

Three Leaps of Faith and Four Giant Steps: Developing Interpreter Training in Ireland

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<1>Introduction: The Irish Context

This chapter documents the relatively recent introduction and development of interpreter training in Ireland. The first interpreters graduated with a Diploma in ISL/English Interpreting in 1994, and interpreter training was, in the early days, only made possible with funding from the European Union: State funding commenced with the establishment of the Center for Deaf Studies at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland's oldest university, in 2001. As we shall see, there have been four major steps towards the development of 'permanent' interpreter training in Ireland. It is important to note that these developments would not have been possible were it not for some key Deaf community-led developments that paved the way for change. But first it is important to outline the Irish interpreting scene, before turning to the Irish Deaf community.

Ireland¹ is perhaps unique in a European context insofar as the demand for spoken language conference interpreting has been relatively recent. In part this is due to our economic history: until the 1990s, Ireland's economy was extremely depressed and economic Ireland was predominantly a monolingual country². Emigration was rife. Yet, with the coming of the 'Celtic Tiger', and the expansion of the European Union, Ireland has become home to non-English speakers from across the world. In this context, it is perhaps surprising that there is currently no program for training conference interpreters (spoken languages) in Ireland. Since 2001, a one semester community interpreter training program has run at Dublin City University (DCU), leading to a

¹ Ireland is a country separate from the United Kingdom (Scotland, England, Wales & Northern Ireland) – therefore the sign language, and sign language interpreting profession and training is very distinct to that in the UK. See chapter in this volume from Wilson & McDade for an overview of the Scottish system, which differs from that in England, Wales & Northern Ireland.

² Irish is the first official language of Ireland, and English the second. In practice, English is the working language of the State.

graduate certificate in community interpreting³. Beyond qualification from this program, no formal national accreditation or registration process for spoken language interpreters is in existence at this time (Mary Phelan, personal communication, December 2007). Spoken language interpreters in Ireland work in a range of settings including conference, legal, medical, liaison and educational settings.

The situation of signed language interpreters therefore compares favorably with that of our spoken language peers: we have had some form of training (albeit initially ad-hoc) since 2001. Today there are approximately 50-60 interpreters in Ireland. The majority of interpreters have completed a Diploma in ISL/English Interpreting and most also hold other degree-level qualifications. The majority of work for ISL/English interpreters is in the domain of education, with the public sector (including legal settings and State agencies undertaking public consultations) and interpreting in the voluntary sector (i.e. for non-governmental agencies, including Deaf organizations (Comhairle 2006). Other work arises in commercial settings (media, staff training, meetings, legal, etc.), and in health settings (which Comhairle separates out from the public sector). Worryingly, it seems that the least organized aspect of interpreting provision in Ireland is with respect to the health services.

<2> The Irish Deaf Community

³ See <http://www.dcu.ie/prospective/deginform.php?classname=GCCI&mode=full>

ISL (ISL) is used by some 5,000 Irish deaf People (Matthews 1996), and it is the third language of Ireland (Burns 1991). Despite this, no public services are available in this language and provision of services in an accessible language in all domains of life is relatively *ad hoc* (Leeson 2005).

Unlike most other European countries, oral education was introduced late in the Catholic schools in Ireland: St. Mary's School for Deaf Girls introduced oral education in the 1940s, but by the 1950s, a strictly enforced segregation divided children who used a signed language and those who did not. This contrasts with the situation in the Protestant school: The Claremont School for the Deaf, established in 1816, was the first school for the deaf in Ireland and it incorporated oral methods, along with signing and fingerspelling from the outset, while oral instruction was initially only available to private, fee paying students (Pollard 2006). The suppression of ISL is well documented: for example, in the Catholic schools, following the introduction of oralism, children were encouraged to give up signed language for Lent, the 40 days of repentance leading up to the Catholic feast of Easter. Children who were caught signing were told that they would be sent to the 'Deaf and Dumb' section of the school, which was associated with lower intelligence and academic mediocrity (McDonnell and Saunders 1993). Leeson and Grehan (2004) report that this practice continued into the mid 1980s, supported by individual Dominican nuns, providing further evidence of the higher status associated with the use of speech in the schools.

The segregation of the sexes for education⁴ and the segregation of signers from those who could speak within the schools has impacted greatly on contemporary

⁴ It is important to note that this was normative for the time, and even today, most 'hearing' religious schools are segregated on the basis of sex. St. Mary's and St. Joseph's remain single sex schools for the deaf, though there has been much talk of

ISL, leading to gender variation and gendered generational variation (LeMaster 1990; 1999-2000, 2002; LeMaster and Dwyer 1991; Leeson and Grehan 2004; Leonard 2005; Leeson, Saeed, Leonard, Macduff and Byrne-Dunne 2006). This sociolinguistic context provides specific challenges to ISL/English interpreters (Leeson 2005).

