

It's All About the Team: A preliminary snapshot of team interpreting in Ireland

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Abstract

In this paper, the authors consider issues relating to hearing interpreter teams, and deaf- hearing interpreter teams. A small-scale investigation of team interpreting in Ireland was conducted, considering where interpreters are working throughout Ireland and in what settings they are operating as a team. An anonymous survey was circulated to the interpreters of Ireland. From this it was observed that hearing interpreters tend to be the lead parties in organising interpreter teams. Furthermore it is interesting to note that Deaf Interpreters (referred to as DIs) report rarely working as part of a team. There is very little guidance for DIs, which further disadvantages them, as they cannot then easily advocate for their own position in the Irish context. The authors concluded by stating the need for guidance policies and/or toolkits surrounding how to decide who should be on an interpreter team. This would be beneficial for all interpreters, interpreting agencies and any organisation looking to book interpreters, whether they be public bodies or private sector.

***Keywords:** team interpreting; deaf interpreter; hearing interpreter; policy versus practice*

1. Introduction

To date, little research has been conducted on team interpreting in Ireland, be that around the work of interpreting teams comprising interpreters who are hearing or teams that include both deaf and hearing interpreters. This paper aims to present an initial overview of team interpreting in Ireland, considering where interpreters work geographically, in what settings they work as part of a team and how frequently. Reporting on a survey of hearing and deaf interpreters (DIs), we aim to illustrate the importance of interpreters working effectively as part of a team and,

based on observations and survey results, put forward suggestions as to what could be improved upon in order to support interpreters in creating their teams.

2. Terminology

Team interpreting, in the broadest sense, is when two or more interpreters work on the same task, taking turns being 'on' and 'off' task (Napier, Mckee & Goswell, 2010), meaning one member of the interpreting team is actively interpreting, whilst the other is not. Russell (2011:1) further defines a team as those who work together '*with the goal of creating ONE interpretation*'. Brück (2011, p. 8) states more explicitly that a team of interpreters should '*...share a common purpose, agree on performance goals, define a common working approach, develop complementary skills, and hold themselves mutually accountable for results*'. Team interpreting occurs to prevent mental fatigue (Moser-Mercer et al, 1998; Demers, 2005; Carnet, 2006; Erikson, 2007; Russell, 2008), physical fatigue (Demers, 2005; Fischer & Woodcock, 2007; Woodcock & Fischer, 2008; Russell, 2008; Hoza, 2010) and allow for cooperation as an interpreting unit, to deliver higher quality work and client satisfaction (Demers, 2005; Chmiel, 2008; Russell, 2008; Hoza, 2010; Brück, 2011).

In this paper, we consider some issues relating to hearing interpreter teams, and deaf-hearing interpreter teams, before turning to report on a preliminary survey that benchmarks where interpreters – deaf and hearing – work in teams in Ireland today. We begin by considering the terminology we use.

A 'hearing interpreter' is an individual who works between a spoken language and a sign language (Napier et al., 2006), for example, between English and Irish Sign Language (ISL). We use the term 'hearing interpreter team' to refer to a team of two or more team members who are working between a spoken and a signed language.

Deaf interpreters (DIs) are, first and foremostly, from and of a Deaf community; Deaf people have always been selected to function as interpreters within the Deaf community. This work has often been unacknowledged and 'unofficial', resulting in language brokering and/or translating that supports members of the community who may not have strong written or sign language skills (Adam, Carty & Stone, 2011; Adam et al., 2014).

In the early 1990s, the work of DIs gained attention when focus was placed on relay interpreting (Bienvenu & Colonomos, 1992; Collins & Roth, 1992). A relay interpreter would work as part of a deaf-hearing interpreter team, and work from the signed product presented by the hearing interpreter, re-packaging the information for the deaf client, and vice versa. The rationale for providing a DI stemmed from linguistic access needs. For example, a deaf client₁ may use a foreign sign language (and so a DI would work between national sign languages); may have idiosyncratic signing or gestural uses; or may use complex forms of the national sign language (Bienvenu & Colonomos, 1992). Deaf interpreters may work within one language by mirroring or shadowing, facilitating (a similar concept to relay interpreting) and/or working with Deafblind clients (Boudreault, 2005). Given this, we see deaf-hearing interpreting teams as '*a Deaf interpreter work[ing] with a hearing interpreter who listens to the hearing person's spoken language and gives an interpretation into sign language for the Deaf interpreter. The Deaf interpreter then translates the meaning from this interpretation into another form of sign language for the Deaf client.*' (Lynch 2015, p. 19).

3. Team Interpreting

Research on team interpreting has truly commenced only in the past fifteen years (Sforza 2014). Work to date has been limited regarding how interpreters work together and support each other in order to create the best interpretation possible (Chmiel, 2008; Brück, 2011). Here, we present a flavour of the key themes emerging from the literature in this regard.

