



INTERPRETER ALLY BY RAZONDA MUNYARADZI

DECEMBER 2015

INTERPRETER-ALLY RELATIONSHIP WITH DEAF INDIVIDUALS REGARDING THEIR INTERACTIONS

- What do Deaf individuals want to see in their allies?
- Who determines whether or not interpreters are Deaf allies?
- Are interpreters natural allies for Deaf individuals?
- Can hearing people other than interpreters be Deaf allies?
- Is the term “Deaf ally” just another passing trend?
- What happens when interpreters are not Deaf allies?
- Can allies for Deaf individuals be “trained or educated?”

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Article Abstract

Commitment to interactions led by Deaf individuals is explored. This is in relation to selective utilization of interpreters for alliance per each ASL speaker and situation. This alliance might seem to be between the Deaf individual and the interpreter, but is actually an alliance established between the Deaf individual and the hearing individuals with whom they interact through the cooperative agency of an interpreter. The said alliance is enacted by Deaf individuals based on the nature and nuances of the alliance-forming circumstance. Deaf-hearing alliances can even include productive partnerships of support for various reasons between Deaf individuals and those who are not as familiar with highly-valued cultural and linguistic identity within the Deaf community. The pivotal point lies with the Deaf individual, instead of the interpreter, to determine the level of passivity or passion along the spectrum of intellectual and emotive alliance with others for unilaterally determined self-advocacy or an otherwise mutually beneficial cause.

KEYWORDS: Deaf, ally, interpreter, intersectionality, relationship, interactions, commitment




Interpreter-Ally Relationship with Deaf Individuals' Interactions

Similar to the stated process by which a real estate agent follows the aspirations of a home buyer, the interpreter adheres to the Deaf individual's desire to establish equity in different forms (Marshall, 2012). There are limitations beyond which interpreters are not to venture. The assurance of this agent-individual alliance guarantees a jointly concerted effort to achieve the Deaf individual's intent or goal through clear, constant communication and respect.

THE ALLY ARC

More than mere team effort, the Deaf individual is the designated MVP (most valuable player) for unique and overall aspects of his or her character, influence and presence. It would definitely become a game changer without him or her. The acronym "ARC" has dual representation to include the attitudes, relationships, and changes that occur per the Deaf individuals' prerogative. The second application implicates the abilities, resources, and conditions set forth or pursued by ASL speakers. In both cases, it is applicable to various aspects of Deaf life as affected by communication access and community alliance. The trajectory of that arc determines whether or not points are scored toward the championship of



change for an even playing field sought after from concurrent grassroots and governmental angles. Deaf individuals are not to be side-lined or marginalized by the hearing community (especially by interpreters). They are to be encouraged on and off the court of the public square. This “game on” mentality aims for a winning situation that overcomes the psycho-social and eco-political plight of the proverbial underdog locally, regionally, and globally. The management for change results from the team’s collaborative plan to engage and execute (or not). The data that can then be collected from the resulting collateral damage or collective success is to be measured for future improvement on a case-by-case or play-by-play basis. Interpreters need to become and remain aware of when tactics change even in the middle of the game and be prepared to follow the leader.

TYPES OF COMMITMENT

Commitment or alliance is born (not borne) out of a variety of sources governing intent. One of those sources could entail experience (privileged or not), but the intersectionality of the interpreter is not to be falsely compared with or override that of the Deaf individual. Just as the unfair treatment and annihilation of Jews in Germany is different from that of African slaves brought to America, no matter that fundamentally undeniable oppression was experienced in both instances, one cannot compare to the



other. Each was horrific in its own right. In the instance of an interpreter of color as an interpreter-ally to the Deaf community, one might empathize to the point of respectful action, but still not be able to actually and fully relate to the Deaf experience due to the inability to “be in the Deaf person’s shoes” since they have been displaced and dissipated.


The levels of commitment vary from cascading to deepening to transforming. Some commitments are like stakeholder targets (Post, Preston & Sachs, 2002) that invest, but that can still be impacted for a change in the course of action based on importance as shown through the Deaf leader’s situational objectives, refined goals, policy or culturally-driven contingencies. Interpreter allies are stakeholders, not shareholders because they do not own what belongs to the Deaf individual. That is the difference between Deaf individuals being in the core of their community and interpreters becoming allies to their community. Other commitments are such that lend themselves to ever increasing levels of community, organizational, and/or nation building momentum. In either case, interpreter accountability for engagement level tactics is of utmost significance in choosing the right tools to lend an eye, ear, head, heart, and hand appropriately as expressly desired by the Deaf individual communicated directly or via back channel (Finigan, 2012). If not, the interaction between the Deaf individual and the interpreter and/or the



Deaf individual and members of the hearing community can result in misunderstanding, confusion, blame, anger, hostility and alienation.

The stages of commitment of hearing individuals to Deaf individuals as portrayed in general by Conner Partners include a progression of experiential interaction from contact and awareness (during the preparation phase), understanding and positive perception (during the acceptance phase), experimentation (defined by Conner as a byproduct of a new way of or paradigm shift in mindset and action) and adoption to culminate in constructive institutionalization of better standards and successful internalization of Deaf-friendly integration (during the commitment phase). The alignment of these stages shows a developmental hierarchy of judgment that counters the opposite effect of a lack of awareness, confusion, negative perception, indifference, rejection, and termination of the alliance (Conner, 2011) when interpreters are not effectively working with the Deaf individual.

