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Unlocking the Mysteries of DeafBlind Interpreting

Krystle A. Chambers
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Unlocking the Mysteries of DeafBlind Interpreting

By

Krystle A. Chambers

A thesis submitted to Western Oregon University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

December 2019
WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED

☑ Thesis
☐ Professional Project

Titled:
Unlocking the Mysteries of Deafblind Interpreting

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.” (Proverbs 3: 5 & 6)

To my Western Oregon University family. Thank you for all of your support and encouragement throughout this journey. All of my professors have shown and taught me so much and ignited a passion for research that I am forever grateful for. To my cohort, thank you for being a sounding board and helping me make some sense out of the craziness that is graduate school. To my thesis committee chair and members, thank you for all of your time and effort in supporting and helping me through this research study.

To my family and friends. Thank you for being there when I needed to bounce ideas off of you for the various papers and projects and then proof reading those papers and projects. Thank you for providing the much-needed distractions by working on different ranch projects and riding our horses, that gave me renewed energy to balance work, school, and life. To my parents and grandparents for showing and teaching me to live by faith and trust in our Lord and Savior.

A special thanks to my husband Nathan, you were there by my side through it all. After working for hours on end, you were always willing to proofread my papers before I submitted them, you took care of our animal babies when I had to leave the state to go to campus, and you helped take care of all of life’s things that popped-up. When I was stressed and wanting to give up, you were there to remind me not to give up and that I could do it. I love you sweet darlin’!
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ABSTRACT

Unlocking the Mysteries of DeafBlind Interpreting

By

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Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

Western Oregon University

December 2019

As the field of signed language interpreting is growing and receiving more recognition and research there is an area that remains understudied, DeafBlind interpreting. Working with the DeafBlind community needs the focus of research and data collection. The research and data collected for this paper is focused on the San Joaquin Valley of California. This specific DeafBlind community is spread over several hundred miles and the interpreters available with the skill set to accurately interpret, in this specialized area of interpreting, are few and far between. This research is based on qualitative and quantitative data collection to represent the geographical area of focus and the people who live there. The data collected are from surveys that were sent out to the interpreting and DeafBlind communities in the geographical area of
interest. With the data collected from these surveys and a review of national and international research, an examination of possible solutions to the lack of qualified interpreters who work in the DeafBlind community can continue. The hope for this research is that the information gathered will add another piece to the nationwide DeafBlind interpreting puzzle.

*Keywords:* DeafBlind, interpreting, Protactile ASL, communication.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

The DeafBlind community was first introduced to me when I was volunteering at a Deaf camp 18 years ago. There was a DeafBlind individual attending the camp with a support service provider (SSP). The SSP asked if I would be willing to be her team in providing communication access to the DeafBlind individual. I informed the SSP and the DeafBlind individual that I would be happy to assist in providing communication access if they would be willing to teach me how to accurately provide this service. This DeafBlind individual and her SSP took me under their wing and started teaching me about the DeafBlind community, culture, and language. When the camp was over a passion to learn more about the DeafBlind community and culture was ignited within me.

It was at that time I found out there were no formal trainings available to me locally to learn about the DeafBlind community, culture, and language which meant the only way to gain knowledge and skills was to engage with and learn from the DeafBlind community. When I went to college for the interpreter training program, several of my courses required volunteer hours. I requested that my hours be fulfilled by being a support service provider (SSP) to individuals within the DeafBlind community. I received approval for the volunteer hours and began volunteering as an SSP. With the combination of those volunteer hours and the interpreting courses, I started to learn how to interpret for the DeafBlind community. The DeafBlind community has informed me they wished there were more interpreters that knew about the DeafBlind community, culture, and language.
The DeafBlind community shared these wishes with me during community events while I was an SSP, interpreting, or both. This has stayed near to my heart and when the opportunity arose for me to gather and share information through this research, I accepted with enthusiasm. The DeafBlind community has taught me a great deal and this study is a way for me to give back to this wonderful community.

**Statement of the Problem**

When one reads about DeafBlind, one might think, “what does it mean to be DeafBlind?” DeafBlind is a term used to represent a community of people with a dual-sensory loss (hearing and vision). The term “DeafBlind” does not necessarily mean a complete vision and hearing loss, just as the term “Deaf” does not necessarily mean a complete hearing loss (Smith, 2002). The dual sensory loss is unique to each DeafBlind individual. Some individuals may be born with a hearing loss and then later in life lose their sight. Other individuals might be born with a vision loss then later experience a hearing loss. It is also possible individuals are born with the dual-sensory loss or experience the dual-sensory loss later in life. The varied experience of when and how the dual-sensory loss occurs is a cause for the variety of communication methods used within the DeafBlind community (Smith, 2002 & American Association of the Deaf Blind, 2009).

The variety of communication methods used within the DeafBlind community combined with environmental factors can create a challenge for interpreters to provide successful communication access (Smith, 2002). Therefore, it is important for interpreters to have access to trainings that can provide the knowledge and skill set for the field of DeafBlind interpreting. Unfortunately, these types of trainings are not available in the San Joaquin Valley of California. The educational programs available in the San Joaquin Valley provide courses in interpreter
training but none of the programs include classes with a focus on DeafBlind communication, let alone interpreting for DeafBlind. When looking at the interpreter education program at California State University, Fresno, it includes courses such as: Deaf culture, American Sign Language linguistics, introduction to interpreting, and many other interpreting related courses. Out of all the courses available at this university none of them have an emphasis or focus on DeafBlind (CSU Fresno, 2018). Other programs offering courses on American Sign Language or Deaf Studies in the San Joaquin Valley, such as community colleges, also do not offer courses pertaining to the DeafBlind community, culture, or language.

In order to provide knowledge, training, and skill sets to current and future interpreters on DeafBlind communication access, information and research needs to be gathered to share with the interpreting community.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to gather data on DeafBlind interpreting to share with and educate the community of interpreters within the San Joaquin Valley about this specialized field. This study will look at how familiar the interpreters who practice in the San Joaquin Valley are with what causes an individual to become DeafBlind, what training/education on DeafBlind interpreting is available, and what modes of communication are used by the DeafBlind community.

**Theoretical Framework**

This research study is focused on gathering information about DeafBlind interpreting to share and educate current and future interpreters of the San Joaquin Valley. The information gathered pertains predominately to the interpreting community and the DeafBlind community of the San Joaquin Valley of California, but could be adapted and applied to many interpreting and
DeafBlind communities. The theoretical framework this study follows is that of knowledge sharing.

Knowledge sharing can be viewed as either exploring and seeking new knowledge or building upon existing knowledge for further analysis (Christensen, 2005). This research touches on many aspects of DeafBlind interpreting and what an interpreter may need to know when accepting an assignment with DeafBlind individuals. Individuals who read this research may already have a working knowledge of DeafBlind interpreting; this will confirm the existing knowledge and add to it, or this may be the first exposure to information about DeafBlind interpreting.

The goal is to share the knowledge and bring new knowledge to those for whom this is their first glimpse into the field (Rosen, Furst, & Blackburn, 2007). The knowledge in this research is shared so, in the event that an interpreter has an assignment with a DeafBlind consumer, the interpreter can analyze the situation by looking at who is involved in the environment, where the interpretation is taking place, why the interpreting situation is occurring, and what is being interpreted. This practice of analysis by who, where, why, and what encourages the interpreter to consider the factors involved with a DeafBlind interpreting assignment since the situation often requires the interpreter to consider more than the linguistic aspect of the assignment (Sergeeva & Andreeva, 2016). As stated before, the information gathered for this research is intended for sharing knowledge about DeafBlind interpreting to current and future interpreters.

**Definition of Terms**

According to the National Center on Deaf-Blindness (2014), a support service provider (SSP) is an individual who assists the DeafBlind person by providing services such as guiding,
transportation for errands, communication assistance, visual/environmental information, and sometimes companionship.

