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Title	Translating deaf culture: an ethnodrama
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Publication date	2019-04-29
Original Citation	O'Connell, N. P. and Lynch, T. (2020) 'Translating deaf culture: An ethnodrama', Qualitative Inquiry, 26(3-4), pp.411-421. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419843945
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1077800419843945 - 10.1177/1077800419843945
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Download date	2026-11-05 15:38:02
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/8101

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Translating Deaf Culture: An Ethnodrama

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Abstract

This ethnodrama is a script writing project based on qualitative research that explore deaf people's experience of working as interpreter in Ireland. A collection of interview data was used to develop the ethnodrama by constructing scenes that reveal a series of interactive moments that capture the challenges faced by deaf interpreters. Framed within Sontag's (1997) conceptualization of 'translation', the authors offer a critique of the term translation and discusses its significance from the perspective of deaf interpreters. Participants were invited to read and comment on aspects of the scenes and contribute to the script writing process. Their statements were integrated into the script to generate meaningful dialogue which appear in the final part of the play. The discussion indicated a positive response to this ethnodrama which was generally successful in producing realistic dramatized scenarios which stimulated reflective discussions in the epilogue.

Keywords

Deaf interpreters; sign language interpreting; Irish Sign Language; deaf culture; translations.

Do your job. Translate.

Translations, Act 3.1 (Friel 1981, 61).

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Prelude

Translating Deaf Culture is an ethnodrama that combines qualitative research with drama script writing in an attempt to portray the actual experiences of deaf people working as interpreters in Ireland. Ethnodrama is an innovative qualitative research method that involves turning ethnographic data and texts into play scripts that are read by a group of participants or performed before audiences (Goldstein, Gray, Salisbury, and Snell 2014). It uses theatre to showcase 'real life' scenes designed to encourage interaction between performers and audience in order to promote debate and discussion (Saldana 2005). As authors of this ethnodrama, our work is based on interview data drawn from six deaf research participants, a figure that probably reflects the small pool of qualified deaf interpreters in the country (Leeson and Lynch 2008). We are both deaf interpreters interested in exploring the experiences of deaf people who work as specialist interpreters and translators. Our aim is to ensure that interview data is made accessible to as many people as possible including deaf people, parents of deaf children, professionals working with deaf people, deaf friends and colleagues and the general public. The purpose was to ensure that readers and audience members could have access to the thoughts, feelings and views of the participants portrayed through performance. We find ethnodrama an excellent means towards achieving this goal.

Author Two: for my research project, I selected the participants on the basis of being deaf professional interpreters with experience working with hearing Irish Sign Language interpreters (ISL). My aim was to address a significant gap in knowledge where deaf interpreters are rarely consulted for their views and opinions in the sign language interpreting profession (Boudreault 2005). The research was guided by the following questions: 1) What are the self-perceptions of deaf people regarding their work as interpreters and translators? 2) What are the challenges that deaf interpreters face when they work alongside hearing sign language interpreters? 3) What impact did their role as interpreter/translator have on their

identity? I adopted a flexible approach using a combination of unstructured and semi-structured interviewing techniques (Creswell 2007). I asked probing questions to get information: *Tell me anything that comes to mind about your experience of interpreting and translating*; *Describe this particular experience*; *What was it like for you? How did you feel about it?* With these questions, I noted key issues of conversations, eye contact, posture, body movement and facial expressions to gain an insight into their emotions. They were noted down straight after the meeting while they were still fresh in my mind. Sometime later, I produced verbatim transcripts using the 'interpretive approach' to 'secure biographical experience' (Denzin 2002, 4). Transcripts were returned to participants for validation purposes. To ensure confidentiality all identifiable contents that led back to them such as place names and geography were removed with the agreement of participants. On receipt of the returned transcripts, they were included as data collected. Thus, the texts were written from the participants' individual and collective memories.

