It's Not Just for Jews Anymore: A Guide to Interpreting in the Jewish Setting

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It’s Not Just for Jews Anymore: A Guide to Interpreting in the Jewish Setting

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Action Research

Western Oregon University

Winter 2019
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Candidate for the degree of: Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment of the requirements of this master's degree.

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It’s not Just for Jews Anymore: A Guide to Interpreting in the Jewish Setting

Jaclyn Korfin

ABSTRACT

Many interpreters are bilingual and can be multilingual in a variety of spoken and signed languages. The typical reason for interpreters being multilingual is for communication when more than two languages are used, for example at borders of countries, or in courts when multiple language must be used to ensure that all parties involved have a solid understanding of the materials. In order to better understand interpreting in the Jewish setting it is important to look at tri/multilingual interpreters in religious settings at events such as a Bris, Bat/Bar Mitzvah, weddings, and funerals. Religious communities each have special traditions and practices specific to the groups involved. Some of these practices are held in other languages or are ancient rituals and prayers that have been used for many centuries. There are a multitude of religions in the world, and Deaf people are involved with every type of religion from Atheism to Zionism.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Two non-Jewish interpreters are contracted for a job at a Jewish temple. The agency called through their entire list of Jewish interpreters, but no one was willing/could pick up the assignment. Eventually the agency found two interpreters who were willing to pick up the assignment but have no knowledge of the Jewish religion. The interpreters arrive, and realize they are unprepared for the events about to occur. They begin to look up information on their phones for what to expect during the Saturday morning service, but someone comes over to inform them that it is Shabbat and they can’t use their phones in the temple, as we do not use electronics from Friday night to Saturday night. They are handed a siddur (prayer book) and shown to the bimah (stage at the front of the temple). They are then left to thumb through a book written in Hebrew and English. The Rabbi begins the service in English with a quick welcome and transitions into Hebrew prayers leaving the interpreters confused. They try their best, but still struggle to interpret the Hebrew portions of the service. After the service is over, the interpreters leave feeling like their work was not up to par with expectations. They might leave and do research to be better prepared for next time or may refrain from picking up another Jewish event. For those who begin to do research they will find a few great sources, but the available research is limited or outdated.

After a quick Google search, you will find a few websites with information and a few books that are outdated, but ultimately are still struggling to put American Sign Language to the Hebrew prayers. Many books are written as a basic introduction to signing prayers for families that have Deaf children. They show prayers with the Hebrew, English translation,
English transliteration, and Signed Exact English translations. This service may also have frightened the interpreters to never pick up another Jewish setting assignment resulting in fewer interpreters to work in the setting. There is often a lack of Jewish interpreters, and a lack of interpreters willing to work in the Jewish setting leaving Deaf Jewish consumers without interpreters, or with one interpreter trying to do everything themselves to give equal access for the Deaf consumers. Each religion has a variety of traditions they follow, and it can be difficult for interpreters who are unfamiliar with those traditions to work within the religious settings.

Background

This research originated from my experience in both the Jewish and Deaf communities. I had the opportunity growing up to observe a few interpreters in the temple setting and noticed they would sign SPEAK HEBREW when the Rabbi would sing the prayers. That resonated with me due to my own experiences with religious settings, and my lack of understanding of Hebrew. Growing up I celebrated every holiday at the temple and celebrated my Bat Mitzvah at a temple. A Bat/Bar Mitzvah is an important event in a Jewish child’s life, and they would want their Deaf friends to share the experience with them. This can also be applied to weddings, or other ceremonies in our lives. With my limited experience in the interpreting community I have noticed a few challenges in finding interpreters for a religious setting. The first Jewish interpreting assignment I did was a challenge even though I was raised in a Jewish family, with the culture. The struggle of not knowing the language and interpreting is a challenge, but there are a few ways to improve my understanding, and ultimately interpret without being fluent in the Hebrew language. It is important to understand that the Jewish community is small and spread around the world. The Deaf Jewish community is even
smaller and can be spread far and few between leaving the Deaf Jewish people in states that have no Jewish interpreters.

**Figure 1: World Religion Percentages**

As seen in Figure 1: World Religions, there is a small percentage of Jewish people. This graph was created from the data on https://www.age-of-the-sage.org, and used to show the percentages of the Jewish population and other religious populations around the world. Due to the small percentage of Jews that worked at the same interpreting agency I did, they called an entire list of Jewish interpreters before reaching out to me due to my new hire status in the agency. I accepted the assignment and was provided a Catholic teamer to work with in an Orthodox temple (Chabad). I was the last Jewish interpreter they had on the list, and I had a strong interest in working in the Jewish setting. I was raised in a Conservative Jewish family and can recite the prayers from memory, read Hebrew words, but have no knowledge of the language or meaning otherwise. Since I was young, I attended a Jewish pre-school, Hebrew (religious) school and a temple, but never really learned to speak or understand the language.
I would casually just memorize the prayers, and tunes, while sitting in services. Not only do many Jewish children and adults only learn to memorize prayers, but there is also a limited number of interpreters who are Jewish and/or know the languages spoken. Religious situations that use an unfamiliar/unknown third language can be a struggle for interpreters due to the variety of tunes, prayer books, and different branches of the religion. One challenge is the meaning of the text and how to interpret frozen text without putting your own opinions and meaning.

