

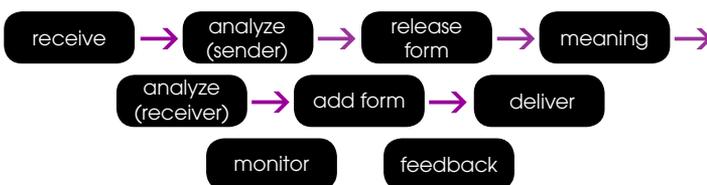


Doing it on a Platform

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Training in deaf-blind interpreting often focuses on the fact, or assumption, that the deaf-blind person uses either tactile or close vision interpreting of one form or another, and that the interpreter is working directly with this person. What is often not included in the mix of skills, modifications and group dynamics is what happens when the interpreter working an event attended by deaf-blind people is working on a platform, at a distance from the deaf-blind attendees. There are two configurations where this might influence what the platform interpreter does: 1) where the deaf-blind person is watching the interpreter directly, generally a person with Usher Syndrome/restricted field of vision; 2) where there are interpreters in the audience, often deaf interpreters, or sometimes people functioning in an interpreting capacity who are not professionally trained interpreters, working from the platform interpretation to the deaf-blind person. Additionally, there are considerations that must be taken into account when a platform interpreter is working from sign into spoken English.

When one is the platform ASL interpreter in such situations, is there more to it than “just” interpreting? In “A Process Model for Deaf-Blind Interpreting” (Jacobs, 2005), each step of a process model:



is expanded upon to include factors relevant to an interpretation when the final recipient is deaf-blind. Each of these expanded steps applies equally when the interpreter is working on a platform and is being watched by a deaf-blind person directly or having their interpretation shadowed¹. Step 5 of the model,

‘Analyze (Receiver),’ speaks to this directly. The ‘Receiver’ in question could be any or all of several individuals:

1. The deaf-blind person receiving the interpretation either a) directly from the platform interpreter, or b) via a relay interpreter.
2. The deaf-blind person’s spouse, support service provider (SSP), friend or community member who is not a professional interpreter but is functioning in an interpreting capacity, or a student or novice interpreter.
3. A professional, experienced interpreter, deaf or hearing.

In the first case (1a), where the receiver is the deaf-blind person, often someone with Usher Syndrome, the platform interpreter must make the appropriate modifications for this person from the platform. These can include speed/pace, particularly for fingerspelling, and visual/environmental information (the person may be able to see you, but cannot simultaneously or easily see the speaker, others in the room, the slides or other visuals being shown.) Some questions to ask oneself would include, What does this person need to know to make this make sense? [e.g., Who is talking (to whom)? Is the context/environmental information/topic known to the receiver? Where/what can this person see? Do you know anything about this person, language background, personal background? What they might be interested in knowing?] (Jacobs, p. 98)

In the second case, the person ‘interpreting’ for the deaf-blind person may be the deaf-blind person’s spouse, an SSP, friend or community member who is not a professional interpreter, or a student or novice interpreter. Any or all of these individuals may be present and functioning in an interpreting capacity at large gatherings such as American Association of the Deaf Blind (AADB) symposia. In this case, ‘analyzing the receiver’ may include such questions as, What is this person’s language fluency? What is this person’s knowledge of and skill

in the interpretation process? What is this person's knowledge of modifications for the deaf-blind person with whom they are working?

In this case, where someone is shadowing the interpretation, the 'receivers' being analyzed are *both* the person relaying the interpretation *and* the deaf-blind person, in which case the platform interpretation must include modifications for the end receiver (1b). If the end receiver is using tactile signing, the platform interpretation must include the tactile modifications, which include modifications in phonology, morphology, syntax and lexical changes. These are outlined in Step 6 of the Deaf-Blind Process Model, where one "Adds Form." (For a full expansion of these modifications, see "A Process Model for Deaf-Blind Interpreting" in the 2005 *Journal of Interpretation*. For additional work on morphological modifications during tactile ASL, see "Adverbial Morphemes in Tactile American Sign Language," Collins, S., and for more recent work on lexical changes, see "YES, #NO, Visibility and Variation in ASL and Tactile ASL," Petronio, K. and Dively, V.) One very common example that has a marked effect on meaning produced in an interpretation is the presence or absence of the sign NOT.

