeCaro (1996) uses the concept of marginality as a figurative space between the hearing and the Deaf community; bicultural-bilingual individuals, like me, sometimes have a well-developed understanding of two communities, while maintaining a complicated membership status in both (p. 283). I share my marginal perspectives to reveal my insider-outsider status because they became imperative in my methodological efforts in both data collection and analysis.

FINDINGS

Case 1: Cultural Significance, or Functionality?

In the pilot phase of the study, two of the three lead members of the research team, Joe Tobin and Joe Valente (JV), interviewed a Deaf informant, Patrick Graham, while I functioned as the ASL interpreter. At the time Patrick was a kindergarten teacher in a school for the deaf. He, like me, is now a member of the research team. As an interviewing cue, the researchers used a video they had shot in Patrick's classroom. Joe Tobin and JV paused the video periodically to ask Patrick to comment on the action. I was physically positioned between the researchers and the informant. I alternated back-and-forth between watching the monitor, so I would know the context of the questions and answers, while simultaneously trying to watch the interviewees and informant. At one point, one of the ethnographers made a comment. As I began to interpret this comment to Patrick, he moved to remove the external receiver to the Cochlear Implant that was fastened to his head, behind his left ear.

[4] The American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities (in this case D/deaf people).



(Figure 1 – Removing the Cochlear Implant processor **[Group of 4 people sits at table watching a video on laptop positioned in the middle of the table. The two researchers are seated on the left of the photo; Patrick sits to the right, with the interpreter Jennifer (the author) in the middle. Patrick is reaching with his left-hand to remove the external magnet and processor of his Cochlear Implant behind his left ear.]**).

My first thought was that this was a culturally significant action, suggesting that Patrick was showing confidence in the accuracy of my translation of his ASL. I also considered the possibility this was an act of defiance of the mainstream hearing culture, a gesture of shutting out auditory information. I learned later there was another, less profound explanation for his removing the implant. Patrick told me he removed it because the battery had died. By addressing him afterward, I was able to uncover the meaning of this action. However, this begs the question, why did I, as the interpreter, first intuit great significance in a gesture that turned out to have no profound meaning? Looking back on my evolution in this project from interpreter to interpreter/researcher and finally to simply researcher, I would say that I was over-eager to identify culturally significant actions so I could demonstrate to the research team my bicultural understanding. At this initial juncture of my involvement with this project, I was already struggling with my role, which was the first step in my evolution from interpreter to research team member.

Case Two: Interpretation Processes

As our ethnographic work progressed, the complexity of the language and cultural challenges grew. The first interview I interpreted for the project outside the United States was at a deaf school in Tokyo. Two Deaf, signing members of our team interviewed two Deaf, signing Japanese preschool teachers in whose classroom we had videotaped. I performed the role of the

ASL/English interpreter, teaming with a Japanese interpreter who interpreted from my spoken English to spoken Japanese and back, and another interpreter who interpreted from spoken Japanese to JSL and back.

At one point in the interview, concerned that meanings were being lost, I stopped the process to have a side-bar or interaction with the other interpreters. I told them that a question asked by a Deaf US team member was a Deaf cultural concept that was difficult to interpret from ASL to English, and I asked if there were similar concepts in JSL. This brief exchange served to alert all parties involved to the complexity of the conversation we were attempting to have.

In this interview, my Japanese counterparts used a method of consecutive interpreting, whereas I used the simultaneous interpreting process that is commonly used in ASL interpretation in the United States Consecutive interpreting is a turn-taking method where the interpreter retains chunks of information in her head, processes internally, and then interprets into the target language, during which time the signer or speaker pauses. Simultaneous interpreting requires the interpreter to attend to and process a source language and produce a target language simultaneously, with only minimal delays. Another complexity present is that while one of the Japanese interpreters was interpreting between JSL and spoken Japanese, the other was interpreting between spoken Japanese and spoken English.

