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Examining Mentorship in the Field of Sign Language Interpreting: An Application of Relational Dialectics Theory

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**Examining Mentorship in the Field of Sign Language Interpreting: An Application of
Relational Dialectics Theory**

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in partial fulfillment of the

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Abstract

Using relational dialectics theory, this study examined mentoring approaches and dialectical tensions that occur in mentoring relationships in the field of sign language interpreting. The traditional function of a mentor is to provide guidance or support to someone who has less experience than themselves. This study focuses on a deeper understanding of the dynamics of mentoring relationships in the field of sign language interpreting. Using a qualitative approach, I conducted semi-structured interviews with sign language interpreters who have been in the role of mentor and mentee. The results, based on interviews with mentors and mentees, show that mentors and mentees prefer the friendship, nurturing, and apprenticeship model of mentorship. This study identified four tensions that impact mentoring relationships within the field of sign language interpreting: structure vs. flexibility, personal vs. professional, openness-to vs. closedness-to, and openness-with vs. closedness-with. Additionally, mentors and mentees noted that trust, commitment, and openness were key to the mentoring relationships. Results from this study support the notion that dialectical tensions and mismatch of mentoring style can have a negative impact on the mentorship and at times lead to termination of the relationship.

Keywords: mentoring, sign language interpreting, relational dialectics, conflict

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Examining Mentorship in the Field of Sign Language Interpreting: An Application of Relational Dialectics Theory

The practice of mentoring has been researched extensively as every profession employs some form of a mentorship program. The traditional function of a mentor is to provide guidance or support to someone who has less experience than themselves (Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007). The core aspects of a mentoring relationship are reciprocity, developmental benefits, and regular/consistent interaction over a period of time (Haggard et al., 2010). Over the years, mentoring research has been conducted concerning numerous occupations such as nurses, physicians, journalists, and more (Haggard et al., 2010). Mentoring relationships can be formal or informal. The difference in formality depends on how the relationships are initiated and the length of time spent meeting with each other and developing the relationship (Wanberg et al., 2006). Some characteristics of mentoring relationships as identified by mentees are the ability for development in career planning and creating a close connection with a faculty member (Dimitriadis et al., 2012). Some of the potential benefits that a mentor may experience include personal satisfaction, improved job performance, organizational recognition, and loyalty from the mentee (Allen et al., 1997; Kram, 1985; Levinson et al., 1987).

While research has shown that there are benefits to mentoring relationships, there are also potential adverse outcomes from engaging in a mentorship. Possible negative effects include jealousy of the mentee, embarrassment if the mentee does not perform well, feeling backstabbed by the mentee, and generating feelings of disloyalty and the time demands of the relationship (Allen, Burroughs, & Poteet, 1997). Status hierarchy created by educational differences creates a supervisor-subordinate dynamic (Apker, Ford, & Propp, 2005). There is an assumption in a

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mentoring relationship that the mentor offers professional guidance to a mentee with less professional experience than themselves (Kram, 1985; Paradise, 2013).

It is important that negative perceptions of mentoring experiences are examined and that these relational issues are understood (Haggard et al., 2010). One prevalent negative perception that particularly impacts mentees is that mentors possess power, and this power differential may create stress for the mentee with whom they are working (Kalbfleisch, 1997). Often mentees in professional or educational environments will perceive their mentor's power as being tied to their future success in their field. Conflicts, misunderstandings, disagreements, and disappointment are all perceived by the mentee as threats to their success, and they will work to maintain their relationship by appeasing the mentor. Kalbfleisch (1997) found that mentees who experienced negativity, embarrassment, and disagreement from their mentor tended to engage in provocative/distancing strategies.

The process of interpreting is dynamic and complex; interpreters must make quick decisions regarding their interpretation based on the context of the interaction they are interpreting (Turner, 2005). The field of sign language interpreting is viewed as a practice profession due to the various situations and human interactions that sign language interpreters experience and how those factors impact their work (Dean & Pollard, 2005; Dean & Pollard, 2001; Gish, 1987; Humphrey & Alcorn, 1995; Metzger, 1999; Roy, 2000a; Wadensjo, 1998). Thus, interpreters need technical knowledge required for the field, such as knowledge of the source and target languages, the code of ethics, and Deaf culture as well as the ability to use their judgement to determine how to approach each interpreting situation they are faced with (Dean & Pollard, 2005). Due to the complex nature of the work, mentoring is used as a way to bridge the

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gap between graduation and entering the field (Frishberg, 1994; Gunter & Hull, 1995; NCIEC, 2009; Paradise, 2013; RID, 1996; Winston, 2006).

In more recent years, there have been studies conducted on mentoring in the field of sign language interpreting. New interpreters who enter the field of sign language interpreting struggle to transition from the classroom to the professional interpreting environment (Paradise, 2013). In the interpreting profession, mentoring is often used to bridge this gap and provide support in acquiring professional knowledge and skills. In their standard practice paper on mentoring, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) states that mentoring relationships benefit the interpreting profession as a whole (RID, 2007). This is due to the fact that mentoring creates opportunities that allow for the development of well-rounded professionals and collaboration with community members, both Deaf and non-deaf (RID, 2007). Mentees who experienced differences in beliefs or approaches to the mentoring relationship than their mentor reported conflict and damage to the relationship (Paradise, 2013).

Relational dialectics theory (RDT) is an interpersonal communication theory developed by Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery (1988) that looks at the dynamic interplay of contradictions and how they affect relationships. I used RDT to explore the role that conflicts and tensions play in mentor/mentee relationships in the field of sign language interpreting through a qualitative study. I interviewed sign language interpreters to identify which mentoring model(s) they utilize, and the tensions and conflicts that arise in these relationships.

Literature Review

Mentoring

Mentoring relationships are a unique form of interpersonal and developmental relationships (Haggard et al., 2010). Chao (1997) examined the phases of mentoring

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relationships using Kram's (1985) four stages of mentorship: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. Chao (1997) confirmed that mentees who engage in mentorships experience long-term benefits. Some of the long-term benefits of mentoring that were supported by Chao's research include career planning, career involvement, job satisfaction, and an increase in income.

Several studies have examined the benefits and positive outcomes that result from engaging in a mentorship (Haggard et al., 2010). Dimitriadis et al. (2012) examined mentoring of medical students in mentoring relationships. They found that their mentors reported feeling that they had made an impact on their mentee's career, and that it provided insights and feedback about the development of the medical students. At the same time, the mentees reported wanting a mentor who would serve as a counselor, a gateway to developing their professional network, and act as a source for ideas. These findings emphasize the need for positive mentoring relationships, and the need for an appropriate mentor or an experienced educator supporting the trainee during the first year in the field leads to higher retention rates (Rynda, 2017). Also, mentors and mentees who have a positive view of their mentoring relationship saw benefit in collaborating with other professionals (Rynda, 2017).

While there are many advantages to mentoring, there are also some common issues that mentors and mentees have faced, specifically power differential, communication, and stress experienced by both parties (Haggard et al., 2019). Young and Perrerrwé (2000) identified these perceptual outcomes and hypothesized that the perceptions of the mentoring relationship would indicate relationship effectiveness and trust. They found that when the expectations of the mentor and mentees were not met, then the mentoring relationship was not perceived as effective. Kalbfleisch (2002) found that there is a power differential between the mentor and the mentee, and that it has the potential to influence the communication between them. This is due to the fact

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that mentors and mentees are taking part in a human relationship, and people experience complex emotions that are present in the relationship. Over the course of the mentoring relationship, there will inevitably be conflicts or disagreements between the mentor and mentee due to the complex nature of human relationships.

