

# Language, Prejudice, and the Under-Acknowledged Importance of the Lewis and Clark Interpreters

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“If I had suspected my interpreter, who every day assured me he would always remain with me and never abandon me,” wrote French Canadian explorer Pierre La Verendrye, “I would have taken advantage of the time I had him with me.... But flattering myself that I had a man on whom I could rely, I put it off.”<sup>1</sup> This journal entry was written by La Verendrye, one of the first Europeans to ever make contact with the Mandan Indians in January 1739, just a few days after his interpreter left without warning leaving him with no way to communicate with the Native peoples. La Verendrye struggled for a few days, since “we could only make ourselves understood by signs and demonstrations,”<sup>2</sup> however, after a while of failed communication abandoned his mission and returned to the nearest French fort. Though he had initially set out on diplomatic information-gathering business, his failure was ultimately determined solely by the actions of his interpreter.

Over half a century later, the French emperor Napoleon ceded the territory of Louisiana to the newly created United States of America, and as president during this purchase, Thomas Jefferson took it upon himself to establish an exploratory mission across the new territory and to the west coast of the continent. The goals of the mission

were twofold: first, to gather geographic information about the territory and possibly locate a Northwest Passage, and second, to establish diplomatic and economic relations with the Native American tribes residing in this territory. Jefferson selected Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to be the co-captains of the expedition, and placed in their hands his goals for the mission. As the Corps of Discovery set out, they too would find, like La Verendrye, that the presence of a skilled interpreter could make or break their success in any diplomatic interaction. Yet despite its importance, the necessity of a good interpreter was not taken nearly as seriously as was needed for the stakes with which the expedition was operating. The expedition left without a verbal interpreter to accompany them and were forced to find one on the go. Based on accounts from prior expeditioners and from the journals of the Corps of Discovery members themselves, the contributions of interpreters were critical to the success of the Lewis and Clark expedition, despite the lack of attention given to their role.

## Context of Linguistic Encounters

Indigenous American to European language encounters began from the very first instances that the groups had contact with each other, through

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1 Brymner, Douglas. “Journal of the First Expedition of Pierre Gaultier, Sieur de La Verendrye to the Mandan Villages on the Missouri.” *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 26, no. 2 (1925): 85–115. 105.

2 Brymner, 105.

what James Merrell referred to as the “alchemy of interpretation.”<sup>3</sup> Records of these encounters exist in large part through personal records and diaries along with biblical translations and ethnographic records done by missionaries, which in North America primarily meant the Jesuits. These records reveal a fusion of language that occurred over time, as indigenous languages combined elements of Dutch, Spanish, English, French, and whatever other European languages prevailed in their local region into their own spoken word. While indigenous languages added European words for new trade goods, Europeans likewise learned and adopted indigenous words for the geography, flora, and fauna previously unknown to them.

In addition to linguistic exchange, there emerged new forms of communication spawned from the need to create a middle ground between European and Indigenous American languages which both parties could understand. Frequently, this process was facilitated through mixed-race marriages and families which created the creole languages that would over time become the “native tongue of communities,” such as Chinook Jargon. Linguistic records also track the language Michif which “intertwined.... Algonquian and Romance languages so thoroughly” that the language ended up using a distinct combination of “Cree verbs and French nouns.”<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, in regions where Native Americans outnumbered European colonists, communication via Indigenous languages remained the “mediums of intercultural communication”<sup>5</sup>; in one example, enslaved Native Americans from the Pequot War taught their European captors, either willingly or unwittingly, the Pequot language.

Native teachers were absolutely essential to European attempts to learn the local languages, and often they were not willing participants; many European records make note of the unfriendly native responses to European attempts at language learning. Oftentimes, “instead of teaching Euro-Americans, these Indians mocked their efforts, refused to answer their queries, or deliberately fed them misinformation.”<sup>6</sup> However there were some, especially European traders who were open to connecting with Native peoples within the context of their own cultures, who were able to acquire basic communication skills in various indigenous languages. Frequently, cross-linguistic encounters would be held via nonverbal communication as well as jargons and pidgins, which were effective for basic trade relay as they “dramatically simplified ... lexicon, morphology, and in some cases phonology.”<sup>7</sup> Many of these communication methods were modeled after existing Indigenous cross-linguistic exchange through Mobilian Jargon and Plains Indian sign language. This linguistic middle ground had its issues, as Joseph-François Lafitau noted that attempts at communication would take place through vague gestures as “words, which are of neither language because they are corrupted, forming a speech without rhyme or reason.”<sup>8</sup>