Author One: As one of participants in her research, I read Teresa's master's dissertation and was keen to develop it into an ethnodrama having previously produced a performative (auto) ethnography (O'Connell, 2017; Deegan and O'Connell 2018). I suggested turning her study into performance and she was happy with the idea. We decided to focus on writing a script as a form of 'readers theatre' (Donmoyer and Yennie-Donmoyer 1995) in which dramatic work would be presented in script form and readers read from the piece. The aim is to engage in script writing practice an important aesthetic function of our study. The purpose is to "show" rather than "tell" the results of the research by producing a performative text (Saldana 2008, p. 2011). My role in this was to construct dialogue and composite characters from the research findings. The design questions obtained from Goldstein et al's (2014) study were employed to guide the script writing process: What is the goal of this project? What do we hope to achieve? How will we assess this project? Who will read the script and provide

feedback (triangulation)? How will we know that we have achieved our goal? Who is our primary audience? Members of the public? Deaf and hearing people? Academics? The goal is to employ literary techniques such as plot, summary, dialogue, action, scene setting, and characterization to give audience members a sense of the embodied deaf experience, that muted feel to the action they are witnessing. I constructed the dialogue in a way that renders the action through the visual, the kinetic and olfactory. We decided to ask the participants to read the transcript to provide feedback and see if we managed to achieve this goal. The dialogue was constructed from the actual statements made by the participants so the conversation is participant-focused. I developed two narrators to represent deaf and hearing interpreters whose comments were constructed out of the literature on sign language interpreting studies. This was necessary to give context to the script. Some adjustments were made to create dramatic effect. For example, some scenes such as setting and characters greeting each other and engaging in 'small talk' were fictionalized. Overall, the scenes were created out of the actual interview transcripts with characters portrayed as people who engaged in conversation with each other in ISL. The participants were invited to read and comment on the script to determine if it is representative of their views and experiences. The participants reviewed, analysed and commented on the script which gave credibility to the dramatic representations of ethnographic data. The participants agreed that the script, as it currently stands, adequately represents their experiences as interpreters and translators.

Perhaps at this point it is best to distinguish the two terms: ethnodrama and ethnotheatre (Hare 2008). To begin with, ethno*drama* is a written script consisting of "dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected through interviews, participant observation, field notes, journal entries, and/or print and media artifacts such as diaries, television broadcasts, newspaper articles, and court proceedings" (Saldaña 2005, p.2). Ethno*theatre*, on the other hand, employs "the traditional craft and artistic techniques of theatre production to mount for

an audience a live performance event of research participants' experiences and/or the researcher's interpretations of data" (p.1). Saldaña established ethnotheare as an important qualitative research method as a method of presenting "truthful" representation of a culture and discuss relevant social issues. The idea that theatre could be used to present data originated from Victor and Edie Turner's (1982) essay "Performing Ethnography" published within the field of Performance Studies. Victor Turner's (1985) later ethnographic work, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, promoted "social drama" as a means of communicating the participants' personal stories through theatre (Gillen and Bhattacharya 2013). Although Turner's concept was controversial at the time, the next three decades saw the publication of a number of texts on performance ethnography including key readings from Conquergood (1991/2006), Pelias (1998), Denzin (2001, 2003) and Pollock (2006). Anna Deavere Smith (1992) gathered stories of real people and transformed them onto stage. Smith's a one-act play, *Fires in the Mirror* laid the groundwork for the ethnotheatre genre.

Many researchers have used ethnodrama to investigate a number of topics including stigma (McMahon, McGannon and Zehntner 2017); racism (Goldstein 2001, 2008; Ward Randolph and Weems 2010), patriarchy (Nedashkovskaya 2008; Morrissey 2018), disability (Baur, Abma, and Baart, 2014), education (Mienczakowski 1997), health and social care (Akroyd and O'Toole 2010), cancer (Sinding et al., 2002), homelessness (Finley and Finley, 1999) and gender relations (Nedashkovskaya 2008; Morrissey 2018). These ethnodramatic projects present "lived experiences" of marginalization and social injustice. Given deaf people's experiences of exclusion and marginalisation, it is surprising that, apart from Deegan and O'Connell (2018), ethnodrama or ethnotheatre has rarely featured in Deaf Studies and is practically thin to non-existent in the field of Sign Language Interpreting Studies research. One possible explanation for this near absence is that ethnodrama is a relatively new phenomenon in qualitative research which may account for the general lack of awareness of it as a research

method. The decision to write and publish an ethnodrama stem from the authors' conviction that research findings should be disseminated to a wider audience to increase awareness of deaf people's experiences of marginalisation and inclusion. Ethnodrama is an effective means of making data accessible to allow audience members enter the deaf world and feel the 'deaf experience' through performance.