The mentee is not the only one who can experience negative emotions from conflicts or tensions that arise in mentoring relationships. The power/knowledge balance breaks down as the mentoring relationship declines due to psychosocial dysfunction in mentors (Beech & Brockbank, 1999). Examples of psychosocial dysfunction experienced by mentors include stress, defensive reactions, guilt, and anxiety. These feelings are due to mentors perceiving the relationship to be 'unfinished' and needing further resolution. By studying communication at the start and throughout the mentoring relationship, we can gain a better understanding of communication and human behavior in the mentors and mentees (Kalbfleisch, 2002).

Mentoring in the field of Sign Language Interpreting

There have been few publications and studies completed on mentoring in the field of sign language interpreting. Important qualities for a sign language interpreter mentor include technical skill competencies and knowledge in specific content areas, knowledge of interpretation models and processes, linguistics of English and American Sign Language, and a passion for interpreting (Macias, 2006). The benefits of mentoring include building relationships, increasing the interpreter's network and broadening their understanding of what a mentorship could be (Bolduc, 2012).

Despite the positive aspects of mentoring relationships in sign language interpreting, there is a lack of screening and training provided to mentors and mentees (Macias, 2006). Specifically, there is little to no training provided for students about the mentorship process

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(Paradise, 2013). Paradise (2013) found that students claim that it is important that the mentor is willing to teach and learn, be supportive, and be open-minded. Paradise (2013) noted that in the context of her study, teaching and learning refers to the ability of the mentor and mentee to both learn from each other and benefit from the exchange of information. In addition, a supportive mentor was one that students felt comfortable sharing their experiences with and someone that would ask questions and engage with them after a bad day. Furthermore, it was noted that it is important that the mentor is open, meaning that they openly communicate with the mentee and that the mentee does not feel judgment from the mentor. Students want to feel that they can trust their mentor and share what they need to with them. The professional demeanor of the mentor was also identified as crucial for the success of the mentorship. Mentees felt it was important for them to get to know their mentor on a personal level to develop trust in the relationship; however, it is not uncommon for mentors and mentees to have different expectations for the relationship, but if their expectations do not align, conflict and tension can arise (Paradise, 2013).

These studies outline how mentoring has been researched and how a deeper understanding of the dynamics of mentoring relationships can be applied to sign language interpreters. Using previous studies as background, this study examines the impact of power differential on mentoring relationships using RDT as a lens to understand what tensions arise and what strategies are employed when contradictions occur in these relationships.

Mentoring Models

Mentoring relationships can take many forms, and organizational priorities can structure some, while others are influenced by the preferences of the individuals participating in the mentorship. Buell (2004) identified four mentoring models as part of her work to understand communicative practices in mentoring relationships. The mentoring model framework that will

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be used for this study was developed by Buell (2004). Her research aimed to understand the communicative practices that are used in mentoring. Buell (2004) conducted a three-part research design with an open-ended questionnaire and two types of focus groups. From her analysis of data collected from Phase 1 and 2 of the study, Buell identified and named three mentoring models: cloning, nurturing, and friendship. When Buell analyzed the data from Phase 3 of her research study, she noted a fourth model: apprenticeship.

Buell (2004) defines the cloning model of mentoring as a relationship in which the mentor aims to control a mentee in order to create a clone or duplicate of themselves. Therefore, in this model, the mentee does not have autonomy within the relationship and the process is led and dictated by the mentor. Mentors who utilize the cloning model are described as arrogant and overly demanding of their mentees. The nurturing model is where the mentor assumes the role of a parent figure and seeks to create an open and safe environment for the mentee so that they can become independent in the future. A mentor who is nurturing is empathetic, guiding, supportive, and encouraging. The friendship model is a collaborative style of mentorship where the mentor and the mentee see themselves as peers rather than the mentor being seen as one with more power than the mentee. A mentor who employs the friendship model attempts to establish an interpersonal bond and the relationship is co-constructed by the mentor and mentee. In the apprenticeship model, the mentor is relatively distant and does not attempt to create a personal or social connection with their mentee, and is solely focused on developing a professional relationship. It is important to note that most mentoring relationships will be a hybrid of more than one of these models in practice, and the aspects of the models that are applied depend on the mentor and mentee that are constructing the relationship. In my analysis, I use Buell's

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framework to determine which mentoring models are preferred by mentors and mentees in the field of sign language interpreting.

Relational Dialectics Theory

Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) is a dialectical theory that was developed by Baxter and Montgomery to examine contradictions and tensions that arise within interpersonal relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Dialectical theorists make the assumption that contradiction is inherent to personal relationships and that it is merely a driver of change and does not hold a negative connotation (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Rather, contradiction aims to understand the unified opposites as they relate to the dynamic interplay or interaction between the individuals involved in a relationship (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007). Dynamic interplay refers to the tensions between unified opposites and drives change in social systems and personal relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

The three core concepts of dialectics and contradiction are change, praxis, and totality (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Change is inherent to relationships because of the dynamic interplay or tensions between unified opposites. Praxis in relational dialectics refers to the communicative choices that individuals in a relationship make based on the prior interactions or events that they have engaged in. As defined by dialectics, totality refers to the relations or interdependencies and helps us understand “where contradictions are located, interdependencies among contradictions, and contextualization of contradictory interplay” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, pg. 15).

The three primary contradictions seen in relationships are integration-separation, expression-non expression, and stability-change. The integration-separation tension exists in relationships when individuals want to either integrate or separate from the relationship.

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Expression-nonexpression tension relates to the openness and closedness of the individuals in a relationship. The stability-change tension relates to predictability or consistency and spontaneity or newness. Sign language interpreting is a complex task that puts multiple demands on the interpreter; the presence of interpersonal demands can distract from the task and can trigger feelings of rejection or judgment (Dean & Pollard, 2011).

Application of Relational Dialectics Theory

A common application and outcome of research that utilizes RDT is identifying common conflicts and dialectical tensions that occur in interpersonal relationships. Individuals engaging in mentoring relationships must understand and appreciate relational dialectic tensions because they are inherent to the mentoring relationship (Johnson et al., 2018). While these tensions are not personally motivated by either mentee or mentor (Kosempel, 2008), Johnson et al. (2018) identified integration-separation, stability-change, and expression-non expression as forms of tension.

This study is the first to apply RDT and communication dynamics in mentoring relationships to the field of sign language interpreting. It has, however, been applied to the dynamics of mentoring relationships in education. Kosempel (2008) identified eight dialectical tensions in mentoring relationships and five management strategies in their study. The eight dialectical tensions include: integration vs. separation, stability vs. change, expression vs. nonexpression, openness-with vs. closedness-with, openness-to vs. closedness-to, equality vs. hierarchy, individual goals vs. organizational goals, personal vs. professional, and structure vs. flexibility. The five management strategies included spiraling inversion, segmentation, reaffirmation, balance, and denial. In the field of sign language interpreting, Tucker (2015) examined relational dialectics experienced by university sign language interpreters and Deaf

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consumers. Through her study, she found that the two main relational dialectics at play are openness vs. closeness and freedom to be dependent vs. freedom to be independent.

This study will contribute to the literature by applying RDT to mentoring relationships in the field of sign language interpreting. It is the first to apply RDT to mentorships in sign language interpreting. The findings from this study also contributed to scholarship on RDT, which has traditionally focused on medical and education-based mentoring. Sign language interpreting is a practice profession and often, most of the knowledge and professional insights that interpreters can glean come from their experiences on the job (Dean & Pollard, 2011). Several factors that could impact a sign language interpreter's ability to interpret include a lack of content knowledge, paralinguistic challenges, intrapersonal issues, and interpersonal issues (Dean & Pollard, 2011). One approach to mitigate interpersonal and intrapersonal issues and gaps in experience is to attend supervision meetings with other professionals to reflect on choices and interactions that have occurred while on the job (Dean & Pollard, 2011). Applying relational dialectics to mentoring relationships in the field of sign language interpreting will provide new insights about which contradictions are present in these relationships and what strategies participants in these relationships are utilizing.

