

# The Deaf Professional– Designated Interpreter Model

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Angela B. Hauser and Peter C. Hauser

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SINCE THE advent of Public Law 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act), Public Law 101-336 (Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990), the emergence of sign language linguistic studies, and the Deaf President Now movement, more deaf people have moved into a relatively new frontier—that of receiving high levels of education and professional positions. This book consists of chapters written by deaf professionals and interpreters who work in a variety of settings such as medical, legal, and education. The purpose of this edited volume is to encourage and inform sign language interpreting students, practicing interpreters, and deaf professionals of current practices in this nontraditional interpreting situation in which the deaf professional is the person in power and the recipient of services is the hearing person.

This volume's chapters candidly explore the deaf professionals' and designated interpreters' experiences, advice, ideas, anecdotes, expectations, and resources to provide insight into the relationships between them in specific disciplines with respect to ethics and the interpreting processes. General themes that the chapters focus on include (a) how deaf professionals describe their interpreting needs; (b) what strategies teams of deaf professionals and their interpreters have developed to make the process work well within their discipline; (c) setting-specific (i.e., medical, legal, etc.) and situation-specific (i.e., social, meeting, etc.) demands; and (d) issues that arise (power, boundaries, ethics, etc.). This chapter summarizes the themes that are common across the other chapters and proposes the Deaf Professional–Designated Interpreter Model.

The Deaf Professional–Designated Interpreter Model presents a relatively new paradigm of interpreting. Any individual and interpreter who have worked together for a significant period of time have developed some specific interpreting techniques, most likely without realizing it. As evident in this volume of chapters written by deaf professionals and designated interpreters, there are deaf professionals working closely with designated interpreters in various countries and disciplines. The purpose of this chapter, as well as this volume, is to bring together a collection of stories, thoughts, and studies on deaf professional–designated interpreter relationships. This collection sheds light on the practices in this emerging paradigm.

The Deaf Professional–Designated Interpreter Model described here is broad because there is no “one size fits all” set of standards. Describing the deaf professional–designated interpreter working relationship is almost like describing the

concept of marriage with only a few couples to use as examples. Designated interpreting, here, represents the marriage between the field of interpreting and the deaf professional's discipline or work environment. In this chapter, we review and discuss existing literature on this topic to bring to the forefront the characteristics and practices of designated interpreters. It was necessary for us to rely heavily on the chapters in this volume because this collection is the first of such writings on this topic.

The number of deaf professionals appears to be growing worldwide. In this volume, the term *deaf professionals* refers to any deaf or hard of hearing employees, trainees, or interns who require interpreting services to access the level of communication needed for them to learn, perform their job responsibilities, or both. The principles and practices discussed here are often relevant regardless of the type of interpreting provided. There are common features in this new discipline that must have emerged as the result of two factors: (a) the advancement of the field of sign language interpreting and (b) more deaf individuals achieving professional positions where their contributions outweigh the cost of interpreting services. The situations discussed here are the ones in which a designated interpreter is a reasonable accommodation and is necessary for the deaf professional to perform his or her job duties.

Interpreting done through a traditional nondesignated means requires fluency in a sign language or a specific communication mode (e.g., cued speech). The many individuals hired as "interpreters" need to be *extremely* skilled and competent (Napier, McKee, and Goswell 2005) to provide fully accurate interpreting. Designated interpreting requires additional skills on top of excellent interpreting skills. Designated interpreting is not possible if an interpreter embraces the philosophy that he or she is a neutral conduit (see Metzger 1999). Many of the actions that designated interpreters need to perform are in conflict with the Neutral Conduit Model (Napier, Carmichael, and Wiltshire this volume). Some (Roy 1993; Metzger 1999) have argued that interpreters in almost any given situation cannot adequately perform their job if they wish to assume the position of a neutral conduit; however, this discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter. The differences between the Deaf Professional–Designated Interpreter Model and other interpreting models are discussed in depth in Campbell, Rohan, and Woodcock's chapter in this volume. Generally, existing models of sign language interpreting work inexactly for the situations in which designated interpreters find themselves because existing models are based on a different power distribution wherein the deaf person is the client and the hearing person is the professional.

