

## PROPOSED DEAF INTERPRETING

### DOMAINS & COMPETENCIES

Working Document – July 28, 2009

#### 1. Background

A Deaf Interpreter is a specialist who provides interpretation, translation, and transliteration services in American Sign Language (ASL) and other visual and tactual communication forms used by individuals who are Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and Deaf-Blind. A recent survey conducted by the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers Deaf Interpreting Work Team (NCIEC 2009b) indicated that while Deaf Interpreters work across the full gamut of interpreting situations and venues, the most common according to 48% of respondents are currently social services and healthcare (medical and mental health) settings. About 16% work primarily in the education arena and 15% of survey respondents indicated that the majority of their interpreting work is performed in legal proceedings. Studies by the NCIEC's Legal Interpreting Work Team have uncovered ample evidence in case law of the essential role of Deaf Interpreters in courtroom proceedings (Mathers 2009) and provided recommended best practices for the use of Deaf Interpreters in court and legal settings (Stewart et. al. 2009).

According to the national survey, more than half of the work of Deaf Interpreters involves interpretation into American Sign Language (ASL) and vice versa with monolingual ASL users who have limited English proficiency. As many as 67% of respondents reported using visual-gestural communication<sup>1</sup> in their work. Most of the work seems to involve a combination of ASL and visual-gestural communication. While most reported that the majority of the deaf consumers with whom they work are sighted, most Deaf Interpreters do employ close vision (62%) and tactual signing (56%) in their work with Deaf-Blind individuals.

Most Deaf Interpreters work as a team with an interpreter who can hear. However, 29% of survey respondents indicated that they do work alone with certain consumers and settings.

Deaf Interpreting Domains & Competencies defines the knowledge and skill sets required for effective Deaf Interpreting. First, we address the formative experiences common among Deaf Interpreters and critical foundation for their later development as interpreters. We then touch briefly on the generalist competencies and specialty training expected of both Deaf and hearing interpreters. Finally, we delve into the specialized competencies for effective Deaf Interpreting in the domains of Consumer Assessment, Language and Communication Foundations, Interpreting Process, and Professional Development.

1.1 **Formative Experiences.** As a Deaf person, the Deaf Interpreter starts with a distinct set of formative experiences described extensively by Deaf Interpreter focus group participants (NCIEC 2009a):

The formative experiences of Deaf Interpreters include:

1.1.1. Exposure to American Sign Language and a wide variety of other communication forms of deaf people through life-long interactions with Deaf family members, Deaf peers within the education system, and Deaf people in the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Visual-gestural communication refers to the use of non-standard signs and gestures as a method of communicating with deaf individuals who are semi-lingual or a-lingual.

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- 1.1.2. Early experiences of interpreting for family and peers;
- 1.1.3. Experiences of personal challenges to comprehending situations, interpreters, and various communication styles;
- 1.1.4. Personal experiences of discrimination, oppression, and what it is like not to have access to communication.

Through these experiences, the Deaf Interpreter has the opportunity to master ASL and other forms of visual communication and to develop what Daniel Gile (1995) refers to as extralinguistic knowledge (ELK) essential, with knowledge of language (KL), for comprehension in interpretation and translation. For our purposes, we refer to the knowledge gained through these first-hand Deaf world experiences as Deaf Extralinguistic Knowledge, or DELK. The Deaf Interpreter relies extensively on DELK in consumer assessment, message analysis, even in the production phase of the interpreting process, to achieve an interpretation that is consistent with the linguistic and experiential frame of the deaf consumer. DELK is, moreover, a prerequisite to training as a Deaf Interpreter.

- 1.2 **Generalist Competencies.** The Deaf Interpreter possesses interpreting competencies expected of all generalist interpreters, a variety of linguistic, interactional, technical, academic, affective, and creative competencies and professional attributes that ensure effective performance in routine situations. The domains of effective generalist practice outlined in *Entry to Practice Competencies for ASL-English Interpreters* are:
  - 1.2.1 Theory and Knowledge Competencies: Academic foundation and world knowledge essential to effective interpretation.
  - 1.2.2 Human Relations Competencies: Interpersonal competencies fostering effective communication and productive collaboration with colleagues, consumers, and employers.
  - 1.2.3 Language Skills Competencies: Use of American Sign Language and English
  - 1.2.4 Interpreting Skills Competencies: Effective ASL-English interpretation of a range of subject matter in a variety of settings.
  - 1.2.5 Professionalism Competencies: Professional standards and practices.
- 1.3 **Specialty Areas of Interpreting.** In addition, like hearing interpreters, Deaf Interpreters who work in specialty areas of interpreting (e.g. conference, legal, medical, mental health, VRS, foreign signed language, and International Sign Language) pursue and demonstrate a thorough understanding of institutional culture, demands, protocols and procedures, terminology, resources, legal and ethical mandates, competencies, and self-care strategies associated with any of those areas in which he or she works.

