



Introduction

This module is designed to provide basic information about sign language interpreting. It will orient the participants to the concepts that are crucial to understanding sign language interpreting. The material is designed at participants with little or no formal training as sign language interpreters or deaf community members interested in sign language interpreting. The module provides clarity about what an interpreter is, and is not, and the kinds of training modules necessary to become a professional interpreter. By exploring the role and responsibilities of a SLI, participants will come to appreciate ethical codes and guidelines for professional conduct. Finally, the model will introduce the concept of being an ally and the ways in which interpreter and deaf associations must collaborate to strengthen the quality of interpreting services provided to the deaf community. The content is divided into three separate presentation, one that is an introduction to interpreting, a second that is advanced information on how the training of interpreters can be best done, and the third is information about collaboration across organizations.

History of SLI

Interpreters have existed throughout history since ancient Greece. The earliest record of interpreters is from the UK, where there was an interpreter in court in 1600th century. In 1970 was the beginning of professional interpreters. First sign language interpreters often had deaf family members or were teachers, social workers, ministers with deaf community. As deaf people began to get access to post-secondary education and work settings, the access to interpreting became a pressing need. In the beginning training was first only 4 weeks, 10 months, or two years but now in some countries training takes 4 years and is a bachelor program.

Part 1: What interpreters do?

They facilitate communication between people who do not share the same language. A professional interpreter must have fluency in spoken and sign languages of the country, be that French and LSF, Spanish and Colombian Sign Language, English, and British Sign Language, etc. They must also have training and the ability to provide effective interpretation between the two languages, and have the interpersonal skills, cultural competency, and maturity to make ethical decisions daily. A professional also understands the nature of the role of an interpreter, which is to facilitate communication, and remain impartial. That means that they allow the parties to make their own decisions. They must be able to understand the ethics that guide the profession of SLI interpreters. Interpreters work at balancing the need to interpret the meaning of what the people are communicating about, and to attend to the goals that the parties have during the communication event. Interpreters do not just sign every word, but rather they draw on their understand of cross-cultural interaction and linguistic knowledge to perform accurately and effectively across a range of settings and events.



Interpreters can be both deaf or hearing. Same ethical practices are required of both deaf and hearing interpreters. Just because a person is deaf does not mean that they are an interpreter. It is important to emphasize that all interpreters need to be trained before they can have the role of interpreter in different events. The interpreter should master in the following competences: language proficiency (spoken and signed language of the country), intercultural competence, interpersonal competence, communicative competence, interpreting competence (eg. notetaking, Consecutive Interpreting, Simultaneous Interpreting), technical competence and special knowledge for settings.

There are qualifications that make an interpreter either a good or a bad interpreter. An interpreter should show respect for all parties and interpret all the information accurately. They are impartial and ethical. They should prepare as much as possible prior to an interpretation session. For instance, they can read materials prior to a class or a conference presentation. Opposed to a good interpreter, a bad interpreter is not effective. They offer their opinions while interpreting. They omit or change information. They accept assignments that they are not qualified for, for example interpreting in an international conference from spoken English into signed language, when they are not fluent in English. They are not respectful to the participants and they do not follow ethics.

Keep in mind that when you require or exclude specific actions, behaviors, or rules, you also reduce or eliminate their flexibility to exercise professional judgement. This leads to “right/wrong” thinking instead of critically thinking what the best option for the situation is.

The role of interpreter

1. Interpreter

They shall interpret complete and accurate information between spoken and signed language consumers. They shall be impartial in the interaction. They shall produce content, contextual information, communication goals and improve conditions for productive communication.

2. Ethical decisions

An interpreter shall ensure that their skills are suitable for assignment. They must turn down work if they are not qualified or cannot stay impartial. For example, if the interpreter has close relations with some members of the deaf community, they might not be able to stay impartial while in an interpreting situation. They shall promote professional development and attend ongoing training. They shall prepare for the work in advance to do a good job while interpreting.

3. Deaf direct their own lives

The interpreter must understand that deaf people have right to represent themselves and direct their own lives. It is expected that the interpreters understand this and are engaged in activities that aim at achieving equality for deaf people.



4. Interpreter as a personal assistant? Or do they have other roles?

Many countries perceive the interpreter not as a personal assistant, counsellor, or teacher. They perceive the interpreter only as an interpreter. It is important to consider what kind of other roles do interpreters play in deaf community. How can roles be kept clear?

5. Interpreter ethics

Most important ethics of an interpreter are confidentiality, impartiality, competence, non-discrimination, professional accountability, create professional relationships – where they respect colleagues and honest and fair in business relationships. Interpreter must also have competences in decision making strategies. It does not mean choosing between right and wrong but choosing the best situation in the situation. An interpreter must be able to see how their decisions impact consumers, both positively and negatively. They must be able to work collaboratively with others to make decisions.

Part 2: Interpreter training

Many countries have an interpreter program, but also there are many countries that do not yet have an interpreter training program. It is important to understand that it may take years to create an interpreter program. There are many steps you must achieve to have a training program.

First step is to carry out a situational analysis of your country or region. A community-based researcher must research about the situation of deaf community and interpreters. During the research they can investigate whether the signed language of the country is documented effectively, is there an educational institution that could be a partner for a deaf studies and interpreter program, investigate the pros and cons of having local or regional program – and investigate the capacity. It is also a good idea to review 2017 WASLI Education Task Group Guidelines.