Hoza (2010) points out that our perspective of interpreters working as a team has shifted, and as a result our understanding of effective team interpreting has also shifted. He notes that circa 1980 '*... there was an increased awareness that the quality of interpretation would degenerate after 30 minutes due to fatigue*' (ibid. 2010, p. 4). Interpreter fatigue results in a higher number of mistakes appearing (Moser-Mercer et al., 1998), coupled with the fact that interpreters may not be aware of the decline in quality of their work (ibid.). Subsequently, the initial adoption of team interpreting was motivated by the need to relieve interpreter mental and/or physical stress (Hoza, 2010). At that time, the understanding of team interpreting was that two or more colleagues would work independently within a team, i.e., when one interpreter was off task, they did not support or monitor their colleague; they took a break (Hoza, 2010). Erikson (2007) stresses the need for team interpreting as a quality control measure to preserve the accuracy of the interpretation, considering the challenges and demands that occur in interpreting settings. Although working individually as part of a team still occurs (Russell, 2005), today, most teams

of interpreters strive to work as a unit, monitoring and supporting their colleagues when not actively interpreting whilst utilising the skills and knowledge of each individual interpreter to benefit the team and the quality of interpretation (Demers, 2005; Hoza, 2010; Russell, 2011).

Demers (2005) writes more generally of what a sign language interpreter is asserting that interpreters should work together as a team, utilising their individual skills for the betterment of the interpretation as a whole. Hoza (2010) interviewed six interpreters who reported the following as important components required to create effective team interpreting:

- 1) Personal characteristics and skills of the team interpreters;
- 2) A shared philosophical understanding of the interpreting process and the work as a team;
- 3) Trust and commitment to teamwork and a successful interpretation;
- 4) An interpersonal relationship with their colleague and clear communication skills.

Russell (2011) reports findings from observing the work of forty-four interpreters, deaf and hearing, working as part of teams at the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf, ICED, which took place in Vancouver B.C in July 2011. Russell (ibid.) reports on their work in terms of preparation, pre-task, on-task and post-task conversation, stressing the importance of communication between interpreters across these stages in order to create the best interpretation, regardless of the hearing status of interpreting team members.

Carnet (2006), a spoken language interpreter who works frequently in court settings, outlines the importance of 'team spirit'. Carnet (2006) illustrates the importance of knowing the skills, weaknesses and style of your co-interpreter before working together, whilst also taking the time to practice cues and signals with interpreting colleague outside of the task itself to ensure efficient team interpreting. In the sign language interpreting realm, Russell (2008) reports on preparatory conversations within teams of interpreters, and between interpreters and relevant stakeholders in preparation for mock trials. As part of this study she interviewed the interpreters, who reported that working as a team is '*more than physically coming together to share the work*' (ibid, p. 138). Her participants reported that pre- and post- task conversations are needed while strategies need to be established to address challenges that could arise on-task, which in turn, enhances the work of the team.

Brück (2011) examined deaf client perspectives of hearing interpreting teams, finding that teams were perceived as successful when there was ‘*mutual support*’, ‘*smooth and regular switching*’ and ‘*feeding (prompting the lead interpreter by showing signs, fingerspelling and whispering)*’ (p. 46).

Research on deaf-hearing interpreting teams is in its infancy (Bentley-Sassaman & Dawson, 2012; Brück & Schaumberger, 2014; Lynch, 2015). Bentley-Sassaman & Dawson (ibid.) analyse how deaf-hearing teams function, and through their interviews discover that clear and open communication pre- and post task lead to successful teamwork. They stress the need for deaf-hearing teams to work interdependently, and it is noted that the more time the interpreters spend together, the more successful the task will be (See also Brück & Schaumberger, 2014).

While little research exists on team interpreting in Ireland, some anecdotal and qualitative data on the observations of team interpreting is available (Leeson & Foley Cave, 2007; Byrne, 2014) along with an outline of the experiences of Deaf interpreters in team settings (Lynch, 2015). However, as far as we are aware, there is no quantitative data that documents how often interpreters have the opportunity to work with colleagues, and in what situations, nor is there research on how interpreters work interdependently as a team. Against this backdrop, we conducted a survey to collect quantitative information around team interpreting in Ireland.

4. The Survey

An anonymous survey was circulated via Survey Monkey in 2019. The survey contained nine questions with a range of possible responses available to respondents (See Appendix 1).

The survey was disseminated in two ways:

- (1) Via the Irish Sign Language interpreter WhatsApp group, which consists of ninety-one interpreters from across the island of Ireland. While not all of these interpreters are currently actively working, this group was the best mechanism for inviting as many interpreters as possible to consider responding.
- (2) The survey was sent to the group of Deaf interpreters individually as not all of them are in the Irish sign language interpreter WhatsApp group, nor do they have a WhatsApp group of their own.

The survey was open for eight days, and two reminders were sent by the authors to both the Irish interpreter WhatsApp group as well as to the Deaf interpreters individually to encourage interpreters to respond. Considering this, a total of thirty-eight responses were recorded. The SLIS Strategic Framework (2019) estimates that there are eighty interpreters actively working in Ireland. This implies a response rate of circa 43.75% of the profession represented within our data.

