

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

By Theresa B. Smith

In translation work there is always a tension between staying as close as possible to the original text and making the original text as clear as possible in the target language. In this case, I have tried to balance the two knowing that many members of the audience of the English versions (translations) will a) have some knowledge of ASL, and b) want to be able to see the personalities of the people being translated as much as understand what they have said.

There are several ASL signs that were *used repeatedly* by the ASL users being interviewed that do not translate easily into English. Sometimes they do not translate well because the lived-experience of DB people is so different from that of non-DB people, especially of hearing-sighted people. I have therefore decided to list these few signs, with a discussion of each.

Connect, connection

This sign is typically glossed¹ 'connect/connection',² 'relationship', 'rapport', or 'cooperate/collaborate'. It

¹ A gloss is a one-word 'translation' into another language that is a best attempt at the meaning but is often missing precision and nuance.

² The movement of the sign can modify the sign so that it functions as another 'part of speech' i.e. from a verb to noun, to an adjective and so on.

can also mean 'link' (as train cars are linked), to work in accord. It sometimes means 'bond' (as in the phrase "we bonded over that challenging class we had together") or 'tie' (as in the phrase "family ties"). The sign is semantically related to concepts of chain, language, parity and reciprocity.

Sprinkled throughout these interviews it has one or many of these meanings. One point being made is that a 'connection' must be formed before effective teaching can take place. The number of times this point is made implies that this is typically not the case. Another point made is that both communication and touch are necessary to make this connection. A few teachers mentioned that DB teachers often have a natural connection with their DB student that other teachers do not have.

The frequency of this sign is consistent with the frequent use of a related sign, 'match.'

Match

This sign is typically glossed 'match' or 'mesh'. It means to be a fit. It is etymologically related to the sign meaning 'gears' representing the teeth of gears and how they interlock. The sign 'mesh' (like the sign 'connect') implies a mutuality, or two-way

compatibility and thus sometimes means 'harmony/harmonize' or 'resonate'.

In the interviews 'match' is used to refer primarily to a communication match which, as the DB teachers explain, includes language (ASL, English or something else), the modality (visual, tactile, in-person or in print/Braille), the fluency or command of that language (the pace at which the student is able to communicate, the sophistication and background of the student), the student's ability to absorb the information, their learning style and the environment (lighting, it's brightness and direction; background colors, teacher's clothing).

Finally, the 'match' includes a match between the communication process and the goal of the lesson including the topic or material to be taught, and the instructional materials that are available. When things 'match' the gears work well. When there is no 'match', the gears cannot work and the machine cannot move.

Full-C / Flat-O at center-chest

This sign represents a positive or negative change in one's sense of self, specifically one's sense of efficacy, as a result of some external cause. The negative meaning is made by flattening the full-C to a flat-O. The positive is made by reversing the

movement. In the negative it is sometimes glossed 'feel flat-tire', there is no regular gloss for the positive. Actions or comments by a teacher will 'make-whole' the student's sense of efficacy or put them down in some way that 'deflates' that sense, takes the wind out of them and makes them feel powerless. It may thus sometimes be used to mean 'empower', or its opposite, to humiliate.

When 'whole' it has the sense of a 'full heart' which in turn has the sense of courage.

The word is used in the interviews to describe how the teacher's actions will act to positively increase or support this sense of efficacy and ability to learn, or negatively collapse it.

Squeeze-throat

This sign also does not have a good gloss. It means to swallow and stuff back down all one's embarrassment or shame, and to restrain oneself from expressing those feelings or acting on them. This word is used by a few of the interviewees in the negative, that is, as a caution to not do this. They encourage their fellow DB teachers or people using SSPs to do the opposite, that is, to assert themselves, to exercise their agency (rather than be overcome with feelings of embarrassment or shame).
