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General Overview of the Puerto Rican Signed Language Interpreter

By

Katia Y. Rivera Hernández

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

Western Oregon University



**WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF
WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED**

- Thesis
- Field Study
- Professional Project

Titled: The General Overview of the Puerto Rican signed Language Interpreter

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Candidate for the degree of : Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

*and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

General Overview of the Puerto Rican Signed Language Interpreter

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The aim of this research is to explore the research question: What is the general profile of the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter? The purpose of this study was to identify the overall characteristics of the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter, including the demographics, their training in interpreting, and their work settings, experiences, needs, and challenges. This study used a mixed methods approach; the data was collected from a survey and three interviews. According to the data, the signed language interpreting field in Puerto Rico is behind compared to the field in the United States, due to lack of research and limited educational opportunities for continuing education. The data revealed that the signed language interpreting field in Puerto Rico is still young; it is dominated by females and a majority of interpreters work in educational and VRS settings. Most Puerto Rican signed language interpreters feel that they need more educational support.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

As a Puerto Rican signed language interpreter, opportunities to further my education were limited. I was motivated to conduct this investigation because of my own needs to learn more about the differences I have noticed between interpreters in the United States and interpreters in Puerto Rico. The purpose of this study is to explore who is the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter and what is the status of the interpreting field in Puerto Rico. In this investigation, no previous research was found regarding specifically the signed language interpreting field in Puerto Rico. There are many questions concerning the interpreting field in Puerto Rico. This study represents initial research to uncover the current situation, focusing on the signed language interpreter's general profile. Research is imperative to grow our profession and improve it.

In my experience, I have noticed that signed language interpreting agencies in Puerto Rico hire interpreters who do not have the necessary skills to work professionally. Some interpreters have not had training to become professional signed language interpreters, and they are hired to work mostly in educational settings. Contrary to the United States and other countries, signed language interpreters in Puerto Rico do not need to hold certification or accreditation to practice as professional interpreters, regardless of the setting. I was curious to know more about practicing interpreters' training, needs, experience, demographics, and work settings to develop a better understanding of the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter.

Statement of the Problem

The goal of this study is to answer the question: What is the general profile of the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter? In this general overview, an attempt is made to examine important characteristics such as interpreter's training and/or education, work settings, experience, needs, and challenges. A closer look at the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter will provide an important insight into why the Puerto Rican signed language interpreting field stands as it does today and what education and continuing education Puerto Rican signed language interpreters have available to them. Investigating these questions and topics will bring to light the most important issues facing the interpreting field in Puerto Rico. It is essential to identify the issues in order to find solutions for them.

I suspect that a great number of signed language interpreters in Puerto Rico are not educated enough in signed language interpreting to be practicing at the level expected of professionals. The fact that signed language interpreting agencies do not require their interpreters to hold certification can cause interpreters to not prioritize the need for pursuing further training in the field. In my experience as a signed language interpreter and a student, it seems that in Puerto Rico there are not enough professional development resources for interpreters to remain current and improve their skills in the field of interpreting. I assume that money plays an important role in the lack of educational resources in Puerto Rico.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the overall characteristics of the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter, focusing on interpreter's demographics, how they got

into the field, the training they obtained in becoming an interpreter, the work settings in which they practice, their experiences, needs, and challenges. This is the first investigation of its kind in Puerto Rico about signed language interpreters. Research is necessary for further development in the field of signed language interpreting. At the same time, this study has initiated research in the interpreting field in Puerto Rico, hopefully encouraging others to follow suit into researching and improving the field of signed language interpreting.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to state that all research has limitations. The sample size depends on the interpreters who agree to participate in the study. It is not clear how many signed language interpreters there are currently in Puerto Rico but, from my experience in the field, it could be estimated that the number of individuals conducting signed language interpreting currently in Puerto Rico is around 200. Sixty-six interpreters participated in this study, possibly leaving out the majority of the interpreters; hence the profile created with the collection of the data is generalized with the participants of this study.

Another limitation may be the data collection sources I have chosen. These sources may limit the important information that can be relevant to my study. In addition, the access I have to Puerto Rican signed language interpreters is limited by the recruiting agencies, leaving out freelance interpreters who work independently. Another limitation might be that the survey was conducted online, and this might leave out interpreters who do not have Internet connection or the necessary technology to access the survey. Finally, as a Puerto Rican signed language interpreter myself, my experience

and knowledge may influence the collection and analysis of the research and result in bias.

Definition of Terms

Certification—a recognition given to an interpreter who has been evaluated and tested on his/her interpreting skills and has succeeded.

Collectivist culture—a group-oriented culture in which people honor their families and have goals defined by their group and not individuals (Mindess et al., 2006, p. 40).

CODA—Children of Deaf Adults, an individual who grew up with Deaf parents.

Code of ethics—a set of ethical and professional guidelines that should be followed in interpreting practice.

Deaf culture—a subculture in which the main language is a signed language.

Deaf versus deaf—capital ‘D’ in Deaf refers to a person who identifies as part of the Deaf community and its culture. Lower case ‘d’ in deaf refers to a person with hearing loss.

High context culture—a culture that depends on linguistic context; one has to be part of the culture to understand their language (Mindess et al., 2006, p 46).

Interpreter training program—a program that trains students in becoming signed language interpreters.

Professional development—continuing education in a field that can include workshops and other activities.

Registro de Intérpretes para Sordos de Puerto Rico (RISPRI)—an interpreter non-profit organization in Puerto Rico.

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID)—an American organization that provides certification to signed language interpreters.

Signed language—a visual language Deaf people use to communicate.

Signed language interpreter—a professional who works interpreting language and cultural differences between individuals who use signed language and a spoken language.

Video Relay Services (VRS)—a form of telecommunication used by deaf individuals who use signed language to communicate through voice phone calls through a signed language interpreter (FCC, 2016).

Puerto Rico

It is important to take a look at the reality of Puerto Rico considering its demographics, culture, Deaf and sign language education, Deaf culture, and interpreting. According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA, 2001), Puerto Rico is an island in the Caribbean to the East of the Dominican Republic with an area of 8,870 square kilometers. The population of Puerto Rico is 3,598,357. The official language spoken in Puerto Rico is Spanish. After being colonized by the Spanish for 400 years, Puerto Ricans were granted U. S. citizenship in 1917, and Puerto Rico became a U. S. territory (CIA, 2001). Puerto Ricans have the same legal rights as people who live in the United States.



Figure 1. Location of Puerto Rico (CIA, 2001)



Figure 2. Map of Puerto Rico (CIA, 2001)

Culture. The people in Puerto Rico are culturally classified as collectivist and group oriented (Schwartz, 2009). Mindess, Holcomb, Langholtz, Moyers, and Solow (2006) discussed the importance of the variance of cultures when communicating. Puerto Rican culture is similar to the Latino/Hispanic American culture mentioned by Mindess

et al. (2006). As a Latino culture, family is “the central network of life” (Mindess et al., 2006, p. 133). Puerto Ricans also share details of their lives with each other and value input from one another when engaging in decision making. In both these examples (collectivist and high context), the culture of Puerto Rico aligns more closely with Deaf culture than the mainstream American culture. Puerto Rican families tend to be larger due to the fact that they include extended family. Elders are valued and honored, and children tend to be dependent on their families even after graduating from high school. Parents are likely to keep taking care of their children until they get married. Puerto Ricans are very affectionate; unlike Americans, they tend to kiss and hug when greeting people. Timeliness is not of great importance. Puerto Ricans are not strict with punctuality, unless it is work related. A cause of this tardiness may be due to the great amount of time it takes to say goodbye to everyone, similar to what was reported by Mindess et al. (2006) regarding the Deaf culture. The dominant religion is Catholicism, with 85% of the population practicing this religion (CIA, 2001).

Signed language and Deaf education. The history of signed language and formal Deaf education in Puerto Rico began when the first school for the Deaf, Colegio San Gabriel, was established in 1913 in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico (Matos, 1990). Colegio San Gabriel was a school directed by American missionary nuns who came to Puerto Rico to educate Deaf children. They taught American Sign Language but after a few years, they decided to take on another mission and left the island of Puerto Rico in 1956, leaving the school administration to Spanish nuns. The school changed locations from Aguadilla to San Juan, Puerto Rico, where it remains to this day. The new administration

tried instituting oralism, but the Deaf students continued to sign (Matos, 1990); they continue to sign to this day.

In 1959, a group of evangelist missionaries established the second school for the Deaf in Puerto Rico, the Christian School and Chapel for the Deaf, Inc. They used spoken and written English and sign (Matos, 1990). There are currently four schools for the Deaf in Puerto Rico: Colegio San Gabriel para Niños Sordos in San Juan, Evangelical School for the Deaf in Luquillos, Colegio de Niños Sordos Fray Pedro Ponce de León in Ponce, and Escuela Cristiana para Sordos in Aguadilla (Williams & Parks, 2012).

Given the exposure Puerto Rico has had to ASL and English signs, the signed language used in Puerto Rico is ASL and Puerto Rican Sign Language (PRSL). PRSL is a variation or dialect of ASL. Deaf Puerto Ricans also use Signed Spanish and Signed English, but ASL meets the linguistic needs of a vast majority (Williams & Parks, 2012).

Deaf community and interpreting. The latest census revealed that there was a total of 151,318 deaf or individuals with hearing loss in Puerto Rico (González, 2016). Even though, not all of the deaf sign, there is still a great demand for signed language interpreters. It is imperative that signed language interpreters are properly trained and available to work in the Puerto Rican Deaf community.

One of the main issues surrounding the interpreting field in Puerto Rico is the lack of access to continuing education, which could have a severe negative impact on the Deaf community. If interpreters do not continue to enhance their skills and polish their craft, they will not be able to provide high quality service; interpreters need to have exposure to the latest research in the field, and without continuing education opportunities there is a lack of exposure to the ways the field is continuously dynamically growing and changing.