We received thirty-eight responses to our survey. Thirty-four responses were from hearing interpreters; four were from DIs. 61% (n=28) work in Dublin, the remaining 39% (n=18) work across the country (Figure 1). It is important to note that respondents were able to select more than one location as their response. As a result, we discovered that 21% (n=8) of interpreters work in more than one geographical location; 66.67% (n=5) of this group work in two or more locations *not* including Dublin and the Greater Area. Three out of the four DI respondents work in Dublin and the greater Dublin area. This follows as Dublin is the most densely populated area in Ireland (cso.ie, 2017), and, according to Dublinchamber.ie (2020) Dublin has 31.7% of the country's working population.

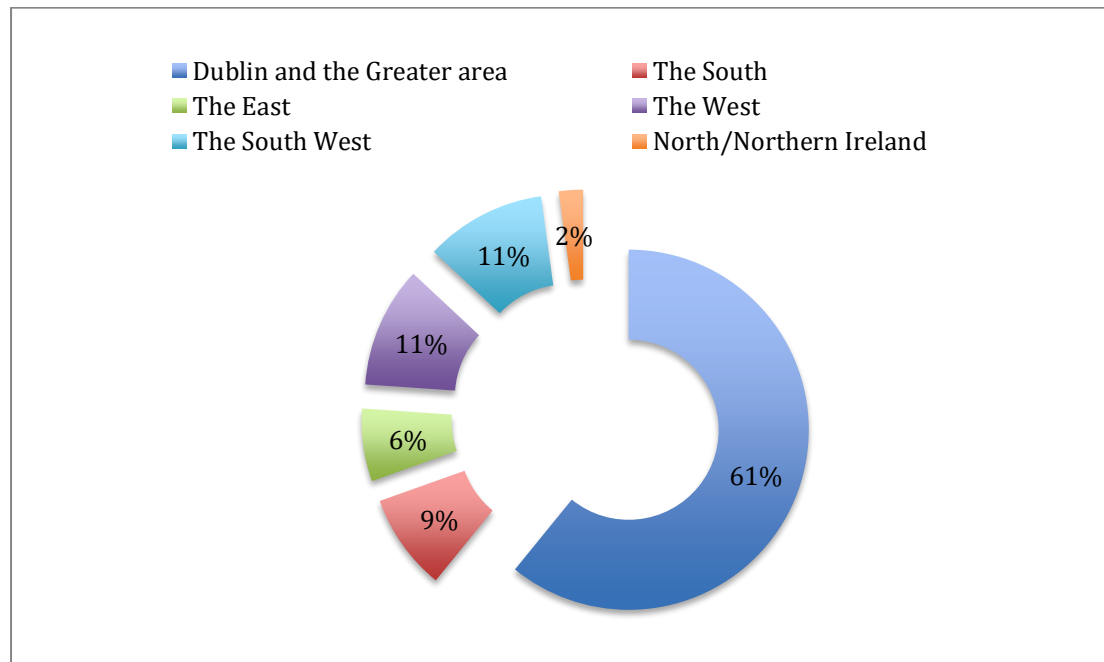


Figure 1: Where do you work regularly?

4.1. How often do you work as part of a team?

Most interpreters (39.47%; n=15) said that they worked as part of a team once every few months. While most hearing sign language interpreters based in Dublin (33.33%; n=9) stated they work as part of a team once a week, in contrast, those hearing interpreters working outside of Dublin (52.92%, n=9) said they worked as part of a team only once every few months (Figure 2). 50% (n=2) of DIs reported they worked as part of a team once a year, and 50% (n=2) reported that they worked as part of a team every few months.