Consecutive interpreting is more commonly used when two spoken languages are being interpreted, as it is difficult to manage the languages simultaneously when both are audible. Interpreter and interpreter educator, Debra Russell (2005), says that consecutive interpreting is generally not used in the United States and Canada because of fears of inaccuracy resulting from the lengthy delay between the source and target languages. The fear or doubt exists in the pause; consumers, hearing and Deaf, may assume that information is not relayed or somehow withheld by the interpreter while he or she waits to listen/watch for the message to be interpreted, which may or may not take the same amount of time to interpret into the differing language. Russell suggests that fears of inaccuracy are misplaced: “Despite the significant body of literature from spoken language interpreting which suggests that consecutive interpreting allows for a greater degree of accuracy, the predominant practice of ASL-English interpreters has been to provide simultaneous interpretation” (p. 161). Consecutive interpretation is recommended for one-to-one and small group conversations as it is seen as a more accurate mode of interpreting that allows for comprehension of one language and production of another language to happen sequentially. While this method is a skill taught early in interpreter training in the United States, it is a practice that is not widely used.

While the JSL-to-Japanese and Japanese-to-English interpreters in the study were primarily practicing consecutive interpreting, I interpreted using a simultaneous interpreting technique. These different practices resulted in moments of misunderstanding for the interpreters, the researchers, and the informants.

Since the American Deaf researchers were not accustomed to the consecutive process, I periodically needed to remind them to pause in asking questions to allow for the JSL/English interpreters to finish interpreting. These reminders visibly disturbed the American researchers, throwing them off their desired pace for receiving information. On the other hand, the Japanese Deaf informants seemed entirely comfortable with long pauses while they waited for ASL questions to be interpreted into JSL. The Japanese Deaf teachers were accustomed to this pace.

The American Deaf researchers were not, which left them frustrated with the lengthy pauses and flustered when the interpreters interrupted them. Aware of the frustration, one of the Japanese interpreters and I called a "time-out" and briefly stopped the interaction between the Deaf consumers to clarify meanings and discuss the difficulty of interpretation between languages



Figure 2 – "Wait" signed to signal a pause in the discourse **[Group of people sit semi-circle on a mat. The people are labeled in red above each person according to his or her roles in the scenario; the interpreters sit on both sides at the outer edges of the group. Below the ASL-English Interpreter (Jennifer) a comment reads, "Wait" and below the Japanese-Japanese Sign Language-English Interpreters a comment reads, "(Still interpreting)."**].

To interrupt the flow of the interview, I gestured to the American Deaf ethnographers, Thomas Horejes (Tommy) and Patrick, to "wait" or "stop." In some cases, gestures are employed while signing as a referent to communicate a concept (Kendon, 2004). Here, I deliberately used a *palms out* gesture, as opposed to the ASL sign for "wait," which uses a different palm orientation (*palms up*), to make it clear that the instruction to wait was coming from me, rather than from the informants. I also thought that a gesture here would be more readily understood than the ASL sign by the Japanese informants and interpreters. Gestuno, or international sign, is a more gesture-based form of signing used in international signing situations.

This example illustrates some of the complexity associated with interpreting in cross-cultural ethnographic research. At some points in the interviews I choose to pause or delay my interpretation midstream to provide my perspective of the differences of communication styles to the American Deaf researchers. In this case, my interruption cued the American researchers to

slow down and allow the JSL/Japanese/English interpreters to use the consecutive interpreting format to which they were accustomed, and therefore to have a better chance of expressing themselves and being understood. My intervention here mixed my role as that of interpreter with my role of that as research team member.