In any grander attempts of diplomacy, interpreters were crucial. Scholars have stressed their importance in “creating the means of communication, exchange, and conflict resolution between Native communities and European colonies,”<sup>9</sup> and records show evidence of expeditions so desperate for a good interpreter that they would kidnap someone who they believed could translate

3 Harvey, Sean P. and Sarah Rivett. 2017. “Colonial-Indigenous Language Encounters in North America and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World.” *Early American Studies* 15 (3): 445.

4 Harvey, 451.

5 Harvey, 451.

6 Harvey, 455.

7 Harvey, 450.

8 Harvey, 462.

9 Harvey, 453.

for them. Many of the most qualified and sought after interpreters were the “traders who took Native wives or the children who resulted from those unions,” although there were also records of hostage-taking in which young European “captives, children of missionaries, boys learning the fur trade, or youths being groomed as mediators”<sup>10</sup> would be able to learn the local Indigenous languages. Their role in diplomacy was absolutely critical, as Indigenous peoples would expect to hear their own language at any diplomatic mission, “which made the services of a reliable interpreter crucial to the often tense coexistence of diverse peoples.”<sup>11</sup> Despite their importance, interpretation was not always entirely reliable, in part because of the natural information loss whenever a language bridge is crossed, but also because “occasionally interpreters deliberately conveyed sentiments that differed from what an orator had expressed, and scribes sometimes recorded what colonial or imperial officials wished to hear,”<sup>12</sup> which would dramatically skew the success (or perceived success) of a diplomatic mission. The two essential features that a good interpreter must possess were linguistic skill as well as the trust of both parties involved, traits which Lewis and Clark would find were difficult to locate for the sake of their mission.

### **Pierre Dorion Sr., Rene Jusseaume, and Interpreter Reputations**

In terms of interpreter resumes, Pierre Dorion Sr. probably had the most legitimate one of any interpreter that Lewis and Clark encountered. He was a third-generation interpreter, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, a

rare feat in that time. He had lived among the Sioux for over twenty years, and he had immersed himself in Native culture and language, with Clark referring to him as being “verry Confidential friend of those people [Sioux tribes], he having resided with the nation 20 odd years.”<sup>13</sup> Dorion came with exceptional performance reviews, and he was generally agreed to be very trustworthy and reliable as a guide and interpreter by everyone who had hired him for his services.

It was, however, entirely out of luck that he was able to be hired for the Lewis and Clark expedition. Very soon into the expedition the interpreter which Jefferson himself had selected for the mission left for another job, and the Corps of Discovery were forced to improvise. Although Jefferson’s interpreter was young and literate, he had no familiarity with the lands, languages, and peoples out west, which made Clark confident in saying “I do not think the failure in getting him [Jefferson’s interpreter] is very material.”<sup>14</sup> The expedition planned to find someone along the way, and they were fortunate enough to stumble into Pierre Dorion who agreed to accompany them through Sioux territory; one June 12, 1804, expedition member Patrick Gass noted in his journal that they had found “an old Frenchman, who could speak the language of the different nations of Indians up the Missouri, and who agreed to go with us as an interpreter.”<sup>15</sup> Though Dorion was not necessarily required as a guide, he worked extensively as an interpreter both of language and of Missouri river customs, making sure the expedition’s interactions with Native tribes ran smoothly. Lewis and Clark both mentioned coming out of their initial diplomatic interactions in

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10 Harvey, 453.

11 Harvey, 453-454.

12 Harvey, 454.

13 University of Nebraska. 2021. “June 12, 1804.” Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-09-05#lc.jrn.1805-09-05.01>.

14 Nelson, W.Dale. 2003. *Interpreters with Lewis and Clark: The Story of Sacagawea and Toussaint Charbonneau*. College Station: University of North Texas Press. Accessed February 16, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central. 12.

