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Multiculturalism and Interpreting

As members of cultural and linguistic communities continue to come into increasing contact, we can no longer view the work of the interpreter as facilitating communication between two languages and cultures. Lightfoot (2007) suggests "we need to open our understanding of interpreting from a bilingual-bicultural model to a multicultural model" (p. 17). McKee and Davis (2010) suggest that we have been living with the impression of a false dichotomy. They state, "The discourse of the sign language interpreting profession has tended to characterize consumers and languages in a binary distinction as Deaf or hearing, at times perhaps implying that these social categories are homogenous, mutually exclusive, and all-encompassing primary identities" (p. vii). By ignoring the reality of the multilingual, multicultural Deaf community, we are creating barriers to the success of these individuals (Gerner de Garcia, 2000). The paradigm with which we have lived only serves to limit the way that we understand the interpreting profession.

There are communities of interpreters who work between several languages and cultures. This skill is in high demand and is growing at a rapid pace; however, our knowledge of the work is only beginning to develop. The following is an exploration of the work of trilingual interpreters (American Sign Language, Spanish, and English) in an effort to investigate the process used and challenges faced by this community.

Trilingualism and Triculturalism

Call **(**www.lifeprint.com/ASL101/topics/trilingual.htm**)** expands upon the common

definition of bilingualism and biculturalism in order to establish a standard definition of

trilingualism and triculturalism. He defines trilingualism as equal language fluency in three

languages, most likely as a result of being exposed to all three languages at an early age. He

then defines triculturalism as identifying and claiming membership with three distinct

cultural groups. For the purposes of this document, trilingualism will consist of ASL,

Spanish, and English languages. Triculturalism includes Deaf, Hispanic or Latino, and

mainstream American cultures, understanding that the terms Hispanic, Latino, and Deaf refer

to a variety of communities with different cultural backgrounds.

 Education of Hispanic/Latino Deaf Students

Through a series of focus group discussions with trilingual interpreting practitioners,

hiring entities, and consumers of interpreting services (Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and hearing),

the NCIEC Trilingual Task Force (2012) found that effective trilingual interpreters have

foundational knowledge of deaf education. In addition, knowledge of history, politics, pop

culture, healthcare, legal systems, the immigration process, and attitudes toward deafness in

Spanish-speaking countries and territories within interpreters' geographical area will help

interpreters understand the community in which they work.

Gerner de Garcia (1993, 2000**)** shares that the largest concentrations of Hispanic

people are on the coasts with the majority of the Puerto Rican, Dominican and Cuban

population in the Northeast and Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the Southwest. This

includes California, New York, Texas, and Florida. Gerner de Garcia notes that there are also

large populations in other urban areas such as Philadelphia, Washington, DC, and Chicago.

The United States Census Bureau reports that 50.5 million people in the United States identify as being of Hispanic or Latino origin (Ennis, Rios-Vargas & Albert, 2011). Three-quarters of this group report being of Mexican, Puerto-Rican, or Cuban origin. Data shows that 41 percent of Hispanics reside in the West while 36 percent live in the South. In addition, 14 percent of the Hispanic population live in the Northeast and 9 percent live the Midwest. The US Census Bureau asserts that over half of the Hispanic population reside in California, Texas, and Florida. This coincides with the information expressed by Gerner de Garcia (2000).

In examining these areas of the United States, it can be seen that the academic achievement of Hispanic students is not always equal to that of children from other backgrounds. This can be attributed to a variety of factors. Children who are raised in different cultures each have a unique style of learning; unfortunately, these differences are not always recognized by educational programs. Gerner de Garcia (1993) notes that Hispanic children often prefer a cooperative learning environment and can be seen to achieve greater success when working with others as opposed to working independently. She goes on to say that families from different cultural backgrounds support their child's learning in different ways. Deaf children whose parents have immigrated to the United States may have come from a location that perceives deaf individuals as being unable to live independently. The family may not have had the resources to support their deaf child's education given the lack of access to information about Deaf culture and signed languages. For example, deaf children in Spain were historically placed in educational environments that favored oralism, which led to a disparity in the education of prelingually vs postlingually deaf individuals. It was not until 2007 that a law was passed by the Spanish Senate officially recognizing both Spanish

Sign Language and Catalán Sign Language (Fraser, 2009).