A close reading of the transcript of this segment of the interview can help us further unpack the complexity of interpretation and meaning-making happening here. The American Deaf ethnographers were asking questions intended to sort out shared versus nationally specific features of Deaf culture. The segment[5] below provides the interaction between Tommy (TH), one of the Deaf researchers, with the American (A1) and Japanese (J1 & J2) interpreters that resulted in confusion of languages, speakers, and roles:

> TH (signing in ASL, with my simultaneous interpreting into spoken English): Well, for instance, Deaf culture might be to get someone's attention by slapping the table or tapping on the shoulder. Um, but Japanese culture, in general, you would, you would bow. You know, there are specific rules in that culture that, so you can identify, you know a national identity by their customs. Are there ways to apply that national Japanese identity in the classroom that maybe we're unaware of? That Japanese Deaf identity (with)?
>
> J 1: Japanese Deaf? (addressed to me)
>
> A1: Mmmhum (nodding to J1)
>
> J1: (continues interpreting into spoken Japanese for J 2)
>
> J1: And that Japanese culture influence…and Deaf culture…how they what? (to AI)
>
> A1: (interprets the question to TH) JAPAN CULTURE AFFECT, DEAF CULTURE AFFECT THAT…**WAIT**
>
> J1: How they interact? Or what…what was the…
>
> AI: (continues interpreting into ASL) HOW BOTH APPEAR CLASSROOM? OR (shakes head – negation). **(points to J1 & J2) CLEAR MEAN (points to J1)**
>
> TH: (nods) Mm, huh. Yes.
>
> J1: Yeah. (continues interpreting into spoken Japanese)
>
> A1: **OK MAKE SURE UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING**

After the interpreted question from Tommy is stated in spoken English, J1 repeated the phrase "Japanese Deaf," seeking clarification. Once verified by me, not Tommy, she continued interpreting. Soon she stopped interpreting again to ask another clarifying question: "How they what?" At that point, I chose to interpret her question to Tommy and to include him in the meaning clarification process rather than to assume what his response would be. Meanwhile J1 resumed interpreting into spoken Japanese. Since the interpreter began interpreting again, I

[5] Statements made in ASL are indicated by CAPS; *J1* is the Japanese interpreter who interpreted primarily between spoken English and Spoken Japanese, *J2* the interpreter who interpreted between spoken Japanese and JSL.

decided that she had understood after all and did not want her question answered. I stopped Tommy from answering to allow her to finish interpreting. The interpreter paused once again to ask, "How they interact, or what was the…?" Realizing the interpreter wanted an answer at this point I interpreted the question but added what I thought to be the intent of the question, "CLEAR MEAN" indicating that the JSL interpreters intended to "seek clarity." Once Tommy verified by nodding that the question was correctly understood, she resumed interpreting. Meanwhile I signed an aside to Tommy "OK MAKE SURE UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING." This comment served to reassure the Deaf ethnographer that the JSL interpreter's clarifications were appropriate and not to be concerned that her seeking clarification was a lack of her ability to interpret.

After the interview, I discussed this incident with the team and explained the Japanese interpreters' preference for consecutive rather than simultaneous interpretation. Questions of accuracy and control arose in this discussion. Were the interpreters, both Japanese and American, getting it right? Were we, the interpreters, rather than the researchers, controlling the interaction? I felt the need to emphasize that consecutive interpretation, though generally not preferred by many deaf people in the United States, is a legitimate technique and by no means an indication of the interpreter's lack of ability and/or a personal vested interest in directing the conversation. My conclusion is that the different practices of interpreting used in the interview caused misunderstanding, which negatively impacted the quality of the interview.

There are several implications to the choices I made here. Had I not called for a "time-out" to clarify roles of the interpreters and the pace of signing by the United States interviewers, more meaning might have been lost. On the other hand, such interruptions break up the flow of the conversation and can contribute to the participants' anxiety about understanding and being understood across gaps in language and culture. I felt the interruption was warranted in this instance because of the danger I perceived of the Japanese Deaf informants feeling that the American Deaf ethnographers were rushing them and not giving them adequate time to answer their question, which might suggest disrespect and might make them less inclined to continue participating in the research. I was also concerned that the JSL/Japanese/English interpreters may have felt rushed, which would lead them to focus more on speed than on accuracy and the clarity of meaning. Not allowing for clear interpreting and discourse could have impacted the quality of data collected and the resulting finding of the research.