Williams and Parks (2012) explored the situation faced by the Deaf community in Puerto Rico regarding the history of education for the Deaf, signed languages used on the island, and organizations that support the Deaf community. Their study revealed that there is a lack of interpreters on the island to meet the demand of the deaf population. No explanation for why these organizations have been failing was found in the literature. However, in my experience, many organizations (i.e., Deaf groups, organizations for Deaf rights, and interpreter training programs) that have been established in Puerto Rico have not had the necessary support to be successful and accomplish further advances in the field of interpreting, which has led to their demise.

Interpreter education started informally in the 1990s in Puerto Rico (Matos, 1990). Development in the field of interpreting may be seen in the establishment of an Interpreter Training Program (ITP) in Universidad de Turabo, Caguas, Puerto Rico. This program recently (in August 2016) went from being a four-year bachelor's degree to a two-year associate degree that consists of a total of 67 credits: 27 credits of general education courses, 37 credits of concentration courses, and 3 credits for an elective course. The description of the program states that:

The Associate Degree in Sign Language Interpreting will be the first academic program at this level in Puerto Rico. The Program will provide theoretical, academic and technical training to those students desiring to pursue a degree in interpreting for the Deaf. It includes classroom lectures, laboratory practice skills and field experience in the deaf and hearing community. The structure of the program provides for the students to have opportunities for incidental learning. The program is focused on the student who does not have an academic degree and

is interested in developing sign language and interpreting skills to work in immediate settings such as education, vocational and community settings. The program includes courses in liberal arts which are important for the students to be able to interpret in any setting. (Universidad del Turabo, 2016)

This was the first interpreter training program offered at the university level, and it is currently the only interpreter training program available in Puerto Rico. There are currently no Deaf instructors teaching in this program.

In comparison to educational programs in the United States and other countries, this seems to be a step backwards with Puerto Rico's only ITP. This study explores if and how factors like these impact the interpreters in Puerto Rico. Some are concerned that signed language interpreters do not meet the professional requirements to be practicing (R. Rivera, personal communication, October 12, 2016), and there is a lack of professional development opportunities in the field of interpreting.

Another way interpreters get trained in Puerto Rico is through the non-profit organization of Servicios Orientados al Sordo, Inc. (SOS, n.d.). This corporation was established in 1995 by Lilian Ramirez, Edwin Diaz, and José Bertrán. Their goal is to support the Deaf community by contributing to the training of signed language interpreters and providing interpreting services. Their interpreter training consists of individual courses in Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced sign language; Conversational Sign Language; and Interpreting I, II, III, and IV. They have hearing and Deaf teachers.

Interpreters in Puerto Rico are limited to non-professional and unconventional forms of education because of the lack of college-level instruction. Interpreters do not need to hold certification or accreditation to practice in the field to work within a variety

of settings such as schools, hospitals, and legal settings. Many interpreters learn sign language and interpreting skills through religious affiliations, Deaf family and friends, short courses, and workshops (which are not often provided in Puerto Rico). Although there has been some progress shown in the interpreting field on the island of Puerto Rico, when compared to other countries, there is still a great need for further development.

Deaf people's needs are not being met on the island. For 15 years, the Puerto Rican Deaf community comes together annually to march, with the goal of being seen, heard, and recognized for their needs and rights that are often not met (Quintero, 2013). The fight continues despite the laws that protect them. Puerto Rico's legal system is within the framework of the U. S. federal system (CIA, 2001). Therefore, the laws that protect the Deaf community in Puerto Rico include the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) and the Law 136 of 1996, Article 1, which states that government agencies must provide signed language interpreters to Deaf people (OPPI, 1996).

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

To set a foundation for comparison, the literature reviewed for this study provides a general overview of the signed language interpreter in the United States as well as the professionalization process of the interpreting field. Puerto Rico can look at the United States as an example of what is expected of the interpreting profession. With the demands for interpreters rising in Puerto Rico (Williams & Parks, 2012), it is crucial that Interpreter Training Programs and educational opportunities are established and developed in Puerto Rico to improve the quality of interpreters and raise the standards comparable to those in the United States for the greater benefit of the Deaf community and the profession as a whole.

Historical Overview

According to Ball (2013), Deaf education in the United States began in the 1800s with the initiative of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc. Gallaudet and Clerc worked together to open the first school for the Deaf, the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons, in Connecticut in 1817. This step opened the doors for higher education for the Deaf, legal protection for the Deaf, and the need for signed language interpreters. It was not until mid-1900s that formal education for interpreters began. The first interpreting program started with Lottie Riekehof in 1948 at the Central Bible Institute in Springfield, Missouri (Ball, 2013).

Before the professionalization of interpreting, family members of the deaf, friends, or teachers interpreted voluntarily for the deaf without being formally trained. It was not until 1964 that a group of interpreters decided to establish the Registry of

Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) in Muncie, Indiana, as the first organization to provide certification for signed language interpreters. In 1970, the National Consortium of Programs for Training Sign Language Interpreters was established. This gave rise to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), which served in funding interpreting programs (Napier, 2009). The National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers was a five-year grant project funded by the United States Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration. The consortium worked toward “increasing the number of qualified interpreters and advancing the field of interpreter education in the US” (Napier, 2009, p. 270). They have also organized numerous efforts towards standardization throughout the years.

Legislation

In addition to these organizations, some legislation impacted the Deaf community by giving them rights pertaining to their access to communication. Therefore the demands for qualified interpreters rose. In 1973, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was established with the purpose of ending discrimination against disabled citizens from preschool to adult education programs. This was followed by Public Law 94-142, known as the Education for All Handicapped Children’s Act, which states that handicapped children from age 3 to 21 shall receive free public education with the appropriate program for the individual child (Piehl & McIntosh, 2011). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) established in 1975 proceeds. The IDEA ensures that children with disabilities receive a free education in the “least restrictive environment”; therefore, the needs of the individual student were to be met (Ladenson, 2000).

Another law significant to the Deaf community is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), established in 1990. The ADA protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination in “employment, State and local government services, public accommodations, commercial facilities, and transportation” (ADA.gov). The ADA specifically protects the Deaf community from being discriminated due to language barriers, which includes the right to a qualified signed language interpreter. Furthermore, ADA Title III (ADA, 1990) defined a qualified interpreter as “an interpreter who, via a video remote interpreting (VRI) service or an on-site appearance, is able to interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially, both receptively and expressively, using any necessary specialized vocabulary.”

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID)

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) has worked to provide an evaluation system to certify interpreters’ competence. The number of certified interpreters listed in the RID website at the moment of this study is of 9,815, five of whom are from Puerto Rico. The RID has also developed a set of ethical guidelines that interpreters should follow in their practice to maintain a professional conduct.

Additionally, the RID Standard Practice Papers define the standards of a professional interpreter and practice settings as follows: “Interpreting is a complex process that requires a high degree of linguistic, cognitive and technical skills in both English and American Sign Language (ASL)” (RID, 2007). Interpreters must understand the subject matter in order to interpret it; they are also required to understand the cultures between which they work to provide accurate interpretation between the two languages. Signed language interpreters need to have a proficient knowledge of Deaf culture to

render the message correctly. Being bilingual and bicultural is essential when interpreting.

There are two types of interpretation, simultaneous and consecutive.

Simultaneous interpretation is when the interpreter does the interpretation to the target language at the same time as the source language is being produced. Consecutive interpretation uses processing time and pauses to make the interpretation in a consecutive manner. Interpreters can work in varied settings such as educational, mental health or psychiatric, medical, legal, religious, entertainment, employment related or personal venues. Wherever the need arises for a Deaf person to communicate with a person who is not deaf and capable of hearing, an interpreter will be needed to bridge the communication gap. Interpreters can be specialized in legal, medical, educational or business interpreting as well as video relay interpreters. In the video relay service, the interpreter is working from one place, and they can be reached through a video phone and a phone providing service to the Deaf and hearing consumers, respectively, at a distance.

Confidentiality and service free of bias are highly valued in the interpreting profession and form part of the tenets of the Code of Professional Conduct, which states the principles to which interpreters must adhere. RID credentials specify a minimum level of competence. To maintain certification, interpreters must engage in continuing education to remain up to date on current and latest practices. Interpreting is a lifelong profession; an interpreter can never stop educating himself or herself (RID, 2007).

The RID has developed a list of seven tenets for interpreters to follow, known as the Code of Professional Conduct (CPC). This same code is utilized by most interpreting

agencies in the United States and Puerto Rico; it is the code by which interpreters should conduct themselves on the job. The CPC, enacted in 2005, stated that:

- Interpreters adhere to standards of confidential communication.
- Interpreters possess the professional skills and knowledge required for the specific interpreting situation.
- Interpreters conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to the specific interpreting situation.
- Interpreters demonstrate respect for consumers.
- Interpreters demonstrate respect for colleagues, interns, and students of the profession.
- Interpreters maintain ethical business practices.
- Interpreters engage in professional development. (RID, 2005)

Each of these tenets has significance in the practice of interpreting and should be considered when making ethical and professional decisions.

Interpreter Qualification/Characteristics

The ADA gives Deaf consumers the right to a “qualified interpreter” (ADA, 1990). In Title III of the ADA, a qualified interpreter is defined as “an interpreter who is able to interpret effectively, accurately and impartially both receptively and expressively, using any necessary specialized vocabulary” (ADA, 1990). A study by Stuard (2008) revealed the characteristics of a qualified signed language interpreter according to Deaf consumers and hearing interpreters. Deaf consumers of signed language interpreters and hearing interpreters agree that a qualified interpreter should value interpersonal and soft skills such as “flexibility, understanding, the ability to get along with diverse cultures,

respect and cooperation, empathy and the ability to accept constructive criticism” (Stuard, 2008, p. 209), professional conduct skills such as “presenting oneself well in the interpreting assignment, acting with diplomacy, and demonstrating ethical values” (p. 209), and timeliness and preparation for assignments.