Cook (2004) wrote about designated interpreting, which she termed "diplomatic interpreting," and described that "the highly technical nature of such work, the status of the Deaf individual and the daily interactions the Deaf professional has with hearing colleagues differentiates this form of interpreting from interpreting in the general public" (58). Cook believes that one of the key components of this form of interpreting is the mutual trust between the deaf professional and designated interpreter as well as the designated interpreter's "intense interest in and commitment to the work of the DP [deaf professional]" (58–59). Cook explains

that the “Deaf professional’s goals become the interpreter’s goals” (64) and that being impartial or neutral is not one of the designated interpreter’s goals.

The designated interpreter is a dynamic and active participant in the deaf professional’s environment, and his or her actions influence communication outcomes and the deaf professional’s work performance. The designated interpreter has a thorough understanding of the deaf professional’s role, the roles of others in the workplace and those who have a relationship with the workplace (contractors, customers, etc.), the work culture, and the jargon used. The knowledge and skills that designated interpreters need to learn depends on the deaf professional with whom they work and the environment in which they work. Hence, the designated interpreter for a specific deaf professional might not be the appropriate designated interpreter for another deaf professional, although common features and methods can be generalized to most deaf professional–designated interpreter relationships.

Designated interpreting involves specialized knowledge of content, vocabulary, and social roles (Campbell, Rohan, and Woodcock this volume). The designated interpreter needs to function on an equal footing with the deaf professional’s colleagues and be able to communicate with them with ease (Kurlander this volume) because this ability enables the designated interpreter to deal with urgent issues immediately. An assigned interpreter who does not know the names, roles, and workplace practices of the deaf professional’s colleagues would not be able to jump into the assignment and work effectively and seamlessly as a member of the work team or work culture. In most settings, the designated interpreter needs to be available at all times and is always on call, even during down time.

The deaf individual who works with a designated interpreter needs to spend a portion of his or her work hours training and continuously updating the designated interpreter. In the beginning of a deaf professional–designated interpreter relationship, the deaf professional needs to take a significant amount of time to train the designated interpreter. The deaf professional needs to have patience with the designated interpreter’s limitations and learning curve. Gold Brunson, Molner, and Lerner illustrate this process in one chapter of this volume. They discuss how the insertion of a third person in a psychotherapist–patient relationship causes some dynamic issues that hearing therapists do not have to face. Before hearing psychotherapists can practice on their own, they receive at least several years of training and supervision on how to use their voice and carefully select what to say when working with mentally ill patients. There is no way to provide an interpreter with all of this information fifteen minutes or even one hour before a therapy session. The process of becoming a designated interpreter can be a challenge for some interpreters because it requires them to acknowledge that they do not initially have the skills or knowledge necessary for optimal performance. It also can be a challenge for deaf professionals, especially those who are new to working with a designated interpreter.

The adjustment into the role of a designated interpreter often requires avoiding the use of some techniques that worked elsewhere but that are now not applicable. For example, interpreters who have experience interpreting for deaf college

students might assume that deaf professors have the same needs as students, which is far from the truth (see Campbell, Rohan, and Woodcock this volume). New designated interpreters need to learn the deaf professional's job position, work environment, and how to behave and perform their own duties within that environment. Designated interpreters need to become fully integrated into the deaf professional's workplace and become an efficient member of the deaf professional's work team.

#### THE DESIGNATED INTERPRETER AS A MEMBER OF THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

The primary factor that differentiates a designated interpreter from a non-designated interpreter is that the former is a member of a professional team, not an outsider. The designated interpreter's membership on the professional team is not independent of the deaf professional. The deaf professional and designated interpreter work together as a microteam within the larger macroteam of the deaf professional's work environment. The designated interpreter has to learn how to "talk the talk and walk the walk" to blend in and to successfully facilitate communication so the deaf professional can work without any more challenges than the deaf professional's colleagues may experience. When the deaf professional-designated interpreter team works effectively, the deaf professional is able to focus on his or her career and not worry about interpreting issues. The goal is to achieve seamlessness.

The adaptation into the work environment takes time. At first, it is a game of catching up, and then it becomes a game of constantly keeping up because workplaces evolve, new individuals are hired, and new terms and concepts are introduced. New designated interpreters need to observe the environment carefully to learn how to fit in. Optimally, new designated interpreters would first observe existing designated interpreters (with other deaf professionals if necessary) and the deaf professional's hearing colleagues performing their duties. For example, a deaf obstetrician and gynecologist (OB/GYN) who works with a team of designated interpreters has the advantage of providing new designated interpreters observational opportunities and time for her designated interpreters to train new designated interpreters (Earhart and Hauser this volume).

