

The Role of Interpreters in Strengthening Associations: A Diagnostic and Analytical Approach

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ABSTRACT

This essay constitutes an adaptation of the paper presented during the Research Week at the CRE-SER Higher Technological Institute. It reflects on the role of sign language interpreters in strengthening the associative structures of the Deaf community in Ecuador. Based on experience as an active member of the associative movement and as a professional interpreter, it analyzes how interpreters function as bridges for accessibility, participation, and collective empowerment. It also identifies the main challenges faced by the community, including the shortage of interpreters, the lack of sustained public policies, and the need to uphold an ethical commitment that consistently places Deaf individuals at the center as key agents.

Keywords:

Sign language interpreter, accessibility, Deaf community, associative strengthening, professional ethics, community interpreting, linguistic rights.

INTRODUCTION

The presence of sign language interpreters in the lives of the Deaf community is neither a luxury nor a secondary option; it is a fundamental necessity linked to the exercise of human rights and communicative accessibility. In Ecuador, this reality becomes even more evident: the Deaf community faces urgent needs in the educational, labor, political, and social spheres, where the presence or absence of interpreters makes the difference between real inclusion and silent exclusion. As Metzger (2019) notes, the interpreter's role also involves an ethical and cultural dimension that strengthens the associative character of the Deaf community.

During the Research Week at the CRE-SER Institute, the author emphasized that the interpreter is not limited to transmitting messages. Their role goes beyond that: they accompany processes, open doors, and ensure that Deaf individuals actively participate in society.

Through this essay, the author seeks to provide a written record of that presentation while also offering a broader reflection on the work and discussions that

have taken place over the years within Deaf associations. The aim is to demonstrate that the role of the interpreter is essential for strengthening Deaf organizations, defending their rights, and contributing to the construction of a more inclusive society.

THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT

Theoretical Framework and Background

Interpreter as a Bridge of Accessibility

The interpreter is, above all, a bridge. Through their work, Deaf individuals are able to access education, healthcare, justice, employment, and political life. Without interpreters, community participation is reduced, limited, and, in many cases, disappears. With interpreters, however, Deaf associations are strengthened and become genuine spaces of empowerment.

In Ecuador, there are more than 75,000 individuals with hearing disabilities, according to records from the Ministry of Public Health (2022), which reflects the magnitude of the challenge: how can

accessibility be guaranteed for so many people with a limited number of interpreters? The situation becomes even more critical in rural and remote areas, where the presence of interpreters is almost nonexistent.

Associative Strengthening and the Ethical Role of the Interpreter

In his presentation, the author emphasized that the interpreter should not be a protagonist, but rather an ally. The code of ethics indicates that the central role of the Deaf individual must be respected, and that interpreters must act with neutrality, fidelity, and commitment. An ethical interpreter does not appropriate ideas, take over spaces, or seek visibility; instead, they accompany, interpret, and ensure that communication is complete and effective (Unspoken ASL, 2024).

Pöchhacker (2022) highlights that interpreting in community and political contexts requires ethical preparation and conscious neutrality to sustain institutional trust.

Associative strengthening largely depends on this support. Associations require interpreters not only for meetings or

events, but also for administrative processes, training activities, document preparation, and advocacy efforts. The consistent presence of interpreters in these spaces enables associations to grow and become stronger.

In the Ecuadorian context, the associative movement of Deaf individuals has played a central role in defending rights and consolidating spaces for participation. The work of interpreters within these associations is essential to guarantee accessibility in assemblies, congresses, and collective decision-making processes. The following figure presents the associations that make up FENASEC at the national level (see Figure 1).



Figure 1

Associations of Deaf People at the national level (FENASEC, 2025).

Note. Image created by the *Mente Abierta* editorial team (2025).

Training and Engagement with the Community

In this regard, Napier, McKee, and Goswell (2021) emphasize that interpreter training must include close contact with the Deaf community to ensure relevance and quality.

Another key aspect highlighted by the author is the need for interpreters in training to be deeply connected with Deaf community associations. Attending classes and passing courses is not sufficient; rather, it involves sharing spaces, understanding cultural norms, recognizing community struggles, and actively participating in organizational processes. Only this direct experience prevents interpreters from becoming distant professionals, disconnected from the reality they are meant to support.

This approach aligns with training programs such as that of Central Piedmont, which promote authentic immersion in the Deaf community as a fundamental part of the educational process (Central Piedmont Community College Interpreter Education Program, n.d.). In this sense, Napier, McKee, and

Goswell (2021) reiterate that interpreter training must include close engagement with the Deaf community to ensure relevance and quality.

CONCLUSIONS

The role of interpreters in strengthening associations goes beyond a purely linguistic function: they act as catalysts for inclusion, agents of accessibility, and strategic allies of the Deaf community. Their work contributes to the consolidation of associations as spaces for empowerment, advocacy, and democratic participation.

However, for this role to be fully realized, a shared commitment is required: from the State, by ensuring public policies and resources; from associations, by providing spaces for training and support; and from interpreters themselves, by maintaining ethical standards, professional vocation, and close engagement with the community.

Only in this way can progress be made toward a truly inclusive society, where communicative accessibility is no longer a privilege but a guaranteed right. In this

regard, Napier, McKee, and Goswell (2021) emphasize that interpreter training must include close contact with the Deaf community to ensure relevance and quality.

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