Stuard’s (2008) study stressed that interpreters possess cross-cultural understanding through socialization with the Deaf community in order to learn the diversity of signing styles, understanding the Deaf culture and developing sign language proficiency. Stuard concluded: “Deaf consumers’ perceptions of desired qualities can be categorized into four distinct areas: 1. Perceptions of signing competencies; 2. Interpersonal skills and professional conduct; 3. Education; and 4. Deaf cultural competencies” (p. 217).

In Kanda’s (1989) study, *Characteristics of certified sign language interpreters including patterns of brain dominance*, the author identified some of the personal demographics of certified signed language interpreters. At that time, 78% of the interpreters were female, 95% were Caucasian, 46% had a deaf family member, and most interpreters were between the ages of 30 and 40. In response to the question about education, 32% of interpreters held a bachelor’s degree, 29% had some college courses and 18% attended an interpreter training program of 1 to 4 years in length (Kanda, 1989). Compared to Kanda’s study from 1989, currently 86% of interpreters are female and 87% are Caucasian, according to the RID 2015 Annual Report.

On the other hand, Yarger (1997) looked at educational signed language interpreters working in two rural western states. He found that most educational interpreters working in these settings were female, Caucasian, had an average five years

of experience in educational interpreting, were not certified by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, and held a high school diploma. In addition, 16% had attended and interpreter training program with one or no course on educational interpreting, and participants self-reported as proficient in a range of not proficient to highly proficient. The interpreters in this study needed more educational opportunities, feedback on their interpreting skills, and access to workshops. Yarger (1997) concluded that the educational interpreters who participated in his study were under qualified for their position. Deaf individuals have a right to a qualified interpreter, which highlights the importance of interpreter's training and certification, a quality that was missing in the two rural western states in Yarger's study.

Requirements for Interpreters to Work in the United States

Currently in the United States, most states require interpreters to be certified either by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf or the National Association for the Deaf; to hold state or national certification when working in court, state agencies, or medical settings; and/or to hold the Educational Interpreter Proficiency Assessment (EIPA) level 3.0 or above when working in educational settings (State regulations for interpreters, n.d.).

Interpreter Training Programs

Interpreter Training Programs emerged from legislation and the demand for qualified signed language interpreters. According to the RID website, as of February 15 of 2017, there are a total of 41 bachelor's degree programs in the United States, 78 associate degree programs, 48 certificate programs, and 4 graduate programs. There is

one associate-level interpreter training program in Puerto Rico, but it is not listed on the RID website.

Summary

The literature reviewed here provides a framework of the history of the interpreting field in the United States and the characteristics of a qualified interpreter. It is valuable to recognize the progress the interpreting field has made in the United States. This information can be used to compare to results of the current study pertaining to the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter and to provide examples on how the interpreting field in Puerto Rico can improve and increase the number of qualified interpreters.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This research used a mixed methods approach. The quantitative data collection method consisted of a survey. This was combined with qualitative data: interviews were conducted to substantiate the quantitative results and provide a deeper understanding of the results (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 6). The quantitative results were compared to the qualitative results to triangulate the data (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 69).

The aim of this study was to look at the general profile of the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter. The data collected examine some important characteristics, such as interpreter's training and/or education in preparing to become an interpreter, their work settings, experiences, needs, and challenges. The survey method elicits interpreters' demographics and experiences in the field to create a general profile. Before starting data collection, the study was approved by the Western Oregon University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The consent forms, survey, and interview were written in Spanish since the participants are Puerto Rican and their primary language is Spanish. (See Appendix A and C for the documents in Spanish.) All the documents were translated to English for the publication of this thesis and because the members of the committee for this study are not Spanish language users. (See Appendix B and D for the translated documents.) Additionally, the hope is that this study will reveal characteristics of the Puerto Rican interpreting community to the interpreting community in the United States. I conducted the translations for this study; my first language is Spanish; I am also fluent in English. The translation for the consent forms, survey questions, and interview questions took

approximately two hours. The translation for the results of the survey took close to two weeks, and the transcript and translation for the interview took one week to complete. The results for the survey were translated to English and analyzed after translation. The interview was transcribed into Spanish and translated before the data analysis. I decided to translate the data into English before analyzing it so that I could focus and work on the data in the same language I was going to use to write about it. A challenge faced during the translation process was that some Puerto Rican cultural nuances do not have a translation to English; this might be an issue, since some information might have been lost in translation and does not meet the original meaning. In future study, an additional translator would be used to mitigate any problems with translation.

Overview of the Instruments

The instruments used for the data collection of this study were a survey addressed to all signed language interpreters in Puerto Rico and an interview with three chosen participants.

Survey

The research started with the quantitative method using a survey as a data collection source. The survey was created in SurveyMonkey and was distributed completely online. The survey consists of 14 questions. Questions 1-8 are factual, 9-10 are behavioral, and 11-14 attitudinal. According to Hale and Napier (2013), factual questions explore the demographics of the respondents, behavioral questions ask what the respondents do, and attitudinal questions solicit respondents' opinions (Hale & Napier, 2013, p. 57-62). The survey was published in October 17, 2016 and closed on November 2, 2016.

Population. The participants of this study were professional signed language interpreters practicing in Puerto Rico.

Sampling technique. In hopes of reaching as many Puerto Rican practicing interpreters to fill out the survey from all around the island, the survey was directly sent to known interpreters through Facebook private message and email; it was also sent to interpreting agencies and interpreter groups through email and Facebook. Interpreting agencies were contacted through phone call and/or email and were asked to send the survey to their interpreters. Through Facebook, some Puerto Rican interpreters' groups were contacted like the Puerto Rico interpreters organization, Registro de Interpretes para Sordos de Puerto Rico, known as RISPRI, Christian interpreters, and groups from other parts of the island of Puerto Rico. Participants were asked to share the survey with their colleagues. The survey was open for 18 days, and a reminder was sent at least twice to the prospective participants who may not have responded to the email or Facebook message. A total of 66 interpreters answered the survey.

Limitations. The survey was distributed online; therefore it did not reach signed language interpreters who do not have Internet access or technology such as computer, smartphones or tablets. The survey was sent to the groups found online; some might have been missed. The survey probably did not reach every interpreter in Puerto Rico, and not everyone who received the survey responded to it. The survey was disseminated to approximately 150 interpreters according to the amount of interpreters in the agency that distributed the survey to all of the interpreters who work for the agency, the size of the Facebook groups, and the number of people that the survey was sent to directly.

Interviews

An interview of 15 open-ended questions was conducted with three Puerto Rican interpreters for the qualitative portion of this study. (See Appendix C for a list of the interview questions in Spanish and Appendix D for a list of the interview questions in English.) Quotes from the interview will be used in the findings of this study. It is pertinent to remember that all quotes have been translated from Spanish.

Population/Sampling technique. The participants for the interview were selected for their different backgrounds in entering the field of interpreting. Each participant has a different profile in regard to aspects such as age, experience working as an interpreter, education levels, and different ways they learned the language and started in the field of interpreting. Their diverse perspectives will help to make known their experiences and their process of becoming interpreters and will also contribute to the creation of a general profile of the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter. One participant is a child of Deaf parents, the second participant is a Jehovah's Witness (the Jehovah's Witnesses have a sign language congregation through which people can learn sign language with courses and interaction with the Deaf community), and the third participant attended the Interpreter Training program from University of Turabo in Puerto Rico. A letter of consent was sent to each participant through email, and the interviews were held through Google Hangouts, Facebook video call, and FaceTime. The interviews were recorded using the Voice Memo application on iPhone and the Voice Recorder application in Windows. The results of the interview were coded and categorized based on the respondents' answers to compare with the results of the survey.

Since the interviews were conducted in Spanish, the transcribed data were translated to English before analysis. Interview extracts (Hale & Napier, 2013, p. 90) have been added to the analysis. With the data collected, I am to know where the main issue is, what the needs are, and identify what needs must be addressed, to create an overall profile of the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter.

Restrictions/limitations. Since the responses have been translated, the original nuances of the text might be lost in translation or not expressed accurately. The sample for the interview portion of this study was limited, and the responses are limited to the three individuals that participated of the interview. The findings will be generalizable due to the small sample.

For the final analysis, a parallel mixed methods design was be used. The quantitative data was measured by the SurveyMonkey program used to conduct the survey. The qualitative data was analyzed using the transcript from the interviews and the categorizations identified in the analysis. The quantitative and the qualitative data will be analyzed individually and the results of both will be compared to triangulate the data (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 69).

Chapter 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter includes the findings of the study from the survey and the interviews. The results of the survey helped answer the research questions and guide toward a better understanding of who the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter is, getting to know important aspects of their characteristics and demographics. The results helped inform suggestions for how to foster the growth of Puerto Rican signed language interpreters and the profession as a whole in Puerto Rico. The results of this survey were analyzed from the answers of all participants and their individual responses.

Survey Results

The questions of the survey were divided into demographic, attitudinal, and behavioral questions. Factual questions ask the demographics of the respondents, behavioral questions explore what the respondents do, and attitudinal questions solicit respondent's opinions (Hale & Napier, 2013, p. 57-62).

Demographics. Of the 66 participants who responded to the survey, 47 (71%) were female, and 19 (29%) were male. The majority of the participants, or 44%, are between the ages of 26-35 (see Figure 3).