The Script: Translating Deaf Culture

Cast of characters

BETTY, 58, born to hearing parents and qualified as deaf interpreter in England. She is a former boarder-pupil of "St. Jude's" School for Deaf Girls in the 1970s.

CHRIS, 54, attended "St. Martin's" School for Deaf boys in the 1970s and qualified as deaf interpreter following local accreditation assessment.

DAVID, 48, a former pupil of "St. Martin's". He was born to hearing parents. A qualified deaf interpreter since the late 1990s, he has 3 sisters, one of whom is deaf.

LAURA, 57, qualified as deaf interpreter in 2004. A former pupil of St. Jude's, she was born to hearing parents and has one deaf sister.

OLIVIA, 39, first attended mainstream primary school before transferring to St. Jude's where she completed her secondary education. She obtained a deaf interpreter qualification following a successful local accreditation assessment.

NARRATORS composite deaf and hearing characters constructed from literature sources and participant stories. The narrators present their personal experience to give the audience a glimpse of their differing roles and responsibilities as interpreters/translators.

Language

While the script is written in English, the play is to be performed in ISL and the performance interpreted into spoken English.

Act One

"The only one in the house who knew sign language"

The scene is set in a coffee shop in "Deaf Village" where five deaf characters gather together to discuss their work experience, reflect on the past and come to an understanding of the present. The time is eleven in the morning. The characters, DAVID, BETTY, CHRIS, LAURA and OLIVIA are sitting behind a large oblong coffee table… Enter NARRATOR 1 and 2.

NARRATOR 1: (*Signs to audience*).

I'm a hearing person. I can hear, speak, talk, and listen in spoken language. I'm specially trained to 'interpret' spoken English into Irish Sign Language (ISL) into spoken English. I did a four year course in ISL/English interpreting. After I passed all my exams, I graduated with a university degree. I'm hired to facilitate communication between deaf and hearing people. My clients include deaf people who use ISL as their first language and hearing people who have no ISL. Hearing people use English as their primary spoken language. ISL is a visual-gestural language with vocabulary and grammar that is different from standard English. ISL is an official language of state after the ISL Act 2017 was signed into law last year. I'm engaged to work whenever deaf and hearing people want to communicate with each other. It works both ways: I might get a call from an interpreting agency on behalf of a deaf person or I might be contacted by a hearing person who need to communicate with a deaf person. So, that's me, the hearing sign language interpreter.

NARRATOR 2: (*Signs*).

Me? I must disclaim the honor of being a 'hearing' ISL interpreter because I'm deaf. I am one of a small group of deaf people working as 'interpreters' in Ireland. I haven't done any training.

There are no professional interpreting training courses for deaf people here. I qualified through local agency-led accreditation assessment. I must tell you that the label 'interpreter' does not suit me. It doesn't explain the different type of work that I do: for example, translating, mediating, cultural brokering, relay interpreting. The list goes on. Which label best describes me? I'm more a translator, less an interpreter. More a 'go-between', less a linguist. More a 'ghost-writer', less a philosopher. More a signer, less a speaker.

[*Pause*].

I'm hired when a deaf person uses signs that are unrecognisable to a hearing ISL interpreter. Their signs may be idiosyncratic, international, home-based, gendered or related to a particular geographic location or institution. Sometimes I work with deaf people who have limited range of ISL skills because they spent a long time in isolation or have intellectual disabilities. I mediate between an ISL interpreter and deaf and hearing people. What I do is watch, recognise, decode, reveal, explain, relay, write and mediate in ISL, English and signs specific to deaf culture. My job is to make sure there is no misunderstanding in the communicative exchange.

[*NARRATORS exit stage. All rise, sign to audience*].

DAVID: How are we different?

BETTY: How are we the same?

CHRIS: We are deaf.

LAURA: Responsible for communication failure,

OLIVIA: Misunderstanding, language problems,

DAVID: Hearing people….not able to understand signed language,

BETTY: Or Deaf ways of being,

CHRIS: Deaf ways of knowing.

LAURA: We think kinship,

OLIVIA: Think bonding, belonging, connection.

DAVID: Yes, think norms, beliefs, values, knowledge of the Deaf world.