Research Questions

Current research of mentoring in sign language interpreting and research in relational dialectics shows a need to study mentoring from the perspective of relational dialectics. By applying relational dialectics to mentor relationships in sign language interpreting, the field will gain a deeper understanding of the roles of the mentor and mentee and how to have a more effective relationship. Relational dialectics specifically looks at tensions or contradictions that create strain or stress on relationships. Since there is no standard approach to mentoring in the

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field of sign language interpreting, this study will add to the literature and broaden the field's understanding of important aspects of mentorships and how to improve mentor/mentee relationships. The following research questions will be explored in this study:

RQ1: What mentoring model is preferred by the mentor/mentee?

RQ2: Which dialectical tensions impact mentor/mentee relationships?

RQ3: What are the characteristics of an effective mentoring relationship in the field of sign language interpreting?

Methodology

This study used semi-structured interviews to obtain a narrative explanation of mentoring relationships dynamics through the lens of relational dialectics theory. I used a framework that was developed by Buell (2004) to identify which mentoring models or combination of mentoring models were being used in mentorships. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for studying relational dialectics because of the theory's foundation in examining contradictions and tensions that occur within interpersonal relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Interviews are an effective method for analyzing interpersonal relationship dynamics because they investigate participants' experiences, beliefs, and attitudes about a particular topic (Hale & Napier, 2018). Another strength of interviews as a methodology is the ability to gain and understand contextual information about each participant (Babbie, 2014). A limitation of interviews is that they do not allow for the ability to draw statistical conclusions about mentors and mentees (Babbie, 2014). It is important to note that I am a full-time staff interpreter at the Rochester Institute of Technology. I acknowledge the personal nature of the research and understand that my personal experiences may affect the interpretations of the responses. However, this familiarity can also benefit the study since I am already acquainted with the

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participants and may help participants feel that they can be more candid during the interviews (Tucker, 2015).

Before starting the interview process, I applied for IRB approval and was granted permission by the board to conduct my study. I used an interview protocol for mentors (see Appendix A) and another interview protocol for mentees (see Appendix B) to guide the interview and asked probing questions when necessary. Probing questions were asked when I wanted to clarify responses given by participants or ask them to expand on aspects of their responses. Interviews were conducted individually with each participant, both mentors, and mentees, to maintain confidentiality. Furthermore, interviewing participants individually allows participants to freely and openly discuss their experiences without fear of retribution or judgment from other participants.

Participants

Participants were recruited by emails that were distributed by one of the directors of the Apprenticeship program at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). All of the individuals who were contacted had participated in the Apprenticeship program as either mentor or mentee in the Department of Access Services (DAS) at RIT. One of the colleges under RIT is the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), and they employ over 100 staff sign language interpreters, as well as student and apprentice interpreters. The participants were self-selected by responding to the email invitation and volunteered to partake in a 30-60 minute interview with the researcher. The participants were contacted and interviewed over a three-month period, from March 2021 to June 2021. There were a total of 11 mentees and nine mentors that responded to the email and participated in the interviews. Participants were not compensated for their participation in this study. To protect the individuals who agreed to participate in the semi-

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structured interviews for this study, I have assigned them all a pseudonym. Twenty sign language interpreters participated in my study, nine of the participants were mentors (see Appendix C), and eleven were mentees (see Appendix D).

Data Analysis

During the interviews, participants were asked questions about their background, preferred approach(es) to mentoring, and previous mentorship experiences. The interview transcripts were first analyzed using open coding, and themes were identified from the initial coding process. Open coding consists of closely examining the collected data to identify categories and concepts brought up by participants during the interview process (Babbie, 2014). I read through each transcript carefully to identify the categories and concepts present in the data that I had collected, and sorted them in an Excel spreadsheet. After completing the open coding process, I reviewed the data again using a thematic approach. Thematic analysis is done to identify, organize, and report patterns of themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used both theoretical thematic analysis and inductive thematic analysis. Theoretical thematic analysis, also known as a deductive approach, is utilized when the researcher has preconceived themes or existing knowledge about what they are researching (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Buell's (2004) four mentoring models were used to guide the coding of data relating to mentoring style. Inductive thematic analysis is when the data is used to identify themes and categories, there is no preconceived theme or idea that the researcher is seeking out (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additional data collected from the interviews were analyzed using an inductive approach, and the categories (dialectical tensions) emerged from the analysis. It was noted that the dialectical tensions noted in this study aligned with some of the tensions that were found in Kosempel's 2008 study. While the dialectical tensions that were found aligned with dialectical tensions that Kosempel had

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found in their 2008 study, these themes emerged organically from the inductive analysis. The most relevant and compelling quotes were selected to contextualize the findings. In the next section, I present the findings by research questions.

Results

This study sought to shed light on approaches to mentoring in the field of sign language interpreting as well as the conflicts and tensions in the mentor-mentee relationship. It is important to note that it is common for mentees to work with several mentors during their first few years in the field. This allows them to gain a variety of perspectives and glean various skills from their multiple mentors.

RQ 1: What mentoring model is preferred by the mentor/mentee?

The first question was related to mentoring models and asked mentors and mentees to explain which approach they preferred. While the research question was open-ended, the data collected were coded using Buell's (2004) four proposed mentoring models. My analysis identified examples of the friendship, nurturing, and apprenticeship models.

Friendship Model

As previously discussed, Buell (2004) defines the friendship model as a mentorship that is collaborative, co-constructed, and reciprocal. Typically, participants who use this model do not think of the mentorship as a professional relationship; rather they see it as a friendship (Buell, 2004). Several mentors noted that the friendship model helped to build trust and comfort with their respective mentees. Additionally, these mentors reflected on their experiences as mentees themselves and said that they had not felt they were equals with their past mentors. They understood the value in collaborating with their mentee to co-construct the mentorship. Mentees felt safe in relationships where they felt that they were seen as equal to their mentor and able to

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let their guard down. Furthermore, both mentors and mentees mentioned that a successful mentorship results in the mentor and mentee remaining friends even after the formal mentorship has ended. Specific comments from interpreters who engage in the friendship model are included in Table 1.

Table 1: *Interpreters Who Engage in the Friendship Model*

Participant	Response
Mentor 1	“The relationships where you can sit down and talk about stuff like equals. Those are the great relationships because that builds trust and builds comfort.”
Mentor 2	“I'm pretty good about treating them as peers. I think that's really important. That's something that I did not feel as an apprentice when I had mentors.”
Mentor 9	“Knowing that you have the other person to connect with, ask questions of, to grab coffee with, or to work together again. I think that really is what mentoring, what successful mentoring looks like is like the long term impacts on each other”
Mentee 1	“Having that ability to relax and not feel so professional about it was really great. But also just feeling like at some point during the time it felt like just two colleagues.”
Mentee 4	“I'm one of those that once I establish that kind of relationship I kind of keep that forever. Just, especially in the nature of this feels like when we're teaming or when we're going and talking about things like. I have these four amazing interpreters, I can go to that I can talk about four different things”
Mentee 10	“My first two [mentors] I'm friends with them now, and like I really did like working together. From the beginning [they] really helped me shape who I am now, so I think one aspect would definitely be friendship”
Mentee 11	"My actual first mentor and I, we kind of hit it off right away. Just like over coffee, not even anything interpreting related, and we were really friendly before we realized we had a lot of things in common. So, when it came to giving feedback about interpreting, it was really easy because we got along so well. It was kind of just like two friends talking, and I was able to ask a lot of questions and get a lot of feedback."

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Nurturing Model

The nurturing model is a mentoring style where the mentor creates a safe and open environment where the mentor and mentee can both learn from each other (Buell, 2004). In this model, the mentor will function as a parental figure who guides and encourages with the hope that the mentee will become independent from the mentor at the conclusion of the mentorship (Buell, 2004). Respondents who discussed tough love, encouragement, and guidance allude to the nurturing model, which draws on parent-child-type roles and interactions. Table 2 highlights some quotes from the participants reflecting the characteristics of the nurturing model.