Hispanic deaf students who currently reside int he United States may have the further challenge of being assessed in a language with which they are not proficient. If the child were to be assessed in the language that they are less familiar, this puts them at an unfair disadvantage from their peers and may result in the incorrect labeling of the child. This challenge is compounded when Spanish dialects are taken into consideration (Gerner de Garcia, 1993). It is within this type of meeting that trilingual interpreters often facilitate communication. Through working with a skilled trilingual interpreter, each participant can achieve access to educational resources.

While it is important to recognize the child's dominant language, it is also important to acknowledge all three languages that the child may be able to utilize if given the right support. This is equally important when considering the various cultures with which an individual may identify. Through the incorporation of multiple languages and cultures in educational activities, the child, along with their family, can greater participate in the educational process. Deafness is not necessarily a barrier to the exchange of cultural information within the family. Often deaf children participate in cultural family practices (Ramsey, 2000). Cultural information can be conveyed in school as well through implementation of activities that center on culture. "Classroom activities that include diverse cultural experiences are likely to stimulate the interest and participation of children who can relate to a particular experience and share the perspective of a native of that culture" (Christensen, 1993, p.24). This may create a sense of pride in the student as they begin to explore their identity. Collaboration between the family and the education system serves to foster the development and maintenance of all three languages and cultures.

Deaf Mexican Experience

Ramsey (2011) found that after the closing of the Escuela Nacional para Sordomudos (the Mexican National School for the Deaf known as ENS) in 1967, Deaf Mexicans are no longer grouped into a single educational institution. Schools for the deaf in Mexico, including the historical ENS, have been primarily oral. Those teachers who incorporated signed language into their instruction were not formally taught Lengua de Señas Mexicana (LSM) and would often use American Sign Language as it was taught to them by individuals from the United States or create their own "school sign" (Parra, 1984, p. 4). The separation of deaf children, along with the lack of proper teacher training ultimately led to poor education of the deaf in Mexico and limited employment opportunities for deaf people.

Both the women and men who participated in Ramsey's (2011) study share that they learned LSM from the older generation of Deaf Mexicans in their community. The participants express that the younger generation of Deaf people in Mexico are often placed into schools with hearing children or with children who have other disabilities. They meet other Deaf individuals through their association with clubs, churches, or sports teams. It is through these avenues that Deaf youth meet older Deaf Mexicans and are able to learn LSM. Interpreters who work with individuals from Mexico will notice extensive language variation for this reason.

Multicultural Interpreter Education

In regards to Hispanic/Latino culture, Call (2010) states that often families have multiple children, which means that a deaf child will commonly have siblings who have the opportunity to become trilingual in Spanish, ASL, and English. These children will have access to cultural and linguistic information from other members of the household. Call

asserts that, "it is these siblings who could become the greatest pool of potential in filling the existing shortage of ASL/Spanish/English trilingual professional educators and trilingual interpreters" (Call, 2010, p.26). In order to foster the development of this knowledge, it is important to actively expose youth to cultural information through school curricula as well as at home. This will serve to build cultural knowledge that can be utilized by members of the Hispanic/Latino Deaf community as well as the trilingual interpreting community.

The National Multicultural Interpreter Project (NMIP), in recognition of the change in the demographics of the United States, established the goal of educating interpreters to work in a multicultural society. NMIP explored multicultural issues in interpreting from 1996 to 2000 with the mission of improving "the quantity and quality of interpreting services provided to individuals who are D/deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind from culturally diverse communities by providing educational opportunities, recruiting culturally diverse interpreters, and enhancing cultural sensitivity within the profession" (NMIP curriculum overview, p.11). The group worked to establish interpreting curricula that demonstrates the inclusion of people from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

Within the lecture regarding the Hispanic and Latino population, the authors describe the knowledge needed in order to successfully interpret within the community. For example, in reference to cultural identity the authors state,

> using the term 'Hispanic' alongside 'White,' 'Black,'
>
> 'Native American' and 'Asian' [in demographic surveys]
>
> has led to some confusion because the terms 'White,'
>
> 'Black,' 'Native American' and 'Asian' refer to race while
>
> the term 'Hispanic' refers to ethnicity. Spanish speakers

cannot be categorized as members of a single race" (NMIP

Hispanic and Latino Lecture, p.2).

This is the type of foundational information that interpreters need in order to provide effective service. It is all too easy to misunderstand the difference between these terms considering the ubiquitous use of particular words on documents.

