

A study of GSV



Paul Michaels presents the results of his international research into interpreting for the Deaf gay community. Is a working knowledge of Gay Sign Variation (GSV) necessary before accepting bookings in this area?

In 2008 while undertaking the Postgraduate

Certificate in Advanced BSL and Related Studies at Durham University, I wrote a dissertation on the linguistics and sociolinguistics of Gay Sign Variation (GSV); the dialect used by some Deaf gay people. The following year, I studied for the Postgraduate Diploma in Interpreting with the Deaf Community, in which I continued the theme and researched the provision of interpreting for the Deaf gay community. This took elements of the previous findings and related them to the interpreting process.

My aim was to find out the views of Deaf gay people as to the type of interpreter provided and their use of GSV at Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) events and also the types of events these may be.

Additionally, the research aimed to obtain information from sign language interpreters as to their working involvement with the LGBT community, and whom they feel is most appropriate to interpret at events targeted towards this community. I also wanted to try and ascertain their knowledge and opinion on the usage of GSV at these events.

Facebook (www.facebook.com) was used to find groups worldwide that related to interpreting with the Deaf community and also specific deaf gay groups. 15 groups were

selected which targeted Deaf gay people and seven groups specifically targeting interpreters. A few Yahoo groups and associations, including ASLI and SASLI, were also identified.

I created an internet-based questionnaire as this was as a source that would enable a large number of people from each group to be surveyed in a timely and cost-effective way. The purpose of this questionnaire was to try to confirm or refute the following hypotheses:

- ▲ A high proportion of Deaf gay people will have been to an event which was interpreted, and this is likely to be a festival where they would most likely want to see this interpretation carried out by an L, G, B or T interpreter.
- ▲ Most interpreters will not feel that interpretation at an LGBT event should be done by an L, G, B or T interpreter.
- ▲ Deaf gay people will feel that interpreters at LGBT events do not have a good working knowledge of GSV.
- ▲ Most LGBT interpreters will feel they have some, but not a working knowledge of GSV.
- ▲ Interpreters will feel they don't need to have a working knowledge of GSV because they will feel that GSV is not commonly used within the Deaf gay community anyway.
- ▲ Most respondents from the interpreter

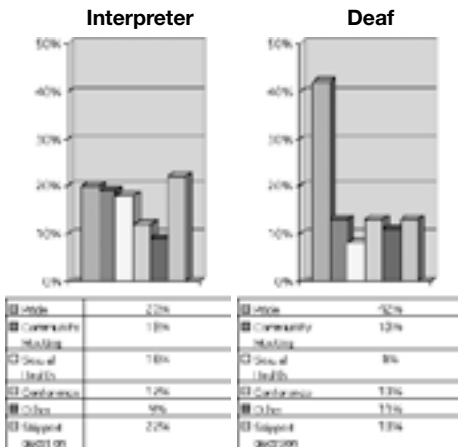
questionnaire will be heterosexual and will not have undertaken bookings in the LGBT domain because they have not had the opportunity to do so.

Respondents totaled 304 interpreters and 23 Deaf people worldwide, which was an encouraging number of interpreters but a disappointing number of Deaf people. To gain more views from the Deaf gay community, I would suggest that future consultation should be conducted face to face.

Survey results

The following information highlights a small selection of the results of the survey.

Q: What types of sign language interpreted LGBT events have you attended?

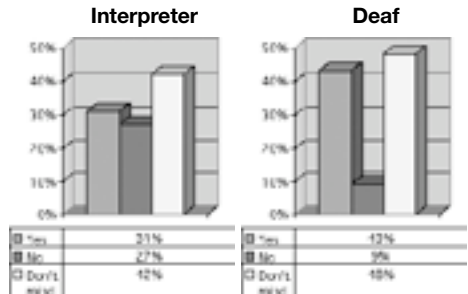


There was a fairly even split between the types of domains that interpreters were working in within the LGBT community compared with the large percentage of Deaf gay respondents who had mostly seen interpretation at Pride events. This may be a reflection in the fairly small number of respondents of Deaf gay people where most would have been to a Pride event but many would not have been to a community

meeting, conference or sexual health clinic. A larger number of respondents may produce different figures.

