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The Benefits of Research on Learning and Practice: Thoughts from the 2017 Symposium on Interpretation and Translation

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The IJIE editors prompted this reflection on the recent 2017 Symposium on Signed Language Interpretation and Translation Research (March 31–April 2, 2017) at an opportune time: I had just wrapped up my involvement at the 3-day event, where I served on the organizing committee registration team, volunteered alongside my fellow colleagues and students, attended many sessions, and presented again.

The Symposium was the second event of its type hosted by the Department of Interpretation and Translation (DOIT) at Gallaudet University and the Center for the Advancement of Interpreting and Translation Research (CAITR). The first was offered in 2014 on the historic Washington, DC, campus that has championed higher education of Deaf and hard of hearing people for over 150 years. As a first-year faculty in the DOIT, I recently have been pondering ways for students to connect with research in order to understand how it shapes practice, as well as identify avenues for my own research engagement to inform my teaching and my freelance interpreting practice.

Varied disciplines make different connections between inquiry and education, and they value such research linkages differently. Research is typically connected to lecture content and reading, or in practice communities by active learning or inquiry-based learning (Healey, 2005). When compared to spoken language translation practice, sign language interpreting and translation is a relatively young profession, emerging only within the past 50 years (Scott-Gibson, 1991). As Napier (2004) predicted, new relationships among research and teaching, learning and practice are taking shape. This second Symposium exemplified the forward thrust of research activity on the work, as current and next generations of signed language interpreters and translators benefit from research-led practice.

The opening-day keynote by Beppie van den Bogaerde set the tone by describing a case of student engagement in research and inquiry. van den Bogaerde elaborated on the practice of embedded research in sign

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language interpreting education in the Netherlands, from the introductory vocational level through to bachelor's and master's level training. I observed several of our Gallaudet interpreting and translation students (BA, MA and PhD) actively involved and learning while engaged in different volunteering capacities at the Symposium, which showed that students can become excited by current research when they have different ways of engaging with it, beyond class readings and their own research or inquiry projects. Bachelor's and master's students were part of the conference support team, and doctoral students were engaged as moderators for concurring session tracks. During one of the breaks, I heard how much one of my master's students enjoyed attending presentations and meeting authors of familiar literature or of readings that were required in their studies. The opportunity to attend presentations about theory, methods, discussions, and conclusions also provided students the chance to critically evaluate others' research as well as identify interests and hone their own research thoughts and skills.

Practitioners and educators gained insights from the Symposium's varied innovative research by presenters doing work in the United States and in numerous countries such as Austria, Norway, China, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Canada, Ghana, and Australia. It is impossible to mention all of the rich information shared in 36 presentations, 32 posters, and three international keynote speakers. The concurrent sessions limited my attendance at all sessions; however, a few key themes came to light. New research topics and findings emerged that are highly relevant to training and practice for signed language interpreters and translators, as well as for our spoken language interpreter peers.

As was evidenced by several Symposium presentations, the practice of signed language translation takes on unique meaning and forms. Cross-modal challenges emerge when working with written text, spoken text and visual-gestural signed text. Although signed language translation has occurred for many decades, research on the practice is an even younger line of inquiry accompanying the increased need for accessible television broadcasting and website-based video technology. Historically, Deaf people have had a significant yet overlooked role in signed language interpreting and translating (Stone, 2009). The evolving and increasingly visible work of Deaf colleagues (often who are native signed language users), among the majority of second-language signed language users, was a complementary theme at this second Symposium. In fact, "Translation" was a new addition to the Symposium title, absent from the 2014 Symposium event title. This change aligned with the host department's recent name change to Gallaudet's Department of Interpretation and Translation (DOIT).

The topic of translation between written language and fixed, recorded signed language or television-based sign language texts recurred in several presentations. Svenja Wurm, a British Signed Language-English researcher from Heriot-Watt University, Scotland, described the challenges presented by the potentials and limits of different kinds of texts (written versus signed modalities). Wurm's presentation connected well with the work of my own Australian research team (Hodge, Goswell, Whynot, Linder, & Clark, 2015), which I presented, about best practice production guidelines for effective website (video) sign language translations—which were derived from Deaf community members and practicing translators focus groups.