This happens when interpreters are not working with the Deaf individual in the process of realization of acculturation vs. assimilation. In acculturation, the Deaf individual maintains his or her intersectionality, whereas with assimilation, the individual is lost among the masses on multi-faceted levels. Change is inevitable, but it makes a difference how it happens. It is the Deaf person's right to determine creative ways to resist




change, let it happen, facilitate accommodations, or become a change agent.


Note: Notice that, in this article, the topic of commitment was introduced from type to level to stage, but it could also be viewed from stage to level to type of commitment Deaf allies ultimately reach.


ELABORATING ON ALLIANCE

The following principles remind interpreters of areas of attention to guide the interpreter-ally in his or her interaction for Deaf inclusion, empowerment, and advancement.

- **Economic opportunity**-know that employment space is an extension of Deaf space
- **Educate the “mindless” majority**-each one reach one on the individual and collective community levels from the right to have an interpreter to the right to have interpreter alliance vs. the often assumed expectation for a hearing alliance that oppresses Deaf people as individuals or as whole communities

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- **Effect the change to change the effect!!**-acknowledge the real change agents who are capable of quality of life improvements (captioning/VRI services, overcoming mediocre interpreting, adhering to cross-cultural equivalence, etc.)
 - **Effective decision-making**-respect Deaf space, Deaf world, and Deaf view not to offend with hearing ways
 - **Embark upon and extend gains**-remain abreast of political progress / successful strategies in the struggle for acceptance
 - **Embody what it means to be a Deaf ally**-go beyond previous interpreting models such as the helper, conduit, communication facilitator, bi-bi communicator, sore thumb, and feminist/masculine-relational views
 - **Embrace**-cherish the opportunity for the Deaf individual / group to lead and secure their desired goal - be a part of the equation for the Deaf person's success
 - **Emergence of Deaf entity/movements**-support the circles of influence where each Deaf person is in all of their roles as parents, professionals, patients, policy-makers, etc.
 - **Eminent and Eventual communicators of change**-primary, profound and ultimate source to making a difference in and for Deaf culture values
 - **Emphasize the importance of having no weak links**-remember this in terms of timeliness, accuracy, consistency, trustworthiness, etc.
 - **Employ adjustments with caution**-be aware of the implications for education, interpreting, and continued research
 - **Empowerment**-do not take over-follow the Deaf person's initiative and drive to resolve the situation

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- **Encourage alliance**-be loyal due to what you have in common-human rights, identity, and solidarity
 - **Engagement**-keep it on an empathetic / civil level, respectful level
 - **Engender connectedness**-don't have your own agenda
 - **Enslave and eliminate no more**-become a part of the intersectionality that signifies a common understanding of what it means to overcome oppression (as a minority, against discrimination, across ethnic, cultural and linguistic and other barriers)
 - **Ensuring**-do not withhold info within the proper bounds of one's role
 - **Envisioned community**-celebrate that this is not an invisible community, but a community with their own voice and vision
 - **Epidemic buster**-don't be a part of the problem, be a part of the solution. Deaf individuals want to be at the table, not on the menu
 - **Equality, Equity & Equivalence**-never lose sight of each one's impact
 - **Essential foundation**-maintain mutual respect
 - **Establish right dynamics**-be diligent in maintaining an appropriate relationship
 - **Ethnographic**-take into account nature of personhood (race, gender, etc.) across hearing / Deaf gap
 - **Evaluate the bottom line**-it is more valuable than mere money (Deaf instructor vs. hearing instructor who signs proficiently in ASL). One cannot adequately critique oneself if one is still trying to play (especially on the other side) in the game
 - **Events and environment**-support Deaf-friendly directives
 - **Everyone is someone significant**-realize that you could be the Deaf person
 - **Exact change in the right ways**-follow the Deaf individual's lead

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- **Examine oneself**-know the limits, understand moving boundaries with respect and check to see if interpretation is true to the Deaf person's wish as well as fully informed so no information is missed either way
 - **Exemplary, Enduring, Endearing**-aim to be consistent in alliance
 - **Expand the movement of Deafhood**-against notions of audism and of deafness as an illness, disability, condition needing to be cured
 - **Expect achievement of Deaf**-oriented goals-recognize they are Deaf led as they navigate the world around them
 - **Experiences need to showcase the speaker**-don't allow hearing people to miss what Deaf individuals say. Hearing people don't realize how much Deaf individuals do say
 - **Explore intersectionality**-know oneself as a person of color, race, gender, class in relation to others and respect others' as well
 - **Expression of integrity**-match/meet Deaf person's intent/preference
 - **Extenuate not**-don't diminish or dismiss the Deaf person's circumstance / use discretion when there are possible or perceived opportunities for diversity training to defer to the Deaf individual's leadership
 - **Exude empowerment**-do so for others so that it is clearly seen that Deaf people are very capable of solving problems, acknowledging similarities /differences, working toward goals, accomplishing dreams

Allies acknowledge deafness as a difference among many other naturally occurring differences because Deaf individuals still understand the same information or concepts in other ways. The validation of ASL as a language is vital and greatly valued. Through interpretation for those who do not



sign, Deaf people can portray alliance-building strength, security and significance and be accurately viewed as equals among their peers.





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