Another reason I began looking at interpreting in the Jewish/religious setting is because I had intellectual conversations with some Deaf friends who told me their families were religious, but they never had an interpreter to understand the service. The service leader would print out the sermon for them to read, but they were not involved otherwise. They would attend Sunday school, but were young and never fought for an interpreter in the church because they did not know they had the right to an interpreter. I feel that if someone wants to make a religious connection, they should have every opportunity, and resource, available to make the connection. Over the last few years I have seen a variety of interpreters, both Jewish and non-Jewish, in the Jewish setting. Many times, when interpreters are requested for a Jewish event we only get one interpreter to show up or we get one Jewish interpreter, and an interpreter of another faith. I have also been in situations where interpreters have been requested but no interpreters picked up the assignment. I looked for previous research, but the knowledge about working in a temple is exceedingly limited due to the minimal number of people within the community. With the limited amount of research available, I will look at aspects of other cultures, and languages that we interpret for to create a better understanding of interpreting in
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the Jewish setting. In order to better understand the Jewish settings interpreting work, I began to look into church interpreters, trilingual interpreters, and Deaf Jewish Culture as well as the limited amount of information about interpreting in the Jewish setting that is available.

Interpreting for the Jewish setting can be a challenge due to the languages, rich culture, and history of the religion where the interpreters may not have familiarity with the culture. Due to my limited knowledge about Hebrew I wanted to learn the basic necessities to interpret accurately in a service. Is it possible to learn key words such as יְהֹוָה (Adonai), which means lord, or מלך (meleh), which means king, and provide a fluent interpretation? Once these words are known, and we can see an English translation in the prayer book, is it easier to translate the prayer from English to ASL while staying with the spoken Hebrew?

Statement of the Problem

When people attend a religious event, they expect to understand everything, or to be involved and receive a specific experience. They might be attending to experience the culture, mourn a loved one, or to celebrate a life event. These events all have different meanings to those in attendance such as if they are the parent of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah teen, or a family member to those who have died. In the situation where an American Sign Language interpreter is involved there are complications to the understanding. If the interpreter is not versed in Jewish culture or Hebrew, then the ASL user may not get the best understanding of the event. For example, a “Bar Mitzvah is the celebration of a boy’s 13th birthday according to the Jewish calendar, when he officially attains his legal and religious majority. Upon reaching this age, the boy is obliged to fulfill all the commandments and observe the religious duties incumbent on a Jew (Eisenberg, 2008, p.23).”
Schein and Waldman (1986) discuss the following:

Under Talmudic law, a deaf person who did not speak could not assume full citizenship in the Jewish community. A born-deaf male could not be counted in establishing a minyan, nor could he enter the contracts (p.1).

A minyan is a group of at least 10 Jewish people, and some prayers require that a minyan be present in order to be recited. Looking at the above quote we see that this set a concept that Deaf people cannot partake in the Jewish service, but that was a standard set two millennia ago. “The very meaning of the word deaf must be reconsidered in the light of technological progress and educational changes that greatly alter its earlier connotations” (Schein & Waldman, 1986, p.1). Since standards have changed over time for Deaf culture, and Deaf education, the need for interpreters has increased accordingly.

The Jewish population is small, and that results in a small Jewish interpreting population split among the 50 states. There are very few interpreters that are fluent in English, ASL and Hebrew leaving the Deaf Jewish population to have interpreters that are not aware of the culture, and language in the Jewish setting. In an interpreter training program, we are not taught about working in religious settings, or with third languages because many of our programs focus only on American Sign Language-English interpreting. In order to do trilingual interpreting you would need other training, and certifications.

**Purpose of the Study**

Every religion is different, and if you are unaware of their specific culture then it becomes challenging to work in the religious environment. The purpose of this study is to look into interpreting in the Jewish setting where a plethora of challenges might occur. These
challenges can include that Jewish events cannot always be planned in advance, for example Jewish funerals are supposed to take place 24 hours after death. It can be a challenge when the death is unexpected while trying to find interpreters available who are willing to work on short notice, and with a third language that is unknown. Due to short notice there is not always time to prep, and ask other interpreters for advice, or information. In addition to helping non-Jewish and Jewish interpreters work in the setting I want to better my own understanding of the Jewish setting.

