

Deaf Interpreters Become Pivotal Part of Bridging Cultures Conference

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The recent RID conference in San Antonio, Texas was truly a "Bridging Cultures" experience for me, especially with over fifty deaf participants. This is something I hope to see an increase of in future conferences: more bridging of cultures!

I was fortunate enough to attend many wonderful workshops, including advanced workshops for the more experienced interpreters. So many of them would be beneficial to deaf interpreters (DIs). Oftentimes, DIs complain that there are not enough workshops for them to attend, but they can easily participate in these geared toward hearing interpreters and get just as much out of it as any other interpreter. For instance, in Byron Bridges's workshop, "Using Prosody in ASL," he said that American Sign Language is 70% facial, and 30% on the hands; so facial expression is critical to the language. In Charlotte Crump's "ASL Dysfluency and Psycholinguistic Errors: How to Recognize the Difference When Working in Mental Health Settings" workshop, she discussed various concepts, such as clanging (a string of signs produced with one handshape), sign perseveration (signs repeated more than three times), echolalia (echoing of other people's speech – or for DIs, repeating signs). These are details that DIs often do not learn professionally because they do not assertively participate in "hearing" interpreter workshops.

With increased participation in workshops geared toward interpreting as a profession, DIs can also become more sophisticated in their skills and expertise by putting new tools in their "interpreting briefcase." DIs will need to be Jacks and Jills of all trades until the field can become wide enough to support DIs working in specialized fields (i.e., mental health, education, or legal settings).

Another impressive aspect of the RID conference was the networking opportunities available for DIs. Many DIs shared their challenges with the CDI tests, including many who have failed the performance exam for various reasons. Also discussed was the Wisconsin Interpreting and Transliterating Assessment (or "WITA"). After prospective interpreters have gone through the WITA, they are given a sheet of paper with the names of raters so that they can

cross out any names that may be potential conflicts of interest. This is something that needs to be done with the CDI test. There are so many potential conflicts within the Deaf community given its small and close-knit nature.

The Deaf Caucus also met during the conference and was revived. New officers were chosen, with me serving as chair; Branton Stewart, of Rochester, New York, vice-chair; and Lauren Kinast of Northridge, California, as secretary. Elections for the leadership team were also held, and the new members are: Region I, Hartmut Teuber; Region II, Jennifer Briggs; Region III, Dawn Watts; Region IV, Stephen Collins; and Region V, Gary Aghabalian and Reed Gershwind. We have numerous goals for the next two years, but the main focus is to make positive changes, especially since RID is a membership-driven organization, and involvement from members is crucial. The first step we have taken is to merge two e-mail discussion groups – the Deaf Caucus e-mail group with the Deaf Interpreters group, which is moderated by CDI Kristin Lund. This e-mail list is a good forum for DIs to discuss topics such as the Travis County (Texas) Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing's new policy that requires that all juvenile matters include a CDI. To stay abreast of news and developments, you may subscribe by e-mailing Deaf_Interpreter-subscribe@yahooogroups.com.

Yet another topic discussed at the conference among DIs was the diversity of settings that now utilize DIs. For instance, at the conference, there was a DI who works in a community college in Arizona, another who works as a DI in the classroom, and yet another DI who works in mainstream environments bridging communication between students and interpreters. These were only a few of the many working DIs. Working mainly in legal situations myself, I came to realize that DIs truly are available for all types of situations, not just the stereotypical "deaf-blind, MLS, or court" situations. It would be wonderful if DIs working in unique settings could submit articles or biographies for the RID *VIEWS* to share with others and to show hearing interpreters the variety of settings that benefit from deaf interpreters.

The Deaf Caucus also discussed different ideas for the 2007 RID conference, including having a hospitality room for DIs, reduced registration fees for DIs until workshops become more DI-friendly, and until the demand and need for DIs working conditions increase. We expect

to see a record number of DIs at the San Francisco conference!

After the conference, I mulled over all the things I had discussed and learned at the conference. I came to a conclusion that many have already reached: the bar for DIs needs to be raised. Although DIs are to meet requirements to earn their certification, those requirements are extremely minimal and hardly equal to those of the other RID tests.

DIs want and need advanced workshops that focus on translations, ASL discourse, interpretation theories and approaches, and so many other areas. There also needs to be an increase in advanced DI training workshops and an increased openness in allowing DIs to participate in specific workshops. For instance, Trudy Suggs, a former CDI Task Force chair and current DI, has traveled across the nation presenting "Think of a Word, Quick!" This workshop focuses on vocabulary expansion and offers fun activities on how to think of words in English or ASL quickly while on the hot seat. Yet, she reports that out of approximately 400 people she has trained, not one DI has attended her workshop. When she asks them to attend, they often tell her, "But I'm not hearing, I know my signs and know enough about the interpreting process." This attitude among DIs needs to be improved upon. DIs like me may be fluent in either language, but there is always room for improvement and learning new approaches or strategies.

Another hot topic at the conference among DIs was the label "Certified Deaf Interpreter." This is something that has been discussed many times by renowned DIs and interpreter trainers, and it seems many are uncomfortable with this label. After all, hearing interpreters aren't labeled "Certified Hearing Interpreter" or "CHI." In a recent editorial written for the *CIT News* by Edna Johnston of the ASL-Interpretation Program at Chicago's Columbia College, she argues that "CDI" is a poor label. Instead, she suggests the use of "mediator." Other possible labels include "language specialist" or "language mediator" or even a different adjective before "interpreter," as long as it isn't "deaf." This is another topic that perhaps the e-mail list will be a good forum for, but this should be something that is acted upon at the next RID conference.

See you all in San Francisco! ■