

**SIGN LANGUAGE:
A NEWCOMER TO THE INTERPRETING FORUM**

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1. Introduction

The vast majority of us perceive language as a form of oral communication, which is taken for granted like the air we breathe. For a minority however, the ability to hear spoken language and use it as a normal means of communication has been lost through deafness, which may have developed gradually through illness or encroaching age, or may never have been acquired because of a congenital condition from birth. Most of us live and work in a spoken-language environment rarely encountering the invisible reality of deafness, which exists in our midst; it is not immediately tangible when one walks down a street. One instantly recognises a Blind person or someone in a wheelchair as having a physical deficiency, but it is impossible to single out the Deaf, unless they are spoken to.

Although most of us have no direct contact with Deaf people, all of us know what deafness is and that the Deaf generally use sign language as a means of communication amongst themselves composed of seemingly incomprehensible, extremely complex, rapid hand movements and exaggerated facial expressions. It should be noted however that not all Deaf people use sign language nor wish to be associated with the Deaf community, preferring to socialize and work in the hearing environment (Kyle and Woll 1985: 7, Paoli 2000).

People associate interpretation with the transfer of a message from one spoken language into another rarely taking into consideration the fact that sign languages are languages in their own right too. The newly arrived migrant lacking the language skills necessary for him/her to cope with certain situations in the new host country may call upon the aid of a community interpreter. Hearing delegates of any nationality may need interpreters in order to follow proceedings during an international conference or to converse during official meetings. Likewise, Deaf people may need interpreters to communicate information to and from their non-verbal signed languages.

This latter form of interpretation (generally considered within the domain of public service interpreting) has gradually become officially recognized as an occupation in many countries throughout the world over the past forty years. People with strong or total hearing impairment attempt dozens of community-related communicative feats every day which the hearing take for granted. In order to successfully accomplish them they often require the aid of an

interpreter; to fix appointments, seek the advice of a lawyer, consult with their children's teachers and so on. The Deaf often have to rely on the help of close friends and relatives, but those luckier ones who live in a country which recognizes sign language on a par with spoken language, may choose to call a professional community interpreter specialised in signing. Although the Deaf are greatly dispersed within the hearing population – their total number in the world being proportionally much lower than those with normal hearing – there is nevertheless in most industrialized countries, a growing number of Deaf people who join Deaf clubs and associations and who are beginning to learn about and ask for interpreter services. Furthermore, they may attend conferences on Deaf issues organized by these organizations, various foundations and universities at both national and international level (for example the regular conferences of the World Federation of the Deaf). Unfortunately, in many parts of the globe there still exist countries where professional interpreter training programmes and facilities for the Deaf are sadly lacking or struggling for recognition because of official disregard or lack of funding.¹ Sign language interpreters at the dawn of the 21st century are facing new challenges² and are having to adjust to a wide variety of working environments including the conference setting and having to adapt their skills accordingly (Kellett Bidoli in press a). Conferences today cover a wide variety of subjects of direct interest to the Deaf such as education, social aspects of deafness, medical advances, linguistic aspects of sign language and interpretation issues, as well as an enormous range of subjects of interest to the general hearing public.

2. The rejection and acceptance of signed languages

Deafness has followed man through the centuries affecting only a small proportion of the total population. The condition may be total or partial, persisting from birth or may develop at any stage during one's lifetime caused by trauma, disease or aging. Advances in modern medicine and technology have done much in improving early detection, identifying causes, enhancing impaired hearing or in extreme cases, inserting cochlear implants or bionic ears in profoundly Deaf children. Despite all the technological advances, there are still many people with varying degrees of hearing impairment. Worldwide there are

1 For example, articles on the emerging interpreting profession in its many guises in South Africa can be found in Erasmus (1999).

2 Papers on a wide variety of issues are presented in the Proceedings of the 1st Forlì Conference on Interpreting Studies, *Interpreting in the 21st century: Challenges and Opportunities*, 9-11 November 2000, edited by G. Garzone and M. Viezzi (in press).

over 70,000,000 Deaf people. In the past they were ignored or treated as imbeciles, considered incapable of speaking or communicating. It was often presumed that if they could not talk then they could not think and therefore if they could not think they had no culture or language like the rest of mankind. They were thus condemned to the edges of society, ridiculed and rejected. Kyle and Woll (1985) mention a case reported in the Glasgow Herald of 26th September 1817. A woman, deaf and dumb from birth, was accused of drowning her child by throwing him into the river from a city bridge. Her solicitor put up the defence that as it was impossible to communicate with her, she could not be tried. Being unable to speak implied that she could distinguish neither right from wrong, nor the gravity of the situation nor the normal course of court proceedings. However circumstances changed when an interpreter was found (Kinniburgh, the principal of the Edinburgh School for the Deaf), who by communicating through gesture led the court to pass a verdict of accidental drowning.