"One area that can lead to a great deal of confusion is an ASL sentence marked by a headshake to indicate negation. With a person receiving ASL tactilely, the negation must be transferred to a tactile form (NOT). Without that transfer of the headshake (representing negation) to the hands, the DB person will receive the signs only (representing the affirmative), which conveys the exact opposite meaning of what the signer is saying. (Petronio, 1988; Steffen, 1998; Frankel, 2002) This is a modification that specifically needs to be included by platform signing interpreters in Deaf-Blind group settings where novice interpreters may be shadowing exactly what is signed by the platform interpreter to the Deaf-Blind individual with whom they are working." (Jacobs, 2005, p. 94)

In the third case, the receiver is a skilled, professional interpreter, deaf or hearing, with knowledge of and skill in working with deaf-blind people. This interpreter will make her or his own professional judgments and determinations in processing and rendering her or his interpretations. Depending on the size of the group and the number of interpreters, aspects of teaming may also come to bear between the platform interpreter and interpreters working from the platform interpretation as the source, that is, monitoring, asking for or providing clarifications, etc. These can relate to the 'Monitor' and 'Feedback' portions of the model, with Monitor expanded to include monitoring the room as well as self, and 'Feedback' taken to include signals from other interpreters working in the room.

When an interpreter for a large event such as an AADB symposium or similar gathering is working into spoken English, with the same constellation of deaf-blind people, professional and novice interpreters, similar considerations must be taken into account. Hearing interpreters, by default or design, may be interpreting from the spoken interpretation to the deaf-blind person with whom they are working. To ensure a degree of consistency, as well as supply information where the lines of sight may be blocked, the spoken interpretation will need to include visual and environmental information. For example, "José is walking up to the stage. He is now walking across the

stage to receive his award, hugging Maria, looking at the award and smiling. José is saying 'thank you,' waving the I-LOVE-YOU sign to everyone, and walking off the stage." As well as the interpreters, there may be deaf-blind people who use their residual hearing or hearing-blind people relying on this information as well. In addition to providing this environmental information, the spoken English interpreter may need to include commentary on the process to manage the flow of information and 'fill in the gaps.' For example, if there are silences while interpreters on the platform or in the room are processing information and 'catching up,' the spoken English interpreter can add these processing notes, such as "Interpreters are interpreting..." This way, interpreters who are 'finished' can let the deaf-blind people with whom they are working know what is going on, and deaf-blind people who are relying on the spoken interpretation can know why there is a long silence. This allows everyone to be in the loop and allay any concern or anxiety about why everything has 'stopped.'

In summary, large group gatherings of deaf-blind people present a wide variety of languages and modes of communication used by the deaf-blind people, and an equally wide variety of skill sets of people in the interpreter role. Far from being the 'general audience' interpreter who does not need to have specialized skills in deaf-blind interpreting, the platform signing interpreter must have facility in the range of modifications used by a variety of deaf-blind people, particularly those who are users of tactile signing. The platform spoken English interpreter, as well, must have facility with including visual descriptions and managing the process so that all participants are aware of what is happening with the communication process and can feel comfortable with the proceedings. ■

Endnote

1. In some areas of the country, this is known as 'copy-signing'. Shadowing here is distinguished from a secondary interpretation which is processed with the appropriate modifications made for the deaf-blind individual.

Rhonda Jacobs has been involved with the deaf-blind community in various capacities for over two decades. She is currently the AADB representative to and co-chair of the National Task Force on Deaf-Blind Interpreting. Contact Rhonda at: Jacobs_Rhonda@yahoo.com.



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