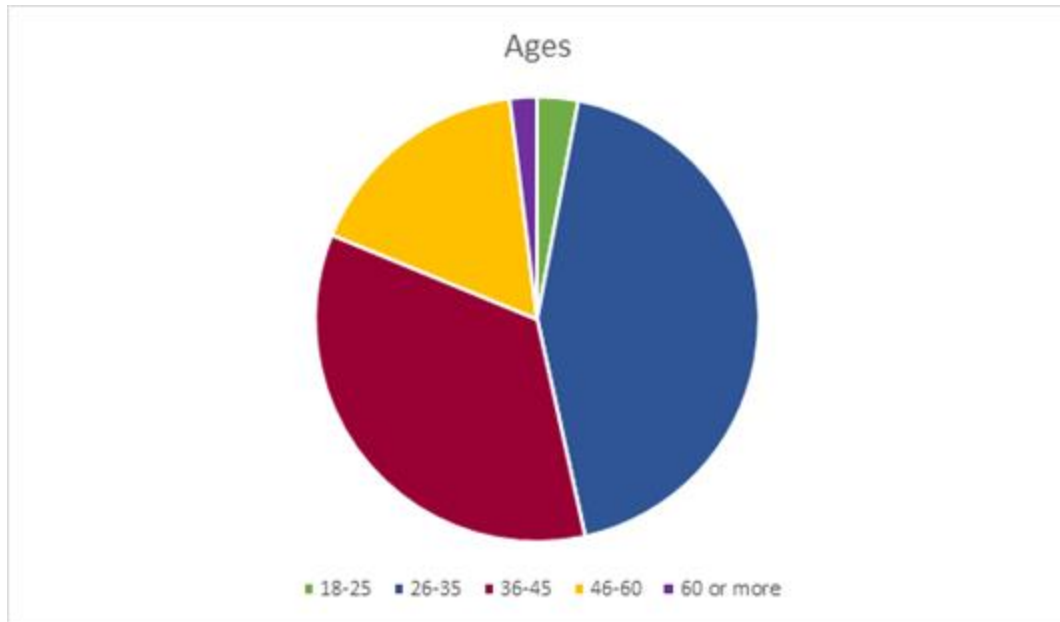


Figure 3. Participant Ages

Twenty (30%) of the participants said they joined the field of interpreting because they had a Deaf family member; 17 (26%) said they started through a religious group. Six (9%) said they entered through a friend. Six indicated personal interest as their reason for entering the field. Three said they entered the field because of education. Three said they saw the need in the Deaf community, and 11 chose the ‘other’ option. In response to the question regarding their participation in an interpreter training program, 47 (71%) said they participated in a training program, and 19 (29%) said they did not. Most of the participants, 21 (40%), said they got a certificate for their training, 15 (23%) completed a bachelor’s degree in interpreting, 12 (18%) took courses, 2 (3%) took workshops, 2 (3%) trained by interacting with Deaf people, and 1 (2%) trained in their religious meetings interacting with friends that know sign language. Ten (15%) of the respondents said they are certified by the RID, and 56 (85%) said they are not certified.

Behavioral. As seen in Figure 4, most participants, 33 (50%), have been working as professional interpreters for 5-10 years. Seven (11%) have been working for 21-35 years, and none have been working more than 36 years.

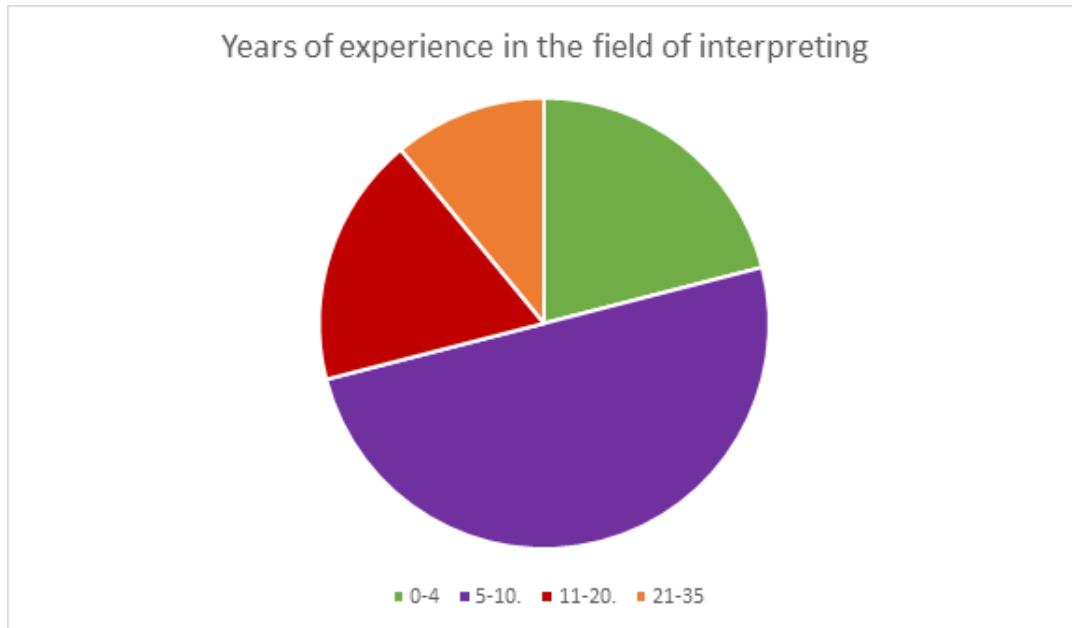


Figure 4. Years of Experience in the Field of Interpreting

The majority of the participants work mostly in VRS (38%) or educational (36%) settings (see Figure 5).

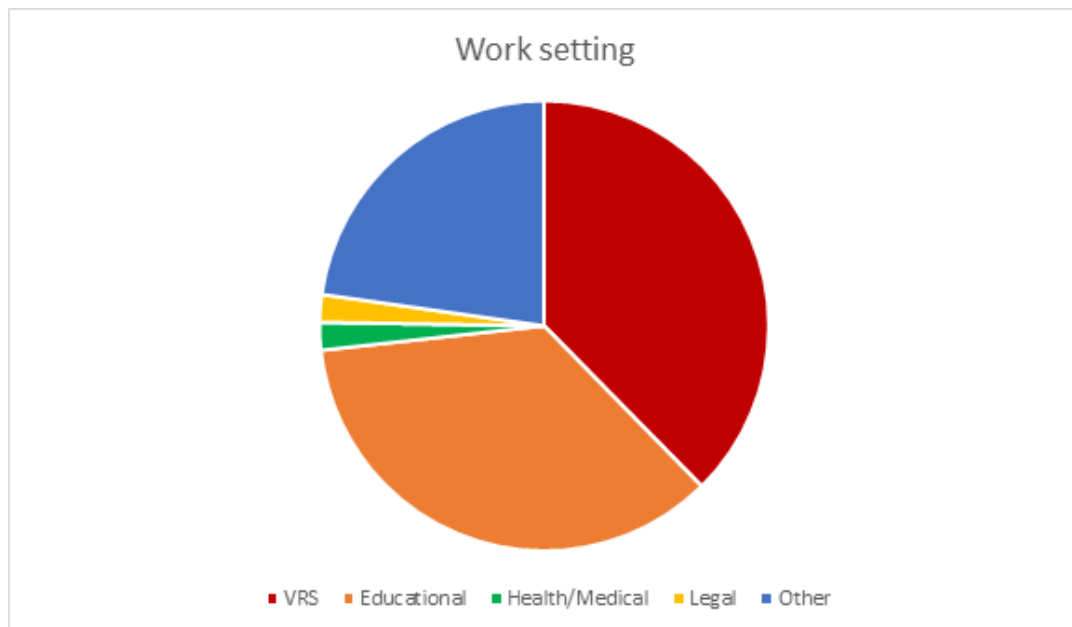


Figure 5. Work settings

Most of the participants, 49 (74%), have participated in continuing education activities 0-6 months ago. Nine (14%) have participated in continuing education 1-2 years ago. Seven (11%) participated 7-11 months ago. Only one participant (2%) said he/she participated 3-5 years ago, and none chose the 6-10 years ago or 'never' options.

Attitudinal. Most of the participants, a total of 66 (95%) respondents, said they would attend more educational opportunities if those opportunities were available. Three (5%) said they did not know if they would participate, and no one said that they would not. Fifty-seven (88%) participants said they need more educational support in interpreting. Five (8%) participants said they did not need support, and 3 (5%) said they did not know. On a scale of 0-5 (0 being not important at all, 3 being somewhat important and 5 being very important), 56 (86%) participants said it is very important for them to participate in continuing education activities, 7 (11%) chose 4 from the scale, and 2 (3%) participants said it was somewhat important. On a different scale from 0-5 (0 being not satisfied at all, 3 being somewhat satisfied and 5 being very satisfied), 29 (44%) participants said they were somewhat satisfied with the interpreting field in Puerto Rico, 14 (21%) chose 2 from the scale, 7 (11%) chose 4 from the scale, 6 (9%) choose 1 from the scale, 5 (8%) said they were not satisfied at all and the same amount said they were very satisfied (see Figure 6).

