

# 2

## CONTROLS OF INTERPRETING

### KEY CONCEPTS

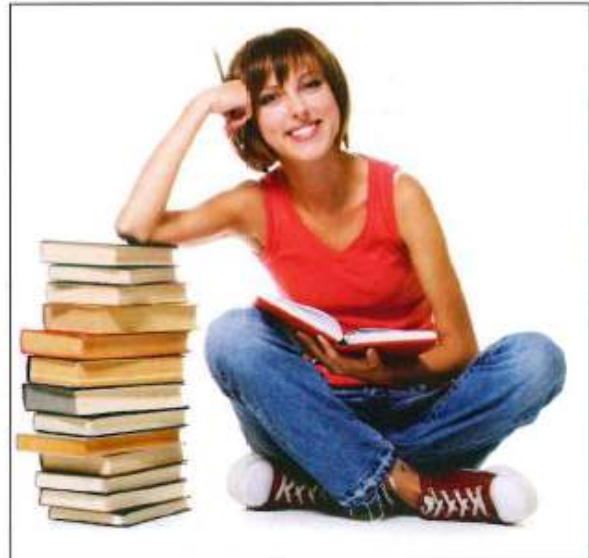
Controls are best understood as nouns not verbs.

Among other controls, age, gender, and ethnicity also can be understood as controls for interpreters.

Different interpreters will bring different controls to the EIPi demands of a job, which will create different demand-control interactions and outcomes.

## CONTROLS OF INTERPRETING

In this chapter, we explore the controls of interpreting. As we discussed in Chapter 1, interpreting involves complex elements of human communication and human interaction and, therefore, every aspect of the interpreter is a potentially relevant control that may impact their work. Controls can best be understood as how the interpreter interacts with and responds to the demands of an interpreting assignment. The term *controls* does not refer to “controlling” a situation nor “taking control.” Also, it does not refer to the psychological state of being in control nor feeling out of control. The term *control* is best understood as a noun, not a verb. Think of the many controls in an airplane cockpit. Controls are resources the interpreter has at her or his disposal or a response the interpreter offers in light of assignment demands. Often, it is helpful to refer to controls as *control options* to help recall the noun use of the term as well as to remind you that interpreters have many controls available at any given time, whether they employ them or not.








Consider the unique controls each of the interpreters in Table 2.1 might bring to a given interpreting assignment.

The interpreters described in Table 2.1 each bring unique features of their backgrounds, personalities, and experiences to their interpreting work. Many of these characteristics can be thought of as *control resources* that may prove useful in responding to interpreting assignment demands. Can you think of ways that the differing characteristics of Joanne, Kathy, Terry, Emma, and Bernard may be more or less fitting to different interpreting assignments? Imagine interpreting assignments that would be a better fit – as well as a poorer fit – for each of these interpreters.

Similarly, interpreting students and practitioners also should consider what controls they bring to an interpreting assignment, simply by virtue of *who they are*. Apart from the issue of one’s source and target language skill set (which are very important, of course), the controls that interpreters bring to an assignment also include their knowledge and experiences pertaining to the assignment topic, relevant character attributes, and other skills

Table 2.1

<p>1. Joanne is in her mid-twenties and very athletic. She graduated from a four-year interpreting program and was nationally certified shortly after graduation. She is very kind and not easily frustrated. She has very good working relationships with her consumers.</p>	
<p>2. Kathy is in her mid-40s and has been interpreting for over twenty years, mostly in the field of medicine. She holds a CSC (Comprehensive Skills Certificate) Registry of Interpreters of the Deaf (RID) certification. Kathy also has a master's degree in education. For the last four years, Kathy has worked exclusively in video relay service (VRS) settings and loves the work. She has otherwise not been working in community situations since beginning her VRS work.</p>	
<p>3. Terry is the daughter of deaf parents and never had formal training as an interpreter. However, she has taken the quality assurance exam in her home state and has been rated to work in any community setting except for legal settings. Terry has a Deaf minority person's view of the hearing majority world even though she is hearing. She is very well-known and liked in her local Deaf community, as most of the Deaf community was familiar with her when she was growing up.</p>	
<p>4. Emma graduated from a two-year interpreter training program and passed the written portion of the national interpreting certificate exam. She was raised in an Asian community in a large city and has been "interpreting" for her Vietnamese-speaking parents all her life. Emma loves children and enjoys interacting with them. She thinks that she connects so well with children because she feels that she grew up very fast.</p>	
<p>5. Bernard holds a National Association of the Deaf (NAD) level 3 certification. He learned ASL when he was young and is well-liked by the Deaf community. Deaf people often comment on his good "attitude." Bernard has interpreted for his church since he was 15 and has since begun interpreting in the community. He is known for his sense of humor and his gregarious and outgoing style.</p>	

