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## **Models and Paradigms**

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As we work toward greater recognition as professionals, I often remind my students of the paradigms of interpreting that we, as a profession, have gone through. We have come to know these paradigms as "models". Models are attempts to describe a system which account for all known properties; paradigms are merely examples or patterns. Cokely has a model. Colonomos has a model. The "models" of HELPER, CONDUIT, and FACILITATOR are paradigms.

At the RID National Convention in Boston, Gary Sanderson presented his own paradigm of the interpreter as a SORE THUMB. While part of Gary's presentation was in jest, much of it revealed the truths we face in our profession today. One comment that Gary made, however, has left me thinking. He cautioned against using the word "Mediator" to describe our work because it brings to mind the work of union negotiators and marriage counselors. Yet in the same presentation Gary told of the damage we have done by trying to be invisible and telling our consumers "just talk normally... pretend I'm not here."

In reality, the communication situation which requires interpreting would break down without an interpreter. It is such a serious potential problem that a specialist — an interpreter — has been asked to participate, often in otherwise private discussions. Think about this... if your marriage is working out just fine, you don't need to see a counselor. If your contract negotiations are working well, you don't need binding mediation. If your communication is working just fine then you don't need any third-party specialists to get involved.

The communication situations which require interpreters NEED a specialist; otherwise they are seriously at risk of failing. The process of interpreting requires a third party to get involved in the business of the other two parties to the point that nearly every exchange of information must include the interpreter. This sounds exactly like mediation to me and I believe that as a paradigm, "Mediator" fits the bill closest to the reality that professional interpreters face. I propose that we adopt the paradigm of "Communication Mediator" because we work with more than just language, more than just culture... communication includes both of these but goes beyond. Let me explain.

Communication is one mind's perception of a message which another mind has expressed. Communication is a broad category which includes all possibilities of language; but communication includes much, much more than only language. Communication requires systematic use of signals. It also requires a minimum of two parties - a sender and at least one receiver - which we will call a community. Any means of communication may use symbols (such as sounds or body movements) to convey information between members of a community, but the word language describes much more specific types of communication systems.

Language is a specific kind of communication which meets all four of the following requirements: 1) The communication must be systematic: it must have rules which apply to the production and organization of the symbols (ie. grammatical rules). 2) The communication system must allow for an infinite number of ways to encode any given message. 3) The communication system must pass between at least two generations of active users in the community. 4) The communication system must be flexible enough to change over time and between users. In sum, language is the systematic use of symbols to express and perceive information between members of a community in which the system is rule-governed, has infinite production possibilities, is intergenerational, and changes over time. Humans are the only species on Earth which have the ability to communicate via language.

My point in reviewing these definitions is to clarify that we mediate more than language, more than culture: we mediate communication. Interpreting is a highly skilled process which requires bilingual and bicultural knowledge and also requires attention to very subtle nuances of communication outside of language.

Interpreting does not occur in a vacuum. Most true models of interpreting have ignored two very important components of the interpreting process: the source consumer and the target consumer. We work with real people and we understand their meanings through personal interaction with them. We have learned not to be helpers to our consumers because such an attitude is inherently oppressive. We are not conduits, such as a “bridge” or “telephone”, which mindlessly “conveys” information from one party to another. Neither are we facilitators, making the communication of others easier. We are mediators who are actively engaged in understanding the source consumers, actively engaged in generating an equivalent target text, and actively engaged in monitoring our target consumer’s response to our work.

Describing the interpreting process as an act of mediation reveals the active participatory role of interpreters in the communication of two other parties. It justifies the cost of interpreting services. It presents the need to maintain high standards in certification. It points out the need to establish standards for all fifty states to authorize interpreters. Finally, it reveals the need for more peer mentoring, otherwise known as team interpreting, in order to ensure accuracy in the work of communication mediation.