1. Pilot development and delivery

Develop and test curriculum for the training with first group. International teachers must collaborate with local advisors and stakeholders. Then you develop and test resources. You must advocate for use and employment of interpreters in your country. Finally, you should evaluate the program.

2. Consolidation and mentored delivery

During this stage, the goal is to make the training more strong and solid. First, you should repeat delivery. Expert teachers teach with local graduates and others. This is called as mentored co-teaching. Based on the teaching, refine curriculum and resources. You must build links with consumers, employers of interpreters and practitioners. Finally, you should evaluate the program once again.

3. Local ownership and sustainability

This stage aims to promoting local ownership and sustainability of the training program. First, you should repeat delivery. Teaching of training program should be led by locals. You should strengthen the links with consumers, service providers and practitioners. Finally, evaluate the program.



There may be challenges in setting up programs, such as finding suitable educators, ensuring that you have advisory groups or stakeholder engagement, finding suitable students and developing the curriculum. There are some solutions how you can overcome those challenges when setting up the program. When trying to find suitable educators, it is a good idea to identify experienced and respected interpreters in local or regional settings and identifying deaf SL instructors who can work with the program. If you are working with foreign trainers, use capacity building model. Next, when creating advisory groups or stakeholder engagement, you should ensure that you have strong advisory group of stakeholders. You should use ideas and resources from the group to build the program. It is important to establish cooperation across regions to build sustainable programs.

Another challenge is finding suitable students. It is good idea to use your network to find people who may have worked as an interpreter before (but are not trained), people who already know sign language or for example children of deaf adults (CODAs). Identify respected people who are doing the work in the field of deaf community. You should also screen for personal suitability – are they good with languages, do they have intercultural and interpersonal skills? They may become good students and good interpreters in the future. Finally, it is difficult to develop a curriculum. It is easier if you fit it to local or regional context. Build links with consumers, employers of interpreters or practitioners. It is also utmost of importance to evaluate the program, so you can take lessons learnt to the next training group.

Sign language training topics

There are steps in sign language training that the students must acquire and complete before going to another level: Understanding sign language, understanding deaf cultural studies, volunteer in community and basic comparative linguistics. Steps in interpreter training include intercultural communication, interpreting skills and techniques, co-interpreting, ethics and decision-making, preparing for interpreting, practicums, considering local needs such as deaf-blind consumers and critical reflection. All in all, trainings must include topics such as language fluency (sign language and spoken language), intercultural competences (respect for all cultures), communication competences (deaf community and culture, majority and minority communities, collaboration with deaf communities and associations), interpreting competencies (understanding of language and interaction) and ethical competences (decision-making and ethics, problem-solving).

How to teach?

Just being a great signer or a great interpreter does not mean that the person is a great teacher. It is important to consider the question of who should teach. Teachers should have knowledge of how to structure training and build curriculum. It is a good idea to find local support, such as partner with universities. You should ensure that educators and trainers have skills needed. Those are experience in teaching and planning training events and working collaboratively with local and foreign teachers. They should have ability to collaborate with diverse team of trainers, that are both deaf and hearing. They should have understanding in how to teach L2 learners (a L2 learner is a person learning a language as second, third, or more language). There are differences in competencies between a language and interpreter teacher. A language teacher should be fluent in national sign



language and have knowledge in how to teach sign language. Interpreting teacher must have experience as being an interpreter, must be certified (if the country has certification) and understand how to teach and sequence activities from translation, consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. It is good idea to work with materials available in language of your country. If you can understand English, there are many resources available. However, it is important to ensure that curriculum suits your country and your stage of development.

Part 3: Cooperation between deaf (association) and SLI (association)

In some countries, interpreters form local and/or national associations. These associations have an important role to play, both in representing the profession and establishing standards for ethical behavior and decision-making. These associations do not compete with deaf associations and nor are they interpreter referral businesses. The interpreter associations collaborate with deaf associations, working to support each other's goals. This module will provide examples of the ways that collaboration is modeled at the international level, with WFD and WASLI and the national level. You must build the roots of collaboration. And understand your role as an ally. Collaboration includes being a visitor in deaf community, valuing collaboration, getting to know people, deaf led activities and learning from feedback. It is important to understand the meaning of ally when being a part of the deaf community and why is being an ally an important piece of your work.

There are ally traits that you as a deaf association should adopt when working with interpreter association, and as an interpreter association when working within the deaf community. You should have frequent communication, both formal and informal. Seek solutions instead of problems. It is important to have problem-solving strategies. You should trust each other, set shared goals, and support each other. Finally, you should value collaboration and not view it as competition.

For instance, WFD and WASLI has created a solid collaboration in action which has resulted that eight years later from the establishment of collaboration, there have been meetings in Australia, Panama, New York, Moscow, Dubai, Sydney, Macau, Istanbul, Bahrain, Singapore, Panama, Brisbane, London, Turkey and Paris. They have held conferences in same country and time in Spain, South Africa, Turkey, and Paris. As a result of a great collaboration, they have produced together several shared documents, such as hiring standards for interpreters at international conferences. Between 2011 and 2015, they created three task groups focused on International Sign standards, International Sign remuneration and Natural Disasters and Communication Access. During 2015 to 2019, they have cooperated to promote joint accreditation of International Sign Interpreters for UN level work and defined who should teach International Sign. Furthermore, WFD and WASLI have joint understanding in language decisions and have produced a statement regarding standardized Arabic sign language.