Deaf interpreters in Europe: a glimpse into the cradle of an emerging profession

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a research study exploring the work context and professional experiences of 11 Deaf interpreters based in Europe. Findings indicate that Deaf interpreters are not afforded the same educational opportunities or work experiences as hearing sign language interpreters in several European nations. Factors required for successful cooperation in Deaf/hearing interpreting teams are addressed in this study amongst which is increased awareness amongst hearing interpreters regarding the work and skill of Deaf interpreters.

Introduction

In the course of preparing for the 20th conference of the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (efsli) 2012 in Vienna, the demand for skilled Deaf interpreters in Austria became obvious as we were hardly able to staff the conference with Deaf interpreters. As there was no training programme at that time, the Austrian Association of Sign Language Interpreters organised a professional development event in cooperation with efsli on the topic of "Teamwork between hearing and Deaf interpreters in Austria" in January 2012. This was the initial professional learning session in a series aimed at the development of Deaf interpreters in Austria in 2012. In the same year, three of the participants started the BA programme for Deaf interpreters at the University of Hamburg, Germany.

Also in 2012, the first efsli working seminar for Deaf interpreters took place in Vienna. Twenty-five Deaf interpreters from across Europe took part in this event. The authors, who were interested in supporting their Deaf colleagues, used this opportunity to conduct interviews with 14 Deaf interpreters from 12 different countries[1]. They wanted to examine the situation of Deaf interpreters in various European countries and document their work circumstances in different nations.

1.   Literature Review

1.1   History of Deaf interpreting

Deaf interpreters have existed as long as there has been the need to communicate with the hearing world. Some Deaf people have been better suited than others to this task and assisted their peers at school, or their adult Deaf friends or family members when writing a letter or communicating with a work supervisor. This work as a language broker by some innately skilled Deaf people has historically not been considered to be a profession, but more like a form of peer support within the Deaf community. These informal interpreters have been described as "ghost writers" by some scholars, particularly when their role has involved written translation elements (Stone *et al.* 2008: 16), although the role is acknowledged to be broader than this:

> There are many possibilities for informal interpreting within the Deaf community where some members of the community possess numerous skills to act as communication facilitators. The context can be within a Deaf school, the workplace or when meeting professional hearing people such as lawyers, doctors, etc. This DI [Deaf interpreting] process can involve voicing, gesturing, writing, or using other signed languages. (Boudreault 2005: 324)

In the USA, sign language interpreting by Deaf people started to be considered as a profession when the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) established the Reverse Skills Certificate (RSC) in 1972. When legislation mandated communication accessibility in legal and medical services and the need for RSC interpreters became necessary for communication with semi-lingual Deaf consumers, this title was changed to Relay Interpreter Certificate. When the RID overhauled its certification system in the 1990s, they initially created a Certified Deaf Interpreter - Provisional (CDI-P) certificate. In 1997, the RID issued a Standard Practice Paper on the use of Certified Deaf Interpreters (RIDPSC 1997). Finally, the full Deaf Interpreter certification (CDI) was introduced in 1998 (Boudreault 2005: 325-326). Despite a formal certification process in place in the USA, there remains an ongoing discussion about the education and training opportunities and qualifications of Deaf interpreters, both in the USA and elsewhere (Gonzales 2005; Bontempo/Levitzke-Gray 2009; Adam *et al.* 2014).

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1   Unfortunately, some of the data was lost and digitally irretrievable so we ended up with 11 interviews to analyse.

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The most comprehensive discussion on Deaf interpreters published to date is presented by Patrick Boudreault (2005), a Canadian Deaf interpreter, who looks into the history of Deaf interpreting (USA and Canada), the roles of Deaf interpreters, various models of Deaf interpreter arrangements, ethical aspects and considerations on Deaf interpreter training programmes. He gives a detailed description of the multi-faceted field of Deaf interpreting (DI) and distinguishes between three types of work that can involve two languages (national Sign Language and International Sign - IS) but also "working from one language to some other form of Communication", that may involve drawing, gesturing, idiosyncratic signs or any kind of nonverbal communication adapting to the needs of the Deaf or Deaf-blind customer: 1. Mirroring, 2. Facilitating 3. Interpreting using International Sign (Boudreault 2005: 329).

Most of the existing literature describes the job, role, and function of a Deaf interpreter, gives an overview of the settings where Deaf interpreters may be working, such as hospitals, courtrooms, and in highly sensitive situations where "trust" would be a major issue (Bontempo/Levitzke-Gray 2009). Another area of work for Deaf interpreters is with Deaf-blind persons and with Deaf persons who have limited sign language skills, limited use of a foreign sign language, or generally limited communication skills. The advantages of the use of Deaf interpreters are underlined e.g. the saving of time and money as clear communication avoids long session times, or repeated sessions because of misunderstandings. Other researchers underscore the need for Deaf interpreters in an interpreting team (Neuman Solow 1988; Collins/Roth 1992; Frishberg 1990; Burns 1999; Sandefur 1994; Mindess 2006; Egnatovich 1999; Napier *et al.* 2006; Capps Dey 2009).