In brief, in Europe, sign languages began to be adopted in special schools for the Deaf after Abbé de l'Épée in Paris in the mid 1700s discovered how to exploit the natural sign language used among his Deaf pupils in order to devise a method to teach them French. Schools based on this methodology spread as far as the USA. In America, French Sign Language (FSL) began to mix with the existing sign languages of the American Deaf to form what is now called ASL (Volterra 1987: 9). The Italian Abbot Tommaso Silvestri was sent to France to study the famous French method. He returned to Italy to open a school for the Deaf at La Casa Di Pietro in Rome only to later abandon signs in favour of oralism (Boggi Bosi 1939 and Perini 1902, cited in Radutzky 1983: 153). Padre Ottavio Assarotti established a teaching method in Genoa based on mime that spread to many Italian cities – Siena, Modena, Turin, Cremona, Milan, Verona and Rome – (Grimandi 1960 and Picanyol 1941, cited in Radutzky 1983: 153). Despite debate between educators and ear specialists in Italy in the 1800s, oralist methods began to dominate the country (Facchini and Rimondini 1983) and culminated in an *International Congress* in Milan in 1880. 'International' delegates – seven-eighths of whom were from Italy and France (Lane and Battison 1978: 77) – were invited to visit oralist institutions for the Deaf in the area before the Congress began, to see the achievements of the oralist method for themselves. They were so impressed that at the first session of the Congress a swift majority vote was cast in favour of the oralist system, which was deemed far superior to methods using signs (Kyle and Woll 1985: 42). The oral method took firm hold and dominated education of the Deaf in Europe (and British Commonwealth countries), rejecting sign language in the classroom for a century. The Deaf had thereafter to learn to speak and thus there was no need for interpreters of sign language. Lane and Battison (1978: 77-78) reported at the

NATO Symposium *Language, Interpretation and Communication* in Venice, September 1977, that as a result of the Congress of Milan, for a century the education of most Deaf children worldwide was not conducted in their primary language, leading as with other minority language users around the globe, to the social, economic and political consequences of an inferior education. They appealed to:

Let us undo in Venice what was done in Milan. Let us set right in 1977 what was set wrong in 1880. Let us, in this international symposium on language interpretation, affirm that no language is incontestably superior to any other, that every language is the priceless heritage of all mankind, and that we particularly cherish the free use and development of minority languages precisely because they are subject to repression at the hands of the majority.

The tide began to turn in favour of the use of sign from the 1960s onward when researchers in the USA began to show interest in gesture from a linguistic perspective (Stokoe 1960, Stokoe *et al.* 1965, Bellugi and Klima 1972, Stokoe 1972, Battison 1974, Friedman 1976). Research revealed a complex autonomous language with its own ‘phonology’ and grammar (Bellugi and Klima 1983: 131-134). Research spread to European and non-European countries and advances in psycholinguistics and increased public awareness led the way to revised theories in the teaching of spoken language to the Deaf such as The Philosophy of Total Communication which “specifies the use of signs and speech together in classroom activities” (Kyle and Woll 1985: 32). Murphy (1978: 88) comments that through the late 1960s and 1970s, “research was reported on the educational, psychological and social gains of children who used, and did not use, sign language” and studies³ “showed superiority of early users of sign language over non-users or late users of sign language”.

The advancement of knowledge about sign language proceeded at varying rates. Italy for example has been a latecomer in this sector with research starting in the 1980s (Volterra 1981, Attili and Ricci Bitti 1983, Volterra 1987). Over the past four decades world-wide research into deafness and sign language and an increased assertiveness within minority groups have played a role in leading to more awareness of the needs of the Deaf among hearers and the Deaf themselves are starting to take a more active role in the diffusion of Deaf culture outside the confines of their associations and clubs. Ladd (in press) contrasts the medical concept of ‘deafness’ with his new concept of ‘Deafhood’ which is the identification of deafness by each and every Deaf individual. He draws parallels

3 Mindel and Vernon (1971) and Schlesinger and Meadow (1972), cited in Murphy (1978: 88).

between Deaf cultures and the cultures of other linguistic minority groups in their struggle for recognition. Woll (1988: 194) states that: “With the greater recognition of minority group rights has come a greater acceptance of the right of deaf people to choose the language they wish, and an understanding that sign language may provide the key to greater integration of the deaf”.

