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## *Using Popular Education with the Oppressor Class*

### *Suggestions for Sign Language Interpreter Education*

Wyatte C. Hall  
*University of Rochester Medical Center*

Thomas K. Holcomb  
*Ohlone College*

Marlene Elliott  
*University of Rochester Medical Center*

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### **Abstract**

*The Deaf community is an oppressed sociolinguistic, collectivist minority that primarily uses sign language. Sign language interpreters are frequently used to bridge the communicative and cultural gap between the members of the Deaf community and hearing people. In the past, many of these interpreters were raised in Deaf households with Deaf parents and/or siblings. Others had Deaf friends or worked in a school for the Deaf. However, the establishment of Interpreter Preparation Programs in the 1970s reoriented sign language interpreter education from community-based development to the academic classroom. This removed the immersion in Deaf cultural values and norms from interpreter development. Consequently, Deaf community members are increasingly disillusioned with what they perceive as culturally inappropriate and oppressive behaviors by some IPP-trained interpreters. Popular Education is proposed as a way to remediate the negative effects of the individualist-based hearing academic reorientation, which can create Language Technicians. Allies, interpreters who strive for social justice and Deaf empowerment, can be created through Popular Education-centered interpreter programs. These programs would be guided by Deaf cultural norms and practices provided by Deaf experts.*



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Sign language interpreters serve as a language bridge between spoken language users and visual language users. Because of the inherent power dynamic tied to interacting between a minority and majority population, sign language interpreters have significant control of the interaction process and its outcomes – whether they be positive or negative. In recent years, there has been a surge in complaints and seemingly more negative outcomes in the interpreting process where Deaf individuals are left feeling unsatisfied at best and oppressed at worst (Bridges, 2013; Boudreault, 2014; Forrestal, 2014; Gray, 2014; Rashid, 2014; Solomon & Miller, 2014; Suggs, 2012; Taylor, 2014).

Contrary to popular belief, deafness is not considered a handicap or a loss among the members of the Deaf community. There exists a sociocultural minority of Deaf people in nearly every country in the world. In the United States alone, there is estimated to be approximately 500,000+ individuals that consider themselves to be culturally Deaf and use American Sign Language (ASL) as their first and/or favored language (Mitchell, Young, Bachleda, & Karchmer, 2006). This population is self-identified by the usage of a capital ‘D’ in deaf, to represent a sociocultural identity and community unified by a collectivist culture, as well as ASL use. ASL, like other signed languages, is a three-dimensional visual-spatial language with its own unique grammar and linguistic rules. The legitimacy of sign language as a fully natural language is supported by more than fifty years of linguistic research (Stokoe, 1960; Valli, Lucas, & Mulrooney, 2005; among many others). It is typically the cultural foundation for a Deaf identity (Holcomb, 2013). Within this paper, the capitalized term “Deaf” will be used to refer to the socio-cultural community and individuals who see themselves as part of a linguistic and cultural minority.

### **The Deaf Community – An Oppressed Sociolinguistic Minority**

To understand the place of modern sign language interpreters within the Deaf community, a brief historical context is needed. In the 1800s, there were thriving communities of sign language users that included both Deaf and hearing individuals, such as Martha’s Vineyard in the 1800s (Groce, 1988) and residential schools for the Deaf (Gannon, 1981). Deaf individuals were both students and teachers in schools for the Deaf with the primary language of instruction being regional signed languages.

Unlike other language minorities, most deaf children do not learn language from their family. An estimated 95% of deaf children are born to hearing parents, most of whom have never met a deaf person before discovering their child is deaf (Kurtzer-White & Luterman, 2003, Mitchell & Karchmer, 2005). Historically, residential schools for deaf children were the primary places of transmission of both language and culture as many staff members were Deaf themselves (Ladd, 2003).

These communities of sign language users were not without challenge or oppression from outsiders. The Milan Conference of 1880 is a critical demarcation in the history of Deaf self-determination. This conference of international educators of deaf children purported to be one where the instructional language for future education of the deaf would be debated. In reality, the conference was established to effectively remove sign language from classrooms for deaf children in favor of spoken language instruction only (commonly described as oralism). The outcome of the Milan Conference was the elimination of many Deaf teachers and administrators

from schools for the deaf, including those who founded some of these institutions. This removal of Deaf professionals effectively consigned the transmission of native sign languages and cultural identities to the shadows of dorm rooms and playgrounds (Conrad, 1979; Roots, 1999).