and personal qualities that may manifest themselves as control resources in the context of the interpreting assignment. Attributes like a sense of humor, studiousness, being contemplative, well-read, or culturally-savvy, punctuality, the ability to handle sensitive interpersonal situations with care, advanced education, physical fitness, mathematical ability, or being well-traveled, all may comprise control resources during a given assignment. Of course, any individual interpreter cannot possess every desirable quality that would meet every potential demand in an interpreting assignment, but we should recognize the broad array of controls that every interpreter brings to their work, as well as those controls we may lack (in light of who we are *not*), and be respectful of the unique array of controls that other interpreters possess who are different from ourselves. Fluency in the source and target languages (e.g., ASL), as important as this control is for all interpreters, is by no means the singular determinate of who will or will not be an effective interpreter in a given interpreting situation.

#### CONTROL OPPORTUNITIES

Let us now present a more detailed discussion of the types of controls that interpreters can bring to bear in response to job demands. We will frame this discussion in terms of when the control opportunities are evidenced. They may be evidenced before the assignment begins, while the assignment is occurring, or after the assignment has concluded. We refer to the controls employed during these three time periods as *pre-assignment*, *assignment*, and *post-assignment* controls.

The types of controls outlined in the Table 2.1 were examples of *pre-assignment controls*. Pre-assignment controls include those controls you bring to the assignment simply by virtue of your background, personality, and other characteristics, as well as the specific things you do to prepare for an assignment. Such preparations would include the type of clothing you choose for an assignment or any preparation that you do beforehand, such as studying the topic or talking with a contact person or consumer before the job.

The second control opportunity category is *assignment controls*. These are defined as controls that are employed during the interpreting assignment itself. Assignment controls include all the decisions you make in light of job demands once the job has begun. They include any actions you take (such as asking for clarification or some other overt behavior), actions that you choose not to take (which is a type of control decision that should not be overlooked merely because it is inaction), as well as all of your interpretation/translation decisions, that is, how you specifically choose to interpret consumers' utterances.

**THE FIRST  
ASSIGNMENT  
CONTROL:  
IDENTIFY  
DEMANDS**

A particularly powerful and a helpful control, one that should be employed at the beginning of every assignment (and, often, repeatedly during an assignment), is simply to name the demands that are present and therefore, are impacting the interpreter's work. When demands are not consciously recognized, interpreters may fail to perceive their influence, either completely or until these unrecognized demands lead to problems. Unrecognized demands, by definition, do not stimulate any control considerations, frequently leading to a compromised work situation or at least one that is more challenging.

Suppose an interpreter is working for a business meeting and the participants are seated around a large conference table. The interpreter and the deaf consumer are seated on opposite sides of the table but not directly across from one another. This is not a problem – at first – as the line of sight between the deaf consumer and the interpreter is unobstructed. However, after a while, a hearing participant unwittingly adjusts his chair and moves slightly into the signing space of the interpreter. The interpreter does not consciously recognize that this interpersonal demand has just occurred. Instead, she instinctually begins to lean over slightly so that good sight lines with the deaf consumer are maintained. Since this interpersonal demand was not consciously acknowledged, the interpreter cannot respond (employ a control) in a more effective manner, such as move her chair or decide how long she will wait to see whether the hearing person remains in that position or decide how long she will wait to see if the deaf person readjusts their seat. Instead, the interpreter's discomfort in this leaning position has "no end in sight" and she may become frustrated about the person who is "in her way." Thus, what began as an (unrecognized) interpersonal demand has now become an intrapersonal demand. Recognizing salient demands before and during assignments is the first and most important line of controls available to the interpreter.