The term “DeafBlind” is a cultural identifier that an individual has a combination of hearing loss and vision loss and identifies themselves as such (Lachney, 2018). Individuals can also culturally identify themselves as Deaf-Blind, deaf-blind, or deaf and blind (Smith, 2002). For the purpose of this study, the term “DeafBlind” will be used to represent an individual with the dual sensory loss of hearing and vision.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Working as a signed language interpreter, there are various subfields one could specialize in and DeafBlind interpreting is one of those subfields. Reading the existing literature, in regard to working with DeafBlind individuals and interpreting in the DeafBlind community, shows there are various factors that could impact the way communication is expressed and received. These various ways include, but are not limited to, what caused the individual to have a dual sensory loss, what mode of communication is used and preferred, and how DeafBlind interpreting differs from, or is similar to, visual American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting.

The information gathered and presented in this chapter is intended to be shared with current and future interpreters working in the San Joaquin Valley.

Causation of the Dual Sensory Loss (vision and hearing)

When an interpreter is contacted for a DeafBlind interpreting assignment it is important to understand that each DeafBlind individual is unique. DeafBlind individuals have varying degrees of dual sensory loss impacting their vision and hearing. That dual sensory loss can be caused by many different circumstances. Several of these causes are Usher Syndrome, Retinitis Pigmentosa, CHARGE (Coloboma, heart defect, atresia choanae, retarded growth and development, genital hypoplasia, and ear anomalies/deafness) Syndrome, congenital rubella syndrome, diabetic retinopathy, accidents, or other illnesses. The most common causes of this type of dual sensory loss are from Usher syndrome, Retinitis Pigmentosa, CHARGE Syndrome, and congenital rubella syndrome (Helen Keller National Center, 2018). When providing DeafBlind interpreting services, it is important to have a basic understanding of what causes the dual sensory loss to better match the consumers’ communication method. The consumer’s
communication preference is predominately based on the age of when the dual sensory loss impacts communication (American Association of the Deaf Blind, 2009). Someone born with a hearing loss who grew up using a signed language and then later experiences a vision loss could communicate differently than someone born with a vision loss who grew up using a spoken language and then later in life experiences a hearing loss.

According to the Helen Keller National Center (2018) and the American Association of Deaf-Blind (2009), Usher Syndrome is the most common cause, about 50 percent of the DeafBlind population, of the dual sensory loss. The other 50 percent is caused by Retinitis Pigmentosa, CHARGE Syndrome, congenital rubella syndrome, diabetic retinopathy, accidents, or other illnesses.

Usher Syndrome affects the genes for making the proteins involved with normal hearing, balance, and vision. When these genes are affected it causes a partial or total hearing and vision loss that will become worse over time (National Institutes of Health, 2018). There are three different types of Usher Syndrome that can cause an individual to become DeafBlind. Usher Syndrome Types I, II, III are distinguished by the severity of hearing and vision loss and the age at which these losses become apparent. An individual who has Usher Syndrome Type I has a severe to profound hearing loss at birth and a progressive vision loss that begins during childhood (National Institutes of Health, 2018). Usher Syndrome Type II is evidenced by a mild to severe hearing loss at birth and a progressive loss of vision that becomes apparent in adolescence or adulthood (National Institutes of Health, 2018). An individual with Usher Syndrome Type III has a hearing and vision loss that appears later in life. The individuals with Type III are typically born with the ability to hear and see within the normal range (National Institutes of Health, 2018).
An individual who is either born with a hearing loss or has a hearing loss later in life can also become DeafBlind due to Retinitis Pigmentosa. The vision loss caused by Retinitis Pigmentosa happens with the degeneration of the rod and cone photoreceptors in the eyes (Verbakel et al., 2018). Retinitis Pigmentosa typically becomes apparent during adolescence with the manifestation of night blindness, followed by the loss of concentric field of vision, then later in life the central field of vision is lost (Verbakel et al., 2018). Retinitis Pigmentosa can also be the cause of vision loss associated with Usher Syndrome Types I, II, and III (National Institutes of Health, 2018). This type of vision loss can create a unique interpreting experience due to the continued change in the field of vision. One could interpret using two different communication methods for the same DeafBlind individual due to the field of vision changing depending on the lighting in the environment. Imagine interpreting for a Deafblind individual at a museum. The lighting in a museum can change from exhibit to exhibit to establish a different ambiance. For a DeafBlind individual with Retinitis Pigmentosa, the changes in lighting will affect their field of vision requiring the interpreter to change or adjust the communication method to be effective.

Another common cause for DeafBlindness is from CHARGE Syndrome (Helen Keller National Center, 2018). CHARGE Syndrome is an acronym that was developed to represent the association of anomalies that make up this syndrome. The acronym CHARGE represents Coloboma, Heart defect, Atresia choanae, Retarded growth and development, Genital hypoplasia, and Ear anomalies/deafness (Blake & Prasad, 2006). However, according to Blake and Prasad (2006), there have now been several individuals diagnosed on the genetic level with CHARGE without showing the signs of choanal atresia and coloboma. Coloboma affects the individual’s retina or iris in one or both eyes causing vision loss that progressively becomes
worse (Blake & Prasad, 2006). The ear abnormalities affect the shape of the outer and/or inner ear impacting the ability to hear causing mild to severe hearing loss (Blake & Prasad, 2006).

Congenital Rubella Syndrome can cause sensorineural deafness, ocular abnormalities, cardiovascular defects, and brain damage (Forrest, Turnbull, Sholler, Hawker, Martin, Doran & Burgess, 2002). This can happen when the mother contracts the disease right before or during the pregnancy (Robert-Gnansia, 2004). The severity of how this syndrome affects an individual depends on what stage of the pregnancy the mother was in when she contracted the disease (Forrest et al., 2002).

These common causes for an individual to become DeafBlind affect the communication methods, varying from individual to individual. An individual who has vision and hearing loss from birth or childhood could have a different communication method than an individual who experiences a vision and hearing loss later in life. The varied modes of communication within the DeafBlind community create added demands for the interpreter during the interpreting process.

**Languages Used Within the DeafBlind Community**

American Sign Language (ASL) is a language in which an individual’s hands, face, and body are used to communicate rather than using vocally produced language for communication. As an example, English words are made by actions with one’s vocal tract that produces sounds, where as in ASL words are made using signs by actions of the hands/arms, face, and torso that produces visual communication (Liddell, 2003). American Sign Language has its own grammatical structure just as other signed and spoken languages have their own grammatical structures (Liddell, 2003). ASL could be used when a DeafBlind individual is at the beginning stages of a vision loss, predominately in their peripheral vision, or if the DeafBlind individual
has some residual vision. Interpreters primarily need to be aware of their signing space when the DeafBlind individual’s peripheral vision is or begins to be diminished (Smith, 2002).

Protactile ASL is an emerging language currently being researched and used by many individuals. Protactile (PT) was being used by the DeafBlind community long before it was classified as an emerging language (Granda & Nuccio, 2018). The community started to take note of the different ways a DeafBlind individual would communicate rather than solely using American Sign Language. Granda and Nuccio (2018) have developed an educational resource that distinguishes what linguistic markers make up Protactile communication. Within this educational resource (Granda & Nuccio, 2018), there are seven principles involved. These seven principles are contact space, reciprocity, protactile perspective, SASS (size and shape specifiers), exceptions, information source, and tactile imagery (Granda & Nuccio, 2018).

The first principle of Protactile, contact space, is crucial in the DeafBlind world. When one experiences both a vision and hearing loss, the feeling of being grounded to something, or touching, is important in both the environment and in language/communication. With ASL, signs are often made in the space in front of the signer’s body which is not as effective for DeafBlind people (Granda & Nuccio, 2018). In Protactile, the most important time when contact space while signing needs to be used is when making references to something, role-shifting, pointing, and emphasizing or showing emotions (Granda & Nuccio, 2018). If the signer is referencing people or things, it is good practice to use the name of the person or thing and then set up a point in contact space to represent that person or thing to use as a reference (Chambers, Moore, & Ramey, 2019). Once that point in contact space is established to represent individuals or things, then role shifting and pointing can be used by referring to the contact point. To represent emphasis and emotions, the signer needs to take what is visual and express it in signing,
movement, or touch in contact space. An example of this would be if the signer saw the speaker yawn instead of only using the ASL sign for YAWN the signer would also open and close their fingers in a circular motion on the pre-established contact point on the DeafBlind person’s leg or arm to show the mouth opening and closing (Granda & Nuccio, 2018). If the signer needed to indicate the feeling of being scared or having tension, the signer can grip the DeafBlind person’s leg or arm to indicate those feelings (Granda & Nuccio, 2018).

