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Newsli

The magazine for the Association of Sign Language Interpreters in the United Kingdom

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for CPD so we have additional funds and expenditure to handle on top of our budget and the spreadsheet again makes this a lot easier to do. I tend to do more of the soft skills side of things, such as welcoming new members to the Region, handling enquiries, keeping the tea, coffee and biscuits replenished and providing regular updates of our activities for KYIT and *Newsli*.

Succession planning is something that all Regional Contacts are mindful of. We have started asking Members to take on chairing meetings, minute-taking and creating and sharing CPD certificates. David and I previously assumed responsibility for these tasks but there are no rules that state that only Regional Contacts can do this. Giving others the opportunity to take on roles gets them to see the sort of things that might be required of them as a future Regional Contact and to see that the tasks are not that scary.

Early on, we made the decision to change when we hold meetings. MSC is a really broad Region geographically, plus we have Members from further afield. Typically, we hold meetings from the north of Hampshire across to the south of the county and into Dorset, so weekday evenings are not that practical for many Members. Previously, meetings were held around every three months, but we realised that if a Member misses a meeting then they won't have access to meetings/CPD activities for around six months, which is not good value for the membership fee. We now hold meetings bi-monthly on a Saturday morning so there isn't such a gap between times when Members can attend. We always include a CPD afternoon because, despite holding the meetings in different venues around the Region, there are always Members who have to travel a long way and we want to make it

'Working together, sharing the workload and playing to our strengths seems to get things done and spreads tasks more evenly'

worthwhile for everyone giving up a Saturday. Across one year, Members can actually get all of the required 24 CPD hours if they were to attend everything (although NRCPD might prefer to see a little more variety of activity).

Surveys and successes

Members are asked for training suggestions and then we use Survey Monkey to establish the most popular choices. We run two surveys: one for afternoon training on meeting days and another for additional full-day events. This year we have hosted Heather Mole's 'Power and Privilege' training and more recently Emma Ferguson-Coleman's 'Deafness and Dementia' training. This month (January), we welcome Jules Dickinson's 'Shame Resilience' training and we'll be holding Darren Townsend-Hanscomb and Josef Baine's 'Unconscious Bias' course in July. We're looking at running the dementia training again too.

As Rep/Chair/Regional Contact, we have attended almost every meeting and CPD event over the last nine years. It has been great to get to know our membership really well and it is a supportive group that goes beyond the time we spend together. We would recommend taking on the role if you get the opportunity, as there are always Members willing to help out and, ultimately, we are all working towards the same goal of encouraging good practice and supporting our fellow professionals.

Unlocking some truths

Policing diverse communities is a hot topic but deaf people have not yet featured in research. Can remote interpreters and frontline police services work well together? By **Robert Skinner**

At the 2016 Scottish International Policing Conference, Phil Gormley (QPM), then the Chief Constable of Police Scotland, explained how 80% of the force's work entailed tending to non-crime related matters. The police deal with a far broader range of issues, such as traffic incidents, missing people, antisocial behaviour, domestic disputes etc.

This is striking because the academic attention on interpreter-mediated police interactions has concentrated on the investigative interview process. How frontline police services (eg custody suites, force control rooms, street patrol officer or front of desk) engage with someone who is deaf and uses BSL has yet to be researched. Policing diverse communities is a current theme in policing studies and there has not yet been a contribution from the deaf community. In my PhD research, I set out to look at frontline police settings where a crime may or may not have happened.

VRS and VRI in frontline police settings

When reflecting on frontline policing provision, the starting point was to proof-test the concept of video-relay service (VRS) or video remote interpreting (VRI). With the deaf person's need for a frontline service unpredictable, the option for the police to call on a remote interpreter is very attractive. There was one further caveat to my research focus – can remote interpreters and frontline police services work well together? It is not known how frontline services will perform when relying on an interpreter to assist someone who is deaf.

A brief summary of video-mediated interpreting (VMI)

Video-mediated interpreting is a term used to explain the way interpreters deliver their service. For the SLI profession, two main types of configurations are used: VRS and VRI.

