



Reading Between the Signs: Decoding Assumptions – Job Interview

Interpreting job interviews may seem a deceptively simple task—just another meeting between a Deaf and hearing consumer. However, there are several crucial differences between job interviews and ordinary conversations. They are formal, prearranged interactions the purpose of which is to “settle certain practical outcomes. The interviewee wants the job; the interviewer wishes to select the most suitable candidate(s). Neither party is interested in the interview as conversation; rather the aim is to achieve a successful outcome. If both participants have the same goal of a “successful outcome,” then where is the challenge?

The job interview is a key that may unlock the door to employment. However, it is also a “situation where social inequality is ritually dramatized, where basic differences in class, ethnicity, access to power and knowledge, and culturally specific discourse conventions mediate the interaction between the participants. Not only are there unspoken assumptions of shared cultural knowledge and similar discourse style, but the power differences between (most typically) the hearing interviewer and the Deaf applicant have a significant impact on their interaction.

The most pervasive structural feature of the job interview is its fixed organizational structure and the strict allocation of rights and duties. Basically, the interviewer has power over the interviewee. She or he controls both the organizational structure of the interview and the mechanics of the interaction...the interviewee is more or less powerless vis-à-vis the interviewer, with a role mostly confined to responding to the interviewer’s questions.

Given this preamble, we may be a bit more wary of the seemingly simple repartee that takes place at the typical job interview.

1. The Opening

Hearing Interviewer: Did you have any trouble finding our office?

Deaf Applicant: I sure did. The traffic was awful. And then they wanted to charge me \$12 in the parking lot! Sorry I was late, but I drove around and around until I found a spot on the street. It was kind of confusing with all the one-way streets, you know. It took me much longer than I thought.

Hearing Interviewer: I’m sure it was difficult for you.

Directions: Your task is to identify presuppositions and cultural expectations for each consumer.

Let’s start with the hearing interviewer. What purpose, in the interviewer’s mind, does the opening question serve? What kind of answer is he or she expecting?

(Refer to pages 136–138 and 140–141 in Reading Between the Signs for specific features of the “hearing American job interview.)

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<https://books.apple.com/us/book/reading-between-the-signs-workbook/id1131166988>

Now, consider the Deaf applicant. How does the Deaf applicant interpret the interviewer's question? What kind of information does the interviewer seem to be asking for? Does the applicant's answer fit the interviewer's expectations?

What are the interpreter's options in the above exchange? This question has no easy answer. Part of your consideration needs to include how much responsibility the interpreter has in a situation with different cultural assumptions (see chapter 7 of *Reading Between the Signs*).

Suppose the interpreter does nothing but literally transmit the words and signs to the other party? What kind of impression will each consumer have about the other? In your opinion, would they have an accurate view of each other?

In chapter 8 of *Reading Between the Signs*, several techniques for dealing with cultural adjustments are discussed. Can you imagine a way in which the interpreter could make use of one or more of those techniques to aid the parties in communicating their intentions without the cultural differences getting in the way?

2. Tough Question

Hearing Interviewer: Why did you apply for this position?

Deaf Applicant: My friend who works here told me that this company offers lots of good benefits and insurance.

Identify the presuppositions and cultural expectations of each consumer. Review the techniques in chapter 8. How can the interpreter utilize "Equivalent Translation," "Message Analysis," and/or "Identifying the Function" to avoid this cultural mismatch? Consider different points within the above transaction where the interpreter could make an appropriate cultural adjustment.