

VIEWS



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Interpreting Culturally Sensitive Information in VRS Settings

Mary Henry Lightfoot, CI and CT, Maryland

Video relay service (VRS), after seven years of use, is becoming a mature form of virtual communication. Interpreters now interpret for deaf and hearing consumers from many different parts of the country, from rural and urban areas, and from many different cultural groups. We are attempting to open the dialogue about specific cultural features of language, effectiveness of interpreting and strategies for enhancing the interpreting of cultural components of language. With VRS becoming a mature industry, we as interpreting professionals need to explore ways to better serve consumers, including consumers of color, using the service.

This spring, a session was held at the Deaf People of Color Conference which allowed deaf consumers of color, as well as interpreters, to talk about cultural features of language, attitudes toward interpretation of information and approaches to the task. In addition, a survey regarding interpretation of cultural features of language was sent via e-mail, as well as disseminated as to participants at the Deaf People of Color Conference. Both deaf consumers and interpreters were the target audiences.

Deaf People of Color Conference

The Deaf People of Color Conference, held March 29 - April 1, was a groundbreaking conference "directed by and held for Deaf people of all ethnic/racial backgrounds: African-American, Latino, Asian, and (Native) American Indian, biracial, multiracial."

There were two full days of workshops about cultures of Deaf people of color as well as a day long leadership preconference workshop. Approximately 200 participants attended the conference.

Included with the workshops was a session regarding interpreting: *Video Relay Service Interpreting: Tools for Effective Dialogue with Culturally Sensitive Content*. The workshop explored cultural competency issues with VRS interpreting. Participants discussed intercultural and intracultural situations through a series of questions and scenarios. In addition, video clips were featured with Deaf people of color, interpreters and experts talking about viewpoints of interpreting culturally sensitive information.

Rich discussions led to tools that we, as interpreters, can use when working with deaf consumers of color in VRS settings.

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Developments in the Area of VRS and 9 -1-1

Donna Platt and Richard Ray

With today's expanding technology, people have various options for communication methods. People who are deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing and individuals with a speech disability are following along with these trends and are rapidly migrating from traditional TTY to more advanced telecommunications methods, both for peer-to-peer communications and for relay services. These newer Internet-based modalities include, but are not limited to, internet relay, wireless relay, video relay service (VRS) and Internet-based captioned telephone.

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Coalition for Accessible Technology Launched!

Karen Peltz Strauss,
Legal Consultant to CSD

Interpreters are getting their COATs on for equal access!

A brand new coalition of disability organizations called the Coalition of Organizations for Accessible Technology (COAT) has just been created to push for federal legislation that will ensure full access by people with disabilities to evolving high speed broadband and other Internet protocol (IP) technologies. Launched this past March, COAT already con-

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Topic of the Month:

Technology, Distance and
Video Interpreting

From Deaf Consumers of Color:

**Note that the information below is from the workshop and interviews. It is not meant to represent viewpoints of all Deaf persons of color.*

■ Interpret culturally sensitive information regardless of the interpreter's comfort level with what is being said. Information is coming from the communication participants, not the interpreter. Thus, if information is communicated that the interpreter feels is offensive, remember that the interpreter is not initiating the communication. Consumers do not want the interpreter to filter information, distilling the cultural components of language.

■ When the interpreter is not familiar with information being discussed or signs being used, ask for clarification. Do not eliminate this content or substitute the information with another concept. An example was given of a deaf person who uses American Sign Language (ASL) but is calling a family member in Puerto Rico and uses a local sign for BEACH.

Miscommunication resulted when the interpreter did not ask for clarification.

■ Do not assume that your cultural understanding of information is the same as the participants. An example was given of the concept of family, *la familia*, in Latino cultures, which is different than what is portrayed in U.S. mainstream culture. The members, attitudes and behaviors may be different with concepts that we often hold as universal.

■ Become aware of cultural features of language so that interpretation includes more than the words, but appropriately reflects the deaf participant.

◆ VRS interpreters should be given training about cultures of Deaf people of color and about interpreting cross culturally.

◆ VRS interpreters should seek out cultural information about

Deaf people of color through various forms of media: DVD material, events held by Deaf people of color such as the Deaf People of Color Conference.

◆ VRS interpreters should seek out cultural information about hearing people of color through various forms of media: books including fiction and non-fiction, movies, television programming, radio stations and interpreters of color interpreting organizations.

■ With recognition of cultural features of communication, interpreters should also continue to improve ASL receptive skills as well as finger-spelling receptive skills. Consumers reported that some interpreters had to ask for repetition many times and could not understand their language.

From Interpreters of Color:

■ Work on an attitudinal level. Heighten respect for the cultures of Deaf people of color. Reflect on your own view of Deaf people of color and hearing people of color. If one does not have an understanding of the culture, do not try to mimic Deaf people of color through improper word choice or inflection.

■ When an interpreter is a person of

color and interpreting intraculturally, there can be transference of one's cultural experience with the communication. Interpreters should be aware that although the participants may be of the same cultural group, their experiences may be different.

From a Diversity Expert:

■ We need to open our understanding of interpreting from a bilingual – bicultural model to a multicultural model, recognizing that Deaf people of color have their own respective cultures.

Conclusion:

No matter where we, as interpreters, reside or where the VRS center is located, we will work with Deaf people of color in VRS settings. Glen Anderson stated, "*The American Deaf community is undergoing a demographic revolution. It is becoming more dynamic, and multicultural...*" With this in mind, we will continue to see more Deaf people of color in our VRS work life. I urge you, as fellow colleagues, to seek out ways to enhance understanding of the cultures of Deaf people of color for provision of culturally rich interpreting in VRS settings.

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