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ASLIA is a provincial association, which represents its membership and advances the sign language interpreting profession by promoting the provision of high quality service through the endorsement of ethical practices, standards, and the continuing development of interpreting skills, underlying knowledge and professional growth.

Introduction

The following paper provides the acceptable standards for ASLIA members' professional work and conduct with consumers as it relates to the use of video remote interpreting. It is intended to raise awareness and guide professional practice and is to be considered by all ASLIA members in making decisions with respect to ethical conduct and professional practice. It has been prepared by Dr. Debra Russell, with assistance from Michael Pidwerbeski, Carla Dupras, Tanya Adler, Alicia Ponciano, Lisa Anderson-Kellett, and Salma Kanji.

Video Relay Services Versus Video Remote Interpreting

Technology has impacted the provision of interpreting services for both spoken and signed language interpreters, specifically through the development of Video Relay Service (VRS) and Video Remote Interpreting (VRI).

Video Relay Interpreting - VRS enables people to conduct telephone calls using sign language and a spoken language. VRS connects a sign language user with another party via a video relay interpreter who interprets the call. In this context, all three parties are in different locations. For example, a deaf caller might use this service to book an appointment at a doctor's office, or a lawyer might call their deaf client to confirm details of a document being prepared. In both cases, the call would be routed through a video relay interpreter who would interpret the call.

VRS in Canada, implemented in 2016, is classified as a telecommunication service and, as such, is regulated by the Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) (CRTC VRS Policy TRP 2014-187). Based on this legislation, VRS is not an option when participants are in the same room. Further, VRS was not designed for appointments that are lengthy or complex in nature, such as staff meetings, legal processes such as an Examination for Discovery, or a family consultation at a hospital regarding a loved one and end of life care.

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Video Remote Interpreting – VRI, by contrast, is an interpreting service provided via any number of videoconferencing programs (video conferencing, Skype, Facetime, Appear.in, Zoom, etc.), where at least one person, often the interpreter, is at a separate location (RID, 2010). VRI may be arranged in different ways, including by pre-arranged appointments or on-demand service. Payment for service may be structured in different ways as well, including individually negotiated contracts, per minute, per hour, or based on individual usage.

VRI services are not mandated by the CRTC; therefore, standards of service and quality can vary significantly. For both spoken and signed language interpreters, there is an increased demand for interpreting services via VRI¹ and hence a need to ensure that the service can be provided in an appropriate manner. The sections that follow are intended to guide appropriate conduct and decision-making as it relates to VRI.

Ensuring a Successful VRI Experience

Canadian sign language interpreters must ensure they have the linguistic and interpreting competence, experience in the setting, and observe the ethical and professional conduct standards set out by the Canadian Association for Sign Language Interpreters (CASLI) before accepting assignments. ² These expectations extend to VRI assignments. However, in order to ensure a successful VRI experience, interpreters also need to understand the benefits and limitations of VRI, established protocols for preparation in advance of meetings and staffing requirements (whether the assignments require more than one interpreter), training on the equipment to be used, technical set-up, internet connectivity, and an understanding of processes to be implemented if the VRI is not successful.

The World Federation of the Deaf and the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters have authored a position statement on the use of remote interpreting services³, where they remind consumers that remote interpreting means that communication occurs via a video screen. Signed languages, such as American Sign Language (ASL) or Langue des signes du Québécoise (LSQ), are visual-spatial languages, also known as “three-dimensional languages”. Viewing sign language via a video screen means seeing it in a two-dimensional way, which can have an effect on how well the interpreter can comprehend the language used.

Is VRI a good solution?