(Leigh 2009, p. 14-17).

[*All take their seats*]

CHRIS: (*to BETTY*). I'm the only deaf person in the family. The others use speech. All the time. No one in the knows ISL. Didn't want me to communicate in ISL.

BETTY: Who?

CHRIS: (*interrupts*). My parents. Especially my dad. He disliked sign language.

BETTY: (*quizzically*). Why?

CHRIS: Don't know. When I was a child, the audiologist told them not to learn sign language.

BETTY: My parents were told the same thing. "Your daughter needs to learn to speak!" she said. "No sign language!"

CHRIS: What did they do to you?

BETTY: (*confused*). Who?

CHRIS: Your parents.

BETTY: (*surprised*) Oh, they tried to stop me. When my parents saw me signing to my friend, they said "Stop signing!".

CHRIS: Makes me angry.

BETTY: Yes, but it was a long time ago. I'm not angry anymore.

CHRIS: (*raises his eye brows*). Really?

BETTY: (*emphatically*). Yes. I think they thought it was for the best.

CHRIS: (*nods*). I know what you mean.

BETTY: In the end, they gave up. I was allowed to sign. Another time, my friend called to see me at home. My parents spoke to her but she couldn't understand what my they were saying. I did relay interpreting. I used lip reading and speech for my parents and ISL for my friend.

CHRIS: You are bilingual.

BETTY: Yes. That's why I became an interpreter.

CHRIS: Not sure 'interpreter' is the right word.

BETTY: Oh, you mean relay interpreter? (*Pause*). Like passing on messages in class. Do you remember? My teachers did not understand ISL. I translated for other students.

CHRIS: You said translated.

BETTY: Did I say translate?

CHRIS: Yes, you did.

BETTY: No, I mean interpreted. What's the difference?

CHRIS: Interpreter. Translator. Relay. Cultural broker. Mediator. Different labels have been used to describe deaf interpreters.

BETTY: Which is the right one?

CHRIS: Hard to know.

BETTY: Well, we do more than interpreting. Right?

CHRIS: Yes. Anyway, one day my father asked me to introduce my friend to him. I ended up interpreting for both of them.

BETTY: Your dad didn't talk to him?

CHRIS: He did. I mean he tried. My friend couldn't understand him.

BETTY How did your dad expect your friend to understand you?

CHRIS (*Shakes his head*). Don't know.

[*At this moment, OLIVIA and LAURA enter stage, followed immediately by DAVID.* BETTY and CHRIS watch after them. *LAURA is very animated*].

LAURA I'm late. Sorry.

[*BETTY and CHRIS rise. Hugs are exchanged. BETTY and CHRIS return to their seats. LAURA sits herself beside CHRIS with DAVID and OLIVIA on her left*].

OLIVIA (*To LAURA*) Where were you?

LAURA Shopping. Bad traffic. Did you get my email?

OLIVIA About your project or coffee meeting?

LAURA Coffee meeting.

OLIVIA Yes, I got it. Sorry for not replying. No time.

LAURA Don't worry.(*To BETTY*) Are you good?

BETTY (*Gives the thumbs up*). Good. Just signing about our families. You know, communication problems and all that.

LAURA: Really?

BETTY: His dad didn't want him communicating in ISL.

LAURA (*Nods slowly, makes faces*). I see.

BETTY Yes.

LAURA (*Indifferent*). Sad. (*To DAVID*). You remember my mum and dad? They didn't allow me sign to my deaf sister. (*To the others*). I have two sisters. One is deaf and the other hearing.

DAVID: (*Interupting*). I've three sisters, all hearing. My parents…

LAURA: (*Annoyed*). I'm not finished. Patience. In the beginning, my parents didn't like me signing but didn't try stop me.

DAVID: I'm the only one in the family who can sign. My school teacher warned my parents "Don't learn signs" he said. My parents never punished me for signing. It was okay to sign at home. Not like school.

CHRIS: (*To BETTY*) How did you communicate with your parents?

BETTY It was tough. Trying to lip read all the time. During the summer holidays, when I was home from boarding school, I sat with my family at the dinner table. I had my head down eating my dinner.

CHRIS I can imagine. I had the same experience..

BETTY Looked up. Saw everyone talking to each other. Felt isolated. Cut off, you know. Didn't understand what they were saying.