There are challenges for interpreters when relocating their practice to call centre environments (see Skinner, Napier & Braun, 2018 for an overview). Regardless of whether the interpreter is present in the room, or joining the interaction via the VRS or VRI configuration, there will also be dependence on the deaf and hearing person's willingness to work with the interpreter, because 'no matter how well-trained and competent the [VRS/VRI] interpreter may be, if a police officer does not "allow" him/her to "do his/her job", the interpreter's performance will not be

satisfactory' (Perez & Wilson, 2007, 81). This latter point moves the focus across to the police and how they manage interactions with the public via an interpreter.

Policing a diverse population

Police forces in the UK have been challenged on their ability to serve different communities. Campaigns led by the black community and feminist groups probably stand out more than those by other social groups in terms of driving forward policing reform. The Stephen Lawrence inquiry is seen as a watershed moment, prompting a series of wide-ranging reforms spanning police recruitment/training through to policies and policing practices. The challenge for the police was to articulate a new set of values and practice that empowered the workforce to do its job and to rebuild public trust.

Access to Justice and PLODS

Across policing literature, there has been a lengthy discussion on how policing diverse communities should work. Contributions from the LGBT and Muslim communities, youth groups, deprived areas, the homeless sector and people with mental health issues have exposed the police's inability to cater for their needs. Little consideration has been afforded to deaf people. In the 1990s, the Access to Justice project, led by the Deaf Studies Research Unit at the University of Durham, conducted a nationwide review of deaf and hard of hearing people's experiences when accessing the British legal system (Brennan & Brown, 1997). With little follow-up, the work carried out by Brennan & Brown (1997) has not been sustained as part of this wider dialogue on policing diverse communities.

The broader diversity agenda did successfully place the subject of citizen diversity into police consciousness. The police now recognise their role in protecting human rights and promoting social order. This realisation has highlighted how the majority of policing is in fact concerned with people's vulnerabilities. Vulnerability is not used in the narrow sense, eg, an individual's association with certain minorities or social groups (Bartkowiak-Théron & Asquith, 2015); the points Macpherson was making were never to be limited to race, ethnicity, or cultural difference. Nonetheless, the policies and practices to emerge since the Macpherson Report have taken race and cultural difference as a template for the development of an ever-increasing number of siloed responses to vulnerability in the policing process. In this article, I examine the essential need to depart from the historical and siloed framing of police–race relations and argue that policies and practices should respond to vulnerability as a fundamental socio-cultural characteristic of all criminal justice encounters. After much public scrutiny, many vulnerable groups have now become the target of non-negotiable, precautionary protocols for police to abide by, in order to address the disadvantage caused by a variety of attributes (such as age, mental health, language) but in a 'broader sense' whereby one might be perceived as existing in a vulnerable situation (Chakraborti & Garland, 2009, 89).

Custody sergeants and call handlers

Framing policing as an issue of dealing with citizen vulnerability meant permitting the citizen space to retell their story. Instead of challenging or confronting citizens, the police would gain more by promoting talk and recognising the vulnerable situation a suspect, victim or witness may happen to be in. For example, custody sergeants now view

'With the deaf person's need for a frontline service unpredictable, the option for the police to call on a remote interpreter is very attractive'

their role as attending to a suspect's behaviour when they are booked into custody (Skinns, Rice, Sprawson, & Wooff, 2017). Custody sergeants are mindful of a suspect's emotions, using politeness and humour to promote to tackle undesirable behaviour in favour of a safe behaviour. Custody sergeants recognise their role in building relations with suspects, thus easing their concerns before participating in a police interview.

Call handlers in force control rooms field emergency and non-emergency calls, and have become adept at dealing with epistemic differences and speaker styles (Stafford, 2018). A call handler cannot see the citizen's actual environment and will have developed communication strategies that involve listening, identifying and probing aspects of a citizen's story. These examples present an interesting way forward for the police when dealing with citizens from different social backgrounds. The concept of policing vulnerability also holds much promise for interpreters, who are in the same predicament as the police, trying to piece together someone's story with little time or notice.

The VRS/VRI simulations

In collaboration with Police Scotland and SignVideo, we designed and tested two types of simulations. The first looked at 101 non-emergency VRS calls to Police Scotland's call handling centre. The calls were initiated by a deaf person and handled by SignVideo interpreters based around the UK. The VRS interpreters transferred the 101 call onto Police Scotland Govan call centre. The interpreters and call handlers had no prior knowledge of the call and were tested on how they spontaneously came together to completed standard frontline procedure. The second batch were VRI calls from Goven custody suite. A deaf person was brought into police custody and the custody sergeant was advised to call the SignVideo service. As with the VRS simulations, neither the custody sergeants or interpreters had prior knowledge of what was about to happen.