15 University of Nebraska. “June 12, 1804.”

high spirits, feeling successful and optimistic about their expedition. The captains, unfortunately, did not fully understand Missouri river customs and on August 30, 1804 accidentally offended Dorion by inviting his son to dine with them and Sioux chiefs but neglecting to invite the senior Dorion as well. Pierre Dorion Sr. left the expedition shortly afterwards, however the expedition was extremely fortunate to have him for the stretch that they did, and since Dorion had not ventured deep into the American West, he likely would not have been much help as an interpreter had he stayed with them much longer. Despite his short stay, however, Dorion was likely the most skilled interpreter to accompany the expedition for the period which he did.

Following Dorion's departure, the expedition sought another interpreter to take his place. The winter of 1804 was spent among the Mandan communities, and it was there that Lewis and Clark met Rene Jusseume. Jusseume was a member of a niche group of *Métis*, a community of half French-Canadian and half Indigenous people. *Métis* would often have a French fur trader father and an Indigenous mother, and because of the extreme prejudice they faced in Canadian French colonies they would often travel the North American continent as independent fur traders. Very often, out of both opportunity and necessity, *Métis* would double as freelance interpreters and were commonly the only trained interpreters available. Although they were often discriminated against and distrusted by European Americans, they were often the only cultural and linguistic bridge between Native and European Americans.

When Lewis and Clark met Jusseume on October 27, 1804, they were aware of him only

through his deeply tainted reputation. Because of the documented prejudice against *Métis*, it's difficult to know for sure how many of the negative claims are true to Jusseume's character and how many are the result of stereotype and discrimination, however even by the standards of other *Métis*, Jusseume's reputation was especially bad. Stories claimed that he conned traveling parties out of their money and either got them lost due to exaggerated claims about his directional abilities or intentionally abandoned them in the wilderness. Prince Maximilian "remarked on his visit to the frontier that Jusseume still could not be relied upon as an interpreter,"<sup>16</sup> and Alexander Henry claimed that Jusseume was able to understand Mandan only "tolerably well," but that he was an "old sneaking cheat whose character was more despicable than the worst among the natives."<sup>17</sup> Other explorers like David Thompson, who wrote in his journal that "Mons. Jussomme cannot be relied on."<sup>18</sup> gave equally bad reviews, including an account in which Thompson hoped to learn about the history of the Mandans through Jusseume, but came to realize that he was either illiterate and did not understand Thompson's questions, or the Native people chose not to answer. Either way, despite being one of the most prominent *Métis* interpreters of the time, Jusseume's performance reviews marked him as a poor addition for diplomatic interpretation to the Corps of Discovery.

While the expedition spent the winter with the Mandans, the captains occasionally hired Jusseume for interpreting services on a case-by-case basis, but even the direct words of the expedition members showed their dislike for Jusseume. On the 28th of November, John Orodway remarked that there was "Gealousy between Mr Gisom one of our Intr.

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16 Speck, Gordon, Charles H. Nilon, and Mildred Nilon. 1969. *Breeds and Half-Breeds*. 1st ed. New York: C. N. Potter; distributed by Crown Publishers. 78.

17 Speck, 72.

18 Wood, W. Raymond and Thomas D. Thiessen. 1985. *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains: Canadian Traders among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians, 1738-1818: The Narratives of John Macdonell, David Thompson, Francois-Antoine Larocque, and Charles McKenzie*. 1st ed. Vol. 68. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 108.

and George Drewyer last evening & C.”<sup>19</sup> indicating dislike of Jusseume from George Droulliard, the full-time sign language interpreter for the expedition. On December 4, 1804, Clark wrote in his journal that “our interpr. [Jusseume] we discover to be assumeing and discontent’d,”<sup>20</sup> another indication of Jusseume being an unpleasant addition to the expedition and of his failure to get along with the rest of the party. Trust, reliability, and linguistic skill are the most essential traits in an interpreter, and unfortunately for the Corps of Discovery, it appeared that Rene Jusseume possessed none of those traits. Needless to say, he did not continue the expedition following their stay at the Mandans’.