LAURA When my sister was not at home, I was left out. I just sat at the table and ate my meal. Had no idea what my parents were talking about.

DAVID Awful. Can't stand being left out.

BETTY Yes. Imagine the whole family together and feeling isolated. They talked, joked and laughed non-stop. I asked one of my sisters to explain what they were saying. She said 'Hold on, I'll tell you later'. She turned her back to me. I reminded her after dinner. She said, "Don't worry about it. Nothing important".

DAVID That's exactly what my sisters said.

[*BETTY smiles*].

BETTY Like nobody cared. Isn't that right? (*Pointing at LAURA*) What about you?

LAURA: (*Thinks for a moment*) My sister, she signed. (*Pause*). Without her, I'd be left out. Definitely. We signed to each other. I think my parents were excluded. They asked "What are you two talking about?" They didn't understand us.

BETTY Did you say "I'll tell you later?"

[*Everyone laughs*].

LAURA No. I couldn't do that to my parents. Not a very nice thing to do. No problem explaining things to them.

DAVID You know what it feels like to be excluded so you don't want them to have the same experience.

BETTY Yes, that's right but hearing people, they do it to us. They forget I'm left out.

[*Light dims. BETTY and LAURA exit*]

Act Two

"The translator's mission"

The scene shifts to early afternoon. It is break time. OLIVIA and LAURA are watching BETTY signing about a meeting she attended for ISL interpreters. BETTY leans back in her chair, signing quickly. CHRIS and DAVID are seated on her left. They are deep in concentration.

[*All rise, sign to audience*].

DAVID The translator's mission,

BETTY To break down barriers,

CHRIS Communicate, decode, decipher, explain

LAURA Make accessible

OLIVIA Make meaningful

DAVID Make better, improve,

BETTY More awareness, less ignorance.

CHRIS Translation begins here,

LAURA Transmitting messages,

OLIVIA By means of relay.

DAVID To be translated,

BETTY To be recognised,

CHRIS To be rescued from isolation,

LAURA Become more enlightened.

(Sontag 1997, p.16).

[*All take their seats*].

DAVID They need to book a deaf interpreter.

BETTY Who?

DAVID Hearing interpreters. Deaf people with limited signing.

CHRIS Hearing interpreters might not understand. We explain what the deaf person is saying.

BETTY I'm a deaf translator. Not an interpreter, no. That's for hearing people.

OLIVIA What do you mean?

BETTY Hearing people interpret ISL to spoken English and vice versa. Right?

OLIVIA Yes.

BETTY What we do is different. We use ISL, not spoken English. Written English? Yes.

OLIVIA I see. If we are not interpreters, what are we?

BETTY (*Pointing at Chris*). He said…something about ghost…I forget.

CHRIS Ghost writer. Relay interpreter.

BETTY Mediator. I did some translation work. Like letters that deaf people need to translate into ISL. Sometimes I help with filling application forms. I translate questions into ISL.

LAURA What about working with interpreter? Is that translating? Not sure about it.

CHRIS: One day in a solicitor's office. I was working with a hearing interpreter. Two solicitors. A barrister. A deaf client. The barrister asked the client: "Do you

plead guilty or not guilty?". How do we interpret "guilty" in ISL if the client does not understand the meaning of the word?

DAVID: It's not the hearing interpreter's job to explain the meaning of the word. That's why we are hired.

LAURA You have to use the deaf way. Deaf way of knowing.

OLIVIA: The client's knowledge of deaf culture. I use it to explain what 'guilty' means.

CHRIS: That's right.

BETTY: How did you do it?

CHRIS: The client used different signs. I picked it up, used the his or her signs to explain the difference between "guilty" and "not guilty".

BETTY: Did the client understand?

CHRIS: Not straight away, no. Took a long time. I used fingerspelling for GUILTY. Then I signed something like 'My fault. Did something wrong'. I used fingerspelling for NOT GUILTY, signed 'Not my fault. Did nothing wrong'. I asked him to repeat what I said. He did. It was fine.

OLIVIA: So it worked?

CHRIS: Yes. Did my best. I used deaf culture knowledge to translate a message. I signed 'this is what he said', then, 'this is what he means'. I translated deaf culture and the client finally got the message.