<1> Training Interpreters in Ireland: Three Leaps of Faith and Four Giant Steps

Before turning to the development of interpreter training in Ireland, it is essential that we look at the Deaf community and contextualize the issues that created the zeitgeist for moving towards interpreter training. The most important is the evolution of deaf self-advocacy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, leading to the establishment of the Irish Deaf Society in 1982. This led to a number of outcomes, including the establishment of the first ISL extra-mural classes⁵ in Trinity College (as far as we know, the first ISL classes in Ireland), discussion of ISL as a natural language in the Deaf Community, and the establishment of a transnational interpreter and ISL teacher training program. This development spurred on others, leading us to our current situation, which we also outline below.

<2> Leap of Faith 1: Establishment of the Irish Deaf Society⁶

The precursor to the Irish Deaf Society can be traced to the *Wednesday Group*—this was a group of deaf and hearing people which met every Wednesday in the late 1970's, and aimed to respond to the inadequate services available to deaf people at that time. By 1981, the United Nations International Year of the Disabled,

amalgamating them due to declining numbers. In contrast, the Mid-West School for the Deaf (Limerick) is a mixed sex school.

⁵ Extra mural classes are typically evening classes that do not lead to any university level certification.

⁶ Information in this section is taken from the Irish Deaf Society's website. See (<http://www.deaf.ie/IDSinfo/IDShistory.htm>, accessed 2 October 2007).

this group had morphed into the Deaf Action Group (DAG), which hosted monthly meetings to create awareness of the needs of deaf people, with a focus on rights. In 1981, DAG established a ‘wish-list’ that focused on tackling the discrimination that Irish deaf people experienced in their daily lives. First amongst these was the objective of establishing an Institute of Interpreters, which would be financed by the State: without an appropriate interpreting service, full participation in Irish society was not possible. For example, while Maynooth College (now NUI⁷, Maynooth) had offered a scholarship to deaf people to mark the International Year for Disabled People, this could not be implemented due to the lack of interpreters (ibid.). In 1982, DAG changed their name to the Irish Council of the Deaf (ICD), and finally to the Irish Deaf Society (IDS).

By the late 1980s, IDS had made contact with the Center for Language and Communication Studies at Trinity College Dublin, the oldest and most prestigious university in Ireland. With the assistance of Prof. David Little, IDS established the first program in ISL at the university. The relationship with Trinity was, as we shall see, to become a long-standing one.

<3> Interpreter Training in Ireland – Step 1: HORIZON

In 1992, the Irish Deaf Society, Trinity College Dublin and Bristol University advertised a two-year full-time program of studies that would lead to a Diploma in Deaf Studies (Interpreting) and a one-year full-time program leading to a Certificate in Deaf Studies (Teaching). The 12 places initially available (10 interpreting students,

⁷ The National University of Ireland (NUI) is a federal university, comprising 4 universities as constituent members. See: <http://www.nui.ie/> for further details.

2 ISL teachers) were part-funded by the European Union's HORIZON Program.

Students were to spend 50% of their time in Dublin and 50% of their time at Bristol University. There were significant challenges to the implementation of this program:

- (1) The ISL teachers were training as teachers even as they were expected to deliver the ISL curriculum to the interpreting students;
- (2) There was no documentation of ISL outside of the groundbreaking work that Barbara LeMaster had carried out, documenting gender variation in the Dublin Deaf Community (LeMaster1990, LeMaster and Dwyer 1991) and a dictionary that was an attempt to standardize ISL (NAD 1979)⁸ – thus ISL teachers had to work from what was known about British Sign Language (BSL) or American Sign Language (ASL) and relate that knowledge to what they knew of ISL⁹;
- (3) Some issues of language contact emerged: the ISL teachers were training in a British Sign Language (BSL) dominant environment, mixing with their British deaf peers as well as with international deaf students. Thus, they unintentionally may have taught some BSL norms in the ISL classroom, which were picked up on by some Irish deaf people when the students returned for an Irish leg of study, leading to some criticism of the language content of the program;

⁸ The National Association for the Deaf's 1979 dictionary ("the blue book") was an attempt to standardize ISL, mediating the significant gendered variation that existed and creating a systematic vocabulary that was influenced strongly by English. Signs were typically 'alphabeticised', that is, the handshape of a sign was changed to bring it in line with the first letter of the English word that the sign related to (e.g. FATHER has 2 'F' handshapes, BROTHER, a 'B' handshape, etc.). One of the objectives was to make it easier for hearing people to learn to sign (Foran 1979:2).

⁹ Subsequently, 2 further PhDs on ISL have been completed (McDonnell 1996, Leeson 2001).

(4) In addition to (3), there were some extremely entrenched responses to an Irish-UK collaboration for ISL/English interpreter training: one interpreting student was asked by a leading member of the Deaf community why they had not waited for a solely home-grown program to be developed. When it came to interpreting placement, some students were castigated for using “BSL”: while there was probably some BSL influence emerging from the language contact situation that they were trained in, it is also the case that the debate regarding the role and functionality of ISL versus Signed English¹⁰ was raging at this stage. For some Irish deaf people, signed English was the preferred public expression of a signed language and any deviation from this was deemed “BSL”. However, the majority of Irish deaf people reacted with pure delight and were exceptionally welcoming of the fledgling interpreters, who, for the first time in an Irish context, were attempting to bridge the gap between English and their language.