## **Toussaint Charbonneau and His Wife Sacagawea**

The community of *Métis* interpreters was relatively small, and as Lewis and Clark decided not to hire Jusseume long term they met one of his colleagues, Toussaint Charbonneau. Charbonneau had lived among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians for a significant period of time, which led him to confidently boast that he spoke their languages fluently. In actuality, his reputation and interpreting resume bore mixed reviews. American exploratory fur trader John C. Luttig spoke of Charbonneau and Jusseume extremely negatively, writing that “these two rascals ought to be hung for their perfidy... they do more harm than good to the American government, stir up the Indians and pretend to be friends to the white People at the same time but we find them to be our Ennemies.”<sup>21</sup> For as many negative reviews as Charbonneau acquired, he also received very positive ones, such as from Prince Maximillion for whom Charbonneau interpreted

later in life. Maximilian appeared highly satisfied with Charbonneau’s work, especially saying that “it was only by the assistance of old Charbonneau, that I escaped a disagreeable and, perhaps, violent scene”<sup>22</sup> when Charbonneau managed to mediate a confrontation between a Hidatsa warrior and the prince.

Charbonneau was far from Lewis’s top choice for interpreter, and the members were also not thrilled to have him as a crewmate. Lewis described him as “a man of no peculiar merit” who “was useful as an interpreter only, in which capacity he discharged his duties with good faith.”<sup>23</sup> Charbonneau was a poor hiker and could not swim, which handicapped the expedition during the rafting portions, and despite his claims of mastery over language he could not speak English and required another expedition member to translate his French for Lewis and Clark to understand. However despite these drawbacks both Lewis and Clark believed him to be a “useful servant” and at the very least a “good enough interpreter,” and also praised his cooking abilities.

Armed with the means of translation the expedition pushed onwards, however they soon found that communicating across language barriers would still pose quite a difficulty. In each new Indigenous American community, Lewis and Clark had to find a multilingual native speaker who would be able to help pass information through a long translation chain which included a Native speaker to Sacagawea, Sacagawea to Charbonneau, Charbonneau to English-speaking Francois Labiche, and finally from Labiche to Lewis and Clark.<sup>24</sup> Each sentence back and forth between the captains and their target of communication had to bounce through at least five intermediary translators before it reached either end. Clark himself acknowledged

<sup>19</sup> University of Nebraska. “November 28, 1804.”

<sup>20</sup> University of Nebraska. “December 4., 1804.”

<sup>21</sup> Nelson, 51.

<sup>22</sup> Nelson, 61.

<sup>23</sup> Nelson, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Ronda, James P. 2002. *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*. N.p.: University of Nebraska Press.

this difficulty on his September 5, 1805 entry, writing they they spoke “with much dificuely as what we Said had to pass through Several languajes before it got in to theirs.”<sup>25</sup> Speech loses details, tone, and cultural nuance each time it is translated, so after passing through at least five filters of different interpretations the original content and sentiment of the speech would be entirely changed. Nuances in culture and tone were especially critical in diplomatic exchanges, so to have these obfuscated could derail the entire original goal of the diplomatic mission.

Other French fur traders in the region observed this linguistic chain in awe, as Northwest Company trader Charles McKenzie explained in his journal that first the chain went through Sacagawea, who “understood a little Gros Ventre, in which she had to converse with her husband, who was a Canadian, and who did not understand English.” It then had to usually pass through York, who McKenzie described as “a Mulatto who spoke bad French and worse English” before finally reaching the captains. Through the tone of his writing, McKenzie was flabbergasted by their attempts to communicate in which “a single word to be understood by the party required to pass from the Native peoples to the woman, from the woman to the husband, from the husband to the Mulatto, from the Mulatto to the Captain.”<sup>26</sup> To make matters worse, McKenzie observed during one of these conversing chains that two Frenchmen who were working in tandem as “mediums of information” between the speaking parties could not agree on the correct translation for what they were attempting to convey, and instead had “warm disputes upon the meaning of every single word that was taken down by the expedition.”<sup>27</sup> Every word went around a game of

telephone, and we have no way of knowing how much the statement had been changed by the time it reached the other end.