OLIVIA: You'd know from the client's facial expression if she or he did not understand.

BETTY: Many deaf people don't understand what hearing interpreters are saying in ISL. You have to sign in the deaf way. Hearing people can't do that.

OLIVIA Hearing interpreters must use facial expression. Signing with blank faces – no good.

CHRIS: Facial expression is part of deaf culture.

LAURA: I make sure every deaf person has full access. Last year, I translated information on breast cancer for deaf women. Many have literacy problems so I record the information in ISL in DVD format.

DAVID: Wow, that's brilliant.

LAURA: I did the same for another project on domestic violence against women. Used deaf culture knowledge to explain the different terms in the information sheet.

[*Light dims*].

Act Three

"Licence to interpret"

The scene is the same. The time is late afternoon.

LAURA: (*Shocked*). What? She didn't sign? At an interpreters' meeting?

BETTY: Yes. She started talking. After the meeting started, she stopped using ISL.

OLIVIA: But why? Were deaf interpreters present?.

LAURA: Yes. I was there with one other deaf interpreter. I was furious.

BETTY: Makes my blood boil.

OLIVIA: I don't understand. Why didn't she use ISL?

BETTY: Don't know. Maybe she thought 'I have the right to use my own language'.

OLIVIA: Awful.

LAURA: There was tension.

BETTY: How many were at the meeting?

BETTY: (*Pause*). Twelve, I think. We sat around a long table. It started okay. Then she started talking. Some people objected.

OLIVIA: Did anyone interpret for you?

BETTY: Yes. Someone did so I wasn't left out.

OLIVIA: Did you complain?

LAURA: I objected but did not make a formal complaint.

CHRIS: You should've complained.

LAURA: Didn't bother.

CHRIS: Why?

LAURA: Can we sign about something else? Too depressing. Okay? What about training for deaf interpreters?

CHRIS: We need training courses.

OLIVIA: There's nothing. No opportunities. I did no training. Just qualified after accreditation assessment.

CHRIS: Hearing interpreters can qualify after doing 4 years degree course at university.

LAURA: Never saw a deaf person do the interpreter course. Only hearing people.

DAVID: Open to both deaf and hearing people. Hearing people, they know they can get interpreting work. Fulltime or part-time.

CHRIS: Very little work for deaf interpreters. Might be lucky to get work, maybe 2 or 3 times a year. Not worth the time and money to do the course.

DAVID: I get work about 2 times a month. Not bad compared to others.

OLIVIA: I have no training. No preparation but still passed the accreditation tests. Attended a few interpreting workshops.

CHRIS: Not good enough just doing the accreditation test. We have to have training.

LAURA: (*Preoccupied*). You know, I was nervous doing the accreditation.

CHRIS: Crazy. Doing the tests without formal training. Had to do it for the qualification. I'm now on the register.

BETTY: One day I worked with a hearing interpreter. When I arrived at the scene, she said 'I don't need you. Can do the job myself'. I left her on her own.

OLIVIA: What? She can't do that. What about the client?

BETTY: I know. The client has the right to quality interpreting.

DAVID: Some people think they could work without a deaf interpreter.

BETTY: That's right.

DAVID: One interpreter was booked to work with a British deaf student. She knew the student used British Sign Language (BSL) but went ahead without getting support from a deaf interpreter.

BETTY Well? What happened?

DAVID: She got a shock. Found it difficult. The student used BSL. She did not understand her.

BETTY: What did she do then?

DAVD: She told the agent to book a deaf interpreter for the next class.

LAURA: Can you use BSL?

DAVID: Yes. Lived in England for a few years.

BETTY: What's wrong with working beside a deaf interpreter?

DAVID: Nothing. Maybe it made them look disabled?

CHRIS: Some of them like to work solo.

BETTY: Even when the client is using international signs.

DAVID: The client's needs must come first.

LAURA: One interpreter I worked with thought she didn't need me. Made her look bad. She interpreted without my support. When the client didn't understand her, the interpreter explained the contents of the message which was not her responsibility. That was my job. I just sat there watching her. Didn't want to create conflict.

[*All stop signing. Light fades*].

Act Four

The scene is the same. Time is late evening.

[*All rise and sign to the audience*].

DAVID I've finished reading the script,

BETTY clear, easy to follow,

CHRIS no, doesn't flow.