There were some significant advantages to the program too: the students, when in Bristol, all lived together. This created a natural immersion environment for the development of ISL skill, consciousness about deaf culture and the reality of living with deaf people. As 9 of the 10 student interpreters were not from a deaf family, this was a rare privilege.

Being away from the heavily politicized response to the HORIZON program gave deaf and hearing students some respite from the situation in Dublin. It offered an

¹⁰ In an Irish context, Signed English refers to a system that was created to represent English in manual form. It borrowed vocabulary from ISL, and added specific signs to represent the morphological changes associated with English word endings (e.g. –ED, –ING, –ION, etc.) (see McDonnell 1997 for further discussion of signed English in an Irish context).

opportunity to create a cohesive group who would, on their return to Ireland, start to change the way ISL was taught (deaf students) and influence the development of professional interpreting services (deaf and hearing students). Though with hindsight, they also probably overstated their own knowledge on their return to Ireland. This too, inevitably, fed into a phase of disharmony that ran from circa 1994-1997, and linked in with issues of interpreter registration and fitness to practice, which we discuss further below.

In the end, 9 of the 10 candidates completed this first interpreter training program (2004). In 2003, the first 2 deaf people completed their Certificate program and an additional 2 deaf students commenced their training. The first graduates continued to teach in the second year of the program, and one, Mr. Patrick A. Matthews, went on to co-ordinate an EU funded program to document the Irish Deaf Community and began to describe aspects of the grammar of ISL (Matthews 1996, O’Baill and Matthews 2000).

Of the 10 interpreting students, five are very active in the Deaf community today, as interpreters, teachers, researchers, community resource workers or activists. Of the remaining 5, several are working in areas where their Deaf Studies backgrounds are back-grounded, though relevant (e.g. management of disability services, disability policy officers in the civil service, social workers, nurses, etc.). Several undertook additional studies and have published in the area of Deaf Studies.

All 4 deaf people who completed the Certificate in Deaf Studies are still active members of the Irish Deaf Community today. Three have undertaken masters degrees in applied linguistics and one is working towards a doctorate in applied linguistics.

Of the 14 students who engaged in the 1992-4 HORIZON program, 2 are now full-time lecturers at the Center for Deaf Studies at Trinity College Dublin, and a

further 4 are regular contributors to the CDS programs in some capacity. Thus, it is clear that the impact of this short-term program has been phenomenal in the context of a small country like Ireland.

<3> Interpreter Training in Ireland – Step 2: The SLIDE Program

In 1994, the National Association for Deaf People (NAD), in conjunction with the UK's Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID), established a 6 month, self-directed learning program for people who were already working as interpreters in the field. The program had already been run in the UK, and the NAD opted to adopt the same approach in a bid to increase the number of trained interpreters as quickly as possible. A weakness of this program is the fact that it attracted no formal certification from a national accrediting body, but a strength was that it drew on an established pool of candidates who were (mostly) established within the Deaf community.

A total of 13 places were offered on the program (Caroline O'Leary and Carol Brailey, personal communication, January 2008), which also included two residential training weeks that focused on introducing core components relevant to the interpreting profession, such as ethics, language processing, professionalism, etc. Opportunities were also created over the course of the six-month training period for students to discuss aspects of their interpreting and professional development with a mentor (Leeson 2003). The success of this program can be evaluated in different ways: for those who had already been actively involved in the Deaf community (e.g. 6 participants were CODAs¹¹, 2 were SODAs¹² and 1 the parent of a deaf child), it gave them an introduction to the theoretical underpinnings of interpreting practice to

¹¹ CODA (child of Deaf adult/s)

¹² SODA (sibling of Deaf adult/s)

support their pre-existing language skills and interpreting experience. These people typically were subsequently registered on the Irish Sign Link register of ISL/English interpreters (more on this below), and 8 are actively interpreting today. However, for those who had no prior experience, there was not sufficient opportunity to develop core competencies to the levels required or expected by the Deaf community. Further, there was no scope for the formal development of language skill during the program, as linguistic know-how was expected to pre-exist. Thus, a common thread appears from the HORIZON and SLIDE programs: where a pre-existing link with the Deaf community is in place prior to training, interpreters in Ireland are likely to remain in the field for the long term.

<2> Leap of Faith 2: IASLI – the birth of a profession

By 1993, there was a mixed group of people who were involved in interpreting in Ireland: there were some who came from deaf families, some teachers of the deaf, some religious people who were involved in deaf education and the chaplaincy to the Deaf community (priests, nuns, Christian Brothers), and some others who were friends of deaf people and who had learned to sign from their friends and over time had taken on interpreting tasks (Comhairle 2006). There were also those undertaking the Bristol/Trinity program and those taking the SLIDE program. Many of the candidates on these programs had often come from the ranks of pre-existing interpreters, and this was occasionally the cause of some discord as general assumptions included the beliefs that people who had deaf parents automatically make the best interpreters, that training was not really necessary, and that as long as one could sign, one could interpret. Interpreter education went some way towards challenging these beliefs.