Though, fortunately, the negative attitude of the past is disappearing, it must not be forgotten that even in the USA, where sign language has been the object of study for a longer time and where Gallaudet University (exclusively for Deaf students) is to be found, it was only in the early eighties that ASL was officially recognised as a minority language.

Historically worldwide, standard national sign languages based on a common set of rules for all Deaf people in each country, as in the case of most spoken languages, did not develop and cultural and linguistic differences still abound among different Deaf communities: “Sign languages are not the same across cultures, and there are differences between the vocabulary of BSL [British Sign Language] and that of American Sign Language (ASL) even though there are strong cultural and spoken similarities between the two countries” (Kyle and Woll 1985: 24). The norm in all countries was the development of numerous signed dialects. Experts have identified dominant dialects which in some cases have become or are becoming recognised as the official sign language of a particular country as for example in Italy where Roman sign language was and still is the most diffuse dialect. CNR (Italian National Research Council) researchers based in Rome in the early eighties (see Volterra 1981, 1987), began analysing the language of the Roman Deaf community and began gathering signs in the Roman dialect recognizable in other parts of the country to form a corpus which is known as LIS (Lingua Italiana dei Segni – Italian Sign Language). LIS is the signed version now most frequently seen on Italian national TV or found in dictionaries of Italian sign (see Angelini *et al.* 1991, Magarotto 1995, Romeo 1991, Romeo 1997) and is becoming a standard notwithstanding the continued evolution of traditional signing in dialect by Italian Deaf communities throughout the peninsula. The Deaf associations are still debating the need for a standard signed form despite their respect for dialect (Volterra 1987: 13). Indeed, the lack of a common standard can lead to problems of comprehension among different Deaf groups or for example by the viewing Deaf audience on national TV (see Steiner 1998).

3. The rise of professional signed interpretation

At the above mentioned watershed NATO Symposium in Venice, several papers on sign language interpretation (illustrating the pioneering American experience) were presented indicating interest within the interpreting community in the then

emerging, 'new' form of professional interpretation which was in a short span of time to cross the Atlantic (see Gerver and Sinaiko, 1978). Since then, progress has been made (mostly in North America) and the general public too has become more sensitive to the consequences of deafness. Many people with no prior knowledge of sign language are enrolling on courses out of interest and curiosity to learn it. Deaf people's rights are beginning to be supported by sporadic favourable legislation. For example in Italy, a law was passed by the Italian Parliament in 1992 which now gives Deaf children the right to obtain the service of an interpreter throughout their education through to university level.⁴ In 1997, LIS was inserted by law for the first time among university disciplines. These two major legal accomplishments have opened the door to formal interpreter training in LIS (see Gran and Kellett Bidoli in press). Today's interpreter training services in sign language in Europe and abroad are developing and expanding, catering principally to community related needs.

The USA has always been at the forefront of developments in sign language interpreter training. The United States Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) was founded in 1964 to determine the professional interpreter's role and functions as well as set guidelines in the specialized field of interpreting for the Deaf. Since then, steps have been taken in establishing evaluation procedures for confidential interpreter certification in all American states, which outline basic competency in most situations evaluated by a specialist team (see Solow 1981). The RID continues to provide regular conferences and publications on all aspects of interpretation.

In the rest of the world few countries have national registers of professional interpreters. In Europe only a handful do (see Woll 1988). In Italy for example, despite a growing demand for sign language interpreter services over the past 20 years there is still need for homogeneity in the quality of services provided and as yet there is no official Italian register of professional sign language interpreters. Girardi (2000) emphasises the need for good quality, stating that in Italy there are few truly competent professional interpreters who can translate the whole message adequately; sections of discourse are often omitted and little attention is given to the culture and needs of the Deaf.

