

## GUEST EDITORIAL

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### **“The Field of Certified Deaf Interpreting”**

**by Edna Johnston, M. Ed**

**ASL-English Interpretation Department  
Columbia College Chicago**

Since the field of certified deaf interpreting is in its formative stage, I wish to share my thoughts in hopes that they will promote a healthy dialogue. While I support certified deaf interpreters in the interpreting profession, I take issue with the name, the role, and the evaluating of candidates seeking this position. If we are to promote the concept of certified deaf interpreters (CDIs), we need to do it right especially at the beginning.

I consider CDIs a misnomer because the definition for *interpret* or *translate* is to “restate words from one language into another language” (WordNet, 2003). Hearing interpreters obviously do that by performing sign-to-voice and voice-to-sign interpretation. On the contrary, deaf people working as interpreters *expand on the ASL* put out by a hearing interpreter. They *do not translate* from a language into another except for the rare situations where they translate from printed English into ASL or from one sign language to another sign language. That is when CDIs interpret at international events such as the Deaf Way II. In general, CDIs do not interpret because they paraphrase the interpreter’s words whether they stand on the platform, or work with deaf-blind or highly visual clients. Please understand that I am not trying to minimize the CDI’s role. I was a volunteer SSP (Special Support Provider) at a deaf-blind camp in Washington State last summer and “shadowed” the signer/interpreter everyday with my deaf-blind partner. I immediately saw that I was not just mimicking because I had to expand on the information given and try to match the speaker’s register and speed. Still, what I did was not interpreting. With these points explained, I propose a new name for CDIs. They should be

called *Transliterator*s or *ASL Transliterator*s. The definition for transliteration is to interpret from one form of a language to another form of the same language. There is also a name for CDIs that we could borrow from France.

Recently, I was on a tour of a Parisian hospital with a deaf access program and met a full time deaf *mediator*. Her job is the same as an American CDI. The mediator goes into the doctor’s office with a deaf patient and a hearing interpreter fluent in French Sign Language (LSF) and French. Whenever the deaf patient does not follow the interpreter, the mediator intervenes and rephrases the words with more classifiers and spatial use. The process of interpretation and mediation is done smoothly because each role is clearly defined. The French sign for mediators is like this; right B handshape from chest outwards to right side and left B handshape from chest outwards alternating twice. I love this sign/word because it shows what a mediator does. S/he is “a negotiator who acts as a link between parties” (WordNet 2003). Also, if the CDI presents himself as a “mediator”, it is likely that the client (often the hearing party) is more willing to pay for an interpreter AND a mediator. That might be one reason why CDIs are hired sporadically. The client is probably thinking, “Why should I hire TWO interpreters?”

I also struggle with the word “deaf” in “certified deaf interpreters”. Why is the word “deaf” stressed? We do not call interpreters “hearing interpreters” or CHIs. Deaf people have always asked that the society see them as individuals first before noting their audiological

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status. Yet, the RID organization labels certified interpreters “deaf” first before their profession. This is an “Us against Them” mentality that promotes unhealthy competition among the hearing and deaf interpreters. Instead, mediators and interpreters should be working together in partnership.

Regarding the evaluation for certified deaf interpreters, I do not support candidates having the option to take the CDI written test in English or ASL. This is equivalent to allowing “hearing interpreters” take the RID skills test in English only. While I recognize that English is a second language for most deaf people, it does not give them an excuse to AVOID English at all costs. If the RID expects “hearing interpreters” to possess basic skills and gives them tests that are written, signed, and spoken, we certainly should expect the same competency levels from CDIs (written and signed). The deaf community always expects the best from hearing interpreters so we should expect no less of ourselves.

I believe the profession of CDIs will be enhanced greatly if those recommendations including a name change, a clearly defined role, and an improved CDI test are implemented. With the name “certified deaf interpreter” changed to “mediator”, there should be no power struggle between the deaf and hearing interpreters because each person is expected to perform different tasks. More CDIs should be hired as mediators because employers will clearly understand the difference between an interpreter and a mediator. They are not splurging when they hire two “interpreters”. Finally, if a CDI demonstrates competency in both ASL and English on the CDI test, s/he is most likely to contribute more to the interpreting process when working. The hearing interpreter will not have the additional burden of explaining English terms that the CDI does not understand. With less time consumed, the less expensive it is to hire a mediator/interpreter team. This also increases the likelihood that the client will hire the team again. Having shared my thoughts, I look forward to feedback and discussion on the field of CDIs in the next CIT News issue.