



**A REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP  
OF THE ASSOCIATION OF SIGN LANGUAGE  
INTERPRETERS OF NIGERIA (ASLIN) ON  
STANDARDIZING OF THE SIGN LANGUAGE  
INTERPRETING PROFESSION IN WEST AFRICA.**

**DATE: 24<sup>th</sup> -28<sup>th</sup> JUNE, 2013.**

**VENUE: NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHT COMMISSION, 19, AGUIYI  
IRONSI STREET, MAITAMA DISTRICT, ABUJA.**

## Introduction

The report of the international workshop of Association of Sign Language Interpreters of Nigeria (ASLIN) on the *standardizing the sign language interpreting profession in West Africa* which took place on the 24<sup>th</sup> -28<sup>th</sup> June, 2013. The workshop started at about 10.30am in the morning with an opening ceremony, having a good number of people in attendance and many more joining the meeting in the course of time.



As part of the activities marking the opening ceremony, different people and organizations presented speeches and welcome and goodwill messages with a sincere support to the success and progress of ASLIN and a pledge to their unflinching resolve to be of help in their nearest future. Amongst presenters of such were: Board of Trustees of ASLIN ably represented by Mrs. Rashidat Okoduwa,

Representative of the Hon. Minister of Women Affairs, Representative of the Swedish Ambassador to Nigeria, National President of National Association of the Deaf (NNAD) Alh. Sulaiman Dagbo, Chairman, Special Adviser of Adamawa State Government on Matters concerning persons with Disabilities, Rep of VSO, Ministry of Youth, Sports and Social Development (Deaf Sport Association).

Evidently, the speeches of all the guests tailored toward a common aim (i.e. securing a leveling ground) suitable for the interpreters in Nigeria and West Africa at large through a workshop such as this, to meet with International best practices and their counterparts of other profession abroad and home. This programme will give members of the Association requisite training and needed insight to continue on course to provide interpreting services to the Deaf and other clients both made at home and abroad.

Another notable point made was that as internationally acceptable language and means of communication (i.e. the sign language) then Interpreting should be professionally standardized in West Africa putting into check in the Deaf community. Mutual agreement should exist, giving

no room for conflict or disunity; rather the two parties must cultivate a cordial relationship that will foster a better future.

Other highlights of the meeting were centered on having a workable code of professional conduct to guide the Association which is equally accepted by the members. This code of conduct must be well spelt-out to the people concerned and tantamount to what is obtained elsewhere in the world.



There is a normal saying that says nobody respects what you do not respect yourself: usually people will always help you to disabuse what you have not respected. Another like it was the aspect of setting down benchmark for interpreting and allowing interpreters pick new skills, become more efficient to meet with the profession by organizing similar workshops, seminars, more often in the future.

However, the Association hopes not to remain this small but grow bigger and become very reputable Institution with both academic workshops and conferences, carrying out research work and propound theories involving interpreting and interpreters a well as those who will chose the course of study was done elsewhere. Thereby, offering these people opportunity to take interpreting as a variable and noble profession having been armed with the principle, rule guideline available in the profession as it is done in other fields of endeavor.

Lastly, they all maintained that there was need for awareness, advocacy and sensitizing of the public on disability issues, especially the Deaf community, using ASLIN as a veritable instrument. Doing this would make the society see the very importance of inclusion of persons with disabilities is faster than expected. These activities will also help people to be able to distinguish who an interpreter is and the Deaf person as has been the case of so many confusing the two persons. (The one with impairment and the service provider) sensitizing people on the role of interpreters, make the profession gain recognition and prominence than never before. Put to stop the wrong labeling and the de-humanizing ways of addressing interpreters as always seen around in Nigeria especially.

The workshop which was attended by 30 participants from Nigeria and Ghana. It started on the second day of the conference with the two main

resource persons featured eminently having spread the area of discussion and interaction the previous day. The resource persons namely: Jannice Radahl and Suzanne Lafork started the meeting by adequately setting a background for the study and discussion of the four days' workshop. To that effect, a handbook on Sign Language Interpreting Theories & Practice in Australia & New Zealand were given out freely to participants as reference materials in the course of the meeting. It is a book adequately prepared for interpreters, students, professionals and educators in Australia and New Zealand even beyond. Written by practicing interpreters and interpreting educators drawing together insights from experiences, research finding and body of professional knowledge.