Although there is ample evidence of the need for Deaf interpreters, many Deaf consumers are still hesitant to use their services:

> The fact is that many Deaf people who encounter a Deaf interpreter for the first time assume that she is hearing, and when they find out that she is Deaf, they are suspicious and confused. (Boudreault 2005: 323)

Deaf people are not yet used to seeing their peers take on a role that historically has been reserved for hearing people. In addition, barriers are presented by wider society when hearing consumers of an interpreting service are not aware of the linguistic problems that may exist due to their lack of knowledge about Deaf communities, the lack of education access available to Deaf people in sign language and the fact that sign languages are fully-fledged languages with their own grammar, distinguishing them from the majority spoken language in each nation. Hearing consumers are often uncertain as to why a Deaf interpreter (in addition to a hearing sign language interpreter) would ever be necessary:

> Clearly identifying the requirements of semilingual Deaf persons is also important when explaining to service providers, government officials, courtroom and legal authorities, etc., what type of interpretation is appropriate so that the Deaf person will be able to understand and express herself comfortably. Many times this includes needing to explain why a DI-F should be part of the interpreting team. The most common explanation is that the hearing interpreter, even when certified, needs to work with a DI-F as the

only way to ensure that communication for all participants will be successful. (Boudreault 2005: 332)

Of course, another problem is the financial aspect of requiring the services of two interpreters instead of one: liable authorities do not see the gain in communication quality, but only the costs that are doubled while they face increasing costs in times of heavy cuts in social budgets (NCIEC 2009a: 11). Nevertheless, in societies where equal rights are mandated by laws and information access has become critical, the use of Deaf interpreters should not be questioned, as "[…] the major advantage of including DIs is that they are first language users of the signed language of the region and share the Deaf experience with the Deaf consumer" (Boudreault 2005: 335). The fact that the interpreter is seen as a peer helps establishing a rapport. The Deaf interpreter can even better advocate for the Deaf customer if needed.

The European situation is less developed and is documented by a report of the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (efsli) that was presented in September 2012 at the AGM held in Vienna that states that in most European countries there is a lack of formal training programmes for Deaf interpreters that can be seen as a major obstacle for the professionalisation of Deaf interpreters. In most European countries, Deaf interpreters are not admitted as members of their national association of sign language interpreters due to their lack of qualification (efsli 2012: 30).

In an interview from November 2012, Knut Weinmeister, a Deaf interpreter from Germany, describes the situation in his country after the first cohort of 12 certified Deaf interpreters left university in 2011. He complains about the lack of information about the availability of these Deaf interpreters with Deaf and hearing customers alike. It was not about financial issues, but about informing the authorities that there are Deaf interpreters. He sees it as the task of these interpreters themselves to raise awareness with the public (Weinmeister 2012; cf. efsli 2012: 29).

In his MA thesis on Interpreting with immigrant Deaf people in Finland, Ari Savulahti reports that Deaf interpreters are not yet in use there, although Finland officially recognised Finnish Sign Language in 1985. He states that, "The Finnish Association of the Deaf provides habilitation workers to be used in support of the Deaf throughout Finland" (Savulahti 2012: 12). Merely the use of the term 'habilitation worker' or 'support worker' indicates that the profession of Deaf interpreter has not yet been established, as it is still developing in other European countries, as will be seen from the results of this study.

1.2   Research on Deaf interpreting

In a comparative analysis of a direct and an intermediary interpretation involving a Deaf interpreter, Ressler (1999) found differences in pausing, eye gaze, head nodding, the number of signs produced per minute and in how clarifications were made. She states that even hearing interpreters with a long experience and good qualification, experience situations where "unfamiliar and subtle nuances

of the language can impede their ability to produce native-like interpretations in ASL" (Ressler 1999: 78).

In 2004, Brian Cerney conducted a study on relayed interpretation from English to American Sign Language (ASL) via a hearing and Deaf interpreter and found out that "relayed interpreting has beneficial qualities to the overall accuracy of messages and provides a greater opportunity to generate more culturally appropriate and idiomatic target texts than non-relayed interpreting" (Cerney 2004: 93).

In 2007, the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC) conducted a Survey among 196 Deaf interpreters in the US, enquiring about their areas of work, their experiences with hearing interpreters and their customers (NCIEC 2009b). In the same year, the NCIEC also conducted six focus group discussions with 26 Deaf working interpreters on topics like formative experiences of Deaf interpreters, professional standards and expectations, formal preparation of Deaf interpreters, and employment issues (NCIEC 2009a). In the last five years, more studies on Deaf interpreters and their way of working and co-working with hearing interpreters have been conducted.

Stone, Adam and Carty (2008) conducted in depth interviews with Deaf translators/interpreters from Australia about their experiences and found that they usually translated/interpreted in both Deaf and mainstream settings. The Deaf interpreters reported that they:

> [...] worked between a range of language forms, including written English, lip-reading, spoken/mouthed English, DeafBlind manual as well as interpreting between Australian Irish Sign Language and Australian Sign Language. (Stone *et al.* 2008)

In 2010, Bentley-Sassaman and Dawson conducted a phenomenological study with six hearing interpreters who had worked for at least five years in a team with a Deaf interpreter and six Deaf interpreters to learn about their experiences with working in a Deaf-hearing interpreter team, especially focusing on teamwork and preparation. They conducted interview sessions with Deaf and hearing interpreters in separate groups to allow them to comment candidly. The authors found "[...] that Deaf-hearing interpreter teams are more effective when the team has time to preconference and to discuss the assignment" (Bentley-Sassaman/Dawson 2012: 24 - pdf version).

Eileen M. Forestal has looked into the thought processes of six Deaf interpreters using a three-phase approach: a preliminary interview, a Think Aloud Protocol, and a retro-debriefing interview. She wanted to identify the strategies and recourses for effective interpretation (Forestal 2011).

Stone and Russell conducted a study using videotaped data of two Deaf-hearing interpreter teams (ASL-IS and BSL-IS) in a conference. The videos were analysed to examine the linguistic decisions of hearing and Deaf interpreters and identify their meta-communication strategies (Stone/Russell 2011).

In the same year, Roberson Russell and Shaw conducted a survey with 1,995 interpreters consisting of 64 questions on interpreting in legal settings. Only 5% of the respondents were Deaf or hard-of-hearing. 35.9% of the hearing interpreters reported they always or usually team with Deaf colleagues. When asked for

the reasons for teaming with a Deaf colleague, they mentioned language issues, the complexity of the case and Deaf consumers' linguistic needs. They also mentioned that availability of a Deaf interpreter colleague was an important factor. The following personal aspects relating to the Deaf customer were considered as particularly challenging: signing style, lack of familiarity with legal processes, low level of education, cognitive ability and mental health issues (Roberson *et al.* 2011: 74).