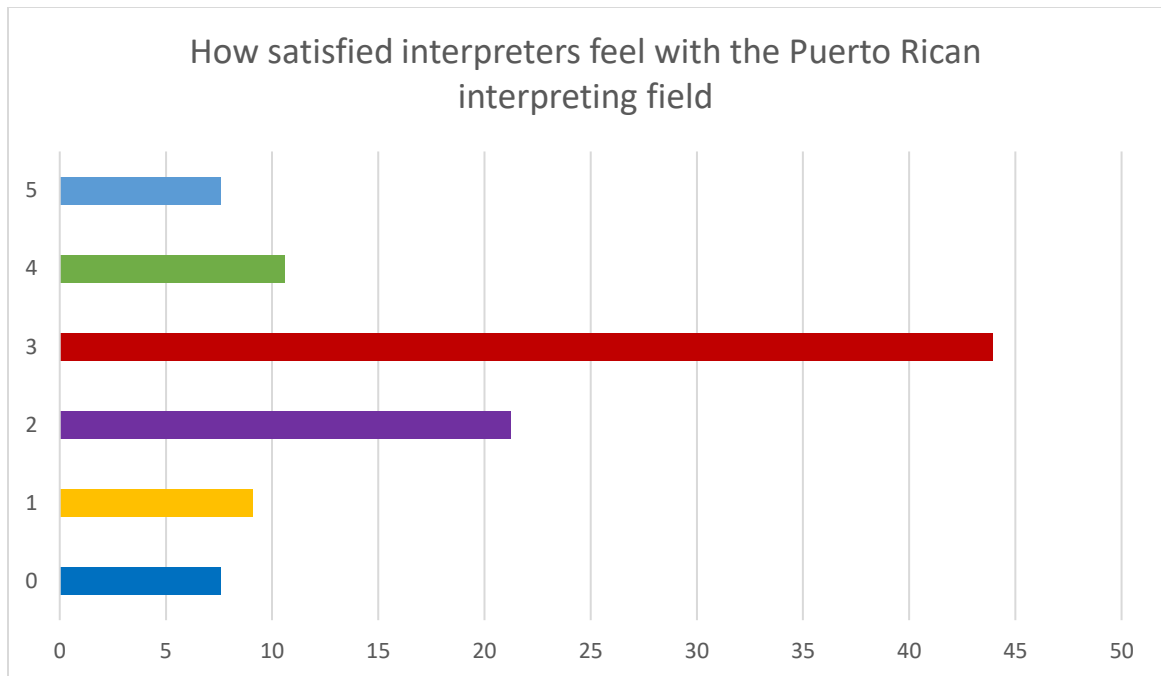


Figure 6. How Satisfied Interpreters Feel with the Puerto Rican Interpreting Field

Interview Results

Three interviews were conducted for this study. The participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity and keep confidentiality. Interviewees will be referred to as Luis, María, and Ana. The findings are limited to the experiences and perspectives of these three individuals.

The first question was “What got you into becoming an interpreter?” Luis responded by saying that a lot of interpreters had their first exposure to signed language through a Jehovah’s Witness religious group. Luis indicated that his main purpose in pursuing interpreting is to help the Deaf community. The Jehovah’s Witnesses have a signed language congregation in which everything is in signed language, Deaf people and other signers congregate together and improve their signing skills through constant practice and interaction with the Deaf members and other signers. The way Deaf people

react when one is making the effort to communicate with them is very gratifying, according to Luis.

Like six of the interpreters who participated in the survey indicated, Luis and Ana also became interested in signed language for its aesthetics; they say it is beautiful, and they fell in love with the language. María responded by stating that some interpreters enter the field of interpreting out of necessity. María knew sign language because her parents are deaf, and when she lost her job she decided to go into interpreting. Ana responded that she got involved in sign language through someone she knows that got her interested.

When asked the second question, “What was your training and education in becoming an interpreter?” Luis indicated that the Jehovah’s Witness congregations in Puerto Rico prepare a basic six month signed language course. Their preparation is focused on conversational signed language with the purpose of communicating with the Deaf, not specifically interpreting. They encourage their students to involve themselves in the Deaf community.

Also, workshops not affiliated with the Jehovah’s Witnesses seem to be the main training for interpreting that some interpreters have, based on the survey and interview data. Many interpreters rely solely on workshops as their professional interpreter training. On the other hand, some interpreters, including Ana and María, have opted to take workshops in the United States for their continuing education. From María’s response, interpreters in Puerto Rico need only to know signed language to start working professionally, even if they have no skills in interpreting and no previous training in the

matter, since she mentions she knew signed language from her Deaf parents but had not been trained to interpret previous to starting to work as a signed language interpreter.

Ana replied that signed language interpreting is a major that interpreters can choose when going to college, and some have decided to make it their profession, as shown in the data. A few interpreters have gone through the bachelor's program offered in Puerto Rico at Turabo University, which is no longer available as it recently changed to an associate degree.

When asked the third question, "What, if anything, would you like to change about your interpreting education?," Luis explained that the basic signed language courses by the Jehovah's Witness congregation do not include training in interpreting. The purpose of their course is to begin helping the Deaf community, not to become an interpreter; therefore, he felt he needed to learn more about interpreting techniques. In addition, interpreters start working professionally without knowing about interpreting and without being previously trained to interpret. Many interpreters start working and learn about interpreting through their mistakes and their experiences while working, according to Luis.

On the other hand, workshops offered in Puerto Rico are not very profound in technical interpreting, according to Luis (Note: Remember all quotes are a translation from the original Spanish source): "I have taken various workshops but they were not very deep on that... I feel that there is information that is deeper that has not been given well." Luis also mentions that exposure to the Deaf community and practice has helped interpreters develop their interpreting skills. He volunteered to interpret for Deaf friends before starting to work as an interpreter.

Furthermore, interpreters who go to the United States to take workshops find they can relate more to the situations of interpreters from the Caribbean. María said:

What I have seen from many of the workshops [offered in the United States] is that they do not adhere to the cultural reality of Puerto Rico ... the reality of us in Puerto Rico is very different from that of Latinos in the United States or in Mexico or Spain or elsewhere.

Most of the workshops offered in the United States are designed for mainstream communities. When minority communities are mentioned in the workshops, their facts are often not straight and their statements are not supported by empirical research, according to María's response.

Additionally, Ana mentioned that the program at Turabo University used to have Deaf teachers but no longer does. The involvement of the Deaf community in the interpreting field in Puerto Rico is lacking and necessary. The perspective of the Deaf needs to be part of any interpreter training program. Ana thought that it might be possible that there is not a Deaf person academically qualified to offer these higher education courses. A concern in María's experience is that the Deaf consumers for whom she has interpreted still expect a paternalistic figure from the interpreter; they depend a lot on the interpreter, and interpreters do not want to carry on that responsibility.

The fourth question was "Where and how do you work as an interpreter (setting, freelance, agency, part-time)?" Luis responded that he works through an interpreting company in educational settings (postgraduate and K-12). María works independently,

through an agency and VRS. Ana and Luis both work through an agency and mostly in the educational setting.

In response to the fifth question, “How often do you participate in continuing education activities?,” Luis participates in continuing education activities four to five times a year. María said some agencies provide workshops for their interpreters once or twice a year. Ana stated that interpreters feel as though, in Puerto Rico, they always present the same types and themes of workshops; this was also mentioned by Luis in a previous response. Ana further discussed that it seems that the workshop presenters might not be a qualified and trusted professional, which leaves the interpreter with a need to seek continuing education elsewhere, like in the United States. Also, the workshops provided in Puerto Rico do not provide CEUs, and the interpreting agencies do not provide financial aid to cover expenses for continuing education, inside or outside of Puerto Rico. “Here the interpreter has to pay mostly for his education, his continuing education,” Ana said. Interpreters need to work individually on their continuing education and seek it for themselves.

The sixth question was, “What type of educational activities do you prefer to obtain?” Luis indicated that interpreters learn from interacting with other interpreters in workshops and sharing their experiences with each other. María prefers workshops related:

With the use of language, with the part that has to do with linguistics, research, new trends. I like more of those kinds of workshops and workshops that have to do with the work but that take into account all these aspects because they go hand in hand with the language. Although many people do not see it like this.

According to Ana, interpreters in Puerto Rico would like to learn more about different themes on interpreting like teamwork and feedback, deafblind, the perspective of the Deaf consumer, and research-based information. She said that “here unfortunately the few workshops that are given either are being the same or few professionals give them with extremely important foundations.” The data shows that there is a need for a wider variety of topics to be discussed in workshops.

When asked the seventh question, “Do you feel satisfied with the education you have obtained so far in your career?,” Luis felt that there is a need to cover profound themes in interpreting workshops and a wider variety of topics. Workshops seem to be repetitive, and interpreters do not take full advantage of workshops because it is repeated information that does not benefit them. María said:

I do not feel satisfied. I think a lot is missing... I see that still many conferences and workshops [in the United States] do not represent us [Puerto Ricans] so there is a big concern with that and I think we should take the reins ourselves and start to represent ourselves.

People outside of the Puerto Rican cultural environment talk about the situation in Puerto Rico without real evidence, and they are often mistaken in their statements, according to María’s experience. Consequently, there is a need for local interpreters to get trained to do workshops and investigations in order to define and evidence the facts of the interpreting field in Puerto Rico.

Ana expressed, “I still want to have other experiences and have had a much higher educational quality than I got... I think it could have been better.” Based on these interviews, interpreters do not seem to receive support in their continuing education.

Interpreters who want to grow professionally and get continuing education must make themselves responsible for it.

In response to the eighth question, “Have you ever had a mentor?,” Luis has never had a mentor before, but he did indicate that he had colleagues who have supported him. On the other hand, María went through a mentoring program outside of Puerto Rico. Ana mentioned that interpreters could benefit a lot from having a mentor while they are doing their internship and when they finish their training. This is something that is lacking in Puerto Rico, and these participants clearly feel the need for having mentorships.

The ninth question was, “Are you RID certified? If not, why not? Do you plan to get certified?” Luis indicated that being RID ‘certified’ could be misinterpreted by an interpreter as being an RID member. This may explain why the numbers of survey participants who said they were certified in the survey does not align with the numbers of certified interpreters indicated on the RID website.

Interpreters in Puerto Rico have no need to get certified by the RID because no interpreting job in Puerto Rico requires it. Luis says, “No job in Puerto Rico has required me to do so and personally it is not in my plans to move to the United States so I have not seen the need to do it yet.” Although there is no immediate need for interpreters in Puerto Rico to get RID certified, María has decided to work towards certification. Interpreters in Puerto Rico could choose to get certified for various reasons, such as to get a raise in their salary or to have a concrete evidence of their competencies, according to María. Since certification is a requirement in specific work settings and states in the United States, interpreters from the United States tend to look down on interpreters that

are not certified. “I did it mostly to show people in the United States, when I go, that I am competent,” María expressed.