The second principle of Protactile is reciprocity, “regardless of how much you see, always communicate reciprocally through touch” (Granda & Nuccio, 2018, p. 7). When communicating with DeafBlind individuals who use touch/tactile in their communication, it is courteous (and expected) to use that same approach when communicating back, regardless of your vision/hearing status (Granda & Nuccio, 2018). This practice of showing reciprocity with the DeafBlind community can be compared to when a hearing person enters a Deaf/signing friendly environment, it is expected that everyone communicates through signing regardless of their ability to hear or not.

The third principle is to use a Protactile perspective when communicating. This requires “working together to co-create signs that are easy to feel and also describing things in ways that reflect protactile experience” (Granda & Nuccio, 2018, p. 9). This is done by not simply telling the DeafBlind individual how to do something or what is happening, but to tactically show what is occurring. An example would be describing the process of cooking pancakes rather than simply giving the recipe. The protactile perspective of cooking pancakes would be to explain mixing the ingredients and then sign the concept of pouring the batter onto the pan by using the DeafBlind person’s hand as the pan and using their other hand as the batter pouring (Chambers et al., 2019). Once the concept of the batter is poured on the pan, the signer then indicates to wait to
flip the pancake over until the batter starts to bubble. The batter bubbling can be tactically represented by tapping the fingers on the palm of the DeafBlind person’s hand (Granda & Nuccio, 2018). One could also use this tactile representation of movement and objects in a similar way that classifiers are used in ASL. For example, to represent something running up a tree, the signer could use the DeafBlind individual’s arm as the tree and then sign something running up the tree by using the signer’s fingers moving up the arm to the hand of the DeafBlind person (Chambers et al., 2018).

Size and Shape Specifiers (SASS) are the fourth principle of Protactile. They are used to “describe qualities such as sizes and shapes, each description should be arranged in contact space” (Granda & Nuccio, 2018, p. 11). If one were to tell a story about catching a fish and how big it was, one could indicate the size by using the DeafBlind person’s arm or leg as reference points (Granda & Nuccio, 2018). One could also compare the size of the fish to another fish by indicating the first fish was the length of the DeafBlind individual’s hand and the second fish was the size of the hand and arm (up to the elbow).

The fifth principle of Protactile communication is that of exceptions. When using protactile, it is not always physically safe or it conflicts with cultural norms to use contact space (the first principle), in which case there are exceptions to the use of contact space (Granda & Nuccio, 2018). If a situation occurred where the signer explained about going to the dentist and had to fix a cavity the first principle of contact space would indicate the signer would have to touch the DeafBlind person’s teeth or the DeafBlind person would have to touch the signer’s teeth. The fifth principle can be applied here so that the signer and the DeafBlind individual are not touching each other’s teeth. Instead the signer could spell tooth and use the DeafBlind
person’s hand in a fist to represent a tooth. From here the signer can use contact space and the other principles to describe fixing a cavity on the “tooth” represented by the fist.

Information source is the sixth principle used in Protactile communication. This indicates the importance of sharing where or from whom information is coming when sharing new information with the DeafBlind individual (Granda & Nuccio, 2018). This principle can be used in a situation where you and a DeafBlind individual are waiting for a friend to arrive. While waiting, you receive a text from the friend saying he/she/they will be there soon. Instead of just informing the DeafBlind individual that the friend is coming soon, you include that you just received a text saying the friend is coming soon. This approach provides the DeafBlind individual with the full story. If one does not indicate how the information was received then the DeafBlind individual is left wondering how one knows that the friend is coming; do they see each other or did one of them call the other? By providing the source of where the information came from the DeafBlind individual does not have to guess or wonder.

The seventh and final principle is tactile imagery, a way to not just communicate information but also “a means of sharing experiences” (Granda & Nuccio, 2018, p. 14). When storytelling or describing something in ASL one can see the story come to life by the facial expressions and the way the signs moved. If one were to just sign and describe the facial expressions to a DeafBlind person then the emotions would not be shared; it just becomes signs moving around in the air (Granda & Nuccio, 2018). Through the use of tactile imagery, those stories can come to life for the DeafBlind individual as well. In an example of going to the beach and sharing the story of a big wave coming, knocking you down, and pulling you out to sea if you just sign the story then the DeafBlind individual might not feel that emotion of fear that you are trying to portray. Through tactile imagery, the signer can use the DeafBlind person’s
hand/index finger as the “body” of a person. Then the signer would sign a wave motion onto the DeafBlind person’s hand/index finger, each time motioning the wave faster and bigger by moving “wave” more aggressively across the hand/index finger. Then to show the wave knocking the person over and dragging out to sea can be indicated by the “wave” hand sweeping up the hand and pulling the “body” over, then holding the “body” with the “wave” hand a pulling it away from the DeafBlind person. This again is used to not just to tell about the story, but to share the experience with the DeafBlind individual.

As shown through the examples of the seven principles above, protactile is a way to clearly communicate between DeafBlind individuals and with DeafBlind individuals. Protactile grounds the signs and movements happening in the air and space around the DeafBlind individual so misunderstandings are reduced and experiences can be shared. Protactile is just one way of communicating, but it is a communication method that is developing and currently being researched showing great support and use in the DeafBlind community (Granda & Nuccio, 2018).

**Modes of Communication**

Interpreters working in this field need to be knowledgeable of the various methods to provide communication access. As stated in a standard practice paper provided by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (2002) on DeafBlind interpreting “interpreters must be versatile and flexible because of the unique communication needs of Deaf-Blind individuals” (p.1). In order to gain the knowledge and skills to provide those communication needs, the interpreters should seek out and obtain training to learn those skills. Interpreting in the DeafBlind field is different from interpreting in the Deaf community.
Using alternative means for communication and being flexible to adapt to the communication needs is something an interpreter should be aware of when interpreting for a DeafBlind individual. DeafBlind interpreters need to remember that the communication within the DeafBlind community varies, not one communication method works for everyone (Hersh, 2013). The various modes of communication stem from the varying degrees of vision and hearing loss the DeafBlind individuals have (Hersh, 2013). In order for the interpreter to know which is the preferred communication method used by the DeafBlind individual it is best to ask the individual about their communication preference (Smith, 2002). It is important for the interpreter to arrive early to an assignment so that the interpreter and DeafBlind individual can become comfortable with the communication before the assignment begins (Smith, 2002). As previously stated, there are many different modes of communication used by members of the DeafBlind community. Various modes of communication used among the DeafBlind community in the San Joaquin Valley include, but are not limited to, tactile signing, tracking, tadoma, and the incorporation of technology.

**Tactile signing** is used when DeafBlind individuals receive signed information by placing their hands on the back of the signer’s hands to read and understand the signs through the movement and touch (Crossroads, 2018). This method of communication may be used by an individual using a signed language when their vision diminishes and goes from using a visual reception of sign to a tactile reception of signs, caused from Retinitis Pigmentosa or Usher Syndrome (Mesch, 2013). With tactile signing, the DeafBlind individual can use one or both hands to receive signs. In a situation where one hand is being used, the DeafBlind person will place their receiving hand on top of the signer’s dominant hand (Mesch, 2013). It is typical that an individual has a dominant hand that is used for various tasks, and that hand is usually the hand
that is dominant during the use of signed language (Mesch, 2013). It is important for the interpreter to be aware that the hand the DeafBlind person uses to receive signs may or may not be the same dominant hand used to express signs (Mesch, 2013). In an interpreting scenario for one handed tactile signing, this could mean that the DeafBlind individual might receive signs in the right hand and the interpreter would have to sign left hand dominant. If the DeafBlind individual receives in the left hand then the interpreter would have to sign right hand dominant.