Consequently, each of the resource persons had a turn according to plan bring across their part of the discussion and the theme of the meeting. First, it was an interpreting service between two people who use different language by accurately conveying one person ideas, feelings. Experiences and intentions in a way that is meaningful to some one of a different cultural and linguistic background, such a task through delicate and often difficult yet, a very good one. Serving both as interpreter and translator.

The general background provide an overview of some key concepts as regards sign language interpreting and how the profession has developed overtime in Australia and New Zealand as well as the type of relationship existing for interpreters and their Deaf community counterparts.

They explored the nature of communication and the actual process of interpreting using some criteria to evaluate whether interpreting is effective or not in Nigeria and West Africa entirely.

For instance, a view on the contextual factors like: the four Ps (EIGHINGER & Kari, 2007)

Participants ----- who is there?

Place ----- Where are they?

Purpose ----- why are they there?

Point -----What do they want?

Furthermore in comparism, as citizens of Sweden they tried to compare the Sweden versus Nigeria system of education with a view to ascertaining what quality of education that is available for the Deaf individual. While the years for the hearing impaired persons making total of (10) years there.



While their hearing counterparts had only a nine (9) years basic education before advancing to a higher education (i.e. university or college).



Another obvious point made by the resource persons was the acknowledgement of a local Swedish Deaf Community and sign language which is in use among the Deaf community and sign language user in the area as well as the renowned American Sign Language (ASL) generally adopted by all. This practice

no doubt is already in the use in the Nigerian and West African Region. Yet, experts in the field from one point to the other depending on what situation is available and what their clients wanted them to do. Similar practices obtain for the sign language interpreting user of Sign Exact English (SEE) or the manual communication without involving the speech/lip reading or simultaneously using these systems in the course of interpreting. Amongst them, total communication appears to be the most appropriate and wildly accepted and recommended mode of communication (i.e. the American Sign Language)

## **CHALLENGES OF THE INTERPRETERS VERSUS TRANSLATING SPOKEN LANGUAGE**

In translating activities you have a lot of aids and time. The time is required to prepare for the programme agenda to know what to talk about especially the last time meeting held.

On the other hand, interpreting can be between spoken and sign language which deals with the following:

- You may not have the time in an interpreting situation where persons talk to each other. Each taking their turns and you going between languages as a “switch” in that language. It is indeed a demanding task.
- The setting/environment influences the interpreters (i.e. the voices in user class arrangement, purpose of meeting, position etc). All these have a way of affecting the interpreter. Interpreting can actually be done anywhere for the Deaf person.
- Another factor to consider is the person’s background, status, educational qualification, origin etc.

All these inform who the participants may be and what role you are performing there. Find out all of these, their peculiarity, the person language code (whether they speak Hausa, Yoruba or Igbo etc) ways or needs to meet them.

In doing this you can use either the formal or an informal, spoken/sign language in the course of the meeting what language tone, mode and text of the message delivery can be very important.

Really, it is good to note that the way something was said goes with particular tones, depicting the attitude or mood you carry each time at the back of your mind as an interpreter;

- Know also the two layers every message or text carry. Sometimes, they could be very direct or indirect/implied meaning being communicated
- Get to know your participants. The Deaf person, find out more about the Deaf cultural view and other clients whether your text involves bilingual or bicultural communication and language.

### **DIFFERENT PLACES WHERE INTERPRETERS CAN WORK.**

An interpreter can work anywhere human beings exists and as long as the deaf individual have something doing there. Any place a Deaf person has need and try to communicate or relate to a hearing person or organization.

Usually interpreters are mediators between these two groups. Interpreters can work in a hospital, court, church, bank, etc. Interpreters can schedule themselves to work either as part-time or full-time.

### **INTERPRETING REGISTER.**

What is register? Register simply means language usage. This is the show and level at which you are familiar with one (i.e. your client), this familiarity will depend on the language use. Whether formal or informal (casual and in nature) the setting and participants will determine your choices.

### **TASK/ASSIGNMENT**

Task were given to participants in the workshop for each day using the handbook, pages were questions marked for such tasks (ranging from pages 63-196).

