

# Press reset



With recording requests ever more prevalent, SLIs need to apply theoretical models at the core of their training in order to confidently determine whether they will accept. **Sharan Thind** reports

## The growth in requests to record interpreting

assignments since the first lockdown in 2020 has revealed the unprecedented level of exposure that SLIs are facing within their everyday practice, as well as highlighting gaps in our professional learning. To better understand how colleagues were responding to these new ways of working, I needed to determine what it would take to make them feel more confident with the decisions they faced when asked to be recorded.

An initial study in March this year highlighted the many concerns language professionals faced when asked whether they were happy to consent to their work being recorded. The survey of 110 sign language interpreters and translators (spanning both registered and trainees) highlighted the following:

- ▲ 87% of respondents had seen an increase in assignments being recorded
- ▲ Over 70% of all respondents were uncomfortable saying no when put on the spot before an assignment
- ▲ 85% of the respondents currently accepting recorded work found it difficult to say no when asked on the spot
- ▲ 70% of respondents wanted a toolkit for approaching assignments being recorded.

Having completed my preliminary research, I concluded that to maintain professional

confidence in situations where our work is being recorded, we need to further develop our preparatory knowledge within the context of online working. We also need to create and implement a toolkit to aid our decision-making process, a proposal that was universally welcomed by participants.

If interpreters can pinpoint why they do not want to be recorded, and therefore refuse recorded assignments, they can confidently create a narrative to support their decisions and take steps to develop their skillset in that area. The intended outcome of a toolkit is a decision-making process that can be adapted to support SLIs generally in assessing their own confidence levels based on skillset, understanding and experience.

## Confidence as core

Following my initial survey, I facilitated two independent workshops to further explore the primary themes of confidence and navigate conversations on being recorded. The workshops, which took place on 5 and 19 May, involved 31 participants across two groups. The overarching theme of confidence was relevant to many people's perceptions of recorded work, whether related to target language produced for a real-time audience that would be viewed later, judgement from peers or struggling to say no without coming

across as unreasonable. Workshop participants said they needed *'to hook into strategies of addressing this beforehand and on the spot'*, as well as wanting to *'have more confidence to approach the topic'*.

I had the sense that interpreters were forgetting, or not applying, the theoretical models that lie at the core of our training. This led to them not asking the right questions pre-assignment, which could otherwise help to address any issues around recording prior to the assignment.

Kay and Shipman (2014) define confidence as *'hard to define but easy to recognise. With it, you can take on the world; without it, you live stuck at the starting block of your potential'*. I believe that each interpreter has the capacity to develop the appropriate skillset to enable them to agree confidently and clearly to being recorded. However, we need to first understand their initial hesitation.

There is little research on confidence within the profession; it is difficult to measure and is subjectively based on an individual's lived experience, personality and overall understanding of a situation. Christina Woods, a postgraduate interpreting student from Wisconsin, brought to light Patricia Benner's (1982) nursing theory, discussing the development of expertise (Woods, 2019) and applying it to confidence in new interpreters. It was noted that Benner's work revealed that, 'as nurses advance in experience and education, they become more proficient and competent in clinical situations, passing through five levels of nursing proficiency: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and

expert' (Messmer, Jones, and Taylor, cited in Woods, 2019). Woods also highlights that 'skill and understanding build from a strong educational foundation and continue to grow with experience.'

## Even experienced interpreters can lack confidence

There is no correlation between experience and being confident with recorded assignments (Thind, 2021). In fact, participants who were qualified for a longer period felt *'pressure to have the answers to issues surrounding recorded work'*.

We need to step away from a narrative that equates interpreter experience with the number of years qualified and instead move towards an understanding of experience founded on continued learning, upskilling and application. One workshop participant stated that *'working online and being recorded is a domain in itself'*. Interpreters move between different environments, clients (deaf, hearing etc) and language audiences daily. This results in them having different levels of exposure and confidence in these different environments.