The harmful effects continue to this day (Humphries et al., 2014), as “[Deaf people] have been hurt, excluded, marginalized and angry at hearing people for the damage visited upon us over generations, 130 years since Milan” (Jokinen, 2010). This context also informs the current negative interactions between Deaf people and interpreters who do not allow self-determination to happen.

### **A Rapid Increase in Sign Language Interpreter Demand**

In the United States, four significant events, beginning in the 1970s, dramatically increased the demand for skilled ASL interpreters. Three were legislative in nature – the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Yell, 1998). The aims of the legislative efforts were to increase access to people with disabilities (including deaf individuals), provide reasonable accommodations in educational, medical, and business settings, as well as make discrimination illegal. The fourth event – the advent of Video Relay Service (federally funded telephone interpreting through videophones) in 2000 – became a new industry that relied fully on ASL interpreters for its success (Rosen, 2007).

The result of these events led to the overwhelming of already-working interpreters, as the traditional acculturative community method was unable to keep up with the steadily increasing demand. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) introduced a national generalist certification system in the early 1970s (Cokely, 2005). At the same time, training programs of varying lengths emerged across the country, largely housed in academic institutions. In 2012, the RID certification system was modified to include a requirement of a four-year degree from an academic institution (RID, 2012). The formation of hearing-run, academic-oriented Interpreter Preparation Programs (IPPs), which typically uses Deaf community leaders as ancillary support rather than primary drivers, marked a drastic shift in “bypassing” community-based interpreter development (Wilson, 2011). Non-enculturated, individualistic interpreters became the de-facto standard; such “professional” interpreters often find themselves at odds with collectivist Deaf cultural norms and values (Cokely, 2005).

### **Sign Language Interpreters and the Oppressor Class**

In typical minority spoken language communities, interpreters predominantly come from the minority community itself — e.g. bilingual Spanish interpreters being native Spanish speakers, culturally and linguistically (Moody, 2011). For example, in the United States, children who grow up in foreign language homes can be taught English as a second language, typically from their educational experiences and from exposure in the wider community and media. Their first language (L1) is something other than English, and their second language (L2) is English. As adults, they can be perfectly positioned to become professional interpreters mediating interactions between their minority community and the majority community. They have native fluency in both the language and culture of their families, and at minimum, a working understanding of the larger English speaking world and norms. To become professional

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interpreters, they may need training in the cognitive processes of translation, terminology/vocabulary of specific venues (medical, legal, etc.), roles, and ethics of interpreting (Stewart, Schein, & Cartwright, 2004). These interpreters can more naturally recognize imbalances of power, and are aware of the cultural norms of the minority community they come from. Their L1 culture and language skills guide their perspective and culturally sensitive performance. Indeed, these interpreters often view their profession as social justice work, including advocacy and cultural brokering in their work (Messias, McDowell, & Estrada, 2009).

Until the 1970s, ASL interpreters fit more closely the description of an interpreter rooted in the minority community. Many interpreters were born and raised in the Deaf community as Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs); others found initial entrance to the community through social or religious connections with Deaf members (Wilson, 2011; Winston, 2005). For these interpreters from a non-deaf family, enculturation was a gradual and natural process until the Deaf community felt they had an understanding of the culture and community. As hearing guests in the community, they would be invited to begin interpreting under the guidance of Deaf leaders (Cokely, 2005; Winston, 2005).

As with any other minority interpreting population, CODAs and other enculturated interpreters must face ethical issues including power, confidentiality, multiple roles, and parent/child role reversals, among other common issues that arise in the general interpreting process. For example, a power imbalance could exist due to the fact the interpreters themselves are hearing and in a position to abuse their power if unchecked. This power imbalance makes it even more critical for a community approach to the development of future interpreters. This is not only to ensure trust between interpreters and the community, but allows for the development of strong internal ethical standards to address common situations where multiple roles and boundaries can occur as often does in small communities. Trust is paramount in any interpreted situations, regardless of the languages and communities involved (Barron, Holterman, Shipster, Batson, & Alam, 2010; Hsieh, Ju, & Kong, 2010).

A community approach to enculturation is a natural process in a collectivist culture. It includes (1) a focus on the views, needs, and goals of the ingroup, rather than on the self; (2) emphasis on social norms and duties, rather than individual pleasure or personal advantage; (3) common shared beliefs within the in-group; and (4) a willingness to work together with the in-group (Triandis, 1990). These aspects are all seen within Deaf culture as participation in the community comes through connectedness, reciprocity, the sharing of knowledge, shared experiences, shared problem-solving, dialogue, and working together for the good of the community (Holcomb, 2013; Mindess, 2014).

