

Critical Perspective on Interpreter Protocol in the Political Sphere from the Deaf Community

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ABSTRACT

This presentation offers a critical reflection on interpreter protocol in the political sphere, from the perspective of the Deaf community. It highlights the constant observation of interpreters' performance, the demands for neutrality and ethics, as well as the need for a solid and specialized professional profile. The main objective is to guarantee the right to information and full political participation of Deaf individuals, emphasizing that the interpreter is not a protagonist, but a communication bridge who must act with fidelity, neutrality, and professionalism.

Keywords:

Sign language interpreter; Ecuadorian Sign Language; Deaf community; political sphere; professional ethics; neutrality; professionalism; interpreting protocol; political participation; access to information; right to communication.

INTRODUCTION

Sign language interpreting within the political sphere represents a fundamental function for guaranteeing the full exercise of the rights of Deaf individuals, particularly in relation to access to information and participation in democratic processes. In a context where political decisions directly impact the social, economic, and cultural life of citizens, the presence of qualified interpreters is not only a communicative necessity, but also a principle of equity and social inclusion supported by international normative frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006).

Unlike other interpreting settings, the political sphere is characterized by strong ideological influences, persuasive discourse, and strategic positioning, which increases the level of responsibility placed on the interpreter. In this context, neutrality, fidelity to the message, and adherence to ethical principles are not optional, but essential conditions to prevent distortion of information and ensure transparent communication (Metzger, 1999; Napier, 2007).

Sign language interpreting in this field therefore requires not only advanced linguistic competencies, but also specialized training that enables professionals to understand the political context and act with sound professional judgment.

From the perspective of the Deaf community, the role of the interpreter is constantly observed and evaluated. It is not merely about translating words, but about accurately conveying intentions, nuances, and meanings while respecting the visual and cultural structure of sign language. This social scrutiny reinforces the need to establish clear protocols to guide professional performance in political settings, avoiding improvisation and inappropriate practices that may undermine trust in interpreting services.

Within this framework, this paper aims to critically analyze interpreter protocol in the political sphere based on the experience and perception of the Deaf community. It addresses the main challenges, ethical standards, and required professional profile, with the goal of contributing to the development of standards that strengthen service quality

and promote truly inclusive political participation (see Figure 1).

**ESCENARIOS DE TRABAJO DEL
INTÉRPRETE EN EL ÁMBITO
POLÍTICO-SOCIAL**



Figure 1

Scenarios of the professional interpreter in the political-social sphere.

Note. Image created by the *Mente Abierta* editorial team (2025).

THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT

First, it is important to highlight that the Deaf community constantly observes the interpreter's performance. Their posture, fidelity in the use of sign language, confidence, and clarity in message delivery are all evaluated. In this regard, synchronization and accuracy in interpreting are crucial to avoid distortions in the message (Napier, 2007; Pöchhacker, 2022). The figure presented below summarizes the main working scenarios of interpreters in the political and social

sphere, emphasizing that each of them requires preparation, precision, and neutrality to safeguard the Deaf community's right to information.

An essential aspect in the political sphere is the interpreter's neutrality. Interpreters must not express opinions or show preferences toward any candidate or political party, as their role is to convey the message faithfully and without bias, always respecting professional confidentiality and impartiality (Metzger, 1999; Pöchhacker, 2022) (see Figure 2).



Figure 2

Interpreter stance options in political campaigns: non-support, support, and neutrality.

Note. Image created by the *Mente Abierta* editorial team (2025).

Although individuals may have political preferences in their personal lives, professionalism must prevail during interpreting. The interpreter must not show

affinity toward any candidate, nor abandon their communicative responsibility; the only valid approach is to maintain neutrality in the transmission of the message (Napier et al., 2015).

Nonverbal communication is also crucial. Political interpreting requires precise use of space, as well as facial and bodily expressions, so that the spoken message is conveyed in sign language with its full visual impact. Haualand et al. (2023) emphasize that interpreting is a social institution in which ethics, professionalism, and Deaf culture converge.