LAURA so many words,

OLIVIA about deaf culture,

DAVID mentions a lot.

BETTY Is it a concept, an idea?

CHRIS about beliefs, practices,

LAURA sign language in performance,

OLIVIA our way life,

DAVID must have physical descriptions,

BETTY in the script like facial expressions,

CHRIS body movement,

LAURA handshapes,

OLIVIA sign alphabets.

DAVID shows sign language in performance

BETTY on stage dialogue,

CHRIS reflects upon

LAURA my experience growing up

OLIVIA at home, school, work,

DAVID our struggles

BETTY feeling left out in family conversation,

CHRIS so many labels,

LAURA translator, relay interpreter, mediator, cultural broker

OLIVIA ghost writer.

DAVID who thought of labels?

CHRIS Adams, Carty and Stone.

BETTY So many names,

LAURA which one,

OLIVIA defines our role,

DAVID we translate deaf culture

CHRIS sign language in action.

(Adams et al 2011; Napier and Leeson 2015).

Epilogue

Translation is a central theme of this ethnodrama. As the title suggest, translation is ultimately bound up with culture or language and the full extent of this is shown in the act of translating sociolinguistic aspects of deaf culture. Given the nature of their work being so varied, the term 'interpreter' does not adequately define what deaf people do in the sign language interpreting profession. Although alternative labels have been applied, none has fully justified the varying roles and functions. As authors, we adopt the term 'translator' because translation forms a major part of their work. What they do is translate certain sign-linguistic features that are often hidden or obscured from the gaze of the hearing interpreter but are readily apparent to the deaf translator.

So, what do we mean by translation? Let's start with Chesterman's (2005) etymological analysis of the concept. According to Chesterman, translation originates in two words from the Greek *metapherein* and Latin *transferre* which, in English, means 'transfer'. To translate is to transfer from source to target 'across a linguistic border' (2005, p.5). The idea is in the act of carrying across something 'towards' the target and 'away from' the source or origin.

Translation is often used in everyday discourses to include interpreting. Indeed, both interpreting and translation are language-based activities. The difference is in the medium: the interpreter translates 'orally' or through signs while the translator interprets written text. The term 'translation' is now being used as a metaphor to explain the process of moving across borders. Salman Rushdie, for example, defines himself as a 'translated man', for having experienced migration, moving from one place to another and from one language to another. An emigrant from India, Rushdie moved across borders to three countries: Pakistan, England and finally the United States where he is currently settled.

Many definitions of translation abound in the literature but the one that closely identifies with this ethnodrama is Susan Sontag's (1997) conceptualisation of translation: 'to transfer, to remove, to displace' (p.15). Sontag defines translation in terms of categories of explanation (replacing ignorance and obscurity with transparency), adaptation (creating another version) and improvement (making progress on the original). Sontag argues that translation 'breaks down' communication barriers something which resonate with the work of deaf translators. The deaf translator's mission is to decode, clarify, explain and make transparent what was initially obscure in the eyes of others. The deaf translator's duty is also to establish a level of understanding that allows for a conversation in two languages. This point resonate with Godamer's (2004) theories on oral translation. According to the author, the translator's task is to convey the meaning of the message and render the message using a new expression (Yan 2012). Godamer's point is that understanding does not occur between the parties involved in conversation but rather between the translators of languages. The oral translator hears the spoken words and provides these words with unique meaning that closely relate to concrete situations described by the speaker in another language. Oral translation allows the people participating in the conversation to understand each other and be able to exchange ideas.

In recent times, the concept of translation has been used as a metaphor for the process of transforming identity. The 'Translating the Deaf Self' project, for example, has been instrumental in establishing the link between translation and identity. Funded by Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in the United Kingdom, the project was steered by Professors Jemina Napier at Heriot Watt University and Alys Young at University of Manchester and supported by researchers, Rosemary Oram, Robert Skinner and Noel O'Connell. This timely research focuses on how deaf sign language users experience 'being translated' by a hearing interpreter and how the process of mediation impacts on their identity (Napier, Oram, Young, Skinner and O'Connell 2016; Napier, Young, Oram and Skinner 2017). The project looked at a scenario where the hearing person is communicating with a deaf person through a sign language interpreter. In the beginning, the identity of the deaf individual is hidden from view until the deaf person experiences 'being translated' by the interpreter and, in the process, becomes 'known' to the hearing person. Thus, translation is advanced as a metaphor for the process of 'crossing over' from relative obscurity to recognition.