The latest publication on Deaf Interpreting is an anthology: *Deaf Interpreters at Work* by Adam, Stone, Collins and Metzger (eds.). In the first chapter, five Deaf interpreters give an introduction to Deaf interpreting, compare Deaf interpreters to hearing interpreters, and discuss the assignments for Deaf interpreters and their positioning (Adam *et al.* 2014). The second chapter presents the findings of a study on team strategies in Deaf interpreter teams working for a deaf-blind individual (Sforza 2014). In the third chapter, Forestal presents a study from 2011 on Deaf interpreters' strategies to facilitate communication between Deaf and hearing consumers and their hearing team member (Forestal 2014). The fourth chapter looks into the professionalization and certification of Deaf interpreters in Australia (Bontempo *et al.* 2014). In the fifth chapter, Nicodemus and Taylor present a study on Deaf and hearing interpreting team preparation using Conversation Analysis drawing on ASL interpretations of an English source text. The sixth chapter looks into linguistic aspects of Deaf-Blind interpreting (Collins 2014). The last chapter presents a study by Stone and Russel comparing strategies of Deaf interpreters and non-deaf interpreters working as interpreting teams between English/BSL/ASL and IS (Stone/Russel 2014; cf. Stone/Russel 2011).

Most of the research known to the authors strongly concentrates on comparing the strategies of Deaf and hearing interpreters, taking stock of the current situation and working conditions as well as of teams of hearing/Deaf interpreters. Most studies have been conducted in the English-speaking part of the world, the efsli study in 2012 being the only research on the situation in Europe so far. This is the main reason why the authors set out to look at the European scenario themselves.

2.   Research focus

The authors have a strong interest in the promotion of the profession of Deaf interpreters in Austria. Being working interpreters ourselves, we are aware that teaming with Deaf interpreters would likely improve the quality of our work in many settings as mentioned in several of the research studies undertaken to date. We want to work with them in the future and we are interested in how to best co-work with Deaf interpreters. Specifically, we are keen to establish which are the main aspects that should not be neglected when working in Deaf-hearing teams. Hence, the following themes were covered in this research study:

– an overview of the situation of Deaf interpreters in several European countries (education and training opportunities, frequency and type of assignments, areas of work, payment, working conditions);

   – co-operation strategies applied with hearing interpreters/co-workers;

   – an understanding of the power relations within the interpreter communi-
ty (individual Deaf/hearing teams, local interpreter association, agencies).

3. Study design

3.1 Participants

The study was conducted among 11 Deaf interpreters from 9 European countries
(Austria – A, Switzerland – CH, Czech Republic – CZ, Denmark – DK (2 interpret-
ers), Spain – E, Germany – G, Italy – I, Portugal – P, Poland – PL) and the USA.
There were no selection criteria, but the intention to have as many countries rep-
resented as possible. All the participants in the Deaf interpreter working sem-
inar were approached and the interviews were conducted with all interpreters
who were ready to participate. There were five women and six men from 25 to 52
years of age. They had worked as interpreters from 0 to 29 years.

One of the interviewees was not an interpreter herself, but a Deaf profession-
al teaching hearing interpreters at an academic level (CH). Two interpreters were
not experienced in actual work, one having completed her education (G) and one
only having experience from some internship in her ongoing education (A).

In the discussion of the data, the respondents are identified by using the code
of their country. As there were two respondents from Denmark (DK), they were
distinguished by adding a number (DK1, DK2).

For the sake of readability the authors have decided to use the feminine pro-
noun for interpreters, as, in general, the majority of interpreters are women.

3.2 Method

The data was gathered via semi-structured expert interviews (Mayring 2002:
67ff) conducted in International Sign and in Austrian Sign Language in 2012 (10
participants) and 2013 (1 participant). The 19 questions asked were open-ended
questions (see Appendix). Initially, twelve interviews were conducted in Vienna
in September 2012, two were conducted in London in November 2012 and one
in Vienna in November 2013. Unfortunately, the data of four interviews was lost
and the authors ended up with 11 interviews.

The interviews consisted of 14 questions and several sub-questions on the
work situation and context of the country and on cooperation with hearing in-
terpreters when working in a team. The length of the interviews varied from
14 to 23 minutes. They were all undertaken in sign language (10 in IS and one
in Austrian Sign Language). Most of the questions were open-ended questions
where the interpreters could answer with whatever came into their minds. The
disadvantage of this method is that a person may forget to mention things or not
think of aspects that may seem obvious to her. The advantage is that by using this
method one gets the most important points that are in the conscious part of the
participants' minds.

The data were organised in tables, the answers were classified and tagged. The results were evaluated and the occurrences of similar items were tallied.

3.3 Limitations of the study

The authors are well aware of some limitations of this study.

The respondents were chosen from a sample that consisted of the participants of the first Deaf interpreter working seminar of efsli held in Vienna in 2012. They may not be representative of the situation of their respective country.

The interviews were conducted by several different interviewers who did not all meticulously follow the interview guidelines, did not want to bias the respondents by directing their attention to a specific topic or by asking back, or were interested in different aspects of the answers. Consequently, the transcribed data are not complete, as not all the questions were answered by all the interviewees. When discussing the results, the number of respondents will be indicated.

Another problem was a hardware crash that ruined four of the interviews that could not be reconstructed (two interviews from the Netherlands, one from the UK, and one from Austria were lost). This explains an additional interview with a second Deaf interpreter from Austria undertaken in November 2013 to represent the situation in that country. In the end, data was obtained from 11 interviewees from 10 European countries who had answered most of the questions of the interview schedule.