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Table 2: *Interpreters Who Engage in the Nurturing Model*

Participant	Response
Mentor 1	<p>“I try to be as supportive as possible and I’m also the kind of person who is going to tell you that something needs to be improved. So, there's like the tough love aspect of it. But it's like tough love with support.”</p> <p>“I will hold you accountable to working on it, to try and encourage you to grow, a whole life mentor. I’m not going to just focus on interpreting, I also want to talk about what else is going on in my mentee’s life, because that is going to impact their work, and learning how to manage that intersection of personal life and work life is really important for interpreters.”</p>
Mentor 2	<p>“I encourage them and connect them to observe different things if they were being a little bit more reserved in that way. Especially, if the person is not as outgoing and assertive, I will try to kind of pull them into that a little bit more because they're not going to be out there, looking for the opportunities that I know will benefit them. My goal is always to help them achieve whatever they want to do after (the mentoring relationship).”</p>
Mentor 5	<p>“I like to try to give as much positive feedback about literally anything as possible, because it is really. I know like being on the receiving end, it is really nice getting compliments. Like in the moment about your work, because I think it's really good for your self-esteem, especially if you are feeling like you're kind of sinking...it isn't like, you're doing a great job, but like very specific, these are the things that you are doing really well with.”</p>
Mentee 2	<p>“I would hope that my mentor would make a space for me to feel that I can share to feel that it's a safe space; that I can talk about hard things, I can talk about ethical scenarios or talk about something I did where maybe I’m not sure that was the right decision, but it's a safe space where I won't feel judged.”</p>
Mentee 3	<p>“First and foremost, be a support and a guide. Somebody who I could go to with questions and when I was feeling overwhelmed or lost about something either professionally or personally. Somebody who I could talk it through with and just get their advice and their perspective.”</p>

Apprenticeship Model

According to Buell (2004), the apprenticeship model is a combination of the cloning model and the nurturing model. These types of relationships are pragmatic and the mentor is

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more “hands-off.” There isn’t an emphasis on personal or social exchange, and the mentor is not as invested as they are in other models (Buell, 2004). From the responses, it is clear that this model is successful for mentees who take initiative and have clear goals. While Mentor 2 has employed strategies from other models, they present the apprenticeship model as a possible avenue depending on the specific mentee. Mentor 5 and Mentor 6 discuss the importance of focusing on the needs of the mentee and asking them to drive the discussion during their one-on-one supervision meetings. It is clear from the responses below that the apprenticeship model is mentee-driven.

Mentee 2 felt that it was empowering to be able to take the reins and drive the conversations with their mentor. Additionally, Mentee 9 valued having a mentor that was able to refer them to other interpreters when they themselves did not have the answers to the mentee’s questions. Table 3 highlights some quotes from the participants reflecting the characteristics of the apprenticeship model.

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Table 3: *Interpreters Who Engage in the Apprenticeship Model*

Participant	Response
Mentor 2	"I have a ton of resources that I've collected over the years. I can come up with structured activities and things like that, but only if they want."
Mentor 5	"I will be there for whatever they need. I don't like to come in with a mentoring relationship with my own agenda because I actually did my undergraduate issues paper about how to be a good mentee and that I understand that the mentoring relationship it's not about me, it's about my mentee and whatever they need."
Mentor 6	<p>"I like to not take the lead, so I'm there as a support of an advocate and whatever role is needed, but I'm not the type to teach during the mentor relationship. If there are moments of learning that's great and expected, but I'm not sending mentees home with homework to complete over the week. It's more of, I am here and we will make this whatever you need it to be."</p> <p>"I don't come with a formal agenda. I asked them to come with some sort of agenda talking points; at least I know it's hard to know what you don't know so I'm willing to take it from there, but I don't run the show."</p>
Mentee 2	"One mentor did a tremendous job at asking me what I had wanted out of the mentorship and really every time we met they were very intentional to ask what do you want to do today and respected that every day is different. Sometimes you know, I would just need to vent about an assignment and sometimes, I'd really want to dig into a recording and analyze my work. So, I think that intention that they had set to really focus on letting kind of me take the wheel and let the mentorship be what I had wanted out of it was a huge part of why it was successful."
Mentee 9	"Don't tell me what to do in my in everything else that I'm doing in my life, like, I asked for help, I hope that you can help me a give me support and if it's something that you can't super help on, refer me to someone who can, or refer me somewhere else that could help."

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RQ 2: Which dialectical tensions impact mentor/mentee relationships?

Research question two was aimed at identifying which dialectical tensions impact mentor/mentee relationships and the perceived effectiveness of the relationship. Four dialectical tensions emerged from my analysis: structure vs. flexibility, personal vs. professional, openness-to vs. closedness-to, and openness-with vs. closedness-with.

Dialectical tension one: structure vs. flexibility

One frequent dialectical tension that was identified in the interview data was structure vs. flexibility. This dialectic comes from Kosempel's (2008) work on mentoring dynamics. Structure refers to the expectations that are set by the mentoring program that the individuals are participating in. Some examples of structure include meeting at scheduled times, discussing goals, engaging in deliberate practice, and ensuring the program requirements have been met. Flexibility refers to mentors and mentees using their own approach to accommodate their needs. A tension exists when one person is attempting to follow the structure while the other is not.

Mentor 1, who has mentored six interpreters, described one situation where they chose specific activities for one of their mentees with the goal of improving their skills. When the mentee was not willing to participate, Mentor 1 became frustrated:

They really just didn't feel like they really needed to get better, they didn't really feel like they needed feedback, they were like yeah, I'm good I'm fine. I'm sitting there like no, you are not fine like you're doing okay, but you're not you're not good, you're not done. When the appointed time came, and this person came back to the meeting, I sat down and I said "Okay, did you work on the stuff that we talked about?" And they said "Well, no, because I got home and they didn't feel like it."

Similarly, Mentee 1, who has had seven mentors, described an instance where their mentor attempted to provide structure for their meetings and when the mentee requested a

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different approach, the mentor was not receptive to having a conversation about changing their approach said:

“These are great so could we work with this together, because having it on paper just won’t work for me,” and that was the moment that wasn’t expected. And what I was met with was “I put in work to do this for you and you’re not appreciating what I put in for you, so no I don’t want to workshop this with you,” and I was taken aback, I didn’t know what to do.

The struggle of following the structure of the mentor meetings and working towards the mentee’s goal is not unique. Both mentors and mentees have a desire to follow structure, but also desire to have the flexibility to attend to issues that may come up and need to be addressed.

Mentor 2 who has mentored five interpreters noted that:

Everyone reaches a point where they’re just done. Either with the semester or with their assignments, or with the effort that they’ve been trying to put in. They’re burnt out. Whatever it may be, or they’re just ready for whatever’s next and they’re not focusing on the present.

Mentor 5, who has been working as an interpreter for eight years, appreciated flexibility in their mentorships and thought that it led to a more natural learning experience:

You can choose when you meet. You can choose what assignments here there's no set, you have to do this, and there's no checklist for them. So, I feel more comfortable mentoring apprentices just because I want that natural relationship and learning and experience to happen. And I think that what helps them learn more is like I'm going into it, not knowing anything pretty much and then going from there, like from a clean slate.

Additionally, Mentor 5 also discussed how too much structure had a negative effect on the mentorship:

They have like a packet of stuff they have to do and I don't personally don't enjoy mentoring students as much now just because I think their requirements for the student interpreting and students in general doesn't allow for natural mentoring for natural learning to happen either just because it's a checklist.