In Italy, in the past few years, workshops and various initiatives for the provision of good quality training of sign language interpreters have been offered by official authorities (Radutzky 2000) such as ENS – Ente Nazionale Sordomuti: Italian Deaf Association – and the Mason Perkins Deafness Fund, as well as by both accredited private and public educational institutions (Ricci Bitti 2000). Cortazzi (2000) however, cautions about the ease with which

4 For information on interpreting services at the University of Padua see De Gasperi (2000).

unscrupulous individuals can still offer courses under present Italian law with little regard to accepted standards of professionalism. The teaching of sign language and interpretation at the SSLMIT in Trieste began in 1998 with a successful two-year course including *Italian Sign Language* and *Interpretation between LIS and Italian* which provides university students with a basic grounding in the discipline (see Gran and Kellett Bidoli in press and Castiglione in press).

Contrary to common knowledge, Deaf people themselves can also serve occasionally as interpreters: "The deaf person can serve as an intermediary interpreter. This occurs most often when an interpreter cannot adequately interpret for a deaf person who possesses minimal language skills" (Domingue and Ingram 1978: 83). The Deaf interpreter is more sensitive to dialectal variations or to minimal gestures and movements as in the case of mentally ill Deaf patients. Furthermore, the Deaf can communicate effectively with Deaf-Blind people and are increasingly becoming involved in this kind of interpretation in the United States (Steven Collins, personal communication)⁵.

4. Sign language research and quality assessment

The discussion of sign language at international conferences on mainstream interpreting has remained sporadic; at least in Europe. Pöchhacker (1995) conducted a bibliographic analysis of a corpus of 945 items with a 'European' perspective and a strong bias towards conference interpreting, divided into two distinct periods; 1952-1988 and 1989-1994. In the later period, out of over 600 items analysed, written in a dozen languages (though English dominated at 55.7%), only 12 items resulted specifically on sign language interpretation. Despite the limited diffusion in Europe of research on sign language and interpretation in mainstream journals, signed interpretation (community and conference interpreting) is an issue discussed frequently at conferences on deafness and Deaf culture organized by Deaf Associations. Papers are indeed published in their proceedings but as they are written in the national standard language of their country of origin they do not easily reach the international circuit.

Research into signed interpretation is certainly less widespread than in the more common spoken modes; consecutive and simultaneous. Research is hindered firstly, because there is a scarcity of researchers with the necessary linguistic skills in sign language. Secondly, because there is difficulty in finding statistically viable samples to work on especially in those countries where

5 For more on the Deaf working as interpreters for the Deaf-Blind see Collins (1993).

professional sign language interpretation is in its infancy. Lastly, it is no easy task to find an adequate notation system for the graphical representation of this three dimensional language.

The American literature on sign language generally tends to focus on community interpreting (see Patrie and Mertz 1997). Discussion of 'platform' interpreting for the Deaf – as conference interpreting is called across the Atlantic – is not widely covered, but useful tips can be obtained in Solow (1981), and especially in RID publications (see for example, Kirchner 1975). Little has been written on it specifically as it is still in its infancy in most parts of the world. For an overview of American research on interpreting with signed languages concerning modality used, sociolinguistics, cognitive aspects and performance factors see Isham (2000).

The literature on sign language and interpretation in Europe has been catching up with the USA since the mid 90s. It is dominated by linguistic aspects of the interpreting process and reports on new training initiatives and teaching methodologies that are indeed welcome additions to the growing wealth of knowledge in this field. A special edition of *Meta* (September 1997) deals with sign language interpreting in Europe and references to European work can be found in Patrie and Mertz's annotated bibliography (1997), though predominantly it covers American research. Isham (2000: 35) laments that there is not enough communication between signed-language interpreters and researchers in North America and Europe. However, this is inevitably caused by the European Continent's rich linguistic diversity. Sign is used in all of Europe's non-English speaking nations and subsequently, papers on sign language research tend to be written in numerous national standard spoken forms, rarely reaching the English-speaking community or international researchers who use English.

An aspect of interpretation which is becoming increasingly recognized as an essential element in the training of interpreters and interpreting research is quality.⁶ It is an aspect that concerns both spoken and signed interpretation. Quality is a degree of excellence, a relative, intangible essence, which is perceived by each one of us in a unique manner. Its enigmatic nature renders any measurement or assessment of it extremely arduous and challenging.

