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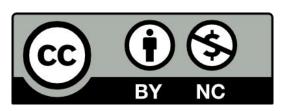
IRIS
Improving Rural Interpreter Skills

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Module 16: Technology and interpreting

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[ASL lecture](#) **by Joe Toledo**

Overview: This module explores ways technology can be used in our work as rural interpreters either in face-to-face or video remote interpreting situations.

Learning Outcomes and Objectives

Upon completion of this module participants will be able to:

1. Give examples of how technology can be used in face-to-face situations.
2. Identify components of an optimal VRI set-up at home.
3. Identify alternative resources if specific technologies are not available for a VRI set-up at home.
4. Explore various best practices and challenges in VRI work.
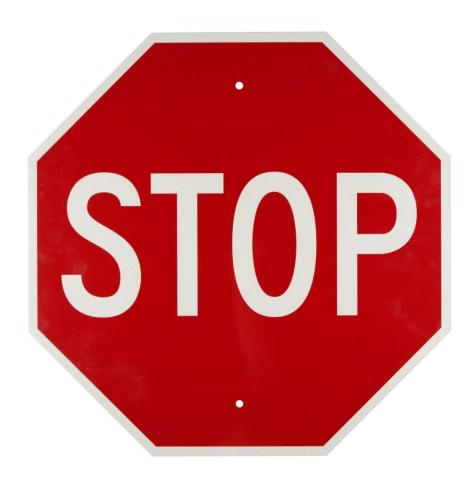
Pre-Test

NOTE: You have to log into Canvas to complete this pre-test

Answer the following questions:

1. You are in a doctor's office. What technologies might you utilize in your interpreting work?

2. What do you need to set up a VRI station for yourself at home?

3. How does teaming work in VRI?

Introduction

Whenever people think of technology, they often think of electronic devices or vehicles that have become fixed parts of our lives. What technologies have the interpreting profession seen? People might say video relay service (VRS) and video remote interpreting (VRI). Not all technologies are electronic. There are also microphones, clear masks/face shields, and portable stages to improve the visibility of the interpreters. Those are technologies at the present time. We have used technologies in our work in the past such as the interpreter smock and a small light clip to illuminate the interpreter in a dark room.

As humans, we have adapted to incorporate technologies in our lives. That is true for the sign language interpreting. Whatever technologies emerge, we adapt to incorporate those somehow. Now that we have numerous options at our disposal, we can be creative about using them in our interpreting work. Essentially, those tools enhance our work as interpreters. Interpreting and technology: The upcoming technological turn and its accompanying ASL summary gives a good overview of two types of technologies we work with: **setting technology** and **interpreting-related technologies**.

IRIS Project is very aware that rural interpreters may have challenges in accessing specific technologies in their communities. It is our hope that this module serves as a resource for you as you explore alternative options in your local area.

Using technologies in face-to-face situations, Part I

Teaming with interpreters who are remote

In some situations, you may be asked to team with an interpreter who is remote. For example, medical clinics have tablets to provide VRI. In other settings, you may be in the room but your team is connected via a remote platform. This is one technology you may encounter as a rural interpreter because at times, there are not enough interpreters in your area available for specific interpreting assignments.

Technologies that are available in the room

Visualize yourself walking into a room where you are about to provide your interpreting services. Feel free to select a specific-setting room such as a classroom, courtroom, or doctor's office. Scan the room. What resources are available to you to support your interpreting work? **Make a list of things you could use. You will need this list for the upcoming GoReact discussion.**

Using technologies in face-to-face situations, Part II

The Center for Atypical Language Interpreting (CALI) suggests that various props can be used to enhance communication access:

"When working with deaf consumers with unique and diverse backgrounds, who use sign language in atypical ways, it is important for interpreters to be creative. This creativity often is seen in the communication strategies interpreters employ—such as drawing, using pictures, using props, acting out events, and having multiple ways to communicate complex concepts. When things are drawn or in picture form, they can also be taken home by the deaf consumer and used for later reference. Using a highlighter to highlight the critical parts of a written document is also useful to the deaf consumer for later reference," (CALI, 2020, p. 106).