The participants in the National Multicultural Interpreter Project explored ideas such as cultural terminology, demographics, cultural history, immigration, health, and education. They broached important themes within culture, such as the importance of family, cultural expectations regarding eye contact/physical proximity, and the significance of non-manual behavior. It is stated that, "Hispanics stand closer to each other approximately 18 inches, while the dominant culture tends to maintain a distance of 36-48 inches. Lowering of head/eyes signifies respect, not humiliation" (NMIP Hispanic Lecture, p. 25). In addition, the Interpreting Via Video Work Team of the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (2008) notes that, due to the small pool of trilingual VRS interpreters, it is common to see the same caller more than once; therefore, callers may consider the interpreter to be a friend or part of the family. They may ask the interpreter personal questions about their background and how they learned Spanish.

Aside from generalist interpreter competencies (e.g. linguistic, interactional, cognitive) the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers Trilingual Task Force (2012) lists additional skills and aptitudes needed by trilingual interpreters. For example, trilingual interpreters must be able to interpret an interaction in which a deaf consumer, an English-speaking consumer, and a Spanish-speaking consumer are all present. They must also be able to perform sight translations of documents written in either Spanish or English

delivering them into either Spanish, English, or ASL. In addition, trilingual interpreters must be conscious of and flexible in their use of regionalisms which may be unfamiliar to consumers. They must also possess knowledge of the names and signs of countries and cities in Latin America, especially of those within their geographic area. Interpreters who are familiar with a variety of cultures possess knowledge needed to understand implicit information within a given message. Sequeiros (2002) discusses pragmatic enrichment in Spanish-English translation, which is used when working between languages that have grammatical incompatibilities as well as varying cultures. Grammatical incompatibilities may include differences in the expression of time. Enrichment due to varying cultures is necessary when "assumptions required to interpret the original text successfully may not be easily accessible to the target audience" (p. 1078). Therefore, contextual clues that are evident to the translator are made explicit in the target language in order to facilitate comprehension of the original message. Decisions made by the translator lead to varying degrees of faithfulness to the source message. It is important to consider cultural and grammatical differences in order to prevent misunderstanding. This type of skill can be honed through pursuit of multicultural education.

Organizations

Trilingual interpreters have the ability to apply their unique skill set in a variety of settings. Treviño (2012) notes that professionals in the fields of signed language interpretation, spoken language interpretation, and translation can learn a lot from one another (e.g. consecutive interpretation and sight translation). He recommends that trilingual interpreters join professional organizations such as Mano a Mano, the American Translators Association (ATA), and the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators

(NAJIT). Treviño also recommends keeping abreast of current events in the field through online resources and participation in discussions hosted by organizations such as the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC). There are currently a number of organizations that can serve as resources for trilingual interpreters.

In 1999, Mano and Mano was established in recognition of the need for trilingual interpreters to network and discuss linguistic and cultural issues unique to the work of those who interpret Spanish, English, and ASL (Mano a Mano, 2011). While the first meeting, which marked the inception of Mano a Mano, was held in Boston, Massachusetts, its reach extended much further as information discovered by its members was shared at subsequent Registry of Interpreter's for the Deaf biennial conferences thereafter.

At the 2011 RID Conference held in Atlanta Georgia, it was announced that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was developed between RID and Mano a Mano (www.rid.org/userfiles/File/pdfs/News/Mano%20MOU.pdf). This conference marked the first time that Mano a Mano and RID workshops were held in tandem. The Memorandum of Understanding demonstrates and solidifies the relationship between these two organizations, emphasizing their mutual goal of ensuring quality interpretation service. The Mano a Mano website (www.manoamano-unidos.org) states,

> The mission of Mano a Mano is to provide an infrastructure for
> access to trilingual interpreting resources, support professional
> development for trilingual interpreters, educate the public
> about trilingual interpreting, and advocate for appropriate
> policies concerning the provision of trilingual interpretation.

Through partnership, Mano a Mano and RID agree to work in collaboration with one another in order to ensure that information sharing takes place. This includes the translation and dissemination of important resources in Spanish so that speakers of Spanish may access this material. Additionally, it is encouraged that Mano a Mano members are present in RID leadership positions so their perspectives may be shared.

In addition to their work with RID, Mano a Mano also collaborates with The National Council of Hispano Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCHDHH), which aims to ensure equal access in the areas of social, recreational, cultural, educational, and vocational welfare, as well as increase awareness of the needs of the Hispano Deaf community (National council of hispano deaf and hard of hearing, 2010). This is accomplished through education, advocacy, and leadership. Both organizations strive to provide resources and professional development for individuals within the community.