Benner's theory of expertise can be adapted and applied to most domains interpreters encounter and it can also be used as a 'confidence barometer' for decision-making, underpinned by other models we should already be using to help prepare for recorded assignments. This multi-theory approach thereby creates a 'system of layering'. The goal is to have each interpreter at the expert level, with the ability to confidently consent to recorded assignments, if they wish to do so. If they choose not to, they can then provide alternatives and troubleshoot when something is not suitable for recording. Alongside this, the competence to take other participants on a journey to fully explain what is expected from a recorded assignment should be developed.

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**'The overarching theme of confidence was relevant to many people's perceptions of recorded work'**

## Recorded assignments and the four Ps

My research has made me intrigued as to how we as interpreters approach our work – our client base, workload and process of accepting assignments. Working from a sociolinguistic model of interpreting, Napier et al (2006) explains that ‘we are now looking at having the capacity to incorporate ourselves as participants into the interpretation process. We have an influence on any interaction that takes place’. In an online environment, where things are vastly different to face-to-face settings, we have no choice but to see ourselves as active participants.

Working online requires interpreters to ask more questions about the assignments they accept, but the research findings suggest that this is not happening. One participant wanted ‘to gain some nuanced thinking and clarity’; however, clarity can only come from understanding all the details of an assignment, irrespective of it being recorded. So, recording our interpretation is not the real issue – everything up until that point is.

This is where the four Ps (Eighinger and Karlin, 2003, cited in Napier et al, 2006) come into effect – Place, Participants, Purpose, Point. These could be considered the foundation of understanding any assignment.

**PARTICIPANTS: Who** is the target audience? Do the participants in this assignment have the same/different objectives?

**PLACE: Where** is this assignment happening in real time? Will there be a present/future audience? Outputs? (This is where interpreters raise the question of recording.)

**PURPOSE: Why** is this assignment taking place? Is it to inform people or make profit from the information being interpreted? Is this an isolated event/one of many? (This is where you can raise and consider quoted fees, if necessary.)

**POINT: What** does the assignment need to achieve? (This enables the interpreter to gauge

whether they can actively participate to achieve the goal of this assignment.)

Once an assignment’s four Ps are established, the SLI is more informed about whether they would like to accept or decline the booking. They are also able to determine at which point in the decision-making process (ie, at which ‘P’) they changed their mind.

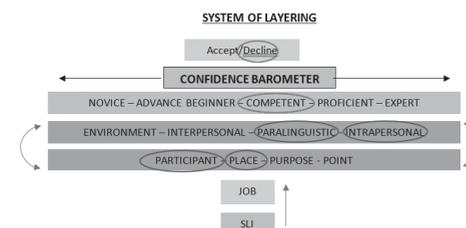
The following example further exemplifies how this process works in the context of recorded assignments: *An interpreter has been working with the same client for five years and is asked on one occasion to interpret a workshop for the client that will later be viewed over the next month by four other deaf colleagues who work for the same organisation. The interpreter realises the four Ps are now starting to look quite different to how they normally appear with this client, and the interpreter is no longer comfortable with their interpretation being viewed later by different audiences. The interpreter declines the assignment.*

## Theoretical layering

Here, the Purpose and Point have not changed; only the Participants and Place have. The interpreter has declined on the basis of possible or perceived judgement by a future target audience (intrapersonal demands) and language used during their interpretation (paralinguistic demand) (Dean and Pollard, 2007, cited in Napier, 2006). The process of theoretical layering is demonstrated by Dean and Pollard’s Demand-Control Schema (2013), through the application

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**‘Clarity can only come from understanding all the details of an assignment, irrespective of it being recorded’**

of the EIPI taxonomy (see figure below). At this point we can also better identify where an individual’s confidence begins to shift, based on experience and the possible demands faced by the interpreter. This interpreter on any other day may have permissioned themselves, on Benner’s scale of expertise, as either proficient or expert. However, when asked to be recorded, allowing their work to be accessed by a wider future audience, there is hesitancy. As a result, we are left questioning what fundamental skill or piece of knowledge is missing which ultimately influences the interpreter’s decision to refuse the recorded assignment?



The four Ps and the elements that make up EIPI need to function together as the main core of any assignment in order for the sign language interpreter to feel confident, especially when being recorded. When any part of this core that highlights their experience level is missing, it reveals their level of confidence.