A notable feature of the ethnodrama is the characters' preoccupation with language and the past. The reference to the prohibition of ISL in Act One clearly shows up some historical and socio-political issues in deaf education that relate to oralism – a familiar subject in Deaf Studies research (O'Connell and Deegan 2014). The term 'oralism' attests to an ideology that is concerned with the exclusive use of spoken language and is strongly opposed to sign language. It is an educational program 'designed to help children acquire English through the production and understanding of sound and speech' (Johnson, Liddell and Erting 1989, p.2). Language suppression which plays a significant part in the 'oral' approach has been described as a form of 'linguistic imperialism' (Rose and Conama 2017) and "colonialism" (Wrigley 1996). The correlation between language, colonialism and identity has already been investigated in Deaf Studies research.

The one issue that requires attention is to bring this ethno*drama* to the next stage and create an ethno*theatre*. The question is: how do we make this leap from page to stage? Again, the process requires translation. Transforming a play script into a stage performance is an act of translation. At every translation, it seems further analysis is required. We need to go back to the beginning to the interview stage. In the early stage of this qualitative research, we conducted interviews in ISL and interviews were video-recorded. The recordings were later translated into English text. The transcripts were sent to the participants for validation purposes. The returned transcripts formed part of the interview data which was then used to write the play script. Given that ISL has no written form, the script was written entirely in English. To ensure critical rigor and trustworthiness, we found it necessary to get further feedback from the participants. While we showed them our work-in-progress, we explained that we had taken license with some of the details of their stories to make the drama work. The problematic nature of 'verbatim theatre' (Paget 1987) is such that it has attracted criticism around claims to authenticity due to accusations of selective editing. This is because the original text of verbatim theatre undergoes constant revision and reorganization exercise. It can be difficult therefore to remain faithful to the origin. However, ethnodramatist must use a certain level of imagination and creativity to make the drama work. For example, arrangements must be made to fit the dialogue and structure of the play.

As our work is a deconstruction of the origin, we had to ensure our data is representative of the participants' 'biographical experiences' (Denzin 2002). As members of the academic community, we are mindful of our responsibilities to the participants. The scope of the method in combining qualitative study with ethnodrama made it necessary to involve the participants throughout the research process. We placed strong emphasis on building relationships with the participants based on trust. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality at all times. The principle of 'do no harm' was adhered to and at the same time the research benefitted them

in having their experiences shown in performative texts. We followed ethical guidelines of informed consent in which participants were told they could withdraw from the study at any time. The responses from the participants were encouraging and their comments and feedback to the transcripts and scenes from the play script were included in Act Three so that the dialogue reflected their views and opinions. Similarly, comments that discuss interpreting, translation and deaf culture were taken out of the literature, re-ordered and then worded into the dialogue presented in the early parts of Acts One and Two.

We've now come full circle in this journey. At this point, we must highlight the actual languages of the play: Irish Sign Language and English. The play is scripted in English which forces the reader to imagine it being enacted in sign language. The audience will have to see it performed in a language that can only be expressed through the hands, the body, facial expressions and spatial movement. At the same time, we need to consider the 'linguistic complexity' involved in presenting a performance for hearing audience members who may not know ISL. Will we need to provide an interpreter to do a live 'oral and signed translation'? We visualise the play as a bilingual rendition of ethnographic encounters mediated through performance in ISL and interpreted in spoken English.

Incidentally, the double use of English and ISL underscores the theme of translation. Translation will form part of our next purposeful activity an ethnotheatre production that involves moving from page to stage. From the page to the stage, there are challenges to be met in producing a play. We need to find a team and venue and organize rehearsals and direct the performers. For now, we will plan to test out a number of short scenes from the entire script recruit performers, rehearse the scenes and showcase to an audience and get feedback. One possible venue is the Fifteenth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry on May 15-18, 2019, an event in which to perform to an academic audience. There may be a public sharing of an extract from this full-length play at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August, 2019. These

events will allow us create a theatre full of characters that bring to life deaf culture, deaf people's stories and their personal histories.

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