

Interpreting Dissent: Narratives About American Sign Language-English Interpreting For the Deaf President Now Protest

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ABSTRACT in American Sign Language



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ABSTRACT

In 1988, a one-week protest unfolded on the campus of Gallaudet University in Washington, DC as thousands of deaf students and community activists gathered, determined to derail the Gallaudet University Board of Trustees' decision to appoint a hearing person as Gallaudet's seventh university president. The uprising, known as the Deaf President Now (DPN) protest, received significant media attention in the United States and across the globe. To facilitate the media frenzy and other protest events, dozens of American Sign Language-English interpreters volunteered to interpret for radio, newspaper, and television interviews, as well as public rallies (Gannon, 1989). While the perspectives of deaf students and stakeholders about the events and significance of DPN has been well documented (Christiansen & Barnartt, 1995; Gannon, 1989), to date, the story of the interpreters who provided communication access during the DPN protest has not yet been examined. This study of interpretation during DPN is drawn from archival evidence and semi-structured interview data with interpreters, protesters, and members of Gallaudet's administration. Drawing from Baker's (2006, 2013, 2018) narrative approach to studying translation in political conflict, I collected interview data from 27 key stakeholders to investigate the organization of interpreting services, interpreters' ideology, and the linguistic and extralinguistic decisions made by the interpreters. Analysis of the narratives reveals how interpreters behaved as social movement actors in ideologically-structured action (Dalton, 1994; Zald, 2000) that was guided by their collective identity (Polletta & Jasper, 2001) with protesters and the deaf community. This study sheds light on how interpreters narrate their experiences when working in protest settings and has implications for scholars seeking to understand interpreting and social movements.

KEYWORDS: contentious politics, interpreters, protest, narrative inquiry, social movement

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