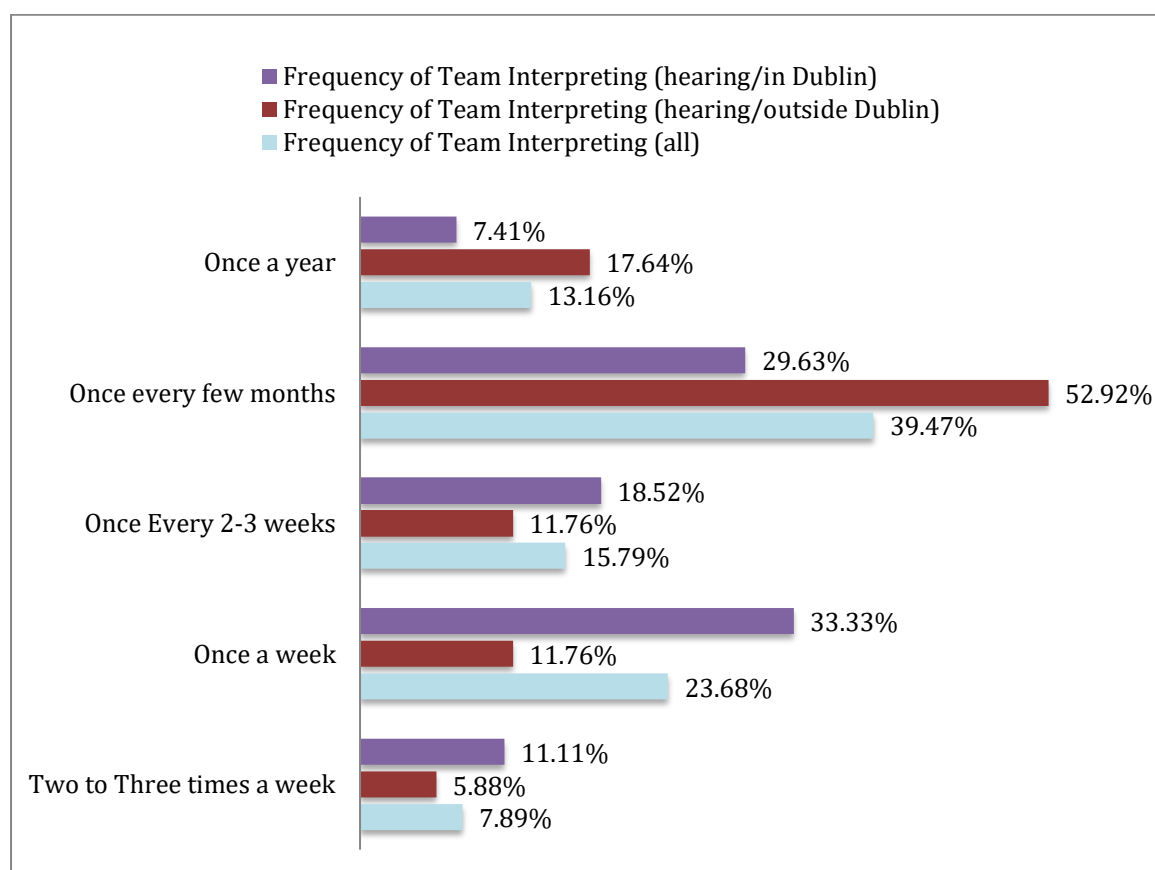


Figure 2: In what setting do you frequently work in a team? (Hearing interpreters)

4.2. In what setting do you frequently work in a team?

Hearing sign language interpreters report that they work as a member of a team in a variety of settings (Figure 3.1). The ‘other’ option was selected four times (5%; n=4). When interpreters specified why they selected this, three mentioned that their assignment was for team meetings or in an employment setting where a second interpreter was also booked. Survey respondents report that training settings are the most common domain where interpreters work as part of a team (32%; n=27), whilst legal (1%; n=1) and media (1%; n=1) are the least common domains where a team interpreter is likely to be hired.

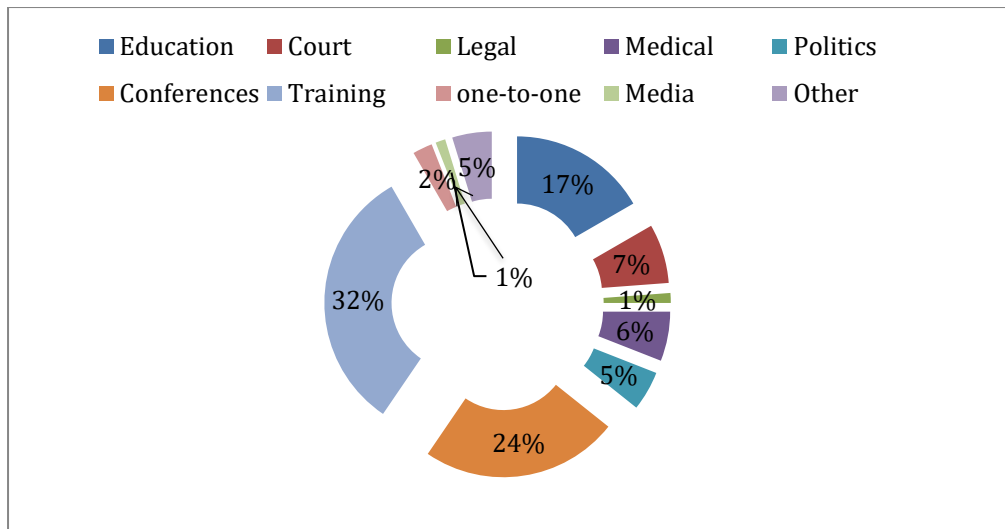


Figure 3.1: In what setting do you frequently work in a team? (Hearing interpreters in Dublin)

When comparing interpreters working on teams in Dublin to those outside of Dublin, we can say that those outside of Dublin mostly work as part of teams in training (29%, n=10) and conference situations (23%, n=8). Interpreters in Dublin report working as part of a team more often in court settings (15%; n=5), compared to those outside of Dublin who work as part of a team in court settings less frequently (7%; n=6). Those working outside of Dublin report working less frequently as part of a team in educational situations at 9% (n=3), compared to 17% (n=14).