Since the 70s, numerous aspects of performance (especially in the simultaneous spoken mode) have been scrutinized such as prosody, non-verbal aspects of communication, stress, fatigue and memory as well as factors external

6 A conference was held on this very subject in Almuñécar, Spain, 19-21 April 2001. Papers on a wide range of quality issues can be found in the Proceedings of the Conference, *International Conference on Quality in Conference Interpreting*. For quality in sign language interpretation see Kellett Bidoli (in press b).

to the interpreter such as lighting, seating arrangement and prior access to subject material (for overviews see Kellett Bidoli 2000, Shlesinger 1997 and Viezzi 1996, 1999). This has led to the formulation of a bewildering number of parameters and variables to describe and scrutinize the quality of interpretation (Kellett Bidoli 2000). Studies of hearing end-user reactions to conference interpreting have revealed that people's opinions may vary according to gender (Ng 1992), or nationality of the assessor (Gile 1990), to whether the assessor be a professional interpreter (Bühler 1986, Altman 1990), or an interpreter trainer (Schweda Nicholson 1993). Assessment may vary among different user groups (Kurz 1993, Marrone 1993, Kopczynski 1994, Weller 1996) or there may be differences of opinion among individuals of the same user group (Meak 1990). It may happen, as Gile (1991) pointed out, that people are not equally interested in all the information offered by the interpreter and that attention may be paid to only portions of speech, resulting in the comprehension and retention of only a small part of the whole. Therefore our opinions are formed, not only by the visual and acoustic signals from what we see and hear, but also according to personal factors such as, interest, level of concentration or state of mind at any given time and place.

Similar interest in sign language interpreting quality first emerged in the United States where professional interpreting in various signed languages (the sign languages of China, Vietnam, Korea, Mexico etc. and ASL) has become widely established since the 60s. There are few specific studies on quality as it generally tends to be included together with other aspects of interpreting research. Furthermore, it is more difficult to determine sign language interpretation quality as opposed to spoken because only the Deaf can do it or hearing people with an excellent knowledge of sign, both of whom are few and far between with respect to spoken language experts in the total hearing population. See Strong and Rudser (1985, 1986) on instruments for quality assessment. For a Deaf end-user's view see Abbou (1994), Bienvenu (1988) and Brasel *et al.* (1974). Two Italian examples are Cameracanna and Franchi's paper (1997) on quality in signed conference interpreting and Del Vecchio and Franchi (1997) on strategies to adopt during the viewing of visual material which may cause problems for the signer.

According to Solow (1981) attributes required of the interpreter in order to produce good quality interpretation for the Deaf end-user are:

- 1) *flexibility* in order to fit into any situation when and where required, ranging from athletic events to religious ceremonies, in the oral or spoken mode and being prepared to adapt to particular consumer requests such as heavy reliance on lip reading or fingerspelling.
- 2) *objectivity* so as not to reveal ones own feelings and influence the interpretation in any way;

- 3) *self-discipline* in order to work unsupervised (in the community setting), maintaining a low profile and working with punctuality and responsibility.

5. Sign language conference interpreting

Sign language conference interpreting is closely related to spoken language interpreting and there are similarities which few oral interpreters are aware of (Kellett Bidoli in press a). Differences can be more readily identified such as the most obvious one which is the mode used: vocal vs. gestual. However there are a number of differences in the conference setting, some of which are outlined below, which do not immediately spring to mind.

First and foremost at a conference, Deaf individuals in the audience may be either the majority (at conferences on Deaf issues), or a minority having specifically requested the aid of an interpreter at conferences organized for the general hearing public. In both cases the prime concern is **visibility**: the Deaf must be able to **see** the translation taking place.

The quality of interpretation from speech-to-sign will depend fundamentally on how far the Deaf clients are seated away from the front of the conference hall and whether certain aspects have been taken into consideration to provide optimal visibility such as illumination of the platform, the provision of a white background and a raised pedestal not too far from the speaker for the interpreter to stand on. The Deaf should always be given front seats in order for them to see all movements and facial expressions made by the interpreter and speaker with ease. They find it particularly annoying to find themselves seated several rows back having to crane and peek between the heads and shoulders of inconsiderate hearers. It can be likened to the acoustics being switched on and off for hearing people so that one persistently keeps missing chunks of information. Signs in the conference setting should be larger than during community interpreting, and avoid any coverage of the face. Facial expression and lip movements should be exaggerated, and fingerspelling kept to a minimum, but when necessary executed with precision.