The collectivist Deaf community (Mindess, 2014) stands in contrast to the predominantly individualist hearing world seen in Westernized cultures such as America (Triandis & Trafimow, 2001). Individualist cultures view the individual as an end in itself (Gould & Kolb, 1964), independent of relationships with others. More emphasis is placed on autonomy, individual rights, and personal pleasure. Personal relationships are judged by their advantages and disadvantages to the self, and competition with others is not only normal but also expected. Even though America is considered a multi-cultural society, many Americans may adopt the individualistic approach in order to be assimilated more fully into the mainstream. While all cultures have collectivist and individualist elements, the differences between dominant hearing

and Deaf cultures in their respective countries can be marked along these boundaries (Mindess, 2014).

Approximately seventy percent of the world population is collectivist, and many in these groups disagree with Western individualist values (Triandis, 1995). This context is an important juxtaposition to understand the situating of Deaf cultures within individualist societies. Sign language interpreters primarily work in situations where collectivist and individualist worldviews often come in conflict, necessitating a deep understanding of the Deaf worldview to facilitate effective communication. Interpreters not steeped in the Deaf culture are less likely to notice the cultural conflicts between collectivist and individualist perspectives. Subsequently, they can, perhaps unconsciously, be more inclined to side with the dominant culture, intuitively feeling the approach a natural one.

### **Oppressor – Oppressed Power Dynamics: The Language Technician**

“Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral” (Freire, 1970).

Often, academically trained interpreters feel that the proper performance of their duties consists solely of signing when someone speaks, and speaking when someone signs (Moody, 2011). The authors describe this type of academically trained interpreter as a Language Technician for the purposes of this paper. Language Technicians are *neutral* in their duties of relaying information between two languages. This attempt to make interactions “equal through neutrality” ignores, and perpetuates, the inherent power imbalance present between the majority hearing community and minority Deaf community (Metzger, 1999).

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf's Code of Professional Conduct (CPC) (RID, n.d.) can become a misappropriated shield for the Language Technician. While the code endorses the guiding principle of impartiality, it does not say that hearing cultural norms take precedence over Deaf cultural norms. Language Technicians who view themselves as neutral conduits (Moody, 2011), equivalent to a telephone line, fail to collaborate with Deaf people.

It can be a common experience for Deaf children in public schools with classroom interpreters, as two of the authors (Hall/Holcomb) have experienced personally numerous times. When asking for clarification of an interpretation within a school classroom directly to their interpreters, the conduit interpreter automatically voices what is signed, rather than engaging in clarification. The result is that the interpreter interrupts the class, already ahead several points in the material, and the Deaf student experiences embarrassment. The teacher mistakenly believes the issue was with understanding the material (and can resent having to spend time backtracking), rather than the interpretation, and the interpreter often may not clarify the distinction. Most importantly, when interpreters behave this way, trust is broken with the Deaf student. While the interpreter is being entirely impartial in the technical sense of not engaging personally – automatically signing what is voiced, and voicing what is signed – this impartiality removes collaboration between the student and interpreter for the supposed shared goal of understanding to occur. In this sense, the impartiality principle of the CPC can be used as an ethical shield to justify, or excuse, what Deaf people experience as oppressive behaviors.

These types of Language Technicians may view culturally competent performance, such as co-creating meaning and sharing decision making with Deaf individuals, in a negative way as “siding with them.” While basic concepts such as neutrality, professionalism, and credibility are obviously culturally constructed, the current CPC makes no acknowledgement of that fact. Language Technicians may not be taught the skills to acknowledge or realize that their view on such matters may be ethnocentric and oppressive.

Linguistic and cultural factors of pacing, relationship building and maintaining, shared decision-making, among many others are a precursor to successful communication outcomes (Wadensjo, 2014). These factors can be removed from the Deaf individual’s participation within the interpreting process of the Language Technician. Even seemingly benign issues, such as where an interpreter will sit or stand to interpret, can be rightly expected to be Deaf-centered negotiations. Many IPPs teach Language Technicians that arriving early and arranging seating is considered their professional duty (Stewart, Schein, & Cartwright, 2004). Interpreters may arrive to a job early with the purpose of establishing where they will stand, and reserve seats where the Deaf “consumers” will sit and see them. This is done for the interpreter’s own purposes (perhaps as a stress relief of removing unknown variables in the environment) without Deaf consultation, rather than for the benefit of Deaf people who may have a different preference of how to best situate themselves. Instead, waiting for the Deaf people to come and discuss the decision, which may ultimately result in the same choice, acknowledges the self-determination of the Deaf person.

