Researching International Sign interpreting as a practitioner

Maya de Wit, PhD Candidate Radboud University, Netherlands

This September, deaf communities around the world celebrated the International Week of the Deaf. The special events were a combination of celebrating deaf cultures and signed languages. They also raised awareness on deaf people's human rights, such as their right to a national signed language. Numerous happenings by national and international organizations were streamed live and deaf presenters from across the globe shared ideas and best practices. Many of the international events were conducted in International Sign (IS) and interpreted into English. Interpreting from and to IS is not as common as the name 'International Sign' might seem to suggest. IS interpreting mainly occurs in international events and projects (Wit, Crasborn, and Napier 2021a).

There is not much known about International Sign interpreting, and even less so in conference settings (McKee and Napier 2002; Sheneman and Collins 2016; Wit and Sluis 2016). As part of a larger research project at the Radboud University[1] I am conducting a PhD study[2] which focuses on IS interpreting at conferences and the similarities to and differences from interpreting spoken languages. Following Gile (1995) I am a *practisearcher*; practicing my profession and researching it at the same time. I was trained as an ASL[3] and NGT[4] interpreter and later was asked to interpret IS. As with many of my colleagues, I did not plan to become an IS interpreter. However, I am passionate about signed languages and signers' rights to quality interpretation. This dedication also drives my PhD research: what makes an IS interpreter a good IS interpreter at international conferences?

There are common agreements and beliefs in interpreting studies on defining the required skills of a conference interpreter (Gile 2009). Conference interpreters should faithfully

interpret the source language to the target language, ensuring proper affect and professionalism. These requirements are assumed to be the same for all conference interpreters, regardless of whether they interpret spoken or signed languages, including IS. IS, however, is slightly different from other languages which have a conventionalized lexicon, grammar, and pragmatics (Kusters 2020). Instead, IS is highly flexible and the way it is used depends on the interlocutors and the setting (Quinto-Pozos and Adam 2015). For a detailed analysis of IS and its use, see Rosenstock and Napier's (2016) edited volume on IS. This high variety in IS adds a layer of complexity to the interpreting process (Wit, Crasborn, and Napier 2021b).

With my PhD research, I aim to contribute to filling some of the gaps in the studies on IS interpreting at conferences. My studies are carried out from the interpreters' perspectives; their background and experiences. To do this, I have used mixed methods to collect and analyze my data. The first study I conducted via a global online survey in English and IS, identifying the signed language interpreters worldwide who interpret IS and their profiles. The study resulted in 108 responses, of which 90 were submitted by interpreters who reported to regularly or sometimes interpret IS (see (Wit, Crasborn, and Napier 2021a). My second study investigated the preparation strategies for signed language conference interpreting, comparing international sign with a national sign language. I interviewed two interpreting teams, IS and NGT, before and after an international multilingual event. Using reflexive thematic analysis, the results show that their preparation methods are very different: the IS team focused on creating signed concepts whereas the NGT team primarily discussed the terminology and using the correct NGT signs. The outcome of this study will appear in 2021 in a special volume

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[1] https://www.ru.nl/cls/our-research/research-groups/sign-language-linguistics/current-projects/deaf-communication-without-shared-language/
[2] https://www.mayadewit.nl/phd
[3] American Sign Language

[4] NGT is sign language of the Netherlands, also referred to as Dutch Sign Language.

on 100 years Conference Interpreting in Cambridge Scholars Publishing (Wit, Crasborn, and Napier 2021b).

An important aspect of the future development of the IS interpreting profession are the perspectives and experiences of current IS interpreters. Their perspectives will provide insight into their process of becoming and working as an IS interpreter. These insights assist in completing the map of the current IS interpreter profession and provide best practices on how to train the IS interpreters needed. To collect these perspectives, I conducted interviews with IS interpreters globally, which I am currently analyzing.

These results will be published in the coming years.

Researching as a practitioner offers me an opportunity for further reflections on the impact that our actions have as IS interpreters. Interpreting IS provides access to international events for many signers across the globe, but it should not be seen as a one-stop solution for any event. The way we as practitioners offer and carry out the IS interpreting services must be in consultation with those that they serve, the sign language communities across the world. My research aims to expand our understanding of the IS interpreting profession and broaden discussions about it and its practices.

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