4. Results and discussion

In this section, the results are organized and discussed in two sub-sections: working conditions (education, membership of interpreter associations, assignments and rates) and cooperation with hearing interpreters.

4.1 Working conditions

The authors were interested in the work situation of Deaf interpreters in their respective countries. Table 1 illustrates the situation among the 11 interviewees regarding their education and membership of a National Association of Sign Language Interpreters (NASLI):

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Deaf interviewee	Country	Formal Education	Education to come	Hearing NASLI	Deaf membership in NASLI
A	Austria	yes (on going)	2013: Logo Salzburg	yes	yes (only associate)
CH	Switzerland	no		yes	no
CZ	Czech Republic	yes (non-academic)		yes	yes
DK1	Denmark	no		yes	no
DK2	Denmark	no		yes	no
E	Spain	no		yes	(no answer)
G	Germany	yes (BA)		yes	no
I	Italy	no		yes	no
P	Portugal	no	october 2012: 1 year postgraduate special education	yes	no
PL	Poland	no		yes	yes
USA	USA	yes (BA)	2013: seminars by Deaf association, 2014: BA	yes	yes

Table 1. Education and membership of Deaf interpreters

4.1.1 Education

When asked about their formal education background in relation to interpreting, seven answered that they had no formal education, one reported to have experienced formal non-academic education (CZ), two had obtained a BA degree at university (G and USA) and one is in the process of finishing her BA (A). These results fall in line with the results of the efsli Report (efsli 2012: 19) where only 4 out of 17 countries in Europe were found to offer formal education for Deaf interpreters (Finland, France, Germany and the UK: England, Northern Ireland and Wales).

Three Deaf interpreters reported that formal education is expected to be established in the near future in their home country (A, P and USA).

4.1.2 Interpreter associations

All 11 respondents reported that there is an interpreter association for the hearing interpreters in their country, however, in only four of the 10 countries, are Deaf interpreters eligible to become members of that association (A – associate member, CZ, PL and USA). This situation is worse than in the 17 European countries that participated in the efsli survey where ten of the NASLIs (58.8%) accepted Deaf colleagues as members (Belgium, England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Finland, France, Germany, Poland, Slovakia and Spain – full membership, Serbia – associate membership, Estonia – full membership for certified interpreters or

associate membership without a certificate) (efsli 2012: 25). There are no specific Deaf interpreter associations in these countries, but in the USA, there is a special section for Deaf members within the interpreter association (Deaf Caucus of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf – RID). One of the interviewees did not see the need for a Deaf interpreter association:

> There is no association of Deaf interpreters, but I think that it is no use to have one, as the professional association is about interpreting and not about the hearing status. (A)

4.1.3 Working situation

The authors wanted to know if the Deaf interpreters worked full time or if they had another job from which they made their living.

Of the nine interpreters who were asked that question, only two answered that they could live on interpreting income alone (DK2 and E), the rest reported other employment, such as working as an interpreter trainer (E), in research projects (G), in an office doing accounting (PL), as teachers of sign language (CZ and USA) and as a teacher for Deaf pupils (A). One did not detail her work.

Participants were asked where most of their interpreting assignments occur. Figure 1 shows the main settings in which Deaf interpreters work:
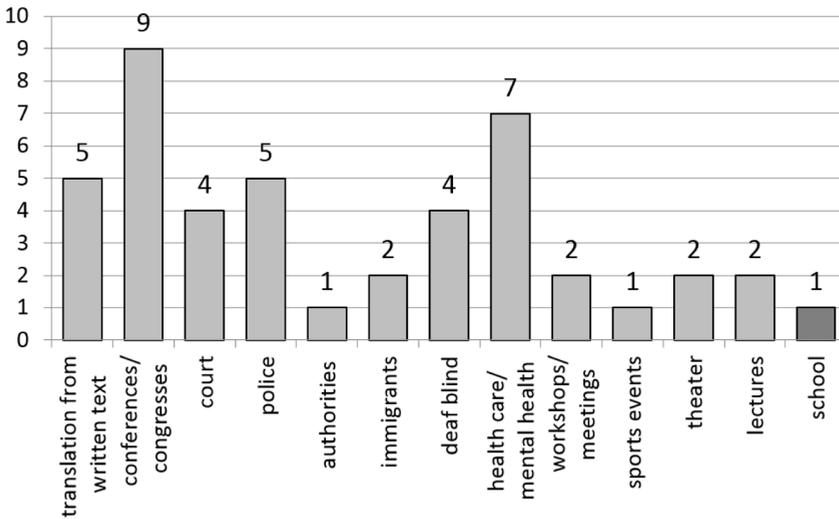
Figure 1. Areas of work (n=11)

The bar graph shows that Deaf interpreters have a broad range of different settings to work in. As expected, most of them work at conferences (9), in health care/mental health care settings (7), with the police (5) and do translations from written text into their national sign language or International Sign, e.g. for websites or news programmes (5). Interestingly, it seems to be uncommon in Eu-

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rope to employ Deaf interpreters in schools, as the only interpreter mentioning school came from the USA. The same interpreter reported that Philadelphia had passed a law some 10 years ago that obliges courts and medical care institutions to provide Deaf interpreters alongside their hearing colleagues for all consultations of Deaf clients and patients (cf. Forestal 2005: 235).

When asked if they earned the same hourly rates as their hearing colleagues, nine interviewees answered that they did. One mentioned that she did not know (E) and one said that the situation was still unclear because the profession was not yet recognised (CH). Interestingly, one interpreter reported that she received a higher hourly wage working with the police and in mental health settings if the Deaf person had minimal language skills, as her work was considered more challenging than that of her hearing colleague (CZ). One interpreter mentioned that for medical assignments, she is paid by the doctor, because the authorities only cover the costs of one hearing interpreter for the assignment (DK). Three interpreters reported also commonly working *pro bono* (P - for Deafblind clients, PL and USA).