Language Technicians can abdicate responsibility for negotiating understanding during the translation process. Back-channel feedback is an essential part of sign language; this includes well-documented sociolinguistic cues, such as conveying facial expressions that indicate a lack of understanding (Shaw, 2007; Wilbur & Petitto, 1983). These cues, for example, would convey a clear message to slow down, back up, find out what is not clear, and clarify. Language Technicians may lack, and may not be taught, the skills to recognize these cues. Either they may be too mentally involved in the translation process that they cannot divert concentration, or they simply may be unaware of the cue’s existence. When a Language Technician forges ahead in their work at the hearing cultural pace and ignores – at best, unknowingly – a clear linguistic indication of need for clarification, they side with the powerful at the expense of the oppressed.

Academic training alone does not fully explain the broader issue of interpreters defaulting to hearing cultural norms. However, programs should take more accountability to emphasize this type of dynamic, how to address it in a culturally sensitive way, and “screen out” would-be interpreters who consistently fail to consider Deaf prerogative.

### **Cultural Context of the Academic Institution**

“Culture is the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas” (p. 6, Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).

Individualistic cultures are a bottom-to-top framework; those on the bottom with less power must consult upwards with system authorities in order to solve problems. The individualist system has experts with specialized knowledge from which their authority rests upon. The process of education within this framework is the imparting of specialized knowledge

to people who successfully navigate the established system (the banking model of education), and who become validated through academic credentials such as a degree (Freire, 1970).

The degree can become a powerful tool used in differentiating individuals who have submitted to the authority of the system and are given access to positions of power, as well as money, in return. Continued success depends upon standing out and respecting the rules of the system. The successful student is given the specialized knowledge and credentials to become an authority figure of his or her own, allowing the system to perpetuate. The banking model of education is a process of indoctrination into the academic system, a maintenance of the hierarchy.

### **The Incompatibility of the Academic Institution and the Deaf Community**

“One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding” (Freire, 1970).

Academic programs naturally take on the cultural components of their host institution. The result of Interpreter Preparation Programs (IPPs) being developed within an academic environment meant that hearing norms and values, rather than Deaf norms and values, became the foundation of their curriculum. The re-centering of interpreters’ learning process, from the Deaf community to the college classroom, had important consequences.

The basic structure of many academic IPPs is for students to attend class, follow a syllabus, read assigned textbooks, watch videos of sign language, and complete homework assignments. As part of the university’s commitment to high expectations and accreditation standards, professors with advanced academic degrees are recruited to teach courses. Credibility of the information is rooted in scholarly constructs. Students learn academic rigor, internalizing the steps needed to do research, and find cited sources for answers to their questions. Credible sources are those validated by the academic world, not the Deaf community. The classroom setting is inherently one where the individual is prized over the group. Interpreting students are in competition with each other for grades and attention. A successful student is one who plays by the rules of the academic system, and at the same time, differentiates him/herself from the rest of the class. In short, standing out from the crowd is desirable, much like Rock Star interpreters. Rock Star interpreters are those who use the interpreting position as means for personal attention and fame, and are frequently involved in highly public conflicts with Deaf people (see description in Elliott & Hall, 2014).

Within the education process, immersive Deaf experiences may not be present. IPPs may have some Deaf instructors, but because of often lacking a pre-requisite terminal degree, they are usually hired as lecturers limited to teaching basic, introductory courses such as beginning ASL classes. In general, students are not exposed to the rich diversity and differences of the broader community, much less steeped in it. Academic programs usually do require students to attend Deaf community events as a way of encouraging culturally informed and appropriate interactions (see Marschark, Peterson, & Winston, 2005 for review). However, students often do not possess even rudimentary cultural skills to meaningfully participate in Deaf events, making these cultural

assignments token gestures at best and harmful at worst (Holcomb & Mindess, 2009). Most often, these students stand on the sidelines at such events, even taking notes in plain-view; Deaf people report feeling like “zoo animals” as these students gaze on (Bridges, 2014). Contrary to the assignment’s intended goal, this creates more cultural discord and increases the distance between interpreters and Deaf individuals.

Academic IPPs (that fail to meaningfully incorporate the Deaf community) naturally create Language Technicians that are attuned to the hierarchical systems of the dominant individualist culture, not community based interpreters prepared to work in a collectivist culture. Such Language Technicians may consider themselves experts credentialed by the academic system, validated by the degree they receive, with little to no consideration for the more-important credentialing of the community they now presume to work in.