Several organizations, including the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) have outlined the benefits and limitations of using VRI services. For example, VRI is beneficial by providing interpretation for areas where there are no qualified sign language interpreters or where the costs of travel to bring an interpreter on site are cost-prohibitive. It can provide fast and

¹ Also referred to as distance interpreting by the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC)

² Formerly known as the Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada; names changed July 2018. See www.avlic.ca

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accessible communication and may be the best alternative in an emergency. However, as the WFD and RID have stated, it is not a comprehensive replacement for on-site interpreting, especially in high-stake settings like legal or medical. Decisions about the use of VRI require input from all parties, and VRI may **not** be appropriate for:

- Situations involving multiple participants with an expectation of high levels of interaction among the parties, with less structured turn-taking protocols;
- Situations where the participant(s) have an additional condition, such as a visual or cognitive impairment;
- Situations where the content and interaction are highly sensitive;
- Situations where one or more parties is intoxicated by drugs and/or alcohol; and
- Settings where the consequences of errors are grave.

Settings where VRI has been used successfully, when all of the professional and technical standards have been in place, include:

- Meetings between lawyers and clients to prepare for a trial;
- Brief interactions at a Court Management Office to file a set of documents or establish a court appearance date;
- On-going counselling appointments where the therapist and deaf client have previously met face-to-face, and have established a working relationship prior to using VRI;
- Bail hearings that are non-complex; and
- Informational interviews between a prospective job-seeker and an employer.

Professional Practice Standards

As with onsite interpreting, interpreters must take the necessary steps to maintain quality and professional standards. The following guidelines are crucial in ensuring the best possible outcomes with a VRI assignment:

- Participants and interpreters require a shared knowledge of the session content, which may require documents and a high-level summary to be shared in advance of appointments.
- Technical aspects need to be planned to ensure high-speed broadband connections or ISDN lines to carry both video and audio messages. The use of WIFI is not recommended as the quality of the sign language picture and reception can be dramatically altered when relying on WIFI. All participants need to be familiar with the technology being used and it is recommended that an on-site technical support person be available. Equipment needs to be tested in advance of assignments.
- Lighting and seating arrangements need to ensure clear sight lines between interpreters and deaf participants and microphones need to be sufficient in order for the interpreter to hear all participants in the meeting. Camera angles also need to allow the interpreter(s) to see all participants, so this requires one video monitor with a full

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picture view of the deaf participant and another video monitor for the view of the other meeting participants.

- Consistent use of qualified interpreters with the appropriate skills and credentials for the setting, including the application of team interpreting protocols where appropriate is paramount. In situations where a team of interpreters will be needed, the interpreters are required to be in same location in order to provide the most effective interpretation.
- In situations requiring a specialized team of deaf-non-deaf interpreters, seating arrangements will need to ensure the deaf interpreter is visible to the deaf consumer, and that the deaf interpreter can see the non-deaf pivot language⁴ interpreter. Finally, both interpreters will require two video monitors.
- Care must be taken regarding the length of the assignment that is interpreted in this format. VRI causes more fatigue for the interpreter due to the extra cognitive load for interpreters working remotely. Sufficient interpreters need to be booked to ensure the delivery of high quality interpreting services, and sufficient rest breaks must be built into the scheduled event.

Dispelling the Myths of VRI

It is easier – the interpreter can work from home.

VRI is not easier than onsite interpreting. The work requires the same professional standards, including preparation work, decision-making skills, and determining whether one has the right qualifications to provide the interpreting in the particular context. In addition, research has identified the work as being more complex, as the VRI context increases the cognitive load given the application of two-dimensional technology to viewing a language that is used in 3-D space.

It is cheaper – interpreters will lower their fees given they are working at home.

The fees set by interpreters are an individual matter; however, the AVLIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct⁵ addresses undercutting and business practices that undermine the integrity of the profession.

It is secure.

Not all videoconferencing is secure. In fact, many reputable interpreter referral services have developed proprietary software to ensure that privacy and security meet government standards, for example, when providing VRI in a hospital or in a courthouse. Skype, Facetime or

⁴ See Stone and Russell (2014) for a detailed discussion of the work of deaf-non-deaf interpreters.