My goal is to allow myself to interpret accurately and completely for settings that may be more sensitive than others, where the prayers and understanding have more significance such as funerals, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs and weddings. I plan to learn the important parts of interpreting Jewish events and share the necessities to allow for everyone to interpret in Jewish settings due to the lack of interpreters. During this study I will be following my own ethnographic experience to learn how I interpret, and how to better fit the needs of Deaf Jewish consumers.

Theoretical Framework

The framework that I have chosen to shape this paper is sense of community theory (Grant & Osanloo, 2014) to help focus on the Jewish and Deaf communities. In order to look at the communities, it is important to look at them as separate communities and together as the Deaf Jewish community. Many communities are often connected by their language and culture, but when communities overlap it becomes a challenge to bridge them if the main languages are different. Sense of community is important for the Deaf Jewish community, and the best way to support that sense is by providing interpreters that will allow the Deaf
Jewish people to join the larger Jewish community. Rabbi Yehoshua Soudakoff said it best, the “Deaf community has been left out of the Jewish world for far too long” (Goodman, 2014).

**Gap in The Research**

There is a large gap in the research due to a lack of knowledge about the topic, and the number of interpreters who volunteer in religious settings without having the proper interpreting education. With many volunteers working in the churches there is little room for skilled and educated interpreters to do research and learn about the requirements. Many churches have interpreters (hired or volunteer), but in my personal experience I have realized temples struggle to find an interpreter (hired or volunteer). “Religious interpreting occurs in settings which are spiritual in nature. These settings can include worship services, religious education, workshops, conferences, retreats, confession, scripture study, youth activities, counseling, tours and pilgrimages, weddings, funerals and other special ceremonies” (RID, 2007). Within different religions these ideas, and processes vary challenging interpreters to know the specifics for that event. For example, in a Jewish funeral we will never say “R.I.P” or “rest in peace.” The phrase used is זיכרון לברכה (zikhrono livrakha) or you will see it shortened as ל״ז (Z”L), which translates to “may his memory be a blessing.” Other traditions that can be important to know are how Jewish people are buried. “Those gathered then help fill the grave with dirt so that they can physically take part in the mitzvah of burying the dead” (Eisenberg, 2008, p.86).

Due to the large gap in the research this will be one of the first papers of its kind to address interpreting in the Jewish setting. I will use a variety of resources that are related to Jewish
traditions, church interpreting, frozen text interpreting, and trilingual interpreting to support my research. The existing research about the Jewish Deaf community is limited to dictionaries of signs, and other books written in the 1980’s-early 2000’s about celebrating holidays, and information about signing the Torah instead of speaking. There is research about interpreting in churches, but much of the research is about volunteers in church services, or how to interpret the prayers.

Jewish prayers compared to Catholic and Christian prayers not only have different meanings, but different signs that are related to the community. For example, words like ‘holy’ have a variety of signs in different religions. Many interpreters know the catholic sign that looks like CLEAN with the dominant hand as an H handshape, but the Jewish sign looks more like IMPORTANT signing 3 times going up as we tend to say ‘Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh.’ Kadosh is the Hebrew word for holy, and we will say it 3 times in a row. The research related to the Jewish traditions and community is large and has plenty of references about each type of service and settings where traditions are important. I think that each part plays a role in the sense of community felt by the Deaf Jewish population and can help interpreters learn what are important aspects of the community and culture to understand when going into an unfamiliar environment.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The ability of interpreters to effectively work in a religious setting is correlated with their knowledge and understanding of the desired religion. Regardless of their specific training and certifications it is important for interpreters to understand the differences between religions, and the challenges that may present themselves. In reviewing literature, I focused on a few topics to increase my knowledge in interpreting for a Jewish setting. I focused on church interpreters, Jewish traditions, the importance of culture, and trilingual interpreters. These four topics allowed me to get a better understanding of religious interpreters and multilingual interpreters, work in the community. In addition to an understanding of religious and multilingual interpreters I will get a better understanding of the Jewish religion/culture and the Deaf community involved in religious groups.

Interpreters in Religious settings/ Church Interpreters

The Jewish religion has prayers and laws that are specific to a situation. It is important for interpreters to be aware and follow these to show respect for a community. Unfortunately, “[q]ualifications are not generally established in the religious setting, although an interpreter who subscribes to the belief is usually preferred” (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007, p.342). When the qualifications are not established, we begin to see volunteer interpreters (other churchgoers), and interpreting students picking up the roles in churches. “The majority of the volunteer interpreters, who are also members of the church, have received no training in interpreting or translation, nor are they ‘ideologically neutral’ in regard to the message being interpreted – a position generally expected, rightly or wrongly, of professional interpreters (Hokkanen, 2012, p.291).” A major part of religious services is creating your own path and meanings behind the prayers. If an interpreter is not trained to keep their ideology out of the
interpretation it becomes harder for those using interpreters to create their own ideology. Religious interpreters need to place their own opinions aside and interpret the text allowing the Deaf congregants to establish their own connections to the prayers and text.