### **STAGE IN THE INTERPRETING PROCESS**

There are two stages namely: the short-term memory and the long-term memory. The short-term memory holds at least five-nine (5-9) items at once. Some of these issues coming into short-term memory that retains information for longer period. Basically for an interpreter, he/she always have many important things going on in mind and information to hold in mind as an interpreter. For example, it is more difficult to keep some names and numbers to mind while interpreting whole items of in-flowing information and appropriately retrieving them accurately with their names and numbers. At such points an interpreter must be careful and better still work as a team using all supports coming from the colleague who is overly responsive at that point.

### **PROCESS ANALYSIS CONVERSION, DELIVERY A& EVALUATION PROCESSING SKILLS.**

So many factors determine the process of analyzing a message or text that flows to an interpreter are as follows;

1. Composition skills: Ability to retrieve message and their meaning from a cultural and linguistic knowledge.
2. Monitoring skills: Ability to notice and access ones delivery and adjust to reduce error and improve comprehension ability.
3. Process Management skills: The time between managing the information flowing in by chunking the incoming messages into the meaningful and manageable portion.
4. Different disclosure styles
5. Level of details is classifiers. Describing objects, people and events. Deaf signers tend to be more detailed above visual aspects and personal information than English speakers.

### **SPECIFIC VERSUS GENERAL REFERENCE**

In a signed discourse they often start with a practical (e.g. a story concentrated or abstract).

- In spoken English, it often starts with a generalization for a main idea before the example of any issue.
- Instead of using first personal pronoun, the third can be used.

### **BICULTURAL / BILINGUAL VIEWS OF DEAF COMMUNITY**

Bicultural – simply means using two cultural views. The two languages and navigating socially in two different cultural worlds relating to Deaf community. when Deaf people appear to be very significant here. They

often talk about the kind of attitude giving to them matters about to their acceptance of you or not. How well you relate with the Deaf community even on personal basis (i.e. your assistance and friendship) places a huge difference. Your work with the Deaf should not be in self-seeking or patronizing anyone but aimed at empowering in the true sense.

## **INTERPRETING TECHNIQUE OR MODES IN USE.**



Consecutive interpreting: The speaker speaks (i.e. sign/spoken) then an interpreter interprets. They can listen for long speeches and take notes. For big conferences, there has to be an applier to help and simultaneously you sign, listen, analyses meaning back and forth. It is like a relaying of sign language. The speaker speaks and you take in the sign so that you do not get

anything wrong. Consecutive interpreting is better for hospital setting.

## **LITERAL & FREE INTERPRETING:**

This simply implies that you get the idea and deliver as it should be not exact word for word of interpreting (i.e. verbatim but literal meanings are produced).

At the third day of the conference, the following areas were considered: the Deaf culture (Deaf versus Hearing). How to teach both English and Swedish Sign Language.

Preparation necessary before interpreting – professional roles, team interpreting and its strategies, interpreter services (interpreter use course for Deaf people) this involves the Delicate Balance that must be resolved before offering interpreting services.

Evaluation and working condition for efficiency of an interpreter: considering the four (4) quadrants coping with the challenges of text/facts as regards your sign language interpreting and ability to display the story line when it is an ordinary text and not fact which is more logical and formal. The quadrants are as follows: the high control: low strain, low



demand passive (not satisfied). High strained, most stressful, high demanded, no satisfaction, work more even without the competencies required (low control). Active quadrant – highly demanded and well controlled and satisfied.

The fourth Day was the last day of the workshop. Only few topics were attempted, these includes: consumers perspective on the idea interpreter, interpreters in educational setting, ethical code and role of professional practice and the Deafblindness another complex condition taken.

### **CONSUMERS PERSPECTIVE ON THE IDEAL INTERPRETER**

- Social connection with the Deaf community.
- Humility and wiliness to learn
- Maintaining professional role boundaries and distance
- Professional dressing & presentation (colours like, black, brown, peach colours etc. just use clothes that fits the environment and occasion.

### **COMMENT FROM A DEAF PROFESSIONAL OF THEIR PERSPECTIVE OF AN IDEAL INTERPRETER.**

- A warm, unpretentious interpreter and not an attention seeker in what every Deaf person looks forward to have.
- Be more matured as an interpreter and quick to clearly draw the line of your boundaries in your dealings with the Deaf both at personal and professional interest in the job.
- Be willing to keep company and be comfortable with the Deaf community.