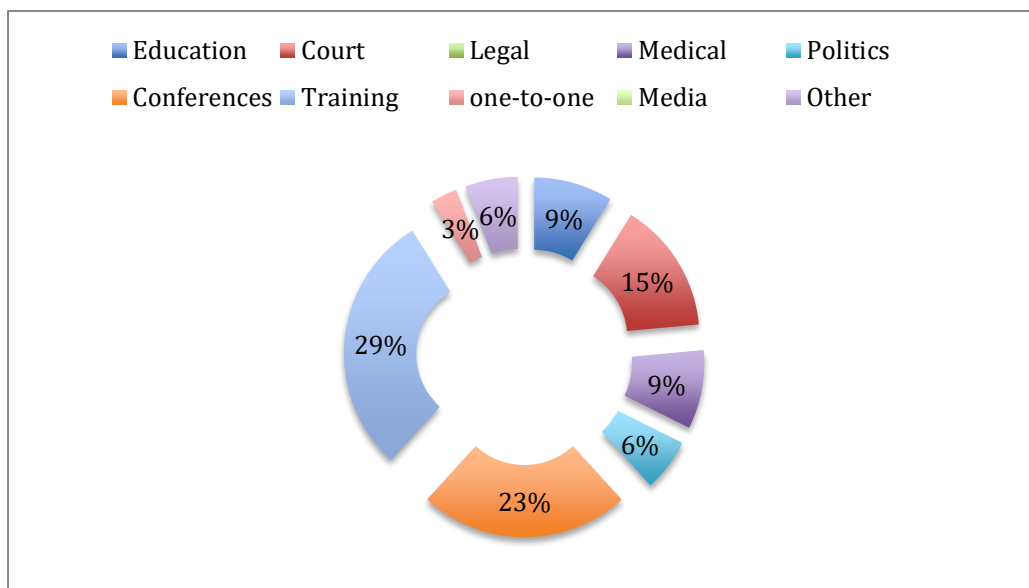


Figure 3.2: In what setting do you frequently work as part of a team? (Hearing interpreters outside of Dublin)

DIs report that they mostly work in teams in legal settings (23%, n=2), closely followed by medical situations (22%, n=2).

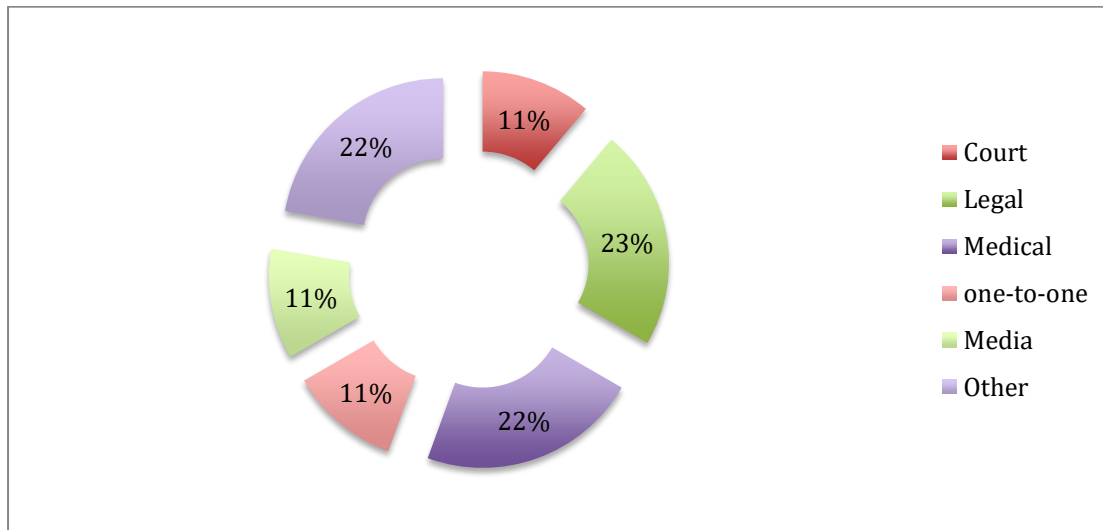


Figure 3.3: In what setting do you frequently work in a team? (Deaf interpreters)

Another question we put to participants was, “Who decides the need for more than one interpreter?” Hearing interpreters were seen as most likely to decide the need for a second interpreter, while a hearing organisation was considered least likely to recognise the need for a second interpreter (see Figures 4.1-4.4).

