

# Introduction

WE ARE PLEASED to offer this book for both the Deaf and interpreting communities with the hope of elevating the interpreting experience for everyone involved. Deaf people often discuss among themselves their experiences with interpreters, what they like or dislike about them, and the effectiveness of their work. Interpreters do the same, albeit without using client names (we hope), exchanging information about the work, the frustrations associated with their job, and more. As regular users of interpreting services, as well as being involved in interpreting education, we see a huge disparity in the literature between the contributions made by interpreters and interpreter educators and those made by Deaf people themselves. We undertook this book project in order to bring Deaf people to the forefront of the discussions about what constitutes quality interpreting service.

In reviewing the literature, we discovered that very few authors of published journal articles or book chapters related to interpreting services were Deaf. Those writers who were Deaf, in almost every case, were Certified Deaf Interpreters and/or involved in interpreting education. Their contributions were usually limited to these two areas. We found relatively few pieces of writing that offered the perspectives of Deaf people as stakeholders.

Perhaps there are several reasons for this. One is that interpreting has evolved from a service mostly provided by people close to the Deaf community (such as family members and close friends) into a profession (akin to accounting, architecture, or real estate) with ever higher degree requirements and national tests and certifications. Accordingly, interpreters have provided themselves with platforms where they can exchange their professional perspectives, research, and ideas on what they consider to be optimal delivery of their work. Furthermore, workshops, courses, and degrees are designed to support interpreters in their pursuit of professionalism and the maintenance of their certifications. All of this has happened while the Deaf community slowly has been left behind.

While Deaf people are the consumers or clients of interpreting services, most do not engage in any aspect of interpreter education or the certification process. This is not unlike the medical field, financial services, or construction where customers and clients are not involved with the licensing and monitoring of those involved in the work. Yes, there are ways to file grievances and reports of unethical practices, but the decision making as to who is qualified has been mostly taken over by the professionals themselves with little Deaf stakeholder input.

There has been widespread criticism regarding this disconnect between professional service providers and people who receive services. Consumer surveys, focus groups, and quality-control systems have been established in response to this concern. More recently, crowd-sourced review sites such as Yelp and Angie's List

provide consumers with direct and immediate feedback on the work rendered by the organizations and/or individuals who provide a variety of services.

Many professional organizations decry this trend, questioning the validity and wisdom of such influential (and often anonymous) feedback. Many experts object to the evaluations of their professional work made by ordinary citizens who, in most cases, do not have sufficient background to evaluate the work. For example, can lay people really assess the work of a dentist? Tom recalls his father being impressed with a new dentist because he came out of the appointment relatively pain-free. Never mind that the reason for the pain-free experience may have been substandard dental work to begin with.

Conversely, another trend has emerged that has also shaped the way business and research is conducted in many areas. Data-driven decisions are increasingly common among leaders in determining the best course of action. In that process, personal anecdotes are dismissed as unreliable and unsound in favor of quantitative scientific approaches to gain a clear and accurate understanding of the facts and truth.

As we well know, discovering “truths” depends on the design of the data collection procedure. For this reason, epistemologies, or the “ways of knowing,” of ordinary people should not be dismissed, especially if they show common themes. If anything, these stories should drive the research agenda. Accordingly, real-life stories of Deaf people and their experiences with interpreters must be valued and treated as critical data in shaping future directions in the interpreting field. Research agendas must include areas that are important to Deaf people, not just those that interpreters and interpreter educators think are important. As an example, there have been studies on interpreter fatigue and its impact on accuracy in the interpreted work. Based on these studies, the twenty-minute model of switching interpreters has become the standard in the field. However, there has been no study on the impact of such switches on Deaf people’s comprehension of the interpreted work. This example demonstrates how the research agenda is skewed toward interpreters’ focus on technical accuracy rather than on Deaf people’s desire for consistency and ease of understanding. This is but one example of why epistemologies of Deaf people should never be dismissed in favor of the data-driven agenda of the profession.

Most of the contributors to this volume are not interpreters themselves, nor are they directly involved in interpreter education. Rather, they use interpreting services on a regular basis, both on personal and professional levels. Frequently, they express a strong desire for better interpreting experiences that would allow them to represent themselves better to the hearing, nonsigning public as competent and intelligent individuals, that would make it easier for them to comprehend the interpreted work, and that would enable them to engage with their hearing counterparts more easily and successfully.