Ethics for religious interpreters are important due to the sensitivity in some settings. It is important to understand the differences between religions and allow congregants to have their own thoughts and feelings. If an interpreter works in religious settings, they need to be prepared and get the information ahead of time. It is essential that religious interpreters be prepared for the prayers, text, sermons, and songs in the event. “Religious organizations often depend on volunteers to staff activities and organizational positions. It is not surprising, then, that they also expect interpreters to volunteer their services to the church, temple, or mosque when required (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007, p.344).” It is beneficial to temples to hire interpreters with a fair wage so they can expect the best service for the Deaf congregants. This is also a challenge when the holidays are present, and they need interpreters to commit to 4-10 hours of interpreting work. It is also expected that “[p]rofessionals interpreting in a religious context should have fluency in a signed language (e.g. American Sign Language or Signed English) and a spoken language (e.g. English or Spanish). In addition, knowledge of a source language of an original text found in scripture such as Arabic, Hebrew, Latin or others would enhance the overall interpretation (RID, 2007).”

Jewish Traditions

Jewish traditions, and culture is important for interpreters to understand when working in the religious setting. If you are unfamiliar with the culture the role of interpreting can be a challenge due to the languages used, and holidays celebrated. “Expressions of American Jewish culture are quite diverse (Pianko, 2014, p.15).” We have many branches of Judaism
across the world including Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist. Each branch differs in traditions from one another allowing congregants to choose how religious they want to feel. Being born into a religious group may have more significance to some people than others. Those others may only celebrate the holidays and not follow the religion strictly.

In Jewish culture we have traditions, and significance paired with specific events. As stated in Eisenberg’s book, Jewish Traditions, some events such as the Bar/Bat Mitzvah are joyous and meant to be celebrated with friends and family as the time a Jewish boy or girl becomes recognized as an adult in Jewish culture. At the age of 13, Jewish people are expected to uphold the commandments and observe the religious duties of a Jew. Other events such as Weddings have different types of traditions, for example we stomp on the glass to symbolize the destruction of the temple, and the idea that something so beautiful can be crushed instantaneously. When it comes to death in the Jewish culture, we bury the loved ones within 24-48 hours. Before the burial there is a series of customs that must be followed over the period from the moment of death to the moment of burial.

**The Importance of Culture**

“Only with a grasp of the language can one fully appreciate the depths of the prayers; only with the knowledge of how the prayers developed and interrelate can one see the brilliance and inspiration of the sages who wrote them” (Eisenberg, 2008, p. xxi). In order for an interpreter to do their best performance interpreting it benefits them to understand the information, and language in which the prayers are being spoken. These prayers often relate to specific life events that can be once in a lifetime or weekly. The “[f]our categories of
events that occur frequently include liturgical services, funerals, weddings, and special events (baptism, bar/bat mitzvah) (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007, p.341).” These events are common and have set prayers, and information that is recited at each. Those at services have a reason to be involved, and the goal is to provide access to the event.

**Figure 2: Cultural Attributes**

As seen in Figure 2: Cultural Attributes above, culture includes many different parts. It is a variety of different aspects that people use to identify themselves and a community in which they are involved. “The holidays are one of the many times of the year that our culture and traditions emerge the strongest. Everyone in our family and circle of friends know and understand our rituals, holiday traditions, even the food we cook and consume to celebrate
the season ("Celebrating Our Culture: A New How-To-Guide", 2018).” When holidays are celebrated it is important to know the culture and traditions that are involved.

**Trilingual/Multilingual Interpreting**

Trilingual and multilingual interpreters should be conversationally fluent in a variety of languages. These interpreters work in all the same places as bilingual interpreters but must be ready to switch languages at a moment’s notice. They must be competent in the languages, backgrounds, and cultures (Annarino, Aponte-Samalot, & Quinto-Pozos, 2014). This not only applies to Spanish-ASL-English interpreters but those who work with any language including ASL and English for this research. Interpreters in temples must be aware of the third language and do their best to interpret either from the English translation in the book, or their ability to speak Hebrew and translate from the spoken Hebrew into ASL.