⁵ <http://www.avlic.ca/ethics-and-guidelines/english>

Appear.in, for example, can all be “hacked” providing no guarantee of privacy. In addition, there is no standard for minimum connectivity when using VRI, allowing for varying WIFI and LTE strength to affect the effectiveness of VRI in a given situation. Interpreters without secure, private offices are encouraged to only accept VRI when they can go to a dedicated videoconference facility, for example, one that is already established and supported in a courthouse or a hospital.

Any interpreter can work VRI.

The most experienced interpreters find VRI interpreting challenging, so it is not recommended for novice interpreters or practitioners who are less linguistically capable and/or inexperienced to accept work in this setting. Interpreters need to be highly competent in the use of both consecutive and simultaneous interpreting (Russell, 2005; Roberson, Russell, & Shaw, 2014), in order to make the best decisions that can result in effective and accurate interpretation.

In addition, interpreters working in specific settings may have additional requirements for training and certification. For example, the AVLIC position on interpreting legal discourse and working in legal settings states that preference must be given for interpreters that hold the Certificate of Interpretation (COI) and have significant training and experience in legal work (Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada, 2011)⁶. Interpreters lacking the specialized training and/or experience are ethically bound to turn down assignments for which they are not qualified.

Using an American interpreter referral service is equivalent to using a Canadian interpreter referral service.

The standards of practice differ between the two countries, as do the certification standards and code of conduct. For example, the pass rate on the American RID certification exam has meant it is possible for interpreters with a few months of experience to pass, whereas the Canadian certification exam typically requires five years of experience prior to experiencing success. The reason for this difference lies in the focus of the testing: RID tests for entry level competence, while CASLI tests for interpreting mastery.

In addition to differences in standards of practice, RID and CASLI assess different codes of conduct. As such, American certified interpreters may not understand the differences in codes of conduct and interpreting practice. Therefore, American RID certified interpreters providing VRI services in Canada should be active members of AVLIC in order to ensure that the ethical standards and the cultural milieu of Canada are honoured.

Of greater concern, however, is that Canadian and US legal systems are different and interpreters in the US will likely have had no training or familiarity with the Canadian legal

⁶ http://www.avlic.ca/sites/default/files/docs/AVLIC-Interpreting_Legal_Discourse%26Working_in_Legal_Settings.p

system and the institutions involved in our criminal, family and civil systems. Without that training and content knowledge, the risk of interpreting errors increases dramatically.

Finally, there are significant nuanced linguistic and cultural difference between Canadian and American discourse. For example, signed language lexicon can vary dramatically between the two countries, creating situations where US interpreters may be unfamiliar with sign choices used by Deaf consumers in Canada which can lead to misunderstandings and errors. Further, differences in discourse style and pragmatic knowledge⁷, can significantly skew the accuracy of the interpretation if misrepresented.

Conclusion

It is important that VRI be understood in the contexts within which they may be used effectively. ASLIA asserts that VRI is not an absolute substitute for onsite interpreting. However, using the guidelines in this paper may make it possible to use VRI more effectively. As a profession, there are evidence-based, research practices and it is incumbent on professionals to ensure they are employing these practices to ensure that VRI services are able to closely match interpreting standards set for onsite interpreting.

⁷ Pragmatic knowledge of language in a given context is demonstrated through one's functional and sociolinguistic knowledge. The Canadian Centre for Language Benchmarks (2012) document as articulated describe these competences in the following way:

Functional Knowledge

The ability to convey and interpret the communicative intent (or function) behind a sentence, utterance or text. It encompasses macro-functions of language use (e.g., transmission of information, social interaction and getting things done/persuading others, learning and thinking, creation and enjoyment), and micro-functions, or speech acts (e.g., requests, threats, warnings, pleas), and the conventions of use.

Sociolinguistic Knowledge

The ability to produce and understand utterances appropriately. It encompasses rules of politeness; sensitivity to register, dialect or variety; norms of stylistic appropriateness; sensitivity to "naturalness"; knowledge of idioms and figurative language; knowledge of culture, customs and institutions; knowledge of cultural references; and uses of language through interactional skills to establish and maintain social relationships.

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