Once the expedition passed the Shoshones and moved across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific, Charbonneau’s already limited linguistic knowledge began to dwindle. The expedition passed from a region dominated by the Ute-Aztecan language family to the Salish language family, with which none of the expedition members were familiar. They were lucky to find a captive Shoshone boy who was able to translate the Salish to Sacagawea as a part of the long translation chain. However the further they pressed, the less they found themselves able to communicate with the Pacific coastal tribes, since neither Charbonneau nor Sacagawea were able to make use of their interpreting abilities against languages neither of them had ever heard. However, Charbonneau was not entirely useless on the western side of the Rockies or on the return trip to Washington. He was still a fur trader with a good sense of what the Native peoples needed, therefore allowing him to use his experience and primarily nonverbal communication to acquire essential goods for the expedition during their winter stay on the Pacific coast.<sup>28</sup> These trade interactions were much less difficult to juggle than complex diplomatic sentiment, and Charbonneau was able to manage on his own. As they once again headed into the interior of the continent, the expedition was delighted to find a Shoshone woman living among the Walla Walla Indians along the Columbia river. The expedition was finally able to use their, although tedious, method of chain translation to communicate with the leaders of the tribe, with which they “Conversed with ... for Several hours” in order to “fully Satisfy all their enquiries with respect

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25 University of Nebraska. “September 5, 1805.”

26 Wood, 238.

27 Wood, 238.

28 Nelson, 41.

to our Selves and the Object of our pursute.”<sup>29</sup> From the available sources, Charbonneau was a mixed bag of an expedition member, but he was nonetheless a necessary part of the diplomatic mission.

## George Drouillard and Native American Signs

Considering both the difficulty in communication through long chains of translation and the occasional lack of faith in Charbonneau’s ability, the Corps of Discovery were glad to have George Drouillard accompany them. Drouillard contributed to the expedition significantly as a hunter, but was also an essential member for his ability to understand and communicate through Native American Plains sign language. Unlike Jusseume or Charbonneau, Drouillard was a trusted member of the expedition, and like Dorion he had a family history of interpreting. His father was an “interpreter for the Royal Army when it was defeated by George Rogers Clark during the American Revolution” and when it came time for Lewis and Clark to choose their expedition members “it was the senior Clark who recommended young Drouillard to Meriwether Lewis.”<sup>30</sup> He too was part Indigenous, however he received a Western education that gave him the ability to communicate across both sides of the aisle.

The sign language which Drouillard knew originated somewhere in the North American plains, where several language groups overlapped, in part to be able to communicate in a semi-universal language that traversed spoken language barriers. Signs were designed to be intuitive, and many of them iconographically represented the concept they meant to portray (for example, “to eat”

would be signed by bringing one’s bunched fingers to their lips) although each tribe had regional differences in the ways they represented certain concepts.<sup>31</sup> Drouillard had not been called on very frequently to use his translating ability during the first part of the expedition, as Dorion, Jusseume, or Charbonneau could translate the speech directly, and in general Lewis and Clark “preferred communication by word of mouth to the cumbersome method of communication by signs.”<sup>32</sup> However, as the expedition continued further west and the chains of translation grew longer and longer, the captains began to call on Drouillard more and more frequently to use his signing abilities and communicate directly. He would often act as a backup source, supplementing the verbal communication through French interpreters so that Lewis could be assured that listeners understood the content of his speeches, and according to his perspective had “satisfactory results”<sup>33</sup> with this means of communication, although the Indigenous perspective on the success of their communication has not been recorded.

When the translation chain broke or simply became too long, the captains would speak through sign language directly, and many mentions of communication via “Drouillard’s signs” appear in both their journals. As the expedition crossed the Rocky Mountains, Plains sign language no longer became the shared medium of communication, however these regions had their own versions of sign language. Fortunately, both Drouillard and the Native speakers he communicated with were clever enough to be able to adapt their sign languages to be able to understand one another. Drouillard translated not only simple sentences for brief

<sup>29</sup> Nelson, 42.

<sup>30</sup> Speck, 80.

<sup>31</sup> Goddard, Ives, and William C. Sturtevant, eds. 1978. *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 17: Languages*. Vol. 17. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian. 278-279.

<sup>32</sup> “George Drouillard, Hunter and Interpreter for Lewis and Clark and Fur Trader, 1807-1810. (Reprint, 1964).” 2004. *Reference and Research Book News*. vol XI. 66.

<sup>33</sup> “George Drouillard, Hunter...,” 67.

interactions, but also entire speeches delivered by either Lewis or the Native American chiefs, meaning that the diplomatic success of the mission at times rested entirely (and literally) in Drouillard's hands.