In sum, education within the larger, hearing-dominated academic institution mirrors individualist values and reinforces the current power structure. Language Technicians can be prepared, perhaps unknowingly, to maintain the system with its inherent power imbalance intact. When systems (medical, legal, education, social services, etc.) employ these Language Technicians, the illusion of access (as defined by the system, not the Deaf people) is granted. For example, the mere presence of a Language Technician is often sufficient to satisfy the access mandates of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, without any consideration for the quality of that access and preferences of the Deaf person. In this sense, the Language Technician functions primarily as a buffer for the maintenance of the systems that holds power over, and oppresses, the Deaf people.

### **Sign Language Interpreters – *Not* a Practice Profession**

Even Language Technicians recognize that their concept of interpreting breaks down in the face of real world interactions. Communication is a dynamic, sometimes messy, process of dialogue that does not always easily conform to the linear sentence making of the Language Technician (see Marschark, Peterson, & Winston, 2005 for review). The meaning behind language is made with context, relationship, intonation, environment, affect, body language, gestures, sarcasm, dialogue, and many other aspects (Wadensjo, 2014). Language Technicians can seek frameworks to manage the “messy” variables in communication (Dean & Pollard, 2001) and attempt to repair a strict translation approach. Rather than culturally-repositioning themselves to Deaf people, these hearing-developed constructs often reinforce an interpreter- and academically-centered approach.

Many Language Technicians now view themselves as practice professionals (Dean & Pollard, 2013), drawing a parallel with lawyers, doctors, psychologists, and other advanced practice professions. These professions generally hold positions of power within the individualist system. In proposing this comparison, Language Technicians align with the academic system for further validation and power. The need for personal evaluation through professional supervision was formerly missing from sign language interpreter practice. The proposed comparison to practice professionals seeks to rectify that, and does mirror the expected supervision process (Dean & Pollard, 2005); beyond that, the parallel to practice professions breaks down. Aligning with power and gaining status in the hearing world, at the expense of Deaf individuals, is not the

only way to introduce reflective processes into a profession as the concept of *praxis*, detailed later, highlights.

In reality, there may be more differences between interpreters and other practice professions than similarities. Practice professionals bring specialized knowledge to their work, knowledge that their “clients” do not have. Interpreters do not have authority or specialized knowledge in the system to effect change like other practice professionals. Instead they are, first and foremost, guests (welcome or unwelcome) in the lives and interactions of both the hearing and Deaf people they serve (Elliott & Hall, 2014). Despite this fact, interpreters regularly refer to both hearing and Deaf people as “consumers” or “clients.” Again, this perpetuates the interpreters’ belief that they are more knowledgeable and credentialed than the people who are the primary owners of the interactions.

In fact, Deaf individuals have the ultimate expertise on their own selves, their lives, culture, values, and goals for the interpreting interaction. For Deaf “clients,” the authors suggest using the term “Deaf experts” instead, to acknowledge that Deaf people have their own expertise in the interpreting interaction, further equalize the Deaf-hearing dynamic, and reclaim Deaf self-determination in the process (Elliott & Hall, 2014).

Deaf people most often refer to satisfactory interpreter behaviors in terms of allies, Deaf-heart, or “attitude-good,” describing them as culturally skilled and most importantly, feeling comfortable (i.e. trusting the interpreter) in the interaction. It is a growing contention that the Deaf community should, once again, be the decision-makers of what constitutes a good interpreter and the terminology used to describe those interpreters (Forrestal, 2014). For the purposes of this paper, “Ally” is used to describe a good interpreter, as defined by the Deaf community, and one that may be developed within the Popular Education classroom.

### **Can a Classroom Instill Cultural Values and Deliver Content?**

Clearly, interpreter education is not going to return to the Deaf community. The certification system demands a bachelor’s degree at a minimum. Likewise, the academic environment is not going to voluntarily become more collectivist and/or accommodate the presence (and cost) of large numbers of Deaf people as experts to enculturate interpreting students. In addition, a doctoral degree is typically expected at the university level for teachers, thus reducing the pool of potential Deaf faculty members. We propose Popular Education as a framework to provide a needed shift in the academic environment, for basic collectivist values and skills, that will develop Allies. The application of Popular Education in spoken-language interpreting curriculum has been successful at the Highlander Center (Tijerina, 2009).

The overall intent of Popular Education is to confront and transform oppression; it is a consciousness-raising process, not merely a mode of educating content. Along with teaching oppression awareness, Popular Education encourages collectivism and sophisticated socio-linguistic skills within the general individualistic, competitive, inflexible, and hierarchical academic setting. This is a first step towards possibly mediating the divide between interpreter students trained in academia and the Deaf community.

