WoMan?
About Sign Language Interpreters and Their Gender Impact
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Contents

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................ 2
2. Gender and Language ..................................................................................... 3
   Language as power ......................................................................................... 3
   Language as culture ...................................................................................... 4
3. Gender in Interpreting ................................................................................... 5
4. Study Setup ..................................................................................................... 8
   The Research Questions ............................................................................... 8
   The Austrian Situation .................................................................................. 8
   The Method .................................................................................................. 9
   The Target Group ......................................................................................... 9
5. Results ............................................................................................................ 9
   About the Respondents ................................................................................. 9
   Gender impact (Questions 9 and 10) ........................................................ 11
   Strategies to minimize gender impact (Question 12) ............................... 16
   Perception of interpreters of the opposite sex (Question 13) ................. 18
   Predominance of Women in the field (Question 14) ............................... 19
6. Conclusion .................................................................................................... 20
7. References ................................................................................................... 23
   E-Books .................................................................................................... 25
   Annexes ..................................................................................................... 26
1. Introduction

Not only do men and women communicate differently but they think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need, and appreciate differently. They almost seem to be on different planets, speaking different languages and needing different nourishment.

(Gray 1992: 5)

These words seem to express a popular belief although the way they are put here in John Gray's famous book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* may be a bit exaggerated. If these differences exist, men communicate differently with men than they do with women and women speak differently to women than they do to men. They seem to use different languages that have different codes for different meanings. The sociolinguist Deborah Tannen states that communication works on several levels and the message is not only coded into verbal symbols, but also into "contextualization cues, including paralinguistic and prosodic features [such as pitch, intonation, rhythm, etc.], word choice and ways of structuring information" (2005:xvi). Re-framing a male message into female language would eventually change the message.

The interesting question is whether this fact has a strong influence on interpreter-mediated communication where the interpreter is of a different gender from her/his client. Having worked as a sign language interpreter for more than ten years now, I am increasingly aware of the influence my gender has on many of the situations I experience in interpretation. This influence is especially pronounced in settings that are dominated by men or where women traditionally have different tasks that are sometimes considered inferior to those of their male colleagues. For over a year I worked in professional training for an all-male profession where women typically work as secretaries or social workers. My presence in a group composed of male adolescents from a migrant background and their male instructors obviously biased the situation. I started to talk to my colleagues about their perceptions and opinions on impact of their gender. Many of them confirmed my perceptions and reported changes in the interpreting situation in cross-gender interpreter-client relationships. Most of them had experienced situations where the communication partners' attention
had been drawn to their person, thereby changing the dynamics of the situation. My impression was that we interpreters are aware of our gender impact but we do not use this knowledge in our daily work. So I set out to examine the gender impact of sign language interpreters and to do a small survey of the Austrian situation in order to to further awareness of this issue among my colleagues (and myself ;-).

2. Gender and Language

Gender and Language studies can be said to have been born in 1975 when the linguist Robin Lakoff published her famous book *Language and Women's Place*. She had found systematic differences in the ways men and women communicate and in the different connotations a word is given when applied to a woman or to a man. Many scientists (also sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists) built on and tested her findings (e.g. Aries 1987, West and Zimmermann 1985, Coates and Cameron 1988). Their work was used in feminist campaigns against the use of sexist language forms, because according to these findings, sexist language not only reflects sexism, but contributes to matters staying the way they have been. This perspective was underpinned by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf's theory of linguistic relativity (Whorf 1956). They defended the idea of language providing people with their symbolic guide to social reality.

Language as power

The "dominance" approach stresses the power relations manifested in language and the dominance of men over women as an explanation for gendered language use.

In 1978, Erickson, Lind, Johnson and O'Barr introduced the concept of powerful and powerless language in their study on speech styles in legal settings. Their idea was that social power and status were linked more to language style than to gender. This concept was confirmed by several researchers who in addition found co-occurrences of gender differences. Female language was then labeled
to be a powerless linguistic style (Blankenship and Holtgraves 2005). Powerless style is characterized by tag questions, intensifiers, hedges, hesitations forms, gesture forms, questioning intonation and question statements. In a study on language use in single-sex and mixed-sex groups, Carli (1990) found that women used more features of powerless language than did men when they were in mixed-sex groups. She also found that "men perceived a woman who used powerless language to be more trustworthy and likable than an assertive woman" (Morgan 2008:70).

**Language as culture**

Daniel N. Maltz and Ruth A. Borker (1982) were the first to use the "cultural" approach that was also taken by Deborah Tannen (1990). They based their work on Gumperz's findings on the interactions between English-English and Indian-English speakers in Britain (Gumperz 1977, Gumperz et al. 1977). He had found that systematic miscommunication was caused by differences in cues. These communication problems were not identified as such but attributed instead to personality clashes or to racial stereotypes, thereby putting even more strain on relations that were already difficult.

