

Institution: Heriot Watt University
Unit of Assessment: 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics
Title of case study: Ensuring Greater Equality for Sign Language Users
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Our research has provided an evidence base for sign language policy changes in Scotland and the UK, leading to structures and practices that reduce exclusion, and giving British Sign Language (BSL) enhanced recognition and Deaf people increased equality. Deaf people experience widespread, chronic social disadvantage, with Westminster only acknowledging BSL as an independent language in 2003. The British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill, lodged with the Scottish Parliament in June 2013, is undergirded by our research. Globally, progressive sign language interpreting – facilitating the advancement, well-being and full citizenship of Deaf people – observes service models and professional principles propelled by Heriot-Watt research.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Research by a group of collaborators, led by Turner (with other Heriot-Watt contributors as named below) generated the following key insights:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New evidence of the nature of BSL and the signing community, with a particular emphasis on setting out the case for protection of BSL, and key vectors for promotion of the language in heritage forms (with appropriate awareness of sociolinguistic variation). 2. Remodeling interactional behaviour among sign language interpreters, challenging assumptions about 'role performance' and articulating a radically collaborative approach with a view to advancing Deaf people's access to the social world through communication partnership. 3. Proposals for structural development of the sign language interpreting and translation (SLTI) profession itself, contributing to adoption of a framework recognising the breadth both of professional contexts and modes of practice, and of the diversity in practitioners. We thereby promoted enhanced professional standing and expansion to include Deaf professionals. <p>These insights arise from:</p> <p>BSL Corpus (Grant i, Section 3). This project created a digital corpus of BSL material permitting investigations of vocabulary, grammar and sociolinguistics. Data were collected UK-wide and innovatively prepared for public searchability (http://www.bslcorpusproject.org/data/). New challenges were addressed in the translation of BSL into machine-interrogable English. The corpus captures regional variation and therefore required the development of original collaborative data-handling practices by a team of translator-researchers. The research thus generated methodological innovation; demonstrated patterns of variation in BSL; defined effective, context-specific BSL-English translation practice; and gave rise to analytical appraisal and practical development in relation to language planning, providing evidence of the current status of BSL to facilitate national programming of training.</p> <p>Building Bridges (Grant ii, Section 3). This project examined SLTI from existing sources in a range of settings to determine how participants construe the interpreter's task and how this influences interactional dynamics. The professional contexts in which these interpreters operate were profiled to acknowledge a range from community to conference environments; practices were reviewed, challenging the translation/interpretation dichotomy and contributing to development of the discipline; discourse norms within communities of practice were established; and the requisite composition of the workforce appraised, including recognition of the emerging significance of Deaf people as interpreters. The findings provoke policy conclusions around professional structures and norm-definitions, whilst redefining best practice by demonstrating interpreters' impact on interactional participation, highlighting how appropriate discourse management influences mutual comprehension. Outcomes are optimized when interpreters and their clients align expectations, working together to co-produce bilingual, bimodal interaction.</p> <p>Deaf beliefs and attitudes towards genetics and genetic counselling (Grant iii, Section 3). Examining Deaf perceptions of genetic counselling, we uncovered clear preferences in health communication. This enhances appreciation of what Deaf people want from community services, facilitating appropriate structural design of interpreting provision, institutional policy on mediated access, and norm-specifications for relevant professions. The findings reinforce that the</p>

'reasonable adjustments' legally required to ensure non-discriminatory practice must, in respect of linguistic access, extend beyond adapting majority-language communication and encompass appropriate sign language provision.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Turner, G. H. (2007) 'Exploring interdisciplinary alignment in interpreting studies: Sign language interpreting at conferences'. Copenhagen Studies in Language 35: Interpreting Studies and Beyond. 191-216. ISBN 978-87-593-1349-7. (*Invited contribution to international festschrift for Miriam Shlesinger.*)
2. Turner, G. H. (2008) 'Re-thinking the sociology of sign language interpreting and translation: Some challenges posed by Deaf practitioners'. In Wolff, M. (ed.) Übersetzen - Translating – Traduire: Towards a "Social Turn"? LIT Publishers, Münster. 284-293. ISBN 3-8258-9552-1. (*Chapter in a refereed book series, derived from peer-selected paper given at the international conference on 'Translating & Interpreting as a Social Practice', Graz, Austria, 2005.*)
3. Dickinson, J. & Turner, G. H. (2008) 'Sign Language Interpreters and Role Conflict in the Workplace'. In Valero-Garcés, C. & Martin, A. (eds.) Crossing Borders in Community Interpreting: Definitions and dilemmas. John Benjamins: Amsterdam. 231–244. ISBN 978-90-272-1685-4. (*Internationally-cited invited contribution alongside other global leaders to a volume in a refereed book series published in Amsterdam and Philadelphia with an international editorial board.*)
4. Middleton, A., Turner, G. H., Bitner-Glindzicz, M., Lewis, P., Richards, M., Clarke, A. & Stephens, D. (2010) 'Preferences for Communication in Clinic from Deaf People: a Cross-Sectional Study'. Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice. 811-817. DOI: 10.1111/j.1365-2753.2009.01207.x .
5. Turner, G. H. (2009) 'Sign language planning: pragmatism, pessimism and principles'. Current Issues in Language Planning 10:3. 243–254. DOI:10.1080/14664200903162505 (*Refereed journal with global editorial board.*)
6. Pollitt, K., Beck, J., Dunipace, H., Lee, S., McShane, C., Roberts, E., Rowan, S., Skinner, R., Schembri, A., & Turner, G. H. (2012) '"Well, it's green here, but I've seen green and green, and my mother's was always green": Initial issues and insights from translating the BSL Corpus'. In Dickinson, J. & Stone, C. (eds.) *Developing the interpreter, developing the profession: Proceedings of the ASLI Conference 2010*. Douglas McLean: Coleford. 80-94. ISBN 978-0-946252-79-4. (*Paper describing globally innovative methods and theoretical implications, developed from plenary presentation within established conference series.*)

