



## **TWO DIFFERENT MODES OF TRANSLATION: INTERPRETING FOR THE DEAF AND THE DEAF-BLIND**

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### **Abstract:**

Translation studies comprises of several modes of translation and interpreting. Interpreting for the deaf and the deaf-blind are two of these modes. With the increase in awareness of the society about people in specific need, these two modes of interpreting started to gain importance in the field and people with different types of handicaps started to be more integrated with the society thanks to translation and interpreting. Not only the translation scholars, but also TV channels, online platforms, event organizers, etc. are becoming more and more interested in such types of translation and interpreting. Several organizations have started to be founded in order to bring common rules that should be applied and to make these modes of translation and interpreting even more visible and professional. Several interviews are made with interpreters for the handicapped to draw attention to the features and challenges in the field. The two modes of translation mentioned in the study have some common features with the other types of translation/interpreting. However, there are also some differences and additional challenges. This study aims to set forth the features of interpreting for the deaf and for the deaf-blind.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Translation studies, which was considered as a part of linguistics at first, became an independent discipline that is extensive and comprehensive. It targets all people who have the need to communicate via translation. Interpreting for handicapped people, who have some special needs depending on the type of their handicaps, also constitute an important field of study within translation studies despite being neglected for a long time. It has not attracted the attention it deserves in the field of translation studies yet.



However, the number of studies on the translation/interpreting for the people with different handicaps (for the deaf, deaf-blind and visually impaired, etc.) has been increasing gradually thanks to the increasing awareness and handicapped people's involvement in daily life and professional life. Such studies are important because they help the handicapped people to communicate and translation/interpreting for the handicapped has started not to be seen as a voluntary work or duty of the acquaintances of the handicapped anymore. It has started to be seen as a professional field of study. Considering the situation in the field, this study aims to set forth the features of interpreting for the deaf and for the deaf-blind.

As is known, humans can communicate in two ways: verbally and non-verbally. They can use language in verbal communication and also signs, symbols, sound or paralinguistic means to communicate their message.<sup>1</sup> Considering the fact that the aim of translation is to convey a message and communicate,<sup>2</sup> divided translation into 3 main categories:

- 1- "Intralingual translation or rewording** is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.
- 2- Interlingual translation or translation proper** is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.
- 3- Inter-semiotic translation or transmutation** is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems".

In classical understanding of translation, interlingual translation comes to mind first. However, as it can be seen in Jakobson's triad, translation cannot be limited only to interlingual translation. There are alternative modes of translation as opposed to classical modes of translation. Types of inter-semiotic translation can be counted among these alternative modes. Although some of the inter-semiotic types are used often in daily life, they are generally not considered as translation.

In this study, interpreting from verbal language to sign language and interpreting from sign language to verbal language will be analysed.

### **Interpreting for the Deaf and the Deaf-Blind**

People have been using signs to communicate since the first days of humanity and they are the first option that people apply when they speak different languages and don't know each other's language.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, they are an essential part of communication. For the people who have impaired hearing, sign languages have evolved around the world. It is important to define what sign language is in order to draw a clear picture of it. "Sign language is a living and dynamic language that represents the culture of the 'deaf' community with its own grammar, phonetics, syntax and wording and is used by people having impaired hearing in order to communicate among each other and also with the people who can hear and speak."<sup>4</sup> Sign languages have their own linguistic properties.

1 Bezuidenhout 1998.

2 Jakobson 1987, 233.

3 Oral 2016, 23.

4 Oral 2016, 51.



They have evolved in their communities over the years just like spoken languages. There is not any sign language spoken all around the world. There is a great variety between the sign languages spoken in different countries and regions. Some countries even have more than a single sign language or dialect.<sup>5</sup>

A sign language interpreter, on the other hand, is a professional who establishes communication between the people who speak sign language and other people who can't speak it and is required when there is a professional setting where family, relatives or friends of the people who need sign interpreting do not have the necessary qualifications to enable communication or when there is a formal setting where an official translation is required.

Like in every type of translation, the aim of a sign language interpreter is to convey messages accurately. However, in sign language interpreting, the interpreter carries out the process between deaf and hearing individuals by using two different channels of communication: verbal language and sign language. This process might be simultaneous or consecutive and appropriate techniques should be developed to enable communication.

