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# 'My Fellow Citizens': Deaf Perspectives on Translating the Opening Line of a Presidential Inaugural Address into American Sign Language

## **Cover Page Footnote**

Author Note: This research was supported by funds from the Carol Easley Denny Fund awarded to Dr. Laurie Swabey at St. Catherine University, St. Paul, Minnesota. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Laurie Swabey at St. Catherine University, 2004 Randolph Avenue, #4280, St. Paul, Minnesota 55105 Email: laswabey@stkate.edu

## **‘My Fellow Citizens’: Deaf Perspectives on Translating the Opening Line of a Presidential Inaugural Address into American Sign Language**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Translating from English into American Sign Language holds a number of challenges, particularly when the English source text is a formal, high profile, scripted speech. This study examined perspectives of Deaf bilinguals on translating President Obama’s 2009 inaugural address into American Sign Language. We conducted a microanalysis of translations of the opening line – ‘my fellow citizens’ – to investigate the product and processes employed by Deaf translators. Five Deaf ASL-English bilinguals who are ASL teachers or interpreters/translators were asked to translate the opening paragraph of the address and were interviewed about the processes they used to render their translations. Findings revealed a lack of standard translations for the phrase among the participants, but with some overlap in lexical terms. The Deaf translators discussed the challenges in creating the translation, including how to meet the needs of a national, but unknown, Deaf audience; the lack of standard ASL correspondents for English lexical items; incorporating cultural and sociolinguistic norms of ASL; and conveying semantic intent and register. The findings provide insights into the processes of the Deaf translators, which may be helpful to both Deaf and hearing individuals when rendering interpretations and translations.

At first you were flattered by the request. A scheduler from a reputable agency contacted you with a personal appeal to interpret the upcoming presidential inaugural address for broadcast on national television. However, within minutes of accepting the assignment, reality began to sink in. Undoubtedly, professional speechwriters will have crafted this high-profile address with careful consideration of every word. The speech will contain historical references, metaphors, scriptural quotes, and names of people and places. The White House will release a copy of the address only 20 minutes prior to broadcast, so there will be little time to prepare. To top it off, millions of people,

including a wide audience of Deaf<sup>1</sup> individuals with varying communication preferences, will view the inauguration. How could anyone produce an interpretation that captures the spirit and content of this historic event? How does one convey the formal tone of the address? What vocabulary will be challenging to interpret? Is it even possible to render an interpretation that is acceptable to a wide-range of Deaf viewers? Images of becoming the next Saturday Night Live parody of signed language interpreters begin to creep into your head.

In this paper we explore the perspectives of Deaf American Sign Language (ASL)-English bilinguals, who work as ASL teachers or interpreters/translators, about translating a portion of President Obama's 2009 inaugural address from English into ASL. Specifically, we conducted a microanalysis for translating 'my fellow citizens', the opening phrase in Obama's inaugural address. This microanalysis is revealing because 'my fellow citizens' encapsulates several challenges that apply to translating the full text, including being a highly formal and frozen phrase containing low frequency words. The translations were analyzed using Dimitrova's (2005) three-part model of the translation process, which involves planning, text generation, and revision.

The present study was motivated by Gile (2011), who compared the output of President Obama's 2009 inaugural address when interpreted into French, German, and Japanese. In a follow-up study, Swabey, Nicodemus, Taylor, and Gile (2016) analyzed ASL interpretations of Obama's speech and conducted a lexical analysis across the ASL, French, German, and Japanese interpretations<sup>2</sup>. The results revealed that the language with the smallest documented vocabulary, the fewest lexical correspondents, and no shared cognates with English – ASL – contained the highest number of lexical omissions and errors across the four languages. Further, the overall variation between the ASL interpretations was striking, exemplified by different versions of the opening phrase.

The opening of U.S. presidential inaugural addresses has changed little over time. Beginning with George Washington, 35 of the 57 inaugural speeches have used the words 'fellow citizens' in their openings (Remini & Golway, 2008). Given this level of predictability, we anticipated somewhat standard interpretations for the phrase among the spoken and signed language interpretations. As anticipated, the French, German, and Japanese interpreters produced fairly uniform interpretations of the opening phrase within their languages. Their interpretations<sup>3</sup> are provided below (with words in parentheses indicating additional lexical items used by the interpreters).

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<sup>1</sup> We capitalize "Deaf" in this paper to refer to Deaf individuals who use American Sign Language as their primary language.

<sup>2</sup> The number of interpreters in each language group was as follows: French (n = 4), German (n = 5), Japanese (N = 5), and American Sign Language (n = 6).