## 2. Specialized Domains and Competencies for Deaf Interpreting

- 2.1 **Consumer Assessment.** The Deaf Interpreter demonstrates the following competencies in determining appropriate interpreting and communication strategies with individual consumers:

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- 2.1.1 Identify educational, cognitive, physiological, and socio-linguistic factors and communication needs likely to influence the interpretation strategies and interventions.
  - 2.1.2 Identify consumer's language ability (e.g. bilingual, monolingual, semi-lingual, communication system interference, international signs, use of culture-specific and idiosyncratic gestures or home signs, use of tactual communication, use of close-vision communication) to determine a compatible production target for the interpretation.
  - 2.1.3 Apply DELK to intuit consumer's potential gaps (e.g. informational, educational, visual, protocol, cognitive, memory, cultural, or frame of reference) relative to the particular interaction or setting and determine required interpretation target language interventions.
  - 2.1.4 Apply DELK and understanding of the history and significance of oppression in the Deaf community in analysis of power relationships among participants within the interpreted interaction and determine how the consumer's position within the power dynamic might influence interpreting decisions or require intervention.
- 2.2 **Language and Communication Foundations.** The Deaf Interpreter demonstrates the following language and communication abilities essential to the effective interaction with the range of consumers with whom he or she may work:
- 2.2.1 Native or native-like competency in ASL including spontaneous use of pragmatic and sociolinguistic features of ASL discourse including ASL prosody, accent, transition markers, discourse markers, and turn taking.
  - 2.2.2 Mastery of and suppleness in all registers, genres, and variations of ASL attributable to age, gender, region, class, physical and cognitive health, and education levels.
  - 2.2.3 Creativity and flexibility in various visual communication strategies needed to convey complex concepts to consumers including ability to employ an arsenal of visual communication strategies, including drawing, mime, props, etc.
  - 2.2.4 Ability to read and write English at a level sufficient for accurate sight translation of routine forms and instructions (e.g. hospital admission, informed consent, job applications, insurance, billing) and written translation of the deaf consumer's responses, working independently and under significant time pressure.
  - 2.2.5 Ability to effectively explain and discuss the following concepts to a variety of stakeholders in an articulate, professional manner using ASL:
    - 2.2.5.1 Process of consumer assessment and the rationale for using particular interpreting strategies and interventions;
    - 2.2.5.2 Deaf interpreter's role and function;
    - 2.2.5.3 Roles, functions, and processes of the interpreting team;
    - 2.2.5.4 Rationale for the decision to use consecutive or simultaneous interpreting;

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2.2.5.5 Rationale for using a Deaf Interpreter for routine and complex assignments.

2.3 **Interpreting Practice.** The Deaf Interpreter demonstrates the following abilities to use analytic, production, and monitoring strategies to ensure access to communication by the consumer:

2.3.1 Ability to engage the deaf consumer in the interpreting process to ensure access to accurate, meaningful, and effective communication.

2.3.2 Strategies for effective analysis of deaf consumer's message, e.g.:

2.3.2.1 Elicitation strategies to draw out sufficient information to make sense of the message (e.g. prompting, probing, questioning, referencing previous comments, paraphrasing, verifying interpreter's comprehension);

2.3.2.2 DELK-based contextual strategies to infer implied meaning and discern meaning in spite of production interference (e.g. incomplete sentence structures, inconsistent pronominal reference, surrogate roles, disjointed reporting of events, incomplete description, confused use of tense and spatial reference);

2.3.2.3 Strategies to maintain deaf consumer's focus on information relevant to the discourse (e.g. reiterating previous remark/question, making connections to earlier discussion, clarifying the point of remark/question).

2.3.3 Ability to effectively produce target language/communication form consistent with the experiential and linguistic framework of the deaf consumer, i.e.:

2.3.3.1 Appropriate strategies to address consumer's identified linguistic and contextual gaps relevant to the interaction and setting, including:

2.3.3.1.1 Adapting syntactic form (e.g. temporal sequencing, spatial representation, temporal referencing, pronominal referencing, constructive action, restructuring of question forms to narrow possible responses, raising/lowering of register);

2.3.3.1.2 Managing flow of information according to consumer's receptive capacity, comprehension, and level of participation in the discourse;

2.3.3.1.3 Providing contextual information (e.g. visual description, linkages among concepts discussed, added redundancy, reframing, analogies, examples, definitions, cultural information, and explanation of situational protocol) to make the source language message comprehensible to the consumer.

2.3.3.1.4 Utilizing consumer assessment and monitoring consumer feedback to determine alternative modes of communication and other interventions (e.g. tactual communication, close-vision communication, international signs, adopting deaf consumer's preferred signs, culture-specific or idiosyncratic gestures, and home signs, use of props, drawing, mime, etc.) as needed to make the message comprehensible.

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2.3.3.1.5 Seeking clarification from source language speaker and/or feed interpreter concerning details as needed to accomplish above.

2.3.4 Demonstrate ability to monitor interaction to determine whether interpreting is effectual; determine when it might be appropriate to stop the proceedings and offer appropriate alternative resources.

2.3.5 When working as a team with a hearing interpreter, demonstrate ability to effectively negotiate aspects of the conjoint work:

2.3.5.1 Agree in advance on compatible feed language, techniques and strategies for routine and complex interpreting situations;

2.3.5.2 Agree in advance on the use of consecutive or simultaneous interpretation modes;

2.3.5.3 Proactively plan how to manage communication breakdowns, including replacing members of the team, when necessary, in a professional manner;

2.3.5.4 Foster a collaborative interpreting process, working together to verify meaning, gather clarifying information, manage information flow within the team, and effect a mutual monitoring process to produce complete, accurate, and comprehensible interpretation.

2.3.5.5 Recognize and effectively navigate potential power dynamics within the team process (e.g. cultural diversity, audism, socio-economic status).

## 2.4 Professional Development

2.4.1 Promote opportunities for face-to-face professional development.

2.4.2 Keep abreast of current trends in interpretation, linguistic, cultural study research (ASL-English and hearing and deaf cultures).

2.4.3 Encourage and participate in professional learning communities of Deaf Interpreters.

## References

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