The "cultural" approach focuses on the complex relationship between the cultural patterning of linguistic behavior and gender relations. Men and women can be thought of as two different cultural groups, because they usually socialize primarily in single-sex peer groups. Such "genderlects" of boys and girls are not merely the product of their copying of adult language, but evolve during a process that Maltz and Borker (1982) call the learning of a "gender-specific culture" within their one-sex peer groups. Brooks-Gunn and Matthews (1979) call this process the "consolidation of sex roles," which aims at a clear distinction through divergent ways of speaking. Maltz and Borker argue that "because they learn these gender-specific cultures from their age-mates, children tend to develop stereotypes and extreme versions of adult behavior patterns"(2002:167). Boys and girls learn to use different languages because of
the completely different social contexts in which they learn to interact with their friends.

If gender-specific culture is learned and exercised in peer groups, gender is a social construction. This view is also shared by Ann Weatherall:

Language about women (and men) and women (and men) speaking are both aspects of one process—the social construction of gender. A social constructionist perspective is tied up with poststructuralist ideas. It holds that meanings associated with male and female are not fixed or static. Rather, understandings of gender are contextually (culturally, historically and locally) specific.

(Weatherall 2005:Loc. 293-97)

The basis of the process of social construction is discourse: language is no longer considered to be a system of representation, but a system that builds the world by describing it: "the categories in language don't reflect the world, but constitute it. Thus gender is not just reflected in language but the concept of gender is itself constituted by the language used to refer to it" (Weatherall 2005: Loc 1904). And further on she states: "It is not biology but social learning that limits what women and men think they can do. Thus gender has been construed as the social 'trimmings' of sex..." (Weatherall 2005:Loc. 1913-14).

3. Gender in Interpreting

In using discourse analysis, Roy (1989) and Wadensjö (1998) have shown that interpreters are participants within dialogic interactions. Interpreters are therefore not invisible and are known to contribute to the interaction as communication managers (Metzger, 1999). As Jamina Napier puts it: "interpreters cooperate with interactants to co-construct meaning in dialogic settings by coordinating the talk while they translate." (2007:412) This cooperation by which interpreters negotiate meaning with interactants is labeled as the communicative pas de trois by Wadensjö (1998). In the light of the gender aspect of language this cooperation seems even more complicated when cross-gender interpreter/client situations are taken into account.
Unlike translation studies where gender has been the issue of many research studies, articles and monographs, there have been relatively few studies in language interpretation referring to gender problems. This may be due to the fact that community interpreting has not been researched for many years; the main focus of spoken language interpreting has been on conference settings. There is one study on gender impact in interpreted medical encounters by Weber, Singy and Guex (2005). Even in sign language interpreting, where the gender issue is more prominent because of the mismatch of female/male voice for a male/female client and the increased visibility of the interpreter, literature is sparse. Most of the existing texts are personal reports within a theoretical framework (Furby 2007, MacDougall 2007, LeMoine Wright 2007, Melton 2007, Levine 2007 and Morgan 2008), but I did not find any texts dealing with research on gender issues.

Furby (2007) reports about a situation in a male IT environment in which the hearing team members were engaging more in conversation amongst themselves than with the Deaf client. She concludes "that it may be because they were communicating to him via a female interpreter. My very presence had altered the dynamics and changed the group from one that was all male to one that was mixed." (Furby 2007:11).

Levine (2007) describes how, as a college professor teaching a class with a Deaf student and using a female interpreter, he became aware that the female interpreter was re-framing his male message into female language for the male recipient and thereby changing it.

MacDougall (2007) draws attention to the fact that what an interpreter produces may have some common features of "powerless" language: Speaking of the hedging that occurs during the internalized transfer phase of interpreting and of apologies for interpreter errors, she states: "The speaker hasn't necessarily uttered any of these words in the original message and may be unaware that the interpreter is processing vocally, but the hearing listeners have heard them and may not know that these utterances are not a part of the original message."
The interpreted message may be weakened just by the interpretation process. Of course this is true for female and male interpreters, but may play even more when there is a female with high vocal pitch voicing over for a Deaf speaker and using "powerless" language.

Melton (2007) sums up the general differences between male and female communication (male directness, telegraphic communication, clear expression of wishes, open fight for supremacy vs. female vagueness, detailed communications, fear of offending someone, avoiding confrontation, need of consensus to feel comfortable) and underlines the negative effects an interpreter's inappropriate gender-language can have for the Deaf client (Melton 2007:10). She concludes: "Using vocabulary terms that are equivalent to choices that a person of the opposite gender might make isn't a luxury, it's a requisite." (Melton 2007:11).

LeMoine Wright (2007) reports an experience in an all-male classroom where he replaced a female interpreter. In the presence of the male interpreter the formerly inactive Deaf client completely changed his behavior and took active part in the classroom communication. He then reflects on the female predominance in sign language interpreting in the US and attributes it to the strong link to Deaf history. In the past, interpreters had worked pro bono and had taken the role of caretakers. The majority of these were women.