Canvas Discussion: Using technologies in face-to-face settings

NOTE: You have to log into Canvas to complete this assignment

Original post directions:

First, using the list you created earlier and based on the information on the previous page from CALI, what might you add to the original list? Next, create an original post sharing the items and ideas you came up with.

Response post directions:

React to the post of one of your colleagues by asking clarifying questions, seeking additional information, or expressing an idea that encourages critical thinking and moves the conversation forward.

GoReact Discussion: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

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NOTE: You have to log into Canvas to complete this assignment

Original post directions:

Create an original post addressing the following prompt:

- Since the pandemic, the demands for remote and over-video interpreting have exponentially increased. How have these shifts in work and demands impacted you as a rural interpreter? Has this shift in service impacted the local rural deaf communities you work with?

Response post directions:

React to the post of one of your colleagues by asking clarifying questions, seeking additional information, or expressing an idea that encourages critical thinking and moves the conversation forward.

Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)

VRI* is a form of interpretation service in which the consumers and the interpreters are in different locations. They connect using various platforms. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the [legal obligations for providing VRI](#).

*Note: You will see the terms "video remote interpreting", "remote interpreting" and/or "over video interpreting" all meaning the same thing. The field of sign language interpreting uses these terms interchangeably.

There are two types of VRI work:

- **Centralized VRI service:**
  - This is very common in medical settings. Those have large contracts with corporations such as MARTTI, Language Line or Stratus using equipment provided by the paying entities. Interpreters may work in a designated call center or within their homes to connect.

- **Individual VRI service:**
  - This service is provided by interpreters working in their own designated locations (typically in their private home). Interpreters may work directly with paying entities or through interpreting referral agencies.
  - Agencies vary in how they select interpreters. Some agencies prefer to use local resources for local VRI requests (also known as local VRI in some areas within the United States). Some agencies open up the work to any interpreter within the country.

What do you need to do VRI interpreting at home?

Alyson Boote, a staff sign language interpreter at Microsoft, wrote a blog about what interpreters need to set up a room/office at their home for VRI work. She also developed comprehensive guidelines explaining the specifications for the equipment you will need.

Using Boote's resources, take note of what you do have and what you need. If your area does not have high-speed Internet, consider potential locations you could use in your area.

Check your local and state regulations for providing video remote interpreting services within your home office. Additionally, interpreting referral agencies may have specific requirements for quality assurance based on their contractual agreements with paying entities.

It might help to be aware that you may be recorded when providing VRI interpretation. If this is problematic, you may want to reconsider in accepting the job. Some assignments are recorded and archived for public viewing. Plan accordingly.

Video conferencing platforms

Organizations will select their preferred video conferencing platforms. When you receive a confirmation with a link, be sure to familiarize yourself with the specifications of the video conferencing platform. The following are the most commonly used platforms for interpreting: Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet. Each platform has different settings and various viewing options.

Find out in advance what controls you may have in the platform. Some organizations may opt to make you the co-host while some others prefer to be in charge of controlling the view shifts.

Some of those platforms offer automatic captioning and/or live transcripts. This can be a great resource if you miss any information.

GoReact Discussion: VRI at home

NOTE: You have to log into Canvas to complete this assignment

Original post directions:

After you have reviewed resources related to what you need at home to do VRI work:
- What were three important takeaways from those resources that you feel rural interpreters should be aware of?
- What challenges do you have in setting up a VRI practice at home in your area? What possible alternatives are you considering and would recommend to others in your COL?
- What video conferencing platforms do you think are effective for interpreting work? Which platforms are not effective?

Response post directions:

Respond to the post of at least two of your colleagues by asking clarifying questions, seeking additional information, or expressing an idea that encourages critical thinking and moves the conversation forward.

Teaming in VRI situations

Below are two resources that discuss teaming strategies in VRI situations:
- [Saint Mary's University, Faculty of Science, Interpreting Services: Video Remote & Hybrid Interpreting](#)
- [Exploring Teaming Dynamics in Video Remote Interpreting](#)

The most common set-up is for the active interpreter to have their camera on while the supporting team will have their camera off using the chat feature to support the team. Text messaging may be used as an alternative way to communicate with each other. Some teams may opt to use a different video platform to connect with their team. This is common for Deaf/non-deaf teams. The second video platforms typically used are a second Zoom room, FaceTime, Google Meeting, or Whereby. Some organizations created their own team video room.