By 1993, it was clear that Ireland should be engaging in communication with our international interpreting colleagues: in a European context, via membership of the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (EFSLI). To do this, an Irish organization had to be formally established to supercede the pre-existing 'Interpreters Group', and a code of ethics that was acceptable to EFSLI had to be drawn up. In 1994, the Irish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (IASLI) was born, and membership of EFSLI secured. While IASLI sought to serve deaf and hearing interpreters, several barriers to further involvement hinged on the lack of funding secured by the organization. IASLI was a voluntary organization and had no staff or offices, limiting the potential for lobbying, information sharing, and professional development. It was also a small organization with some 40 members, and perceived as lacking in power vis-à-vis self-representation to external bodies. Further, the membership debated for a long period of time as to whether IASLI should serve as a professional association or a support group for interpreters. This debate was never resolved: in December 2007, IASLI was formally disbanded. However, an alternative professional organization does exist: the Irish Translators and Interpreters Association (ITIA), initially established to represent the professional interests of translators in Ireland, already counts several signed language interpreters amongst its members¹³.

<2> Leap of Faith 3: Establishing the First Interpreting Agency

Running parallel with the establishment of interpreter training programs, the Deaf community began to call for an independent referrals agency to ensure a professional interpreter service where client confidentiality would be maintained. If pre-1994, there were no full-time interpreters available, by 1994 there were some 20

¹³ See <http://www.translatorsassociation.ie/>

people offering themselves in this capacity. Given this, calls for regulation emerged. In response, a working group comprising organizations of deaf people, service providers, interpreters and ISL teachers negotiated the establishment of Irish Sign Link, a national ISL-English interpreting agency. It was agreed that interpreters who wished to work through the agency must first undergo assessment to ensure the quality of interpreting provision on offer. This comprised 5 tasks: (1) a translation from ISL to written English, (2) a simultaneous interpretation from ISL to English, (3) a simultaneous interpretation from English to ISL, (4) simultaneous interpreting in a simulated setting (i.e. a role play scenario) and (5) an interview with the assessment panel to ascertain the candidate's knowledge and experience (Accreditation Board 1997).

Following from the first registration process in 1997, some 15 interpreters were included on Irish Sign Link's books. A second process of registration took place in 1999, bringing the number to the mid 20s. In 2006, a third round of assessments took place. Despite the fact that serious questions were raised regarding the integrity of the assessment process, some 29 candidates went forward for assessment, including 5 deaf interpreters. Following from this process, a total of 38 interpreters were registered with Irish Sign Link (see Table 1). While there was a great deal of discourse surrounding the validity of this assessment, it has proven positive for deaf interpreters: this was the only route to acknowledging their skills in the interpreting domain in an Irish context. It is important to note that the Irish Sign Link register is not recognized as an independent national registry of interpreters nor does it have any standing legally (i.e. as a professional register that gives right to practice). It is clear that these are issues that remain to be ironed out in an Irish context.

Irish Sign Link saw a need to have a follow-up system of assessment in the late 1990s as those who had been registered as ‘registered trainee interpreters’ had no scope for seeking promotion on the Irish Sign Link scale until this happened. That is, individually, interpreter skill development was unacknowledged in the absence of such an assessment, and this had repercussions related to pay.

<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>

Irish Sign Link was disbanded in 2007, and a new, state-funded body, Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS)¹⁴ was established in its place to ensure the effective delivery of high quality interpretation services and to make public services accessible to the Deaf Community. SLIS is supported and funded by the Citizens Information Board. SLIS has not yet formally made any announcements regarding how they will deal with the issue of registration, though recommendations from a review of sign language interpreting services proposed a process of accreditation be established (Comhairle 2006). It is also worth noting that, unlike the mid 1990s, when Irish Sign Link was the only agency providing interpreting services, there are now a number of private agencies that also operate on the market, and they too must be included in any move towards the development of a national system of accreditation¹⁵ or registration¹⁶. It remains to be seen if a truly national system of accreditation and registration of interpreters can be developed.

¹⁴ <http://www.irishsignlink.ie/> (accessed 2 October 2007)

¹⁵ Here, ‘accreditation’ means the accreditation of a program of study: on completion of an accredited program of studies, a graduate of that program is automatically placed on the register of interpreters at a pre-determined level (e.g. as with the UK’s CACDP- University training mapping system).

¹⁶ Registration is used to refer to a system of assessment for interpreters who have not completed an accredited program to enable registration as an interpreter.

Further, as Ireland is currently seeing an expansion of demand for spoken language interpreters at this time, and no national register of spoken language interpreters exist, it would make sense to explore the potential for establishing a register that includes both spoken and sign language interpreters, similar to the system that exists in Sweden (Kammarkollegiet¹⁷ (trans. “The Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency”), Australia (NAATI) and the UK (CILT and CACDP hold the tender for assessing/ accrediting and registering Public Service Interpreters).