In an interpreting scenario where the DeafBlind individual prefers to use two hand tactile then the interpreter would sit facing the DeafBlind individual (Mesch, 2013). Due to the nature of tactile signing some of the signs produced may need to be altered because of contact with the signer’s body, physical limitations, or limitations in space (Collins, 2004). When producing the signs, interpreters should remember to keep the signs clear and crisp to be easily received and understood by the DeafBlind individual (Chambers et al., 2019). For example, signs that might be initialized, such as an “L” moving left to represent “moving left” or “something is on the left side,” may need to be spelled or the concept expanded on to ensure clarity and understanding on the part of the DeafBlind individual.

**Tracking** is a method of communication used by individuals who communicate using a signed language and whose ability to see is impacted by a field of vision that changes, possibly caused by Retinitis Pigmentosa. The signed communication is understood by the DeafBlind individual holding or touching the signer’s wrist or forearm to assist in visually following (tracking) the signer’s hands (RIT, 2018). An interpreter working with someone who prefers to use this method of communication does not need to be concerned with making many modifications to the signs but instead have an awareness that the production of signs may feel different due to the added weight/pull from the DeafBlind person’s hand (Smith, 2002).
**Tadoma** method is used by the DeafBlind individual positioning their hand in a specific way on the face and neck of the speaker to retrieve speech information through touch (Gick, Jóhannsdóttir, Gibraiel, & Mühlbauer, 2008). According to Tabak (2006) tadoma has not been a widely used method of communication since before the 1950’s. The hand is situated on the face and neck of the speaker by placing the index finger just above the mandibular ridge, the other three fingers fanning out below the mandibular ridge and throat, the palm is held over the jaw and chin, and the thumb is lightly on the speaker’s lips (Gick et al., 2008). The DeafBlind individual receives information based on the cues by the speaker’s lip movement, jaw movement, oral airflow, and laryngeal vibration (Reed, Rabinowitz, Durlach, Braida, Conway-Fithian, & Schultz, 1985). This method of communication requires the DeafBlind individual to practice many years for it to be of benefit (Gick et al., 2008).

**Print on Palm** is the spelling of words with the index finger on the surface of the palm (Obretenova, Halko, Plow, Pascual-Leone, & Merabet, 2010). This method of communication can be used if the DeafBlind individual has a familiarity with the printed alphabet being used (Crossroads, 2018). When communicating using the print-on-palm method, it is clearer to use the capital form of the alphabet and staying on the palm area rather than printing the letters towards the fingers (Morgan, 1998).

**Haptics** is tactile signaling that can be used to provide visual information by touch (Nielsen, 2010). This visual information could be visible emotions exhibited by people, facial expressions and body language, or even the layout of the surrounding environment (be it inside or outside) (Senses Australia, 2018). There are trainings individuals can receive to learn different haptic signals. DeafBlind individuals can also create their own haptic signal to mean or represent certain things. An example of a haptic signal often used by DeafBlind individuals is a big “X”
traced on their back or arm indicating an emergency situation that requires everyone to leave urgently (Smith, 2002). The use of haptics can provide visual information to the DeafBlind individual about the environment, moods, and facial gestures of the people around the individual (Nielsen, 2010). The person producing the haptic signals to the DeafBlind individual needs to be aware of what is happening in their surroundings. If people in the environment are laughing, smiling, crying, sleeping, or doing any other behaviors, haptics can be used to provide this information to the DeafBlind person. The haptic signals are typically received on the back, arms, or hands (Nielsen, 2010). The person providing the haptic signals will need to communicate with the DeafBlind individual to know where the preferred location to receive the haptic signals is. Again, haptics is a method to provide visual information that is added to the communication, not replacing the communication due to the fact that it is not a language itself (Nielsen, 2010).

**Technology** is another communication avenue that can be incorporated and used by a DeafBlind individual. Technology can play an important role in supporting communication and sharing information between the public and the DeafBlind community (Andersson et al., 2006). Technology can be used for distance communication (e.g., email, online ordering, texting) and communicating with someone who does not share the same mode of communication. There are a variety of technological devices that are available to the DeafBlind community. Some of the technologies available are Braille devices, scanners, optical character recognition software, screen readers, magnification devices, and alerting devices (Bapin Group, 2012). Many of these devices can be costly but there are programs available to help the individual obtain a device at little or no cost. One of these programs is iCanConnect (2017), a national DeafBlind equipment distribution program. To qualify for this program the individual needs to meet the federal guidelines for disability and income guidelines (iCanConnect, 2017). If the individual qualifies
for this program, that individual would participate in a technology assessment to find technology that matches the communication needs. Once the technology has been received, the individual receives free training with the technology (iCanConnect, 2017).

Above are several modes of communication used, but by no means the only modes of communication used, in the DeafBlind community and the interpreter or signer should remember the communication often varies between DeafBlind individuals (Smith, 2002). As one gains more experience in working with the DeafBlind community, the more one will be able to assess and adjust their mode of communication to better match the DeafBlind individual for a successful communication outcome.

**DeafBlind Interpreting Compared to Visual ASL Interpreting**

When interpreting for an individual who receives information via American Sign Language (ASL) through visual means, it is important that the interpreter remains in the line of sight of the individual. When an interpreter is providing communication access to a DeafBlind individual the interpreting can take on a very different approach than interpreting using visual ASL. As previously mentioned, there are many different modes of communication used by the DeafBlind community.

Interpreting using visual ASL is different than a tactile (or non-visual) use of ASL. In research done by Collins and Petronio (1998), how a language designed for visual reception is adapted and changed to be used tactilely is analyzed. The researchers point out that it is important for interpreters- learning about how to interpret for the DeafBlind community- to remember the modes of communication are sociolinguistic in nature (Collins & Petronio, 1998). This means it is crucial that the interpreter learn the linguistic nuances of the DeafBlind
community with whom the interpreter works closely. When interpreting using visual ASL, the interpreter receives the spoken information and interprets that visually to the ASL user.

When interpreting in a DeafBlind setting, the interpreter not only interprets the linguistic information, but also the visual information that occurs in the environment (Raistrick, 1995). It is also important for the interpreter to have an understanding of lighting and distance for DeafBlind individuals to use any residual sight if they so desire (Raistrick, 1995). In visual ASL interpretation, facial expression is of great importance and a crucial part of the language, but when communicating with DeafBlind individuals those facial expressions need to be modified and adapted for tactile reception (Petronio & Dively, 2006).

As one conveys the visual environment, it is important remain neutral and provide only the facts about the environment and not include personal opinions or bias (Chambers et al., 2019). The description of a room can be done by giving size (e.g. by counting the steps from one wall to another), by how many tables (including the shape and size) and chairs are set up in the room, or by how many people are in the room (Chambers et al., 2019). Providing this visual information alongside the auditory information helps DeafBlind individuals orient themselves to the setting and what is occurring around them.

When working in a DeafBlind interpreting environment, the role of the interpreter might be modified from the interpreter role at a visual ASL interpreted environment. For example, if a printed document were to be passed around for all participants to view then the interpreter would interpret not only the auditory information but also what is printed on the document (Chambers et al., 2019). Another modification to the role of the interpreter might also be to guide the DeafBlind person from one area to another area. A possible reason for requiring the interpreter to provide guiding services would be if a last-minute change of relocating a meeting place or
changing rooms at a medical appointment were to occur and a support service provider was not currently present (Smith, 2002). In the event that an interpreter is called upon to guide the DeafBlind individual, it might behoove an interpreter working with the DeafBlind community to receive training on how to guide someone (Chambers et al., 2019).

DeafBlind interpreting can be more physically and mentally demanding, it may require more rest breaks and a greater benefit for a team interpreter to be present (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2002). It is also important to note that the number of DeafBlind individuals at any given assignment will influence the number of interpreters needed for that assignment (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2002). An example of this would be if two DeafBlind individuals are at a meeting with an individual who does not communicate by using a signed language. One of the DeafBlind individuals uses tactile communication while the other individual uses low vision communication. There would need to be two separate teams of interpreters, one team for the DeafBlind individual using tactile communication and one team for the DeafBlind individual using low vision communication. Therefore, a meeting between three individuals (two DeafBlind people and one person not communicating in the signed language) could require four interpreters to have a successful communication outcome due to the various communication demands.

