

## **SLPI PAPER #4: SLPI-SCPI-SLPI HISTORY**

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We originally labeled our adaptation of the Language/Oral Proficiency Interview (L/OPI) for assessing sign language communication skills as the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI). As discussed below, this was changed to the Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) in 1983. Given the history of our sign language assessment tool and current circumstances in the area of sign language assessment, in May 2006 we decided to return to our original title; that is, SLPI. Therefore, throughout this paper we refer to the assessment tool we have developed as the SLPI, recognizing that it was referred to as the SCPI from 1983 to May 2006.

As we discussed in the first edition of this paper, in the late 1990s questions arose about the history of the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI), which at that time was referred to as the Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI); for example, Who developed this assessment tool? and Where was it developed? What follows is the history of this assessment tool from our experiences and perspective.

As we discussed in our first publication on adapting the L/OPI for assessing sign Language communication skills (Newell, Caccamise, Boardman, & Holcomb, 1983), in 1980 Protase Woodford from Educational Testing Services (ETS) presented information about the L/OPI at the Third National Symposium on Sign Language Research and Teaching in Boston (Woodford, 1982). As Woodford discussed, the L/OPI, an interview format based assessment tool, was developed by the US federal government after World War II in response to a need to have an assessment tool that could be used to assess current and potential government employees' spoken communication skills for a variety of foreign languages. Based on Woodford's presentation, several individuals began to explore the application of interview techniques to the assessment of American Sign Language (ASL), including faculty from the College of Staten Island, Gallaudet University (then Gallaudet College), and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID).

In 1982, as part of our learning procedures, four NTID faculty members, Keitha Boardman, Barbara Ray Holcomb, and the two of us (William Newell and Frank Caccamise) attended an ETS L/OPI Training Workshop in Princeton, NJ. As this training workshop we observed L/OPI assessments for French and Spanish, and, with guidance from ETS staff, we practiced applying L/OPI interviewing techniques to ASL. Later that year we presented our first training workshop on our L/OPI adaptation for assessing ASL, the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI), at the Louisiana School for the Deaf (Caccamise, Newell, & Mitchell-Caccamise, 1983).

During the time from 1980-82 we were aware that other people were investigating application of the L/OPI to sign language assessment, and we visited Will Madsen and Catherine Moses who were conducting this work at Gallaudet College (now Gallaudet University) and Will Madsen visited us at NTID. We discussed the similarities and differences between our work and shared materials and procedural information. In 1983, Mary Mosleh from the College of Staten Island, who was conducting similar efforts, organized a meeting to bring together people who were involved and interested in applying L/OPI techniques to assessing sign language communication

skills. People attending this meeting, which was held at ETS in Princeton, NJ, included Carol Lazoriak, William R. Gut, and Mary Mosleh, College of Staten Island, Will Madsen and Catherine Moses, Gallaudet College, Ted Supalla, University of Illinois, William Tomes, South Carolina Personnel Division, and Keith Boardman and the two of us, NTID. In Caccamise et al. (1983) we discussed the meeting at ETS, stating that persons attending this meeting suggested renaming the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) Rating Scale (published in Newell et al., 1983) the Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) Rating Scale. It was agreed that this would be the rating scale used by all in attendance as each of us continued our work to apply L/OPI techniques to the assessment of sign language, and we agreed that we would continue to share our efforts and to collaborate whenever possible.

For a variety of reasons, however, we were soon working independently. Therefore, although subsequent development of the SCPI (as it was labeled at that time) by Will Madsen and Catherine Moses at Gallaudet College, and by us at NTID shared a common base (the L/OPI) and a common rating scale developed by us, methodological differences in terms of both materials and procedures developed over time. In considering this, it is important to appreciate that some methodological variations are allowable for the L/OPI. Therefore, some differences between the SCPI as it evolved and was applied by Gallaudet College faculty following our 1983 meeting and the sign language interview assessment that we continued to develop and apply may be accounted for by decisions as to the best L/OPI methodological variations upon which to base an adaptation for assessing sign language communication skills.