What we can say regarding the current situation is that it does not compare favorably with our Scandinavian neighbors: Sweden has a deaf population of approximately 10,000 deaf people who are served by a professional interpreting community of over 400 interpreters (this provides a ratio of 1 interpreter: 25 deaf people). But even with this degree of interpreter provision, access via interpretation is not guaranteed as demand continues to outweigh supply (Katarina Karlsson (STTF),¹⁸ If we apply these figures to the Irish context, we would need approximately 200 interpreters on stream in order to provide a comparable service to that currently in Sweden (Leeson 2005). Presently, Ireland has a ratio of approximately 1:100¹⁹, while in the UK, the figures suggest a ratio of 1:140 (Leeson 2007(a), Comhairle 2006).

This (ongoing) lack of access to professional interpreting services proved to be a pivotal campaigning point in the Irish Deaf Society’s campaign to establish a permanent Center for Deaf Studies in Ireland. Following almost a decade of lobbying,

¹⁷ <http://www.kammarkollegiet.se>

¹⁸ STTF is the association of signed language interpreters in Sweden affiliated to the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (EFSLI).

¹⁹ These figures are based on pre-existing figures for registered interpreters (Comhairle 2006) plus graduates of TCD interpreting programme in 2006 and 2007, who were not eligible for candidacy to the last round of assessment carried out by Sign Link in 2007 due to insufficient hours of practical interpreting experience post-graduation, or because they were still in training.

the IDS, in partnership with the Trinity College Dublin, secured funding for an initial five-year period for an Irish Center for Deaf Studies in 2001, which we discuss further in section 2.1.7 below.

<3> Interpreter Training in Ireland – Step 3: Cork: The European Union Goes South!

A second EU funded program of interpreting was established in early 1998. With Cork Deaf Enterprises as lead partner, and Bristol University and NUI Cork as the academic partners, the Diploma in Deaf Studies (interpreting) was offered to a cohort of 10 students. Three deaf people registered on the Certificate program (teaching). This program was very similar in nature to the original TCD-Bristol collaboration, but due to time constraints on funding, the two year academic program in interpreter training was delivered across 18 months. All 10 interpreting candidates completed the program. The majority are active in interpreting today, and one has set up the first commercial ISL/English interpreting agency in the Republic (Bridge Interpreting²⁰). Others have extended roles within the Deaf community: for example, one graduate is active as a chaplain to the Deaf Community.

The three deaf students completed the Certificate program subsequently transferred to a Diploma program, and, when Bristol introduced an undergraduate degree in Deaf Studies, all 3 applied for and were granted access to this course. Two of the three have continued with postgraduate studies. One has established a school of ISL in Galway. Several of the Cork/Bristol graduates have also worked as lecturers/interpreters at the Center for Deaf Studies in Dublin.

Further, the initial presence of deaf students on campus at NUI Cork has led to very positive outcomes in terms of access and provisions put in place to support deaf

²⁰ See <http://www.bridgeinterpreting.ie/>

students on campus. This is helping to create the possibility of increased levels of participation at tertiary level for members of the Deaf community. While there are still problems in securing interpretation due to supply/demand issues (Comhairle 2006, Leeson 2007 (a), (b)), it is clear that the impact of this EU funded program, like the IDS/TCD/Bristol program before it, has been significant.

<3> Interpreter Training in Ireland – Step 4: CDS- A Home for Deaf Studies

From the time of the HORIZON TCD-Bristol-IDS Program (1992-4), the IDS had campaigned for the establishment of a permanent home for Deaf Studies in Ireland. Almost a decade passed before this became a reality. In 2001, the Minister for Education and Science, Mr. Michael Woods, announced ring-fenced funding for a five-year period to establish a Center for Deaf Studies at Trinity College Dublin. This occurred only when a significant range of stakeholders made clear the consequences of the lack of provision regarding ISL in education, and for enabling the participation of deaf citizens in society. Given the introduction of cutting edge equality legislation, coupled with rumblings regarding the outcomes of oralism, and emotional, physical, and sexual abuse in the schools for the deaf from the 1950s through to the 1980s, some recognition of the need to have a larger pool of professionally trained interpreters and a cohort of professionally trained ISL teachers emerged. The need for the provision of a general program of Deaf Studies was finally recognized.

This led to the first intake of students on the Diploma in ISL/English Interpreting and the Diploma in ISL Teaching in 2001²¹. The Center is part of the School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences at Trinity College

²¹ The first students on the Diploma in Deaf Studies commenced in 2002.

Dublin²². With three full-time academics (2 deaf, 1 hearing) and some 9 deaf and 5 hearing occasional/ part-time lecturers, the Center delivers academic programs in a bilingual setting where ISL is the primary language of engagement. The Center has two mutually reinforcing functions:

- To raise awareness, both in the Deaf and hearing communities, of the distinctive character of ISL and Irish deaf culture;
- To offer courses that in various ways improve communication between the deaf and hearing communities and lead to better employment prospects for members of the Deaf community, for example, as teachers of ISL.