The conference interpreter from speech-to-sign must at all times face the audience and thus, being unable to turn around and observe the oral speaker's non-verbal communication (NVC) markers, must be able to hear clearly everything that is said. (Voice-to-voice simultaneous interpreters have the advantage of looking directly at speakers from the booth, which aids the understanding of the source language). In some cases the speaker may be invited to sit in the front row, out of public view, so that the interpreter can see all NVC markers. However this solution is not favourably looked upon by hearing audiences. Another option is the engagement of two interpreters, one in the front row who can see the speaker and signs the target language (TL) to a second

interpreter who shadows it in sign language to the public. This second solution is often adopted when the TL is different from the national standard signed/spoken version such as in an Italian conference setting from spoken English to ASL (or BSL) to LIS. In Italy the reason for this relay system is that at present there are few sign language interpreters who can work into and from more than one signed/spoken language. At conferences attended by large numbers of Deaf participants it may be necessary to position several interpreters along the sides and central aisle of the hall and in the case of international conferences several language combinations may be required which greatly complicates the organization of the interpreting service. A recent symposium in Zagreb, Croatia – *Sign Language and Deaf Culture 3-5 May 2001* – may serve as an example of the complexity involved in organizing interpretation for an international audience composed of a Deaf (majority), a hearing (minority) and two Croatian Deaf-Blind individuals (see figures 1 and 2). The three official working languages were Croatian, English and their respective sign languages. Also International Sign, Slovene and Tactile interpreting for two Deaf-Blind Croatians were provided during the event. Fig. 1 illustrates sign-to-speech interpretation during a signed presentation in ASL. Few Deaf participants could follow it, hence the provision of other signed varieties all stemming from the English oral rendition by an American interpreter (1) picked up by interpreters in the booths (2 and 3; English to Slovene and English to Croatian) and relayed through the various signers (4 - 9). In the case of tactile interpretation an interpreter was present for each client as needed and not just one as illustrated. Fig. 2 shows how speech-to-sign interpretation employed the same number of interpreters in almost the same configuration but input to the two booths was direct. Most hearing participants could follow the original English, but headsets were provided for the few who could not. All the Deaf participants relied on what the signers received from the booths. For the sake of clear graphics in the figure, interpreter 9 appears far from the Deaf interpreter 5, but in effect they were seated in front of each other.

Another aspect to take into consideration is the use of the signed version of the spoken language structure commonly used by interpreters in some countries (UK and Sweden) and rarely in others (Italy). Humphrey (1997: 20) states that for example when working between English and ASL, interpreters often slip into the grammatical structure of their native language (English) and conform to hearing cultural norms and behaviour especially when the text is complex, the source language (SL) is fast or the topic unfamiliar. Kyle *et al.* (1981), amongst the findings in a report on levels of BSL performance in the UK, found that even when signers had Deaf parents they were still strongly influenced by English syntax. They used little idiom and all had difficulty interpreting from speech-to-sign. The language of hearing people seemed to be geared towards an

interlanguage rather than the BSL used by the Deaf. Llewellyn-Jones (1981), reported that in the consecutive mode interpreters would more likely use a correct English form but in simultaneous interpretation there was a tendency to follow the SL structure with the production of non-English sentences, omissions or incorrect usage and added that a hearing audience will “assume that this was the function of the deaf person’s lack of knowledge of English (and feel that the interpreter was doing a good job)”.

Lag time depends very much on the speed of the SL. If long, important information may be lost, if short there is the risk of following the SL too closely leading to recurrent correction of the TL. From sign-to-speech if the signer has to resort to fingerspelling of proper names or unfamiliar terminology s/he may take a few seconds longer which may interfere with memory retention of what the speaker has said in the meanwhile, thus reducing the quality of the signed rendition. Evidence is offered by Cokely (1986) of a relationship between lag time and miscue occurrence during sign language interpretation: shorter lag times led to an increase in errors except omissions whereas longer lag times improved performance despite an increase in omissions. Quality assessment and discussion on several aspects of interpretation can be found in Cokely (1992).

Another difference to be mentioned is fatigue which may influence general interpreter performance and lead to a negative impression on behalf of the Deaf end-user/s as the use of gross motor articulators tires the interpreter quickly and frequent turns must be organized (Brasel 1975).