The third control opportunity category is *post-assignment controls*. Post-assignment controls are controls that are employed after the assignment is over. These might include talking with your team partner to assess how the job went or following up with consumers or a referral agency about some aspect of the job.

Table 2.2 is a summary of the different types of controls, their definitions, and examples.

Table 2.2

Control Opportunity	Definition	Examples
Pre-assignment Controls	Controls employed before interpreting work begins	Personal characteristics Education (all types of education) Personal and work-related experience Direct preparation for the assignment
Assignment Controls	Controls employed during interpreting work	Acknowledgement of demands Positive self-talk Behavioral interventions All interpretations/translations Quality of relationships The Code of Ethics or Professional Conduct of interpreting organizations
Post-assignment Controls	Controls employed after the interpreting work has concluded	Follow-up with consumers Follow-up with referring party Further education on the topic Debriefing/venting Self-care Supervision

Let's discuss in detail the control examples listed in the table above. In the pre-assignment control category, personal characteristics include the interpreter's physical, cognitive, and psychological attributes, gender, age, ethnicity, etc. Education refers not only to one's interpreting education but education outside the field of interpreting as well. Experience includes any experience relevant to the given assignment, both work-related and personal.

As mentioned earlier, all the preparations one does for an assignment also constitute pre-assignment controls, including clothing choices, contacts made with one's team interpreter, or with the hearing and deaf consumers you will be serving, and the efforts you make through internet searches, reading, and studying assignment materials in advance.

As noted, assignment controls are those that are employed while the job is occurring. The very first assignment control one should employ is assessing which of your pre-assignment predictions were accurate and useful. After acknowledging these matters, then identify other (unanticipated) demands

that may be present. Identifying and naming demands should always be the first assignment control you employ. Indeed, if you cannot name demands, then you cannot respond to them.

In addition to your interpretation or translation decisions, other important assignment controls include positive self-talk, the direct behavioral interventions you make (or choose not to make), the quality of the relationships you engage in with consumers, and your knowledge and application of codes of ethics or codes of professional conduct.

The final opportunity for employing controls is after the assignment is completed. Perhaps you have determined that a demand could not be adequately addressed during the assignment. This might lead you to engage in some follow-up action with the people involved, such as your team interpreter or a consumer. You could also follow up by obtaining further education about assignment topics you would have liked to understand better. Maybe you interpreted for a doctor's appointment involving diabetes and you employ the post-assignment control of learning more about diabetes symptoms and treatment options in preparation for the patient's next visit, or simply to increase your knowledge base for future assignments in this topic area.

Other examples of post-assignment controls include debriefing or venting with a professional or personal support system (being careful to protect client information), engaging in self-care activities such as yoga or exercise, and obtaining supervision. Supervision is an important educational and ethical process commonly used in other types of practice professions. Supervision sometimes has other names such as peer consultation, case conferencing, and mentoring – though each of these terms differs somewhat from the other. In essence, supervision is a confidential but forthright discussion about work events that takes place between two or more professionals for the purpose of

improving one's critical thinking, practice skills, and job performance. We will talk more about supervision in Chapter 10.

We have emphasized that controls include a wide range of resources, skills, knowledge, behavioral actions, translation decisions, and more – everything the interpreter brings to the assignment. This also implies that the characteristics an interpreter does *not* possess or the things an interpreter does *not* do in the



Dean, R. K., & Pollard, R. Q. (2013). *dc-s; the demand control schema: interpreting as a practice profession*. North Charleston: CreateSpace Independence Publ. Platform.  
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course of her or his work also are relevant in the context of controls. For example, if an interpreter chooses to do nothing about a fight that breaks out in a high school hallway, this non-response is actually an identifiable response to a demand and should be acknowledged as such. “No response” is still a response. Similarly, those skills and characteristics that an interpreter does *not* possess also can be framed in the context of controls, since assignment demands will be affected by what is absent as well as what is present. Recognizing when one has insufficient controls to respond to job demands (even those demands that are outside of linguistic skills) is a crucial aspect of ethical interpreting practice.

