



We have lived and interpreted together for 30 years, which has led to some interesting arguments (“Your speech act was condescending ...”). It has also led to decades of work developing our team interpreting skills.

Before and After Photos from Nancy’s Perspective as Feed/Support Interpreter

We had just finished a long assignment when the deaf presenter returned to the stage and announced that the banquet was not ready. To fill the time, he spoke about his hobby: clogging (an Appalachian dance form).

Our team interpreting model involves both production and support interpreters (PIs and SIs), sharing responsibility for an accurate interpretation. I had, however, mentally clocked out when I expected dinner to begin. I saw the speaker describing the costumes worn by female cloggers. I heard Chuck pause, searching for the appropriate adjective for the skirts.

I think of my feed role as standing behind my trusting teammate and catching him when he leans back for support. This time, however, I let him fall. I did not suggest “flowing” or “flouncy.” Chuck, obviously fatigued, sputtered, “... bushy skirts.”

After letting him fall, I kicked him, smacking his knee and saying, “You can’t say *bushy* skirts.”

Chuck hissed, “I just did.”

Fast forward two decades. We were interpreting a plenary message into ASL. The speaker, for whom we had often interpreted, told a story about losing his fourteen-year-old daughter in a crowded arena. He said, “To make matters worse, she’s tall for her age.”

As SI, my internal “feeding” frenzy began:

- Being tall should make her easier to find in the crowd (rather than worsening the problem).
- What is this reserved speaker trying to communicate?
- I visualized him looking for his daughter in the crowd and wondered what was on his mind.
- Light bulb: His daughter looks more like a woman than a girl and all of the men suddenly look like predators.

I “fed” Chuck the glosses: “SHE SHAPELY.” Later, the speaker confirmed that our interpretation was accurate.

Before and After Photos from Chuck’s Perspective as Feed/Support Interpreter

Nancy was interpreting from English to ASL. The acoustics were problematic. Because she had missed an important book title in the reverberating acoustics, Nancy had to wave her hand in my face to get my attention and the information she needed.

Fast forward two decades. Nancy was interpreting into English. The deaf speaker began a story. Nancy interpreted slowly, waiting to see the connection to the speaker’s point. Nancy paused, still not getting the connection. She was so focused on this textual connection that she began missing the story’s conclusion. She panicked and tried to hand me the microphone. Because her interpretation up to this point had matched the speaker’s register with excellent word choices, I chose to encourage her and give her a large chunk of feed. I explained the connection, then fed her several sentences to conclude the story. Nancy then continued producing a successful interpretation.

Two to Tango

When he was a teenager, Chuck loved watching his parents dance. He once commented on how different their style of dancing was from that of his friends. His mother replied, “That’s because we dance together.” In honor of our interpreting dance, we worked together to write the following section.

We began with these basic steps (which we will highlight through examples):

Specific Lexical Items:

- While the PI maintains sufficient processing time, the SI feeds items that must be carried through in their lexical form: names, dates, titles, Scripture references, etc.
- The SI feeds words that the PI did not understand (due to speaker accent, uncomprehended fingerspelling, etc.).

Omissions:

- “Nice expansion tying Joe Paterno to the ‘Got Milk?’ billboard, but you omitted the point that he is Penn State’s football coach.”

Background information that helps the PI’s decision-making process:

- “He said, ‘Sixth point.’ He meant, ‘Seventh point.’”
- “That lake she keeps referring to is the Sea of Galilee.”

Corrections:

- [The speaker said, “The elders of Israel assisted the judges...”]: “You used the sign for ‘judge-in-a-courtroom,’ but Israelite judges were short-term leaders during crises.”

Word choices:

- “You’ve said ‘oppressive’ often. Try ‘patronizing’ or ‘condescending.’”

Proactive support:

- [She signed “VOICE INTERPRETER”]: “Say ‘interpreter.’”
- [He signed “TWO-OF-US SAT DOWN”]: “Say, ‘During my interview...’”
- “He lay **prostrate**,” [when you know your teammate is likely to say, “He lay *prostate*”].

Monitor message equivalence:

- “The speaker’s goal is to inspire. Your interpretation is informing.”
- “The speaker never smiles. You keep smiling.”
- “Pump up the intensity.”
- “This is formal register. Use technical English vocabulary: ‘hermeneutics’ and ‘exegesis.’”

Environmental information:

- When interpreting a plenary message into ASL, the PI often cannot see the speaker’s actions, facial expressions, gestures, etc.: “He just threw his hat in the air.”
- The PI may need information about his/her physical space: “There is better lighting to your left.”

Then we added fancier footwork. Based on frequent conversations about our interpreting and teaming skills, we worked on specific support functions. Initially, we focused primarily

on one of the following skills. As we became comfortable giving and receiving that specific type of feed, we added another area. Now, we focus on all these types of feed every time we interpret.

Cultural and/or linguistic adjustments:

- “Instead of describing the bags under Lincoln’s eyes and the deepening wrinkles in his forehead, try, ‘Lincoln was weighed down by the pressures of leading our nation ...’”
- [The hearing speaker referred to ancient Middle Eastern empires]: “Sign, ‘Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, etc.’”

Predictions and degree of certainty:

- “She hasn’t said it yet, but I **know** she’s talking about Obama’s childhood.”
- “I *think* he’s going to tie this to Watergate, which happened the same year.”