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Mentee 2, who has had three mentors, described how too much flexibility and lack of structure is not desired either:

They [the mentor] keep talking and there's an interesting dynamic right of like being the mentee and then being the mentor um, you don't really feel like you can interrupt them and be like can we talk about something related to my work? Because I would find like a lot of venting happening that wasn't I didn't really feel it wasn't appropriate space and I wasn't quite sure why it was coming out so me being just my personality type you know I want to listen and so I'll be there for them, but kind of in the back of my mind I'm like oh like I feel cornered and I feel like my time isn't being respected. The goals that we had set like aren't really being accomplished.

These examples clearly show that interpreters do experience the structure vs. flexibility dialectic and use strategies to manage the tension. In addition, it is important to note that this dialectic tension is not always the mentor's structure vs. the mentee's flexibility and that the expected structure of the mentorship can come from either side.

Dialectical tension two: personal vs. professional

The second dialectical tension identified from the interviews was personal relationship vs. professional relationship (Kosempel, 2008). This dialectic focuses on the tension between an informal, friendship-like relationship and formal relationship working as colleagues (Kosempel, 2008). Mentors and mentees described the personal tension as the desire to share personal information about themselves or share information that was not directly related to work tasks. The professional tension was evident when mentors and mentees felt the need to stay on task and maintain a professional relationship.

Mentor 2, who has a Master's degree and has been working for seven and a half years, talked about providing the opportunity for their mentees to discuss their personal lives, this may not be a comfortable situation for some mentees:

I think that helps a little bit to build the relationship to be like, "hey I'm vulnerable too" or "you know this thing is going on in my personal life, so this is what I'm bringing to

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work today.” And I don't expect the other person to do the same, but it's nice if they do, because then I can understand what they're bringing and maybe you know, especially if someone's a student they have so much going on.

Mentor 1, who has a Master's degree and has been working for seven years, also discussed the necessity of sharing some personal information to establish connections:

Yeah, keeping a fully professional face on things I don't think works in our field, the whole thing is built on relationships and connection, so you gotta share some stuff otherwise it feels really artificial.

Mentor 4, who has a Master's degree and has been working for ten years, felt that they experienced a desire to develop a friendship with their mentees, but also wanted to provide constructive criticism and was not sure how to balance the two:

I have a hard time being like well they're not going to like me now and that's like not the point of that relationship so there's the danger of being friends and I think that that could be a reason to be careful about boundaries, but on the same token it's like, I that's how I build trust with people.

Mentee 10, who has their bachelor's degree and has worked with four mentors, felt the need to discuss their personal life with their mentor because they felt like it was having an impact on their work and later regretted it:

In my personal life, pivotal things happened and I felt like it was affecting my work, so I had to talk about it to kind of explain why it was affecting my work. So absolutely yeah, I had to be personal. I think I was a little too personal with them [one of my mentors], because I think that that was maybe one of the reasons why my relationship changed. But at the time, I mean you live and you learn, at the time I was going through such a hard time that I didn't know what else to do so, I trusted them and maybe I shouldn't have.

Mentee 11, who has been working for one and half years and worked with three mentors, said that the personal discussions took over their mentoring meetings and they learned from that experience to set a boundary with their mentor earlier in the relationship:

The friendship kind of took over, with my first one [mentor], and we weren't always getting to what was supposed to be done. We were kind of rushing through that part to be able to catch up. After my first one [mentor], there were a lot more boundaries that I

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personally had to set and just make sure that I'm asking for what I need and then taking the time to make sure it's done before we can talk and you know catch up and stuff.

These results established the personal vs professional dialectical tension in the mentoring relationships of the study participants.

Dialectical tension three: openness-to vs. closedness-to

The third dialectical tension noted in this study was *openness-to* vs. *closedness-to* (Kosempel, 2008). Kosempel (2008) defines *openness-to* as individuals who are receptive and open to receiving communication. Whereas, *closedness-to* refers to individuals who are not interested in receiving information. If the mentor and mentee are on opposite ends of the spectrum, this can cause discomfort and lead to communication breakdowns.

Mentor 7, who has been employed as an interpreter for six years, discussed desiring their mentee to have *openness-to* the tension, but also wanting to respect their mentees preference to be *closedness-to*:

They wanted to cancel meetings, or sometimes after assignments they didn't really have much to say and that's a really rich assignment and now, I have to figure out how to have this conversation. But also realizing that today is just not the time or the day and that's okay. I'll note it, and we can talk about it later. Or we can just not talk about it.

Mentor 4 discussed the tension they experience when they need to confront their mentee with necessary feedback. They recount feeling uncomfortable with confronting their mentee:

One of the people that I mentored and they were struggling in a situation in an assignment, and I don't think they were quite realizing it. I have a hard time with confrontation, so then having to like have a confrontation, or have a chat about that and being like, do you understand why this didn't go well?

Mentee 6, who has worked with six mentors and worked for three years, talked about the importance having their openness be reciprocated by their mentor:

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Having somebody that I can be open with and that are open with me as well, I guess, like a two-way street.

Mentee 9, who has a Master's degree and has worked with three mentors, discussed their disappointment with their mentor who demonstrated closedness and not willing to engage in conversation with them:

It's someone that you're trusting and you're willing to be vulnerable and talk about those things... like a personal thing or an interpreting thing or like this, I made this mistake in class today, and it was really embarrassing, can I talk to you about it? And just getting nothing back is like really disheartening.

Mentee 8, who has worked with four mentors and has been employed as an interpreter for three years, expressed a similar sentiment:

One mentor didn't care about me at all, I would bring stuff [to discuss] and she was just like, no like I don't want to talk about that. Like she didn't have an answer and I would be like, okay...in the beginning, when we had sat down, I brought like a little list of like here's what I'm looking to get out of my mentoring relationship. Here are some things that I know that I'm weak in that I would like to grow in, and here's some strengths of mine. I brought that to her and she was like I don't really care.

Mentee 8 made efforts to engage with their mentor and was disappointed to find that their mentor was not open to having discussions with them. The lack of communication from their mentor led to Mentee 8 feeling unsupported and start doubting themselves:

I was trying to ask questions to figure out what their goal was. At the time, I didn't know. Maybe she doesn't like me, maybe I'm doing something wrong. It triggered like all these questions and doubting of what am I doing wrong that's why this relationship is not working. And I got more and more like, I'm not going to share anything. I'm really struggling, but I can't show that I'm struggling. I don't know how to ask questions of you, I don't know how to address things that aren't working. About like the third or fourth week, I was like, hey is there a better structure that you would like to do for our meetings? I was like I can bring questions that I have or, if you want to do something else? I'm just grasping at straws; I don't know what to do.

The *openness-to* and *closedness-to* dialectical tension was present in the interview data.

There were several examples of mentees who described mentors exhibiting *closedness-to*

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providing feedback and engaging with them. This caused mentees to feel uncomfortable and ultimately feel that the mentorship was lacking. Additionally, there were mentees who evidenced *closedness-to* their mentors providing feedback and having discussions about the work. This caused mentors to feel unsure about whether or not they should make the effort to provide the feedback at all.

Dialectical tension four: openness-with vs. closedness-with

The fourth dialectical tension also is a type of expression and nonexpression tensions, *openness-with* vs. *closedness-with* (Kosempel, 2008). *Openness-with* includes sharing personal information, asking questions, and discussing personal history. *Closedness-with* occurs when the mentor or mentee states that they would rather not share information or declares specific topics off-limits for conversation. Mentors and mentees struggled to determine how much information they wanted to share with each other.

Mentor 6, who has a Master's degree and nine years of experience, explained that their relationship with the mentee prior to the onset of the mentorship determines how much personal information they will share:

For the mentees that I've worked with previously, and then we go into a formal relationship often we already have information about each other's personal lives and we'll continue talking about things that are in an area that we share in common. With others not so much or the occasional like i'm going to see my family, and this is my family makeup but not a, let me tell you about everything happening in my life.