Continuing with the example above, firstly, the sign language interpreter identified that their output would need to cater to a wider audience. This means they would have to consider appropriate use of language and standardisation of some BSL vocabulary, which they may not be used to. An example would be if for the past five years the above interpreter has been using the sign for ‘TRIGGER’ (strong emotional reaction set off by a set of words or image that reminds a person of a traumatic event) as the sign for ‘GUN’. That sign may be contextually appropriate

## ‘A disclaimer, attached to a recorded assignment, is sometimes necessary to safeguard an interpretation’

for use between the interpreter and their regular client, but otherwise inappropriate, or inaccurately perceived during a recorded assignment for a wider audience.

Secondly, to better understand their fear of judgement from others, the interpreter could engage in supervision. Interpreters can use the model above for professional development, before and during recorded assignments, to better understand themselves, as well as navigating what they need and communicating what those needs are. Interpreters should use the consideration of recorded work as an opportunity to monitor and regulate their output, develop their knowledge and progress their career. In support of this, 76% of my respondents acknowledge the benefits of having their work recorded for professional development purposes (Thind, 2021).

This model of layering is still a work in progress and will be further shaped by ongoing dialogue and workshops. One workshop participant wanted to understand the issues surrounding recorded work as ‘this topic wasn’t covered much in interpreting training’, something that I agree with. However, we were trained to understand each part of our assignment. I have never felt more strongly that interpreters need to be proactive in ascertaining the four Ps before accepting the booking.

## Disclaimers

It is important to state that some participants are happy to be recorded and already seem to be navigating this changing landscape. Still, a disclaimer, attached to a recorded assignment,

is sometimes necessary to safeguard their interpretation. The popular 'one liners' are the hardest to create, as our interpreting journeys are subjective, but creating the disclaimer for people to take away and adapt according to their own narrative reassured some workshop participants. A speech to text reporter helped in this. Variations of the following could be used: *'The interpretation of this content was recorded live and may contain errors due to the live nature of the content, speakers and prep materials provided. Please keep this in mind when watching.'*

SLIs need to think about the conversations they have with those booking them and start pre-empting problems by asking at the outset whether it will be recorded. An unprecedented recording request may occur even in a regular assignment which has never previously been recorded. Initiating the conversation about recording allows the interpreter to clarify what the four Ps may look like and as a result they can choose whether to proceed with the assignment or not.

Working remotely has been beneficial for individuals to gain access to information after real-time events. We should create shadowing opportunities to start building confidence in this

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## 'The systems that enable us to work remotely need to be navigated with confidence, as do our conversations around being recorded'

area. If we want to be seen as professional, active participants, we need to start behaving like it.

Our professional landscape has changed dramatically in such a short period of time, but to grow as a profession we must adapt to a new way of working. The systems that enable us to work remotely need to be navigated with confidence, as do the conversations around our work being recorded. This article is an introduction to my research at its most formative stage, but there is much room for further discussion and exploration around the increasing prevalence of recorded assignments and on issues of confidence.

Through the application of theory and a process of layering, I hope we can learn to accommodate these demands through appropriate self-reflection and self-actualisation. 



## 'Five minutes into the workshop I felt relieved. It wasn't just me'

**Debbie Watkins** reports from Sharan Thind's workshop on the 'hot potato' of recorded assignments

Even before the pandemic sent everyone to the comfort of their own pets, I was already aware of how easy it was for participants to record my work. With the 2020 lockdown, we were all suddenly remote. I often wondered if people were secretly taking recordings of me happily engrossed in my interpreting work. I found myself thinking more about this – why it would happen. Was it curiosity from hearing participants? Was it the deaf person double-checking the accuracy of my BSL-ENG interpretation? Would they quality-check the level of interpretation with a hearing counterpart, after the event?

My already complex job had become more intricate. While I was trying to navigate all these changes, I was asked if it would be OK if an upcoming remote assignment could be recorded. Honestly, it felt as if someone had fired at me, at close range, with a slingshot. My stomach churned and I had horrible feelings of unease. I declined and the hearing client agreed and that was the end of the conversation. To my relief, the client never asked me why I had refused, as I honestly do not know what I would have said.

