

Interpreting Gay Sign Variation into spoken language



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304 responses to an international survey

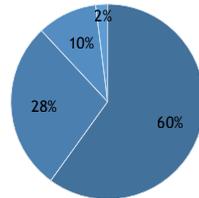
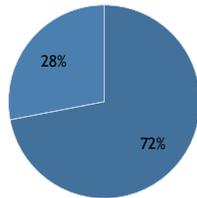
89% are a member of a professional body for interpreters

59% have undertaken a booking within the LGBT domain

51% have an awareness of GSV

84% feel interpreters should have a good working knowledge of GSV at an LGBT event

72% Female
28% Male



60% Heterosexual
28% Homosexual
10% Bisexual
2% Not declared

What is Gay Sign Variation?

A social language variation is described by Crystal (1995) as identifying who you are. It has been established that there are certain signs used within the British Deaf gay community that are linguistically different to those of British Sign Language (Michaels, 2014), as well as a style of signing influenced by camp behaviour (Beck and Hesselberg, 1995). This social language variation is commonly known as Gay Sign Variation (GSV).



Some responses from the interpreters to two of the questions posed regarding GSV.



failing to prepare = prepare to fail

"I've been to a workshop and it was eye-opening to all the signs and variations that I don't know but it was great information to have and hopefully I can use it and build on it in the future."

TIP 1. PREPARATION



"This [GSV] is not something I've given previous thought to and so now would be likely to influence my decision whether to take an assignment or not."

TIP 2. PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY



others respect people treat

Interpreters should have good "receptive skills yes, but not to try and sign in an artificial way. People should be true to themselves, whoever they are, but respect difference."

TIP 3. RESPECT



"I think if there are interpreters available who are LGBT community members, they are likely to have a greater affinity, more 'fluency' if you will with the in group language, and the level of comfort that some straight people might not have."

TIP 4. AFFINITY

Do you have an awareness of a GSV of your sign language?

Some participants felt that they had some knowledge of GSV and were perhaps using it without realising and therefore not fully understanding it and doing it justice. This led them to believe that they should develop awareness and skills in GSV, as well as the Deaf gay community in general.

"I know gay-specific signs from my region, but I've never heard it labeled GSV" "At the lexical level, certainly. Unsure about other levels (Pragmatics, etc.)" "I've had to swap out VRS calls because I felt that I was not doing a gay caller justice to their voice." "I was not aware of GSV until last year's Pride event. I felt woefully inadequate."

Because of their lack of knowledge of GSV, one interpreter felt that they would need to consider if they would work within the LGBT community in the future. One straight interpreter felt it was not appropriate for them to use GSV productively.

"Receptively I am aware but it would be inappropriate for me as a heterosexual to use it EXCEPT, for example during role shift where relevant, or for example when I interpreted a comedian who's act was dependant on portrayal of this quality."

Do you feel interpreters at an LGBT event should have a good working knowledge of GSV?

Many interpreters felt that not having a good working knowledge of GSV should stop them from undertaking a job within the LGBT domain. In general, they said it was acceptable to do so as long as they had the sign language skills, topic knowledge, respect for the client and an understanding of the community.

"It enhances the interpretation so is preferred, but isn't absolutely necessary." "As long as an interpreter is reflecting the speaker and has a good working knowledge of the topic then they should be okay." "It's very crucial to understand and be familiar with the terminology and sign vocabulary." "The use of GSV by a heterosexual might cause offence to participants." "In my opinion, openness and non-judgmental attitude seem to be more important than sexuality when it comes to working with the LGBT community."

However, appropriately representing the client was of paramount importance to most interpreters.

"How to voice in such a way that gives the 'flavour' as well as the interpretation so that it is understood as the interpretation and is not a 'send up'." "An interpreter would not necessarily be expected to use GSV themselves, but should be expected to have good receptive ability of this sign variation if voicing over." "An interpreter who takes on LGBT interpreting and who doesn't know GSV will skew the message." "Important if you are trying to give over an accurate sign to voice translation."

My thanks go to all the interpreters from around the world who took the time to participate in this research. I thank you for your wisdom, honesty and words of encouragement.

Please note that references are available upon request.

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