Morgan (2008) reports her own experience as a full-time designated interpreter for a Deaf male supervisor in mid-level management of a large organization. She found out that due to her interpretation the Deaf supervisor was not taken as seriously by his subordinates as his hearing co-managers because she had not been aware of her use of powerless female language. She explores the effect of different conversational styles, gender-linked language, commands and directness, communication logistics and communication behaviors, and proposes changes to be introduced in cross-gender interpreting (e.g. recognition of conversation styles of superiors, coworkers and subordinates;
awareness of gendered language; assessment of one's own communication style, creating a new pattern if necessary).

Till now, sign language interpreting research has not conducted many surveys of interpreters or clients. This small-scale study is intended to contribute to the field.

4. Study Setup

The Research Questions

These are the research questions I set out to answer:

- Are Austrian SLI's aware of the influence of their gender when they interpret?
- Do they experience situations where their gender may be an advantage/a disadvantage to their clients?
- Do Austrian SLI's adopt strategies to avoid negative effects of their gender on the social status of the Deaf client?
- Do they think that the female predominance in the profession makes a difference?

Before I go into any detail of the outcome of my survey I would like to give you a picture of the situation of sign language interpreting in Austria.

The Austrian Situation

Austria is a very small country with a Deaf community of about 10,000 people. Sign Language interpreting is a very young profession. The Austrian Sign Language Interpreters Association (Österreichischer GebärdensprachdolmetscherInnen-Verband - for short ÖGSDV) was founded in 1998 by 24 graduates of the first Sign Language Interpreter Education (HORIZON) that was created in the wake of the 1995 WFD Conference in Vienna. Until then, interpreting was mostly done by hearing children of Deaf adults or by clergymen who worked pro bono. It was the helper model that prevailed. With the advent of education opportunities, the helper model was replaced by the conduit model and the keyword was "professionalization."
Today, the interpreter community in Austria consists of about 100 interpreters. Most of them have passed the qualifying examination and are members of the ÖGSDV (85). They are entitled to work as "certified" interpreters and are paid by the federal government or the various provincial governments. For practical reasons, I have only addressed these as they can easily be contacted by a mailing list of the ÖGSDV. In addition, I contacted three more interpreters I know personally.

The Method

Due to time restrictions, I decided to limit my study to the sign language interpreters' attitude/view on the topic. I drew up a survey with 15 questions (see Appendices 1 and 2). Many of the questions were open questions. I decided to do a qualitative study using quantitative methods to cover as many aspects to the topic as possible and gather the knowledge of the professionals in the field.

The Target Group

The target group of the survey consisted of the 88 qualified sign language interpreters of Austria; 82 of them were female and 6 were male. The respondents had a deadline of three weeks to answer the 15 questions. 35 questionnaires, i.e. 39,77% were filled in and returned, 32 from the women, three from the men. This means that the 39,02% of the women responded, whereas 50% of the men did so.

For privacy reasons, I will not analyze the data by gender because there are too few male interpreters in Austria to preclude giving clues to their identity.

5. Results

About the Respondents

Age and Working Experience (Questions 2 and 4)
The respondents were grouped in the following age groups: 20-30, 30-40, 40-
50, 50-60 (see Chart 1), the youngest being 22, the oldest 55. Their working experience was grouped as follows: 0-2 years (<2), 2-5 years, 5-10 years, and more than 10 years (>10) (see Chart 2). I chose these categories because of the youth of the profession in my country (see chapter The Austrian Situation).

![Chart 1: Age distribution of respondents](image1)

![Chart 2: Working experience](image2)

**Working areas (Question 5)**

The areas in which the respondents work are: workplace, (vocational) education ["education" ohne Attributswort wäre alles umfassend], community, legal, medical, political settings, and miscellaneous events. The results are shown in Chart 3 below.

![Chart 3: Working fields](image3)

Most of the respondents work in community (97,14%) and workplace (94,29%) settings, followed by settings in the areas of events (88,57%) and education.
(85,71%) as well as in the medical area (82,86%) settings. Those involved with political settings (48,57%) are comparably few.

Working experience outside interpreting (Questions 6, 7, 8)

94,29% (33) of the respondents answered that they had working experience outside the interpreting field, although some of them worked in other capacities with Deaf people. 90,9% (30) of them think that their prior working experience has informed their work as interpreters. Only 5,71% (2) of the 35 respondents have no prior working experience and are aware of the fact that this lack of experience could be a disadvantage.

Gender impact (Questions 9 and 10)

All respondents believe that their opposite gender has an influence on interpreting situations.

Question 9 of the questionnaire asked for situations where they considered that gender influence would play. The suggested categories were higher education, workplace, (vocational) school, stage performance, legal, medical, political settings, telephone interpreting, therapeutical settings and others (see Chart 4). To these categories the respondents added the categories community, media/theatre, counsel, mediation, and police.

In retrospect, I sincerely regret not having the working areas coincide with the areas of gender influence. Had I done so I would have been able to look for relationships between the working areas and awareness of gender impact in the same areas. I also neglected to include the categories of media interpreting and community interpreting.
All 35 interpreters are aware of the influence of gender in interpreter-mediated medical encounters.