Mentor 7 experienced the tension of *openness-with* and *closedness-with* with their mentee and made extra efforts to only share information that they thought would be beneficial for the mentee:

It was helpful that we had that foundation and I was very mindful to not overshare. I wouldn't share like I do with my friends. I would probably share on the level that you share with a coworker; you know, this is my background. If they share something they've

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experienced or something that's struggling with then I'll reciprocate, like oh, this is similar, and this is how I navigated that cause that's beneficial to them. But we didn't like hanging out outside of work, we didn't go for dinner and things like that.

Mentor 9 felt that it was the mentor's responsibility to be the first to be open with the mentee, but if it is not reciprocated, the mentor needs to recognize this and respect the mentee's preference to be *closedness-with*:

I think when both people approach a mentorship and they're both kind of like, okay here's me, that's a door that's open and hopefully the other person says great this is me too. So if the door hasn't been open at any point in time, or, there were kind of openings but they were not reciprocated, then I don't think I've continued. Like, oh it doesn't seem like right now is a great moment, no problem. This wasn't a great moment either, you know what we'll just hold on to that, because we really need to talk about this other topic. So, I think the amount of connection and the amount of sharing is, unfortunately, dependent on those moments.

Whereas, Mentor 8 waited to see if the mentee would be open with them before they opened up:

Some people would open up a little bit more to me, and then I would feel more comfortable opening myself up to them or kind of like developing more of a friendship than just a mentor mentee relationship...them opening up to me, made me more willing to open up to them too.

Mentee 4 felt that it was necessary to share information with their mentor if it is going to affect their work:

Mostly because in our work, you know we are our work and if there's something going on in my personal life that is going to affect my work. Then, my mentor needs to know that so that they are aware of everything so that they can better support me when they need to or if I need it.

Mentee 5, who has worked with two mentors and has worked for one year, shared their experience of having a mentor that demonstrated *closedness-with*:

I would say no, not at the beginning um my first mentor had very different boundaries than my second one, regarding what we wanted to share personally. I'm a very open person, I'm very much an open book so that was new for me, so I had to kind of adapt to that.

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Mentee 5 compared this to their relationship with their second mentor, who exhibited *openness-with* them. They said they had a relationship with their second mentor and felt that it contributed to the openness:

With my second mentor because, like I said, that existing relationship made it easier because we already knew some stuff about each other.

Mentee 6 felt that they were more comfortable being open with mentors that were closer in age:

With some of them, yes, I did [share personal information]. (Being) closer in age helped because there is more understanding and common experiences within someone who is within my age group.

Mentee 4, stated that without openness there is no point for the relationship:

Open and honest communication that's probably my biggest one. If I can't be honest with you and you can't be honest with me, what are we doing then? There's no point, and we're not going to get anything out of this relationship.

These tensions are not unique to the field of sign language interpreting. Kosempel (2008) noted these dialectical tensions in his work on formal mentoring in a teacher preparation program. Both the *openness-to* vs. *closedness-to* and the *openness-with* vs. *closedness-with* fall under Baxter and Montgomery's original expression vs. nonexpression dialectical tension.

RQ 3: What are the characteristics of an effective mentoring relationship in the field of sign language interpreting?

The last research question explored the qualities of an effective mentoring relationship and my analysis identified three main themes: trust, commitment, and openness.

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Trust

Mentors and mentees valued trust and a personable relationship between mentor and mentee, and this led the participants to feel comfortable being vulnerable. The interpreters in this study noted that they feel that their work is an extension of themselves and thus were sensitive to criticism of their interpreting work. Mentee 2 emphasized trust several times in their interview:

I would expect that I can trust my mentor. It's a safe space. I'm going to reiterate that that's really important to me is that I feel like I can talk about tough things about our job and not worry about being judged.

Mentee 1 explained how the dynamic of the mentorship changed after they could no longer trust their mentor and had to find another mentor:

At that moment, I didn't feel safe working with the person... I was just going to accept their feedback without saying anything at that moment. I was closed basically to that person, so I had asked another person to fill in for that role.

Mentor 1 talked about the benefit of knowing your mentee prior to engaging in a mentoring relationship. They felt that knowing the individual before working with them in a mentorship helped because the relationship already had a foundation:

I've also mostly mentor people who I knew on a personal level at some you know, be it that we've been friends for a couple years or like I have seen you around the department and we've interacted a little bit. It was more of like yeah, we already know each other there's always a little already a little bit of foundation of trust. The unsuccessful ones have taught me that the foundation of a relationship and of trust is really important to being able to give feedback and have it be received well.

Mentee 5 felt that it was important to meet outside of work to develop trust and get to know their mentor on a more personal level:

Just being in casual settings and going out, getting coffee, and getting to know each other to know that okay this person cares about me as a human being, not just you as an interpreter.

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Mentee 3 said that mentors should push their mentees to challenge themselves but also create a safe space:

Listen to the mentee and don't push them to limits that they're not comfortable with. I think that being a mentor is kind of providing a safe space for mentees to go for a challenge or try something new, but at the same time, you shouldn't be pushing their comfort level.

Mentee 10 emphasized the importance of trust and stated that creating trust in a mentorship allows for the relationship to continue after the formal mentorship has ended:

I think being able to go to them, I feel like a mentor/mentee relationship should kind of be something that never ends. Because even now, I still go back to some of my mentors that I trust and I'm like "hey, you know I'd love to talk to you about this, or have you seen this sign before," whatever, so something that can be long lasting is a great aspect for me, because then the relationship never really goes away.

Mentor 9 stated that if trust exists in the mentorship, the individuals involved will be able to work through challenging situations more easily:

I think when you trust someone you can work through challenging situations, right? We can go into an assignment that is definitely a stretch for one because there is trust there because there is rapport, care, and understanding.

Typically, the aim of a mentor/mentee relationship is to improve one another; therefore, the mentee needs to trust that they are not being judged. The data provided evidence that mentorships benefitted from the mentor and mentee taking time to develop this trust at the beginning of the relationship.

Commitment

The second theme that emerged was commitment to the mentoring relationship. This includes respecting each other's time, being present during one-on-one meetings, and communicating when they are not able to attend meetings or will be arriving late. The mentors expected that their mentee would put in the work to improve their interpreting skills because the

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mentor is putting in energy and effort to meet and work with the mentee. Mentor 1 mentioned the expectation of their mentee is that they will put in the work to improve their interpreting skills:

I expect that they are going to work at being a better interpreter. I don't expect that they like devote their entire life, you know? Eat, sleep, breathe interpreting; like that's not realistic. But I do expect that they're committed to getting better, whatever getting better means for them.

Mentor 9 expected that their mentees were committed to the work and discussing it afterwards:

I really need the people that I work with, mentee or not, to want to show up and do the work, to want to talk about the work, to want to figure out how we could have done that differently, what other options that we have.

Mentor 7 expects their mentee to be committed to meeting with them regularly:

I do expect them to meet with me, how much or how often? I'm pretty flexible. But at least once or twice a week, at least for 30 minutes or something.

Mentor 2 highlighted the importance of punctuality and following the meeting times that they have agreed upon:

If they can't do something, or if those times end up not working out, or if schedules change, or if workloads change, (then) tell me. Like this is for you as a mentee, it benefits me, but it's for you, and if what we're doing is not working for you, I need to know that.

Mentor 6 emphasized the importance of the mentee's commitment to the community that they serve:

My biggest expectation is that they actually are involved in the community that they hope to work in. But also, to ask when they need support to continue working on improving themselves and the greater profession and/or community.

The mentees also expected that meetings with their mentors would be productive and focused on the mentee's personal interpreting goals. For instance, Mentee 1 said:

I end every session with an action item, like I'm going to work on my depiction this next week, and hopefully when we come back - work and we can see you know improvement.