In *Towards Effective Practice: Interpreting in Spanish-Influenced Settings*, it is important to realize that “[t]he profession of trilingual interpretation is finally gaining public recognition as a unique subfield that requires interpreters with unique skill sets. Yet, there remains a paucity of formal trilingual education, as evidenced throughout this volume” (Annarino, Aponte-Samalot, & Quinto-Pozos, 2014, p.162). Many trilingual interpreters only get trained for bilingual interpreting and will apply their previous knowledge of a language to their training.

**Positioning the Research**

I am a newer interpreter with a little over three years of experience in the field. Many interpreters, newer or older, have asked me about my religion or specific words, and signs related to a topic they are unfamiliar with as soon as they learn that I am of the Jewish faith.
In addition, since I began working on this research, I have been approached by other interpreters I know who want more information about Jewish culture and how to provide better interpretations in the setting. This is a topic not discussed in interpreter-training programs, and thus needs to be addressed for the interpreters interested in working in the religious settings. I have avoided working in religious settings that differ from my own Jewish background due to my lack of knowledge in the other religions.

Within these three years of interpreting experience, I have worked in Orthodox temples, Chabads, Conservative temples, at college and university Hillel organizations, and other Jewish events. I am specifically asked to interpret by consumers in the Deaf community, and temples around my town who request interpreters. Many times, when a Jewish interpreting request comes to an agency, they start with the list of Jewish interpreters that they have and work their way down until one or two agree. When they get through the list, they begin looking for any interpreter who is willing to fit the demand. Many interpreters first are hesitant to accept the assignment due to a lack of knowledge, and second due to the inopportune time Jewish services are held (i.e., Friday night and Saturday morning.)

The gap in the research is difficult to fill due to the lack of knowledge. Looking at my education of interpreting I realize that I never learned about trilingual interpreting, religious interpreting, sight translations, or anything that would help me interpret in the Jewish setting. I think many interpreters feel this way when graduating from any interpreting school program. By using the research on trilingual interpreters, I can apply it to my own knowledge of studying Hebrew to eventually be a fluent trilingual interpreter. However, many
interpreters will not become fluent in a third language but can use the research to benefit when a word borrowed from another language is used in everyday conversation. This research is specifically focused on Jewish settings but can be applied to many different religions that may use an unknown third language. For example, this can be applied to many places such as Southern California where people switch between English, and Spanish. In addition, learning culture and the signs that apply to cultural differences may be important too. Having a base knowledge will allow more interpreters to feel comfortable with every setting and pick up assignments that may not have previously felt comfortable in, due to a lack of knowledge.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Autoethnography is research where the author uses self-reflection and personal experiences to present research to a wider culture, and population. Autoethnographies “are highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding” (Sparkes, 2000, p. 21). The information the author/researcher finds often can be applied to many others in similar settings. For example, the researcher is focusing on interpreting in the Jewish setting, which can be applied to other interpreters working in the same setting, or settings where there is a multitude of cultures and languages being combined.

According to Ellis and Bochner (2000) the study of autoethnography has been referred to by a variety of names:

- it seems appropriate now to include under the broad rubric of autoethnography those studies that have been referred to by other similarly situated terms, such as personal narratives . . . lived experience, critical autobiography... evocative narratives . . . reflexive ethnography . . . ethnographic autobiography . . . autobiographical ethnography, personal sociology . . . [and] autoanthropology. (pp. 739-740)

Over the year I began working in many Jewish settings to improve my skills and learn what I could do to better support my skills and develop professionally. With this interest I began researching and looking through prayer books and books about Judaism. For this study, autoethnography was the choice of methodology because it allowed me to share my experiences working in the Jewish setting. Although culturally Jewish I did not have a strong
understanding of the religion and prayers challenging my interpreting skills in a religious setting.

Participants

This research is an autoethnography, and only pertains to my personal experience while working in the Jewish interpreting setting.

Data Collection

For collecting data, I have been keeping a notebook of questions and information to apply to the research to allow for expansion on information that is relevant. These notes can be seen in Appendix A: Notes. These notes and questions include only my own thoughts and wonders, and I also keep notes of what I noticed in temple when there is no interpreter, and I am there to pray as a participant. In addition to the notebook I am also keeping a folder on my computer of references, and PDF books with relevant information to the topic.

In addition to questions and research topics I have begun studying prayers and the meanings behind the prayers. As I studied prayers, I would begin to write down the ASL, or film videos to work on the interpretations and better my own understandings of the prayers. I have all the videos in a file on my computer with a series of prayers as I work on interpretations, and meanings. I also have a prayer book of my own with notations of where temples have participants stand and sit so I am always one step ahead.

