## Unit 1 – Introduction and Overview of DI-HI Teams

This introductory unit focuses on defining Deaf interpreters and hearing interpreters, briefly delineating their individual roles, and explaining how they can come together to create Deaf interpreter-hearing interpreter teams (hereafter "DI-HI team").  Before one can understand how Deaf and hearing interpreters come together to form a DI-HI team, it is essential to understand the roles and functions of each one separately.

**Hearing Interpreters:**

Hearing interpreters, often called ASL-English interpreters, work between two languages that do not share the same grammar, syntax, rules, or modality.  Interpreting between two languages is also referred to as *interlingual* interpreting.  Interlingual interpreters include spoken language interpreters (e.g. Spanish-English interpreter) as well as those interpreting between two signed languages (e.g. American Sign Language-British Sign Language).   However, those working between a signed language and a spoken language, such as ASL-English interpreters, also work between two modalities - signed and spoken.  As with any kind of interpreting, an ASL-English interpreter needs to have a high level of fluency and cultural competence in both languages to successfully facilitate communication between two or more people.

**Deaf Interpreters:**

Deaf interpreters, when working interlingually, serve the same function as hearing interpreters in terms of facilitating communication between two or more people. However, their task may differ when working within the same language, or *intralingually*. Deaf interpreters also have been called relay interpreters, intermediary interpreters, or reverse interpreters. Intralingual and intermediary are the two most common alternatives to the title of Deaf interpreter, whereas relay and reverse are outdated labels though they may still be encountered.

 Several examples of interlingual interpretation done by Deaf interpreters include:

> • Sign languages of other countries, such as British Sign Language (BSL) ⇔ ASL
>
> • ASL ⇔ International Signs
>
> • Written English ⇔ ASL
> The only instance where Deaf interpreters use two separate modalities is when they work with written texts to be translated or interpreted into a signed language (often called *sight interpreting*, e.g. a Deaf interpreter interprets the closed-captioning on TV into ASL).

Several examples of intralingual interpretation done by Deaf interpreters include:

> • Visual ASL ⇔ tactile ASL (for a Deaf-Blind person)
>
> • English-dominant contact signing ⇔ ASL
>
> • ASL ⇔ English-dominate contact signing

There are many factors that contribute to the diverse and wide variety of language use within the Deaf communities. This vast variation creates a need for Deaf interpreters who carry that "strong sense of cultural awareness, and can navigate those worlds smoothly" (Burns, 1999, p. 7). Due to their own personal experiences as core members of Deaf communities, DIs are "comfortable conversing with all members of the D/deaf community – encompassing a variety of backgrounds, educational levels, regional dialects, and other factors" (Bienvenu & Colonomos, 1992, p. 71). This personal insight, along with years of experience accommodating different educational backgrounds and language variations, uniquely qualifies them to interpret for other D/deaf individuals. You will learn more in the next few units about specific situations and consumers that present unique linguistic challenges that warrant the use of a DI-HI team.

**Certification in the United States:**

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), established in 1964 and incorporated in 1972, began certifying hearing interpreters in 1965 and Deaf interpreters in 1972 (RID, 2012a). There have been a number of certifications offered throughout the years, some have been retired while others are currently recognized. Some examples are listed below. Reference RID's website for a current listing of certifications http://rid.org/rid-certification-overview/.

- National Interpreter Certification (NIC) pass/fail beginning in 2011. However, from 2005 – 2011 this was a three-tiered system awarding the National Interpreter Certification (NIC), National Interpreter Certification Advanced (NIC Advanced), and National Interpreter Certification Master (NIC Master).

- Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) beginning in 1998.

- Oral Transliteration Certificate (OTC) beginning in 1999.

- Educational Certificate: K-12 (ED:K-12) beginning in 2006.

- Specialist Certificate: Legal (SC:L) beginning in 1998.

- Conditional Legal Interpreting Permit-Relay (CLIP-R) beginning in 1991.

Each certified interpreter must adhere to ethical standards with the most current version being co-authored by NAD – the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct http://rid.org/ethics/code-of-professional-conduct/.

**Hearing Interpreters Certification – A brief history**

For hearing interpreters the first certification, awarded from 1965 to 1988, was the Master Comprehensive Skill Certificate (MCSC). Since its inception, the exam for certification for hearing interpreters has gone through several revisions and almost as many certification name changes: from 1972 to 1988 Comprehensive Skills Certificate (CSC), from 1988 to 2008 Certificate of Interpretation (CI) and Certificate of Transliteration (CT). There were other interpreting certifications for hearing interpreters such as:

• Transliteration Certificate (TC) from 1972 to 1988,

• Interpretation Certificate (IC) 1972 to 1988,

• Oral Interpreting Certificate: Visible to Spoken (OIC:V/S) 1979 to 1985,

• Oral Interpreting Certificate: Spoken to Visible (OIC:S/V) 1979 to 1985,

• Oral Interpreting Certificate: Comprehensive (OIC:C) 1972 to 1988,

• Specialist Certificate: Performing Arts (SC:PA) 1971 to 1988.

The most recent generalist certification is the National Interpreter Certification (NIC) which has been awarded beginning in 2011.