This fact is confirmed by the literature. In one of the rare studies on gender influence in interpreter-mediated medical encounters, Weber, Singy and Guex (2005) found that the majority of female patients using interpreters prefers female interpreters. One of these patients explained as follows:

"… sometimes we are in situations where we don't say anything anymore, between us and the male interpreter, because we want to reveal things of intimacy, so we're not free, if it's a woman, it's different." (Weber/Singy/Guex 2005:144)

Chart 5 illustrates the gender-awareness of the interpreters in the nine settings that were proposed to choose from. For example, 34.29% (12) of the interpreters believe that four out of nine situations are likely to be influenced by a cross-gender interpreter/patient relationship. Only 11.43% of the 35 interpreters (4) are convinced that gender impact plays a role in all nine given settings. 60% (21) find that only two to four situations out of the nine might be affected by gender.
This high percentage could be indicative of low awareness of gender impact even among the interpreters who seem to be aware of the issue in general and are ready to consider the problem by participating in the survey. As I mentioned before, I did not consider the coincidence of the working areas and the proposed categories for gender influence consciously enough. It would have been useful to know if the interpreters are only aware of their gender influence in situations they are accustomed to work in. Since the working areas and the proposed categories for gender impact unfortunately do not match exactly, it is not possible to establish such a relation.

Factors of gender impact
91,43% of the interpreters (32) gave more detailed information on the reasons of the gender impact. They mentioned the following factors: embarrassment in medical encounters (17), traditional role expectations (14), female vs. male voice (12), experience with sexual abuse in women (5), negative experiences with the opposite gender (4).

Personal experience with gender impact on cross-gendered interpreting situations (Question 10)
80% (28) of the respondents report personal experiences, 92,86 % of these give one to three examples. The examples given may be categorized into 5 categories:
Traditional role expectations (14)
Sexual interest (12)
Embarrassment in medical/therapeutical encounters and alike (9)
All-male educational settings (7)
Wrong voice (4)

Traditional role expectations refer to situations where the female interpreter is not considered competent enough to do her job or is attributed the role of a helper or advocate for the Deaf. One case resulted in a positive discrimination to the benefit of the Deaf client. As the female interpreter knew the technical language of the field, the (male) person giving the exam was so impressed by her knowledge that he allowed the Deaf man pass the exam without further questioning thereby advantaging him over the hearing students.

Sexual interest is the category of situations where the Deaf or the hearing client became sexually interested in the interpreter or was irritated by her/him. For example, one of the female interpreters reports a situation where her presence as interpreter for a female client stimulated the sexual interest of the male doctor. She believes that the doctor would not have exhibited such behavior if she had been a male interpreter. In this case the cross-gender interpreter/client mismatch was between the interpreter and the hearing client.

By Embarrassment in medical/therapeutical encounters and alike I mean situations where the client of the opposite gender does not want to undress or talk about his/her sexual life or is ill at ease in a situation where he/she has to communicate with people of the opposite sex. One example concerns a consultation at a youth welfare office where a male client is very stressed and ill at ease because of the presence of too many women (social workers and interpreter).

In her scenario 206, Brenda E. Cartwright describes such a situation:

I was interpreting for a Deaf man at a doctor's appointment. He had requested a male interpreter but was told there was none available.
In the name of expediency, the client agreed to have a female interpreter. The doctor is examining the man's genitals, and the client is becoming obviously increasingly embarrassed. The doctor, thinking he's being funny, says "What's the matter, hasn't a woman seen your penis before?" (2009: 85)

It was not only the presence of the female interpreter that contributed to the Deaf patient's embarrassment, but also the doctor's reaction - trying to be funny - to his patient's discomfort.

**All-male educational settings** are situations where male adolescents in vocational training or other educational settings are distracted when they are confronted with a female interpreter. Sometimes, they start bragging to attract her attention or try to test her reaction by swearing heavily or telling dirty jokes.

**Wrong voice** describes situations where the female/male voice for the client of the opposite gender causes confusion for the audience. Instances of this category are telephone interpreting, radio interviews of Deaf people or contributions of Deaf speakers.

In his text on barriers to professional success for Deaf professionals, Bristoll found that "a Deaf man interpreted by a female interpreter can prove distracting to the hearing interlocutor, especially on the phone (Dickinson 2002) and there is some evidence that women's voices are unconsciously considered less authoritative or 'powerful' than men's (Morgan 2008)." (Bristoll 2009: 118).

In all these situations, the (female) interpreter not only is the third party in the communication but becomes the focus of interest, her presence changing the situation by distorting the discourse and sometimes even completely shifting the attention from the communication partners and their communication goals to the interpreter and her being a woman. This phenomenon may either harm or, on the other hand, sometimes even improve the status of the Deaf client.