<sup>3</sup> Franz Pöchhacker and Chikako Tsuruta supported the acquisition and use of the German and Japanese interpretations, respectively. Kathy Okumura and Masahiro Nakamura analyzed the Japanese transcripts with Daniel Gile. Daniel Gile analyzed the French transcriptions. Cindy O'Grady Farnady created the ASL transcriptions.

*English:* ‘my fellow citizens’

- (1) French: ‘*Mes (chers) compatriotes*’ or ‘*Mes (chers) concitoyens*’.  
Note: *Chers* (dear) is standard in French and more or less mandatory in this translation of ‘my fellow citizens.’
- (2) German: ‘*Meine (lieben) Mitbürgerinnen und Mitbürger*’ or ‘*(Liebe) Mitbürger.*’  
Note: *Liebe/Lieben* are also standard in German for use in this phrase.
- (3) Japanese: ‘*(shin’ai naru) kokumin (no minasama)*’ or ‘*shimin (no minasama).*’  
Note: *Shin’ai naru* (dear) is rather unnatural in Japanese and *minasama* (all of you) indicates the plural, which is not explicit in *kokumin* or *shimin* (citizens).

While the ASL interpretations contained some lexical overlap, each of the versions was distinct from one another. For example, three of four of the ASL-English interpreters began their interpretation with the sign for YOU, but each used different linguistic forms. One interpreter opened with MY. Three of the four interpreters incorporated the sign for AMERICA, while one did not. Three interpreters fingerspelled C-I-T-I-Z-E-N-S; one interpreter did not include this term. In fact, no single lexical item was used uniformly across all four ASL interpretations. The diversity among the four ASL interpretations<sup>4</sup> may be seen in the transcriptions given below.

*English:* ‘my fellow citizens’

INT1: YOU-plural(2h)-honorific AMERICA-agent C-I-T-I-Z-E-N-S YOU-plural(2h)-honorific//

INT2: YOU-plural-honorific LIVE AMERICA SAME-AS-YOU-plural (B-hs)ALL-OF-YOU(2h)//

INT3: YOU-plural(2h)-honorific AMERICA C-I-T-I-Z-E-N-S YOU-plural CITIZEN(C on shoulder) YOU(2h)-honorific//

INT4: MY SAME-AS-YOU-singular C-I-T-I-Z-E-N-S//

The ASL-English interpreters expressed numerous questions about how to interpret the opening phrase. In a follow-up interview with interpreters regarding their preparation strategies for rendering the speech, two interpreters specifically mentioned ‘my fellow citizens’ as a phrase of concern:

INT1:

I used the dictionary to look up one word and that was ‘citizens.’ Because [Obama] says, ‘my fellow citizens,’ I thought, ‘Huh, that’s different from my fellow Americans,’ but is it? So I looked up the word ‘citizen,’ and it said, ‘a person who is born into or naturalized into a country.’ So, yes, he was saying ‘my

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<sup>4</sup> Six ASL-English interpreters participated in the original study, two of which were from Canada. Here we are providing the interpretations from the four interpreters who are U.S. citizens.

fellow Americans.’ I thought, ‘Do I want to (finger)spell citizens? Is it really that important?’ Yes, it kind of is, especially in light of the birth certificate thing. It’s interesting that he chose to say ‘my fellow citizens’ versus ‘my fellow Americans,’ which is much more common. I think my interpretation was ‘AMERICA-agent C-I-T-I-Z-E-N-S.’ Actually, I’m not sure; is that meaningful in ASL? I would need to see it signed without the source text to say, ‘No, a Deaf person would never do that.’ They would just sign some sort of honorific, even though there’s more meaning in it. I don’t know.

INT2:

I really wanted to emphasize what ‘fellow citizens’ meant. That was actually a word I looked up. I know what a citizen is, but I wanted to see who I thought [Obama] was referring to when he said ‘my fellow citizens.’ Was he trying to talk about people who were born in America, or was he talking about people who live in America currently? Through the outline, as I read the rest of his speech, I realized he was talking about anyone living in America at that time. I don’t think he was referring to just natural-born citizens because throughout his speech he talks about any man, any woman, any child, any race, any culture. So he’s saying any culture, not just American culture. He’s talking to anybody who has moved to America, anybody who has made America their ideal. They’ve moved here; this is what they consider as their home now. So that’s why I didn’t just use the sign for citizens. I think he was talking to people who have moved here, and who have lived here, and whose dream was to be a success in America. That’s why, even though he said one word, my interpretation was like, seven signs.