### **CODE OF CONDUCT.**

The role of professional practice is listed below:

- Keep apart role of a teacher and an interpreter. Never mix them together.
- The interpreter act as an educator (that is team educators) by knowing the subject of discussion in class. Know the concept and make your notes where necessary, think through how to express yourself in class.

- Find a way to handle your fatigue and that of the student in the course of your activities. To do that effectively find time to pause with your interpreting allow each person time to relax and move on.
- Treat matters confidently at all times.
- Similarly, the EIPA provided a guideline- 2007. Similarly it stated that Educational interpreters should have preparation time to review lesson goals and build vocabularies and consult with educational team members.
- Other interesting features are that the interpreters are available to offer students services according to their choice especially during examination. Standardized testing like examination is a critical one where they can choose either to have the examination written or signed for them. This decision is based on the skill available to them and their convenience.
- The teacher always works with the interpreter to ensure that the educational content, language, visual information is accessible to the student. Know also the visual cues that will go with the information are a good practice.

## **PROFESSIONAL ETHICS.**

Four elements that are core in the practice are:

- Confidentiality.
- Impartiality and neutrality.
- Accuracy and faithfulness and
- Conflict of interest.

Finally on the topics treated deafblindness.

The Nordic definition of Deafblindness adopted in 2007:

Deafblindness is a distinct disability, a combination of vision and hearing disability. It limits activities of a person and restricts full participation in the society to such a degree that society is required to facilitate specific services, environmental alteration and/ or technology.

The board of the Association of Swedish Deafblind (FSDB) on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2008 defines deafblind interpreting as: requirement for people with this disability to achieve full participation, equality, independence and self-determination in every area of the society. Other definition provided by this body on Deafblindness covers the Nordic definition interpreting for the Deafblind, interpreting of speech and tactile interpreting for this client.

## RECOMMENDATION:

1. Interpreting profession highly demanding, technical and must be handled well by both the interpreters and the deaf community through a cordial relationship.
2. It is always good to have **team interpreter** who understand themselves and assist each other when need arises holding information for the other during interpreting process not merely while away time. On the other side, they should know their areas of strength and weaknesses in terms of specialty and subject matter or area of study and engagement.
3. Be versatile; take your time to prepare yourself adequately for venturing into any assignment.
4. Negotiate properly with your client on what to be paid at the end of the session. If need be please engage the services of a lawyer. Make your agreements firm and binding against any future occurrence both as an individual and as an Association.
5. Set benchmarks of your operation and put down your core values as a profession and as it's done abroad. You can both adopt and adapt some of the activities of others like the U.S.A, Sweden and EIPA.
6. Be willing to give your client what they want in terms of services, especially for conscience sake.
7. Do not refrain from saying 'NO' when need arises.
8. Be ready and willing to continue learning to update knowledge and for effective, efficient performance always e.t.c.

## CLOSING ACTIVITIES.



The last day of the meeting witnessed few other things. First was the remark by the representative to the representative of the Executive Secretary of National Human Rights Commission, the venue of the workshop. She sincerely welcomed and appreciated participants of the four days meeting especially for patiently stayed all through in building

their capacity and adding to knowledge because no knowledge is a waste. She recounted many attempts that the Honorable Minister of Women Affairs has made to in reaching out to Persons Living with Disabilities especially the deaf community on a daily basis in providing services to them. Having emphasized that the training offers to prepare people with skills for effectively interacting with the deaf, as such help them when the need arises so that, the maximally gain their rights and privileges. She went further to pledge the Commission's support to ASLIN in the future. She thanked the resource persons from Sweden and other participants that have travelled far and near.

Finally, certificates were handed first to the resource persons and Gift items especially to their Director Abroad who offered a projector to the Association during their trip to Nigeria for their meeting.

In turn, the Swedish Ladies handed each one of the participant their individual certificate of attendance with their signature and that of the Nigerian and Ghanaians who participated with them as resource person. The two ladies also gave out little items of Shirt-Tags to each one. Photographs were taken eventually and the Workshop rounded off at about 4:30 p.m.

**Signed:**

Samuel Oluwadare  
National Secretary,  
ASLIN