In this volume, the thirty-two Deaf authors freely share a wide range of encounters with the goal of generating dialogue on improving the interpreting experience for both Deaf people and interpreters. The contributions are organized into four parts: Seeing the Issues through Deaf Eyes; Understanding the Issues through Deaf

Eyes; Exploring the Specialized Areas of Interpreting through Deaf Eyes; and Moving Forward with Deaf Eyes. A summary of each chapter is also available in ASL. They can be accessed by typing on the computer the URL listed on the title page of each chapter. They all can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVIbI5DOBBWvfeyOv1VmUkQ>.

The first part, “Seeing the Issues through Deaf Eyes,” serves as a primer for this volume. Trudy Suggs discusses the importance of storytelling in understanding the true picture of the plight of the disempowered. Indeed, storytelling has played an important role in so many disenfranchised communities, including the Deaf community, in their struggle for liberation and empowerment. In his chapter, Thomas Holcomb envisions a new term, DEAM—a play on three English words (*Deaf, Dream, Team*)—to encourage both Deaf people and interpreters to work closely together to move the interpreting experience to the next level of excellence and accessibility. Transparency and accountability are often missing in the business side of interpreting, leaving Deaf people in the dark and powerless. Chad Taylor, Ryan Shephard, and Justin “Bucky” Buckhold discuss how the current practice of providing interpreting services is antiquated. They argue that it is time for the interpreting world to catch up to the modern world where transparency and accountability are expected and accepted. Only then will both Deaf people and interpreters be empowered to provide satisfactory services.

The following section, “Understanding the Issues through Deaf Eyes,” includes the work of several scholars who share their research and case studies related to effective interpreting support for Deaf people. John Pirone, Jonathan Henner, and Wyatte Hall present their findings from interviews with several students about their mainstreamed collegiate experiences. ASL fluency, professionalism, and intercultural skills were identified as three primary concerns related to interpreter competencies in providing Deaf people with the necessary support in mainstreamed settings. Because interpreters may not yet have developed the necessary skills to do their job effectively, their presence in the classroom does not always translate into equality or access for mainstreamed Deaf students. Deaf professionals face the same challenges. In their interviews with several Deaf professionals, Kim Kurz and Joseph Hill asked them to list the specific skills interpreters need to do a superior job. Linguistic competency in *both* English and ASL is essential, which is surprisingly lacking among many interpreters. With strong bilingual skills, other critical factors such as depiction, discourse, audience engagement, message equivalence, language register, and pragmatic enrichment are made possible, allowing for exceptional interpreting work to support Deaf professionals.

The need for advanced ASL skills among interpreters is reinforced by Keith Cagle, Sharon Lott, and Phyllis Wilcox in their study on head movements. They argue that by incorporating appropriate head movements, interpreters can make it easier for Deaf people to understand the interpreted message. The functions of specific head movements are outlined in their chapter.

Continuing with the needs of Deaf professionals, Tara Holcomb and Aracelia Aguilar present a case study where two completely different outcomes were a result

of differing actions taken by interpreters. These actions had a drastic impact on the authors' ability to participate and function effectively in a professional conference setting. Their essay illuminates the importance of honoring Deaf people and listening to them in their attempt to create the most accessible situation possible. Unfortunately, these attempts are frequently suppressed by interpreters and interpreter coordinators. Leala Holcomb shares *zir* experiences trying to create an accessible environment at the university where *ze* began *zir* doctoral studies, only to have the concerns dismissed by the university's disability services officials. Leala turned to social media in a desperate effort to find solutions and support with positive results.

Part III, "Exploring the Specialized Areas of Interpreting through Deaf Eyes," allows the authors to discuss issues that are specific to their professional arenas—higher education, K–12 education, the corporate world, and health care. Tawny Holmes shares her legal expertise on deaf and disabled people's rights to accommodations to ensure a successful collegiate experience. She also recounts her struggle for equal access inside and outside the classroom while she attended law school.

David Smith and Paul Ogden hope to demystify the academic world for interpreters who seek to work with Deaf academics. In their chapter, they provide a clear picture of the challenges facing all college professors and the unique challenges of the growing numbers of Deaf academics. Along this line, Patrick Boudreault and Genie Gertz discuss their struggles to gain access to professional conferences and the disempowering actions taken by conference organizers that prevented them from benefitting fully from such conferences. In his chapter, Thomas Holcomb argues that Deaf professionals deserve more than just completely trusting their interpreters to represent them well in their ASL to spoken English interpreting work. He shares an experience in which he had a team of transliterators sign back to him the spoken words of the interpreters who were assigned to voice interpret his signed lecture.