### SEPARATING DEMANDS FROM CONTROLS

Demands can be distinguished from controls by noting that demands are about the job and controls are about the interpreter. The demands in the EIPI categories come together – like a puzzle – to form the entire “constellation of demands” of the interpreting assignment. Demands are the salient characteristics of the job alone and, in that regard, have nothing to do with the interpreter – at least until the interpreter arrives and her or his controls begin to interact with those job demands. As any potential interpreter is placed into the job scenario, there will be a matrix of potential demand-control reactions and interactions that will be different for interpreter A, B, or C. Note that the job demands facing each interpreter remain the same. It is the potential *interaction* between demands and controls that changes with each interpreter because each interpreter possesses a different set of controls that they can bring to bear in response to the demands of the assignment. Even though the demands of the job are constant (before interaction with the interpreter begins), there is an endless combination of demand-control pairings that can result when different interpreters begin to interact with those job demands. In Chapter 5, we will explore demand-control interactions further. Before that, in the next chapter, we will explore how to create sound analyses of interpreting assignments using demands and controls.



## CLASS ACTIVITY

**Science Class Scenario**

A class of sixth graders is dissecting fetal pigs, in groups of three students per pig.

A deaf student has been designated the lead dissector of his small group.

The teacher visits each group to assist, teach, and give advice.



Return to the list of demands that were identified from the science class fetal pig dissection scenario (see Chapter 1 pg. 10) and review the demands that were listed. There are probably demands that were stated as conditionals, such as, "The teacher could be in a bad mood" or "One of the members of the small group might not want to be assigned to that group." Demands also may have been phrased as questions, such as, "What if the deaf student didn't do his homework and doesn't know how to proceed with the dissection?" or "Does the teacher know how to work with interpreters?" Trying to imagine demands from looking at pictures alone often draws us to think in these types of hypothetical ways. However, if controls are to be considered and chosen in light of demands, the demands can't be hypothetical, conditional, or phrased as a question – they must be phrased in a definitive manner, even when you can't be sure about the validity of the perceived demand. At this stage, a degree of uncertainty is alright. Being definitive about the demand list allows us to move on to a productive consideration of controls.

If the science class demand list contains demands that are phrased as conditionals or questions, you will have to decide whether to rephrase them in a definitive manner or eliminate them. Edit the demand list until it clearly conveys exactly what is happening in the scenario, with no hypothetical comments remaining. Make sure your demands are written in ways that are as specific as possible.

Next, if you haven't done so already, label each demand in terms of its appropriate EIPI category – environmental, interpersonal, paralinguistic, or intrapersonal.

Finally, consider what pre-assignment controls, assignment controls, and post-assignment controls you would employ in response to each demand on the list. Write your control choices down, organized into these three time-specific categories. Try to come up with three pre-assignment controls, five assignment controls, and two post-assignment controls.

## HOMEWORK

Take an inventory of your own controls, that is, those personal characteristics and resources that you bring to the practice profession of interpreting, simply in light of who you are at this time in your life. Think broadly. Consider the full range of your attributes, skills, and knowledge that could come into play in your interpreting work. You can think of these in both positive ("I like people; I've traveled extensively") and negative terms ("I can't stand the sight of blood; I am often impatient") since having insight into both these sides of you is very relevant to good interpreting practice. Sometimes, the controls you bring will be positive in relation to one job situation but negative in relation to a different job situation. For example, an impatient person is also a person who values efficiency or quick-paced environments.

The control inventories below are from working interpreters who were asked to submit examples of a couple of controls they possessed when they were students:

"I was politely assertive, confident, had a positive affect; I was willing to learn and to accept constructive criticism."

"I had experience working in an office setting, experience living in a college dorm where I had to get along with people I didn't know/different backgrounds than me."

"I had a strong customer service background from previous work experiences. I also had a lot of experience in theatre, which has benefitted me in many ways."

"I was brought up in a culturally diverse way and never saw a certain culture or perspective to be superior. Also, I had traveled extensively which boosted my knowledge in geography, history, arts, and sciences."

"I had good world and pop culture knowledge. I also possess an optimistic attitude."

"I possess a sense of humor and a creative and flexible approach to problem solving."