Transitions: Because of the processing time needed to produce high quality interpreting, PIs might miss transitions to new points. SIs can feed those transitions.

- The deaf speaker explained many reasons why parents of deaf children should learn ASL and is beginning to talk about parental advocacy in the schools. The SI feeds a statement that summarizes the message up to this point: “Because your child’s physical, psychological, social and spiritual well-being is at stake, it is critical that parents make it a priority to learn American Sign Language.”

Reminders of the speaker’s main points so those points can shape the production of each sentence or paragraph – preserving the message’s organization and flow.

- At the beginning of the message, the hearing speaker emphasized the concept of aseity. Toward the end of the message, the speaker mentions “derived being.” The SI reminds, “That’s the opposite of aseity.”

Textual adjustments:

- [The English speaker’s transition was, “So...”]. The SI feeds the speaker’s first and second points (the way the PI originally signed them). The PI puts the third point in context.
- [The deaf speaker began the story with its “punchline.”] The SI suggests holding that point until the story’s conclusion, then feeds it when appropriate.
- The English speaker gave dozens of culturally-bound vignettes, planning to inspire his audience with his final words, “Culture is a virus. Infect somebody today.” The SI reminds the PI to express this point with each vignette, so the deaf people can leave as inspired as the hearing people.

Who’s On First?

Chuck, the sports fan, here to change metaphors. When I work with other teammates, they ask, “Who’s on first?” to determine who will take the first turn as PI. I believe that both teammates are always “on.” Furthermore, I believe it would



benefit our profession to recognize support interpreting as a specialized role. I have worked at conferences with outstanding interpreters. Generally, the interpreters who apply for such work are people who are skilled in the production role. Like me, they like the pressure of making on-the-spot decisions. Conference teams often lack skilled SIs.

Sometimes, during a week of English to ASL conference interpreting, Nancy does all the support interpreting. I find that kind of concentration exhausting, but she finds it exhilarating. Even when I spend long days and nights in the production role, I am less fatigued than when I rotate between production and support roles. In baseball, the catcher must know the pitcher's strengths, suggest pitches and monitor the entire field. When the catcher does his job well, the pitcher can more effectively focus on pitching. The feed role is as exhausting for me as the catcher's role would be for the pitcher.

Who Does What?

SIs and PIs share certain responsibilities:

- Preparing for assignments.
- Bearing equal responsibility for producing high-quality interpretation.
- Post-conferencing.

PIs have unique responsibilities:

- Communicating their needs/preferences.
- Receiving information from the SI.
- Decision-making:
 - Making the many decisions involved in the interpreting process.
 - Deciding how to use the SI's feed. To continue the baseball analogy, the catcher informs the pitcher that someone has moved too far off first base, but the pitcher decides whether to make the throw to

first.

SIs have unique responsibilities:

- Understanding the PI's process and what types of feed he/she prefers.
- Monitoring the equivalence of the source and target messages.
- Feeding as needed.
- Brainstorming possible solutions to problems.
- Remaining vigilantly attentive. Even if the PI rarely needs feed during a particular assignment, it is extremely disorienting not to receive feed when it is needed.
- Encouraging the PI.

Let's Go, Team!

For us, team interpreting was not just a couple's dance, it was a family affair. Our children saw various models of solo and team interpreting. Years ago, our teenage son described our profession's evolving team interpreting model with the following analogy:

A basketball league only played one-on-one. It was exhausting, but they never imagined another way to play. Someone developed an innovation: teams with two players. One played the first half of the game; the other played the second half. Because the players were less exhausted, the games were better.

One day, two players decided to work together, with both of them on the court simultaneously. It was awkward at first. With practice, the teammates learned to pass the ball and work together to set up shots. Soon, the players realized that the best teams had individuals with different strengths: one who made shots and rebounded well, and one who passed and defended well.

Although we have worked for 30 years to set up points and pass the microphone, we sense that we are just beginning to play ball. We hope you will practice your teaming, develop skills we have not yet imagined and hit the goal of providing high-quality interpretation that promotes equal access for deaf and hearing participants. **Let's go team!** ■



Chuck and Nancy Snyder have been married and interpreting together for over 30 years. Chuck holds a CSC and earned a Masters in Teaching Interpreting from Western Maryland College. Nancy holds a CI and a teaching certificate in Special Education. They currently work under the direction of a Deaf board with Deaf Reformed Ministries.

IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS AT THE VRS INTERPRETING INSTITUTE

A world-class training facility for ASL interpreters

VRS Interpreting Institute
Empowering Interpreters and Educators®

The VRS Interpreting Institute (VRSII) is a world-class training facility dedicated to life-long ASL interpreter training and mentoring. **ASL educators, register now for:**

Interpreter and Language Mentoring, May 13 – 15

Instructor: Cindy Farnham, Master Mentor; RID CI, CT

Faculty Collaboration Training, June 24 – 26

Instructor: Charlotte Toothman, CPCC; MA

"The VRSII is a one-of-a-kind facility, with endless possibilities for empowering interpreters and educators. They are making a difference in the field. Participate!"

- Marty Taylor, Ph.D., Interpreting Consolidated

For more information about ASL student and educator classes, visit www.vrsii.com/curriculum.

© 2011 Sorenson Communications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.