In considering what the literature review has uncovered thus far, there is an apparent difference to how an interpreter should approach a DeafBlind interpreting assignment compared to an assignment where the Deaf/hard of hearing individual uses or has the use of sight. By providing awareness and trainings in the area of interpreting within the DeafBlind community, interpreters can better match the consumers’ communication needs and preferences during assignments. It is the researcher’s hope that this information can be shared and used among the
interpreting communities working in the San Joaquin Valley. Discussing the methodology, research conducted, and results from the research are in the coming pages.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The design, participants, process, and data analysis procedures will be discussed in this section.

Design of the Investigation

This research was conducted utilizing two online surveys. One survey was designed for DeafBlind individuals and the other survey was designed for American Sign Language/English interpreters. The survey for the DeafBlind individuals asked questions about their perspective of the quality and skills of the interpreters available in their community. The survey for the interpreters asked questions pertaining to the training they have or have not received for DeafBlind interpreting and what knowledge and skill sets they have to successfully interpret in a DeafBlind setting.

The two surveys were designed to show whether or not the perspective from the DeafBlind individuals about the interpreters’ skill set and knowledge in the community was similar to what the interpreters themselves felt about their skill set and knowledge pertaining to DeafBlind interpreting.

The purpose for using a survey was to gather data from two populations that reside and work across the large geographical area of the San Joaquin Valley. A benefit of using a survey was for the anonymous factor. The participants could respond honestly without the concern of someone identifying who they are. Some limitations of using surveys are the researcher is unable to ask for clarifying questions or ask follow up questions for various responses. The surveys also ask the participants to self-report based on their feelings and perceptions without having a baseline to compare/contrast to. The reason for asking these self-reporting type questions is to
start gathering some qualitative data on what the communities (both DeafBlind and interpreters) are experiencing from their perspective. These surveys are designed to open the communication between these two communities - to begin gathering data on the interpreting needs for assignments with DeafBlind consumers in the San Joaquin Valley.

**Participants**

The target population for this research was DeafBlind community members and ASL/English interpreters in the San Joaquin Valley of California. The individuals were over the age of 18 and were invited to participate via a link to the anonymous survey distributed through email. In order to contact these participants, the researcher sent an email with a description of the study and a link to the consent form and survey to agencies that contract with ASL/English interpreters and agencies providing services to the DeafBlind community. The agencies would then distribute that information to the interpreter and DeafBlind communities.

**Process**

The online surveys were sent out to the agencies and then distributed to the DeafBlind and interpreting communities. The surveys were anonymous to encourage the participants to be honest in their responses. There were no foreseeable risks to participating in the survey and the individuals had the option to stop participating in the survey at any time. Prior to starting the survey, the participants read the consent form and if they were willing to participate they were directed to click the link to the survey. A copy of the consent form for both the DeafBlind participants and the interpreters can be found in Appendix A.

The online surveys consisted of a combination of multiple-choice responses, a scale of “Never” to “Always” to show frequency with which they experience the situation being described, “Yes” or “No” responses, and short answer responses. The questions on the survey to
the DeafBlind participants included their preferred mode of communication, whether or not they felt the interpreters had enough knowledge/skills for DeafBlind interpreting, and what they would recommend to future interpreters. The questions on the survey to the interpreter participants included what type of training they had received, whether or not they felt competent to interpret in DeafBlind settings, their knowledge about DeafBlind interpreting, and what they would like to learn more about the DeafBlind interpreting field. A copy of the survey instruments can be found in Appendix B.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

The type of data collected in the research was predominately quantitative with a few qualitative questions/responses. The quantitative data from the surveys have been analyzed and broken down to show how many individuals of each population marked which option. The qualitative data was analyzed by the researcher to look for correlations between the various responses of each completed survey (Hale & Napier, 2013).
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section shows the results from the interpreter participant survey and the DeafBlind participant survey while comparing and contrasting their responses.

Results

A total of nine individuals participated in the online survey. Five of the individuals are practicing interpreters and four of the individuals are DeafBlind. The two surveys were developed to gather data from the interpreters’ perspective and the DeafBlind individuals’ perspective about the interpreters’ knowledge and skillset to interpret for the DeafBlind community. The following results have been organized in several categories to represent the theme of the questions, not by the question number they appeared in the survey. The purpose of providing the data in categories was to draw comparisons between the interpreters’ responses and the DeafBlind individuals’ responses.

For the survey sent to the interpreters, most of the responses were ranked on a scale of one to five. When the responses fell in the middle of the scale, the researcher would record the data as “sometimes” or “somewhat.” The responses to most of the questions on the survey sent to the DeafBlind participants required them to rank their responses on a scale of one to ten. When the responses fell in the middle of the scale the researcher would record the data as “sometimes” or “somewhat.”

Background of Participants Regarding Interpreting for DeafBlind Individuals

Before delving into the perspectives from each group, some background about the participants is important to better understand who the perspectives are coming from. In the survey sent to the interpreter participants, the first question asked to help establish a background
is “How long have you been a practicing interpreter?” Of the responses, four interpreters have been a practicing interpreter for five years or less and one interpreter has been practicing six to ten years. These responses indicate that most of the interpreter participants are fairly new to being a practicing interpreter.

![Pie chart showing the distribution of years since becoming a practicing interpreter among 5 respondents. 80% have been practicing for less than 5 years, 20% for 6-10 years.]

*Figure 1. How long have you been a practicing interpreter?*

The second question asked to the interpreters about their background pertains to their formal education/training with the goal of becoming a practicing interpreter, “Did you attend an interpreting training/education program?” All five interpreters responded “yes” to the question.
The next question asked to the interpreters is “How familiar are you with DeafBlind interpreting?” to which the interpreters responded on a scale of one to five, one being “not familiar” to five being “very familiar.” One interpreter responded with not being to familiar with DeafBlind interpreting, three interpreters responded with they were somewhat familiar with DeafBlind interpreting, and one interpreter responded with being familiar with DeafBlind interpreting. None of the interpreters answered with being very familiar with DeafBlind interpreting. These responses are interesting because the following question asked the interpreters “Have you interpreted for DeafBlind individuals before?” of which three of the five interpreters responded “yes.”
The interpreters were then asked “What is your DeafBlind interpreting skill level?” Four of the interpreters ranked themselves at the novice level and one interpreter responded at the intermediate level. The following question asks “How often do you interpret for DeafBlind individuals?” on a scale of one to five, one being “never” and five being “often.” Three of the five interpreters responded with never, one interpreter responded with almost never, and one interpreter responded with sometimes. The reason for the interpreters not interpreting very often in the DeafBlind setting is unclear, but due to the previous responses to how familiar the
interpreters are with DeafBlind interpreting and how they viewed their DeafBlind interpreting skill level might be factors as to why they do not interpret very often in the setting.

**Figure 5.** What is your DeafBlind interpreting skill level?

**Figure 6.** How often do you interpret for DeafBlind individuals?

The last question asked to the interpreters to help establish their background is “How familiar are you with the interpreting demands and skills associated with DeafBlind interpreting?” The interpreters were asked to respond on a scale of one to five, one being “not familiar” and five being “very familiar.” One of the interpreters responded with not being very
familiar with the demands and skills associated with DeafBlind interpreting. Two interpreters responded with being somewhat familiar with the demands and skills associated with DeafBlind interpreting and two interpreters responded with being familiar with the demands and skills. None of the interpreters responded with being very familiar with the demands and skills associated with DeafBlind interpreting.

