

# Our Work as Interpreters in these Unprecedented Times

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We hope this editorial finds you safe and well. When we started planning our first draft for this editorial, the world was just beginning to enter lockdown on a large scale due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As we now come to publish issue 12(1) of the *International Journal of Interpreter Education*, the world is already a drastically different place to live in than it was just a few months ago. The pandemic has impacted interpreting in numerous ways. In some countries, signed language interpreters have become highly visible interpreting for heads of states, governors, mayors and public health officials. In others, communities are battling for access to vital information about the pandemic and government responses, such as can be seen in the #whereistheinterpreter campaign by the Deaf community in the United Kingdom.

As essential workers, both spoken and signed language interpreters have been on the frontline, working face-to-face as well as having to quickly adapt to providing services online. We would direct readers to Jemina Napier's recent blogpost on Acadeafic (<https://acadeafic.org/2020/06/10/interpreting/>), in which she considers the impact of the pandemic on signed language interpreters. She sounds words of warning, lest the suboptimal working conditions which have resulted from the pandemic response become the new normal, potentially eroding hard-fought gains regarding breaks and team interpreting. While Jemina Napier's comments are underpinned by the experiences of signed language interpreters specifically, there are many parallels for spoken language colleagues as well. We invite contributions to the Open Forum section of our next IJIE issue from interpreters and interpreter educators wishing to share their own perspectives on issues related to COVID-19 and on the creative strategies they have found to confront these issues.

As we have all seen in recent months, conferences and workshops around the world are being cancelled, postponed, or moved online during the pandemic. While unfortunate, this trend has also given rise to a great many online professional development opportunities for interpreters! The interpreting field seems to have responded by

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producing a wealth of high-quality free resources. We cannot include all, but would like to share a few examples we have come across recently:

- InterpretAmerica<sup>1</sup> had been wanting to organize a celebratory event to celebrate its 10th anniversary, but instead planned what it described as “a series of free, online meetings where our field can meet, take stock, and get unified to face the extreme disruption COVID-19 is causing to our profession and to the language access we make possible” (InterpretAmerica, 2020). It held its free online forum on March 26, 2020, at the start of the pandemic. The recordings can be accessed through the InterpretAmerica website.
- InterpretAmerica co-presidents Katharine Allen and Barry Olsen also announced plans to launch a special website called [remoteinterpreting.info](http://remoteinterpreting.info), in view of the heightened demand for this mode of interpreting during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The Remote Interpreter blog series by Cross-Cultural Communications also provides information for spoken language interpreters having to adopt remote interpreting during Covid-19. All webinars are posted on the InterpretTIPS channel: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNjL\\_WcM4BIBw1L0X\\_ls63Q](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNjL_WcM4BIBw1L0X_ls63Q).
- We would also like to mention the Remote Simul Interpreting channel which was set up by a group of spoken language court and conference interpreters trying to think of the best ways to set up safe and quality sound and video for remote simultaneous interpreting. That channel can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWf3gSXwbZtt2p54MFmXsNw>.

These are just a few examples of some of the newly adapted resources available to interpreters and educators in these challenging times. They are evidence of the spirit of collegiality and support shown by interpreters across the board, and we encourage our readers to engage in these discussions at a local and international level.

With the cancellation of the *Conference of Interpreter Trainers 2020 Biennial Conference* due to the pandemic, the CIT Board of Directors is looking for ways that accepted presenters can disseminate their research to a wide audience. The Director of Research and Publications, Dr. Danielle Hunt, is working on creating a special edition of the IJIE to highlight these presenters’ evidence-based work. More information is forthcoming. If you have any thoughts about this upcoming issue, please feel free to reach out to her at [publications@cit-asl.org](mailto:publications@cit-asl.org).

The COVID-19 pandemic response has also had a huge impact on training, most notably resulting in educators struggling to quickly adapt to online delivery of teaching and assessment. While online delivery seems a sensible (or at least, the only) answer when on-campus classes are not possible, it has also brought significant inequities to the fore. Not all students have been able to use digital devices or access reliable internet (see Tommy, 2013, for exploration of these issues for Pacific Island students – written pre-COVID but extremely relevant to us all now). In our experience, which we assume echoes recent months for many readers, life in isolation and online means everything is a lot more demanding and time consuming. Our interpreting students need more care and flexibility, as they face the multiple challenges of mastering interpreting skills online, whilst dealing with their own sometimes very stressful circumstances.

Academics and students with young children have had to combine online teaching/learning with childcare and home schooling, and it is reasonable to assume that, around the world, it is disproportionately female academics and students who have been most affected. As Colleen Flaherty notes:

...women already juggled more domestic and affective, or emotional, labor with their actual work prior to the pandemic. Female academics, as a group, also struggled more with work-work balance, as well: numerous studies show they take on more service work than men and are less protective of their research time, to their detriment. The coronavirus has simply exacerbated these inequities by stripping away what supports women had in place to walk this tightrope, including childcare. (Flaherty, 2020)

Researchers in our field who were or are at home with children during lockdown are thus likely to be producing less research and fewer publications than academics without these responsibilities, which could have long-term effects on research standing and career advancement. Flaherty’s (2020) article on the Inside Higher Ed

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<sup>1</sup> InterpretAmerica was established in 2009 to provide an open forum “where key players from all branches of interpreting can gather and foster greater connection among its many sectors” (InterpretAmerica, 2020).

