# Applying a Language Justice Approach to Evaluation

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# LANGUAGE JUSTICE & EVALUATION: VIGNETTE

Imagine you've been contracted by an important client to conduct an evaluation of a promising new program developed by an immigrant community. You ask the group if you can come to some of their activities and introduce yourself and the work you'll be doing with them. They agree, and invite you to their upcoming community meeting. Since you don't speak or understand their language, you hire an interpreter.

On the day of the meeting, you start off by having difficulty finding the correct room, since the signage is in a language you can't read. You eventually locate the interpreter, who gives you a headset without much explanation of how it works. Once the meeting begins, you notice that no one else is wearing headsets, and realize that while you can listen to the simultaneous interpretation, when you wish to speak, everyone has to pause to listen to the consecutive interpretation.[1] The first couple times you make a comment, a few people seem willing to wait for the interpretation and hear what you have to say, while many others seem irritated by the inconvenience. You are put off by the reactions and start feeling self-conscious and less inclined to participate.

The interpreter, who holds a medical certification, is not versed in your field, so she keeps using words in your language that don't make sense in this context. You wonder how you are being interpreted into the other language. No one is making any adjustments for the time it takes to interpret consecutively, participants are speaking quickly and it's hard for the interpreter to keep up. She starts summarizing, which makes you miss some of the nuance of the conversation. You notice the meeting facilitator has stopped calling on you for questions or comments; she explains that since the meeting needs to end on schedule, there is not enough time to keep pausing for interpretation. Then someone distributes a newly-completed community outreach plan, which participants start discussing excitedly. Unfortunately, no translated version is available, and with all the cross-talk, interpretation becomes impossible. During your presentation, when you attempt to converse with the audience, there is little engagement, and several people start chatting or leave the room. With all of the language-related issues, you feel out of step with the discussion and unable to understand or contribute much. You hope to remedy this during dinner afterwards with program staff, but unfortunately learn that no interpretation is available.

You leave the meeting feeling inarticulate and frustrated, wondering how these language differences will affect your work, especially the relationship-building and communication necessary to conduct the evaluation.

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[1] **Interpretation** is defined as the process of orally speaking or signing a spoken or signed message from one language into another language, whereas **translation** is converting written text from one language into written text in another language.

**Consecutive interpretation**: A person speaks or signs and then pauses to allow for the interpreter to relay what was communicated into another language. No equipment is needed. Time becomes a factor: everything takes twice as long because it must be communicated twice, once in each language.

**Simultaneous interpretation**: Using equipment (transmitter and receiver, microphone, and headsets), a person speaks or signs while the interpreter follows along rendering the message simultaneously into another language. Everyone experiences the entire conversation in real time, with no interruption to the flow of conversation.

**Relay interpretation**: Commonly used in spaces where facilitators, stakeholders, participants speak more than two languages. Interpreters work in relay listening or looking at the source language speaker and then rendering the message into a language common to all the other interpreters (in the US context, English), those interpreters then render the message to each target language. For example, the speaker uses JSL (Japanese Sign Language), then the JSL-English interpreter renders the message in English to every interpreter in the room, and then they proceed to render it to their target language groups (Spanish, Cantonese, Bengali), etc.

# LANGUAGE JUSTICE & EVALUATION: EVALUATION PROCESS WORKSHEET

The following are some considerations for evaluators who wish to apply a language justice lens to an overall evaluation process, in which the stakeholders speak/sign more than one language.

## PLANNING AND DESIGN

1. Who will be impacted by this evaluation? Who has often been left out or minimized in previous evaluations?
   - How will you invite in and build trust with language communities who have been excluded in the past?

2. What are the languages that stakeholders/participants are most comfortable speaking?
   - What is the history of privilege or oppression for each language community?
   - How does language intersect with other identities of privilege/oppression for each language group?
   - What languages are spoken by those who hold positional power (including those funding the evaluation, and people on the evaluation team)?

3. Who needs to be on the planning team to focus specifically on language justice throughout the design & implementation of the evaluation?
   - How does the evaluation team reflect the diversity of languages?
   - Who on the team is an experienced language justice organizer? If the team does not have this experience, how will you locate someone who does, so they may advise you?

4. Who are the interpreters and translators you'll be working with?
   - If they have certifications, are they relevant to this context (medical, legal, etc.)?
   - Are they familiar with this field or context?
   - Are there professionals that participants are already working with and trust?
   - Are the interpreters/translators familiar with language justice approaches? If not, how will you insure that training is provided for them?
   - Have you considered training bi- or multi-lingual community advocates in evaluation methods (such as focus group facilitation), rather than using your usual facilitators?

5. Is language justice adequately resourced in the evaluation?
   - Are all participants able to access necessary language resources (e.g., interpretation, translation) with no charge to them, and without any extra hassle?

6. Does the timeline take into account the time needed to implement language justice practices?

## IMPLEMENTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

7. Are all the language groups you are working with comfortable with the methods of communication you're using?
   - Are the technologies/apps you're using available in all relevant languages?
   - Does your webinar/videoconferencing platform support captioning and subtitling?