The interpreters’ comments revealed various challenges in making appropriate lexical choices to convey the semantic intent of the opening line of President Obama’s inaugural address. Presumably, the interpreters made their choices about rendering the phrase in ASL in light of not having readily available lexical correspondents for the phrase. INT1 considered her lexical choices at length, but ultimately admitted uncertainty about the option, stating, “I don’t know.” INT2 also gave thoughtful consideration to the opening line and resolved the dilemma by using numerous signs to convey the phrase.

In the present study, we aimed to gain further insights into the challenges of interpreting ‘my fellow citizens’ by asking Deaf bilinguals to create translations of the phrase and discuss their perspectives about the translation process. We were particularly interested in three aspects of their work – planning, text generation, and revision – as described in Dimitrova’s (2005) model of the translation process. We offer this microanalysis as a window into the cognitive, linguistic, and sociocultural issues faced when rendering formal, scripted speeches into ASL.

## FUNDAMENTALS OF TRANSLATION

Creating a translation is a highly complex linguistic endeavor influenced by numerous factors before, during, and after the task performance (Dimitrova, 2005, p. 19). Based upon a model of how writing tasks are performed, Dimitrova (2005) suggests three main processes in the translation process: planning, text generation, and revision.

Planning is defined as preparatory reflection upon a goal and the means to reach the goal (Hayes & Nash, 1996). Planning activates the knowledge and routines a person has internalized over time that led to achieving past translation goals. In translation, being specific about the goal, and possible sub-goals, is important since this allows the formation of a concrete plan and the actions needed to carry out the plan (Hayes & Nash, 1996). There may be competing and overlapping goals, such as providing specific wording from a source text but also creating a translation that follows linguistic and cultural norms of the audience. As a result, translators must be willing to strike a balance between those various goals. According to Mackenzie (1998, p.202), a primary aspect of planning is to analyze the task by asking the right questions and defining the problems, which include decisions surrounding the culture and linguistic structures of the source and target languages.

The second stage of the translation process is text generation. This process has been characterized as having a “stop and go” nature, as it generally involves alternating between segments the translator produces automatically without any problems and segments that require strategic problem-solving (Dimitrova, 2005). In one approach, the translator reads (or watches) a source text segment, comprehends it, and produces it in the target language. In another approach, the translator views a segment and notes problems with one or more parts of the process – comprehension, retrieval, production – that require slower work, while considering multiple options and ramifications. In these segments, the translator switches to problem-solving mode, using strategies to produce the target text. For this study, we use the following definition for strategy, translated from German in Dimitrova (2005): “The translator’s potentially conscious plans for solving concrete translation problems in the framework of a concrete translation task” (Krings, 1986, p. 175).

Finally, revision is an integral component of the translation process. Revision involves monitoring and evaluating the translation product in relation to the goal of the text, then taking action as a result of the evaluation. Evaluating the target translation as it is being produced and making revisions is, to some extent, an automatic process (Dimitrova, 2005). Underlying the revision process is the challenge of finding the “appropriate linguistic distance” between the source and target texts (Dimitrova, 2005, p. 144). Numerous studies have been conducted on the time, accuracy, and self-revision process in translation tasks (Arthern, 1987; Jakobsen, 2002; Krings, 2001; Künzli, 2007). In one study, experienced translators made errors in legal translations because the translators were working at the lexical level, as opposed to examining the sentence in which the word was embedded (Künzli, 2007). Revision is a process not necessarily planned nor focused upon as a separate component in the production of a translation; however, it often takes up the largest proportion of total time in creating the translation (Dimitrova, 2005, p. 143).

### SETTING THE STAGE

Increasingly, signed language interpreters are working in public, high-profile venues – conferences, news broadcasts, and political rallies – in which lectures and speeches may be scripted prior to delivery. The challenges of interpreting a pre-scripted, formal speech have been well documented (Galaz, 2011; Knox, 2006). It is known that

public speakers typically use written speeches that are the product of many hours of organizing thoughts, ideas, and words designed to make a specific impact upon an audience. As a result, the words in written speeches tend to be longer, more abstract, and of a higher register than the words in spoken language (Al-Antti, 2003). Further, the syntax used in written language tends to be more complex and contain fewer repetitions than in spoken language (Knox, 2006; Russo, Bendazzoli & Sandrelli, 2006). An additional challenge of scripted speeches is that they often contain frozen phrases, such as direct quotations, idioms, or catch phrases (Al-Antti, 2003). Interpreters who face these and other challenges typically work in conference-type settings.