In 2011, Mano a Mano became a voting member of the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI). The overall aim of WASLI is to advance the profession of sign language interpreting worldwide through encouraging the creation of national associations of sign language interpreters, serving as a support system for these national associations, sharing information, supporting sign language interpretation at an international level, and working with Deaf associations as well as spoken language interpretation organizations on interpreting issues (World Association of Sign Language Interpreters, 2006). Mano a Mano representatives serve to provide the perspective of Spanish interpreters in the U.S.

Trilingual Interpretation in VRS/VRI

With the advent of video relay service (VRS) the geographic divide between members of different cultural communities has become less concrete (McKee and Davis, 2010). Lightfoot (2007) asserts that interpreters who work in VRS settings would benefit from participation in training aimed at increasing cultural awareness due to their frequent encounter with culturally sensitive information with which they may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable. While this is true for a number of communities who use video relay service, it is specifically visible in the Hispanic community. A large number of deaf children from Spanish speaking households reside in the United States. They use VRS to communicate with their families; therefore, the work of trilingual interpreters is key to the successful delivery of interpreting service in this environment. In recognition of this growing population, Texas petitioned for Trilingual VRS to be compensable from the Interstate TRS fund. The motion, which was filed in 2000, was originally declined; trilingual video relay service did not become available until January, 2006 (Quinto-Pozos et al, 2010). This change in the way interpreters provide interpreting service led to future investigation of the work of trilingual interpreters.

Research conducted by the Interpreting Via Video Work Team of the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (2008) found that trilingual interpreters working in VRS settings often encounter a variety of Spanish dialects as well as differing levels of linguistic fluency. They emphasize the challenge of interpreting for deaf callers who have recently moved to the United States and are neither fluent in ASL nor their national sign language. In addition, Quinto-Pozos et al (2010) found that a great deal of code-mixing and code-switching occurs between English and Spanish as well as between English and ASL. In regards to code-mixing and code-switching the authors state,

> The influence can take a number of forms: the mouthing of spoken
> language words while signing, the use of initialized variants that
> highlight the first letter of the spoken language word within the
> handshape of the sign (see Quinto-Pozos, 2008), and perhaps having
> spoken language word-order influence the signed language grammar
> that is being produced (p. 35)

The complexity of trilingual interpretation in the video relay setting is compounded by the appearance of other signed languages due to differences in the region of origin of the deaf VRS caller (Roth, 2009). Roth argues that it is possible to see "Mexican Sign Language (LSM), Cuban signs, Dominican signs, Puerto Rican signs, Colombian signs, etc., each with ASL variances, range and register" (p. 48). This obstacle is relevant to trilingual interpreting in the community setting as well; however it happens in VRS to a greater extent and at a much faster pace due to the rapidity at which VRS calls occur. Roth goes on to say that while ASL-English interpreters are presented with the hurdle of unknown regional signs, trilingual interpreters face the surfacing of signs from other countries. She concludes that the key is training and encourages the development of workshops, curricula, and educational materials.

Quinto Pozos et al. discuss quite a few linguistic challenges raised such as nouns that indicate the gender of a referent and lexical items that vary according to dialect. Other identified challenges are due to the lack of visual access to the hearing participant in the call. For example, speakers of Spanish utilize formal variants of particular pronouns and verb conjugation in order to show respect to conversational participants. Without explicit knowledge of the age and status of the hearing interlocutor it would be all too easy to breach this cultural norm.

Similarly to Roth, Quinto-Pozos et al. acknowledge a need for more training in the field of trilingual interpreting. The authors also recognize that there are an insufficient number of teaming opportunities for trilingual interpreters due to a small population of

trilingual interpreters in most areas. They discuss a variety of strategies employed by interpreters in order to overcome these challenges while recognizing that more training is clearly needed. One strategy that interpreters report is the use of non-gendered words whenever possible. Other strategies include asking for clarification from a caller, utilization of cloze skills, fingerspelling a word phonetically in hopes of receiving clarification from the deaf interlocutor, utilization of information conveyed through lipreading, and avoidance of lexical items that may be regional. After the completion of a call the interpreter may decide to consult other resources such as books and the internet in an effort to discover the proper use of a particular word in a particular area. When presented with the challenge of pronunciation, interpreters report adhering to the pronunciation used by the hearing caller or basing their decision off of the language used in the call (English or Spanish).