Popular Education (“educación popular” in Spanish) refers to “the people,” meaning the common, everyday, largely oppressed masses (Freire, 1970). As such, Popular Education is fundamentally concerned with both social justice and social change. The term education generally refers to teaching; in Popular Education, education means to facilitate learning – a subtle but key difference (Flowers, 2004 as cited in Tijernia, 2009).

This approach stands in contrast to the banking model where teachers, as the experts, make deposits of knowledge in the students’ “accounts.” Popular Education employs a highly participatory framework of dialogue. The pedagogy is purposefully “collective, focused primarily on group as distinct from individual learning and development” (p. 4, Kirkwood, 1999).

All participants are both teachers and students; knowledge and wisdom is drawn from participants’ experiences, posing problems and collectively exploring those problems together through dialogue. This method reinforces the *mode* of learning in collectivist cultures such as the Deaf community, a mode of valuing lived experience and shared problem solving (Holcomb, 2013).

The tenets of Popular Education are explicit – (1) students are expected to learn with their bodies and hearts, not just with their minds, and (2) life experience and formal education are valued equally. The Popular Educator creates an environment to promote a learning community consistent across all classes regardless of who the teacher may be. Students are seated in a semi-circle where everyone is on an equal footing. Group rules are also explicit, including (1) directions for respect, (2) making space for both introverts and extroverts to contribute equally, and (3) accepting what other people may say, even when others may disagree i.e. learning how to listen.

Dinámicas, activities that are physically active while delivering content and/or creating group cohesion are used throughout the curriculum. The students learn to develop a sense of group that includes a variety of perspectives. Problem Posing can be used to address language skills, ways of being with Deaf people, professional approaches to work, as well as self-reflection in specific interpreting settings and interactions. Narrative is shared between both the Deaf community and Popular Education, this natural overlap allows interpreting students a daily opportunity to experience a wide variety of Narrative functions (such as education, entertainment, culture participation, identity development, credible evidence sharing, and many others).

Socio-dramas are one type of short, scripted Narrative that students act out as a way of delivering and exploring content. This approach to weaving Narrative into the fabric of class sessions can be a centerpiece of developing skills to participate, in a positive way, in the daily life of the Deaf community. While this is one example of how Popular Education may influence current interpreter curriculum, a full restructuring of current curriculum is strongly recommended to fully instill a Popular Education approach that will encourage developing culturally competent interpreters.

The Popular Education classroom becomes a mini-community of continuous interaction where everyone practices responsibility for learning. Credibility comes from real-life experience, especially shared experience. This is a *critical* aspect, as the average Deaf expert does not have

an academic degree (Holcomb, 2013), and therefore, little to no legitimacy in the academic system or in the eyes of the academically trained interpreter.

In a Popular Education classroom, students who are Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs) would be a tremendous resource and advantage due to their native experience within the Deaf community. This is in contrast to the more common CODA experience where individualistic teachers, who did not grow up in the Deaf community, feel challenged by students who have more experience and knowledge than them (Kraft, personal communication, 2015; Williamson, personal communication, 2015). CODA interpreters may describe their academic-based training as boring, demeaning, and difficult, one in which their Deaf world experience is devalued. This also reinforces the “academic legitimacy before experience” dynamic for non-native students.

Another resource for IPPs would be Deaf people themselves. With the growing demand for Certified Deaf Interpreters, more and more Deaf people are beginning to consider interpreting as a viable career. The Popular Education classroom can more easily incorporate Deaf students than traditional “banking” methods. By enrolling in IPPs, their hearing, non-native classmates are able to benefit from their Deaf world experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, Deaf graduates would now be armed with formal education and academic degrees, as well as articulate the perspectives of the Deaf community in how interpretation work can be best accessed in the most culturally appropriate manner.

Two other aspects shared across Popular Education and Deaf culture are pace and shared decision-making. Popular Education demands a slowing of pace to allow for full inclusion of all group members. Cognitively, ASL demands a slower pace to allow for full understanding. Visual information takes up more space in our working memory (short-term memory that deals with immediate processes including language) than auditory information (Boutla, Supalla, Newport, & Bavelier, 2004), similar to video files typically consuming more computer hard drive space than a auditory song. This means less visual information can be processed in the same amount of time as auditory information.