There is no doubt that physical conditions are significant in all kinds of interpreting. They are of great importance in this mode of interpreting, too. The interpreter has to be seen by the participants who have impaired hearing and heard by the hearing participants and s/he should also see and hear the clients clearly, which also signals us the importance of technology in the process.

Besides all these common features, in the case of interpreting for people with different handicaps, their special and specific situation should also be kept in mind. It is important that the interpreters have general knowledge about deafness to empathize and create appropriate strategies based on the situation. Despite the similarities in different types of interpreting, there are certain differences in the case of sign language interpreting. Cokely explains the main difference as follows:<sup>6</sup>

“Given that sign language interpreters/transliterators are positioned between sign language and spoken language worlds, there are critical aspects of their social and cultural positionality that have no counterpart among interpreters who are positioned between two spoken language worlds.”

Interpreters who carry out the process of interpreting for the deaf can be either deaf or hearing. Interpreters who are deaf interpret between different national sign languages or within a sign language. As for interpreters who are hearing, they work in similar interpreting settings, but generally they interpret between spoken language and a sign language. On the other hand, deaf and hearing interpreters can work as a team.<sup>7</sup> As Cokely states, “On the surface it appears that the cognitive, linguistic and communicative processes that are at work in such interactions are fundamentally different for deaf people and for their nondeaf teammates”.<sup>8</sup> Considering this, it can be stated that teamwork is of importance and it is important to note that deaf translators should

5 <https://www.eud.eu/about-us/eud-position-paper/sign-language-interpreter-guidelines> (March,3 2022)

6 Cokely 2009, 1.

7 Skaten, Urdal and Tiselius 2021.

8 Cokely 2009, 25.



also be given the equal rights, chances and be provided with the necessary education/training to carry out the duty as a part of the team.

As in all professions, it is important to have organizations and associations to improve the conditions in the field. There are several organizations and associations for interpreting for the deaf all around the world such as World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI), Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), The European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (EFSLI). There are also ministries and other national organizations in different countries such as the Ministry of Family and Social Policies and Ministry of National Education or independent organizations such as ISMEK in Turkey.

Lack of communication for people with hearing loss might lead to social, emotional and educational problems depending on the level of their handicap.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it is important to provide them the appropriate conditions to enable communication. Individual steps are, of course, of great help. However, official organizations are needed for setting criteria for the interpreting process.

The organizations founded for this field of interpreting try to establish a professional framework for interpreting for the deaf. For example, WASLI prepared a guideline for interpreting for the deaf. There are three main points in the guideline which can be summarized as follows:

- ◆ The interpreters are supposed to interpret between the deaf and hearing people in a complete, accurate and impartial way. They should do their best to have improved conditions for enabling communication between the parties.
- ◆ The translator should take ethical decisions including having suitable skills for the work, improving themselves professionally in interpreting, getting prepared for the work, turning down the work they are offered if they are not qualified for it and turning down the work if they are not sure they can be impartial.
- ◆ Deaf people can represent themselves and direct their lives, so they should be given the equal opportunities in all positions.<sup>10</sup>

As it can be seen in the guideline, there are principles for carrying out the process of Interpreting for the Deaf and it can be stated that these principles are useful to create a professional framework for this mode of translation and help other people to it better. These guidelines are also useful to help Interpreting for the Deaf be conceived as a translation mode as it is not considered as translation by some. Despite this negative point of view, it can be said that Interpreting for the Deaf is luckily taking more part on the TV and in other parts of our daily lives day by day.

One of the dimensions in interpreting is Interpreting for the Deaf-Blind. In order to understand what Interpreting for the Deaf-Blind is, it is necessary to know what the term deaf-blind refers to. Deaf-blind people usually have some useful but not always reliable vision and hearing. Some of the Deaf-Blind people have little or no useable hearing and vision.<sup>11</sup>

9 Şahlı and Belgin (cited in Vişne and Yıldırım) 2020, 681.

10 <http://wasli.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/WASLI-Statement-on-Role.pdf> (October 16, 2014)

11 [http://www.aadb.org/FAQ/faq\\_DeafBlindness.html#define](http://www.aadb.org/FAQ/faq_DeafBlindness.html#define) (October 16, 2014)



The three main points which were set forth by WASLI and mentioned above, also apply to interpreting for the deaf-blind. On the other hand, the individual's needs direct the interpreting situation.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, there are different types of interpreting for the deaf-blind.

