

# Unique Challenges of Spanish-ASL Video Relay Services

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There's the equipment, headsets, work shifts, platforms, government regulations, protocols and all the rest that goes into the video relay services (VRS) work.

But when it comes time to put eyes to the screen and ears to the headset, the Spanish language platform is a different ballgame.

## LANGUAGE

The most defining difference between interpreters working on English versus Spanish platforms is the issue of language, the influences of the majority and the national language influence.

English platform video interpreters (VIs) deal with regional differences in American Sign Language (ASL), along with a range of how much ongoing influence of English syntax gets embedded into the ASL structure. By contrast,

when working on a Spanish platform, the Spanish VI will also deal with callers that use ASL embedded (in all its range and register) with English.

Unlike the English platform VI, the Spanish VI will also deal with the signs embedded from other signed languages, such as Lenguaje de Señas Mexicana/ Mexican Sign Language (LSM), Cuban signs, Dominican signs, Puerto Rican signs, Colombian signs, etc., each with ASL variances, range and register. While ASL on the English platform is embedded with regional differences, ASL on the Spanish is embedded with differences influenced by caller's country of origin, both on the signed and spoken sides of the call. The work is far more complicated and mentally taxing in any setting, be it community, VRI or VRS.

For this reason, the Spanish platform VIs would require unique adjustments

for support, teaming, mental breaks and scheduling. Failure to take these factors into account would lead to nothing less than physical and mental abuse of the VIs.

## UNIQUE PROCESSING

While this article focuses on VRS work, the reality is the work Spanish speaking sign language interpreters do is a specialty in itself.

The work in Texas by the Trilingual Task Force of developing the first three language test (ASL, English and Spanish) is a step in the right direction in compiling the complexity and uniqueness of this work.

No doubt, the trilingual work opens up new challenges and discussions to be made in language processing.

The uniqueness of bi- and trilingual Spanish-ASL-English and trilingual

## Gallaudet Interpreting Service is seeking Senior Level Staff Interpreters

Opportunities are available for both full and part time staff interpreters.

*(20 hours or above receives full (pro-rated) benefits).*

Salary range dependent on experience, education and skill:

**\$64,056.00 to \$98,100.00**

### Opportunities:

- Training on current trends and topics in interpreting
- Observation of and experience in high profile interpreting settings
- Work with experts in research on ASL, Deaf culture and interpreting
- Professional and talented colleagues including CDI's who are known nationally and internationally
- Work with national and international consumers in a wide array of setting from cradle to grave
- Involvement in the development of best practices in the interpreting field

### Benefits:

- Gallaudet tuition waiver or reimbursement for non-Gallaudet classes
- 401K, Annual/Sick Leave, Health Insurance and more.....

### Qualifications:

- RID: CSC, CI/CT, NIC or NAD IV or V
- Minimum 5 years interpreting experience
- Demonstrated fluency in English to ASL and ASL to English
- High visual platform and team interpreting experience including microphone voicing

For more information on Staff position, please contact: Sue Casteel (GIS Staff)

Sue.Casteel@gallaudet.edu, or 202-448-7219

Spanish-English-ASL work makes it a specialty that needs to be recognized and compensated appropriately. The scarcity of qualified trilingual Spanish interpreters only adds to the need for development of more training programs/ courses, curriculum, tracks, workshops, along with task specific materials and resources that need to be infused as part of the standard curriculum. In order to provide the necessary understanding to support and develop the pool of multilingual interpreters needed in today's global society, RID Certification Maintenance Program requirements are also needed to address the diversity training as a requirement. This also heightens the need for the mentoring and training of Spanish speaking interpreters to become interpreter trainers.

Our association has started, but needs to continue to push through into

the critical paradigm shift that recognizes the need to use "the most qualified person(s)" and what that truly means. Such a shift will occur when individually and collectively as professionals we acknowledge and appreciate the unique multilingual/multicultural work in all its range; and push not to exclude but to cross mentor each other including the mix of skills as part of our working professional team.

### **NOT THE ONLY ONES ...**

While clearly Spanish trilingual interpreters are the largest group of trilingual interpreters in our field, the title "trilingual" is not just ours.

Spanish/English/ASL VRS and community work may well be the flagship to open up and drive the critical elements that must be put in place to ensure the communication access of all the cultur-

ally and linguistically diverse Deaf communities within our borders.

The unique challenges and special skill set of ALL the bi- and trilingual ASL interpreters merit the research, financial compensation, support and recognition of our field. The resulting benefits to our profession and the communities we have pledged to serve by virtue of our membership to service deserve no less. ■

*In addition to being president of Mano a Mano, Angela Roth is the President and CEO of ASL Services, Inc., ASL Services Latino, Inc., and Gracias VRS, Inc.*

## Memorable Milestones

**A**t the March RID Board of Directors meeting, Matthew O'Hara, M.S., CAE, NAD IV was honored by the board for his ten years of dedicated service and contribution to the growth and efficiency of RID and the interpreting profession. Matthew, who has been serving in the capacity of Director of Finance and Administration for the past seven years, has served the membership in a variety of other capacities since joining the RID staff in 1999, including as the National Testing System Project Assistant, Accountant, Accounting and Human Resources Manager, Ethical Practices Coordinator and Interim Executive Director.

In RID Resolution 2009.01, the board of directors expressed gratitude to Matthew for his 10 years of faithful service to the association and the RID board

and for his consistency in upholding the association's approach to philosophy, mission, goals and diversity.

Matthew is a native of West Palm Beach, FL. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting from Bob Jones University in Greenville, SC, and a Master of Science in Administration from Gallaudet University. Matthew, who has more than ten years of accounting and finance experience, is an active member in the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE),

currently serving as Chair of the ASAE Ethics Committee, as well as the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM). In his free time, he enjoys volunteering with the Special Olympics and trying to keep up with his toddler son, Elijah.



*L-R: Clay Nettles, Matthew O'Hara and Cheryl Moose*