



Laying the Foundation for Deaf Interpreter Education: Deaf Interpreting as a Career Choice within the Realm of the Deaf Studies Curriculum

National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC), Jimmy Beldon, Jr., Patrick Boudreault, Cathy Cogen, Eileen Forestal, Lillian M. Garcia, Carole Lazorisak, Priscilla Moyers, Cynthia Napier, and Deborah Peterson

Background

The National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers is a collaboration of six Interpreter Education Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration for the purpose of increasing the number of qualified interpreters and advancing the field of interpreting and interpreting education. The Consortium has established a national partner network of interpreters, educators, and researchers to investigate effective practices in teaching Deaf Interpreting. Together since summer 2006, the team is working to describe the specialized domains and competencies required of the Deaf Interpreter (DI) particularly in the critical areas of language foundations, consumer assessment, decision-making, and interpreting process. Consortium-sponsored surveys and focus groups of Deaf Interpreters and DI educators have begun to shed light on current and best practices in this emerging field. Planned outcomes of this work are a clear definition of the roles and functions of the DI, domains and competencies required for effective interpreting practice, and the future implementation of a clearinghouse of resources, study, and networking opportunities for DIs. These professional discussions and qualitative data gathering are critical as the field works toward understanding and embracing Deaf interpreting as a vital and valued enterprise: an emerging industry of the interpreting field. The purpose of this conference presentation was to highlight Consortium findings to date; provide an overview of the tasks performed by the DI; and consider how the Deaf studies curriculum can contribute to the emergence of Deaf Interpreting as a professional career choice and provide core knowledge and foundation for interpreting education.

What is the Deaf Interpreter's Work?

The DI's work may be viewed as involving interpretation or translation between two distinct languages (e.g. LSQ and ASL; or written English and ASL) or within one language employing a variety of communication systems or techniques based on consumer and situational needs. Boudreault (2007) refers to the latter function as "facilitation." In either case, the DI might produce the target language or variety either visually or tactually, as in Deaf-blind interpreting.

In terms of interpreting roles and functions, the DI provides interpreting services in a variety of situations: conferences and lectures; international conferences and events; legal proceedings; employment and vocational rehabilitation; social services; healthcare; entertainment; educational; and interpreting via video, to name several. Additionally, he or she serves as translator (sight or videotext), clarifier or monitor, linguistic and cultural mediator, and may team with or mentor novice interpreters. All of these areas have potential for growth as consumers, ASL-English interpreters, hiring entities, and policy makers learn about the value of Deaf Interpreting. Interpreting via video is one sector

where growth is anticipated. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently acknowledged roles for the DI within Video Relay Services (VRS), (FCC 2007) and the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), Inc. encourages the use of Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDI) as team interpreters in the VRS (RID 2006).

National Survey Conducted

With the resources provided by the National Consortium, we have been able to begin to move from anecdotal information about the work of the DI to more tangible data-driven descriptions of who Deaf Interpreters are, where they work, in what languages and communication forms, who their consumers are, and what their educational experiences and needs are. The following reflects some of the findings of an on-line national survey conducted from February-March 2008. Of 196 respondents captured by the survey, fifty-eight (or 30%) indicated that they were RID certified (CDI and/or RSC).

While anecdote would have us believe that the DI works primarily with Deaf-blind and semi-bilingual Deaf persons, the data indicates that 73% of National Survey respondents reported that the majority of their work was with consumers who are sighted; 52% reported regular or frequent work with monolingual ASL users; and 27% reported that they are regularly or frequently called upon to work with consumers who have little or no language.

Some believe that DI work is limited primarily to the legal setting. In fact, only 15% of National Survey respondents indicated that the majority of their work was in the legal setting; 27% reported working most of the time in healthcare (medical and mental health) settings; and 41% worked in a variety of community settings including social services, professional or business settings, vocational rehabilitation/job placement settings, educational settings, performing arts, and religious settings.

The survey supported earlier assertions about the need for DI education (Boudreault, 2005; Forestal, 2005). Only 16% of the respondents reported having taken a formal interpreting education program. Yet, most of the Deaf Interpreters responding to this survey had college degrees. 67% had an associates degree or higher; 54% reported having at least a baccalaureate degree.

More in-depth analysis of the National DI Survey may be found at <diinstitute.org>.