The Center has also developed a research profile in the area of Deaf Studies, particularly in the areas of linguistics and applied linguistics. In addition to the three undergraduate programs, the Center aims to promote research into ISL and the culture of Irish Deaf Community by recruiting appropriately qualified deaf and hearing students to undertake PhD research and seeking funding for research projects in ISL, sign linguistics and other areas of Deaf Studies. To date this mandate has been fully met, and the research strand of our work has significantly impacted on our approach to teaching. All three undergraduate programs have been running successfully, though it has become clear that two year programs do not offer sufficient time to develop the competencies required to work within the Deaf community to the level now required. Given our focus here on interpreting, we can say that today, the Deaf community is more sophisticated and engages in activities in domains that they simply did not have access to when the first cohort of interpreters graduated in 1994. Today, members of the Irish Deaf community are completing postgraduate programs of study, lecturing in universities, holding down executive and professional positions, and lobbying

²² See <http://www.tcd.ie/slscs/cds/news/index.php>

government and potential corporate sponsors in a sophisticated manner. To engage successfully in these enterprises, their interpreters need to be at least as sophisticated as their deaf clients, with additional sensitivity to the nature of interaction and the range of discourse functions that are particular to the domains that they encounter. This is no mean feat. In addition to the specificities of the hearing world(s) that interpreters engage with, they must also be sensitive to the historical consequences of deaf education and its impact (educationally, linguistically, emotionally and socially) on deaf clients (Leeson 2007a). They must also be able to deal with the gendered, generational and within-cohort variation that has emerged (Leeson 2005). Thus, in a bid to bring Ireland's Deaf Studies programs in line with international best practice, it is proposed that the Diploma programs offered by CDS be extended to four year degree programs, with a significant on-line/ blended learning component in order to offer programs to students nationwide.

The move to a four year program would allow for the necessary competencies in ISL, teaching and interpreting to be more fully developed (an issue raised by stakeholders in a number of fora since 2001) and, at the same time, offer graduates a better foothold in terms of accessing further training (e.g. for those who graduate with a Degree in ISL Teaching, they would then be able to access Postgraduate Diploma in Education programs to become recognized teachers, which in turn would feed the need for fluent ISL teachers at secondary school level).

It would also bridge the current gap in the Irish national framework of qualifications whereby someone wishing to study in the field of Deaf Studies can work to Levels 3 or 4 (Leaving Certificate Applied in ISL or some CACDP Qualifications), but there are no recognized qualifications at levels 5²³ or 6²⁴.

²³ Level 5 is commensurate with tertiary education certificate programs.

Currently, CDS' courses are recognized at Level 7²⁵. However, for graduates to qualify for entry to many postgraduate programs, a Level 8²⁶ qualification is required. With a Level 8 qualification in place, the potential for students of Deaf Studies – deaf, hard of hearing and hearing – to pursue further studies and contribute to the body of knowledge in this field is exponentially greater. For Deaf Studies to mature as a discipline, this is an essential development that needs to take place in order to pave the way to Masters (Level 9) and PhD (Level 10) work.

<1>The Next Generation: The Challenges

One of the issues that emerges clearly is the inextricable link between the development of skilled ISL teachers and that of ISL/English interpreters. As we see below, the balance is far from ideal in Ireland today.

<2>The sociolinguistic context: who teaches ISL?

Currently, there are 22 professionally trained ISL teachers in Ireland, all of whom are deaf²⁷. Supply cannot meet demand. If aspirations of ISL recognition are met, or even if bilingual education is introduced formally, there is not a sufficient pool of deaf ISL teachers in Ireland to meet demand (Leeson 2007(a), (b)).

There are several reasons why deaf people don't undertake training at university level, including fear of failure, the low status of ISL, and ambivalence with respect to the language. For example, Leeson and Matthews (2001) report that deaf students often present with very low self-confidence, resulting from their negative experiences

²⁴ Level 6 is commensurate with tertiary education diploma programs.

²⁵ Level 7 is commensurate with ordinary degree level.

²⁶ Level 8 is commensurate with honours degree programmes.

²⁷ 4 from the HORIZON Program (1992-4), 3 from the Cork HORIZON Program (1998-9) and the remaining 15 from the CDS (2001-7)

of education at primary and post-primary levels. Work carried out by the Irish Deaf Society on the relative poverty of Irish deaf people found that educational experience leads to underemployment, and that most deaf people are reluctant to risk leaving a secure job, albeit a low paying, low status post which they dislike (Conama and Grehan 2002, Conroy 2006).

Ambivalence relating to the status of ISL feeds into attitudes towards the need to seek a qualification in order to teach ISL. For example, as the Department of Education and Science does not demand any minimum qualification for teaching ISL, it is unsurprising that there is no institutional demand for a more qualified group of people. But the prevailing institutional and policy views of ISL don't stop there: to be a teacher of the deaf in a school for the deaf, or a visiting teacher of the deaf, it is not a mandatory requirement to have any knowledge of ISL. This is something that has been raised as problematic but presently, no policy is in place (Leeson 2004, 2007(b)). This builds on an additional sociolinguistic aspect: historically, any signed language use was associated with lack of intelligence, and was the "communication method" (not "language") of those considered "oral failures" (c.f. Department of Education 1972). As such, the stigmatization of ISL has consequences that are still felt in terms of older deaf people's ambivalence regarding the status of the language and its usefulness for academic purposes. The good news is that this is an attitude that has been challenged widely and is changing slowly.

