Guidelines for sound engineers when SL and spoken conference interpreters work in the same team

These guidelines cover situations where spoken and sign language interpreters are working together in a mixed team.

Introduction

Spoken language interpreters interpret between spoken languages. Sign language interpreters interpret between spoken and a signed language. These guidelines cover situations where spoken and sign language interpreters are working together in a mixed team.

Sign language interpreters need to hear the spoken language well in order to interpret into sign language (using their hands). They also need to be seen properly by the deaf delegates, and to see these delegates properly in order to interpret sign language into spoken language for other delegates and provide relay for their colleagues in the booths.

1. Placement

Sign language interpreters do not work in the booth like spoken language interpreters, they work on the floor close to where the speakers are so that the deaf participants can see them. Sign language interpreters work in teams of two or three, depending on the duration, the speakers, the languages and the content of the programme.

a. General

The sign language interpreters need to place themselves in a position where the deaf participant can see the interpreter as well as the speakers in the same view. This means that the sign language interpreter should be placed in a central spot in the room and not to the side.

b. Speaker (hearing uses spoken language)

At events with presentations made from a stage or rostrum, the sign language interpreter stands (or sits) with their back to the presentation screen, facing the audience. It is important that the interpreter has eye contact with the deaf participants in the audience and that there is no visual obstruction. The second interpreter sits facing the other interpreter. Depending on the setting (such as a meeting around a meeting table) the interpreters can also sit beside one another, facing the deaf participants.

c. Speaker (deaf uses sign language)

The deaf speaker faces the audience and the sign language interpreter sits facing the deaf speaker (the interpreter has his/her back to the audience). It is important that the interpreter has eye contact with the deaf presenter and that there is no visual obstruction. The second interpreter sits next to the first interpreter. Depending on the setting (such as a meeting) the interpreters can also sit beside one another facing all the participants.

d. Seating

When sign language interpreters are seated it is important that the chairs are preferably non-revolving and have either a low armrest or none at all.

e. Background

It is important that the background behind the sign language interpreter is not visually distracting, such as bright coloured patterns, or backlit, such as by a window or a bright screen. If the background is not right it will be difficult for the deaf participants to see the sign language interpreter.

2. Technical Requirements

a. Lighting

The lighting in the room should be clear and cast no shadows on the face of the sign language interpreter. When films or presentations are screened, ensure that the light on the interpreter remains so that the deaf participants can see the interpreter.

b. Headset

Sign language interpreters need comfortable adjustable headsets with soft ear pads which do not easily fall off when signing. They also need to be able to select the incoming channel for relay purposes. The headphones should preferably be wireless receivers, which can be easily attached to clothing, and should use Radio Frequency (FM) and not infrared signals

(the latter type can lead to signal distortion when signing). In addition, in most conference rooms the participants headsets have a cord which is too short for the sign language interpreter, who may need to stand while working (see 3 below). **An extension cord for the headset is needed**.

c. Microphone

When a deaf person gives a presentation or contributes to the discussion, the sign language interpreter will interpret this into spoken language, providing relay to the spoken language interpreters. The sign language interpreter works more easily with a handheld wireless microphone (not an attached table-top microphone, lapel microphone or headset combo), so that they can turn easily towards deaf signers in the audience as well as signers giving presentations.

d. Monitor

The interpreter who stands in front facing the audience is unable to see the screen where the presentations are projected. In order for the sign language interpreter to see the presentations a separate monitor should be placed in front of the interpreter, such as is provided as a speakers monitor.

e. Captions

When using audio visual media, captions or alternative formats should be provided for all audio content, including sounds, so the deaf delegates know what others hear (spoken language, music, specific context related noises).

3. Web Streaming

The sign language interpreter can be web streamed separately or in a frame within the total broadcast. When web streamed, the interpreters stand while interpreting (1). This means that the interpreter will need to wear a headset with an extension cord or a wireless receiver. For the online viewer it is important that the sign language interpreter is clearly visible. There are two options for incorporating the sign language interpreter in the view simultaneously(2):

- In a box or bubble in the main screen or a window in the main screen, with the box showing either the signer or the visuals;
- Chroma key (green screen): with the signer totally or partially super-imposed on the visuals.

When the box is used the preferred location for (right-handed) signers is to the right (from the viewers' point of view) of the visuals. The size should be large enough for the signer to be clearly visible. The location should be fixed, not variable. The interpreter should be visible from the waist to slightly above the head.

Equipment Checklist

- Chairs without armrest
- Background: no backlight, even color screen or chroma key screen
- Lighting on the interpreter, no shadow on the face
- Wireless FM radio receiver and headset or, if not available, soft padded adjustable headset with extension cord
- Handheld wireless microphone.

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[1] https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20-TECHS/G54.html
[2] http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/signingbooks/sbrc/grid/d71/guide13.htm

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