![Graph showing familiarity with interpreting demands and skills associated with DeafBlind interpreting]

*Figure 7. How familiar are you with the interpreting demands and skills associated with DeafBlind interpreting?*

In the survey for DeafBlind participants, the first question asks “How often do you use interpreters?” on a scale of one to ten, with one being “Never” and ten being “Always.” Of the DeafBlind participants, three responded with always using an interpreter and one responded with sometimes uses an interpreter.
The next question asked to help establish the background of the DeafBlind participants was “Do you communicate by using ProTactile ASL?” The responses from the DeafBlind participants are that two of them answered “yes” while two of them answered “no.” These responses are consistent with what research has shown, from the literature review portion of this paper, that not all DeafBlind community members use the same mode of communication.
The interpreters responding have all received formal training and education from an interpreter program. Most of them have worked with DeafBlind consumers from time to time and identify themselves as being novice DeafBlind interpreters. The DeafBlind responses show most of them use interpreters and 50% use Protactile communication.

Now that some background information has been established from both the DeafBlind participants and the interpreter participants, the next category, pertaining to trainings, can be presented.

**Trainings for Interpreters**

This next category of questions asked the interpreters and the DeafBlind individuals for their perspective on the local trainings available to interpreters. The data from the interpreters’ responses will be presented first and then the response from the DeafBlind individuals will follow.

The first question about trainings asked to the interpreters is “Have you received trainings on DeafBlind interpreting?” Three interpreters responded yes and two interpreters responded no. When then asked “What type of trainings have you received on DeafBlind interpreting?” three interpreters responded with workshops and two interpreters responded by receiving training from a DeafBlind community member/socializing.
Have you received training on DeafBlind interpreting?

5 responses

- 40% Yes
- 60% No

*Figure 10. Have you received training on DeafBlind interpreting?*

What type of training have you received on DeafBlind interpreting?

5 responses

- 40% Workshops
- 60% DeafBlind community member/socializing

*Figure 11. What type of training have you received on DeafBlind interpreting?*

The following question to the interpreters is “How satisfied are you in the training you have received on DeafBlind interpreting?” The interpreters were asked to answer the question on a scale of one to five, one being “not satisfied” and five being “very satisfied.” Two interpreters responded with not being satisfied, two interpreters responded with being somewhat satisfied, and one interpreter responded to being very satisfied with the training that have received.
How satisfied are you in the training you have received on DeafBlind interpreting?

![Bar chart showing satisfaction levels for DeafBlind interpreting training.]

**Figure 12.** How satisfied are you in the training you have received on DeafBlind interpreting?

The interpreters were then asked “Are you interested in receiving more training on DeafBlind interpreting?” to which four interpreters responded with yes and one interpreter marking other with the explanation of “perhaps in the future. At the moment, it does not align with my current position(s).”

**Are you interested in receiving more training on DeafBlind interpreting?**

![Pie chart showing interest levels for more training on DeafBlind interpreting.]

**Figure 13.** Are you interested in receiving more training on DeafBlind interpreting?
The final question to interpreters asked about trainings is “Are there DeafBlind interpreting trainings available locally to you?” Three interpreters responded with yes and two interpreters responded with no.

![Pie chart](image)

**Figure 14.** Are there DeafBlind interpreting trainings available locally to you?

The DeafBlind participants were also asked several questions pertaining to interpreters receiving trainings on how to provide interpreting services to the DeafBlind community. The first question asked to the DeafBlind participants is “Are there enough interpreters, that work with the DeafBlind, available in your community?” The DeafBlind individuals were asked to respond on a scale of one to ten, one being “no interpreters available” to ten being “many interpreters available.” Two DeafBlind participants responded with few to no interpreters are available, one DeafBlind participant responded with some interpreters are available, and one DeafBlind participant responded with there are interpreters available. None responded with many interpreters are available.
Figure 15. Are there enough interpreters, that work with the DeafBlind, available in your community?

The next question to the DeafBlind individuals is “Do you want more interpreters to know how to interpret for the DeafBlind community?” Three DeafBlind participants responded yes and one responded no. A follow up question was then asked to the participants answering yes to please explain why. Only two of the three participants who responded yes explained. The first participant said yes to “better match [the] DeafBlind person” and the second participant said yes because “many DeafBlind [individuals] are being left out and alone.”
Do you want more interpreters to know how to interpret for the DeafBlind community?

The final question asked to the DeafBlind participants about interpreter trainings is “Do you want interpreters to receive more training on DeafBlind interpreting?” Three DeafBlind participants responded with yes and one responded with no. The participants who responded yes were then asked to explain why. The first individual responded yes so interpreters “keep improving how to communicate.” The second individual responded yes so interpreters are “accurate and not confusing.” The third individual responded yes so interpreters “get better [at] communication.”

Do you want interpreters to receive more training on DeafBlind interpreting?

Figure 16. Do you want more interpreters to know how to interpret for the DeafBlind community?

Figure 17. Do you want interpreters to receive more training on DeafBlind interpreting?
Interpreter Familiarity with Modes of Communication

The following questions presented, from both the interpreters’ perspective and the DeafBlind perspective, fall under the category how familiar the interpreters are with the various modes of communication used within the DeafBlind community. The data from the interpreter participants will be presented first followed by the data from the DeafBlind participants.

The first question asked to the interpreter participants about communication is “How important is the ability to match communication preferences from consumers?” The participants were asked to respond on a scale of one to five, one being “not important” to five being “very important.” All five interpreter participants responded that the ability to match consumer’s communication preference is very important.

Figure 18. How important is the ability to match communication preferences from consumers?

The next question asks “How familiar are you with the diverse communication modalities used within the DeafBlind community?” The participants were asked to respond on a scale of one to five, one being “not familiar” to five being “very familiar.” Two interpreter participants
responded with not being very familiar with communication modalities. One participant responded with being somewhat familiar with the communication modalities. Two interpreter participants responded with being familiar with communication modalities. None of the participants responded with being very familiar with the communication modalities.

How familiar are you with the diverse communication modalities used within the DeafBlind community?

![Bar chart showing familiarity levels with communication modalities](chart.png)

Figure 19. How familiar are you with the diverse communication modalities used within the DeafBlind community?

Interpreter participants were then asked “How familiar are you with ProTactile ASL communication?” The participants were asked to respond on a scale of one to five, one being “not familiar” to five being “very familiar.” Two interpreter participants responded with not being very familiar, two participants responded with being somewhat familiar, and one interpreter participants responded with being familiar. None of the interpreter participants responded with being very familiar. Then the interpreters were asked “How familiar are you with Haptic communication?” to which the responses were on a scale of one to five, one being “not familiar” to five being “very familiar.” Four interpreter participants responded with not being very familiar with Haptic communication while one interpreter participant responded with being very familiar.
somewhat familiar with Haptic communication. None of the participants responded with being very familiar with Haptic communication.

The following question was then asked to the interpreter participants, “How familiar are you with the various technology available to the DeafBlind community?” The participants were asked to respond on a scale of one to five, one being “not familiar” to five being “very familiar.” One interpreter responded with not being familiar, three interpreters responded to being
somewhat not familiar, and one interpreter responded with being familiar with technology available to the DeafBlind community. None of the interpreter participants responded with being very familiar.

![Bar chart](image)

**Figure 22.** How familiar are you with the various technology available to the DeafBlind community?

The final question to interpreter participants pertaining to communication is “How important is including environmental information while interpreting to a DeafBlind individual?” The participants were asked to respond on a scale of one to five, one being “not important” to five being “very important.” One interpreter responded that it is important and four interpreters responded it is very important to include environmental information while interpreting to a DeafBlind individual.
How important is including environmental information while interpreting to a DeafBlind individual?

The first question asked to the DeafBlind participants pertaining to interpreters’ familiarity with the modes of communication used in the DeafBlind community is “Do interpreters ask you what your preferred mode of communication is?” The responses are on a scale of one to ten, one being “interpreters never ask” to ten being “interpreters always ask.” Two DeafBlind participants responded that the interpreters sometimes ask what their preferred mode of communication is. Two DeafBlind participants responded that the interpreters always ask what their preferred mode of communication is.
The next question to the DeafBlind participants is “Do interpreters provide both environmental information and communication information to you so you know everything that is happening?” The DeafBlind participants were asked to respond on a scale of one to ten, one being “interpreters never provide both” to ten being “interpreters always provide both.” One DeafBlind participant responded that interpreters never provide both. Two DeafBlind participants responded that interpreters sometimes provide both. One DeafBlind participant responded that interpreters always provide both.
Figure 25. Do interpreters provide both environmental information and communication information to you so you know everything that is happening?