For spoken language interpreters, conference interpreting is practiced at international summits, professional seminars, and bilateral or multilateral meetings of heads of State and Government. Conference interpreters also work at meetings of chief executives, politicians, official delegates, or union representatives. Spoken language interpreters have training programs specifically designed to educate students for work as conference interpreters (e.g., Middlebury Monterey Institute of International Studies in California, École Supérieure d'Interprètes et de Traducteurs (ESIT), and Institut de Management et de Communication Interculturels (ISIT) in Paris). These programs teach strategies for coping with the demands of conference work, (e.g., preparation and note-taking techniques). Further, organizations exist that address the specific needs of conference interpreters (e.g., International Association of Conference Interpreters). In addition, there are reference books, journals, and other publications that address the challenges of conference interpreting for spoken language interpreters.

In signed language interpreting, however, no specific training programs, associations, or written materials exist that address working as a conference interpreter. Conference interpreting tends to be done at official meetings of associations within the field of signed language interpreting (e.g., conferences hosted by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada, Conference of Interpreter Trainers, European Forum of Signed Language Interpreters). These conferences are typically centered on issues regarding interpreting research, education, and teaching, rather than international, political, or trade issues.

Signed language interpreters are typically trained to work in community settings, such as medical, educational, and vocational environments. The demands and strategies used within community interpreting are different than for those in conference interpreting. For example, in community settings, the interpreter may have opportunities to control the pace of the interaction or ask for clarification (Metzger, 1999). This is typically not the case during conference work in which the interpreter must rapidly respond to the information as it unfolds, without the possibility of gaining clarification from the speaker. In addition, no standard preparation techniques are taught to signed language interpreters who are rendering highly formal, scripted speeches. In a related study that examined the preparation techniques of ASL-English interpreters prior to interpreting the Obama address, the interpreters reported a variety of strategies for working with scripted material, with little overlap of strategy use between the interpreters (Nicodemus, Swabey & Taylor, 2014).



An additional factor that influences ASL interpretation of formal speeches is the lack of lexical correspondents between spoken and signed languages. The term “lexical gaps” was used to describe the disparity of correspondents between Australian Sign Language (AUSLAN) and English in the healthcare context (Major, Napier, Ferrara & Johnston, 2012, p. 37). Not having a ready word or phrase that corresponds between languages creates challenges for interpreters, in this instance, those who are interpreting from a scripted English speech into American Sign Language. These lexical gaps can increase the cognitive load placed upon the interpreter (Swabey, Nicodemus, Taylor & Gile, 2016).

Finally, the background, education, and language preference of Deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers also influences the choices interpreters make. Studies indicate that 92% of deaf children are born to parents who can hear and do not know ASL (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004). The age and manner in which Deaf adults have acquired ASL varies, with some learning signed language at a young age in Deaf schools and others not learning ASL until they attend college. Some Deaf individuals may learn non-standard variations of ASL from teachers or interpreters in mainstreamed educational environments. Thus, interpreting for a variety of Deaf individuals who have differing communication preferences can create challenges.

In the present study, we investigated how Deaf bilinguals used three components in the translation process – planning, text generation, and revision – in rendering Obama’s 2009 inaugural speech from English into American Sign Language.

## **METHODS**

### **PARTICIPANTS**

Five Deaf ASL-English bilinguals participated in this study. The Deaf investigators recruited the five participants based upon their professional contacts as well as the participants’ recognized competency with translation activities, particularly with documents that require a formal register. Each of the participants held either interpreting certification (Certified Deaf Interpreter) from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) or teaching certification from the American Sign Language Teacher’s Association (ASLTA). The participants were from various areas of the United States, including the southwest, the mountain west, the west coast, and the southeast. The participants were four males and one female: one African American and four Caucasians. All of the participants considered ASL to be their native language, with four using ASL from birth and one from age three. Participants’ ages ranged from 31-66 years, with a mean age of 45. Three participants had master’s degrees, one had earned a doctorate degree, and one had not completed a college degree. Participants had between 5-27 years of experience teaching ASL or interpreting/translating. All of the participants were experienced in giving public presentations (e.g., keynote, conference lectures), and four had seen President Obama’s 2009 inaugural speech or similar speeches by Obama. Participation in the study was completely voluntary, without compensation.

## **MATERIALS**

The stimuli were 1) a captioned video recording of President Obama's inaugural address delivered in Washington, D.C., on January 20, 2009, and 2) a transcript of the section of the video that participants were asked to translate (the first 1½ minutes of the speech). A link to the video and transcript were emailed to participants one week prior to their scheduled appointments. Participants' translations and interviews were conducted through Internet video conferencing (ooVoo or nTouch) and recorded either on ooVoo or an iPad.