6. Conclusion

Until recently, sign language interpretation was rarely mentioned at conferences dealing with the interpreting profession, but as professional spoken- and signed-language interpreting evolve there will develop a growing awareness of the need to guarantee a good quality end-product in both modes. At the international Forli conference in November 2000 (Garzone and Viezzi in press) community interpreting emerged as a new and strong area of development in the interpreting world. Much debate centred on the need to cater for the emergence of a new type of client with linguistic communicative difficulties at the dawn of the 21st century: migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, the Deaf and Deaf-Blind. Indeed, the need for more discussion at international level on the various types of community interpreting and their inclusion in the curricula of training establishments for interpreters is strongly felt.

The worldwide recognition of sign language and hence signed interpretation by the mainstream interpreting community has made much headway since Venice 1977 but more remains to be done. Spoken interpretation has much to learn from sign language as Isham (1995) has pointed out, in that research into

sign language can lead to a better understanding of the cognitive processes of mainstream interpretation in general. Interpretation enables communication between different languages and cultures, thus any discussion of its many facets cannot ignore the myriad of languages conveyed in signs:

[...] the interpretation of sign languages is an integral part of the general study of interpretation [...] no description (practical or theoretical) of interpretation which fails to take account of sign language interpretation can be regarded as complete (Ingram 1978: 109).

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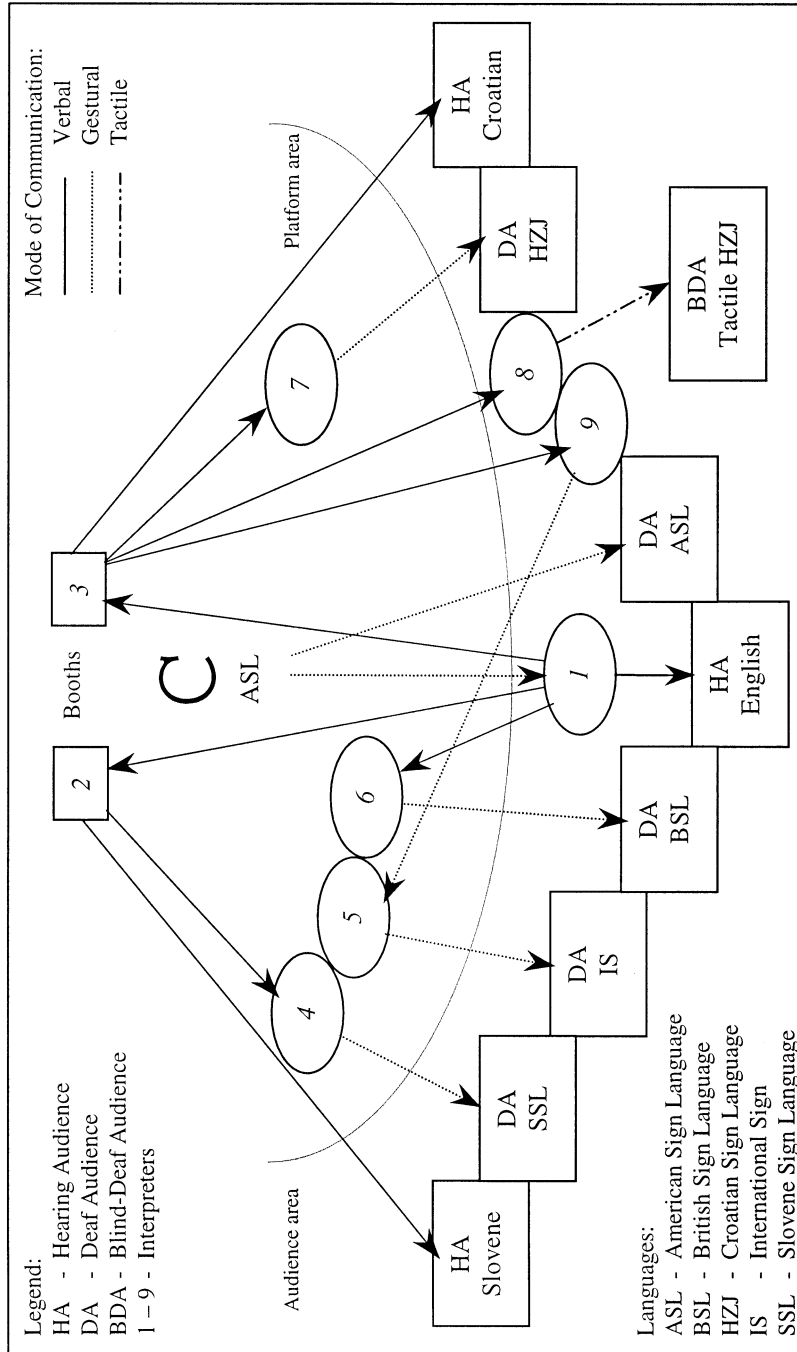