<3>Learning to Sign: Who teaches ISL?

A major challenge in preparing potential candidates for the interpreting profession is the lack of access to formal ISL classes. Given the small number of professionally trained ISL teachers, and the fact that most are localized in the major cities, there is a clear rural-urban divide emerging regarding access to ISL. There is no high school program of studies in ISL, which would allow for the language to be taken to matriculation level. The only undergraduate programs offering ISL as an option are the Diplomas offered at the Center, so the potential to develop ISL skills is limited. However, we have seen some students take the Diploma in Deaf Studies in order to develop ISL competence and then complete an additional year to qualify as interpreters. This demands that students are able to commit to 2 to 3 years of full-time study. Given our student profile (the majority are women, who are mature students), this is not a viable solution for those with families or other responsibilities, particularly those who are usually resident outside Dublin.

The general experience is that students undertaking training have inadequate signed language skill at entry to embark directly on interpreting related activities. As such, the first year of the program is given over to ISL skill development (40²⁸ credit points) while the remaining 20 credit points allowable in any year of an Irish university program are dedicated to courses on deaf culture, history and socio-cultural-medical perspectives; and an introduction to the linguistics and sociolinguistics of signed languages. The objective is to immerse students in ISL so that they have better command of ISL before embarking on interpreter training proper. The second year of their program is then focused specifically on interpreting related activities.

²⁸ One credit point equals 25 hours of student work for a language module.

But this is far from perfect: our objective is to put in place a four year degree program that will have a blended learning approach in order to facilitate the delivery of training nationally. Funding permitting, this will be done in conjunction with a range of nationally recognized tertiary education institutes, and particularly, in partnership with the Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown²⁹. Some piloting of the technologies required has been taking place since late 2006.

<3>The complexity of developing ISL competence to an advanced level

There has been an historical lack of involvement of the Deaf community at tertiary education level (Conroy 2006, Leeson 2007(b)). For example, in 2006/7, only 128 deaf and hard of hearing students were registered across the Irish university sector (Leeson 2007(b)). Conroy (2006: 27-30) reports that 4 out of every 10 former pupils of deaf schools had no access to post-secondary school training, with only 6.5% of her sample holding a Third Level Degree or Higher, in contrast to 15% of the non-deaf Irish population.

Beyond the issue of social justice and the right to access tertiary education, there are other linguistic consequences of this lack of participation at tertiary level: if a very small minority of deaf people are participating as students in new domains (new to ISL users), then there is no pre-established specialist vocabulary, leading to significant lexical and conceptual gaps (see Leeson and Foley-Cave (forthcoming) for discussion of this in the linguistics domain). The questions arising here include: Who decides on new vocabulary? What principles are invoked in developing new vocabulary? How is this shared with interpreters or students of ISL? How does standardization of specialist vocabulary occur when the community does not have a

²⁹ www.itb.ie

critical mass of specialists operating in a specific field (e.g. finance)? Then there are the parallel issues associated with the development of any new profession: there is a dearth of teaching and learning materials for ISL, a serious lack of continual professional development possibilities for ISL teachers and a general lack of literature on signed language teaching generally. Some of these are being tackled as we grow (e.g. the development of ISL teaching and learning resources (e.g. Matthews 2007)), while others will evolve from the recently established ISL Academy, which functions under the auspices of the Irish Deaf Society, and aims to prepare and implement a strategy for the organization of ISL courses and the promotion and development of ISL as a language (<http://www.deaf.ie/ISLAcademy.htm>).

<1> The Future

Here we provide an overview of the future path of the Irish Sign Language interpreting profession, highlighting three key issues for consideration.

<2> Deaf Interpreters

While deaf people have always played a role as interpreters in an informal manner (e.g. they acted as interpreters during their school years, explaining to peers what their teachers were saying), in recent years, they have emerged as key players in more formalized settings. For example, they work with their hearing counterparts in some legal and healthcare settings as well as in conference settings (working between signed languages). As mentioned earlier, in the most recent round of assessments carried out by the now defunct agency, Irish Sign Link, some 5 deaf interpreters sought and secured registration on the agency's list. But there are challenges in this domain too: there is currently no formal training available to deaf people who wish to

become interpreters and this limits professional development and skill enhancement. This is something that clearly requires attention.

Perhaps more worryingly, there is also a growing number of deaf people who function as *de facto* interpreters in educational settings. Very often in Ireland, deaf people have been appointed as Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) in schools for the deaf or in classes in mainstream schools where there are deaf children. While this provides positive deaf adult role models to students, the deaf SNAs are frequently expected to interpret what the teacher says (because teachers are not required to have signed language skills), despite the fact that they are not trained to do this, and the fact that they are effectively expected to lipread the teacher in order to translate the class content or class instructions to their deaf pupil/s (Leeson 2007(b)). As this role falls outside what we conceive of as interpreting proper, the SNAs do not typically identify themselves as interpreters (though they recognize that there is an interpreting component to their task) and have not been affiliated to IASLI or ITIA. As such, they do not have any access to interpreter peer-support, *ad-hoc* training, or recourse to demand the professional working conditions that those who were members of IASLI (or ITIA) have had. It makes sense to us to suggest that the role of SNA is akin to that of educational interpreter and that this should be acknowledged formally by the interpreting profession and the Irish Department of Education and Science. Following from that, the requirements for training, professional support and working conditions should be given space to emerge.

<2> Recruiting ISL Teachers

We have noted that there are a number of sociolinguistic factors that impact on attitudes to ISL and its use. These also impact on the potential candidates for ISL

teaching. Ambivalence to language skill, along with a fear of failure (associated with past educational experience) results in very low uptake of full-time tertiary level training (Leeson and Matthews 2001). As noted above, the severe shortage of qualified ISL interpreters indicates that there is a great deal of potential in terms of business opportunities for qualified graduates, and this may increase in coming years if a number of proposed educational policy changes are implemented (Leeson 2007(b)). There are also a number of large scale projects in development which would demand the input of qualified personnel, who may prove difficult to identify in the current climate. The fact remains that deaf people in Ireland are underemployed (Conroy 2006), and because of negative educational experience and stigmatization of their language, are reluctant to take up opportunities that may open other doors for them. Thus historical attitudes to language use have conspired to create a “catch 22” scenario for many Irish deaf people.

<2>Developments

Since the establishment of the CDS in 2001, several developments have emerged as a result of research-oriented work arising from our “home” within the School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences. These include the development a European Language Portfolio (ELP)³⁰ for ISL, which has involved the critical re-evaluation of our ISL curriculum, with a commitment to authentic, student-centred learning. Another major development has been the “Signs of Ireland” corpus, which comprises ISL data from 40 signers aged between 18 and 65 from across the Republic of Ireland. The data is annotated using ELAN software. Annotations include information about lexical information (e.g. if it is gender specific, if it is borrowed

³⁰ www.coe.int/t/dg4/portfolio/Default.asp?L=E&M=/main_pages/welcome.html

from another SL), non-manual features, dominant hand versus non-dominant hand usage, mouthings, etc. It is currently the largest annotated corpus of a signed language in Europe, and is used not only for linguistic analysis of ISL, but also in the teaching of ISL and interpreting and translation (see Leeson, Saeed, Leonard, Macduff and Byrne-Dunne for further discussion). This supplements a non-annotated corpus of ISL and English language data that was created for interpreting students by Fulbright student, Ms. Michele Clapp.

<1>Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the evolution of interpreter training in Ireland. Stemming from the days of the Deaf Action Group in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the need for interpreters was highlighted, and this paved the road for the establishment of the Irish Deaf Society, who, with EU funding and transnational partners, made interpreter training a reality. We outlined several “leaps of faith” that led to the establishment of the IDS, IASLI and the first interpreting agency, Irish Sign Link, as well as the “giant steps” that led to the establishment of the Center for Deaf Studies.

We noted that the situation today, which, while better than even a decade ago, is far from perfect. It is clear that how ISL teaching is delivered nationally impacts on the quality of candidates coming for interpreter training. Clearly associated with this is the current small cohort of professional ISL teachers, and the need to persuade and encourage more deaf people to see ISL teaching as a profession. This is perhaps one of the last great challenges to establishing the status of ISL – ensuring that Deaf community ambivalence to the status of ISL is redressed in parallel with attitudes in the hearing community.

We also noted that the duration of training is currently insufficient to meet the needs of an increasingly sophisticated Deaf community. Coupled with problems in sourcing ISL pre-entry to CDS, the short duration of programs (2 years, full time) is insufficient to adequately develop the full range of linguistic and interpreting skills required post-graduation. Our aim is to bring the CDS program in line with international best practice – that is, by offering a 4 year degree in ISL/English Interpreting. It remains to be seen if this will be funded. It is clear that the Deaf community and interpreters themselves are clear that this is an essential step in order to increase access for deaf people and to raise the bar for practicing as an interpreter in Ireland (Comhairle 2006, Leeson 2007(b)). And the issue of deaf interpreters and their training needs also must be addressed. Finally we looked at some of the key developments that have aided the delivery of the current program.

The first steps have been taken, and international collaboration has made possible developments only imagined by the Irish deaf people who met one Wednesday night a month in the 1970s. Hopefully, when Irish deaf people 30 years from now reflect on how they have progressed, they will judge our “giant leaps” as having brought them further along the road in the right direction.

<1> Acknowledgements

To all those who made the development of interpreting services in Ireland possible.

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Table 1: Registration of Interpreters in Ireland: Irish Sign Link, 2006

<p>R1 – Registered Qualified Interpreter (Advanced) [formally RQI]</p> <p>18</p> <p>R2 – Registered Qualified Interpreter [formally RTI] 14</p> <p>TI – Registered Trainee Interpreter 6</p> <p>(Deaf Interpreters: 5 – included in figures for R1 and R2)</p>

(SLIS, personal communication, October 2007)