## **PROCEDURES**

In the letter of invitation to participate in the study, individuals were informed that they would be asked to prepare a translation of a formal speech and that the transcript and captioned video of the speech would be emailed to them one week prior to the scheduled appointment for the translation and interview. In the email with the video link and transcript, participants were informed that they would be creating an ASL translation of the first 1½ minutes of President Barack Obama's 2009 inauguration address. They were also informed they would be asked to stand while producing the translation. Participants were instructed to have a prepared translation ready for video recording with the expectation that they would not consult the video nor transcript when rendering their prepared translation. Each participant's appointment consisted of the translation task and a follow-up interview.

At the scheduled time for the translation and interview, one of the Deaf investigators on the research team and the Deaf participant connected through videoconferencing software (ooVoo or nTouch). Each participant's entire session was video recorded. Each participant first provided a translation of the selected section of the speech. Following the translation, the investigator asked a series of questions about the participant's translation process (see Appendix A), with a specific focus on the opening phrase of the speech 'my fellow citizens.' Each interview was conducted in ASL and lasted approximately 15-20 minutes.

## **TRANSCRIBING AND TRANSLATION**

The video recorded translations of the speech were transcribed using standardized ASL glossing techniques. By convention, ASL signs are glossed in capital letters (See Appendix B for transcription symbols used in the study). The interviews were translated into written English. A doctoral student in interpreting, who is fluent in both ASL and English, created all the transcriptions and translations. The investigators separately reviewed the transcriptions and translations, comparing them to the digital videos, to confirm the accuracy of these documents.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Using Dimitrova's (2005) model of the translation process, two of the investigators created a protocol for coding the interview data based on the three identified components of the translation process: preparation, text generation, and revision. Independently, the same two investigators coded the data, noting instances of overlap

between the components. Following this, each investigator reviewed the coding of the other investigator. Five instances of non-agreement were noted and discussed by the two investigators until agreement was achieved. Together, the two investigators then selected interview comments that most clearly represented Dimitrova's (2005) model of the translation process. Later, the other two investigators reviewed the coding and the interview comments. The full research team (i.e., the authors) then finalized the coding decisions and the interview comments presented in this paper. Lastly, each of the five participants was assigned a pseudonym for reporting purposes.

## RESULTS

### INTRODUCTION

In this section, we provide the Deaf translators' renditions of 'my fellow citizens' and use interview excerpts to indicate the reflections of the translators on their planning, text generation, and revision processes.

### PLANNING

In the data of the Deaf translators' interviews, two themes emerged related to planning: 1) the importance of knowing the target audience, and 2) how to balance conveying the meaning and intent of the speech with the style and form of the original text. All five participants emphasized the challenge of interpreting for an audience that was presumed to be diverse yet unknown to the translator, as in a televised address. For example, Rubin explained, "Who my target audience is would impact whether I just interpret the message directly or use some sort of explanation as well." Kurt acknowledged, "Some Deaf people want to see things more literally, and others are looking for a more full translation." These competing goals in planning a translation for a linguistically diverse audience were also echoed by Rita and Finn. Rita stated, "I struggled too, because in considering my audience, I can imagine what I might sign if the audience was not very fluent in English. On the flip side, though, some audience members might actually want to know what English words were being used." Finn had similar thoughts, stating, "There are some people who are very fluent in ASL and there are some people who are very strong bilinguals. I remember in some cases in college or at other events ... I asked the interpreter to not do too much translation and to interpret the words that were actually said. Sometimes I wanted the opportunity to see English words on the mouth and in fingerspelling. This was something for me to consider in my translation as well, how much I veered toward one language or the other."

All five of the participants mentioned that during their planning they envisioned the actual inauguration in some way, although they did not all take the same viewpoint. For example, Rita took the perspective of the speaker, stating, "I tried to imagine myself as the president giving a speech ... I was thinking what it would be like giving the speech in front of an actual audience. I would want it to be dynamic, with movement and direction toward members of the audience." Conversely, Kurt took the perspective of the audience and said, "I envisioned what people would think as they watched his speech." Only one translator mentioned the speech's historic impact on the audience during the planning phase. Finn said, "...when there is such a major transfer of power, it is a very

profound moment.” He wanted to “provide the same sense of impact in the target text as the source text.”