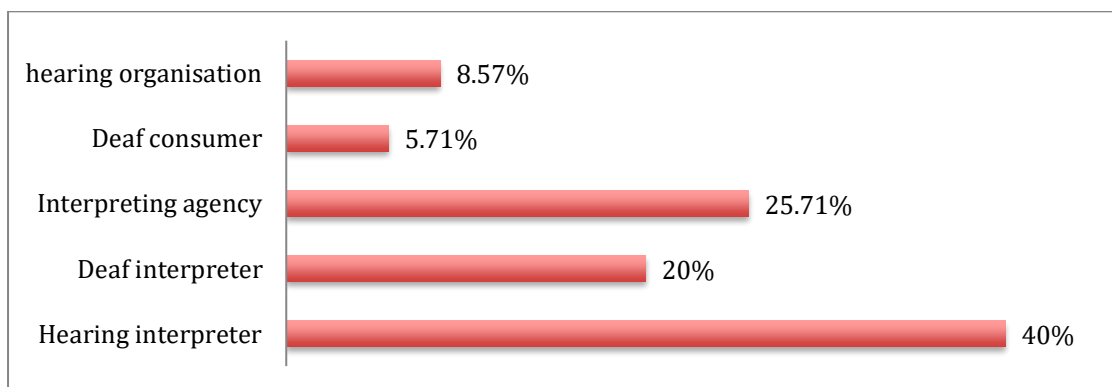


Figure 4.1: Who decides the need for more than one interpreter? (Hearing interpreters)

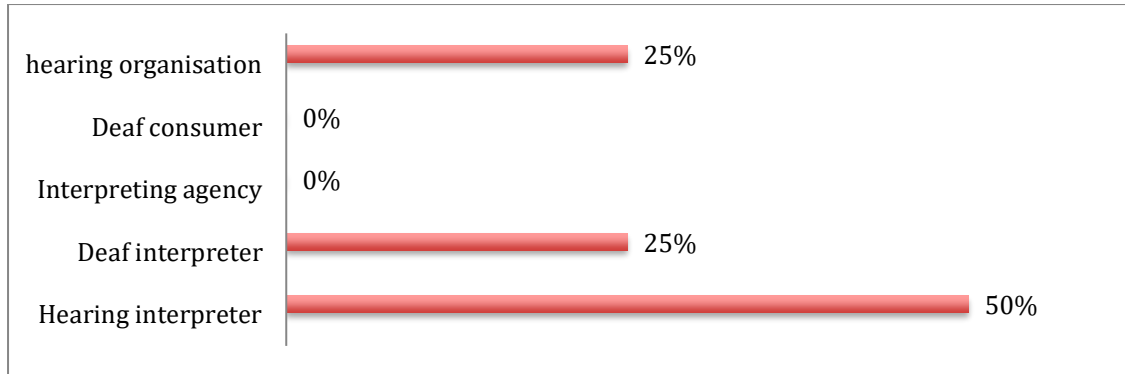


Figure 4.2: Who decides the need for more than one interpreter? (Deaf interpreters)

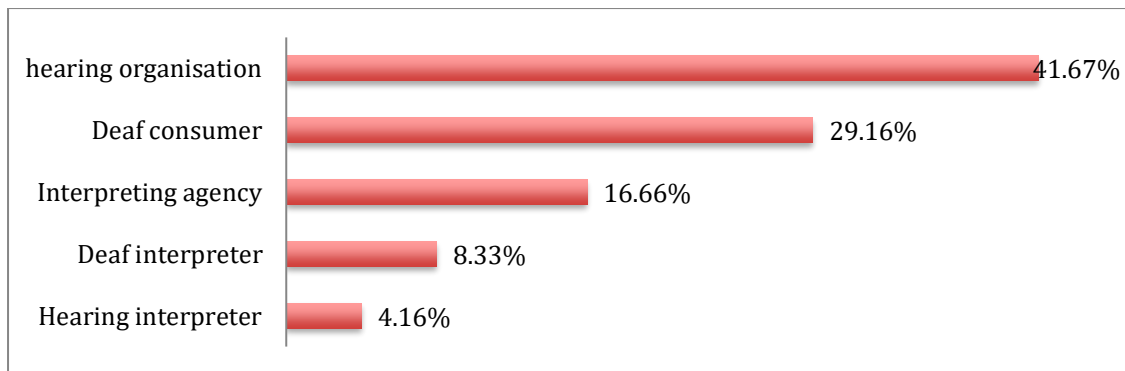


Figure 4.3: Who is least likely to decide the need for more than one interpreter? (Hearing interpreters)

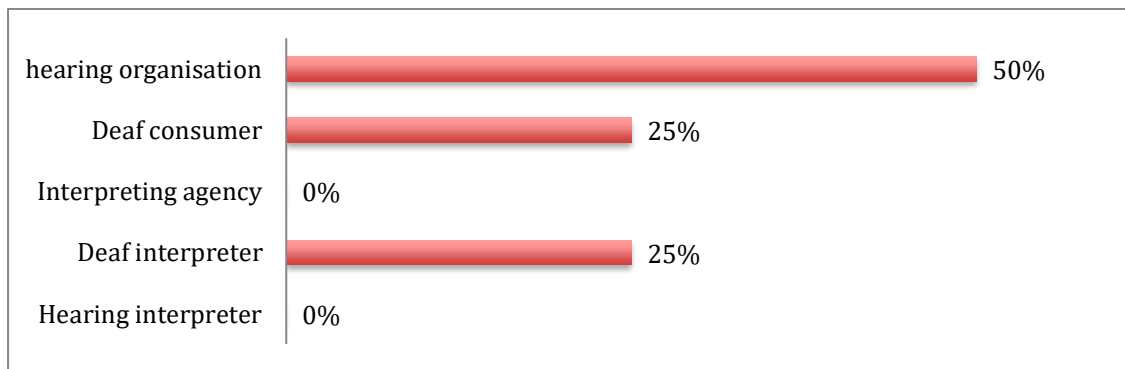


Figure 4.4: Who is least likely to decide the need for more than one interpreter? (Deaf)