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website describes how journal editors are already noticing female researchers being less productive than male researchers during the pandemic. Although we have not yet noticed such a pattern for IJIE submissions, it will be telling to see who submits articles during the rest of 2020 and into 2021. Now, then, is the time for us as a collective to support each other and to speak out about this inequality in our workplaces and profession. We as editors would like to offer concrete assistance; if any readers feel they are being affected in this way and are finding themselves struggling to get a submission finished for publication, please contact us at [citjournaleditor@gmail.com](mailto:citjournaleditor@gmail.com) so that we can evaluate possible avenues of support.

While still coming to terms with the threat of COVID-19 pandemic and the risks of adverse outcomes to underserved communities in particular, the murder of George Floyd in the USA provoked wide-spread condemnation and international #blacklivesmatter protests. We would like to re-print the statement of the Conference of Interpreter Trainers, publisher of IJIE, here:

The Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT) greatly values diversity, respect, compassion, cultural awareness, and the acknowledgment of privilege. CIT is greatly dismayed by the abhorrent murder of George Floyd. The suffering of Black people has led to protests taking place around the United States and, with solidarity, the world.

According to our mission statement, “one of our primary goals is to increase our students’ knowledge . . . by fostering teaching practices and research that help educate compassionate, engaged professional interpreters . . . who are sensitive to issues of privilege.” Now, more than ever, CIT implores interpreting students, interpreter trainers, and professional interpreters to be reflective in their reaction to issues of privilege beyond the dynamics experienced between Deaf and hearing people. With the goal of making change to society, CIT implores members to be mindful, thoughtful, and to take action during this tumultuous time. CIT is committed to work with each one of you across our organization to ensure we all make CIT a place that supports unity and continues to provide life-long learning opportunities.

CIT expresses our heartfelt and deep condolences to George Floyd's family as well as to other families who have suffered intolerable acts of discrimination, racism, and inequality. We strongly stand in support of people of color and the fight to end systemic racism. To our members, this is a call to action.

#BlackLivesMatter

Turning to issue 12(1) of IJIE, we are pleased to bring you range of contributions that emphasize the collaborative spirit that we are seeing in these unprecedented times. If the articles do not directly reflect the focus of this editorial, it is because the review process was completed before “coronavirus” and “George Floyd” became part of our global lexicon.

This issue starts with a research article by Rosie Henley and Rachel McKee: *Going through the motions: Participation in interpreter-mediated meeting interaction under a deaf and a hearing chairperson*. Interpreted multiparty meetings are increasingly common, yet what happens in such meetings, including how turn-taking is managed and mediated, has been under-researched. The authors examine how a deaf and a hearing chairperson respectively facilitate mixed meeting interaction and how this impacts both the interpreting process and deaf individuals’ participation.

In his research article *Toward standard interpreter education program admission criteria*, Marc Holmes reports on a study which explored admission criteria for signed language interpreter education programs in the USA. Holmes explores which criteria were used, how they were measured and whether any particular configuration had a positive impact on student completion of IEPs and their time to credentialing.

Ineke Crezee and Lynn Grant follow up on their earlier research (Crezee & Grant 2013, 2016) when they take another look at the abilities of non-native English-speaking trainee interpreters to recognize and/or explain idiomatic language in their paper *An Achilles’ Heel? Helping interpreting students gain greater awareness of literal and idiomatic English*. They provide a number of recommendations for interpreter educators wishing to help expose their students to naturally occurring idiomatic language.

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We are also delighted to bring you several commentaries in this issue. Daniel Gile and Jemina Napier join forces in a commentary entitled *Spoken language interpreters and signed language interpreters: Towards cross-fertilization*. They trace the history of signed and spoken language interpreting, drawing parallels and commenting on points of difference, but above all emphasizing areas where the two fields can learn from each other in research, practice and training.

Maya de Wit has been the Sign Language Network Coordinator of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) since 2015. In her commentary, *Making It Work: Applying AIIC professional standards to conference signed language interpreters*, Maya considers the extent to which signed language interpreter education programs in Europe prepare students for conference interpreting.

Francesca Frittella presents a book review of *The next generation of research in interpreter education: Pursuing evidence-based practice*, edited by Cynthia Roy and Elizabeth Winston (2018). Frittella reviews the work of each of the five contributors and expresses the hope that all interpreter educators will be inspired to gradually replace common practices in the interpreter classroom with effective practices based on well-designed research studies.

The Dissertation Abstract section features the doctoral dissertations by Robert Skinner (Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh) and Thu Thi Quy Do (Monash University, Melbourne) as well as Pamela Collins and Kierstin Muroski (both Gallaudet University, Washington, DC). This section is a great opportunity to share the work of emerging researchers in our field, and we invite our readers to send in relevant master's or doctoral dissertation abstracts for our next issue. We are looking forward to receiving submissions for all sections of the journal, from research articles to book reviews, commentaries, interviews or contributions to the student work section.

Above all, we hope you will remain safe and well. We think it appropriate to end this editorial with a quote by Tuli Kupferberg:<sup>2</sup>

*When patterns are broken, new worlds emerge.*

## References

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<sup>2</sup> As cited by Patrick Johnson, March 9, 2015, on <https://beyondquarterlife.com/patterns-broken-new-worlds-emerge/>