Despite the differences mentioned above, the translators did exhibit similarities by indicating they were focused on the meaning behind the words. Although this was a consistent theme, the translators had different ways of stating it. Tyler said, “I knew the speech itself was very important. I wanted to capture what he meant behind what he was actually saying.” Tyler continued by explaining, “Overall my idea was to try to preserve the content while disassociating from the actual words of the speech.” Kurt’s approach was to “get the overall picture and let it sink in ... then later I did some more work on it.” Finn mentioned lexical items as a challenge in the process of finding meaning in the speech when he said, “I thought the speech was beautiful, and I had to consider how to convey the powerful English words he used into equally powerful ASL ... My point is that I had to consider which specific terms I felt were important enough to preserve and what I was able to translate more completely into ASL.” Kurt’s view on meaning was stated differently, “The way the speech was written and the points he made would perhaps not make sense and would merely be a jumble of words if presented literally to a Deaf audience.” About his process, Kurt stated, “Something like this can have so many meanings, and I made several choices which reflect my own understanding of the speech. Many of the choices were not easy, and I took the liberty of trying to decipher their meanings when creating my translation.”

Two of the translators discussed culture norms for opening a speech in ASL. Kurt considered both the cultural and linguistic challenges and mentioned, “... thinking about whether a sign like ‘HELLO’ should be included. I’m not sure if it’s formal. It’s something to figure out. But that’s because we don’t have formal speeches very often in the Deaf community.”

## TEXT GENERATION

When the investigator connected with the Deaf translator through video conferencing, they opened by having the translator produce a prepared translation of the beginning of President Obama’s speech. Here we present the ASL translations of ‘my fellow citizens’ as created by the five Deaf translators. Following the translations, we present the translators’ reflections of their processes of text generation.

*English:* ‘my fellow citizens’

Tyler: (B-hs)ALL-OF-YOU(2h) PEOPLE ALL-OVER AMERICA-agent(1h) ALL-OVER(1h)//

Finn: MY STANDARD(2h-circular) CITIZEN(C on shoulder) AMERICA-agent//

Rubin: HELLO++ (B-hs)ALL-OF-YOU(2h) AMERICA PEOPLE (B-hs) ALL-OF-YOU(2h)//

Kurt: MY F-E-L-L-O-W C-I-T-I-Z-E-N-S (B-hs)ALL-OF-YOU(2h)//

Rita: MY (CL:B)ALL-OF-YOU(rh) (B-hs)ALL-OF-YOU(lh) F-E-L-L-O-W FRIEND  
CITIZEN(C on shoulder) (B-hs)ALL-OF-YOU(2h)//

Shown below, the translators offered explanations of how they generated their translations for ‘my fellow citizens.’

Tyler: I used ALL-OF-YOU (2h) PEOPLE, rather than MY, because MY PEOPLE ALL-OVER implies superiority, as though the President were a king ruling over his people. The other phrase implies equality. I had to determine how I would represent that equality within my translation. To me, my translation conveys that the President is one of us; that he is not to order us nor have control over us as his people. That’s my understanding. In considering ‘fellow citizens’ to mean ‘people,’ I signed ‘PEOPLE ALL-OVER.’ In essence, he is giving a greeting to everyone.

Finn: ‘My fellow citizens’ and ‘my fellow Americans’ are well-known phrases. I always see Obama, and past presidents, saying ‘my fellow citizens,’ or ‘my fellow Americans.’ For that reason, I decided to use both. I think most people are familiar with these phrases since they are said so often. I also signed CITIZEN AMERICA-agent) because I don’t think that sign is exactly common knowledge, so I thought it was important to add the bit about Americans. I prefer AMERICA-agent to CITIZEN because it seems more relevant. Going back to ‘fellow,’ obviously the President has more power than us. He is the most powerful person in the entire world. At the same time, he has to remember who elected him. Since we elected him, we did not do so to simply grant him a great deal of power. He serves at the pleasure of all of us. So I think what the President meant to do was to show respect because, although he has a position of great responsibility, the bottom line is that he is still an American. He is still the same exact person. Now, on ‘my,’ I think that is an English thing. When I envision Deaf speakers in front of an audience, I don’t think they say things like ‘YOU MY PEOPLE...’ I think if a Deaf person was giving a talk about the Deaf community to hearing people, he might sign something like ‘MY PEOPLE ARE...’ But he wouldn’t do this when talking to Deaf people, people like them. Maybe it’s something from hearing culture, or it is just a formal nicety of frozen text that has been used through time.

Rubin: (Rubin explained his reason for choosing his translation of ‘fellow citizens.’) I think the idea meant by ‘citizens’ is who we are – Americans. I had to have a way for it to come together well. So I think that was what was meant by the phrase.