The use of communication through signs played its most dramatic and critical role during the expedition's first encounter with the Shoshones. Lewis, Drouillard, and another expedition member named Shields encountered strangers on horseback who they by luck identified as a Shoshone. Lewis "had no doubt of obtaining a friendly introduction to his nation provided I could get near enough to him to convince him of our being whitemen"<sup>34</sup> and so he took out a blanket and waved it in the air, likely a symbol which Drouillard had told him was an understood sign of peace. The symbol did not have the desired effect, Drouillard and Shields were still approaching the man in a way that might seem threatening, and so Lewis switched tactics to calling out "ta-ba-bone," a word which he believed meant "white man." Lewis had learned this word from either Charbonneau or Drouillard, however, since the Shoshone language did not have an explicit word for "white man," he was using the word for "stranger."<sup>35</sup> This translation error likely did the opposite of what it was intended to do and made the Shoshones more fearful of the strangers, as they then turned and left on their horses. Because of a failure to communicate, this initial interaction with the Shoshones failed and it wouldn't be until a few days later that the expedition would have a second chance to make a good impression on the Shoshones. The further the expedition proceeded, the less and less reliable spoken communication became, and from the Nez Perce tribes to the Pacific Coast, Drouillard's knowledge of sign language and his adaptability of knowledge was the only means by which the expedition could hope to communicate with the native peoples of the area.

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<sup>34</sup> University of Nebraska. "August 11, 1805."

<sup>35</sup> Ronda, 140.

## **The Effects of Linguistic Interpretation in the Expedition**

Because the linguistic encounters along the Lewis and Clark expedition happened either verbally or through signs, there is no complete written record of exactly what each party said, what was translated along each step of the way, and how the translation was interpreted. However, from the subtext there are a few key takeaway points about the impact of the Lewis and Clark interpreters. The first is that the expedition simply could not have taken place without the cooperation of *Métis* interpreters, regardless of their skill level. Every major interpreter along the expedition, from Jusseume to Charbonneau to Drouillard himself were *Métis*, and often also independent fur traders. Traders like Jusseume, Charbonneau, or the other *Métis* fur traders that Lewis and Clark met without hiring faced extreme prejudice even from those who hired them for their services, despite being a necessary part of any elaborate trade or diplomatic mission. It is difficult to judge their skills exactly, but it is clear that without their services, the expedition across the continent simply would not have been able to take place.

The second point is that despite the importance and delicacy of the mission, and the fact that having a skilled interpreter was the single best indicator of a successful diplomatic mission, Lewis and Clark did not seem to understand the importance of their interpreters until crisis struck and they found themselves without one. The expedition departed without any verbal interpreter, and the captains were nothing short of extremely fortunate to have found the translators that they did. Even so, because they had to find an interpreter on the fly, the captains had no way of vetting their interpreters and ended up having to rely extensively on Charbonneau, who admitted to not being particularly skilled at

the Hidatsa language. They allowed Dorion to leave the expedition without much of a protest, even though it meant that they were without an interpreter during their first meeting with the Sioux. The portions of the expedition during which Lewis reported feeling the most frustrated and agitated were the ones where translation was most challenging, especially on the far west coast where linguistic diversity was at its highest and no one in the expedition could understand any spoken languages. Though the expedition did not seem to have very many options available to them, it appears that channeling more time or resources into finding adequate interpreters would have been a worthwhile investment.

The final point is that as much as we speculate, we have no way to assess to any degree of certainty the effects that the presence of quality of interpreters had on the course of the expedition. Only one side of the story remains, from the journals of the expedition members or from occasional mention in another fur trader's log, and without primary Native American sources on the interaction with the Corps of Discovery we can only speculate from one half of the conversation. As far as we know none of the interpreters listed kept journals of their own (Jusseume and Charbonneau were illiterate), which also could have provided great insight into the challenges they faced and where they felt they succeeded or failed. Without being able to compare a side by side account of the interactions between the Corps and various Native tribes from both perspectives, there is no way to definitively claim what impact translation had on the diplomatic success or failure of the Lewis and Clark expedition. However, from the existing sources, it seems clear that language barriers were one of the greatest hurdles for the Corps of Discovery to overcome, and that the role of interpreter was one of the most essential for the expedition to take place.

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