In addition to the sign language interview assessments developed at Gallaudet and by us, other sign language assessment tools have been labeled as the ASL Proficiency Interview (ASLPI). The first ASLPI was a direct adaptation from the L/OPI by Mel Carter when he was working at California State University at Northridge in the 1980s. Another use of the ASLPI label during the 1990s was by Ed Rogers, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, California Department of Rehabilitation. Ed, in consultation with one of the authors of this paper (Frank Caccamise), adapted the SLPI for use with California vocational rehabilitation personnel, and he labeled this adaptation the ASLPI. The most recent use of the ASLPI label to our knowledge was announced in a May 17, 2006 memorandum from Dr. Thomas Allen, Dean, Gallaudet University Center for American Sign Language Literacy (CASLL), in which he addressed a change from the SCPI as it evolved at Gallaudet University to the GU-ASLPI:

Recently, CASLL introduced the GU-ASLPI as the primary means for measuring ASL proficiency of individuals throughout the campus who are not faculty members....The GU-ASLPI is a refinement of the ASLPI that is in use in an increasing number of programs throughout the United States.

Dr. Allen provided several reasons for this change, including:

The GU-ASLPI has a specific target language (ASL) and therefore is more appropriately modeled after the LPI administered by the US Foreign Service to credential Federal employees assigned to foreign countries.

The SCPI, over the years, has BECOME a measure of ASL, so a refocusing of its name and scoring procedures is overdue.

We agree that specifying a specific target language is helpful when applying L/OPI adaptations for assessing sign language communication skills. Across the US and in Canada, the SLPI has been implemented in order to assess ASL from a broad perspective as it is used among skilled sign language communicators in the United States. As discussed in several of our SLPI documents, including SLPI PAPER #3, *What Does the SLPI Assess?*, this use includes the full range of ASL from pure, linguistic descriptions of ASL to English-like contact signing. This full range is characterized by (a) meaning-based sign language vocabulary selection consistent with standardized signs in current use by skilled language communicators, and (b) a variety of grammatical features that are consistent with effective use of gestural/visual language for communication. Considering the above, we are now labeling this application of the L/OPI to assessing sign language communication skills as the SLPI-ASL. Naturally, if the SLPI is used to assess sign languages other than ASL, this should be specified similar to applications of the L/OPI for different spoken languages. For example, the SLPI could be applied to Japanese Sign Language (JSL) and could then be designated as the SLPI-JSL. The SLPI has been adopted by the US Peace Corps for assessment of Kenyan Sign Language (KSL), and this application, therefore, could be properly labeled the SLPI-KSL.

We respect the work of our colleagues, and we encourage people to contact them, as well as us, to learn about options for assessing sign language skills. As we stated in our first SLPI publication (Newell et al., 1983) in response to two reviews:

...application of the LPI to sign evaluation is in its infant stages, and we have much to learn about its potential strengths and limitations for assessment of sign communication....Through continued cooperative efforts, supportive critique, and sharing of experiences, the appropriate issues raised by reviewers will be addressed. What we and others must keep in perspective is that communication is what is most important.

We have continued our efforts to apply LPI techniques from its infant stages to the level of making a significant difference in the quality of communication and services provided by academic, vocational rehabilitation, and other professionals working with students, clients, and our colleagues who are D/deaf and hard-of-hearing. We have learned much in our efforts through collaboration with our colleagues at more than 50 academic and vocational rehabilitation programs across the United States and in Canada and Kenya, Africa. Hopefully our efforts, and those of our colleagues who are engaged in developing other assessment tools for sign language skills, will be discussed and applied in a manner that recognizes that *communication* is what is most important.

By whom and where was the SLPI developed? For us, the SLPI developed through (1) careful study of the L/OPI literature, (2) discussion with L/OPI professionals, (3) participation in a L/OPI training workshop, (4) participation in a stimulating and informative meeting with our colleagues at ETS in 1983 to discuss application of L/OPI techniques to sign language assessment, and (5) since 1982 more than 70 SLPI Training/In-Service workshop training experiences across the United States, in Canada, and in Kenya, Africa.

For a history and perspective on the development of both the sign language instrument labeled as the SCPI as it evolved at Gallaudet University and the GU-ASLPI, we encourage you to contact Gallaudet University: [gradschool.gallaudet.edu/casll/morescpi.html](http://gradschool.gallaudet.edu/casll/morescpi.html). Also, information about the ASLPI and its' use at California State University Northridge is available at the following website: [www.csun.edu/~speddhh/aslpi.htm](http://www.csun.edu/~speddhh/aslpi.htm). In addition, we encourage you to learn about other sign language communication assessment tools that may serve your needs; for example, see SLPI PAPER #14, *Sign Language Assessment of Students and ASL Assessment Options*.

#### References

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