Being certified in Puerto Rico does not imply a big difference, besides the pay. Interpreters who are not certified get as many assignments that interpreters with certification do. Ana said, “There really is nothing here that leads me to be as such certified.” Interpreters in Puerto Rico do not see the need to get certified by the RID, because they do not need certification to work; hence it is not their priority. The test is not made for Puerto Rican interpreters, which means that Puerto Rican interpreters would need to get trained in the United States to be able to pass the examination. The training, the test, and the airplane tickets (because the test is not offered in Puerto Rico) are a big and unnecessary expense. Despite all this, some interpreters do aim to be certified and reach higher levels in their professional endeavor.

When asked the tenth question, “Do you belong to an interpreter’s organization?” María and Ana indicated they belong to Registro de Interpretes para Sordos de Puerto Rico, Inc. (RISPRI).

In response to the eleventh question, “How often do you relate with your interpreter colleagues?” Luis described meeting once or twice a week with the interpreters who belong to the Jehovah’s Witness congregation. Similarly, interpreters who work in VRS are able to engage with each other frequently because they work in the same space. They also spend time together outside of work at least once a week, according to María. Ana stated that interpreters who belong to an interpreter organization tend to relate often with their colleagues, like once a week.

The twelfth question was, “How often do you relate with the Deaf community?” Luis said that his congregation is comprised of Deaf individuals and signers, so they relate to each other often during the week. In a like matter, María indicated that every week the Deaf community meets in a Starbucks, and interpreters often participate in these gatherings as well. Ana also engaged with the Deaf community in activities of the Deaf school or on their gatherings at Starbucks on Wednesdays.

When asked the thirteenth question, “What do you think about American interpreters and the American interpreting field as opposed to Puerto Rican interpreters and the Puerto Rican interpreting field?” Luis has only associated himself with interpreters from Puerto Rico and does not know what the interpreting field is like in the United States. On the other hand, María suggested that the experience of the Deaf community in Puerto Rico has impacted the interpreting community. According to María, the reality here is that Deaf schools do not have Deaf teachers, and they do not have teachers skilled in signed language, which affects their language acquisition. The Deaf communities in Puerto Rico and in the United States are different in their signing. In Puerto Rico, Deaf people rarely fingerspell. Some people think that they do not have language, but it is not accurate, according to María’s response:

I can tell you that the [profession of] interpretation here is growing. There are many people who want to learn but here we need more resources, it takes money to work with these resources, prepare more people, but prepare them to work here because many people are going to the United States to study...There is a great need to prepare interpreters in different areas...We also need the Deaf [community] to be those resources and give the Deaf [individuals] a job...the

Deaf [community] should prepare in their language, know and learn it well and know everything in order to work and learn from the area of interpretation as well.

Interpreters in Puerto Rico feel like the field is stuck and that they have not had the same educational experiences as the interpreters in the United States. Therefore, we are not at the same level as they are. Ana said, “The field of interpretation in the United States is much more advanced than here in Puerto Rico.” Americans are at an advantage, because they have done various research studies in the field and have developed resources (e.g., numerous books). In contrast, Puerto Rico has only one book, *Aprende señas conmigo* (Matos, 1990), and it is on the topic of signed language vocabulary, not interpreting. Therefore, the majority of resources available to Puerto Rican interpreters originate from the United States and their academic backgrounds. In addition, Ana said that Puerto Rico lacks research and the educational experience of the Puerto Rican Deaf individuals is not as competitive and the American Deaf individuals.

Ana also mentioned that in Puerto Rico it is not clear what type of signed language is used; there is no research to explain our language structure and linguistics. She further suggested that Puerto Rican signed language has used ASL as a base signed language and assimilated to it; educational options are limited to the interpreting program at Turabo University or taking courses in (or traveling to) the United States for training, before returning to Puerto Rico.

In response to the fourteenth question, “What are your hopes for improvement in the interpreting field?” Luis thinks that certification would be an improvement in the Puerto Rican interpreting field, because it would give an assurance that interpreters are

qualified to take on specific assignments. Additionally, María repeated that it is essential that research be done to know the situation of signed language in Puerto Rico, to define the linguistic and cultural differences. Educational institutions should be involved in this. Ana suggested that resources from the United States could be used for training Puerto Rican interpreters. She also reiterated the need for more research and that the perspective of the Deaf needs to be considered.

The last question was, “Do you have any suggestions for better educational opportunities for interpreters?” Luis indicated that although the interpreting field in Puerto Rico is progressing slowly, it has been improving. Some of the changes are seen in interpreting agencies, as they demand that interpreters engage in continuing education hours to keep their contracts. He explained that constant continuing education is essential for interpreters to stay current with the language.

María mentioned that some interpreters in Puerto Rico have to leave the island to prepare professionally. Therefore, there is a need for people in Puerto Rico, from Puerto Rico, who are willing to grow professionally and help others grow as well. “We need funds so that these things can be achieved,” María said. Ana suggested: “Many times the economic situation binds us to look for alternative education.” Ana also mentioned the need to get certification in order to raise the standards of our profession. “We have to evolve academically,” she said. We use Puerto Rican signs mixed with ASL and with various cultures, according to Ana. She also suggested that “We have to create and temper our program to the Deaf Puerto Rican.”

Discussion of the Findings

Demographics

The signed language interpreting field in Puerto Rico is dominated by females, just as it is in the United States. According to the RID 2015 annual report there are a total of 9,389 (86%) female and 1,500 (14%) male interpreters in the five regions of the United States. From the survey, 71% of the participants were female and the interviews provide exemplars of this, since two out of the three interviewees were female and one male.

Survey data suggests that there are a lot of young interpreters in Puerto Rico, which shows how new the field still is. Also, the majority of the interpreters had 5-10 years of experience working professionally. The interviews repeat that the interpreting field in Puerto Rico is lacking research and educational resources to advance; the field is still younger compared to the field in the United States, which has more than 50 years of research. According to the literature reviewed, in the United States Deaf education started in 1800s (Ball, 2013), while in Puerto Rico, it started in 1900s (Matos, 1990). The professionalization of interpreting began in the United States in 1964 with the establishment of the RID (Napier, 2009), and in Puerto Rico interpreter education began in the 1990s (Matos,1990). Varied reasons were found as to why interpreters joined the field of interpreting including family, friends, religious groups, and personal interest.

Interpreter Training

The majority of the interpreters, 71%, said they participated in an interpreter training program. “Interpreting training program” does not necessarily mean a college-accredited program. There are courses, including interpreting courses, that students take

to become interpreters; most of those are through Jehovah's Witness trainings and Servicios Orientados al Sordo (SOS). There is one accredited Interpreter Training Program in Puerto Rico, at Turabo University; other programs, like courses, can be considered as training programs. Some questions that still remain are: What are the credentials of these programs? How did the 29% percent of interpreters who did not attend a program develop their interpreting skills?

Some new categories arose from this question in the 'other' section; two interpreters said their training was based on socializing with the Deaf, and one said from interacting with people that know signed language. In comparison with the literature reviewed for this study, Stuard's (2008) study mentioned the importance of socialization with the Deaf community to develop cross-cultural understanding as one of the characteristics a signed language interpreter should have. The majority of the interpreters in Puerto Rico do not have a formal education in interpreting. There is only one college in Puerto Rico that has an interpreting associate degree program (while there are 78 associate programs in the United States, according to the RID website), University of Turabo, 26% of the interpreters attended this program and the remaining 74% have certificates and other sorts of training. From the interviews, we also see the variety in the participants' training as one participant took basic signed language courses and engaged in socialization with the Deaf community through his religious congregation, another was a CODA without previous training in interpreting, and only one had gone through the interpreter training program offered through Turabo University.

From the survey, 10 participants said they are RID certified. In the RID database, there are only five Puerto Rican interpreters listed as certified. None of the three

interview participants are certified; in fact, one of the participants misinterpreted being certified with being an RID member. This may have also been the case with the survey respondents who indicated that they are certified.

Although 74% of the participants attended continuing education activities in the past 0-6 months, from the interviews, it became clear that interpreters are not satisfied with the workshops presented in Puerto Rico as they mention the themes are usually similar, they want to learn more technical information, and they opt to take workshops outside of Puerto Rico. One of the interview participants said that the workshops in the United States do not adhere to the cultural reality of Puerto Rico. One of the tenets of code of professional conduct by the RID states that interpreters need to engage in professional development, which should be made available in Puerto Rico to comply with this tenet. Another concern, revealed by two interview participants, is that interpreters from Puerto Rico move to the United States to get trained as interpreters and do not come back.

Work Settings

The data from the survey reveals that most interpreters work in educational and VRS settings, 36% in educational and 38% in VRS. The participants from the interview worked through agencies; two worked in educational settings and one worked in VRS settings.

Needs and What is Lacking

The survey and the interviews make it clear that interpreters need more educational support. In the interviews, participants mentioned the need for a wider variety of continuing education options, and in the survey, the majority of the

participants, 88%, said they need more educational support. This result is similar to Yarger's (1997) study on educational interpreters working in two rural western states. Yarger concluded that the interpreters in his study need more educational opportunities and access to workshops. Regarding satisfaction with the Puerto Rican signed language interpreting field, the results from the survey were varied from not satisfied at all to very satisfied. However, the majority of the interpreters, 44%, said they were somewhat satisfied. In the interviews, two of the three interviewees said they were not satisfied with their education in interpreting, and one said they were satisfied but that the workshops could be better. The data also shows that there is a need for mentorship in Puerto Rico. Additionally, Puerto Rico is lacking professionals in the field of interpreting, since many interpreters choose to move to the United States and do not come back. On the same note, there is a need in Puerto Rico for Deaf resources in the interpreting field. The Deaf perspective is lacking in our interpreting field and training. As mentioned by one of the interview participants, Deaf people having not been exposed to signed language from a young age has impacted their language acquisition and the signed language used in Puerto Rico. María says it is also true that hearing people teach the deaf in schools. The participation of the Deaf community in the interpreting field is essential, and it will enrich the field.

