



National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators

1707 L Street, NW ♦ Suite 570 ♦ Washington, DC 20036

Tel: 202-293-0342 ♦ Fax: 202-293-0495 ♦ www.najit.org

Terms of the Profession

Direct Speech is the most important standard technique an interpreter uses. While interpreting, the interpreter assumes the same grammatical voice as the original speaker and never interjects himself into the communication by using the third person (“*He says that...*”). The use of direct speech lessens confusion, keeps the written record clear by making it plain who is speaking, and enables the parties to communicate directly with each other as though no language barrier were present. (See the NAJIT position paper on the subject, at www.najit.org.)

Interpretation refers to the process of orally rendering communication from one language into another language. Interpretation deals with oral or signed speech.

[Note: In its *Standard Guide for Language Interpretation Services*, the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) defines interpretation as “the process of understanding and analyzing a spoken or signed message and re-expressing that message faithfully, accurately, and objectively in another language, taking the cultural and social context into account.”]

Modes of Interpretation are the different techniques that can be used to convey oral messages. There are only three permissible modes of interpretation in legal, quasi-legal, or medical settings:

Simultaneous: The message is heard and conveyed virtually at the same time, with only the shortest time lag. The interpreter renders a second language version while listening to the original. Simultaneous can be provided in whisper format (*chucotage*) for one listener; or more commonly, for many listeners at once, with the assistance of electronic equipment (an interpreter microphone and listener headsets). Simultaneous interpretation is used during all court proceedings, for international conferences, at the United Nations, in press conferences, television news broadcasts, or in other venues where the message needs to be conveyed immediately.

Consecutive: The message is conveyed after a pause. The interpreter waits for the original speaker to complete an entire question or statement, and then interprets this utterance into the second language. This mode is used generally for Q and A scenarios, attorney-client interviews, interrogations, or witness testimony. Consecutive interpretation is considered more accurate than simultaneous because the whole context is clear before the language conversion process begins.

Sight Translation is the oral rendition of a written text from one language into another.

Summary Interpretation is also known as “occasional” interpretation, where the interpreter listens and later decides what and how to summarize. In legal, quasi-legal, and medical settings, professional standards do not permit summary interpretation, which may exclude crucial information. (The interpreter should not be given the authority to decide what is or is not important.) Untrained interpreters resort to this mode because they lack the skills for simultaneous or consecutive, lack memory skills, are unfamiliar with terms, or cannot accurately reproduce the rate of speech and density of information. (See the NAJIT position paper on the subject, at www.najit.org.)

Translation takes a written text from one language and renders it into an equivalent written text in another language, conserving style, tone and content. Translation deals with written texts.

NOTE: Interpretation and translation, while both language-related, are not identical disciplines. Each area requires knowledge, training and practice. Credentialing is different for each. Some practitioners are equally adept at both; others specialize in one discipline or the other. Although the public and media often use the terms interchangeably, we use *interpretation* when referring to oral speech and *translation* when referring to written texts.

Transliteration is communication between spoken English and a sign language, using English grammar and structure.

Linguist, strictly speaking, refers to someone who engages in the study of the nature, structure, and variation of language, including phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics. A scientific linguist can be monolingual and restrict his or her field of study to one aspect of one language.

Broadly speaking, however, in popular jargon, government and the media, people refer to those who are adept at foreign languages as “linguists.”

ABBREVIATIONS

AOC: Administrative Office of the Court

Administrative staff of a given court system, whether state or federal. (Note: In some states it is called Office of Court Administration.)

AOUSC: Administrative Office of the United States Courts

As the administrative arm of the federal courts, the AOUSC provides information and guidelines to the 94 U.S. District Courts. The AOUSC certifies interpreters for federal courts via written and oral examinations and maintains a database of all certified and otherwise qualified interpreters. (The interpreter database is posted on the J-Net, an intranet shared by all the federal courts. The public site for the AOUSC is www.uscourts.gov/adminoff.html)

ASL: American Sign Language

The language most commonly used by deaf Americans, although not all deaf Americans communicate in this language. (Note: Deaf persons from outside the U.S. do not communicate in ASL, but in other sign languages particular to individual countries.)