A subsequent study conducted by the Interpreting via Video Work Team of the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (2010) found additional strategies employed by video interpreters (both bilingual and trilingual) when presented with instances of cultural and linguistic variation in Video Remote Interpreting settings. These strategies include requesting a team (either Deaf or hearing), utilizing third-person in the interpretation, switching to consecutive interpretation, or transferring the call to another interpreter. In addition, when clarification is needed, the interpreter may ask a direct question of the consumers. While these strategies appear to be effective in many cases, the authors note that there is a strong need for more research in this area as well as the development of training programs.

Trilingual Certification:

Dueñas Gonzalez et al. (2010) discuss the creation and evaluation of a trilingual interpreter certification test offered in Texas through the Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI). The University of Arizona National Center for Interpretation Testing, Research and Policy (UA NCITRP), along with the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services-Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DARS-DHHS) created a trilingual interpreter certification process with the goal of ensuring quality trilingual interpreting services to the Hispanic Deaf community and their Spanish speaking families. The authors note that, in order to create a valid and reliable certification test, the organizations needed to consider authentic trilingual interpreting scenarios relevant to the members of the community who will utilize this service. In order to achieve this goal, a variety of experts participated in the development of the test to ensure that it is truly representative of the work that a trilingual interpreter encounters on a daily basis while still accounting for a number of skills needed to successfully interpret. For example, Dueñas Gonzalez et al note that trilingual interpreters often work in a three-person interactive setting, which is described as one where three conversational participants, each speaking different languages communicate. This is the type of skill that the National Interpreter Certification test would not measure but is imperative to trilingual interpreting.

Trilingual interpreters work in a variety of settings, including legal, medical, education, business/government, VRS, etc. The Trilingual Interpreter Certification Test was designed to assess interpreting skills that may be applied to different settings. In order to qualify to take the Trilingual Interpreter Certification Test an interpreter must be at least 18 years of age, a certified ASL/English interpreter, possess a high school diploma (or its equivalent), and successfully complete a Spanish proficiency written test (DARS, 2009). The

interpreter is then eligible to take the 80 question written portion of the trilingual interpreter Certification Test, which examines Spanish reading comprehension, vocabulary, idioms, sentence completion ability and listening comprehension.

The performance exam has two forms – advanced and master, which differ in difficulty, length, and topic complexity. Both of the tests consist of four parts – three person interactive, expressive interpreting (Spanish to ASL), receptive interpreting (ASL to Spanish), and two time-constrained sight translations (written English to ASL and written Spanish to ASL) (DARS, 2009). During the course of the three-person interactive test, the interpreter is required to interpret first into ASL before interpreting into either Spanish or English. This order was established so that consistency can be seen and the test can be rated appropriately. The sight translation component incorporated into the test is not weighed heavily in comparison with other portions of the test due to its infrequent use amongst interpreters (Dueñas Gonzalez et al, 2010).

While there are four separate parts to the exam, the goal should consistently be to "render the source language message into the target language without distortion or omission of any aspect of the message's meaning" (DARS study guide Overview of Advanced and Masters Trilingual Performance Tests, italics in original). DARS goes on to say that the goal of the test is not to assess whether the client uses perfect grammatical form, but to maintain that the client receives the content of the message in a comprehensible manner with consideration for the register needed in order to ensure clarity. Tests are scored based on delivery, adaptability, pronunciation, and fluency.

Similarly to the expectations of interpreters who hold RID certification, an interpreter who successfully obtains their trilingual interpreter certification must continue to attend workshops and trainings in order to maintain certification. Certified trilingual interpreters are expected to complete 5.0 CEUs related to interpretation, 2.0 CEUs in ethical related topics, and 3.0 CEUs in trilingual interpretation studies. (DARS, p. 77).

Conclusion

Given the expansion of the Hispanic community and the coinciding increase in the need for interpreters fluent in Spanish, English, and American Sign Language, there is a greater call for information regarding interpreting in this environment. Research regarding trilingual interpreting services has become a hot topic and it can be seen that education in this specialized field is increasing in the form of workshops and presentations. With the increase of information comes the ability to identify features of quality interpretations, which leads to the ability to evaluate an interpretation as well as offer certification in the field. We are now seeing a shift in the way trilingual interpreting is understood and practiced.

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