In the interviews, two participants repeated that there is a need for research in the field of interpreting in Puerto Rico. It is unknown what signed language is used in Puerto Rico because there has been no linguistic research. The research is necessary to develop the right resources to train interpreters according to the cultural and linguistic reality of Puerto Rico.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Summary

In this quantitative and qualitative study, the general profile of the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter was developed. The purpose of this study was to identify general characteristics of the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter, including the demographics, their training in interpreting, their work settings, experiences, needs and challenges. The data was collected through a survey answered by 66 participants. In addition, three interviews were conducted. This study uses a mixed methods approach, and the results for the survey and the interview were compared in the discussion section. There was no previous research done in the area of the signed language interpreting field in Puerto Rico, which makes this the first study done on this topic. The data also suggest that there is a need for further research in the field.

Based on this study, the signed language interpreting field in Puerto Rico is dominated by females. Most interpreters are between the ages of 25 and 45. Most interpreters earned a certificate from completing courses as their training to become interpreters. The majority of the interpreters have been working for 5 to 10 years, primarily in educational and VRS settings. Most interpreters said they needed more educational support and that they would like to participate in continuing education activities if there were more available. The interview data shows that interpreters depend on workshops that are perceived as repetitive.

The data also reveals that the field of signed language interpreting in Puerto Rico has been slowly progressing and there is a lack of continuing education opportunities. In

comparison with the signed language interpreting field in the United States, the field in Puerto Rico is behind. There is no testing system in Puerto Rico to evaluate interpreters' competencies to work in any setting. Throughout the data, the need for research in our field to achieve improvement and advance the field was also reiterated.

Recommendations

The data make clear that there is a need for further research in the field of signed language interpreting in Puerto Rico. The initial—and most important—recommendation would be to do more research on the signed language interpreting field in Puerto Rico to provide evidence to work with for further development in the field. The results of research can be shared so that the issues and realities in the field can be made known. The results of this study can be sent to the Department of Education and Vocational Rehabilitation to emphasize the importance of qualified interpreters and to develop a system to identify interpreters to be qualified to work in specific settings. With this and other further research, proposals can be made for legislation regarding interpreter qualifications, and a testing system could be developed to certify signed language interpreters in Puerto Rico.

There is currently one interpreter training program in Puerto Rico, a series of courses offered by Servicios Orientados al Sordo, and other independent courses and workshops. It is recommended that these training programs conduct and participate in further research. The available sources of training and continuing education for signed language interpreters should be revised using the results of this study and future research on signed language interpreting and the Deaf community in Puerto Rico. Given the

demand for higher education in the field of signed language interpreting, it is also recommended that new interpreter training programs be established in Puerto Rico.

Another recommendation is that interpreter agencies and organizations should actively mentor and train interpreters, providing professional development opportunities. Agencies should individually evaluate their interpreters and work with them to improve their knowledge and skills through mentoring and other educational activities.

Interpreting organizations and agencies could also team with RID and other interpreting organizations from the United States to bring speakers for continuing educational activities. Additionally, organizations and agencies should have an online library with material for interpreters to read and stay updated with new trends and research.

Interpreters from Puerto Rico should be trained, encouraged, supported and guided to get RID (NIC) certified.

Interview data further suggest that there is a need for the Deaf community to participate and take part in the interpreting field. It would be beneficial to have the Deaf community involved in giving their feedback to interpreters and helping to develop and promote sign proficiency by tutoring, mentoring, and being signed language models, teachers, and coaches. Another recommendation regarding the Deaf community is that they get educated regarding their rights regarding the use of interpreters so they can demand qualified interpreters and get interpreting services when they need them. With these recommendations, the Puerto Rican signed language interpreting field can be set on course toward further development.

Further Research

This study was kept as a simple introduction to the general profile of the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter, but it serves as an initiative to start research in the signed language interpreting field in Puerto Rico. With this study as a base, other elements can be added, such as more interpreter characteristics including sexual orientation, education level, personality characteristics (e.g., introvert or extrovert), soft skills, whether or not they do self-care, if they have another job, and their income. Additionally, this study can be conducted again, targeting other parts of the island and going directly to interpreting agencies and VRS offices to reach a larger population of interpreters.

I would like to see research on the Puerto Rican Deaf community. From my experience working with the Deaf community and issues related to the Deaf consumers' negative experiences with interpreters or lack of interpreters, I believe it would be beneficial to research how aware the Puerto Rican Deaf community is of their rights, what they should expect from interpreters, and the actions they should take when their rights are violated. On the other hand, there are many important factors not currently known, which would benefit the field of signed language interpreting and the services interpreters provide to Deaf consumers. Further research could be conducted to explore the experiences of the Puerto Rican Deaf community regarding their experiences with interpreters, as well as Deaf consumers' satisfaction with interpreters and the Deaf consumers' perspectives of what is lacking in what they expect from interpreters and their practice. Another recommendation for further research would be to look into the cultural aspects of the Puerto Rican interpreters and the Deaf community compared to the

American interpreters and Deaf community. A very important research stream would be to focus on the linguistic aspects of the signed language used in Puerto Rico, followed by a comparison that could be made between the signed language used in Puerto Rico and American Sign Language, how they are similar and how they differ. Even in Puerto Rico, the signed language can vary; it would be interesting to compare the signed language and interpreting practices in different areas of the island.

There is currently no system to measure interpreter qualification in Puerto Rico. Given this information, further research could be done to investigate the perspectives of interpreting agencies and what they look into when hiring a new interpreter. I am also curious about the intrapersonal skills of the Puerto Rican signed language interpreter. Future research can also be done to study the various interpreter training programs and measure and compare their effectiveness in training interpreters.

Something not included in this research is the experience of trilingual interpreters. In Puerto Rico, interpreters work from Spanish to sign, but there is no research on those interpreters who are working with three languages, signed language, Spanish, and English. Also, it would be good to find out how many interpreters in Puerto Rico are trilingual and how that affects or benefits their practice.

Since this study is the first research done on signed language interpreting in Puerto Rico, there remains a great deal of further research to be done in the field. I hope this study motivates other researchers, students, interpreters, and/or teachers to continue to do research in the field to improve the signed language interpreting field in Puerto Rico, raise our standards, and provide quality services to the Puerto Rican Deaf community.

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Appendix A: Consent and Survey in Spanish

Formulario de consentimiento para encuesta

Saludos,

Mi nombre es Katia Rivera, y yo soy estudiante del programa de Maestría de Estudios de Interpretación de Western Oregon University y soy intérprete en San Juan, Puerto Rico. Estoy llevando a cabo un estudio de investigación que examina el perfil general del intérprete de lenguaje de señas de Puerto Rico.

Le agradecería su participación en esta encuesta. La encuesta es en línea y anónima, removeré todo identificador personal luego de codificar los resultados para mantener confidencialidad. Los resultados de este estudio serán utilizados en mi tesis de maestría y pueden ser usados en presentaciones, reportes o publicaciones pero su nombre no será utilizado. Su participación contribuirá a los conocimientos en el campo sobre la situación de los intérpretes de lenguaje de señas de Puerto Rico, siendo este el primer estudio realizado sobre los intérpretes de lenguaje de señas en la isla. La encuesta puede tomar de 5-10 minutos en completarse.

Su participación en esta encuesta es voluntaria. Usted puede salir del estudio en cualquier momento y los datos colectados de usted serán destruidos al borrar los archivos. La finalización de la encuesta indica su consentimiento para participar en este estudio a través de sus respuestas a estas preguntas.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta, por favor no dude en contactarme a krivera15@wou.edu o por teléfono al 787-454-5634. Este proyecto de investigación ha sido aprobado por la Junta de Revisión Institucional de Western Oregon University. Si tiene preguntas sobre el proceso de revisión, por favor, póngase en contacto con el presidente del IRB de Western Oregon University al 503-9200 o al irb@wou.edu. También puede comunicarse con mis maestros asesores, Amanda Smith y la Dra. Elisa Maroney, en smithar@wou.edu o maronee@wou.edu.

Gracias por tu tiempo,

Katia Rivera

Encuesta

1. Género: F ___ M ___
2. Edad:
 18-25
 26-35
 36-45
 46-60
 60- o más
3. Qué lo llevó a entrar al campo de la interpretación?
 Familiar sordo
 Amigo sordo
 Grupo religioso
 Otro _____
4. Explique su respuesta a la pregunta anterior _____
5. ¿Participó usted de un programa de entrenamiento para intérpretes? Si ___ No ___
6. Si su respuesta fue sí, ¿qué tipo de programa?
 Grado Asociado
 Bachillerato de cuatro años
 Certificado
 Otro _____
7. ¿Está usted certificado por el RID (NIC, CDI, OTC, SC:L o Ed:K-12)? Si ___ No ___
8. ¿Por cuánto tiempo lleva trabajando como un intérprete profesional?
 0-4 años
 5-10 años
 10-20 años
 21-35 años
 36- o más
9. ¿Qué tipo de escenario trabaja usted mayormente?
 Educacional
 Salud/Médico
 Legal
 VRS
 Otro _____
10. ¿Cuándo fue la última vez que usted participó de una actividad de educación continua?
 0-6 meses atrás

- ___ 7-11 meses atrás
- ___ 1-2 años atrás
- ___ 3-5 años atrás
- ___ 6-10 años atrás
- ___ Nunca

11. De haber más oportunidades educativas disponibles, ¿usted asistiría?
Si___ No___ No se___
12. ¿Siente usted que necesita más apoyo educativo como intérprete?
Si___ No ___ No se___

Para las siguientes preguntas, conteste con un número en la escala del 0-5 en el cual 0 es nada y 5 es más.

