

## Guided Observation Questions for Interpreters

Observation is a powerful tool for learning, especially when done intentionally and actively. It can also be the basis for productive discussions between colleagues that help each person grow.

Interpreting is such a complex task, however, that it may be difficult to analyze what we see, especially if we are watching the work live. These guided observation questions are a tool to help an interpreter focus their attention when observing an interpreter work. Interpreters can also develop similar observation questions based on their professional development needs.

Before or during an observation, select a few questions that may be relevant to your professional development goals and observable during the given assignment. Take the time, even if it means missing part of the interpretation, to make clear notes regarding each question. It may be helpful to divide your note paper into sections so you can jot notes regarding different questions on different segments of the paper. Use your notes to discuss the work with the interpreter afterwards.

### 1) Language Voice-to-Sign (V-S)

- a) What register did the interpreter use? What about the interpretation made this clear?
- b) What concepts did the interpreter communicate using classifiers?
- c) How did the interpreter use space to their advantage in the interpretation?
- d) What concepts did the interpreter communicate using fingerspelling?
- e) What numbering systems did the interpreter use (e.g. cardinal, ordinal, height, age)?
- f) What concepts did the interpreter communicate using facial grammar?
- g) What concepts did the interpreter communicate using different sentence types (subject-verb-object, topic-comment, rhetorical questions, conditional)?
- h) What particularly effective sign choices did the interpreter make?
- i) What language markers did the interpreter use to indicate a transition (such as the beginning or ending of a topic)?
- j) If the interpreter was transliterating, what features of ASL did they use?
- k) What were the communication goals of the speaker? How did the interpretation reflect these goals?

### 2) Language Sign-to-Voice (S-V)

- a) What register did the interpreter use? What about the interpretation made this clear?
- b) What nuances did the interpreter communicate using vocal inflection?
- c) What particularly effective word choices did the interpreter make?
- d) What idioms did the interpreter use?
- e) What language markers did the interpreter use to indicate a transition (such as the beginning or ending of a topic)?
- f) What were the communication goals of the speaker? How did the interpretation reflect these goals?

### 3) Teaming

- a) Did one interpreter do both S-V and V-S or did the team divide responsibilities? If they divided responsibilities, how?
- b) What were the responsibilities of the interpreter in the cold seat?
- c) How did the interpreter in the hot seat communicate that they needed a feed?
- d) How did the interpreter in the cold seat feed the interpreter in the hot seat?
- e) How often did the team switch responsibilities?
- f) How did the team go about making decisions about who would do what? What were the rationales for their decisions?
- g) What difficulties were noticed and how might these be resolved?

### 4) Interpreting Process

- a) What factors seem to lead to the interpreter using *more* processing time?
- b) What factors seem to lead to the interpreter using *less* processing time?
- c) What evidence did you see of the interpreter's monitoring loop?

- d) How and when did the interpreter ask for clarification?
- e) When did the interpreter use a linguistic or cultural *reduction* (explicit details in the source message left to be implicit in the interpretation)? What kind of details did the interpreter eliminate in their reduction?
- f) When did the interpreter use a linguistic or cultural *expansion* (implicit details in the source message made explicit in the interpretation)? What kind of details did the interpreter use for their expansion?

## 5) Preparing for Assignments

- a) What information did the interpreter receive when accepting the assignment?
- b) Did the interpreter gather additional information before the assignment? What? How?
- c) How did the interpreter go about gathering information once at the assignment?
- d) How was information regarding the assignment used within the interpretation?

## 6) Content

- a) What types of content were encountered on the assignment (e.g. technical terms/acronyms, legal terms, jargon)?
- b) How did the interpreter prepare to interpret this content?
- c) What types of content proved difficult? Why?
- d) How did the interpreter manage content that was unfamiliar?
- e) What was the format for the communication (e.g. one-on-one interaction, discussion, presentation/lecture, videotape, demonstration, handouts, overheads, power point presentation, computer screen)?
- f) How did the format of the content influence interpreting logistics (e.g. lighting, placement)?
- g) How did the format influence language choices (e.g. indicating on the screen, classifier set-ups)?

## 7) Telephone Interpreting

- a) What information did the interpreter receive before making the call?
- b) How did the interpreter handle telephone etiquette? Greetings? Pauses? Closings?
- c) What telephone equipment was available and how did the interpreter choose to use it?
- d) What kinds of filler did the interpreter use to bridge gaps in conversation?
- e) How did the interpreter handle an answering machine? Automated menus?
- f) How did the interpreter convey the hearing person's affect and tone to the Deaf caller?
- g) How did the interpreter identify who or what (e.g. answering machine) was speaking?

## 8) Group Dynamics

- a) How did the interpreter indicate who was speaking?
- b) When a hearing person had a comment to add to the discussion, how did they get the floor? What did the interpreter do to facilitate this?
- c) When a Deaf person had a comment to add to the discussion, how did they get the floor? What did the interpreter do to facilitate this?
- d) How did the interpreter indicate that a hearing person was being spoken to directly?
- e) How did the interpreter indicate that a Deaf person was being spoken to directly?

## 9) Physical Aspects

- a) What was the interpreting environment like (e.g. location of consumers, room design, lighting, location of windows, sight lines, audio-visual equipment)? How did this affect the placement of interpreters?
- b) Who was doing most of the communicating (e.g. who chaired the meeting)? How did this affect the placement of interpreters?
- c) What decisions related to the setting and logistics did the interpreter control?
- d) When the physical aspects were not ideal, what did the interpreter do to make the best of the situation?

Adapted from Rogers, Phyllis. (1997, November). Optimizing Observations. *Views*, 14(10).