**Deaf Interpreters Certification - A brief history**

For Deaf interpreters the first certification awarded in 1972, was the Reverse Skills Certificate (RSC).   The RSC was awarded from 1972 until 1988 when RID stopped certifying Deaf interpreters while the certification system was being overhauled.  RID then developed a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) test but shortly after administering it was suspended due to questions regarding the validity of the written portion of the test (Forestal, 2005).  Later, in 1995, RID instituted a system where DIs could obtain a Certificate in Deaf Interpreting-Provisional (CDI-P).  Criteria for this certification required Deaf interpreters to have taken eight hours of training on theories of interpreting, eight hours of training on RID's Code of Ethics, and to have provided evidence of a minimum of 1 year interpreting experience (RID, 2012b).  This certification is no longer awarded nor valid.   For Deaf interpreters RID began offering the Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) exam in 1998, the Conditional Legal Interpreting Permit-Relay (CLIP-R) in 1991, and the Specialist Certificate: Legal (SC:L) beginning in 2011. This SC:L exam, offered to CDIs with accommodations, is the same test that hearing interpreters have been able to take since 1998.

**DI – What does it take?**

What does it take for a Deaf person to become a qualified Deaf Interpreter? Just as there are hearing interpreters who work without certification, there are also Deaf interpreters who work without certification.  Burns (1999) warns us that, "It is well known that unqualified hearing interpreters lacking credentials can be very dangerous, and I believe the same applies to Deaf interpreters as well" (p. 7).

While certification is not required in all situations, it does provide a minimum measurement of basic interpreting skills and allows for a formal process of recourse in the event of a grievance.   It is critical to understand that, just as every bilingual hearing person cannot work as an ASL-English interpreter, not every bilingual Deaf person can become a Deaf interpreter.   Bienvenu and Colonomos (1992) suggested four foundational skills necessary for Deaf interpreters:

1. Linguistics skills suited for a variety of communication used by Deaf consumers;

2. Fluent communication skills that allow for familiarity with hearing norms and cultural values;

3. Cultural sensitivity and an acknowledgment of their biases and internal conflicts that may interfere their work;

4.  And a high level of comfort in a variety of bilingual/bicultural settings. (p. 71)

**A History of DI-HI Teams**

Unfortunately, the history of DI-HI teams is not well documented.  Bienvenu (1991) as cited in Forestal (2005) notes that deaf people have been interpreting for each other since the first Deaf Schools were founded as they would "clarify, explain, or reinforce by repetition for each other what was being said" (Forestal, 2005, p. 235).  In Indiana in 1886, there is documentation that mentions a DI-HI team was used for a rape case (Skaggs v. State 1886).  More recent research by Ressler (1999), Cerney (2004), and Bentley-Sassaman (2011) has provided insight into DI-HI teams.  As Bentley-Sassaman (2010) states, " A need for a Deaf-hearing interpreter team arises from the language discrepancy between these native ASL users and interpreters who use ASL as their second language" (p. 34).  If this is true, one can posit that for as long as there has been a need to interpret messages intertwined with cultural and linguistic complexities, there has been a need for a DI-HI team.

**How does a DI-HI team form?**

DI-HI teams, as with any professional interpreting team, need to acknowledge their own biases, life experiences, professional knowledge and skills, and how they can navigate their differences together in order to become a successful team.  However, because Deaf and hearing interpreters come from different communities that experience different power dynamics, positions of privilege, as well as different professional foundations, they should be cognizant of these influences on the team.  Burns (1999) states: "It is imperative…that the [DI-HI] team works as a team, presenting a united front in which they clearly show their support for each other. This is where 'chemistry' between interpreters becomes crucial" (p. 7).

Interpreting teams do not always click immediately, regardless if they are Deaf or hearing.  Interpreters have to build trust for their working relationship to be successful.  This is no different within a DI-HI team.  Interpreters need to agree on logistics; understanding each other's interpreting strengths, weaknesses, and preferences; have clear communication; and mutual respect.

Bienvenu and Colonomos (1992, p. 74) provide the following compatibility checklist for teaming:

**Bienvenu & Colonomos Compatibility Checklist for DI-HI teaming**

- Trust each other

- Communicate your interpreting needs

    - How much support or independence
    - How does your team interpreter know you need assistance?
    - Hearing interpreter will sign in English or ASL?

- Who is in control: Hearing or Deaf interpreter?

    - Are two interpreters (DI-HI) enough? Should Deaf interpreter get a team Deaf interpreter too?

To add to the difficulty in uniting Deaf and hearing interpreting teams is the fact that training opportunities for DI-HI teams are rare.  It has been noted by many interpreter practitioners and educators that there is a great need for proper training for DI-HI teams so they can provide effective interpretation *together* (Bentley-Sassaman, 2010).

**Throughout this Course…**

With allies such as yourself advocating for DI-HI teams coupled with increased awareness of how DI-HI teams benefit all involved, educational and training opportunities for DIs and DI-HI teams will increase. This in turn will grow the number of CDI-holders across the nation and lay a foundation for successful DI-HI teams.  It is with great hope that you will learn more about yourself as an interpreter, about DIs and DI-HI teams, and about your role as a member of a DI-HI team to better meet the needs of the D/deaf and hearing consumers we serve.

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National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers

**Suggested Resources**

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