Not only must interpreters work at a slower pace to allow for their own cognitive processing of two separate spoken and signed modalities, but also allow for the visual language processing of Deaf experts. Efficient use of ASL spatial and chunking properties can allow for ultimately catching up to hearing pace in a non-linear fashion, as seen in Figure 1. Thus, interpreters must mediate between the linear hearing pace and non-linear Deaf pace to allow for understanding to occur. This is an advanced skill, a hallmark of a skilled Ally, and often lacking in Language Technicians (who feel internal pressure to follow hearing pace) at the expense of their own skills growth and Deaf experts’ understanding.

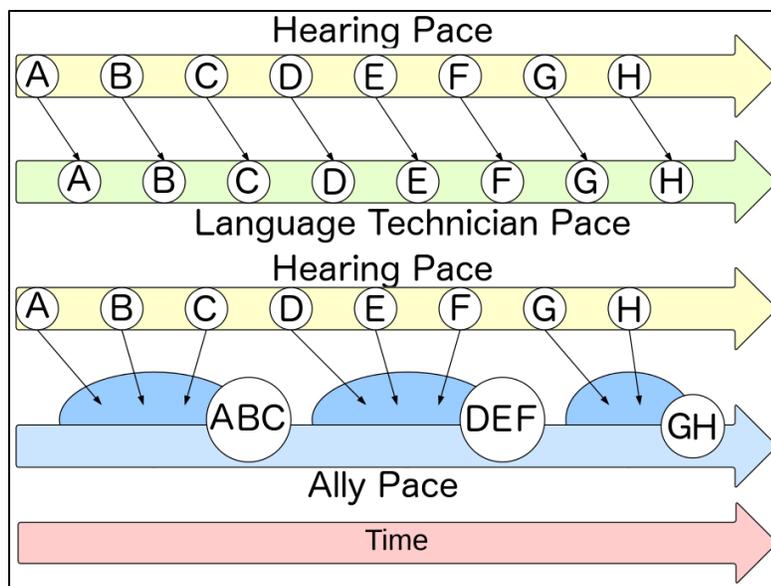


Figure 1.

Deaf experts, especially in context of self-determination, value shared decision-making. Shared decision-making on pace, content, and process during interpreting should be led by the Deaf expert to ensure understanding occurs for them. It is not enough to simply tell students that decisions are more interactive and shared in the Deaf community. To truly have a frame of reference for such behaviors and a rudimentary beginning of developing this critical skill, burgeoning Allies need repeated practice as a key aspect of their curriculum. These are only several examples of important skills that can lead students to a more culturally competent understanding of respect, and how it is expressed in the collectivist context of Deaf culture.

Perhaps the most important skill that interpreters, who did not grow up in Deaf culture, can learn is how to value and learn from the experiences of Deaf individuals, and see them as credible sources of information about their own lives and language, as the Deaf experts they are. For example, CDIs use culturally appropriate features such as pausing, eye gaze, and head nods more frequently than hearing interpreters (Ressler, 1999). Language Technicians may not recognize or learn to internalize culturally relevant behaviors occurring before their eyes. Some have made a case for improving interpreter situations by having hearing interpreters observe and learn from CDIs, as well as how cultural features are utilized for improving clarity of the interpretation (Cokely, 2005).

Another example of cultural utility is the clear and direct feedback that Deaf individuals tend to value among each other as a means of information sharing; this is a direct contradiction of the hearing value for feedback to be subtle and indirect (to avoid being rude and hurt feelings) (Holcomb, 2013; Mindess, 2014). This clash in values leads to a cultural conflict, where interpreters become offended at the offered feedback despite it actually being a caring behavior by the Deaf person. In this, the interpreter is unhappy with the “rudeness” of the Deaf individual, and the Deaf individual is unhappy with the loss of cultural trust in the interpreter. Mediating these type of cultural situations cannot be taught in a book, they must be practiced repeatedly in a learning environment.

In a Popular Education classroom, learning becomes a process of internalizing humility – which can be lacking in Language Technicians (Elliott & Hall, 2014). It is a humble attitude that interpreting students most need as they venture into a culture that is not their own. Interpreters with cultural humility and the skills discussed above will be lifetime learners and Allies. Otherwise, they are likely to come into continuous conflict with Deaf experts like Language Technicians currently do.

When interpreters view themselves as outsiders, guests in the private lives of Deaf people and the larger hearing systems they interact with, a different quality of reflection (beyond translating skills) becomes possible. Every interpreting assignment is an opportunity to learn, rather than an iteration of performing professional expertise. This viewpoint can lead naturally to praxis, the continual process of “theory to action to reflection,” that is a hallmark of Popular Education (Smith, 1999, 2011). Praxis allows for addressing the fundamental concern that classifying interpreters as practice professionals sought to address (Dean & Pollard, 2013); i.e., the need to continually analyze and improve interpreting performance and to carefully consider the performance’s impact on others.