Personal Bias

When working in the Jewish setting there is information and knowledge that feels like second nature to me but may not be known to my team interpreters. I had to put myself in their shoes
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to figure out what information is important and how to best address those types of questions.
I also had to remember that my knowledge and information is primarily from one branch of Judaism (Conservative), and that there are other branches that have traditions and cultures of their own. I have a strong opinion about what participants in religious settings should experience.

I strongly feel that everyone should get an opportunity to connect and experience the service in a way that is impactful to their own lives. I know some people who never had interpreters, but were brought to church or temple, and forced to sit through a service they did not understand. While their families had understanding and a religious experience the Deaf consumer was lost in the service. They might have been given the sermon to read, but they did not get to participate in the service in a way that could be meaningful to them.

Ishikawa Fishbone Diagram

Figure 3: Ishikawa Fishbone Diagram

As seen in Figure 3: Ishikawa Fishbone Diagram is the beginning plan to collect information and data in order to help shorten the gap of knowledge about interpreting in the Jewish
setting. I began working with the little information I could find such as theinterpretersfriend.org, and other books that had a variety of information about the Deaf Jewish community.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section I will discuss the data I collected while working on my research. This data includes my reported marks of how my understanding impacted my interpretations. The discussion will also include the discussion of learning Hebrew while researching. While working in Jewish settings I began looking for patterns of questions and gaps in knowledge of my team interpreters and myself. There were a few questions that stood out and prompted my research to continue further. Main questions referenced respect in the temple, and the Deaf community. Vocabulary I recognized as repetitive is listed down below in Appendix B: Vocabulary For Jewish Settings. These questions, and vocabulary furthered my research, but the main goal was to focus on interpreting in different Jewish settings, and the information that pertains to the specific events within the community. It would allow for more interpreters to feel comfortable in a setting they may not frequently interpret due to a lack of knowledge.

Learning Hebrew

At the beginning of this research I had very little understanding of spoken Hebrew besides the basics of thank you, restroom, and water. The first experience working in a temple was difficult due to my lack of knowledge and the setting being an orthodox temple with limited Hebrew spoken. I had heard the prayers and knew the tunes but struggled to keep time with the ASL to the English translation and spoken Hebrew. I would finish the ASL translation before the spoken Hebrew was finished, and have an awkward pause, or I would struggle to interpret a prayer and end up way behind the service. This happened over the first few services, but then I started to recognize words and phrases that are used often-such as ברוך אתה (Baruch atah or blessed are you). As I began to recognize words I began
highlighting my prayer book as seen in Appendix C: Word Recognition to work on my word/meaning recognition.

Next I began to work on gloss for short prayers that are used on a daily basis. This can be seen in Appendix D: Simple Prayer Translations. Working with short prayers allows me to learn how to interpret and focus on the meaning behind the prayers. Every short prayer that I glossed, and understood, allowed me to begin focusing on the longer more intricate prayers. I am still working with sight translations, but I can keep in tune with the Hebrew because of my word recognition and understanding.

When working through my prayer books, and the typical order of the service I used different colors for each key phrase to keep my interpretation smooth and match with the spoken Hebrew. As I began to recognize words and patterns in prayers it became easier to interpret prayers and even short phrases without needing the English to support my translation. For example, in Appendix D: Simple Prayer Translations, you can see the beginning of word recognition and how I began to interpret short prayers by figuring out the meaning behind the words.

As I began learning Hebrew, I started to keep notes of my learning, and information about the language. As you can see in Appendix E: Studying Hebrew, I began with the vowels and the sounds that they produce. Next I began with simple words, and then worked my way up to more difficult words. In Hebrew, one letter can mean a whole word and add to the
meaning by simply adding the letter to the word. For example, the following word חפשת (apple) can be changed to mean the apple by adding a ה to the beginning of the word, חפשת.

Many small words, such as the, in, and my, are as simple as adding one letter to the root words in the language. The page on Appendix E: Studying Hebrew is one of the many pages I have written to produce a better understanding of my own work, and information I need to remember. It is a quick glance at the beginning of my work, and memorization skills for speaking, reading, and writing Hebrew. Remembering the simple words allows me to break down bigger words such as הביתה. Looking at this word we see the breakdown of ב (in), ה (the), and בית (house).

Data

I began collecting data outside of the Jewish events to keep track of my own understanding, and information as during Shabbat, and other Jewish holidays we are not supposed to use electricity or write. I would listen to recordings of the prayers off of YouTube, and then interpret with my prayer book open. At the beginning I would struggle due to the lack of knowledge and understanding I had of the spoken Hebrew. The first run through of any prayer looked choppy, and hard to follow as I struggled to read the English and keep in time with the Hebrew. Every run through after would improve slightly as I had better timing after learning a few simple words. I started with simple prayers such as the Shema and built up my understanding. For example, Appendix F: Data Collection contains a variety of prayers, and my collection of understanding during run throughs of practice. I began with a simple prayer that I could recite by myself and practiced my understanding. On the first run through I recognized four of six words, and then continued to improve each time I ran through the
prayer until I had a complete understanding of the basic words. This not only allowed me to focus on specific prayers, but also track my understanding of many Hebrew words. As I went through a multitude of prayers, I noticed that many words were repeated over and over making it easier to recognize throughout multiple prayers.

