

FORUM

If you have ever paused to wonder why English is so often difficult to comprehend, a partial explanation/illustration might be represented in an article in this issue of the JRD, "The Use of Interpreters with Deaf Clients in Therapy". Specifically, note the use of the term "transliterating".

According to several dictionaries, transliterating is the process of changing words or letters from one alphabet into another. This means changing words or letters from, for example, the Greek alphabet into the Roman alphabet. Thus, the Roman transliteration for the Greek "μ" is "m". This is transliteration, changing a letter from the Greek alphabet into the Roman alphabet (English). The transliteration of the word "CROW" from the Roman alphabet into the Greek alphabet is "ΧΡΩ," which may not make any sense, but it is the transliteration.

As the term is used in the article, it is apparent that the intended meaning is a literal or word-for-word translation from an oral English mode into a manual English mode or vice versa. No matter how you cut it, again according to several dictionaries, translating is still translating or its synonym, interpreting, and whether it involves translating/interpreting from one mode into another or from one language into another or both, it is still translating/interpreting.

When we 'invent' meanings for words, we contribute to a confusion which we should be able to avoid. Coining a new word is one generally accepted way of adding new words to our language. But taking an established term and using it to mean something entirely different from its given/understood/accepted meaning is a kind of practice which can lead only to confusion.

Sometimes, we suspect, words are used incorrectly because the user 'thinks it ought to mean' whatever. Instead of checking the word out in a dictionary, one might simply start using the word in a totally different context, thus leading to obfuscation and contributing to the difficulties in an already difficult language.

We see nothing wrong with using already accepted terminology in describing interpreter functions. If one is limited to interpreting from oral English into manual English, fine, that seems to say it quite clearly. If one also has the ability to interpret manual English to oral English, fine again; that seems to say it, too. In neither instance, however, is the interpreter transliterating and, quite frankly, we seriously doubt that there are more than a very few interpreters (in our field) who actually have the ability to transliterate from the Roman alphabet (English) into any other alphabet. And if one can, so what?

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Editor