Regardless of the new designated interpreter's skill or prior experience as a designated interpreter, he or she would need to learn the deaf professional's role, others' roles, and the purpose of the occupation. The learning of roles and occupational practices is another game of catching up and keeping up with the situation. Kurlander (this volume) explains that this effort involves understanding the corporate culture as well as how to behave, dress, and communicate within it. This task is a complicated one (see Gold Brunson, Molner, and Lerner in this volume for discussion) that requires active learning that is not typically required in nondesignated interpreting situations. The designated interpreter needs to have a good sense of the deaf professional's role to understand the type of professional relationships that the deaf professional has with others. Goswell, Carmichael, and

Gollan (this volume), describe the deaf professional–designated interpreter process and relationship in a situation where a deaf professional directs a film production. The designated interpreters needed an intuitive sense of the deaf director’s perception, goals, and role, which also required them to have a solid understanding of the roles of all of the individuals one would see in the credits of a movie. The importance of the designated interpreter’s understanding of the roles of team members is discussed in a number of chapters in this volume. For example, Earhart and Hauser’s chapter discusses in depth the different roles of the members of a medical team.

A new designated interpreter would need to be open to the idea of becoming a member of the professional team. This membership on the team can be a challenge for interpreters who wish to remain impartial and outside of the professional team. The designated interpreter must learn how to respect the needs of the professional team, which requires a willingness to learn the culture and organizational practices of a deaf professional’s discipline. Meanwhile, the deaf professional needs to be willing to let the designated interpreters into his or her inner circle, which often encompasses more than the deaf professional’s work circle. This level of familiarity is a challenge for any designated interpreter because the socialization has to be neutral, and neutrality can cause problems. Pouliot and Stern (this volume) explain that there is a fine line between being too involved and not being involved enough. Too much neutrality can cause tension between the deaf professional and those with whom the deaf professional interacts frequently. However, not enough neutrality could shift the spotlight off the deaf professional and onto the designated interpreter.

The designated interpreter often acts as the deaf professional’s ears when the deaf professional is not in the room or is not attending to background conversations. A lot of incidental learning is not directly available to deaf professionals but is available to their hearing peers. The designated interpreter is the holder of this information for the deaf professional and needs to share what information the designated interpreter judges to be important to the deaf professional (Cook 2004). In the case of the deaf director (Goswell, Carmichael, and Gollan this volume), her designated interpreters had to pass on seemingly incidental information such as gossip and banter floating around for her to get an ongoing sense of the mood and morale of the crew she was leading. The lack of this information could have a negative effect on her ability to direct the film production and, ultimately, on the film itself. It is difficult for the deaf professional to do the job if the designated interpreter is out of the loop of what is going on at the workplace (Goswell, Carmichael, and Gollan this volume). As a result, the deaf professional needs to keep the designated interpreter updated, and the designated interpreter needs to be involved in the work environment enough to remain in the loop. If the deaf professional has more than one designated interpreter, then the other designated interpreters need to help one another stay in the loop and share their tactics, signs, and habits (Earhart and Hauser this volume; Goswell, Carmichael, and Gollan this volume).

Designated interpreters interpret not only the deaf professional’s work conversations but also social conversations in informal and formal social settings. The

importance of social interpreting (see Clark and Finch this volume for discussion) as a part of the designated interpreter's role cannot be minimized. Campbell, Rohan, and Woodcock (this volume) further explain why gossip is important in the academic setting and why this incidental information must be passed to the deaf professional. Consider, for example, that a new academic professors' work performance over a period of up to seven years or more, is evaluated by his or her peers when that professor is up for tenure. Thus, for a deaf professional in this position, his or her peers decide whether they want to recommend that the deaf professional stay employed based on whether the deaf professional contributes appropriately and fits well into the department. Campbell, Rohan, and Woodcock (this volume) discuss the peer assessment process, the importance of social interpreting, and how the designated interpreter can easily harm the deaf professional's ability to achieve tenure.