Grants:

- i. ESRC (RES-062-23-0825) £100,221: October 2007/September 2010: Gary Quinn, Graham Turner
- ii. Scottish Government Equality Unit/Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters £372,445: October 2008/September 2011: Jules Dickinson, Tessa Padden, Gary Quinn, Graham Turner, Svenja Wurm.
- iii. NIHR Health Services Research (RCUF070) £24,000: October 2006/September 2009: Steven Emery, Graham Turner.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Heriot-Watt's output propels the access agenda for Deaf people in Scotland and beyond. As the Scottish engine-room of BSL research and knowledge exchange, we inform dialogue across the public sector. Beneficiaries include Deaf people, individual members of signing professions and professional bodies at Scottish, UK, European and global levels. We inform commercial practice in the private sector, third sector developments and public policy advances. Source 1 (section 5) notes that Heriot-Watt "*has enhanced public understanding and improved the quality of public discussion on the major issues for Deaf people in society*", while Source 6 states that Heriot-Watt University's input "*has certainly framed public debate on BSL in numerous respects and used research to challenge social assumptions about deafness and sign language.*" Key impacts are:

We were instrumental in preparing for Scotland's BSL Bill by leading an event (November 2010) http://scotlandfutureforum.org/assets/library/files/application/BSL_Report.pdf defining BSL's future in 'an inclusive Scotland'. "*Heriot-Watt research drawn from the University's analytical output fronted this Forum, while the follow-up briefing for MSPs, researchers, Scottish Parliament*

corporate staff and Deaf community representatives helped define the direction of the subsequent Bill" (Source 2). The impact of increased awareness became evident (October 2012) following the largest public consultation response to a proposed Member's Bill in Scottish history. Mark Griffin MSP lodged a final Bill proposal to Parliament (June 2013) and intends to see it enacted by winter 2014-15 <http://www.markgriffinmsp.org.uk/>. Research from Heriot-Watt "has been particularly critical in providing fundamental underpinning analyses which framed the consultation process leading towards this Bill" (Source 2) and is recognised as contributing significantly to addressing a gap (acknowledged in the Scottish Government [SG] Equality Evidence Strategy 2013) in evidence on disability issues. A successful Bill will transform the lives of all Scottish signers by securing access to BSL across all sectors and institutions.

Since 2000, the BSL and Linguistic Access Working Group (BSLLAWG <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/remit/Access-Working-Group>), convened and chaired 2000-2011 by SG Equality Unit, 2011-13 by the Scottish Council on Deafness (SCoD), has developed Government strategy on BSL in Scotland. Heriot-Watt has been the only university represented on BSLLAWG throughout this period, and has "brought new information to the table and applied research findings informatively to topics across the policy spectrum" (Source 1). BSLLAWG channels priorities to Government and acts as the policy 'think-tank' for improving linguistic access nationally. In August 2009, leveraging contributions from Heriot-Watt research, the Working Group published a BSL 'roadmap', setting out the knowledge SG, Local Authorities and public bodies require when setting and implementing policy: "Insights from Heriot-Watt research influenced the recommendations of the report in all areas of BSL" (Source 1). In this context, our research has penetrated the work of institutions such as the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service-led 'Working Group on Interpreting & Translation', Scottish Police Services Authority, Law Society Scotland, NHS Health Scotland and NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde (leading to keynote invitations <http://www.elitelinguists.co.uk/pdfs/Programme.pdf>, consultancy and public awareness-raising <http://www.scotsman.com/news/graham-turner-language-must-not-be-a-barrier-to-care-1-827104>).

The 'Building Bridges' project (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/remit/projects>) enabled our work to prompt a new SG policy to secure a sufficient, sustainable population of BSL interpreters: the UK skills-promoting body, Signature, affirm that they "have introduced new qualifications, such as those in BSL/English translation and interpreting between sign languages as a result of your research" (Source 5). We rolled project lessons out via continuing professional development for interpreters and Deaf professionals (e.g. via an innovative 'Deaf Managers' seminar, promoted by bodies such as the British Society for Mental Health & Deafness <http://www.bsmhd.org.uk/news0411.htm>). "Your work has changed the way interpreters operate in Scotland, and this affects every interaction between a deaf and a hearing person," states Source 6.