All European respondents said that the number of Deaf interpreters within their countries was small and varied from two (A – in education) to 13 (DK). In the USA, there are some 140 certified Deaf interpreters and another 300 or so Deaf interpreters believed to be working without certification.

4.1.4 Assignments

The Deaf interpreters were asked how they received their assignments and if there was an agency that organised their work (see Figure 2).
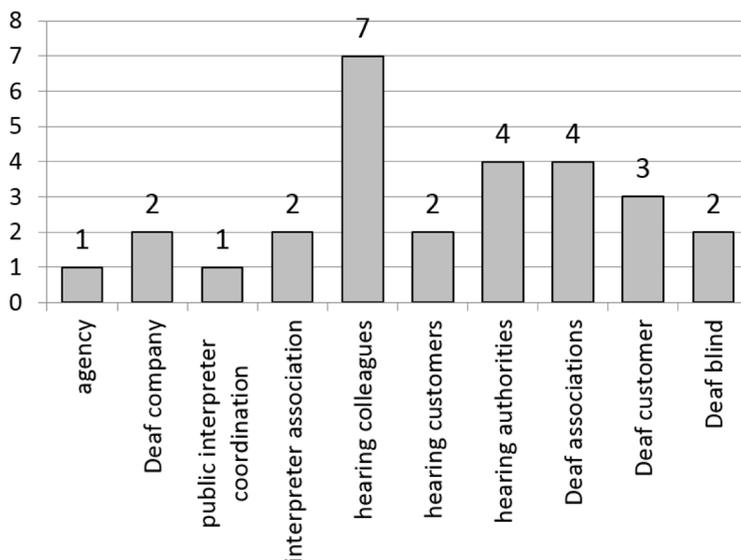
Figure 2. Who books the Deaf interpreters? (n=11)

The results clearly show that most assignments seem to come from hearing colleagues who ask the Deaf colleague to work with them (7). Few assignments seem to come from Deaf customers (3), some are organised via the Deaf association (4) or the interpreter association (2). The interpreter from the USA reported that an agency gives her assignments. In one country, there is a company run by a Deaf person (DK) that obtains the assignments from the customers.

The fact that the most frequent way of booking seems to be via hearing interpreters indicates their interest in cooperating with Deaf interpreters. Similar findings were reported by Bentley-Sassaman and Dawson in 2012. The hearing interpreters participating in their study had stressed their readiness to work with Deaf interpreters. This contradicts the situation reported by Capps Dey who mentions Deaf interpreters complaining about the lack of respect and recognition by hearing colleagues (Capps Dey 2009: 44). Nevertheless, some of the respondents of this study also mentioned power imbalances with hearing interpreters when teaming for the first time or with newcomers on the interpreting scene (see section 4.2.4).

4.2   Working in a Deaf-hearing team

In this section, the authors analyse the cooperation of Deaf and hearing interpreters, their contact with their customers/consumers, their communication strategies, their processing of assignments, their practices, and their expectations of good teamwork.

When asked if they worked in regular teams with hearing colleagues, eight respondents answered "yes", one "no" (CH) and one said that a regular team was only necessary in high level assignments like congresses, not in community settings (A – interpreter has only worked in internships). One interpreter did not answer this question (G). Seven interpreters gave details on the size of the hearing interpreter pool they were regularly teaming with (ranging from 1 to 7). If working at an international level, one interviewee mentioned having to team with other hearing interpreters he had never met before (E).

As to the composition of their teams, seven respondents reported being able to choose their hearing co-worker, two said that it was the agency (CH) or the Deaf company (DK2) that decided on the composition of the team.

4.2.1 Processing the assignment

When asked about establishing and keeping in **contact with the customer** after the booking, nine respondents answered that both hearing and deaf interpreters had contact with their customers, only one reported the deaf interpreter to have contact while not explicitly mentioning the hearing interpreter's contact (G), another said that it was the duty of the hearing interpreter (P).

With regard to **preparation of the assignment**, all of the respondents (n=10, without CH due to missing data) reported that they prepared for the assignment

at home by themselves. Nine of them said that they met their hearing co-interpreter beforehand to discuss the content or the vocabulary (5: DK1, E, G, I and PL), five respondents said, that they would ask the speaker for a briefing on site (DK1, E, G, PL and USA). Only one interpreter mentioned they would regularly go to interpret in community settings without any preparation (CZ).

When asked who was responsible for providing **preparation material**, three answered that it was the contact person of the customer (A, DK1 and I), two answered that it was the task of the hearing interpreter (G and P), two replied that it was the coordinator (E and PL), one thought that both interpreters were responsible (CZ), one answered that she was doing it either herself or that the agency was responsible for providing preparation material (USA).

As to **communication on site**, the participants answered as shown in Figure 3:
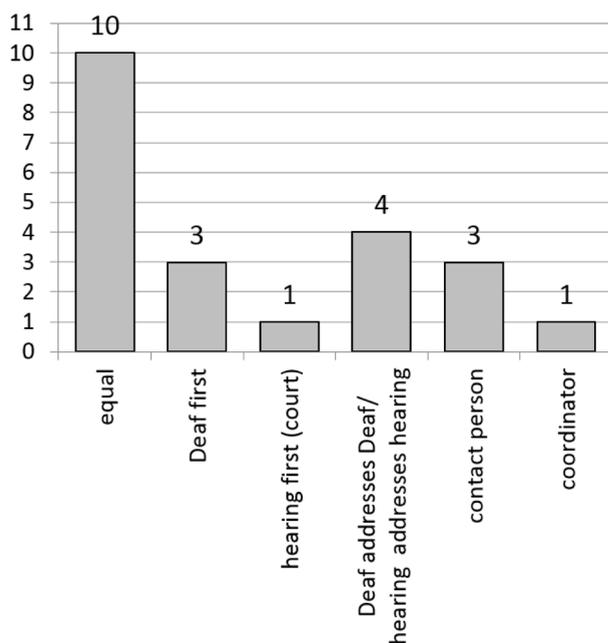
Figure 3. Communication on site (n=10, without CH)