Results

As I began to practice interpreting the prayers, I noticed not only that it became easier as I would learn new words, but my ability to have lag time would increase. I began recognizing words and could apply them to the next prayers that I started as many words are constantly repeated throughout the service. The shorter prayers were easier to run through and remember long term, but each run through of short prayers prepared me for longer prayers that I use the book to support my interpretation.
Replication

Due to the nature of this research it cannot be replicated, but more research can be done and added to the results. Every consumer is different, and every interpreter is different making the nature of this study specific to the interpreters involved. If others wanted to replicate this study the results would be different based on location, interpreters, and Deaf consumers involved in the event. Although it cannot be perfectly replicated, I would expect to see strong connections between the original study and the replicated study. Connections I would expect to see include important words, written gloss, and recognition of Hebrew words.

Contributions to the Discipline

Going through an IEP we rarely talked about working in religious settings due to the variety in settings and cultures. I feel that it is an important topic, and interpreters should be prepared to work in any setting or situation. We have a nature as a group to want to perform to the best of our abilities and knowing how to work in religious settings is a big part of life. With the limited research on interpreting in religious settings I believe that my research will add resources for interpreters working within specific religions. This will allow more interpreters to be prepared to work with Jewish culture in any situation. It is important as Jewish funerals are planned 24-48 hours after death and can be seen as a last-minute assignment with no time to prepare.

If the interpreters are ready in advance then it becomes easier to pick up funerals, and other assignments, knowing they will not feel stressed or unprepared for the job. This also allows the Deaf community to feel more comfortable attending a religious event and, therefore, being able to have a better connection to the spiritual world.
What I Learned About Myself as an Interpreter

Working in temples and other Jewish settings really pushed me to be on top of my game. I wanted to provide the best interpretation I could, but also struggled being unaware of the language as well as in branches of Judaism that were unfamiliar to me. I worked hard to interpret while listening to the Hebrew and reading the English in the book challenging myself to provide an interpretation and not just sit idly while prayers were sung. I would prepare by looking up specific prayers I knew would be read, and practice interpreting them for myself before I went to work. This allowed me to work on my understanding of Hebrew and match up Hebrew words with English to provide a translation and keep in tune with the singing of prayers.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my research and have many plans to continue not only my research but also my experience working in the Jewish setting. I would like to provide access to those mourning a loved one or celebrating a life event to not only be present but also understand all the languages involved. I like challenging myself, and I plan to continue working on interpretations of prayers to allow others to better their skills, and knowledge, about the Jewish culture. This research has allowed me to be more involved not only in my religion and culture but provide access to others who want to get involved. The overall goal of my interpreting experience is to be fluent in Hebrew and interpret without a sight translation. As an interpreter, I love the challenge, and plan to work in a variety of Jewish settings.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Summary

From the beginning I planned to see an increase in my understanding and interpreting abilities when it relates to Jewish culture, and services. However, the ability to learn a language fluently in a year is challenging but starting with simple words and phrases allowed me to interpret more accurately than knowing none of the language. Interpreting in a Jewish setting can be a challenge due to the languages, prayers, and short notice of need. In addition to the challenges that are present in interpreting there is a lack of research and references for those working within the Jewish interpreting community. Research that is available is often from the 1980’s-1990’s and shows prayers in Signed Exact English with signs that are initialized, and not accepted by all different parts of the Deaf community. These books are written for Deaf families, or families that have Deaf members. They are not focused on interpreting for the Deaf community and, therefore, have little to no relevance to this research.

My hope for this research is to allow more interpreters to work in the Jewish setting and provide information that is relevant and necessary for the communities. Learning Hebrew and interpreting in the Jewish setting both have their challenges, but the overall effectiveness of interpreting would be beneficial to the Deaf Jewish community.

Limitations

The research has limitations due to my one perspective on the topic. With limited prior research on the focus of interpreting in the Jewish settings it is important for the community to recognize the need for exploration. When beginning this research, I had little information,
and began a journey into an unknown topic. Due to the lack of research there was no right or wrong way to go about the plans for exploration of interpreting in the Jewish setting. My research is just one autoethnography about my personal experience working in the Jewish setting.

Other limitations in this research are the lack of assignments in Jewish settings. I did work a total of 30 interpreting assignments in the Jewish community over one year. Much of my research is from personal practice listening to prayers and working with the prayer book to better my understanding of the language.