Neutrality is an especially important point to emphasize. As explained previously, Language Technicians often use an individualist impartial view of neutrality, which excuses negatively perceived behaviors and maintains an already-existing power imbalance that oppresses Deaf experts. For an Ally, the idea of professional neutrality takes on new meaning, one that is essentially the opposite of the traditional perspective. Allies become entirely neutral in the sense that they allow Deaf experts to control them within the interpreting process in such a way the hearing-Deaf power imbalance becomes more equalized. They may heighten awareness of pace, adjust the style of interpretations (literal/linear versus conceptual/visual), watch closely for Deaf experts’ socio-linguistic cues for management of the interaction, and defer to the Deaf experts’ preferences, among many others. In essence, they allow themselves to be the channel for the Deaf experts to be fully self-determined in how they may choose to interact and whether to confront power imbalances. Language Technicians allowing the chips to fall where they may, regardless of injustice, is no longer an acceptable scenario within the Deaf community. Deaf experts are demanding more self-determination and raising expectations for ASL interpreters to become Allies.

## **Conclusion**

Consider this scenario – a weekly team meeting at the large company committed to diversity and inclusion for their Deaf employees. An interpreter, educated in the Popular Education classroom, will approach her work centered in the visually oriented, collectivist Deaf world. She will have the ability to make subtle but powerful decisions to increase the Deaf employee’s feeling of inclusion and self-determination.

Using the socio-linguistic cueing of eye gaze, she can make time for the Deaf employee to visually connect with speakers before representing the content of their words. She will not “rush” the Deaf employee by starting to sign before he has a chance to look at written materials or slides. She will carefully watch the Deaf employee’s face to find her cues as to how she can manage the flow of information, allowing the Deaf employee to scan the entire room rather than

the small space the interpreter occupies. In essence, she will have the Deaf expert guide her performance.

Embracing Popular Education in traditional academic institutions can help prepare interpreters to meaningfully develop culturally competent, visually oriented practice. However, it is only part of the solution. Interpreter preparation programs can accept more accountability for the interpreters created by their curriculum. They can find ways to more actively bring the Deaf community into the academic environment. Deaf people can be hired to serve as “cultural navigators” or mentors to students, programs can host events *for* the Deaf community, students can be led to engage in culturally appropriate service, and Deaf people can be brought into the classroom as often as possible. Better yet, Deaf people can be actively recruited to take the courses and become certified interpreters or teach advanced courses. The hearing professors can serve as models for students in how to *learn* from Deaf people’s experience and corrections.

At present, there are a number of IPPs that are attempting to re-center their program philosophy to become “Deaf-centered,” with the goal of preparing future interpreters who are culturally competent and function as Allies. Ohlone College is one of these institutions. There, the program is situated in a college where there are a large number of Deaf students. This affords IPP students the opportunity to have on-going, regular interactions with Deaf peers of similar age and cultural backgrounds. In addition, the majority of the faculty in the Deaf Studies Division, where the IPP is housed, are Deaf. They teach several IPP courses on a regular basis. The required coursework includes over 200 hours of mentorship with at least three different Deaf mentors both on and off campus. Sociolinguistic analysis of ASL discourse is a prominent feature of the program in order to enable students to develop skills in using the language the way Deaf people themselves do. To secure a coveted spot in IPP, the college hosts an all-day community-screening event every spring. Here, Deaf experts, along with former IPP graduates and working interpreters, vet the candidates to select those that have the most potential of becoming Allies and skilled interpreters who are capable of understanding as well as meeting the needs of the Deaf community.

This shift from Language Technician to culturally competent Ally is not impossible to imagine; there were, and are, natural Allies in the community. The eight resolutions of the 1880 Milan Conference were formally rejected and apologized for in 2010 (Moore, 2010). It should not be another 130 years until interpreter education reorients itself – away from creating Language Technicians – and empowers the Deaf community once again. Popular Education can help remediate the negative effects of taking interpreter education out of the community. It can open the door for the Deaf community, the original educators of sign language interpreters, to take its rightful place as leaders and collaborators in the process once again.

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### **Authors**

Wyatte C. Hall is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the National Center for Deaf Health Research, University of Rochester Medical Center.

Thomas K. Holcomb teaches in the Deaf Studies Division at Ohlone College.

Marlene Elliott works in Interpreter Services, University of Rochester Medical Center.

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