5. Discussion

Figure 2 shows that 33% (n=9) of hearing interpreters in Dublin who responded to this survey work as part of an interpreting team on a weekly basis. This may arise for a number of reasons. A number of Deaf community-led organisations are based in Dublin, for example, the Irish Deaf Society, the national deaf women’s organisation (National Deaf Women of Ireland), Deaf Sports Ireland, etc. All of these organisations, but particularly the Irish Deaf Society (IDS),

advocate and campaign for the rights of ISL users within different sectors (IDS.ie, 2020), working with interpreters on a day-to-day basis. Further, public bodies are increasingly aware of their duty to provide Irish Sign Language interpretation. For example, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland launched their access rules (BAI, 2019) that includes ISL provision targets which public broadcasters are obliged to meet across a 5-year cycle. Other public bodies are preparing for implementation of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017 – for example, the Houses of the Oireachtas has recruited two in-house ISL interpreters to provide access to their various services in response to the Act (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2018). As a critical mass of high-level meetings and conferences take place in Dublin and attract Deaf community representatives, coupled with increased awareness on the part of public bodies with respect to their duty to provide ISL interpretation, we see increased demands for teams of interpreters in Dublin over other parts of the country.

Some 52.92% of hearing interpreters outside of Dublin (n=9) work as part of a team every few months, more infrequently than their colleagues in Dublin (Figure 2). This could be because fewer interpreters work outside Dublin (39%; n=18), and the fact that there is a shortage of trained ISL interpreters in rural areas (Citizens Information Board, 2017), requiring the buying in of interpreters from further afield to meet demand. We see from Figures 3.1 and 3.2 that hearing interpreters report working as part of a team in conference settings, but most frequently in training (workshops, staff training) settings. It may be that interpreting is provided as a result of the Employment Equality Act (1998), which requires employers to ‘... *do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person who has a disability...*’ (1998, p. 20; Article 16.3(b)). It could equally be the result of the Equal Status Act (2000), which states ‘...*discrimination includes a refusal or failure by the provider of a service to do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability...*’ (2000, p. 9; Article 4 (1)). The Irish Sign Language (ISL) Act (2017), due for implementation in December 2020 (justice.ie, 2018) should further support existing legislation, improving the access of services for deaf ISL users.

When analysing the survey responses we note interpreters in Dublin are unlikely to work as part of a team in legal settings. This could be due to the fact that some legal meetings outside of court may be under two hours in duration; therefore interpreters and/or agencies do not request a second interpreter. However, considering the complexity of legal interpreting it is surprising that so few interpreters work as part of a team in these settings.

As indicated in Figures 4.1 and 4.2, hearing interpreters tend to be the lead parties in organising interpreter teams. It should be noted that Codes of Professional Practice tend to place an expectation on hearing interpreters to indicate the need for a team interpreter (AVLIC, 2000; RID, 2005; ASLIA, 2007; CISLI, 2011). This may be because the hearing interpreter is the professional booked first for a task, and following from their booking, they are in a position to indicate that a DI is required. Considering this norm whereby hearing interpreters are expected to assess and decide when a DI is needed as a co-worker, there is very little policy or guidance available in Ireland or indeed, internationally, either on the topic of team interpreting generally, or, more specifically, regarding the need for DIs to be included as part of a team. Arguably, there is a need for policy or guidelines surrounding team interpreting which hearing interpreters could use to guide their decisions when assessing the need for a team.

Considering this, it is interesting to note that DIs report rarely working as part of a team with 50% (n=2) stating this occurs only every few months, and 50% (n=2) stating they work as part of a team just once a year. This reflects how infrequently DIs are booked for a task at present, supporting Lynch's (2015) findings which suggest that DIs are still working towards professional recognition. Irish DIs in our survey did not report working in education, politics, conferences and training settings (Figure 3.3), implying that Deaf interpreters are not employed in these areas. This could be due to lack of awareness of the existence of Deaf interpreters and their role (Adam et al., 2014), or it could be due to the fact that hearing interpreters are expected to decide when and where to request a DI without recourse to guidance or training. Furthermore, apart from a mention in some Codes of Professional Ethics/Practice (AVLIC, 2000; RID, 2005; ASLIA, 2007; CISLI, 2011) to treat DIs as equals and ensure they are brought in to work in assignments, there is very little guidance for DIs themselves, which further disadvantages them, as they cannot then easily advocate for their own position in the Irish context.