The topic of being recorded soon became a hot potato, as people batted the idea around.

## 'Was it just the recording element that had jolted us into this heightened state of fear?'

Having these conversations felt like doing cartwheels in treacle. I just could not get my head around what to say and why I was uneasy.

I had heard that Sharan was looking into this monster that needed addressing – online work and the recording of interpreters – and attended her workshop on 19 May.

### Who are we anyway?

Sharan, an expert host, asked us to really consider what sort of person we each were and how our personality and frame of reference made us choose the types of jobs we accept. Are we hot-seat multi-domain creatures, diving from job to job with volcanic interpreting demands in a variety of settings? Or are we more 'Steady Eddie' with familiar clients and regular safe-space domains? We were asked whether we liked being recorded and the consensus was a big fat no. Five minutes into the workshop I felt relieved. It wasn't just me.

We were expertly taken on a journey by Sharan, exploring more deeply the reasons we felt confident or otherwise at work. What made us avoid certain bookings and drew us to others? Was it just the recording element that had jolted us into this heightened state of fear? Sharan gently suggested it was a good time for us, as SLIs, to start looking both more inwardly and outwardly when we think about our work.

We were introduced to Patricia Benner's model, 'From Novice to Expert', and were asked to picture ourselves in a job setting where we felt

we were up in the 'expert' end of the scale. We had to picture a job that we had completed many times before, over many years, and then imagine that we were asked to be recorded for that very same job. Sharan asked us to consider why we were so reluctant to say yes to the recording.

Why was our gut reaction to say no, or to 'whack a £100 on top'?

Was it:

- ▲ fear of scrutiny?
- ▲ loss of control?
- ▲ fear of criticism?
- ▲ not being paid enough to be filmed?
- ▲ not having any rights?
- ▲ the worry that it would go viral?
- ▲ the fact we don't know the deaf person and/or SLIs who would be viewing the interpretation at a later date?
- ▲ anxiety around the target language/unknown regional variations?
- ▲ anxiety about errors occurring due to a lack of prep?

These are the reasons factored into why we decline to be recorded. So how would we reduce or eliminate these? Our resounding answer was a toolkit. We wanted language we could use in these conversations and confidence in knowing what to ask for before saying yes, but the answers had to come from us, as we are all different interpreters. For some reason, we had all forgotten that we can clearly state our needs. We can be concise and friendly and all those nice things we often are. We were shown how we could ensure we had all of our four Ps in place (who, what, where, why) and understand the different aims of all of the participants involved.

We were asked to go one step further to look at another concept, which would help us unpack all these feelings and was referred to by Sharan as a 'system of layering.' Having the four Ps, alongside a grasp of the Demand/Control EIPI (environment, interpersonal, paralinguistic,

## 'Sharan asked us to consider why we were so reluctant to say yes to the recording'

intrapersonal) would surely make us feel happier to do the job.

Finally, we looked at disclaimers. Sharan shared some excellent examples of phrases and paragraphs we could tweak for future use. Either way, we all seemed happy with our newfound confidence.

The very next day, I was offered a job to interpret for some upcoming interviews for a research company. These would be on Zoom and would be recorded. I can't tell you how confident I felt setting out my questions and the reasons why I needed to know this information. I was able to initiate a useful conversation around the style of the interviews and the required length, format and tone. The individual conducting the interviews and I both gained an insight into each other's work that we may not have otherwise had. I sent over my disclaimer paragraph and had an email straight back with full agreement that it would be added to each recording.

Below is the disclaimer I used. Please feel free to adapt: *'The interpretation of these conversations was recorded during a live interaction and may contain errors due to the nature of the content and/or speakers being unknown to participants. The intention is always to provide a true and accurate interpretation and is tailored purely to the needs of the people present. Please bear this in mind when watching the videos.'*

Sharan asked us if we felt we had been through a bit of self-discovery and I can honestly say that I truly feel like I hit the reset button and it worked.