**Future Plans**

This research is just the beginning of my future plans. I have plans to become completely fluent in Hebrew, and work in a variety of Jewish settings such as services, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, and funerals. My ultimate goal is to create a website (similar to theinterpreterfriend.org) for information, and videos of possible interpretations for Jewish prayers. This website can be found at thekorfins.com/jackie under the menu Areas of Focus, Jewish Interpreting. I would not do this alone but ask Deaf Jewish people from all over the United States to participate and send in videos of them signing prayers. Of course, this research can’t necessarily be replicated, but I hope that others will add information as they see fit, and grow the research relating to the Deaf Jewish/ Jewish Interpreting community.

In addition to working on a website, and my own knowledge of Hebrew I plan to hold workshops focused on interpreting in the Jewish setting and preparing for different events. My goal is to make RID supported workshops for CEUs and get more people knowledgeable
about the Jewish culture, and community. I have attended two workshops relating to Jewish Interpreting and it was beneficial to my research. The workshops were for interpreters that have zero knowledge of interpreting in Jewish settings. I plan to create workshops centered around interpreting in the Jewish setting for interpreters who have both no knowledge, and more in-depth knowledge, about Jewish interpreting. My workshops would be related to important events, and topics for interpreting in the Jewish settings. This would allow interpreters from all over the country to learn about interpreting in the Jewish setting and strengthen their confidence and skills in the Jewish setting.

**Final Reactions**

From this action research project, I have learned that every word I learn in Hebrew will improve my interpreting skills. As I progress in my career as an American Sign Language interpreter, I will continue to learn, practice, and teach the interpreting community about Jewish settings. The benefits of this study are to increase my understanding and the community’s ability to interpret in religious settings they may be unfamiliar with. I also look forward to presenting, and publishing more research related to the topic of interpreting in the Jewish setting. This study as a whole helped me develop a niche in which I plan to work and improve my overall understanding and ability to work in a challenging setting.
REFERENCES


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Appendix A: Notes

Interpreting in the Jewish Setting:
- Timeline for Jewish Events
  - Funeral: 24 hours after death
  - Bar Mitzvah: 12/13 birthday
  - Bris: 8 days after baby is born
  - Shabbat: Every Weekend
  - Holidays: Every year

Prep Time:
- Funeral: little to none
- Bar Mitzvah: months
- Bris: 8 days
- Shabbat: 1 week
- Holidays: months

Vocabulary:
Baruch Atah Adonai: Blessed are you
V’emru Amen: Let us say Amen
Yisrael/Zion: Israel
Shalom: Peace
Chai: Life
Shamayim: Heaven
Kaddosh: Holy
Appendix B: Vocabulary for Jewish Settings

Vocabulary:
- Kiddush
- Ketubah
- G-d/Adonai
- Jerusalem
- Mazel Tov
- Holy
- Jewish
- Temple
- Shul
- Synagogue
- Shiva
- Bris
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah
- Rosh Hashanah
- Yom Kippur
- Passover
- Matzah
- Purim
Appendix C: Word Recognition

(Praise the Lord, to whom our praise is due!
Praised be the Lord, to whom our praise is due, now and for ever!
Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who has chosen us from all peoples by giving us His Torah. Blessed is the Lord, Giver of the Torah.

(Stern, 1975, p.438)
Appendix D: Simple Prayer Translations

Blessing for Washing the Hands

Baruch atah Adonai,  
Eloheinu melech ha-olam,  
asher kid’shanu b’mitzvotav,  
v’tzivanu al n’tilat yadayim.

Bless G-D King Universe

Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who  
has sanctified us with His commandments and has  
commanded us to wash our hands.

Hamotzi

On Friday evening and Shabbat lunch,  
two uncut loaves of challah are uncovered,  
they are raised, and the following blessing  
is recited.

Baruch atah Adonai,  
Eloheinu melech ha-olam,  
hamotzi lechem min  
ha-aretz.

Bless G-D King Universe G-D

Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who  
brings forth bread from the earth.

(Shiovitz, 2008, p.12)
Appendix E: Studying Hebrew

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrew Vowels</th>
<th>English Meaning</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>ת - an</td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>י - an</td>
<td>saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>א - ei</td>
<td>they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>א - e</td>
<td>met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>א - ee</td>
<td>machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>א - o</td>
<td>alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>א - oo</td>
<td>moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>או - a</td>
<td>alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>א - a</td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>א - a</td>
<td>saw</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the = ש
and = ו
in = ע
here = ל
my = מ
I = אני
love = אני
Appendix F: Data Collection

Shema

Hear one G-d israel ade

= first run through
= second run through
= third run through