Another overarching theme pertained to Deaf community perspectives, involvement, and representation. The lived experience that Deaf translators and interpreters bring to the profession is a valued one that several presentations and posters brought to light. Laurie Reinhardt described trust building between Deaf-hearing interpreter teams, and Eileen Forestal showed that Deaf interpreters' cultural brokering skill is a tool for effective team interpreting. Anne Leahy reported on historical cases of Deaf interpreters and Deaf expert witnesses in US and UK courts in the nineteenth century. In keeping with the legal theme, Napier, Hale, and colleagues' presentation reported on improved levels of participation in juror deliberations that a Deaf juror gains via interpreting services. Naomi Sheneman offered insights into ethical decision making and training needs of Deaf interpreters in light of the unique collective cultural challenges that they may face as community insiders.

The value of community and consumer engagement was evidenced in several presentations and it aligned well with the 2-day Deaf Translators Summit event that preceded the Symposium. For this event, Deaf interpreters from numerous countries had been invited to share research and discuss amongst themselves the practices and nomenclature of 'translation' and 'interpretation' work done by Deaf people. Both events benefited from the expertise of Robert Adam from University College, London, who during keynote speeches brought his insights as a practitioner, researcher and educator to attendees at the two events. My on-site dialogues with Deaf colleagues indicated that many more discussions will likely emerge regarding how the work of Deaf practitioners and hearing practitioners can be mutually supportive, and that inquiry into practice will no doubt shape the next decade or more of the unique work of signed language interpreters and translators.

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The second day's morning keynote was given by Xiaoyan Xiao, a Chinese researcher, practitioner, and educator from Xiamen University. Xiao presented about highly visible, high-impact broadcast news interpreting and shared her research team's findings of low comprehension rates of television signed news by Deaf viewers. The conclusions showed a need for training and research to improve practice in China (and, by implication, perhaps in other countries as well).

The theme of training and education emerged in several presentations and posters. Tobias Haug, Lorraine Leeson and Christine Monikowski surveyed linguistics course content used and available in European training programs, while Jihong Wang explored effective conference interpreting strategies employed by signed-to-spoken language interpreters in Australia. Technology was another theme, with research on interpreter-initiated communication in video relay service (VRS) interpreting, and another poster about engaging students in asynchronous online interpreter training courses.

Research was also shared about the linguistic features of interpreted interaction and social justice education in interpreter training. Many of the new research presented aligns with increased global mobility, as well as with the social and technological changes that interpreters and Deaf communities are facing. Multiculturalism and multilingual trends in signed language interpreting were also seen in presentations such as Cat Fung's report on her research team's development of training materials for multilingual interpreters in Hong Kong.

The final endnote presentation, by Robert Adam, emphasized the gap in research on the work of Deaf people who work as translators and interpreters. This area is emerging and despite new 'qualifications' and recognition, there are still large inequities in training opportunities, as well as gaps in exploration and learning about best practice in this specialized area. Many points in Adam's presentation resonated with me, as I have recently been involved in Australia's process of recognizing the work of interpreters who are Deaf. In British Sign Language, Adam shared his wealth of knowledge and experience, and his provocative thoughts; for example, he questioned why Deaf interpreters are not simply just called 'interpreters' like everyone else. During the presentation I appreciated the complex effort and skill of the Deaf-hearing interpreter teams working between two different signed languages (as an alternative to reliance on International Sign—a limited, contact sign language). It was an exemplar for professional practice in internationally attended conferences pertaining to signed language interpreting research, aligning with spoken language interpreting and translation standards at international conferences.

Credit is due to the Symposium organizing committee and scientific committee members. Particular kudos are owed to the convenor, Brenda Nicodemus, director of Gallaudet University's Center for the Advancement of Interpreting and Translation Research, for a brilliant take-home research resource. Registrants departed with not only the souvenir conference program, but also a compiled reference list of literature cited by all Symposium presentation and poster abstracts. Having a rich list on hand of sign language interpretation and translation research resources will remind me of the exciting research shared by colleagues at the second Symposium, and will enable me to revisit and implement current research inquiry into my teaching, learning, and practice.

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