Case Three: Culturally Bound Meanings and Language

The third example I analyze is another instance that required cultural and linguistic clarification. In this example, I provided cultural mediation within our team of researchers. This example is typical of instances where I try to point out cultural differences in communication to help our research team work more effectively together and avoid misunderstandings. A simple example of such clarification of cultural norms is reminding the hearing members of the research team to make eye contact with the Deaf researchers and Deaf informants, as a way of indicating their interest and attention, which is expected in Deaf culture.

The following segment is an instance where, in the midst of an interview, I stepped out of my role as interpreter and into my role as research team member and raised questions about the intent of the direction of the interview. In this segment of the interview, Patrick (PG) begins listing concepts in ALS that he speculates are culture bound, and difficult to translate into spoken

English, much less into spoken Japanese or JSL. Tommy (TH), the other Deaf ethnographer, points out to Patrick that he is asking the American interpreter, A1 (the author), to do an impossible task—to ask the Japanese informants about a sign which he suspects isn't translatable. The interpretation process comes to a halt when I decide to stop interpreting and discuss the problem with the Japanese interpreters:

> PG: Um. There's another sign, um, for instance, uh, we sign this, CLUELESS. Um, or this, OOPS.
>
> TH: HOW (to Patrick, points to me) INTERPRET THAT?
>
> PG: HOW CAN INTERPRET THAT…BUT…MEAN… "OOPS" OR "VOICE OFF" (turning to Japanese Deaf teachers)
>
> TH: (waves to get attention of Japanese Deaf teachers) "VOICE OFF"
>
> A1: These signs in ASL [OOPS, CLUELESS, VOICE OFF] are very difficult to interpret into English. And so we're discussing they're, they're… (addressing JSL interpreters)
>
> J1: Typically Deaf? (to A1)
>
> A1: …very culturally bound signs that don't have a direct translation. Are there signs like that in Japanese sign? (addressing JSL interpreters)

The topic of the interview was focused on teaching practices and Deaf cultural practices in the classroom. At the beginning of the segment, when Patrick asked his question, I used ASL signs to demonstrate to the JSL interpreters the concepts that I was having difficulty interpreting. As a native ASL user and an insider to American Deaf culture, I understood Patrick's signs, but I did not understand the intent of his question and how he anticipated the Japanese informants could respond. At that moment, I stepped out of my interpreter role into my ethnographer/researcher role and attempted to redirect the conversation. Seeing that the other ethnographer, Tommy, recognized my difficulty, I felt more confident to stop interpreting and have a side-bar with the Japanese interpreters. This was a brief, but important, interruption in the flow of the interview; a moment of cultural and linguistic mediation that allowed for a continuation in the flow of communication. Upon debriefing with the American Deaf researchers, Patrick and Tommy, I admitted my perceived conflict in the interview and the challenges that I experienced. Their response shared a similar resolve, and we all gained more insight to future challenges we may encounter.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Jentsch (1998) cautions researchers about the possible methodological problems that may arise when using interpreters in research. It is therefore important to consider the complexities in the role of the interpreter in ethnographic research and how the act of interpretation impacts the research process. I propose that, where possible, researchers working across divide of language and culture should include bilingual/bicultural interpreters as members of the research team. Similarly, Temple (1997) argues, without the benefit of the interpreter's perspective, the cross-cultural researcher risks being able to engage deeply with informants.

When, as in our research on deaf kindergartens in Japan, France, and the United States, there is a need for interpretation across more than one language and culture, the methodological challenges are dramatically increased. In such a situation, much value is added when the interpreter is also considered to be a member of the research team, allowing him or her not only to literally interpret, but also to draw on his or her intercultural as well as bilingual knowledge to alert the team of instances of heightened misunderstandings and of cultural gaps and gaffes. The interpreter can inform each stage of the research, from setting the research questions and planning the interviews, to finding meanings and drawing larger conclusions.