A good deaf professional–designated interpreter relationship allows the deaf professional to socialize fully in the workplace. Having a designated interpreter around helps others to become comfortable with the interpreting process (Pouliot and Stern this volume). The designated interpreter must remain in the role of an interpreter in social situations, which can pose a challenge (see Clark and Finch this volume). One designated interpreter described that “the trick was to accept his role and preserve the position yet develop a sense of how little of oneself should be spread into the outcomes, implications, and dynamics of the situation” (Pouliot and Stern this volume, p. 138). Another designated interpreter suggested that it is necessary to stay unobtrusively in the background as much as possible (Gold Brunson, Molner, and Lerner this volume). The designated interpreter must make decisions that would maximize, and not harm, the deaf professional–designated interpreter relationship and would maximize the deaf professional's ability to immerse him- or herself into the workplace.

The level of personal involvement the designated interpreter has in social situations depends on not only a lot of external factors but also the designated interpreter's ability to handle having two or more roles with the same individuals. Those who know they do not do well in dual relationships might prefer to stay in the background whereas those who are comfortable and skilled at dual relationships could be more involved while protecting the boundaries of their role. Many hearing individuals in the deaf professional's work environment may wish to socialize with the designated interpreter. The designated interpreter needs to remember the he or she is always on duty (see Earhart and Hauser this volume for discussion). Kurlander (this volume) suggests that “interpreters who have a need to be seen and heard, to prove themselves . . . , or to overshadow the deaf professional are not suitable for [a designated interpreter position]” (Kurlander this volume, p. 110).

The designated interpreter must be conscious of the representation of the deaf professional at all times (Kurlander this volume). He or she needs to socialize with others to become recognized as a member of the deaf professional's work team. As Kurlander explains, “the more comfortable the coworkers are with the interpreter, the easier it is for the deaf professional to assimilate into the workplace”



(p. 121). Initially, hearing individuals will most likely ask a lot of role-, language-, and deafness-related questions when the deaf professional is not around. Some deaf professionals believe that it is the designated interpreter's role to answer these questions (see Campbell, Rohan, and Woodcock this volume for discussion) to get past that level of social interaction and to satisfy the curiosity of the deaf professional's coworkers. The more people who know the answers, the more people who will be available to answer those types of questions. When the designated interpreter's role is clear and the deaf professional's coworkers work with the deaf professional–designated interpreter team, such questions will occur less frequently and, often, the coworkers can even answer similar questions for the deaf professional and designated interpreter when asked by others. There are possible negative consequences if the deaf professional's colleagues do not understand the boundaries of the designated interpreter's role or feel uncomfortable around the designated interpreter. Kurlander (this volume) explains that this misunderstanding of role can cause tension between the designated interpreter and coworkers. In some situations, this kind of misunderstanding could mean that the designated interpreter is causing tension at the workplace in which case the deaf professional may need to put forth more social effort in establishing and maintaining relationships with coworkers. Thus, it is clear that the designated interpreter must walk a very fine line between being an integral, natural part of the environment and not being the deaf professional's representative but, rather, realizing that it is the deaf professional's position to represent herself or himself.

#### THE DEAF PROFESSIONAL– DESIGNATED INTERPRETER RELATIONSHIP

The deaf professional–designated interpreter relationship is one that involves teamwork, mutual respect, and trust. The importance for interpreters and deaf professionals to develop working relationships has been recognized in the past (Cokely 2005; Liedel and Brodie 1996). The deaf professional–designated interpreter relationship is not established immediately; it develops over time and needs to be maintained. The deaf professional and designated interpreter need to see each other as equal partners in a team. This relationship can be harmed by egos and neglect. If the relationship is neglected, it may become difficult for the deaf professional and designated interpreter to trust each other. The deaf professional needs to trust the designated interpreter's judgment as to what and how to interpret. The designated interpreter needs to trust that the deaf professional will provide feedback when necessary so the designated interpreter's judgment and skills will continuously improve. The designated interpreter must also trust and respect the deaf professional's professional position and knowledge.

One factor that influences the beginning of the relationship is what stereotypes the deaf professional and designated interpreter bring to the partnership. Deaf professionals might have experienced working with many interpreters throughout a long period of their deaf lives. Some deaf professionals might be initially doubtful of a new designated interpreter's skills. Interpreters new to the designated