Continuing with the educational setting focus, the next two chapters deal with interpreting concerns at the K–12 level. In their entries, based on their own experiences, both Amy June Rowley and Fallon Brizendine present their serious reservations about educational interpreters and their inability to meet the needs of Deaf children in the mainstream. Even though Amy June Rowley is considered a success story in mainstreamed education, she refuses to subject her own Deaf children to the same process. In her chapter, she explains why. As a faculty member in an Interpreter Education Program, Fallon Brizendine supervises interpreting students at their internship placements in public schools. Based on her observations, she shares her deep concerns about the poor quality of education that deaf children are receiving in the mainstream environment, partially due to the inability of educational interpreters to provide the kind of access Deaf children need.

Moving on to the corporate world, Sam Sepah recounts his efforts to orient his designated interpreters to the corporate world of Google. He emphasizes that interpreters needed to learn both the corporate culture and his particular needs as a Deaf person. This was necessary in order to make the relationship between him and his interpreters, and between him and his colleagues at Google, a success.

With healthcare access emerging as a critical issue within the Deaf community, Susan Gonzalez and Marta Ordaz teamed up with Lewis Lummer and Cynthia Plue

to discuss how to meet the communication and language access needs of Deaf and DeafBlind people in healthcare settings. The authors argue that interpreters must be creative and flexible enough to ensure that Deaf and DeafBlind individuals, especially those who are foreign-born, comprehend what is happening in healthcare situations.

Finally, in the last section, “Moving Forward with Deaf Eyes,” thoughts and ideas are shared on ways that interpreters can become more effective in meeting the needs of Deaf people in interpreted settings. Wyatte Hall presents the parameters of Deaf-centered interpreting, in which Deaf people are truly supported in their efforts to participate in interpreted sessions. He contrasts this approach to what he calls voice-activated interpreters, in which the interpreters’ focus is primarily on interpreting the spoken words as accurately possible, without any real consideration that the message will be understood by Deaf people. He contrasts this with a Deaf-centered model of interpreting; outlines its specific aspects, including feedback, pace, partnership, visual orientation, and cultural competence; and provides examples for each. Interpreters who adopt a Deaf-centered model of interpreting are often the favorite of Deaf people.

Marika Kovacs-Houlihan explains in her chapter how a person can work to achieve the coveted “favorite interpreter” label. She shares her personal experiences of working with favorite interpreters at her university. Some of them eventually became her designated interpreters, allowing her to excel in her work as a university faculty member. In order to be a Deaf-centered or favorite interpreter, interpreters need to be cognizant of Deaf culture norms, including making appropriate self-introductions. In her chapter, Naomi Sheneman notes that many interpreters fail to do so. For this reason, she makes a strong case that interpreters need to learn how to introduce themselves appropriately.

Finally, Chris Kurz, Kim Kurz, and Raychelle Harris discuss how academic ASL strategies can assist interpreters in making their interpretation more accessible to mainstreamed Deaf students. They present several considerations for interpreters to improve their effectiveness in delivery of the interpreted message. These areas include register, cognition, lexicon and semantics, fingerspelling, ASL phonological patterns, and assessment translation and testing.

The volume concludes with an afterword by noted interpreter educator and past president of the Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT) Carolyn Ball, who reinforces our plea for interpreters, new and experienced, to listen to our stories and learn about the Deaf-centered, Deaf-friendly, and Deaf-focused skills they need to be able to work collaboratively in teams the DEAM way.

We hope this book, whether read as some individual chapters or as whole, with our stories as narratives or shared research, has a positive impact on the field of interpreting. We need to get back to sharing and understanding some of the good Deaf roots and connections that made interpreters great while embracing the increased and long-overdue recognition that interpreters are now real professionals. Please go forth and understand we know that some parts of this book may make those in the profession feel uncomfortable and/or realize that their actions have been unintentionally disempowering. These are not intended to be mean-spirited

vignettes but rather just the way we see and feel about it. We also hope that readers have positive “Aha!” moments and either find they have already been doing things the Deaf way or will learn how to move forward while following the DEAM approach.