Some video platforms do not allow two interpreter videos to be on at the same time which can be problematic in some situations. It also supports the exclusion of Deaf interpreters if deaf consumers want to see both the Deaf interpreter and non-deaf interpreters on screen.

Best practices in VRI settings

Review the resources that discuss best practices in virtual meetings involving deaf people. Consider how those resources can be used to be applied to your work as a rural interpreter.

- [NAD Accessible Remote Work Meetings for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Employees](#)
- [NAD Ranking Report of States for ASL Access during COVID-19 Briefings](#)
- [Best Practices in Access: Video Remote Interpreting](#) from the National Deaf Center
- [Accessibility Tips for a Better Zoom/Virtual Meeting Experience from the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Technology Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center](#)
- [Zoom Video-Conferencing: Accessibility Practices for People who are Deaf-Blind](#) from Helen Keller National Center

Special considerations

While VRI has proven to be a positive shift for deaf people's access options, there are important considerations of how interpreting work can be impacted by this shift.

Combating Performative Accessibility by Gloshanda Lawyer and Kenton Myers
Review the resource in [English](#) and in [ASL](#).

Reclaiming our time by Gloshanda Lawyer, Kenton Myers, and Tiffany Hill
Review the resource in [English](#) and in [ASL](#).

VRI - It's complicated

Before the pandemic, VRI was not a popular preference among deaf people. Some deaf people liked it because they could have access to interpreters from anywhere in the country. Some consumers liked that it was quick and easy. However, there were always connection concerns that could impinge communication access.

The pandemic forced VRI on deaf people. Deaf people no longer had the option between a face-to-face interpreter or a VRI interpreter. In large part, deaf people have adapted.

Deaf people have realized that they can work with interpreters from anywhere in the country. Should no local interpreters be available, deaf people now have greater autonomy in finding them elsewhere. This shift and expanded pool of service providers, has allowed deaf people to request interpreters that better represent their diverse identities.

While deaf people can have greater control of how they can view and engage via video platforms (if they are on their own computer) this is often at the mercy of the hosting party (i.e. business, workplace, hospital, etc....). Entities may use tablets connected to an interpreter with whom they have no familiarity or previous experience. Some clinics and hospitals have poor connectivity so those get disconnected often. Those tablets are difficult to navigate and may not work if a deaf person is bent over or laying down. In short, be aware that deaf consumers' reactions will vary. In thinking back to Module 15, are there ways to tap into healing-centered interpreting practices that may support the efficacy of communication in these settings?

Consumers' perspective of VRI, Part 2

A deaf Disability Studies scholar, Manako Yabe, did her dissertation study on consumers' (deaf and hearing) perspective of VRI in medical settings before the pandemic. **Review the video** accompanying her dissertation to learn about perspectives. This was an important study as it is not common that consumers to be asked for their perspectives in interpretation research.

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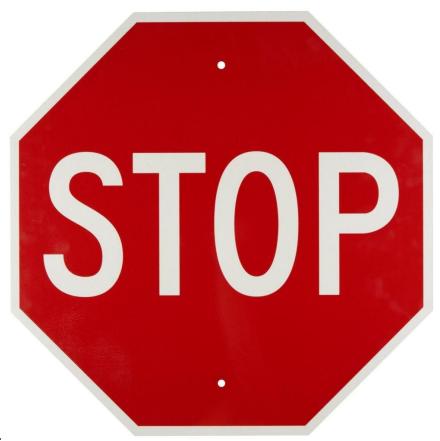
Post-Test

Answer the following questions:

1. You are in an attorney's office. What technologies might you utilize in your interpreting work?
2. What do you need to set up a VRI station for yourself at home?
3. How does teaming work in VRI?
4. What are some of the best practices in VRI you would like to adopt?
5. What are some considerations that you want to be aware of when you do VRI work?

Correct responses: 1. Various answers will apply., 2. Up to date computer (desktop or laptop), high-speed Internet connection (cable or fiber), webcam (laptop or separate webcam whichever is better), contrasting background, bright lights, a room where you can work privately., 3. Use chat for support, co-host adjustments, and/or use another video platform for teaming feeds/discussions., 4. & 5. Various answers will apply.

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