Fig. 1 – Situation 1: Sign-to-speech

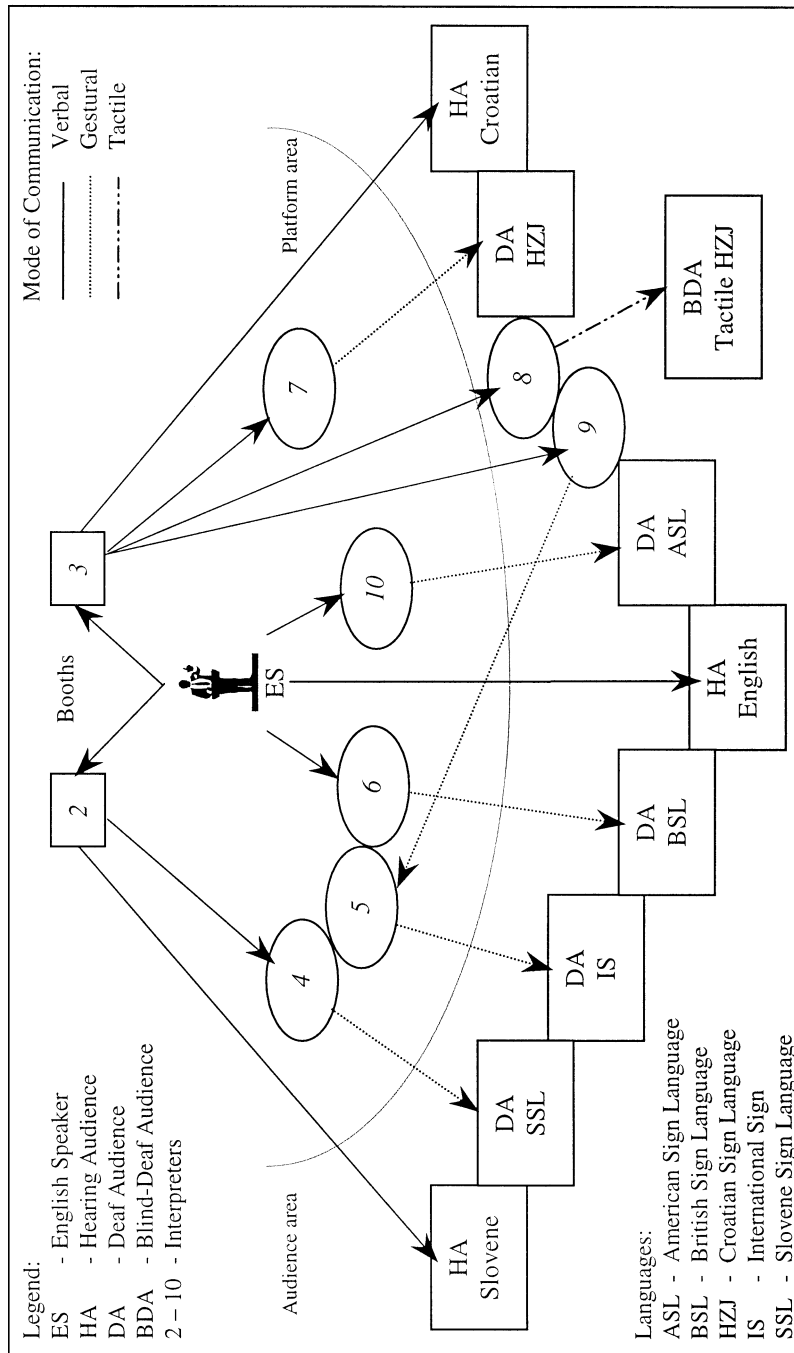


Fig. 2 – Situation 2: Speech-to-sign