13. ¿Cuán importante es participar de actividades de educación continua? (utiliza la escala del 0-5 donde 0= no es importante para nada, 3= algo importante, 5= muy importante) _____
14. Cuán satisfecho se siente con el campo de interpretación puertorriqueño? (utiliza la escala del 0-5 donde 0= no satisfecho, 3= algo satisfecho, 5= muy satisfecho)

Appendix B: Consent and Survey in English

Survey Consent Form

Greetings,

My name is Katia Rivera, and I'm a student in the Masters of Art in Interpreting Studies program at Western Oregon University and an interpreter in San Juan, Puerto Rico. I am conducting a research study that examines the general profile of the Puerto Rican sign language interpreter.

I would appreciate your participation in this survey. The survey is online and anonymous, I will remove any personal identifiers after coding is completed in order to maintain confidentiality. The results of this study will be used in my master's thesis and may be used in presentations, reports, or publications but your name will not be used. Your contribution will help add to the knowledge in the field about the situation of Puerto Rican sign language interpreters, being this the first study done about sign language interpreters in the island. This survey may take from 5-10 minutes to complete.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time and all data collected from you will be destroyed through deletion of files. Completion of the survey indicates your consent to participate in this study by your answers to these questions.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at krivera15@wou.edu or by phone at 787-454-5634. This research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Western Oregon University. For questions about the review process, please contact the Chair of the Western Oregon University IRB at 503-838-9200 or at irb@wou.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisors, Amanda Smith and Dr. Elisa Maroney, at smithar@wou.edu or maronee@wou.edu.

Thank you for your time,

Katia Rivera

Survey

1. Gender: F___ M___
2. Age:
 18-25
 26-35
 36-45
 46-60
 60- above
3. What got you into the field of interpreting?
 Deaf family
 Deaf friend
 Religious group
 Other _____
4. Explain your response to the previous question

5. Did you attend an Interpreter Training Program? Yes ___ No ___
6. If you did, what type of program?
 Associate's degree
 Four year bachelor's degree
 Certificate
 Other _____
7. Are you RID certified (NIC, CDI, OTC, SC:L or Ed:K-12)? Yes___ No___
8. For how long have you been working as a professional interpreter?
 0-4 years
 5-10 years
 10-20 years
 21-35 years
 36- above
9. What type of setting do you work mostly?
 Educational
 Medical
 Legal
 VRS
 Other _____
10. When was the last time you participated in a continuing educational activity?
 0-6 months ago
 7-11 months ago
 1-2 years ago
 3-5 years ago
 6-10 years ago

___ Never

11. If there were more educational opportunities available, would you attend?

Yes ___ No ___ I don't know ___

12. Do you feel you need more educational support as an interpreter?

Yes ___ No ___ I don't know ___

For the following questions, answer a number from the scale of 0 being nothing to 5 being the

13. How important is to participate of continuing educational activities? (use a scale from 0-5 where 0= not important at all, 3= somewhat important, 5=very important) _____

14. How satisfied do you feel with the Puerto Rican interpreting field? (use a scale from 0-5 where 0= not satisfied at all, 3= somewhat satisfied, 5= very satisfied)

Appendix C: Consent Forms and Interview Questions in Spanish

Formulario de Consentimiento para Entrevista

Saludos,

Mi nombre es Katia Rivera soy estudiante de la Maestría en Artes en el programa de Estudios de Interpretación en la Universidad de Western Oregon y soy intérprete en San Juan, Puerto Rico. Estoy llevando a cabo un estudio de investigación que examina el perfil general del intérprete de lenguaje de señas de Puerto Rico.

Gracias por estar dispuesto a ser entrevistado para esta investigación; su participación aportará a los conocimientos en el campo sobre la situación de los intérpretes de lenguaje de señas de Puerto Rico, siendo este el primer estudio realizado sobre los intérpretes de lenguaje de señas en la isla. La entrevista será audio grabada y posteriormente transcrita y traducida al inglés. La entrevista es confidencial, se removerán identificadores personales luego de codificar los resultados para mantener confidencialidad. Los resultados de este estudio serán utilizados en mi tesis de maestría y posiblemente en presentaciones, reportes o publicaciones, pero su nombre no será utilizado. La grabación de audio se almacenará en mi computadora personal protegida por contraseña y será destruida tras la finalización de la tesis para asegurar la privacidad de su identidad. Voy a llevar a cabo su entrevista ya sea en persona o por medio de un programa en línea de video chat, y tendrá una duración aproximada de una hora.

El único riesgo posible para usted en participar en esta entrevista es cualquier incomodidad que pueda sentir al hablar abiertamente sobre sus experiencias en el campo de la interpretación, aunque anticipo que el riesgo es mínimo. Si se siente incómodo, usted es libre de negarse a responder a cualquier pregunta o terminar la entrevista en cualquier momento. Si usted decide no participar más de este estudio, toda la data recolectada de usted será destruida al borrar los archivos. En caso de que un seguimiento sea necesario, con mucho gusto podría darle seguimiento con usted.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta, por favor no dude en ponerse en contacto conmigo al 787-454-5634 o a mi correo electrónico krivera15@wou.edu. Este proyecto de investigación ha sido aprobado por la Junta de Revisión Institucional de Western Oregon University. Si tiene preguntas sobre el proceso de revisión, por favor, póngase en contacto con el presidente del IRB de Western Oregon University al 503-838-9200 o al irb@wou.edu. También puede contactar a mis consejeras de la facultad, Amanda Smith al smithar@wou.edu y Dra. Elisa Maroney al maronee@wou.edu.

Su respuesta a este mensaje indica su consentimiento. Gracias por tu tiempo.

Katia Rivera

Preguntas para la entrevista:

1. ¿Qué te motivó a convertirte en intérprete?
2. ¿Qué tipo de entrenamiento y educación obtuviste en tu formación como intérprete?
3. ¿Qué, si algo, te gustaría cambiar de tu educación en interpretación?
4. ¿Dónde y cómo trabaja usted como intérprete (escenario, independiente, agencia, a tiempo parcial)?
5. ¿Cuán frecuente participa usted de actividades de educación continua?
6. ¿Qué tipo de actividades de educación continua prefiere usted?
7. ¿Se siente usted satisfecho con la educación que ha obtenido hasta ahora en su carrera?
8. ¿Ha tenido usted un mentor?
9. ¿Está usted certificado por el RID? Si no, por qué no? ¿Está en sus planes certificarse?
10. ¿Pertenece usted a alguna organización de intérpretes? ¿Cuál?
11. ¿Cuán a menudo se relaciona usted con sus colegas intérpretes?
12. ¿Cuán a menudo se relaciona usted con la comunidad Sorda?
13. ¿Qué piensa usted de los intérpretes Americanos y el campo de interpretación Americano en comparación con intérpretes puertorriqueños y el campo de interpretación de Puerto Rico?
14. ¿Qué espera usted que pueda mejorar del campo de la interpretación?
15. ¿Tiene usted alguna sugerencia para mejorar las oportunidades educativas para los intérpretes?

Appendix D: Consent Forms and Interview Questions in English

Interview Consent Form

Greetings,

My name is Katia Rivera, and I'm a student in the Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies program at Western Oregon University and an interpreter in San Juan, Puerto Rico. I am conducting a research study that examines the general profile of the Puerto Rican sign language interpreter.

Thank you for your willingness to be interviewed for this research; your contribution will add to the knowledge in the field about the situation of Puerto Rican sign language interpreters, being this the first study done about sign language interpreters in the island. Your interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed and translated to English. The interview is confidential, I will remove any personal identifiers after coding is completed in order to maintain confidentiality. The results of this study will be used in my master's thesis and may be used in presentations, reports, or publications but your name will not be used. The audio recording will be stored on my personal, password-protected computer and destroyed upon completion of the thesis to ensure the privacy of your identity. I will set up your interview either in person or through an online video chatting program, and it will take approximately one hour.

The only possible risk to you in participating in this interview is any possible discomfort you may feel in speaking openly about your experiences in the field of interpreting, though I anticipate this risk to be minimal. If you feel discomfort, you are free to decline to answer any questions or discontinue the interview at any time. If you chose to withdraw from the study all data collected from you will be destroyed through deletion of files. Should follow-up be needed, I would be happy to follow up with you.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at krivera15@wou.edu or by phone at 787-454-5634. This research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Western Oregon University. For questions about the review process, please contact the Chair of the Western Oregon University IRB at 503-838-9200 or at irb@wou.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisors, Amanda Smith at smithar@wou.edu and Dr. Elisa Maroney at maronee@wou.edu.

Your response to this email indicates your consent.

Thank you for your time,
Katia Rivera

Interview Questions

1. What got you into becoming an interpreter?
2. What was your training and education in becoming an interpreter?
3. What, if anything, would you like to change about your interpreting education?
4. Where and how do you work as an interpreter (setting, freelance, agency, part-time)?
5. How often do you participate in continuing education activities?
6. What type of educational activities do you prefer to obtain?
7. Do you feel satisfied with the education you have obtained so far in your career?
8. Have you ever had a mentor?
9. Are you RID certified? If not, why not? Do you plan to get certified?
10. Do you belong to an interpreter's organization?
11. How often do you relate with you interpreter colleagues?
12. How often do you relate with the Deaf community?
13. What do you think about American interpreters and the American interpreting field as opposed to Puerto Rican interpreters and the Puerto Rican interpreting field?
14. What are your hopes for improvement in the interpreting field?
15. Do you have any suggestions for better educational opportunities for interpreters?