Rita: I actually struggled with that part. I considered the definition of ‘fellow,’ and it felt like the first translation was too casual. I then considered what my perspective would have been as an audience member. Would the President really call me and others his ‘friend?’ That’s why I decided to fingerspell the word ‘fellow.’ I definitely struggled with this decision.

Kurt: That phrase really did bother me, so I checked in the dictionary, and one term that came up was ‘countrymen.’ I decided it was best to fingerspell the term though, as this established a more formal tone. I was also wondering whether I should open with something like HELLO, but President Obama never said ‘hello.’ For that reason I decided to translate ‘my fellow citizens’ literally, although I did add the ALL-OF-YOU sign to reference the people he was speaking to. I think that was sufficient. I was trying to think if there was anything else I could add, like HELLO AMERICANS or SAME-ME. But I just decided to use fingerspelling for ‘my fellow citizens.’

## REVISION

After the translation performance, each translator was interviewed and within the context of the interview had the opportunity to revise the opening phrase of the text (‘my fellow citizens’) and produce a different version. Both Rita and Kurt decided to produce revised versions; Finn, Tyler, and Rubin maintained their original translations. Here we present the final revised versions produced by Kurt and Rita. Following that, we report some of Kurt and Rita’s commentary about their revisions.

Final revised versions of ‘my fellow citizens’:

Kurt: HELLO AMERICA PEOPLE (B-hs)ALL-OF-YOU(2h)//

Rita: (B-hs)ALL-OF-YOU(2h) MY FRIEND++ AMERICA SAME-AS-ME++(left to right)//

Below are excerpts from Kurt and Rita’s processes of revision, which occurred during the interview with the investigator, as they discussed the original translation.

Kurt: It’s definitely not easy. MY F-E-L-L-O-W C-I-T-I-Z-E-N-S

ALL-OF-YOU AMERICA-agent. I like signing it as B:ALL-OF-YOU AMERICA PEOPLE. Yes, HELLO AMERICA PEOPLE. Now for ‘fellow citizens’... SAME-AS-ME? Interesting ... hmm, but for an opening? For a greeting? If someone signs HELLO EQUAL (circular), how is that truly an opening? Or HELLO SAME-AS-ME? It’s almost like an expression such as “How are you?” or “Good morning” in that it’s a frozen piece of text. So for that reason I felt that fingerspelling it and moving on was effective. Historically, is that something U.S. presidents have always said? Maybe the usage of the phrase is frozen.

So, HELLO ALL-OF-YOU. Should I sign HELLO? HELLO AMERICA-AGENT, no...HELLO AMERICA PEOPLE ... HELLO AMERICA PEOPLE ALL-OF-YOU SAME-AS-ME, no, that feels funny ... HELLO AMERICA PEOPLE ALL-OF-YOU, hmmm. If I

would change, it would just be a bit to that new version. I would add B:ALL-OF-YOU. HELLO AMERICA PEOPLE B:ALL-OF-YOU

Rita: I guess I could sign something like MY F-E-L-L-O-W C-I-T-I-Z-E-N B:ALL-OF-YOU(2h). Or MY SAME-2h AMERICA-agent B:ALL-OF-YOU(2h), something like that. Maybe add PEOPLE. Yeah, maybe add PEOPLE. I think it's very interesting when you consider the meaning of 'citizen' and 'fellow' and combine them together to see what they become.

Rita continued her revision process and she explained,

Well ... B:ALL-OF-YOU MY SAME-AS-ME ... I feel a little concerned about the sign MY. I'm almost tempted to eliminate the sign MY altogether. It just doesn't seem to work when it's 'my fellow.' Something like B:ALL-OF-YOU(2h) MY FRIEND++ AMERICA-agent SAME-AS-ME++(left to right). Well, just a thought. It (the sign MY) just doesn't seem to work! It seems so authoritative. Perhaps B:ALL-OF-YOU(2h) FRIEND or maybe something like WE AMERICA-agent or something like that. Maybe even B:ALL-OF-YOU(2h) is enough to capture the meaning.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, five Deaf ASL-English bilinguals individually created translations of the opening English phrase from a high-profile political address and discussed their translation processes. We examined the translations and insights of the translators using Dimitrova's (2005) proposed stages of the translation process – planning, text generation, and revision. As reported, in an earlier study, four hearing ASL-English interpreters interpreted the same opening phrase, 'my fellow citizens,' and there was not one single lexical item that was uniformly used across all four versions. Similarly, the Deaf translators initially did not produce a uniform translation; however, in the final renditions, there were two lexical items used by each of the five Deaf translators – AMERICA or AMERICA-agent. Although two of the Deaf translators incorporated fingerspelling in their first renditions, no translator used fingerspelling in their final versions.

