



# PIE à la mode



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## Deaf/hearing TEAM Interpretation

by Lisa Perry Burckhardt and Sandy Peplinski

(This is the first in a series of four articles on Deaf/hearing team interpretation. Editor.)

“PIE sends Deaf interpreters more often than needed”. This is an accusation that has been made against PIE. It is a statement with which we completely disagree. It is the policy of PIE to use a Deaf interpreter when the risk of less than optimal communication is too great. PIE's policy has always been to send a Deaf interpreter to situations in which there is a potential need. If the Deaf interpreter is not needed or used, there is no charge to the customer. We find this superior to and preferable to sending a single interpreter into a high-risk situation, a situation that could lead to communication failure. The Deaf interpreters PIE works with are committed to their craft and their profession. Their goal is not to take advantage of customers but to respect and defend the communication rights and needs of the Deaf individuals they serve.

A respected Deaf and hearing interpretation team has written an article for this edition of the à la Mode. I will reserve further comment until I read and consider what they have to say. I hope you will do the same.

Stephanie Kerkvliet

Communication barriers can overshadow any interpreter's work in spite of their level of experience and their certifications. Every interpreter has experienced this. To understand and to be understood: These are the goals. When using every professional tool available to the single interpreter does not work, that's when the certified deaf interpreter (CDI) is key.

“Why do we need two interpreters for one deaf consumer?” we often hear. Simply put, there are two languages (English and American Sign Language) being used in the communication process.

Before a more detailed explanation can be given as to the rationale for two interpreters, one who can hear and one who is deaf, a language assessment must be completed. The deaf interpreter is the trained American Sign Language expert, a native user of the language, and a lifelong participant in Deaf culture. The need for a deaf interpreter does not necessarily have to do with the deaf consumer's intelligence. The deaf consumer may not have had any formal training in ASL. Instead, he may use it in an idiosyncratic manner while still incorporating many of the structural/grammatical components of the language (gestures, facial expression, body language).

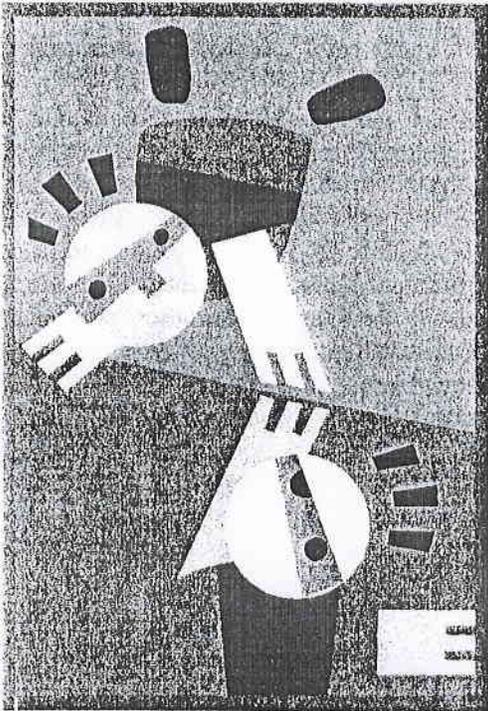
Deaf individuals are used to adapting their language mode to the hearing interpreter. Even though we interpreters may think we are matching the deaf person's language mode, deaf individuals are continually code switching to accommodate us. With the use of a certified deaf interpreter, the deaf individual is able to use his or her *own* language to exchange information and to be expressive in a comfortable communication setting. The invisible language barrier disappears, and the deaf person can now communicate through *one of their own*.

Being a deaf individual, a native user of ASL, and a person immersed in Deaf culture does not necessarily qualify an individual to be a deaf interpreter. The Deaf author of this article, Lisa Perry Burckhardt, has worked for seven years building her skills and acquiring knowledge about the profession.

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) requires that a deaf individual who wants to become a deaf interpreter complete 32 hours of training prior to taking the RID exam: 8 hours of training in role and function of a deaf interpreter, 8 hours in code of ethics, and 16 hours related to team interpreting. In the authors' professional opinion, 16 hours of training is not nearly enough for interpreters to learn about the teaming process, a process

that is vital to interpreting. The deaf interpreter *must also* learn more about the process of interpreting and the tools used within the profession. Ignoring this as a requirement prior to team training leaves a large gap in understanding the interpreting process and the standard practice of professionalism in our field. Basic foundational training is not widely offered to deaf people. There are very few highly qualified trainers providing foundational CDI training. This is probably the leading reason for the high failure rates of those currently taking the CDI exam.

The requirements for deaf interpreters are far less than the stringent requirements currently or soon to be in place for interpreters who can hear (i.e. completion of a formal Interpreter Training Program, Bachelor's degree, ongoing workshops for professional development). For a deaf interpreter to be effective in their work they must have a number of often overlooked qualities including: A high level of trust with their hearing teams, a good understanding of the interpreting process, command of both languages (ASL and English), training to work with a team interpreter, and specialized training to work in legal, medical or mental health settings. We believe that RID should increase the training required for deaf interpreters enabling them to be an integral and equal member of the TEAM.



Interpreting is like a garment held together by many threads. If one thread breaks, a seam pulls apart. So it is with our work. If there is a missing piece, the messages may not be equivalent. Interpreters must learn to think

outside of the box, to concentrate on the work they are producing, and to remove the focus from the interpreter. Monitoring needs to expand to consider all perspectives and assess any inconsistencies in understanding. Interpreters have a responsibility to act ethically in the decision-making process. They must set pride aside and look at the situation and interpreting process from all perspectives to look for indicators that the deaf consumer understands the interpreter, and that the interpreter understands the deaf consumer.

Deaf individuals continually code switch to match an interpreter's mode of communication, a stark indication that we are not living up to the expectation of *equal access* in the deaf person's preferred mode of communication. Hearing interpreters must realize that their critical and analytical thinking skills are different from those of someone who is deaf. How we think and talk about information is very different in both languages. Hearing interpreters need to learn to think of information from the deaf person's perspective. Discourse *is* different in ASL than it is in English.

What does information look like in the deaf individual's own language? This should be *our target* language. Another rationale to support the use of a deaf interpreter is that hearing interpreters are not able to express themselves in the same way a deaf person does. Involving a deaf interpreter provides the deaf consumer with a means to express himself and to receive information in a natural and comfortable manner.

Some interpreters view their need to work with a deaf interpreter as a weakness, a reflection of their abilities and inabilities. Most often interpreters with the highest credentials and the most experience are the ones who ask for deaf interpreters. These highly qualified interpreters have learned to recognize indicators that a deaf interpreter is needed and have learned to assert themselves to ask for what they need. *Deaf interpreters are our specialists.* Do we frown upon our doctor or think less of them if they want to call in a specialist? No. Rather, they build our trust and we think more highly of them.

Hearing interpreters should make use of a deaf interpreter's skills and training each and every time we are in a situation where we feel communication is not quite what it should be. Deaf interpreters will enhance our work, help us become better interpreters, and allow deaf consumers to have the access to the communication they deserve, in their own language. ♡