Once on site, Deaf interpreters indicated they all felt equal to their hearing colleagues and that they would share the lead in terms of communication and directives on site (such as introductions and explaining how the interpreting will work, or where the interpreters need to stand). Four of them said that it was natural that the deaf interpreter would address the deaf customer, the hearing would talk to the hearing customer (A, DK1, DK2 and I). Three said that it depended on the situation and on who had had the first contact with whom (A, G and PL). Interestingly enough, there were three who said that the Deaf interpreter would be the one communicating and the hearing interpreter would be interpreting for her (CZ, P and USA):

Usually it is me who addresses the customer first using sign language, my co-worker does the voicing. I have never experienced my hearing co-interpreter trying to dominate or start first, they have always been respectful and I was given the floor. (P)

The next topic addressed was **communication within the team** while the interpretation was going on. The respondents were asked to talk about communication strategies (see Figure 4).
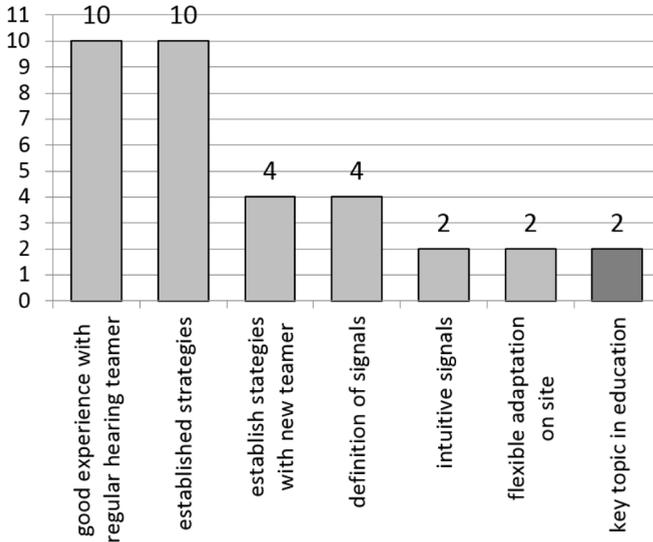

Figure 4. Communication with the co-interpreter while working (n=10, without CH)

All of the respondents reported very good experiences with their regular co-worker. They mentioned the need to have established strategies of signalling. Four stressed the need for defining signals before starting to work (A, DK1, I and USA), two of the respondents reported depending on intuitive strategies of communication that have not been formally agreed upon (P and USA), and two stressed the fact that signalling (mode and volume) depended on the setting (DK1 and DK2). Four explicitly mentioned the time and effort needed for establishing a strategy with a new co-worker (A, CZ, E and USA):

In the beginning, I instructed my hearing co-interpreter about how to work, how to feed, how to communicate. For me, eye contact is a key issue. After having solved some initial problems, we became a good team and have been working together smoothly. (CZ)

Two stressed the need to include training sessions with the hearing co-worker into the curricula of the deaf interpreter education programmes (A and CZ).

As to **feedback** after or during the assignments, the ten respondents (without CH) mentioned several topics. All of them reported on the importance of reflecting on their work with their hearing co-worker; seven of them mentioned that

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they did it after every assignment. Three reported they do not always have feedback sessions per se, only in the case of problems arising (P and PL). This was noted as sometimes being due to a lack of opportunity when teaming with a hearing interpreter abroad (E). They all reported a need to reflect on assignments to avoid miscommunication or problems in the team the next time and to improve the quality of their work. They mentioned different forms of feedback: analysis of notes and videos taken during the assignment, reflecting on problems and aspects of their work, sharing of feelings and observations. Five reported that they also had feedback sessions and exchange with other Deaf colleagues (A, DK1, DK2, G and USA).

4.2.2 Improving teamwork

When asked if they had **practice sessions** with their hearing colleague, eight of the nine interviewees (without CH and CZ) who had been asked the question answered that they did practise team interpreting. One respondent with little experience with team working answered as follows:

> If both interpreters have had a formal education and are certified, they know the rules and know what to do; interpreters only need practice, if they have had no formal education. (G)

As to the frequency of practice, all but one (DK2) of the interpreters reported that their practice sessions were irregular and depended on assignments they were preparing for. One interpreter stressed the need for practising and mentioned that she would appreciate if there were opportunities offered for seminars by the national and European associations (A). On the form of these practice sessions, one respondent reported as follows:

> At the company, we do training sessions with cameras and analyse the videos, discuss the situations, the feeding process and try to find solutions. (DK2)

Another way of improving teamwork is **mentoring**, the continuous exchange between an experienced interpreter and a newer interpreter. Mentor and mentee have an ongoing developmental partnership and meet to discuss problems or issues regarding the work of the new interpreter. Seven of the nine interpreters in this study who commented on mentoring did not have a clear concept of mentoring, they misinterpreted mentoring as supervising or feedback, only two respondents were reasonably well acquainted with the concept of mentoring (DK1 and A), but both had no experience with it.