Positioning theory

To analyse how approaches to communication were negotiated, I applied Davies & Harré's (1990) positioning theory. When people engage in talk we can see how there are interactive rights and duties spread between participants. Harré (2012) summarises rights and duties as:

Rights: My rights are what you (or they) must do for me.
Duties: My duties are what I must do for you (or them). (Harré, 2012, 197)

Positioning theory therefore 'aims to examine and explore the distribution of rights and duties to speak and behave in certain ways among the participants of face-to-face interaction or intra-group relations' (Hirvonen, 2016, 1). This approach to analysing interactions means the investigator can focus more on how co-operation between all involved is reached. In what way do we see different actors remaining fixed within their role or demonstrating flexibility and willingness to enable others to perform their task? I am still analysing the data and

preliminary results suggest an improvement with how frontline police services work with an interpreter.

Frontline services were quick to recognise their collaborative role by considering how questions were formulated, moving the interaction forward in stages, waiting for interactive cues on when to take up their turn and allowing the interpreter to engage in side conversations for the purpose of correcting an interpretation. With the non-emergency VRS calls, there were more challenges for the interpreter as the structure of the citizen's story telling was more random and free. The issue here is keeping up with the citizen's storytelling and piecing together their concern. This inevitably meant mistakes in the interpretation crept through. Interestingly, the call handler instinctively revisited aspects of the citizen's story. This would be to identify further lines of inquiry or to correct mistakes in the call log. Here we see a shared challenge between interpreter and call handler. Both have a duty to make sense of another person's story. In both the VRS and VRI context, there were issues around ongoing communication. When a call handler advises a victim of hate crime to call back via the 999 platform, whose duty is it to highlight to the call handler that no such 999 VRS facility exists? The interpreters in my study would intervene if they were aware of such gaps. However, they did not always know how to comment on or advise the police with how to offer ongoing assistance to a deaf BSL user.

A challenge to SLIs

The police have been challenged on how they handle people's demands and convey to the public what they can realistically do. The interpreting profession has much to learn from how our police counterparts have taken on these criticisms. Can we succinctly explain what it is we as sign language interpreters do to someone outside the profession? Can we sum up what we are doing and why? There were clearly mixed abilities in how we explain our role and actions as interpreters. Failure to do this risks alienating others rather than enlisting their help in an interpretation.

One perfect example was during a VRS call, where an SLI explained an issue with image quality. The call handler recognised the need to step back and wait in total silence for 75 seconds. This was an example of a behaviour that empowered the interpreter to do their job. To behave like this means breaking completely free from the conduit model and placing greater value on interactive management techniques. This collaborative approach does not mean speaking on behalf of others or over interpreting another person's utterance, but explaining to others why an intervention is needed and possibly what is required in return.

Research often focuses on the moral role played by the interpreter's or professional/public service (eg, officer/lawyer/doctor). This is because researchers strive to translate their findings into training. The tracing of rights and duties means turning the focus to include the behaviours and actions of the deaf citizen. In doing so, the research describes a range of strategies where the citizen sought to manipulate how the interpreter functioned. Citizens would vary in their approach from limiting the interpreter to being a conduit or would align themselves as a co-worker.

There were examples of the citizen directing the interpreter to perform a certain action or an awareness and willingness to share responsibility in producing an interpretation. The citizen would feed the interpreter corrections, guide the interpreter through their story, offer more than one sign to remove ambiguity, invite the interpreter to confirm if they understand and provide the interpreter with that vital and reassuring nod.

VRS/VRI technologies may add a layer of complexity to how interpreter-mediated communication is experienced. Many of these known issues were mitigated by the strategies already put in place by call handlers and custody sergeants. Call handlers routinely manage telephone interactions and are used to not seeing and knowing the citizen's reality. Custody sergeants seek to slow the interaction down and create a collaborative environment to avoid antagonising the citizen.

Research should not only highlight problems but should also identify what works well. Information like this can be used to inform where VRS or VRI can be applied and why.

For more information about my research please visit my website www.proximityinterpreting.com. Information is available in English and BSL.

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