

SLPI PAPER #10: SHOULD SLPI RESULTS FROM OTHER PROGRAMS BE ACCEPTED?

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Introduction

As may be expected, as use of the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) has spread, a question whose frequency has increased is, “Should our program accept SLPI results from other programs?”

Options

We have given this significant thought, and after several in-depth discussions, we have come to the conclusion that this decision should be an either all or none decision; that is, either SLPI results from all other programs should be accepted or SLPI results from all other programs should not be accepted. If the decision is to accept results from all other programs, official documentation of results for each individual should be required.

Our Recommendation

We recommend that SLPI results from all other programs be accepted, with official documentation of results for each individual required. Below we provide a rationale for this recommendation. We recognize, however, that a decision to not accept results from other programs must be considered based on local circumstances and needs.

Rationale for Our Recommendation

The primary goal of SLPI use, for us, is to contribute to improved and effective communication among Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and Hearing people. We believe this can be accomplished best when respect is shown for our colleagues both locally and nationally.

The SLPI process is based on respect for local, highly skilled sign language communicators; that is, it is local people who are trained to conduct SLPI interviews, ratings, and sharing of results and it is local people who implement and monitor use of the SLPI. Given this, and given the efforts we have observed by our colleagues across the United States and in Canada to conscientiously implement and monitor their use of the SLPI, we believe all programs using the SLPI are contributing to improved and effective communication among Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and Hearing people. By accepting SLPI results from other programs, we are showing respect for the efforts of our colleagues, and we believe, as stated above, that this too will contribute to our goal of improved and effective communication among Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and Hearing people.

Naturally this leads to the question, “But how can I be sure that ratings across programs are equivalent?” The simple answer is “You cannot be sure.” To guarantee equivalent results a nationally based procedure would need to be implemented. We recognize the importance and benefits of nationally based testing systems, but we believe implementing SLPI use on a local basis, rather than national basis, has several important benefits. These benefits include (1) involving local/community people in SLPI application; (2) providing local control that allows the SLPI to be implemented and adapted in a manner consistent with local resources and needs; (3) sensitivity and respect for local sign language dialectical variations within the assessment procedure; (4) opportunities for people to review and discuss their assessment results with people knowledgeable about both the SLPI and local options for developing and refining sign language communication skills; (5) opportunities for programs to take into consideration assessment results when planning courses, workshops, and other options to support sign language communication skills development; and (6) providing assessment and follow-up services in a timely and cost effective manner for people taking the SLPI. [For an informative discussion that provides a comparison of a nationally based assessment procedures and a locally based assessment procedures, readers are referred to an article by Julie Moore in the July, 1997, *Journal of Interpreting*, pages 9-22, “Looking at RID and NAD Interpreter Evaluations Through an Intercultural Lens;” this is Reading #19 in *SLPI Notebook (NB)* Section 8. Also, see SLPI PAPER #12, *Support for Local SLPI Teams and Team Training*.]

Importance of SLPI Team In-Service Training and Faculty/Staff Professional Development

Given the fact that SLPI results from one program may be accepted by other programs, we wish to again stress the importance of programs using the SLPI to carefully monitor their use of the SLPI and to provide in-service training for their SLPI Team Members on a regular basis. Training should include workshops and other activities that are designed to help ensure standard SLPI procedures are being followed and to help ensure consistent and appropriate interpretation of the SLPI Rating Scale by SLPI Team Members. (See SLPI PAPER #19, *Monitoring the Consistency of Your SLPI Team Members' Ratings*.) In a training notebook for the Language/Oral Proficiency Interview, the basis for the SLPI, the importance of in-service training is evident from the following statement:

Extensive standardized training and periodic recalibration have successfully assured the reliability of both interviewers and raters.

_____. (1982). *Foreign Language Oral Proficiency Assessment*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Also, program guidelines for SLPI use should include a statement that all faculty/staff members, including those who have achieved their sign language communication skill level standards, may, as part of their professional development plans, be requested by their supervisors to take the SLPI. If faculty/staff members achieve below their skill level standards, their professional development plans should include plans for sign language communication skills development and for re-taking the SLPI when appropriate.

Summary

We believe the decision to accept or not accept SLPI results from other programs should be an all or none decision. Further, based on the fact that the primary goal of SLPI use is to contribute to improved and effective communication among Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and Hearing people, and based on the importance of respect for our colleagues on a local and national basis to the accomplishment of this goal, we recommend that programs accept SLPI results from all other programs, with official documentation of results for each individual required. We encourage programs using the SLPI to carefully monitor their use of the SLPI and to provide in-service training for their SLPI Team Members on a regular basis to help ensure standard SLPI procedures are being followed and to help ensure consistent and appropriate interpretation of the SLPI Rating Scale by SLPI Team Members.

In addition, we encourage programs to consider sign language communication skills development in professional development planning for faculty/staff who have and have not achieved their standards, including taking the SLPI..