8. How well are your events & activities integrating all appropriate language justice practices?
   - Is everyone able to communicate and mingle freely with others, regardless of languages spoken/signed, during both social and working parts of your activities?
   - Are the activities you've planned doable within reasonable timing for interpretation & translation?
   - See "Evaluation Event Checklist" for more details

9. Do the leaders, facilitators, speakers, and other "front of room" folks reflect participants' language diversity?
   - Are you beginning events and activities in languages other than English?

## CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND APPLICATION

10. How often are you receiving feedback about the language justice practices you're using?
    - From whom are you collecting this feedback (interpreters, participants, etc.)?
    - Do your internal debriefs include discussing language justice?
    - What is your plan for timely, continuous course-corrections based on this feedback?

11. How are you planning to share your learnings around language justice with the field?

12. How are your hiring practices, partnerships, and professional development activities responding to your learnings around language justice?

# LANGUAGE JUSTICE & EVALUATION: EVENT CHECKLIST

The following checklist provides an overview of steps evaluators can take when planning an event or activity in which participants will be communicating in more than one language.

## DESIGN AND PLANNING (3+ MONTHS BEFORE THE EVENT)

### Develop a language justice plan

Ideally, this plan is part of an overall evaluation process that has integrated language justice from the beginning. If this is a first attempt, then consulting with an experienced language justice organizer is recommended. Some questions and considerations follow:

- **Language needs.** Who will participate in the event? In what languages do they feel most comfortable communicating?

- **Interpretation.** Do you have enough interpreters to provide interpretation for all of the languages signed/spoken? [2] Do you have enough equipment for everyone who needs it, including participants, facilitators, presenters, and organizers?

- **Translation.** What written materials will you use, both in the planning process and during the event (e.g., event communications, agendas, slides, hand-outs, etc.)? Does your planning timeline account for the time required for translation of materials into all languages, and review (and possible editing) of those materials *in advance of the event*? [3]

- **Budget.** Does your budget account for these expenses: translation, interpretation (signed/spoken), CART (Communication Access Real-time Translation)/text to speech support, and interpretation and CART equipment?

- **Agenda and roles.** As you draft your agenda and assign roles (presenters, facilitators, keynote speakers, etc.), how will you ensure that all languages, especially non-dominant languages, are being spoken from "the front of the room"?

- **Media usage.** If you plan to use video, it is highly encouraged to use (or create) videos with subtitles, and to consider showing different videos in different languages. In multilingual spaces where more than two languages are being used (including ASL), consider creating videos with subtitles in multiple languages.

### Engage interpreters, translators, and captioners/subtitlers

- **Secure translators, interpreters, captioners and/or subtitlers**. Identify people who are professionally trained, with familiarity in your content area, for all of the languages represented.

- **Choose and develop relationships with these professionals.** Identify and build relationships over time with people who 1) are trained and experienced (where available), not simply a bi/multilingual individual you happen to know or work with; 2) are familiar with the language justice framework and/or are interested in building their capacity in this area; and 3) reflect the demographics of the community you are working with.

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[2] Interpreters typically work with a partner, taking turns every 20-30 minutes. This allows them to avoid fatigue and maintain accuracy. It also supports a well-functioning bi/multilingual space by allowing the person who is not interpreting to troubleshoot, if necessary, without interrupting the flow of the conversation.
[3] Encourage having bi/multilingual collaborators, stakeholders, and participants develop written material in languages other than English, and then translate them into English.

- **Ensure full coverage throughout the event**.  Identify enough trained interpreters, captioners and/or subtitlers for each component of the event (presentations, large and small group activities, etc.). This includes coverage for networking and socializing.

- **Prepare interpreters in advance.**  Provide all relevant material to interpreters in advance, so they can familiarize themselves with the topic, structure, agenda, and materials.

## DURING THE EVENT
### Encourage language parity throughout the event

- **Set a ''language justice tone'' from the beginning of the event:**
    - **Interpreters' introduction and creating collective responsibility.**  Allow 5 minutes before any welcoming remarks for interpreters to introduce themselves and the concept of a bi/multilingual language justice space, and to ask everyone to play an active role in supporting the creation of this space. Interpreters will also tell everyone what signals they will use when they need people to slow down or speak louder.
    - **Welcoming remarks.**  Ideally these are offered in a non-dominant language.

- **Use of interpretation equipment:**
    - A best practice is that all individuals – including facilitators, presenters, and participants – who are not *fluent in all languages,* use equipment.
    - Encourage everyone to keep their equipment on throughout the meeting, so communication can flow effectively and respectfully.
    - When working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/d/Hoh) communities, make sure you have all the necessary A/V and onsite CART equipment to support captioning.[4]

- **Invite bilingual individuals to use the non-dominant language(s) throughout the meeting.** This creates a welcoming space for people who do not speak the dominant language.

## AFTER THE EVENT
### Post-event evaluation of language justice practices

- Get feedback from interpreters, facilitators, and presenters on what worked well and what could be improved.

- Include language justice-related questions in any event evaluation forms or activities.

- Incorporate language justice into the post-event debrief process of your group/organization/institution. What lessons can be learned for future events?

This checklist was developed by Ana Paula Noguez Mercado. Please do not share it without permission and appropriate attribution. She may be reached at anapaulanoguez@gmail.com with any questions or requests.

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[4] For additional tips and best practices for working with D/d/Hoh communities, please contact DeafHope http://www.deaf-hope.org, or the Vera Institute www.vera.org.