All these aspects complicate the difficult interpreting situation in workplaces or educational settings where interpreters are regularly present and change the dynamics by their mere presence. As Jules Dickinson and Graham H. Turner
state in their article on sign language interpreters and the role conflict in the workplace (2008), the mere presence of the interpreter in the situation makes Deaf people "highly visible within the office." Her presence "can emphasise the Deaf client's absence" when he/she does not show up whereas the absence of a hearing colleague would pass unnoticed. Sometimes the interpreter's inactivity draws attention "when everyone else around them is engaged in work-related tasks." (Dickinson and Turner 2008: 238). So what about the invisibility of the interpreter?

**Strategies to minimize gender impact (Question 12)**

Asked how they prevented their gender impact in interpreting situations, 62.86% (22) of the 35 respondents report that they consciously try to minimize their gender impact. Sorted by frequency, these strategies are:

- neutral behavior (6)
- neutral clothing (5)
- more professional/competent behavior (4)
- avoiding intimacy/little eye contact - especially in medical settings (4)
- different choice of expression/"male language" (3)
- distant attitude/no display of involvement (3)
- refusal of assignments for a client of the opposite gender (in medical encounters) (2)
- teaming up with a male colleague (2)
- better preparation/technical vocabulary (2)
- explaining potential problems beforehand (medical encounters) (2)
- explaining situation to hearing client (telephone) (1)
- asking client about his/her preferences (in case of strong impact and "sexualisation") (1)
- more flexibility/adapt to situation (1)

Some of these strategies imply conscious decisions and action beforehand: neutral clothing, explaining potential problems beforehand, better
preparation/technical vocabulary, teaming up with a male colleague, and refusal of assignments for a client of the opposite gender (in medical encounters).

The question is how neutral and unmarked can a woman be, especially if she is entering a predominantly or exclusively male domain of work? In this respect, Deborah Tannen states as follows:

A man can choose a style that will not attract attention or subject him to any particular interpretation, but a woman can't. Whatever she wears, whatever she calls herself, however she talks, will be fodder for interpretation about her character and competence. In a setting where most of the players are men, there is no unmarked woman. (Tannen 1995: 112)

I remember the first time I entered a training facility with almost 100% men (apprentices and their instructors). After I came in, I had all their eyes on me. Just being a woman was enough. And I had tried to dress "unmarked", but I had not cut my hair or changed my way of moving.

Many of strategies mentioned concern the behaviour in the field: explaining situation to hearing client (telephone), asking client about his/her preferences (in case of strong impact and "sexualisation"), neutral behaviour, distant attitude/no display of involvement, avoiding intimacy/little eye contact (especially in medical settings).

There are only three respondents (13,64% of the 22) who mention strategies that relate to linguistic aspects: different choice of expression/"male language". This lack of awareness does not only seem to be true for Austrian sign language interpreters. Talking about the members of their French focus groups in the study mentioned above, Weber, Singy and Guex report that they do not mention "problems caused by the fact that different languages - as instituted and instituting vectors of communication - operate divergent analyses of the male and the female in their grammatical and lexical structures" (Weber/Singy/Guex 2005:144).
Although I have been interested in this subject for some years and have talked about these phenomena to many people, I have to admit that I do not consciously choose my expressions or think of sounding more "male" when doing a voice-over for a Deaf male client. I try to formulate as precisely as possible but I think that it is the impulse of the resolute and determined signing of a male client that makes me adjust, not my own conscious decision to do so. And I cannot say that I am aware of adjusting my vocal pitch or my body language. If somebody asked me to interpret using "male language", I would not know how to do so.

And there is still another aspect that should not be underestimated: Do I want to be considered to be male? Am I ready to change gender in public, even if it is only for a short period? As Ann Weatherall put it:

> Norms about speech are powerful forces that influence people's perceptions and evaluations of others. Ideas about women's speech, for example, can be seen as constructing a double bind for women. Women's speech is believed to be grating and trivial, therefore easy to ignore. However, for a woman to talk in a low pitch about serious matters is to be dismissed as a real woman.

(Weatherall 2005: Loc. 261)

So the female interpreter has to perform something close to a gender switch. This is even more so in sign language interpreting where the Deaf male client is not present with his own voice. That's why sign language interpretation is more prominent than that between spoken languages because the prosody and rhythm of sign language are usually not accessible to the hearing audience.

**Perception of interpreters of the opposite sex (Question 13)**

74,14% (27) of the interpreters answered the question on their perception of the opposite sex. One in eight respondents said they were unable to answer the question because of the lack of male interpreters in her federal province. This may well be the reason for the seven others, too, who did not respond as male interpreters currently work in only three of the nine federal provinces.

59,26% of the 27 respondents (16) report that they do not see any difference in
being a female or male interpreter. 18,52% (5) of the respondents believe that being male is a competitive advantage in society (status, credibility etc.). 14,81% (4) report that male interpreters have the advantage of being a rare species and therefore being in heavy demand. 14,81% of the 27 respondents (4) think that speaking with a male voice is an advantage for some settings (e.g. politics). 11,11% (3) of the 27 think that being male can be of a disadvantage to the interpreter because there are situations they are not able to deal with.