In their decision-making processes, the Deaf translators continued to assess the linguistic distance between the source and target texts, although there were notable differences in the lexical decision-making of the translators. The two translators who opted to revise their renditions (Kurt, Rita) initially made translation choices that were closer to the original forms in the source language. These were made thoughtfully, but changed during the revision process and frequently came about after discussion with the investigator during the interview portion of the study. This type of collaborative creation of a translation by Deaf individuals has been noted before in an earlier study of Deaf translators (Stone, 2009) and may reflect the collective nature of the Deaf community. Notably, although Kurt and Rita used fingerspelling in their first versions for the word 'fellow,' they both dropped this in subsequent versions. Similarly, in revising their first translations, both Kurt and Rita eliminated their more literal translations of 'citizen'

(fingerspelled by Kurt; C sign on shoulder for Rita) to replace it with the sign AMERICA-agent. In their first renditions, Rita and Kurt also used MY, but after reflecting upon this choice during the interview, both made individual decisions to drop MY in their final versions. This change also influenced the opening of Rita's and Kurt's translations. In their first renderings, they opened with MY, as did Rubin in his (unrevised) version. In their revised versions, Kurt opened with HELLO, followed by 2hB: ALL-OF-YOU. Rita dropped MY and opened with 2hB:ALL-OF-YOU. In the final versions, there were three variants on the opening: HELLO (Kurt and Rubin), MY (Finn), and ALL-OF-YOU (Rita and Tyler).

A frequent lexical term used by the Deaf translators was ALL-OF-YOU, although it occurred in different places in the translations: in first position (Rita, Tyler), last position (Kurt), and both second and last position (Rubin). ALL-OF-YOU seemed to reflect the formality of the situation and convey some sense of all the words in the English sentence. One translator even mused whether that sign alone would be sufficient for the opening. 'Fellow' does not have a standard lexical correspondent in ASL, and the translators selected different strategies for incorporating this concept into their translations. Rita included the sign FRIEND. Finn and Rita each used a variant of SAME: SAME-ALL-AROUND (Finn) and SAME-AS-ME (Rita). Three signs were only produced by one translator: MY (Finn), FRIEND (Rita), and ALL-OVER (Tyler).

The Deaf participants reported on their translation processes and decision-making in the interview portion of the study. They discussed the challenges of producing a translation that would capture the spirit and content of the inaugural address, convey the formal tone of the speech, accommodate the lack of standard ASL correspondents for English lexical items, and satisfy a linguistically diverse Deaf audience. As described by Hayes and Nash (1996), the Deaf translators reported having competing and overlapping goals in creating their translations, such as making choices about specific signs for the target text versus creating a translation that follows linguistic and cultural norms of a diverse Deaf audience.

This study responds to Krings' (1986) call for examining conscious plans for solving concrete translation problems. The results provide insights into the processes of Deaf translators, which may be relevant for both Deaf and hearing individuals when rendering interpretations and translations. This study is a starting point for further discussions about the cognitive, linguistic, and sociocultural issues of relevance for interpreters and translators who work between spoken and signed languages.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Questions for Participants

1. Could you please describe the process you went through to prepare for the translation? (The following questions may be covered in their description.)
2. In what ways did you use the script for preparation?
3. In what ways did you use the video for preparation?
4. Did you use a dictionary, thesaurus or other references? Describe.
5. Did you watch any videos of interpretations or translations of this speech? Describe/explain.
6. Did you discuss the text and translation with anyone else? Describe/explain.
7. If you were to prepare again, what would you do the same, and what, if anything, would you do differently?
8. In what ways did your preparation aid your translation?
9. Please discuss the opening line of the speech – ‘my fellow citizens’ – What choices did you make when translating this line? Why? Would you do it the same way if you were to translate this speech again?

**APPENDIX B**

## Transcription Coding Symbols

Symbol	Meaning	Example from data
B	Flat palm “B” handshape	(B-hs)ALL-OF-YOU
hs	Handshape	(B-hs)ALL-OF-YOU
(1h), (2h)	One hand, two hands	ALL-OF-YOU(2h)
-	Compound or fingerspelled item	AMERICA-AGENT F-E-L-L-O-W
//	Sentence boundary	HELLO AMERICA PEOPLE (B-hs)ALL-OF-YOU(2h)//
+	Repeated sign	HELLO++