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Mentee 2 also discussed the importance of productivity and the ability to work with their mentor on their interpreting goals:

Productive could mean a variety of things like whatever it is the goal that you had set that is being accomplished or in the process of being accomplished.

Mentee 9 discussed their frustrations about experience working with a mentor that was not committed to the relationship:

I needed a lot of help and be like, can you talk about this concept from class this morning and she'd be like Google it...then she asked if we could meet even less than we are meeting for one for less than an hour a week she's like I think we should meet less. So that was really frustrating so that wasn't great, wasn't super supportive and wasn't really helping me get where I needed to be.

Mentor 7 described the approach that they use if they are concerned about their mentee completing the required tasks in the formal mentorship:

Sometimes if I'm a little concerned, I'll just say "hey let's pull up the checklist" and I'll take it upon myself to do that. Or other times, later into the semester or second semester, like "hey you're good? You checked your checklist all is well?" You do like less checking in to make it so the responsibility to be a professional interpreter slowly becomes more on them.

It is imperative that both the mentor and mentee are committed to the success and improvement of the mentee's interpreting skills. Without a certain degree of commitment on the part of either the mentor or mentee, the relationship is strained.

Openness

The third theme was openness. Mentees felt that openness was characterized by a mentor who was empathetic, willing to be vulnerable, open-minded, and flexible. Mentors felt that openness included open-mindedness, the ability to have difficult conversations, and a willingness to learn.

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Mentee 4, who has worked with four mentors, said that open mindedness was important for both the mentor and mentee to gain something from the mentorship:

I have worked with a multitude of people from different backgrounds, different age groups, different education, everything like that, and all of them have been very open minded when it comes to the work that we do, interpreting, so that's been really great they've learned from me and I've learned from them.

Mentee 9, who has worked with three mentors and been working for three years, stated the importance of having empathy and being open to and understanding of the struggles that a mentee may be experiencing:

I would expect a mentor to be willing to listen, and to be empathetic. Because, especially like newer interpreters being mentored, you don't know what you don't know, and struggles that they might have as an experienced person, and the struggles that someone who's new have are very different.

Additionally, Mentee 6, who has worked for three years and had six mentors, said that openness between a mentor and a mentee needs to be reciprocated:

Having somebody that I can be open with and that is open with me as well. I guess like a two-way street.

Mentor 5, who has worked with eight mentees and has a master's degree, emphasized the importance of identity and the need for the mentor to be open to assess whether or not they are a good fit for a mentee:

I have worked with individuals who come from vastly different places in the country, from different religious backgrounds, and from different ethnic backgrounds. Just being open minded and doing the work to understand (different backgrounds) is important. I've mentored BIPOC interpreters before and because most of us (interpreters) are white, we need to be aware of our role, and how and what microaggressions that we could be expressing that could impede our mentoring relationship and affect our ability to lead these individuals to success. Just being aware of your influence on your mentee, because I think that's a really really important thing. And if you think that it's not a good fit, if you think that you can't support an individual based on religion or any different type of aspect, don't do it. We have plenty of other people who will do it who could jive with them more.

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Additionally, Mentor 5 stated how important it is for the mentee to access alternative resources if the mentor is not able to provide something that they are looking for:

I'm not the most skilled interpreter, but there are so many other people that they can observe. If they want a specific skill set that they want to work on, or that they want to see, they can access it here. I'm not a wealth of knowledge, and I'm not going to know everything. I'm not going to be the best at everything, but there's so many other people that they can get that from.

Mentor 6, who has worked for 9 years and mentored eight interpreters, argues that mentors and mentees do not need to have something in common in order to work together. Rather, it is important that they are open with each other and are able to find something to take away from the experience:

Openness to learning is the most important thing. Sometimes the relationships are just brought upon us and we don't necessarily share anything in common, but being willing to at least contemplate information that is shared or suggested, you know you can take everything with a grain of salt, but be appreciative that someone is there and be open to at least consider other or other perspectives.

Mentor 9 who has worked with four mentees and has a master's degree, discussed that mentoring needs to be tailored to the mentee and their needs. The mentor has to be able to make adjustments to meet the needs of the mentee:

I don't approach it in the same way every time, this is not cookie cutter. This really is tailored to what you need and each mentee. I develop a relationship over time that changes and is different. Some of them have been more skills focused in our work, in our conversation, some of them have been a pretty fair mix of life and skills. Some of them had more life at times because they've been going through something, and so I think you know what that relationship needed at that point in time.

Mentors need to be open to each mentee and recognize where they are at in their development. Furthermore, they need to be open to providing resources outside of themselves if they are not able to assist with certain skills or goals that their mentee has. Mentees value mentorships where they feel that their mentor is open and responsive to their needs. They also

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felt that they appreciated mentorships where they felt that they could be open with their mentor and that their mentor was open with them in return.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to build on current research by applying relational dialectics theory to mentoring relationships in the field of sign language interpreting. Relational dialectics theory posits that relationships consist of opposing positions that influence one another and that communication is important to negotiate and handle contradictions that occur in interpersonal relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). I conducted semi-structured interviews and used open coding and thematic approach to analyze the data. Through the data analysis, mentoring approaches and common tensions experienced by mentors and mentees were identified. Three of Buell's (2004) mentoring models were noted; friendship, nurturing, and apprenticeship models. Additionally, four dialectical tensions were noted; structure vs. flexibility, personal vs. professional relationships, *openness-to* vs. *closeness-to*, and *openness-with* vs. *closedness-with*. Furthermore, through a thematic coding approach, three themes emerged; trust, commitment, and openness.

This study contributes to scholarship on relational dialectics theory through the application of the theory to mentoring relationships in the field of sign language interpreting. The findings show evidence of the expression-nonexpression tension originally identified by Baxter and Montgomery (1996). By applying relational dialectics theory, this study was able to identify tensions that mentors and mentees face and the cause for the tensions. Additionally, it confirms that contradiction is inherent to personal relationships, meaning that regardless of the strength of

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the relationship, the individuals involved in a relationship will eventually experience some form of tension or conflict.

Buell's (2004) mentoring models were applied as a framework for identifying which model is preferred most by mentors and mentees. The findings indicated that three out of the four mentoring models were identified by mentors and mentees in the field of sign language interpreting; friendship, nurturing, and apprenticeship model. The cloning model wasn't present in the findings. The nature of the cloning model is based on power and control, where the mentor aims to replicate themselves and control their mentee (Buell, 2004). In the field of sign language interpreting, this model would not be able to be applied since there are many factors that lead to decisions that are made during the interpreting process; creating "clones" is not possible.

The findings from Kosempel (2008) showed that relational dialectics theory can be applied to mentoring relationships, and is supported in my findings which included four of Kosempel's dialectical tensions; structure vs. flexibility, personal vs. professional relationships, *openness-to* vs. *closeness-to*, and *openness-with* vs. *closedness-with*. These tensions are also consistent with tensions identified by Tucker (2015) who applied RDT to sign language interpreters working in university settings; distance vs. closeness and freedom to be independent vs. freedom to be dependent. In Tucker's (2015) work, distance vs. closeness is similar to the *openness-to* vs. *closedness-to* tension seen in Kosempel's work and this study. Both of these tensions relate to the desire to develop and build rapport while also maintaining their distance and avoiding oversharing. While this study examined mentoring relationships in higher education, Tucker (2015) found similar tensions that exist between interpreters working in university settings and their consumers. The findings indicate that there are some tensions experienced by mentors and mentees that are also experienced by interpreters and consumers in

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the classroom. While a mentor-mentee relationship has a clear-cut power dynamic, the consumer-interpreter relationship is not as starkly defined. This supports research done by Kalbfleish (2002), who found that conflicts are inevitable due to the power differential between the individuals in the relationship and due to the fact that human relationships are inherently complex. Encouraging effective communication strategies in interpreters through their mentoring relationships can provide useful strategies that can be employed to effectively manage and work through the dialectical tensions experienced with mentors, mentees, and consumers.