**Predominance of Women in the field (Question 14)**

74,29% (26) of the interpreters believe that the female predominance in their profession has an influence. 20% (7) believe this aspect to be irrelevant, 5,71% (2) did not answer this question.

![Chart 6: Impact of female predominance in the profession](chart)

Asked for the negative/positive impact, 69,23% (18) of these 26 respondents mention that because of the female predominance in the profession, the public view on sign language interpreting is biased toward “caring” and “helping”, thereby reducing our work to the social aspect. 57,69% (15) are convinced that the female predominance is a barrier to adequate payment and a handicap in
fee negotiations, 34,62% (9) are convinced that female predominance is the reason for the poor regard in which the profession is held (see Chart 6).

These results confirm the findings of Christa Maria Zeller who in 1984 concluded her diploma thesis on the predominance of women in translating and interpreting by stating that the presence of many women in a given profession apparently diminishes its repute and discourages men from entering the field. According to her analysis, this also holds true for translators and interpreters (1984: 65).

7,69% (2) of the 26 interpreters believe that women are too emotional and lack pragmatism, both of which hinder the development of the profession.

6. Conclusion

The Austrian sign language interpreters, at least the 39,77% (35) of them who contributed to the survey, seem to have some awareness of the impact of their gender in cross-gender interpreter/client situations. All of them are aware of this impact in interpreter-mediated medical encounters. But their awareness of the linguistic and language aspects of gendered situation seems at best very limited.

80% (28) of the interpreters definitely have experienced situations where their gender impact was an advantage/a disadvantage for their clients.

62,86% of them (22) report to use strategies to minimize their gender impact. Most of these strategies involve neutrality, clothing, preparation and professional behavior. Only three interpreters report that they use different choices of expression/"male language" as a strategy.

One of the results of this small study is that gender issues should be included into the interpreter's education and training. Interpreter students should be taught how better to reduce the impact of their gender and become aware of the linguistic aspects of gendered discourse. Austrian sign language profession seems far away from a situation like the one which Morgan has recently described:
Before beginning an assignment with John (male Deaf client), I would take a moment to think about the pitch of my voice and intentionally lower it to a level that was slightly lower than my everyday pitch, yet not so noticeable that it became a caricature of a man's voice. This shift helped me to provide an interpretation that was consistent with the agreement we had made to interpret in ways that reflected his gender and communication style. I chose to use fewer words when voicing. I attempted to eliminate all superfluous words and sounds. While interpreting, hearing my own voice speak in this way, which was different from my usual speech patterns, I was better able to remember to avoid powerless language, put aside my personal aversion to speaking in a direct manner to a superior, and state John's commands directly. I also paid particular attention to whether or not I actually had the floor before I began to speak. I sometimes would ensure this position by saying the name of the person who currently had the floor and then pausing, which can be an accurate interpretation of the Deaf professional's eye gaze toward an individual. (Morgan 2008, 76-7)

Only 77.14% (27) answered the question on their perception of the colleagues of the opposite gender. This low rate may be due to the fact that the six male Austrian interpreters currently work in only three of the nine federal provinces. Many of the interpreters may therefore lack experience with male colleagues. Almost 60% of the 27 respondents report that there was no difference/advantage/disadvantage for the opposite sex although they all are aware of gender impacts in interpreting.

74.29% (26) of the interpreters believe that the female predominance is a problem for the profession. According to them, it is the reason why the profession is more considered to be social work than professional interpreter's work (69.23% of the 26). More than half of them are convinced that the female predominance is a barrier to adequate payment and a handicap in fee negotiations (57.69%); there are some who believe that female predominance in the profession is the reason for its poor standing. (34.62%).

This small survey has provided interesting results on the gender awareness of Austrian sign language interpreters. The data of the survey could be further
examined, cross-related and interpreted. One of the questions of the questionnaire (question 11) was not evaluated in this study. It relates to the interpreter's opinion on their clients' perception of cross-gender interpreter/client situations. This topic could be examined in more detail with the help of data to be collected among Deaf people.

[To be continued...]
7. References


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WoMan? About Sign Language Interpreters and Their Gender Impact
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E-Books

Annex 1: Questionnaire (German)

Fragebogen
„WoMan? About Sign Language Interpreters and Their Gender Impact“

Liebe KollegInnen!


Alle Informationen, die Sie beisteuern, werden nur für mein Forschungsprojekt zu Genderfragen im Rahmen von Gebärdensprachdolmetschen verwendet. Die Informationen werden streng vertraulich behandelt und anonym in einer Computer Datenbank gespeichert, so dass keinerlei Rückschlüsse auf Personen möglich sind. Die Daten unterliegen den Datenschutzrichtlinien.

HINWEISE ZUM AUSFÜLLEN DES FORMULARS:
Zwischen den Formularfeldern weitspringen mit der Tab-Taste
Kontrollkästchen ( ☐ ) bitte anhaken durch ANKLICKEN oder Aktivieren mit der LEERTASTE
Bitte innerhalb eines Textfeldes (z.B. ☐ ) den vorgegebenen Text überschreiben (gesamtes Textfeld markieren und neuen Text eingeben).
Auswahlfelder (z.B. ☐ ) werden erst durch Anspringen sichtbar, bitte aus den vorhandenen Optionen wählen.