It is also established that interpreters must not improvise in the political sphere. Preparation and study are essential. Pöchhacker (2022) warns that political settings are highly sensitive and require specialized training. Accepting an assignment without having the appropriate professional profile only weakens community trust and damages the interpreter's professional image (see Figure 3).



Figure 3

Recommended actions when the interpreter recognizes that they are not yet prepared to work in the political sphere.

Note. Image created by the *Mente Abierta* editorial team (2025)

The practice of interpreting in political contexts requires a high level of professionalism, ethics, and social commitment, particularly when ensuring the Deaf community's access to public information. The following section presents the main aspects that define this role, organized into key categories ranging from the most relevant challenges and codes of conduct to the required professional profile, the relationship with the Deaf community, and international references.

This set of elements helps to understand the importance of a practice grounded in neutrality, confidentiality, and

responsibility—fundamental pillars for effective and respectful interpreting.

Table 1

Summary of the main aspects of interpreter protocol in the political sphere from the perspective of the Deaf community

Category	Key Aspects	Observations / Implications
Main Challenges	- Constant observation by the Deaf community - Confidence and self-assurance - Avoiding unnecessary pauses - Professional confidentiality - Absolute neutrality	The community demands precision, confidence, and consistent professionalism.
Code of Conduct	- Fidelity in message transmission - Avoiding post-event contact with politicians - Appropriate body language - Professional attire - Immediate withdrawal after interpreting	Maintaining ethical and professional boundaries during and after interpreting. Interpreters should not appear as the protagonists of the event.
Professional Profile	- Advanced command of Ecuadorian Sign Language (LSEC) and political terminology - Continuous training and ethical awareness - Building trust within the community - Not prioritizing financial interests	Interpreters in the political sphere must be highly trained and aware of their social responsibility.
Relationship with the Deaf Community	- Social oversight and formal complaints - Direct contact with the community - Rejection of poor performance	The Deaf community regulates service quality and supports trustworthy interpreters.
International Examples	- U.S. presidential debate (Trump and opponent) with neutral and reliable interpreters	Ecuador should move toward international standards of professionalization.
Audience Questions	- Dark clothing without accessories - Neutrality in hiring processes - Consequences of lack of neutrality - Rigor in selection processes	The protocol also includes aspects related to image, ethics, and hiring practices.
Conclusions	- Neutrality, ethics, and solid preparation - Essential community oversight - Professional awareness - Guaranteeing political access for the Deaf community	The political interpreter is a communication bridge, not a political actor.

Furthermore, it is essential that the interpreter withdraws immediately after completing their role, without seeking additional visibility. They must not take photographs with political figures or share their work on personal social media, as this compromises neutrality. Nor should they exchange direct contact information; the connection must be established between the Deaf individual and the institutions, not through the interpreter.

Likewise, interpreters must maintain strict confidentiality at all times regarding any information accessed during their intervention, avoiding any misuse or disclosure. They must also act with absolute impartiality, refraining from influencing or expressing personal opinions that could alter the original message (see Figure 3).



Figure 3

Recommended actions when interpreters recognize they are not yet prepared for the political sphere.

Note. Image created by the *Mente Abierta* editorial team (2025).

The Deaf community actively participates in evaluating interpreters' performance through observation, feedback, and, when necessary, the submission of formal complaints. This involvement contributes to improving service quality and strengthening trust in professional practice (Baquero, 2025).

In this context, the interpreter's ethical and competent performance is essential, as trust, once compromised, is difficult to restore.

CONCLUSIONS

Interpreting in the political sphere requires a rigorous protocol. Interpreters must act with neutrality, professional confidentiality, continuous preparation, and an ethical profile that inspires trust within the Deaf community. Community observation and social oversight are mechanisms that strengthen service quality and prevent improvisation. International examples demonstrate that it is possible to move toward a fully professionalized model. In this context, the interpreter is not a political actor, but a

bridge that ensures equitable access to information.

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