The theme of openness/communication noted in this study is consistent with Paradise (2013), who identified characteristics of mentors as defined by mentees. Paradise (2013) found that mentees defined openness in mentors as not being judgmental, openly communicating, building trust, and respect. In this study, both themes of trust and openness emerged from data collected from mentors and mentees. Mentors and mentees felt that trust was crucial for the mentorship because it allowed both individuals to feel comfortable being vulnerable and opening up to one another. This is supported by Paradise (2013) who found that mentees were able to be more open and trusting of their mentor if they felt that their mentor was invested in their development.

Implications

This study contributes to the literature on mentoring in the field of sign language interpreting and relational dialectics. Mentors and mentees need to be able to build trust in their relationships in order to feel comfortable being vulnerable with each other. This can be done by sharing information about their personal lives because an interpreter's personal life often affects their work and working relationships. Interpreters engaging in a mentorship can use the results of this study as a guide to managing their own relationships as mentors and/or mentees. While

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mentoring placement may be determined by “fit,” successful outcomes depend on a variety of factors. Furthermore, if a mentor or mentee is aware of their preferred mentorship model, they can learn how to work within that model to achieve their mentorship goals. This supports the idea of establishing training for mentors and mentees to engage with prior to embarking on a mentorship.

Based on the results of this study, it is important that there are considerations for communication style and preferences when pairing mentors and mentees in the field of sign language interpreting. Mentors and mentees who preferred the same model from Buell (2004) noted feelings of validation, support, and trust. When mentors and mentees did not have the same preferred model, the participants in the mentorship were more likely to experience tensions or conflicts. Thus, a questionnaire or conversation regarding preferred mentoring models would be beneficial for mentors and mentees to engage with before they decide to embark on a mentoring relationship.

Limitations and Direction for Future Research

One limitation is that I interviewed mentors with similar years of experience with similar educational backgrounds. A future study could be conducted to examine interpreters with a wider range of years of experience, educational levels, and a variety of settings i.e., medical, community, and K-12. Additionally, this study focused on sign language interpreters at one university and the culture of the university could have impacted the mentor-mentee program. Also, this study did not take into account the age or gender of the participants and could be examined more thoroughly in a future study. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all mentor and mentee relationships in the field of sign language interpreting.

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In this study, the majority of the mentees had experienced being mentored by several mentors, but at the time of the study were not currently working with mentors. A future study could conduct semi-structured interviews with mentor and mentee pairs before, during, and after their mentorship. This would allow the researcher to compare and contrast the experiences of the mentor and mentee throughout their relationship and obtain more information about the causes of the dialectical tensions in real time. One other possibility for a future study would be a survey approach in order to gather quantitative data. This could be a survey that is distributed to mentors and mentees at a number of universities that have mentoring programs and would allow to gain further insight on the themes, tensions, and models discussed in this study and offer quantitative results.

Another possible future study could examine mentoring relationships in sign language interpreting students who have not yet graduated from their interpreting program. Typically, there is a requirement in interpreter education programs for students to work with mentors and gain experience prior to graduation. A future study could examine and compare mentoring model preferences and tensions that exists in these relationships and compare them to mentorships that involve individuals who have already graduated from their interpreting program.

Conclusion

My study explored how mentors and mentees structure their mentoring relationships and how they navigate conflict and tensions. In conducting this research with a relational dialectic's lens, I analyzed the data to see which dialectical tensions were commonly experienced by mentors and mentees and which mentoring models were being employed. This study will not only contribute to current literature on mentoring relationships in the field of sign language interpreting but hopefully also be used as a guide for interpreter mentoring relationships in the

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future. While tensions are inherent to interpersonal relationships, there are strategies that can be used to mitigate these tensions. These strategies can help mentors and mentees communicate effectively, learn from each other, and achieve their individual and collective mentorship goals. effective mentoring relationships can occur within and in spite of conflicts and tensions.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol-Mentors

Introduction

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as a sign language interpreter who has been involved in a mentoring relationship in the role of mentor. My research project focuses on understanding what conflicts and tensions arise in mentoring relationships in the field of sign language interpreting.

A. Interviewee Background

- What is your highest degree?
- Where did you obtain your degree?
- How long have you been working as a sign language interpreter?
- What settings have you worked in as a sign language interpreter?
- How many sign language interpreters have you mentored?
- How did you become a mentor?
- Did you receive any formal mentor training prior to becoming a mentor?

B. Background information on mentoring approach

- How would you describe your mentoring style?
- How would you describe your relationship(s) with your mentee(s)?
- What expectations do you have of your mentee(s)?
- Briefly describe what you consider to be aspects of a successful mentoring relationship?
- How have past mentoring experiences influenced what you consider to be aspects of successful mentoring?

Probe

- Do you discuss your personal life with your mentee?
- What advice would you have for someone interested in becoming a mentor?

C. Conflict identification and management in mentoring relationships

- Describe instances where you experienced conflict with your mentee.
- What strategies did you implement to resolve the conflict?
- Have you had mentoring relationships that have been prematurely terminated?
 - i. If so, briefly describe the events that led to premature termination.
- Describe feedback that you have received from your mentee(s) about your mentoring relationship.

Probe

- Were you able to resolve the conflict?
- Did the conflict change the dynamics of the mentoring relationship for the remainder of the mentoring relationship?

Appendix B

Interview Protocol- Mentees

Introduction

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as a sign language interpreter who has been involved in a mentoring relationship in the role of mentee. My research project focuses on understanding what conflicts and tensions arise in mentoring relationships in the field of sign language interpreting.

● **Interviewee Background**

- What is your highest degree?
- Where did you obtain your degree?
- How long have you been working as a sign language interpreter?
- What settings have you worked in as a sign language interpreter?
- How many mentors have you worked with?
- How were you paired with your mentor(s)?

● **Background information on mentoring**

- How would you describe your relationship with your mentor(s)?
- What expectations do you have of your mentoring relationships?
- Briefly describe what you consider to be aspects of a successful mentoring relationship.
- Did your definition of a successful mentoring relationship change after each mentorship you have experienced?
- How have past mentoring experiences influenced what you consider to be aspects of successful mentoring?
- What advice would you give to someone seeking a mentor?

Probe

- Do you discuss your personal life with your mentor?

● **Conflict identification and management in mentoring relationships**

- Describe instances where you experienced conflict with your mentor.
- What strategies did you implement to resolve the conflict?
- Have you had mentoring relationships that have been prematurely terminated?
 - i. If so, briefly describe the events that led to premature termination.

Probe

- Were you able to resolve the conflict?
- If the mentoring was terminated prematurely, are you interested in another opportunity?

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Appendix C*Mentor Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Education Level	Interpreting Experience (years)	Number of Mentees
Mentor 1	Master's	7	6
Mentor 2	Master's	7	5
Mentor 3	Bachelor's	4	1
Mentor 4	Master's	10	3
Mentor 5	Master's	8	8
Mentor 6	Master's	9	8
Mentor 7	Master's	6	2
Mentor 8	Bachelor's	13.5	5
Mentor 9	Master's	8	4

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Appendix D*Mentee Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Education Level	Interpreting Experience (years)	Number of Mentors
Mentee 1	Associates	4.5	7
Mentee 2	Bachelor's	2	3
Mentee 3	Bachelor's	2	3
Mentee 4	Bachelor's	2	4
Mentee 5	Bachelor's	1	2
Mentee 6	Bachelor's	3	6
Mentee 7	Bachelor's	3	4
Mentee 8	Master's	3	4
Mentee 9	Master's	3	3
Mentee 10	Bachelor's	3	4
Mentee 11	Bachelor's	1.5	3