Temple (2002) argues that it is important to view interpretation not as a linear, straightforward sequence of translating, but rather as a social process, an exchange and unfolding, and as a negotiated and co-constructed discourse. I have presented examples in this article of the difficulty in balancing the roles of interpreter and researcher during a social process as complex as conducting ethnographic research.

In the early stages of the project, I played both roles. As I became more interested in the researchers' questions and more committed to a long-term goal of making a career shift from interpreter to researcher, I became frustrated that my interpretation responsibilities were precluding me from having my own voice in the study. This meant that our team now had to employ the services of interpreters who are not researchers. This does not solve the problem, as these interpreters must decide when to call "time-outs" during the interviews to address misunderstandings and cultural missteps. It also leaves me at times in the awkward position of being able to more accurately interpret one of my colleagues' questions than our hired interpreter, but hesitant to correct her, both to avoid embarrassing her and to avoid risking giving up my hard won position as a research team member.

The inclusion of interpreters as research team member and to pay attention to problems of interpretation is consistent with the core assumptions of the ethnographic method, beginning with the need for reflexivity on the part of the researcher(s). This reflexivity includes "identity assumptions" which, as Goffman (1963) explains, are often ingrained and overlooked (p. 127). To ignore the impact of the interpreter's role on the research is to omit an important source of meaning making (and/or meaning-loss) in the ethnographic process.

Recent work by Williamson et al (2011) presents a new role of "interpreter-facilitator" in cross-cultural interviews used in qualitative research. While agreeing with Temple and Edwards (2002) that the interpreter needs to be made more visible in ethnographic research and Williamson et al (2011) incorporation of the interpreter into methodological and reflexive practices, I take this claim further by adding to it the call for researchers employing interpreters to view these individuals as members of the research team and scholars with collaborative potential. Greater rapport and collaboration between interpreter and researcher in an ethnographic inquiry has the potential to enhance the meaningfulness of the findings illustrated by the three cases analyzed in this study.

The period in our research project, when I played the roles of both interpreter and researcher, was challenging. As I was interpreting, I often found myself frustrated by being unable to participate and engage with informants. When our team met to discuss our methods, make logistical decisions, and debrief interviews, I acted as the interpreter between the signing and speaking team members. This made it very difficult for me, as a researcher, to add my own

perspectives. It also made it difficult in long meetings for me, as an interpreter, to speak up about my need for breaks. As the team became aware of my frustration, they eventually agreed to my changing roles and not take advantage of my availability as an interpreter.

LAST THOUGHTS

I remain an intermediary in many ways but often by circumstance. At team meetings, we tend do a loopty-loop around the table to figure out the best places for everyone to sit, directing traffic at the table. The interpreters we hire sit near Joe Tobin, our hearing team leader; Patrick *and Tommy sit near each other, so they both can see the interpreter and Joe Tobin, but not too close, so they also can see each other signing; JV, who signs, reads lips and relies on his hearing aid, sits across from the interpreter and Joe Tobin to see their lips move, but making sure both the interpreter and our Japanese team member, Akiko, are to his left, near 'his good ear;' I sit wherever I want most days as I have the privilege of choosing what language I use and to whom I use it.*

In our final year of the project I am no longer the interpreter at our big shindigs, presentations, focus group interviews, and larger team meetings. We often have interpreters brought in to fulfill this duty, but it's still not ideal as we have a different team of interpreters working with us in each city and country. Each set of interpreters provides a new challenge and occasional frustration as I still struggle to trust everyone will gain their own understanding and that every interpretation will be different. Simultaneously, it is freeing to engage an active research-minded voice within the team. We are all much more aware of the interactions we have via interpreters and know what comes with it--an added layer of analysis, perspective, and voice to our already complicated project. It's not perfect. We still haven't managed to add a team member solely dedicated to the socio-linguistic challenges of this project. Until then, I am awkwardly, (but becoming comfortably, seated in my position in the margins.

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