The following question asks the DeafBlind participants “Are the interpreters, in your community, competent in DeafBlind communication modes?” The participants were asked to respond on a scale of one to ten, one being “not competent” to ten being “very competent.” One DeafBlind participant responded that interpreters are not competent in DeafBlind communication modes. Two DeafBlind participants responded that interpreters are somewhat competent in DeafBlind communication modes. One DeafBlind participant responded that interpreters are very competent in DeafBlind communication modes.
Are the interpreters, in your community, competent in DeafBlind communication modes?

4 responses

Figure 26. Are the interpreters, in your community, competent in DeafBlind communication modes?

The final question to the DeafBlind participants about their perspective of the interpreters’ familiarity of the communication modes used within the DeafBlind community is asking about the interpreters’ communication skills. The participants are asked to respond on a scale of one to ten, one being “not satisfied” to ten being “very satisfied,” to the question “How satisfied are you with the interpreters’ communication skills?” Two DeafBlind participants responded that they are not satisfied with the interpreters’ communication skills. One DeafBlind participant responded they are satisfied with the interpreters’ communication skills. One DeafBlind participant responded that they are very satisfied with the interpreters’ communication skills.
Final Questions/Wrap Up

To wrap up the surveys, the final questions for the interpreter participants pertain to their knowledge of DeafBlind culture and what would they like to learn or know more about. The final question to wrap up the DeafBlind participant survey asks about what they would like interpreters to know.

On the interpreter participant survey, one of the final questions asks “How familiar are you with DeafBlind culture?” The responses are on a scale of one to five, one being “not familiar” to five being “very familiar.” Two interpreter participants responded that they are not familiar with DeafBlind culture. One interpreter responded they were somewhat not familiar with DeafBlind culture. One interpreter was somewhat familiar with DeafBlind culture. One interpreter participant responded with somewhat very familiar with DeafBlind culture. None of the interpreter participants were very familiar with DeafBlind culture.
Figure 28. How familiar are you with DeafBlind culture?

The next question asked to the interpreter participants is “How familiar are you with what can cause an individual to become DeafBlind?” The participants were asked to respond on a scale of one to five, one being “not familiar” to five being “very familiar.” One interpreter participant responded to being not familiar with the causes. One interpreter participant responded with being somewhat not familiar with the causes. Three interpreter participants responded with being somewhat very familiar with the causes. None of the interpreter participants responded with being very familiar with what can cause an individual to become DeafBlind.
How familiar are you with what can cause an individual to become DeafBlind?

5 responses

![Bar Chart]

Figure 29. How familiar are you with what can cause an individual to become DeafBlind?

The final question to wrap up the survey to the interpreter participants is “Regarding DeafBlind interpreting, what would you like to learn or know about?” The interpreters were asked to respond via short answers. The first interpreter responded with:

Appropriate setup for effective interpreting in various settings, especially if working with a CDI [Certified Deaf Interpreter] or DI [Deaf Interpreter] while working with a DeafBlind client. Many times, the environment has been an issue for the few DB [DeafBlind] interpreting scenarios I’ve had where positioning so that the client can interact while also the interpreters can hear/see what is going on and also not disrupt the activities. This could be in class rooms, outdoor activities, group discussions, or even in office settings.

The second interpreter participant responded with “An overview of the different methods of communication and how to best provide access and inclusion: important elements a hearing-seeing person might overlook.” The third interpreter participant commented “Haptics and more
practice with protactile signing” is what they would like to learn and know more about. The fourth interpreter wants to learn and know more about “how different is it [DeafBlind interpreting] compared to traditional interpreting?” The final interpreter participant would like to learn and know more about “ProTactile and Haptic communication.”

The final question to wrap up the DeafBlind participant survey is “What do you want interpreters to learn and know about working with the DeafBlind community?” Only three of the four participants responded to this question. One of the DeafBlind participants wants interpreters to learn and know more about “protactile and ASL.” Another DeafBlind participant wants interpreters to learn and know more about how “to be more accurate of surrounding actions” which the researcher took to mean what is happening in the environment around the DeafBlind individual. The final thought from the DeafBlind participants is for interpreters to learn and know more about how “Protactile ASL provide[s] [a] lot of information of background and people.”

Discussion of Findings

The following discussion presents the results of the data collected from individuals in the San Joaquin Valley following the categories of participant background, trainings for interpreters, interpreter familiarity with DeafBlind communication, and the final wrap up from the interpreter and DeafBlind participants.

In the background portion of the survey, the results from the interpreter participants revealed all of the interpreter participants have been a practicing interpreter for less than ten years, with most of them reporting less than five years. All of the interpreter participants responded they had attended an interpreter training/education program. The interpreter participants reported only being somewhat familiar with DeafBlind interpreting. All of the
interpreters responded to having the skills for DeafBlind interpreting at the intermediate level or less, four out of five reported being at the novice level. When asked how familiar they were to the various demands and skills of DeafBlind interpreting, the interpreter participants responded to being somewhat to not familiar with the demands and skills. Three out of the five interpreter participants have interpreted for the DeafBlind community, although it is not often. It is interesting to note that some of the interpreters have interpreted for the DeafBlind community even though the results from the survey indicate the interpreter participants are not very familiar with the field of DeafBlind interpreting. The background portion of the survey sent to the DeafBlind participants, revealed that most of them use interpreters quite often and two out of four use Protactile ASL.

Under the category of training for the interpreters, the interpreter participants reported to receiving training on DeafBlind interpreting from workshops and the DeafBlind community. None of the interpreters reported the training for DeafBlind interpreting was from their interpreter training/education program. The interpreter participants did report, however, that of the trainings received, they were somewhat to very satisfied and most of them were interested in receiving more training on DeafBlind interpreting. The interpreters were also asked if there were DeafBlind interpreting trainings available locally, to which three out of five replied “yes.”

When the DeafBlind participants were asked about whether or not they wanted the interpreters to receive more training on DeafBlind interpreting most of them responded “yes.” This aligns with the interpreter participants’ response to wanting more training as well. When asked what trainings they would like the interpreters to receive more of, the DeafBlind participants responded with learning the various communication modes and to be clearer and more accurate. Most of the DeafBlind participants also reported that they felt there were not
enough interpreters available to them and that they wanted more interpreters trained and available for DeafBlind interpreting.

In the next category the participants from both groups were asked about their perspective on how familiar the interpreters are with the various modes of communication used in the DeafBlind community. The interpreter participants all responded that it is important to match the communication preferences of the consumer. Then they were asked how familiar they were with the various modes of communication used by the DeafBlind community, to which they responded to only being somewhat familiar. The interpreter participants responded they were somewhat familiar with Protactile ASL and not very familiar with Haptic communication. The interpreter participants were also not very familiar with the technology that can be used by the DeafBlind community. The final question to the interpreters in this category was about the importance of providing environmental information while interpreting, the interpreters responded it was important.

The DeafBlind participants were asked how satisfied they were with the communication skills of the interpreters and the data collected shows there are varying perspectives. Half of the DeafBlind participants reported to not being satisfied with the communication skills of the interpreters and half of the participants reported they are satisfied. The DeafBlind participants also responded the interpreters were only somewhat competent in DeafBlind interpreting. Three of the four DeafBlind participants reported the interpreters asked them their preferred mode of communication, which seems to align with the interpreter participants response that it was important to match preferred communication modes of the consumer. The final question in this category asked to the DeafBlind participants asked if the interpreters provided environmental information while interpreting? Most of the participants responded to the final question that it
sometimes occurs, which does not align with the interpreter participants’ response of it being important.