ABSCHNITT 1: PERSÖNLICHE ANGABEN

Frage 1: Geschlecht: Weiblich ☐ / Männlich ☐

Frage 2: Alter am 1. November 2010:

Frage 3: Ausbildung zur/m GebärdensprachdolmetscherIn (Bitte anhaken):
Universität Graz ☐ / GESDO ☐ /AFL ☐ /HORIZON 1 o. 2 ☐ /Andere ☐ Geben Sie hier Ihre andere Ausbildung an

Frage 4: Dolmetscherfahrung 0-2 Jahre

Frage 5: Dolmetschbereiche (bitte in % Angaben – insgesamt 100 %)
Arbeitsplatzsituationen: 0%
Bildungs- und Ausbildungsbereich: 0%
Community Interpreting: 0%
Gericht: 0%
Medizinischer Bereich: 0%
Politische Settings: 0%
Veranstaltungen: 0%

Frage 6: Haben Sie Arbeitserfahrungen außerhalb des Dolmetschens? JA ☐ / NEIN ☐

Frage 7: Wenn JA bei Frage 6, haben Sie das Gefühl, dass Ihre vorigen Arbeitserfahrungen Ihnen in der Dolmetschpraxis helfen? JA ☐ / NEIN ☐
Wenn JA, können Sie ein Beispiel dafür geben?
Fragebogen: WoMan? About Sign Language Interpreters and Their Gender Impact

Füllen Sie hier bitte ein Beispiel ein

Frage 8: Wenn NEIN bei Frage 6, glauben Sie, dass dieser Umstand einen Einfluss auf Ihre Dolmetschtätigkeit hat? JA [ ] / NEIN [ ]
Wenn JA, beschreiben Sie bitte inwiefern:
Füllen Sie hier bitte die Beschreibung ein

ABSCHNITT 2: ARBEIT ALS DOLMETSCHER/IN

Frage 9: Glauben Sie, dass das Geschlecht der/s Dolmetschers/in Auswirkungen auf einige Dolmetschsituationen hat? JA [ ] / NEIN [ ]
Wenn JA, in welchen der unten angegebenen Settings sind am ehesten Auswirkungen durch das Geschlecht der/s Dolmetschers/in zu erwarten? (bitte anhaken)
Akademien/Universitäten/ Hochschulen [ ]/ Arbeitsplatzsituationen [ ]/ (Berufs)schulklassen [ ]/ Bühnenauftritte [ ]/ Gerichtsverfahren [ ]/ Medizinische Settings [ ]/ Politische Settings [ ]/ Telefondolmetschen [ ]/ Therapeutische Settings [ ]/ Andere [ ]
Geben Sie hier bitte weitere Situationen an
Wenn JA, könnten Sie beschreiben, worauf Sie diese Auswirkungen zurückführen? Beschreiben Sie hier die möglichen Ursachen für die Auswirkungen

Frage 10: Haben Sie selbst Dolmetschsituationen erlebt, in denen Ihr Geschlecht einen Einfluss hatte und die Situation verändert hat? JA [ ] / NEIN [ ]
Wenn JA, beschreiben Sie, wenn möglich, 3 Situationen, die für Sie in diesem Zusammenhang besonders aussagekräftig waren:
Beschreiben Sie hier bitte die Dolmetschsituationen

Frage 11: Glauben Sie, dass das Geschlecht der/s Dolmetschers/in für gehörlose KundInnen ein Kriterium ist, wenn sie Dolmetschaufträge vergeben? JA [ ] / NEIN [ ]
Wenn JA, aus welchem Grund?
Geben Sie hier bitte Ihre Vermutungen an
Wenn NEIN, aus welchem Grund?
Geben Sie hier bitte Ihre Vermutungen an

Frage 12: Setzen Sie bewusst Strategien ein, um negative Auswirkungen Ihres Geschlechts auf die Dolmetschsituation zu vermeiden? JA [ ] / NEIN [ ]
Wenn JA, welche?
Geben Sie hier bitte Ihre Strategien an

Frage 13: Sie selbst als Frau/als Mann, wie nehmen Sie Ihre männlichen/weiblichen KollegInnen wahr? Glauben Sie, dass diese Vorteile/Nachteile Ihnen gegenüber haben? Gibt es spezielle Probleme, die mit ihrem Geschlecht verbunden sind?
Geben Sie hier Ihre Einschätzung der andersgeschlechtlichen KollegInnen ein

Frage 14: Gebärdensprachdolmetschen ist ein Beruf, der vor allem von Frauen ausgeübt wird. Glauben Sie, dass dieser Umstand einen (positiven oder negativen) Einfluss auf das Image des Berufsstandes hat? JA [ ] / NEIN [ ]
Wenn JA, welchen?
Beschreiben Sie hier bitte den Einfluss näher

Frage 15: Sind Sie bereit, an weiteren Aktivitäten im Bereich Gebärdensprachforschung teilzunehmen? Ich suche nach einigen DolmetscherInnen, die bereit sind, zwischen Februar und April 2011 ein reflexives Tagebuch (anonymisierte Aufzeichnungen von
Dolmetschsituationen und Reflexionen dazu zu führen.
Wenn Sie daran interessiert sind, teilzunehmen, bitte füllen Sie unten Ihren Namen ein oder kontaktieren Sie mich unter patricia.brueck@utanet.at für mehr Informationen. Ihre Daten werden nicht weitergegeben und werden nur für den Kontakt für diese Forschungsarbeit verwendet.