In addition to DIs struggling to advocate for their own profession contemporaneously, it is reported that historically, there has been tension between hearing and deaf interpreters as (some) hearing interpreters feared that their work would be taken by DIs (Adam et al., 2011; Lynch, 2015). In Ireland, Lynch (2015) reports there are still occurrences of hearing interpreters not supporting their DI colleagues. Additionally, there are Deaf-hearing power-relationships at play wherein hearing interpreters view DIs as clients rather than colleagues (ibid.). This shows the need for training for hearing interpreters to know how to work with their

DI colleagues (Forestal, 2014). Further exploration of the relationships that hold between DIs and their hearing colleagues is needed. Power-relations are a factor, along with status inequality for DIs. We also need to ask to what are the barriers that exist for DIs and how can we dismantle these. We need to explore to what degree are hearing interpreters and service users aware of the complexity of the work that DIs do and how might increased awareness of the transcultural, translanguaging work carried out reflect back on access to training, career opportunities, and indeed working conditions for DIs?

6. Conclusion, considerations, and possible recommendations

This report presents on an initial, small-scale investigation of team interpreting in Ireland, considering where interpreters are working throughout Ireland and in what settings they are operating as a team. We appreciate that there are a number of limitations to this approach, including the narrow range of responses possible arising from the quantitative nature, the limited number of questions asked, the number of responses. However, we see this as the starting point for Irish research in this area, something to be built upon and learned from.

Following from our brief review of the literature and our survey results, we would like to highlight a number of issues. Firstly, we need to raise awareness of the value of the work of DIs. Hearing interpreters need to be more aware of their gate-keeping position when assessing tasks and considering the need for building an appropriate team. Training for hearing interpreters from DI colleagues would be helpful in supporting increased awareness of when DIs should be considered for assignments, and their scope of practice when on-task. Additionally, guidance policies and/or toolkits surrounding how to decide who should be on an interpreter team would be beneficial for all interpreters, interpreting agencies and any organisation looking to book interpreters, whether they be public bodies or private sector.

Although public services are increasingly aware of their duty to provide ISL interpreters under a range of legislation, most recently the Irish Sign Language Act 2017, we still see fragmented policy (O'Rourke & Castillo, 2009) and practice (Leeson, Sheikh, Rozanes, Grehan & Matthews, 2014).

There is significant research potential around the strategies that interpreting teams apply in practice, and in particular, those teams comprising Deaf and hearing professionals. Questions that we need to address include how interpreters should work effectively as team members;

Should similar strategies be utilised when working as a member of an all hearing team as well as when working as part of a Deaf-hearing team? How can interpreters communicate better to facilitate maximising the capacity of their team? How can we create awareness of the benefits of team interpreting?

With more research and evidence of the benefits of hearing teams and Deaf-hearing teams, interpreters will be better able to advocate for their role and for the benefits of team interpreting for all participants of an interpreting task, this would improve the working conditions for interpreters and in turn, improve access for deaf and hearing clients.

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Appendix

Q1*

Please select the following:

I am a hearing interpreter

I am a Deaf interpreter

Q2

How many years experience do you have as a working interpreter?

Less than 1 year

1-3 years

4-6 years

7-9 years

10+ years

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Q3*

Geographically, where do you regularly work (tick all that apply)?

Dublin and greater area

The East of Ireland (not including Dublin – Dundalk, Wexford etc.)

The West of Ireland (Galway, Mayo, Clare etc.)

The South West (Limerick, Tralee, Killarney etc.)

The South (Cork, Waterford, etc.)

North of Ireland/Northern Ireland (Donegal, Londonderry, Monaghan etc.)

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Q4*

How often, on average, do you work as part of a team?

Two to three times a week

Once a week

Once every two to three weeks

Once every few months

Once a year

Never

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Q5*

In what settings do you frequently work as part of a team? Please tick all that apply.

Education Settings (university, college etc.)

Court Settings (not including pre and post meetings)

Legal Settings (including Garda station meetings, legal pre and post meetings etc.)

Medical Settings

Political Settings

Conference Settings

Training Settings (workshops, staff training, marriage preparation etc.)

One to One meetings (job interviews, parent-teacher meetings)

Media (interviews, on screen interpretation)

Other (please specify)

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Q6

What would be the average time you would work before turn taking?

10 minutes

15 minutes

20 minutes

30 minutes

45 minutes

Other (Please specify)

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Q7

Were you ever formally trained in working as part of an interpreting team?
(Through workshops, your qualification programme, seminars etc.)

Yes

No

Other (please specify)

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Q8*

Who decides the need for more than 1 interpreter? (1 = most likely to organise the second interpreter. 5 = least like organises the second interpreter)

The hearing interpreter

The Deaf interpreter

The interpreting agency

The Deaf consumer

The hearing organisation (private business, HSE, courts etc.)

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Q9

Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

¹ Following Kusters et al. (2017), we adopt use of lower case 'd' when we use the term 'deaf' in a bid to be more inclusive of the intersectionality of people within Deaf communities.