Interpreters claimed to have interpreted at a diverse range of events. Many events were linked to the arts or social events, including comedy, choral, drag shows, Leather community contests, comedy and fashion shows. Many political events and rallies, as well as medical, religious and employment events were also interpreted. These reflect more of the mainstream events at which interpreters find themselves.

Q: Do you feel that interpretation at an LGBT event should be done by an L, G, B or T interpreter?

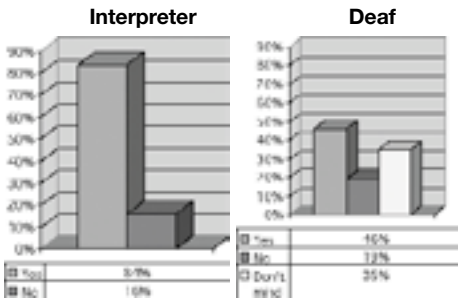


There was a significant difference between the interpreter and Deaf consumer views regarding interpretation at Deaf gay events. Almost 1/3 of the interpreters (27%) felt it was not necessary to have an interpreter who was a member of the LGBT community interpreting. However, only 9% the Deaf respondents felt the same, which highlights that more Deaf gay people were more likely to prefer an interpreter who was a member of the LGBT community.

Approximately the same numbers (42% of interpreters and 48% of Deaf people) felt they didn't mind either way if the interpreter at an LGBT event was part of the LGBT community. Many of the interpreters felt that an interpreter

who is a member of the LGBT community would be preferable but not essential. It was felt to be a similar situation when an interpreter goes into any minority or cultural group and has some affinity with that group.

Q: Do you think that interpreters should have a good working knowledge of Gay Sign Variation and would you like to see GSV used at an LGBT event?



Hypotheses results

It is true to say that a fairly high proportion of the Deaf gay people (74%) had been to an event that was interpreted and also that this was a festival (42% had been to a Gay Pride event) but, interestingly, a lower percentage than anticipated definitely wanted to see this interpretation done by an L, G, B or T interpreter – 43%. 48% did not mind either way.

It was not necessarily the case that most interpreters felt that interpretation at an LGBT event should be done by an L, G, B or T interpreter. Most had no view either way (42%), with a significant number (27%) saying they disagreed with the statement.

Originally, it was thought that Deaf gay people would feel that interpreters at LGBT events do not have a good working knowledge of GSV. However, this can be questioned, as a large proportion (46%) of this small sample felt that interpreters did. Approximately half of the

interpreters had some knowledge of GSV but it was suggested by many in the additional comments section that they did not have a 'working knowledge' of GSV.

The hypothesis that interpreters will feel it is not a requirement for them to have a working knowledge of GSV was refuted. 84% felt they should, even though many felt they did not currently have this knowledge of GSV. Some of the additional comments did suggest that interpreters felt that GSV was not commonly used within the Deaf gay community.

The data indicates that most respondents from the interpreter questionnaire were heterosexual, but not that they had not undertaken bookings in the LGBT domain. A significant 59% had undertaken such bookings. It was however accurate from the data to say that, of the 41% who had not, most had not had the opportunity to do so – 26% – and only 4% choose not to undertake these bookings.

Conclusions and implications

This research is initial and only touches briefly on the specialist subject of interpreting within the Deaf gay community. However it does provide interesting results and the additional comments from the questionnaire responses show that there are contrasting views, related to interpreting provision and activity, from both interpreters and Deaf gay people.

What is evident is that interpreters should be aware that this is a specialist area of interpreting, similar to that of legal, medical, education, theatre and religion. For that reason, specialist preparation and understanding of the gay community and more specifically the Deaf gay community should be considered when accepting bookings within this area. ▲

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