Domains and Competencies

While there are many domains in which DI work is akin to ASL-English interpreting provided by hearing interpreters, the National Consortium work team has begun to identify some critical areas where DI work diverges from ASL-English interpreting provided by hearing interpreters. Like ASL-English interpreters, the DI works one-on-one, in small groups, and in larger groups such as meetings and conferences. Similarly, the DI performs sight translation, translation of frozen texts, simultaneous and consecutive interpretation, shadowing or mirroring, and as feed to another interpreter. Like the ASL-English interpreter, the DI is expected to exhibit such minimum competencies inherent in general interpreting as:

- Knowledge and application of interpreting theory to understand and describe the work itself;
- Effective communication in the languages of the participants including nuances of discourse, culture, race, gender, region, ethnicity, age, and socio-economic status;
- Ability to explain, discuss, and negotiate the role and function of the interpreter and the interpreting team;
- Ability to adjust interpreting approach to the needs of consumers;
- Proficiency with technology used in interpreting;

- Ability to appropriately choose, use, and monitor the effectiveness of different types of interpreting (e.g. simultaneous, consecutive, sight translation);
- Ability to apply academic and world knowledge during interpreting;
- Commitment to ethical conduct and professional development;
- Strategies for managing professional conflicts, boundary issues, personal safety; and
- Knowledge and adherence to interpreting-related laws and professional requirements including credentialing and licensure.

Moreover, the DI is expected to bring additional, further developed and specialized competencies beyond those of day-to-day ASL-English interpreting to meet the challenges offered up by the consumer population the DI is most often called upon to serve. These additional competencies seem to fall into four domains: communication/language foundations, consumer assessment, interpreting process, and ethical decision-making.

Communication/Language Foundations

Currently, the DI is most often called upon to interpret for Deaf and Deaf-blind consumers over age 16 who have had limited or inconsistent exposure to English or ASL. 83% of survey respondents reported working at least occasionally with monolingual ASL consumers (i.e. consumers whose English proficiency is limited). 67% of survey respondents reported that they use gesture-based communication in their interpreting work. When respondents were asked to indicate which communication form they are required to use the most in their work, ASL and a combination of ASL and gesture-based communication were most frequently selected. 63% report that they work occasionally, regularly, or frequently with individuals who have no language. The DI is expected to be able to make a determination as to the language or communication mode required and to be ready with an arsenal of communication strategies to meet consumer needs. Where all interpreting requires the ability to demonstrate awareness of and ability to ameliorate typical communication challenges that members of the Deaf community experience as they interface with the hearing community, the need for this ability is more prevalent and emphasized with these consumer populations.

Consumer Language Assessment

There are also variations of language ability and preference among Deaf ASL users. Again, the DI must be able to assess if the consumer is fluent in ASL, how long they have been exposed to ASL, or if their ASL exposure has been social and/or academic. The consumer's fluency and contact with ASL will impact the interpretation. Furthermore, some Deaf ASL users may be affected by cognitive or physical disabilities. For example, if a consumer has had an accident, a stroke, or has cerebral palsy, the DI must be able to evaluate their needs, abilities, level of communication and comprehension, and adapt the interpretation to meet the consumer's needs. Competence in consumer language assessment equips the DI to recognize the essentials to demonstrate reflective cohesion in their interpreting by having exceptional skills far more broad than only ASL and English. They must be able move with ease from one language to another and one sign code to another on a case-by-case basis.

Ethical Decision-making

Interpreting requires moment-by-moment decisions. The ethical interpreter has thought critically through his or her own personal tendencies, values, and ethics, and the meaning of professional conduct. S/he is able to recognize ethical dilemmas and to distinguish not only between right and wrong, but also between right and right. The ethical interpreter will employ decision-making processes to evaluate dilemmas, weigh several options and possible outcomes, and determine the optimal course of action. The DI navigates complex relationships: with him/herself, whose skills and tendencies s/he must know well and manage expertly; with the consumer, whose struggles may generate boundary or role

conflicts within the DI which must be analyzed and managed appropriately; with the ASL-English partner interpreter, with whom the DI negotiates in constructing meaning, managing logistics, and sharing power; and with the non-signing party, who is unlikely to understand why the DI is present or what the process is all about. The education of the DI must present sufficient opportunities to explore and think critically about personal and professional ethics as well as decision-making processes to develop ethical fitness.

Deaf Interpreting Processes

In the United States, most of the DI's work (57%) is carried out collaboratively with an ASL-English interpreter. The DI works from signed source language material provided by the ASL-English interpreter on one side and from ASL or gesture-based communication provided by a Deaf or Deaf-blind consumer on the other side. The DI can also interpret directly from a signing source-language presenter or translate from a written or filmed text.

The complexity of the content, situational protocol, and participant needs factor into decisions on how to conduct the process, that is, whether the interpretation will be simultaneous, consecutive, or quasi. In simultaneous interpretation, the DI renders an interpretation while the source message continues without pause; in consecutive interpretation, the source language message is divided into segments allowing for more in-depth analysis and resulting in a more linguistically accurate and culturally nuanced interpretation. A setting may determine a combination of simultaneous and consecutive in which the interpreting team moves between the two modes. Semi- and a-lingual consumers often require the DI to employ extra-linguistic knowledge and such interpreting strategies as the use of props, gestures, distillation of the most important points, or parsing and restructuring a complex question or statement into several shorter, more easily understood forms.