Name: Vorname und Name
Vielen herzlichen Dank für IHRE Mithilfe!
Ich werde Ihnen den Artikel natürlich nach Fertigstellung zusenden.

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Annex 2: Questionnaire (English)

Questionnaire
„WoMan? About Sign Language Interpreters and Their Gender Impact“

Dear colleagues!

I am about to write a master thesis for my EUMASLI (European Master of Sign Language Interpreting) Studies and do some preparatory research as a kind of mini pilot study. I am interested in the subject of the impact of the interpreter’s gender on the interpreting situation, if the deaf client does not have the same gender as the interpreter. This study is to look into the Austrian situation and that’s why I ask you to contribute your experience. Your contribution will be very valuable to the development of the profession and, of course, to my research! Thanks a lot in advance!

All information you provide will be used as part of my research project on gender issues in Sign Language Interpreting. All information is strictly confidential and will be recorded in a way that is anonymous and non-attributable. Data will be stored on a computer database and is subject to Data Protection.

PART 1: PERSONAL DATA

Question 1: Gender: Female ☐ / Male ☐

Question 2: Age on November, 1st 2010:

Question 3: Interpreting Education (tick the option that applies to you):
University Graz ☐ / GESDO ☐/AFL ☐/HORIZON 1 o. 2 ☐/ Other ☐ Please indicate your education

Question 4: How long have you been working as an interpreter?

Question 5: In which areas do you interpret (please estimate in % adding up to 100%):
Work place: 0%
Educational: 0%
Community Interpreting: 0%
Court: 0%
Medical: 0%
Political: 0%
Events: 0%

Question 6: Have you worked outside of the interpreting field? YES ☐ / NO ☐

Question 7: If YES is your answer to Question 6, do you feel that your previous work experience has informed your interpreting practice? YES ☐ / NO ☐

If so, can you give an example?

Fill in an example please
Questionnaire: WoMan? About Sign Language Interpreters and Their Gender Impact

Question 8: If NO is your answer to Question 6, do you feel that this affects your interpreting performance in any way? YES ☐ / NO ☐
   If so, can you give an example?
   Fill in an example please

PART 2: WORKING AS AN INTERPRETER

Question 9: Do you think that the interpreter’s gender has an impact on some interpreting situations? YES ☐ / NO ☐
   If yes, which of the following settings are most likely to be affected by the interpreter’s gender? (please tick the relevant options)
   Academies/Universities ☐ / Work Situations ☐ / (Professional) Education ☐ / Bühnenauftritte ☐ / Gerichtsverfahren ☐ / Medical ☐ / Political ☐ / Telephone Interpreting ☐ / Therapeutical ☐ / Other ☐
   Please indicate more relevant settings
   Can you describe what may cause that influence?
   Please indicate the possible source of the influence

Question 10: Have you yourself experienced interpreting situations where your gender had an influence and may have changed the discourse? YES ☐ / NO ☐
   If so, please describe three situations that seem particularly significant to you in this respect:
   Please indicate the interpreting settings

Question 11: Do you believe that deaf customers consider the interpreter’s gender when giving assignments to interpreters? YES ☐ / NO ☐
   If so, for which reason?
   Please give your assumption
   If not so, for which reason?
   Please give your assumption

Question 12: Do you consciously use strategies to prevent negative effects of your gender on the interpreting situation? YES ☐ / NO ☐
   If so, please describe...
   Please indicate your strategies

Question 13: Being a women/a man, how do you perceive your male/female colleagues? Do you think that they are more advantaged/disadvantaged compared to you? Are there any specific problems in connection with their gender?
   Please give your opinion on the SLI of the other gender

Question 14: Sign Language Interpreting is a profession that is predominantly exercised by women. Do you think that this influences the status of the profession in any - positive or negative - way? YES ☐ / NO ☐
If so, please describe...

Please indicate the influence

**Question 15:** Are you willing to **take part in further research**? I am looking for a number of interpreters to participate in a reflective diary/journal keeping exercise between February and April 2011. If you would be interested, please complete the section with your name below or contact me at patricia.brueck@utanet.at for more information. Your details will not be passed on to any third party and will only be used to contact you for the purpose of this study.

Name: surname and family name

Thank you very much for your contribution!
I will send the article once I am ready.

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