We contribute significantly to high-impact BSL skills development. From 2005 and 2008 (under Building Bridges), Equality Unit sponsorship enabled us to educate research-informed teacher-trainers. (This had been recognised as critical since 2002, when BSLLAWG produced a blueprint for BSL <http://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/resources/deaf/sasli/intro.html>, underlining that vital expansion of skills was impossible without more BSL teachers and thus teacher-training.) These advanced practitioners subsequently designed sector-leading programmes (e.g. [http://www.bda.org.uk/British_Sign_Language_\(BSL\)/BSL_Academy](http://www.bda.org.uk/British_Sign_Language_(BSL)/BSL_Academy)) and catalysed greater professionalisation of BSL teaching. UK-wide, key institutions have exploited our research similarly: the British Deaf Association notes that our work enables them "to undergird our campaigning with a strong, evidence-based account of 'heritage BSL'. Our campaigns are, above all, designed to carry forward language planning strategies that are significantly informed by Heriot-Watt University's research and policy analysis. We have been assisted in drafting consultation responses and position statements with reference to your work and it is clear that your engagement has advanced public awareness and debate on BSL" (Source 7). Our work has "given us... the evidence we need to develop a GCSE in BSL" (Source 5), prefiguring massively improved national signing skills.

We have been instrumental in driving forward regulation, establishing good practice, and standard-

setting in the SLTI profession: for example, Heriot-Watt's research "*to identify effective practices in the work of sign language interpreters has guided the field in the provision of services in the workplace for Deaf employees, [...] has established Deaf people's preferences for communication in health consultations, and has played a leading part in articulating and making the case for progressive, collaborative models of interpreting performance*" (Source 8). Informing a 2013 Liberal Democrat conference vote for enhanced BSL recognition, we briefed Westminster MPs on BSL policy challenges (Stephen Lloyd, Mike Crockart <http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2010-12/2549>). This included digital, remote interpreting services, a commercial field transforming SLTI services (worth a proportionate share of \$33 billion globally – Common Sense Advisory 2012). Market leader SignVideo <http://www.signvideo.co.uk/> consulted us on service delivery. Citing our BSL corpus study (grant i, section 3), they note that this research "*legitimises the status of BSL and by establishing this gives weight to the daily communication barriers faced by deaf BSL users which proves the business case for an instant-access communication solution such as SignVideo. We have used this in our sales and marketing collateral to ensure that public and commercial service providers are made aware of the potential customer market*" (Source 9). SignVideo now offer remote SLTI services to customers "*such as Accident and Emergency wards in hospitals, and in doing so we have reduced the waiting times from weeks (RNID 2006) down to mere seconds*" (Source 9).

Our research advances global practice as we advise the World Federation of the Deaf's own experts: "*Heriot-Watt's research on sign language studies and sign language interpreting has informed the work of the relevant WFD expert groups, so that they have a global picture of the lives of deaf sign language users*" (Source 3). As noted by the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (Source 4): "*Each time WASLI seeks an evidence-based study to share with a member making an inquiry, we know we can reliably refer people to the work completed by Heriot-Watt.*" We coordinate an advanced professional programme www.eumasli.eu, injecting research that defines SLTI practices, critical to Deaf participation (e.g. in the United Nations). Graduates take research-informed practices forward as Presidents of national (Anja Hemmel, German Sign Language Interpreters' Association <http://bgsd.de/>) and European (Maya De Wit, European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters <http://efsli.org/>) organisations. Exploiting our research (source 10), the leading International Sign interpreting provider, Overseas Interpreting Co, delivers professional training from Iceland to Singapore. The company "*has expanded our presence with offices in both London and Paris. Our turnover has increased 34% over the past two years... With Heriot-Watt research profoundly informing our service design, this year will see us doubling staff numbers as well as expanding our global reach to provide services in at least 15 countries across three continents*".

At Scottish, UK, European and global levels, therefore, key institutions representing Deaf people (from the Scottish Council on Deafness to the World Federation of the Deaf), and parallel bodies charged with advancing sign languages and SLTI professions, exploit Heriot-Watt research to change policies and practices and improve life-chances. Through robust partnerships, initiatives arising from our research improve the lives of thousands of Deaf citizens every day, delivering services that remove barriers to participation.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Senior representative of Scottish Government Equality Unit
2. Member of the Scottish Parliament, leading development of BSL legislation
3. President of World Federation of the Deaf
4. President of World Association of Sign Language Interpreters
5. Chief Executive of Signature (UK body leading advancement of standards of communication with Deaf and Deafblind people) & Chair of UK Council on Deafness
6. Factual statement, Director of Scottish Council on Deafness
7. Factual statement, Chief Executive of British Deaf Association
8. Factual statement, Director of Association of Sign Language Interpreters
9. Factual statement, Managing Director of SignVideo/Significant [UK] Limited
10. Factual statement, Director of Overseas Interpreting Co.