

Glass half full



Social interpreting may be a fun and entertaining break from the everyday, but it doesn't mean we can relax our ethics, boundaries or professional conduct.

Paul Michaels outlines the pitfalls

The social domain is rarely mentioned

when interpreting settings are discussed in literature aimed at trainee interpreters. This could be because it is a difficult domain to define. It might include events such as parties or dinners, the sports arena, entertainment such as cabaret or theatre performances and the arts, holidays, museum or gallery tours and religious social events, to name a few.

In some ways, this may be referred to as escort interpreting which 'is marked by the spontaneity and the broad spectrum of situations interpreters may find themselves in, from formal meetings to tours of factories to cocktail parties' (Gonzalez et al 1991). Such interpreting, particularly parties and dinners, is often a bolt-on to an existing booking. Trainee interpreters are also frequently involved in social interpreting, on a voluntary basis, as a way of gaining experience.

Napier, McKee and Goswell (2006) recognise that 'Deaf people can never develop complete access to a spoken language' resulting in a 'potentially life-long relationship with sign language interpreters across a much broader range of settings'. Therefore, in a situation where a Deaf person attends a family wedding, it is not uncommon for a sign language interpreter to be provided

to facilitate communication. This is different to most minority languages where, in this situation, family and friends will act as 'language brokers' (Napier 2013).

There are several factors that should be examined when considering working in the area of leisure interpreting:

- Diversity of audience
- Culture
- Ethics
- Physicality
- Personal security
- Environmental demands
- Interpersonal demands
- Paralinguistic demands
- Intrapersonal demands

Diversity of audience:

The audience we work with is extremely varied at social events. Factors such as an individual's level of deafness, family background, education, communication preferences and how frequently they use an interpreter should all be considered when choosing whether to accept a job.

We are reminded of the work of Labov who first introduced the concept of style in sociolinguistics, as well as Vermeer's Skopos theory, which suggests that the primary

consideration when interpreting and translating is the function of the source and target text. Nord (2006) addresses this from a translation perspective, but it is just as relevant to interpreting. She explains that 'every translation is intended to achieve a particular communicative purpose in the target audience, and if we analyse who the target audience will be and what they may need and expect, we might be better able to deliver a product that suits their needs and expectations. After receiving (and analysing) the source text, the translator transforms it so as to suit a particular target audience from among various possible audiences.' These various audiences may all be present at the single event that we will interpret.

Culture

Cultural aspects include cultural behaviour or norms that are specific to the event, language used which may need to be analysed in advance, particular clothing that we may be required to wear and taboos — things that we may do or say that should be avoided. Do your research, ask your client or, if you don't have that contact, ask other members of that culture or fellow interpreters for their advice.

Ethics

Although social event interpreting often happens in a relaxed environment, we shouldn't relax our ethics or professional conduct. Although the event may be public,

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information gleaned while interpreting should be treated in a similar way to that of any other booking. Publicising the fact that you are interpreting at a public event through social media may not be appropriate.

Physicality

Make sure you're prepared for the physical demands of a social booking before accepting it. Think about clothing — particularly if an event is held outside, involves a certain amount of walking, or will keep you on your feet for a considerable amount of time. These events are often in the evening after a full day's work and tiredness can affect your interpreting both on that evening and the next day, so check your diary before accepting a job.

Personal security

There is very useful guidance on lone working on the ASLI website, written by Whistance and Kilbride. Plan journeys to and from evening events carefully, especially where public transport is concerned. You might wish to meet the client beforehand and travel to the event with them. Think ahead about the security of any equipment such as your phone or tablet.

Environmental demands

You may have difficulty hearing what people are saying if the event is noisy. The number of people in an environment could also affect how you work, particularly if you are constantly being interrupted and having to move your position while interpreting. With a large number of people in a room, it can also become quite warm and this is something that could affect your work. Alcohol is often free-flowing at social events so consider this when dealing with people you are interpreting for. You may need to consider whether you will also drink alcohol, even if your client encourages it.

Interpersonal demands

It's good to be aware of how you interact with your clients and co-interpreters while working in the leisure domain. Increased diplomacy, as well as a potentially heightened need to culturally mediate, may become additional responsibilities. If you are working within a team, try to determine how the work will be split to ensure breaks are managed. This is particularly important when eating and drinking, so that both interpreters are not caught with a mouthful of food or hands full, and unable to sign.

People will often try to engage you in conversation, so it's good to strike a balance of politely responding to a question but making it quite clear that your primary purpose at the event is to work. The event may also be aimed at a particular gender, so consider this before accepting the job.


Paralinguistic demands

Many of the paralinguistic demands placed upon us are linked to the environment and the people we work with. The more alcohol people drink, the more relaxed their signing becomes,

voices become distorted and pace can quicken, which can all affect our understanding of what is communicated. There may be jargon that can, hopefully, be researched beforehand. If you have had to travel to a region you're unfamiliar with, there may be an issue with local accents and regional sign. If the event is aimed at children, bear in mind the differences between the language formation of children and adults.

Intrapersonal demands

In any interpreted event, there are factors affecting your ability to interpret and these should be controlled as much as possible. You should think about the effect you are having on the relationship-building within the event. This is particularly relevant in a networking event for business purposes..

The leisure domain can be a difficult area to work in and commands flexibility because of the diversity of the clients and events. However, like all interpreting assignments, preparation is key. If this is done extensively, it can make leisure interpreting an interesting and rewarding area in which to work. 

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