This misconception of mentoring in the field of sign language interpreting in Europe was also found by de Wit, Schaumberger, and Salami in their study on mentorship in Europe. They report that:

> […] the majority of the interpreters think it is a specific way of giving or receiving feedback, more or less frequently, a rather informal relationship between someone who

shares knowledge with a less experienced colleague. None of the respondents used the terms "mentor" and "mentee" (or protégé) to characterize the persons involved. (de Wit *et al.* 2013: 31)

Six respondents mentioned already working with hearing interpreters in a training type role (DK1, DK2, I, P, PL and USA). One Deaf interpreter reported on her activities as follows:

Recently I have worked with a group of hearing interpreter "babies" whom I tried to teach about volume in signing and deaf needs, I felt like a mother hen. (I)

4.2.3 A good co-worker

The authors, being hearing interpreters themselves, were very interested in exploring what their Deaf colleagues considered good teamwork and what their expectations of a good team interpreter were. For the analysis of this part of the data, the authors used a classification of items developed by Brück (2011) that uses a colour code to group items that are aspects of teamwork.

The following items were mentioned in respect to good teamwork (see Figure 5):
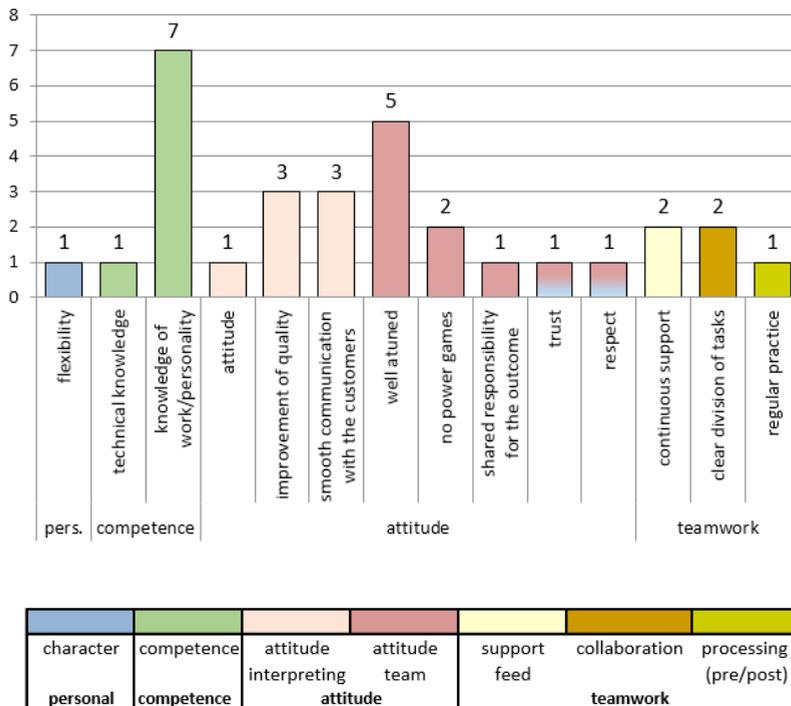
Figure 5. Good teamwork (n=10, without CH)

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The item "knowledge of work/personality" was considered most important by almost all respondents (7), followed by the item "well attuned", meaning that the team should be used to working together and knows how to adapt to each other. Most of the items mentioned concerned attitude towards interpreting (attitude to work, readiness for improvement and communication with customers) or towards the team (well attuned, no power games, shared responsibility, trust and respect). Trust and respect may also be classified as personal character items and have two colours to indicate that double classification. Only little focus is laid on the actual work or strategies for working, a result that underlines the findings of Patricia Brück in her study on team interpreting where she compared the views of Deaf customers and their interpreters. In her study, the focus of the interpreters regarding teamwork is also mainly on knowledge and attitude (Brück 2011: 61). The stress on switching is explained by the fact that hearing interpreter teams change primary and support roles, which can be very disruptive if not done deftly.

When asked what they would expect from a good co-interpreter, the nine respondents who answered this question mentioned the following items (Figure 6):
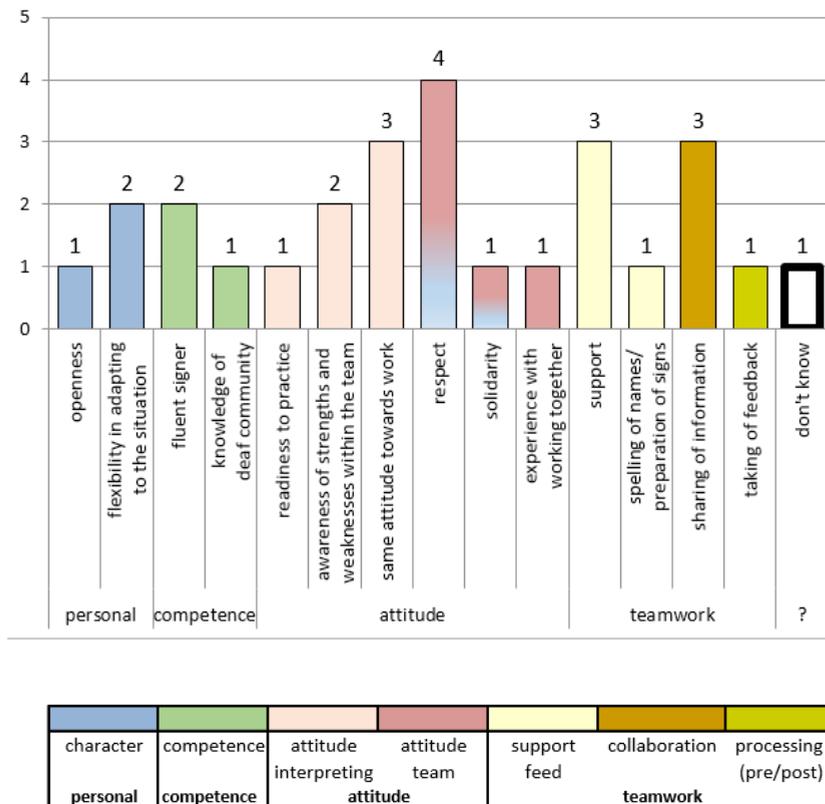
Figure 6. Expectations of a good team interpreter (n=9, without CH, G)

Again, most features mentioned can be categorized under attitude: respect (4: A, E, P and USA) and attitude towards work (3: G, DK1 and E) were mentioned with the highest frequency. Like the hearing interpreters in Brück's study (2011: 65, 67), the attitude features are the most frequently mentioned.