In the 2006 Deaf Interpreting Critical Issues Forum, our team explored the application of interpreting service models, theories of interpretation including Gile's Effort Model (Gile, 1995) and Vermeer's Skopostheorie (1989/2004), and pedagogical approaches such as Colonomos' CRP model (discussed in Boines, et. al. 1996), Gish's goal-to-detail, detail-to-goal approach to information processing (Gish, 1984), and Monikowski & Winston's discourse mapping approach (Monikowski & Winston, 2000) as means of illuminating the practice and teaching of Deaf Interpreting and the interpreting team process. Forum presentations are available in summary and PowerPoint form through the Consortium website at: <diinstitute.org>. Here the reader may find more information about the Deaf Interpreting strategies described above, as well as discussion of interpreting process and pedagogical models as applied to Deaf Interpreting.

Training Needs and Preferences

Deaf Interpreters express a serious interest in and a critical need for continuing professional development. As many of 41% of the National Survey respondents would be willing to travel away from home to participate in educational opportunities. 82% indicated that they were willing to participate in online education. While there was some expression of interest in general interpreting education programs (27%) and interpreting teacher training (15%), the majority (58%) were most interested in specialty training in such areas as legal, medical, and mental healthcare interpreting.

Current Critical Issues for DI

We intend that the work of the Consortium on Deaf Interpreting will affect several issues in the field today:

- While ASL-English interpreters are generally expected to complete two-to-four years of interpreting education before sitting for certification, the RID currently requires only 16 hours of training before a DI is eligible for certification. This may contribute to a high rate of failure on the DI certification test. Additionally, it creates an uneven playing field for the DI and ASL-English interpreter who practice together as a team.
- A number of workshops on Deaf Interpreting are offered each year around the U.S. There is a need to identify and promote content and approaches based in effective practices.
- Interpreting Education for the Deaf Interpreter needs to support the development of the requisite skills and knowledge for effective Deaf Interpreting described above through coursework, internships, and mentoring opportunities.
- The value of the DI in the interpreting process is not well known among members of Deaf Community, ASL-English interpreters, and the general public. Deaf Interpreters themselves need information on how to market themselves and how to build careers in this emerging field.

By defining the knowledge and competencies required for effective Deaf Interpreting, the Consortium will help to promote higher standards for DI education. The Consortium's plans to create an Internet based clearinghouse of information and resources for and about Deaf interpreting practice and education will help to advance the field through sharing of information and networking opportunities.

Future Plans

The Consortium Deaf Interpreting Work-team is currently developing a web-based clearinghouse of resources, study, and networking opportunities for and about Deaf Interpreters, which will be known as Deaf Interpreting Institute. *DIInstitute.org* will be a focal point for the Deaf Interpreting field, offering information about Deaf Interpreting including definitions and DI domains and competencies; an interactive, annotated bibliography of literature and DVDs on Deaf Interpreting; resources for Deaf Interpreters, the Deaf Community, interpreting education programs, ASL-English interpreters, and the general public; a calendar of events; DI learning opportunities and case studies focused on common issues and challenges in Deaf Interpreting; data collection surveys; and a VLOG to promote networking and discussion among Deaf Interpreter practitioners, mentors, and educators.

The Role of Deaf Studies in the Advancement of Deaf Interpreters

The field of Deaf Interpreting might be well supported by a partnership among Deaf Studies programs, interpreting education programs, and the forthcoming *DIInstitute.org*.

A solid Deaf Studies curriculum, including such content areas as Deaf and Culture, Deaf history, linguistics of ASL, Deaf-blind community, communication, and culture, dynamics of oppression, ASL literature, sign language acquisition (psycholinguistics), issues and trends in the Deaf Community, law and the Deaf, and foreign Sign Languages would lay a solid foundation for Deaf Interpreting Education. The interpreting education curriculum would then focus on the knowledge and competencies of effective interpreting, however built upon core knowledge and experiences that will expand the DI's schema, foster critical thinking and decision-making skills, help them better understand and assess consumers, and become more conversant in the underlying issues and challenges of Deaf Interpreting. *DIInstitute.org* will support continuing professional development through the services and networking it will provide. Partnering together, Deaf Studies, Interpreting Education, and the DI Institute would allow for continual professional growth for Deaf Interpreters. These opportunities would also help Deaf Interpreters reach the goal of achieving credentials.

It is important for us all to be involved in driving this initiative forward. Deaf Studies Programs can participate by strengthening the curriculum to incorporate a wide range of courses beyond Deaf Culture. A strong core curriculum will facilitate the emergence of Deaf interpreting as a professional career. When we become unified in doing this at the basic curriculum level, we will see our students develop quickly into successful and professional Deaf Interpreters.

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Information on the National Consortium's work on Deaf Interpreting, as well as its other projects, may be found at these websites:

www.asl.neu.edu/nciec

www.asl.neu.edu/nciec/projects.html#di

www.asl.neu.edu/nciec/resource/docs.html

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