The amount and type of vision and hearing a person has determines the method of interpreting for the Deaf-Blind. These methods are as follows:

- ◆ "Sign language at close visual range (less than 4 feet) and/or within a limited visual space
- ◆ Sign language at a greater visual range (4-8 feet) for individuals with limited peripheral vision
- ◆ Sign language received at close visual range with the use of tracking
- ◆ Sign language received by sense of touch with one or two hands (tactile)
- ◆ Fingerspelling received by sense of touch (tactile)
- ◆ Print-on-Palm (block letters drawn on the palm)
- ◆ Speechreading at close visual range
- ◆ Hearing with assistive listening devices
- ◆ Reading via text-based devices and services (e.g., real-time captioning connected to a large visual display or refreshable Braille output)
- ◆ Sign supported speech".<sup>13</sup>

The point that should be kept in mind is that Interpreting for deaf-blind requires more than transmission of words. "The task of a deaf-blind interpreter is to mediate a complete picture to a deaf-blind person about the situation. This will be formed by three functions: language transmission, guiding, and transmission of visual information".<sup>14</sup> As interpreters for deaf-blind are required to have three main functions at the same time, their duty is demanding and stressful. Therefore, interpreters should be equipped with special knowledge and training and be able to cope with the stress of this demanding task, so having breaks are necessary and feedback from a deaf-blind client can relieve the stress and improve the interpreting process.

## CONCLUSION

Interpreting for the Deaf and Interpreting for the Deaf-Blind can be considered as alternative modes of translation as opposed to classical modes of translation. They have both common and different features compared to interpreting between two foreign languages. Like in all interpreting types, the interpreters are there for both parties and their duty is to carry out the interpreting process in the most appropriate way possible. On the other hand, differences occur due to the special situation of one of the clients. Therefore, interpreters should be trained and equipped appropriately for the job keeping both the common and different features in mind. International and local organizations

<sup>12</sup> Joffe, Huebner, Prickett and Welch. 1995.

<sup>13</sup> [https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/dbi\\_interpreters/24](https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/dbi_interpreters/24) (October 16, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Hassinen, 2014.



are of great help and significance in providing the necessary conditions for the interpreters and clients and creating a professional network for interpreters. Thus, it is important to support such organizations to improve the conditions in the field of interpreting for the handicapped.

Organizations of sign interpreting can be formed of both deaf and hearing interpreters to come up with a variety of solutions to improve the profession. Such organizations with professional setting can also shape the future of interpreters for the handicapped. On the other hand, it is important that universities provide education on interpreting for the handicapped at different levels of study (bachelors', master's and PhD). They should also provide trainings for those who want to specialize in this field.

## FURTHER STUDIES

This review study consists of interpreting for the deaf and deaf-blind. Translation for the deaf and deaf-blind with special focus on different media such as books and TV programs can be studied. On the other hand, further studies can be carried on translation/interpreting for people with different types of handicaps so as to shed light on the current situation and also offer solutions to the problems of such types of translation/interpreting.

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## DVA MODELA PRENOŠA PORUKE: PREVOĐENJE ZA SLABOVIDE I OSOBE OŠTEĆENOG SLUHA

### Rezime:

Studije u vezi sa prevodilaštvom govore o različitim formama, a među njima i prevođenju usmerenom ka slabovidim i osobama oštećenog sluha. Razvoj svesti o osobama drugačijih potreba doveo je rasta interesovanja za ove modele prevođenja, a predstavnike ovih grupa je približio društvu, upravo zahvaljujući procesu prevođenja. Ne samo naučnici, stručnjaci, no i medijski sadržaji, internet platforme, savremena sredstva komunikacije, događaji, i sl, postaju sve više zainteresovani za ove oblike prevođenja, ali i sve dostupniji pomenutim grupama. Brojna udruženja rade na tome da ovakvo prevođenje dobije i svoje standardizovane forme, dok najveći doprinos daju sami aktivni prevodioci. Iako ova dva modela dele neke osobine sa drugim oblicima prevođenja, krase ih i značajne razlike i izazovi, na koje ovaj rad želi da ukaže.

### Ključne reči:

Prevođenje,  
Slabovidi,  
Osobe oštećenog sluha,  
Jezik.