4.2.4 An evolving profession

The respondents are aware of the need to develop the Deaf interpreting profession and to make their skills and their service known to hearing and Deaf members of the public. This is even more urgently needed in countries where Deaf interpreting is not common and the Deaf community remains unserved or underserved with regard to interpreting services. One respondent described her efforts to promote awareness of Deaf interpreters among the Deaf community:

> My deaf colleague and I have given speeches to inform the Deaf community about Deaf interpreting, as a kind of PR activity. We have been to several Deaf clubs in Austria to inform about our emerging profession, about what we can offer and the audience was very interested. We hope that they will remember us if needs be and give us assignments. (A)

Awareness raising is also an issue with our hearing interpreter colleagues. When asked about power imbalances in the relation to hearing interpreters, all ten Deaf respondents (without CH) said they felt equal in their regular teams. However, three reported to have experienced perceived imbalances in equality in the past because of their lack of certification (DK1, DK2 and I). Three mentioned that they may have felt a lack of respect from newer interpreters they had not worked with before (G, I and USA), but one reported that she had quickly felt equal when she had addressed the issue with them (I).

These results fall in line with the efsli report stating that "lobbying for the recognition and valuation of this kind of interpretation is also needed" (efsli 2012: 29).

5. Conclusion

Deaf interpreters in Europe are still an emerging profession. Interestingly though, based on the data collected herein, it would appear their situation is not so much worse than that of Deaf interpreters in the USA despite much more well-established certification processes and formalised status for Deaf interpreters there.

The number of skilled practising Deaf interpreters in Europe is low, with the biggest number mentioned being 13 in one country. There is little formal education offered, let alone at a higher academic level. There are no deaf interpreter associations and many Deaf interpreters are yet to be admitted to most of the hearing interpreter associations. Most of them interpret occasionally and earn their living by teaching or working on various sign language projects. Most assignments are in conferences, health care and mental health, with the police and

as translators in TV programmes or for websites. They are paid the same rates as their hearing colleagues. Mostly, they are booked by hearing customers, associations, or hearing colleagues. What they value most in teamwork is the profound knowledge of the team partner, being in harmony with them, having a similar attitude to work, experiencing respect, support, as well as the sharing of information.

In general, they work well with their regular team mates and feel on an equal level, although they report power imbalances with some hearing interpreters who may not be used to working with Deaf colleagues.

The authors recommend the following measures to improve the general situation of Deaf interpreters as well as the cooperation of Deaf and hearing interpreting teams. When compiling this list, they thought of the steps that need to be taken in some countries where Deaf interpreters are just emerging (e.g. Austria):

1. Lobbying and awareness-raising amongst hearing interpreters to prepare them for team work with Deaf interpreters:
   a. admission of Deaf interpreters into the national SLI associations,
   b. further professional training with hearing/Deaf interpreter teams,
   c. group discussions at regular professional meetings.
2. Opening of formal education to Deaf interpreters.
3. Inclusion of the topic of team work with mixed hearing/Deaf interpreter teams into the curricula of SLI education:
   a. gain of the use of mixed hearing/Deaf interpreter teams,
   b. areas for team work and their characteristics,
   c. strategies for team work,
   d. practice for different interpreting settings (conference vs. community interpreting).
4. Lobbying and awareness raising amongst hearing and deaf customers:
   a. lobbying by the SLI associations to have authorities accept double fees for an increase in interpreting quality (e.g. in court or for medical assignments),
   b. continuous lobbying by hearing interpreters for mixed interpreting teams,
   c. lectures at Deaf Clubs by hearing/Deaf interpreter teams.
5. Research on several aspects of Deaf interpreting:
   a. problems and needs of Deaf customers with minimal language skills/ immigrant Deaf customers,
   b. team working strategies in mixed teams of hearing and Deaf interpreters,
   c. best practices of Deaf interpreting,
   d. deaf interpreters in special settings (in court, in healthcare interpreting, etc.).

The authors are aware of the fact that their investigation can only be a start of the research that has to be done on Deaf interpreters in Europe, but they sincerely hope to have contributed to that task by presenting this study.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix

Interview: Deaf Interpreters in Europe

FRAME WORK:

1. What formal education have you received?
   i. How long was your education?
   ii. What was the structure of your education?
2. Does your country have an association of Deaf interpreters?
   i. When was it founded?
3. What is your hourly rate?
   i. Do you get the same rate as hearing interpreters?

4. Can you earn your living from sign language interpreting?
   i. Which are your other professions?
5. How many deaf interpreters are there in your country?

Cooperation with hearing interpreters

1. Do you work in regular teams?
2. Who establishes contact with your customers?
   – the hearing interpreter?
   – you?
   – an agency?
   1. Do you choose your team partner yourself?
   2. Does the agency compose the team?
3. Who does the communication on site?
   1. Deaf interpreter
   2. Hearing interpreter
   3. How do you feel as a Deaf person?
4. How do you prepare for your assignments?
   i. Who contacts your customer for preparation material?
5. How do you communicate with your feeder when interpreting?
   i. What are your communication strategies?
   ii. Is there regular feedback?
   If so, which kind of feedback and how open?
6. What do you expect from your hearing co-worker?
7. Do you do exercises in the team?
   If so, how and how often?
8. Have you already worked as a mentor for hearing or Deaf interpreters?
   If so, how?
9. Is there a power imbalance in the team?