The final category included a few follow up questions as well as what the interpreter participants wanted to learn more about and what the DeafBlind participants want interpreters to learn more about. The interpreter participants reported to being somewhat or not very familiar with DeafBlind culture and what can cause an individual to become DeafBlind. In summary, the interpreter participants want to learn more about working with Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDI) and Deaf Interpreters (DI) in a DeafBlind setting, how to work with the environment of a DeafBlind interpreting situation, various modes of communication, and how DeafBlind interpreting compares to traditional interpreting settings. The DeafBlind participants want interpreters to learn more about Protactile communication and how to be more accurate when providing environmental information. The responses from the interpreter participants align with the responses from the DeafBlind participants; the interpreters should learn more about communication and how to provide that communication based on the needs of the setting/environment.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATION

From the data gathered in San Joaquin Valley, it appears the field of DeafBlind interpreting is young and unknown to some in the interpreting field. The information provided in the literature review has shown there are many nuances unique to the field of DeafBlind interpreting that interpreters might need to be aware of if they decided to work with this population. Unfortunately, in the San Joaquin Valley of California the interpreters going through the four-year interpreting program are not exposed to and trained in DeafBlind interpreting, according to the university’s website and from the researcher’s personal experience of attending the interpreting program. According to the data collected from the interpreter participants in this research, DeafBlind interpreting trainings are not locally available to some interpreters in the San Joaquin Valley. It would seem, from the review of literature and the data collected, the DeafBlind community uses interpreters to access the world around them and it would benefit the DeafBlind community to have interpreters with the skills and knowledge to provide this service successfully.

The data collected from both the interpreter and DeafBlind participants also revealed the two communities had similar perspectives on certain topics. The DeafBlind participants mentioned they would like interpreters to know more about the various communication modes and including more environmental cues and information in the interpretations. The interpreters also responded with wanting to learn more about DeafBlind communication modes and how to navigate and include environmental information. The two communities also seemed to show similar perspectives about the skills level of the interpreters could be improved upon. It is also interesting to note that the field of DeafBlind interpreting may be a relatively recent subfield to
interpreting and most of the interpreters have been interpreting for less than five years which may mean the local interpreter training and education program is not providing enough information on DeafBlind interpreting to its students. If this were to be the case, then it is all the more important for knowledge of DeafBlind interpreting be shared with the education and training programs and with the interpreting community at large. At the same time, it is also important to keep in mind the limitations of this research study.

**Limitations of the Study**

The data collected for this research was only from the San Joaquin Valley of California with one four-year interpreter training and education program in this geographical area. This research does not include the perspectives of the DeafBlind and interpreter communities outside this region of focus. What has been revealed in this study may not be a true representation of the DeafBlind and interpreting communities throughout the entire state of California or the nation. The data also required the researcher to infer some of the information when the responses from various participants were not entirely clear due to these surveys having limitations in responses and the researcher being unable to ask for clarification from the participants.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Research in this specialized field of DeafBlind interpreting is limited and requires more research to be added. Future research may include a needs assessment for DeafBlind interpreters in state of California, which would encompass many more DeafBlind communities than this current study and a wider range of interpreters. Knowledge about DeafBlind interpreting should be shared with interpreter training/education programs and future workshop presenters to better serve and work with the DeafBlind communities. The more research collected, analyzed, and shared will assist in unlocking the mysteries to DeafBlind interpreting.
REFERENCES


https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492615618271


This research is a part of a graduate thesis project at Western Oregon University in the Interpreting Studies program. The purpose of this study is to gather data on DeafBlind interpreting to share with the community of interpreters about this specialized field.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve taking an online survey that can be accessed directly through this link: **Click Here**. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes.

Please understand that by clicking the above link you are giving consent to participate in this survey. You can stop participating in this survey at any time without penalty. Simply click the “X” button if you would like to quit and/or close your browser.

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary, and responses will remain anonymous. You must be 18 years or older to participate in this study. There are no foreseeable risks to your participation. There will be no compensation for participating in this survey.

If this survey is not accessible to you, please contact the principle researcher, Krystle Chambers. Krystle Chambers will do her best to explore options for accommodations to provide alternative formats.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Western Oregon University has approved this research project. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the review process, please contact the IRB at (503) 838-9200 or irb@wou.edu. This survey is being conducted under the guidance of Amanda R. Smith who may be reached by emailing smithar@wou.edu.

If you have any questions regarding this research, please feel free to contact the researcher:

Krystle Chambers

Cell (text or voice): 805-503-8672

Email: kchambers18@mail.wou.edu

Thank you,

Krystle Chambers

Master’s student, Interpreting Studies

Western Oregon University
APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS

The following surveys were sent to the participants using Google Forms via a link in the consent letter.

For Interpreter Participants

1) How long have you been a practicing interpreter?
   a. Less than 5 years
   b. 6-10 years
   c. 11-15 years
   d. 16-20 years
   e. Over 20 years
2) Did you attend an interpreting training/education program?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Other:
3) How familiar are you with DeafBlind interpreting?
   a. 1 (not familiar) 2 3 4 5 (very familiar)
4) Have you interpreted for DeafBlind individuals before?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Other:
5) How often do you interpret for DeafBlind individuals?
   a. 1 (never) 2 3 4 5 (Often)
6) Have you received training on DeafBlind interpreting?
   a. Yes
   b. No
7) How familiar are you with ProTactile ASL communication?
   a. 1 (not familiar) 2 3 4 5 (very familiar)
8) How familiar are you with Haptic communication?
   a. 1 (not familiar) 2 3 4 5 (very familiar)
9) What is your DeafBlind interpreting skill level?
   a. Proficient
   b. Intermediate
   c. Novice
10) What type of training have you received on DeafBlind interpreting?
    a. Workshops
    b. DeafBlind community member/socializing
    c. Interpreter training/education program
d. Never received training

e. Other:

11) How satisfied are you in the training you have received on DeafBlind interpreting?
   a. 1 (not satisfied) 2 3 4 5 (very satisfied)

12) How important is the ability to match communication preferences from consumers?
   a. 1 (not important) 2 3 4 5 (very important)

13) How familiar are you with the diverse communication modalities used within the DeafBlind community?
   a. 1 (not familiar) 2 3 4 5 (very familiar)

14) How important is including environmental information while interpreting to a DeafBlind individual?
   a. 1 (not important) 2 3 4 5 (very important)

15) How familiar are you with the various technology available to the DeafBlind community?
   a. 1 (not familiar) 2 3 4 5 (very familiar)

16) How familiar are you with the DeafBlind culture?
   a. 1 (not familiar) 2 3 4 5 (very familiar)

17) How familiar are you with what can cause an individual to become DeafBlind?
   a. 1 (not familiar) 2 3 4 5 (very familiar)

18) How familiar are you with the interpreting demands and skills associated with DeafBlind interpreting?
   a. 1 (not familiar) 2 3 4 5 (very familiar)

19) Are you interested in receiving more training on DeafBlind interpreting?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Other:

20) Are there DeafBlind interpreting trainings available locally to you?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Other:

21) Regarding DeafBlind interpreting, what would you like to learn or know more about?
   a. Comment:
For DeafBlind Participants

1) How often do you use interpreters?
   a. 1 (Never) 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Always)

2) How satisfied are you with the interpreters’ communication skills?
   a. 1 (Not Satisfied) 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Very Satisfied)

3) Are there enough interpreters, that work with the DeafBlind, available in your community?
   a. 1 (No interpreters) 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Many interpreters available)

4) Are the interpreters, in your community, competent in DeafBlind communication modes?
   a. 1 (Not competent) 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Very competent)

5) Do you want interpreters to receive more training on DeafBlind interpreting?
   a. Yes
   b. No
      i. Please explain your answer:

6) Do interpreters ask you what your preferred mode of communication is?
   a. 1 (Never) 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Always)

7) Do interpreters provide both environmental information and communication information to you so you know everything that is happening?
   a. 1 (Never) 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Always)

8) Do you communicate by using ProTactile ASL?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Other:

9) Do you want more interpreters to know how to interpret for the DeafBlind community?
   a. Yes
   b. No
      i. Please explain your answer:

10) What do you want interpreters to learn and know about working with the DeafBlind community?
    Comment: