

Reconsider Sign Language Interpreter Setting Rule for International Conventions from the viewpoint of Social Model of Disability

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Introduction

Now in United Nations (UN), many discussions for Human Right Convention of the Disabled Peoples are going. For a long time, Deaf People are marginalized in formal discussions in each country all over the world, including Parliament discussions, even though the discussions are about rights of People with Disabilities. The Sign Language (SL) Interpreter Services are not offered in these situations. It has been the same as in UN. Though UN has its official languages, these languages are all spoken languages. Interestingly the SLs in these countries where these spoken languages are official languages in UN have not still been accepted as UN official Languages.

WFD, World Federation of the Deaf, is the official NGO for UN and the presenters from WFD uses International Sign or her/his native SL at UN conventions. They came to these conventions with their SL Interpreters by themselves. So far there does not seem to any problem with this situation. The main reason for this peace in disguise

is their priority for communication, that to send Deaf delegate to UN has been more important than to discuss the budget problem with UN and most of the delegates come from developed countries.

UN's new Interpreter Cost Rule

Of course, UN tries to pay for the interpreter for their standards, which means they pay the interpreter fee within UN's budget framework in existence. The item used for this payment is 'miscellaneous'. As many people know, there is a strong bureaucracy in UN and it would be very hard to set up a new budget item exclusively for the SL Interpreter Service. The 'miscellaneous' would be the good exercise of ingenuity of UN's better minds.

However, at the same time, we should mention another problem for their new rule. There become more and more conferences about Disability around UN recently. They try to make another rule for the interpreter payment. Now UN will pay only for Interpreter's bed and meals during the conferences. The above 'miscellaneous' payment exercise allow each delegate from each country to apply one interpreter. Deaf Delegates and Participants should find their interpreters in their country and come to the conference with these interpreters. UN's idea shows that it would be the best idea to

take their interpreter from their country because each country uses different SL and some participants has difficulties in reading/writing English. The interpreter from their country can help the participants to understand the convention well and to participate in the convention more fully. It seems good idea in one way.

Deaf Official SLs for international conventions

On the other hand, in International Deaf Academic Community, the Deaf accept American Sign Language(ASL) or British Sign Language(BSL) for their conference official language. Amsterdam Manifest of TISLR, Theoretical Issues in SL Research, which is the biggest and only international convention about Sign Linguistic Research, was released in its 7th conference, in 2000 by Deaf researchers. And in addition, International Deaf Academic network (mailing-list), ASL and BSL would be 'Lingua Franca' for them. It is because Gallaudet University in US is the only and famous liberal-arts university in the world and many Deaf leaders came from or has some contact with the Gallaudet Deaf Community. BSL has different manual alphabet system and it has also many sister SLs all over the world. Of course, Japanese Sign Language could be a good candidate for the third SL for international conference.

More burden for participants/delegates in non-English countries

Now, in UN, they don't offer official SL Interpreter service. They only give a one option for participant to take one interpreter by themselves. However, from a viewpoint of Social Model of Disability, the current UN resolution came partly from the individual model of Disability. The Deaf participants should try to find English/their Native SL interpreter in their country. It would be a great burden for them as in Japan, where we know only few English/Japanese Sign Language Interpreters. Japan is very Japanese-language-closed country and most of hearing Japanese don't know English well. Most of JSL interpreters don't know English well because in interpreting situations in Japan, they don't need English and Most Deaf people in Japan don't know English well. The English-weak situation is the same as for JSL interpreter and the Interpreter fee would be very expensive for this special English skill. In Japan, spoken English/spoken Japanese interpreter fee is around ¥20,000/ 2hours while the highest Japanese spoken language/Japanese Sign Language (JSL) interpreter fee is around ¥7,500 /2 hours (around US\$68.00). If we try to find the spoken English/JSL interpreter, probably we have to prepare the amount of ¥20,000 at minimum.

I believe the situation would be the same as in many countries in all over the world, especially in developing countries, where many Deaf people cannot go to school fully and don't know English well. The UN's current rules impose much burden for each

Deaf participant and Deaf participants should pay the large cost by themselves. It is in the opposite site of the social model of Disability. We should ask UN to reconsider their rules and to have more flexible options for Deaf participants. It would be another new protest for UN's current rules and I would like to propose more possible ways (options) for the conference rules.

Social Model and important points

The disability Studies tell us the Social Model is more important than Medical-Individual Model for social reform and our future. The appropriate mechanism to share the cost for SL interpreters should be made from the viewpoint of Social Model, not from Medical-Individual Model. The current UN's rule might be one option for the sharing cost. However, it assumes the unchanged situation of official spoken languages in existence. Now they try to make the different type rule for SL interpreters and for some English-strong countries, Deaf delegates could find English/ their native SL interpreters easily with the almost same cost as their nation's national spoken language/ their native SL interpreters. However, the situation is not always the same for other countries.

The important points for this discussion are as follows.

1. Why not Official SLs - Though as for spoken language, UN has its official language, as for signed language, they don't have any official SLs.
2. Bring their own Interpreter by themselves? - UN's current cost sharing rule for interpreter is to pay meals and beds during conference. The participants and delegates should find their SL interpreters by and for their selves and in most cases, they should take the interpreters from their countries at their own expense.
3. Official SLs in International Deaf Community - Now even though in most countries, Deaf people have very less accesses to foreign languages, many of them know ASL and BSL as international Deaf communities' situation. The two languages might be good candidates for International Official SL for international convention situations.
4. Higher Interpreter fee and Searching Cost - With the current rule by UN, participants/delegate should pay higher interpreter fee (sometimes more than twice of the regular interpreter fee), flight cost for the interpreter and searching cost for the interpreter while with alternative rule (official SL interpreter service is offered by UN), they should only pay their own cost and probably learning cost of the official SLs.
5. SL Interpreter Services as Public Goods - We should take another feature of SL into

consideration. I mean SL Interpreter Service is public good, what can be used by many people at the same time once it is established. For example, if someone comes to US convention with her/his particular native interpreter, even with the interpreter service in most cases most of the other participants/delegates cannot use the service. However, if UN offer ASL interpreter service for its convention, if more Deaf people can use the service with other participants/delegates at the same time.

Conclusion

With the above 5 points, we should conclude the UN's current SL Interpreter Rule should be reconsidered from the viewpoint of Social Model of Disability and the more proper cost sharing between the Deaf and the hearing majority Society. The important key would be to find Official SL for International Convention along the line of International Deaf Community experience.

These considerations should be immediately implemented in UN's newer situation with Human Rights of Peoples with Disabilities(PWDs), especially for PWDs in developing countries. The rules should be reconsidered with more broader International Deaf Community members for our future.

Thank you.