ATA: American Translators Association

ATA is a national association in the U.S. comprising over 9,000 members. Their main expertise is in translation, but they also have an interpreters division. Many NAJIT members are also members of ATA and some are certified as translators by ATA. (www.atanet.org)

LEP: Limited-English-Proficient

The term LEP refers to those individuals who can speak some English, but with limited proficiency.

NAJIT: The National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators

NAJIT is a national association in the U.S. with approximately 1,300 members who interpret in legal and quasi-legal settings. Among its members are interpreters and translators with extensive experience in federal and state courts. Many members are also researchers or experts in tape transcription and translation, legal document translation, interpreter ethics, interpreter protocol, and legal issues related to interpreting. (To view published articles, position papers, and other resources available to the public, go to www.najit.org and click on "Publications.")

RID: Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf

RID is a national interpreter association in the U.S. for the deaf and hard of hearing. RID's association protocol conforms to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Rules pertaining to interpreters for the deaf and hard of hearing are available through RID. (www.rid.org)

SL: Source Language

Commonly used to refer to the language of the *original* speech or text that is to be interpreted or translated.

TL: Target Language

Refers to the language *into which* the original speech or text must be interpreted or translated.

Note: Source language and target language change with each circumstance, depending on the language of the original and the language into which it needs to be converted. For example, if a police officer is giving instructions in English, English is the source language. If those instructions are meant to be conveyed to a Russian speaker, Russian becomes in that instance the target language.

T&T: Transcription and Translation

Refers to the process of preserving audio or video-taped sound files in written form, whereby a complete transcript of the original, together with its translation into the target language, is created. For evidentiary purposes, transcripts should be produced in dual-language format, with the original and the translation side by side. Specialized skill, training, and experience are required to produce complete and accurate transcripts. While there have been articles written on this subject in professional journals, there are no instruction manuals on this process. NAJIT is in the process of producing a position paper and a manual on this topic.

USCCI: United States Certified Court Interpreter

These initials are often used to refer to interpreters who are certified by the federal court administration (AOUSC) and identified by a federal certification number. (Alternatively, sometimes the initials FCCI are used, which stand for "federally certified court interpreter.") The federal examination for interpreters is only available for interpreters of three languages: Spanish, Navajo, and Haitian Creole.

Note: As of February 2008, there are 952 federally certified Spanish interpreters, 11 federally certified Haitian Creole interpreters, and 6 federally certified Navajo interpreters.

INTERPRETER CREDENTIALING

ATA Certification: The American Translators Association administers a certification test for translators in many language combinations. ATA certification *does not cover* interpreters. The ATA has instituted continuing education requirements for translators to maintain certification.

Certified Interpreter: Interpreter certification is offered by a number of different entities, e.g., the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) Consortium for State Court Interpreter Certification; the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts; and the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators. Interpreter certification tests are available in a limited number of languages. Because each of these entities has differing criteria for its certification program, certifications are not necessarily equivalent. Many entities have continuing education requirements to maintain certification.

NCSC Consortium for State Court Interpreter Certification: Standardized testing program for minimum competency to work as an interpreter in state courts. Members of the Consortium (approximately 40 states belong) have access to multiple versions of various oral performance examinations as the central pre-requisite for their state certification credential. Many states have added written components to the testing process. Administrative support is provided by National Center for State Courts. Full tests are available in approximately 13 languages; abbreviated tests are available in a number of other languages.

Federal Court Certification: Certification through written and oral examinations administered by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. Tests minimum competency required to work as an interpreter in federal court. Examinations are available in Spanish, Navajo, and Haitian Creole only.

NAJIT/SSTI Exam: Credentialing for judiciary interpreters and translators via written and oral examination administered by The National Association of Judiciary Interpreter and Translators. Currently available only in Spanish.

Other State Court Certification: Some states that are not members of the Consortium (above) have their own interpreter testing and qualification procedures.

Otherwise Qualified Interpreter: Persons who have met certain requirements established by each individual state or the federal government. Definitions vary from state to state. The AOUSC defines “otherwise qualified interpreter” at www.uscourts.gov/interpretprog/categories.html.

Language-Skilled Interpreter: Persons who do not meet the requirements for certification, but who have demonstrated to the satisfaction of the court the ability to interpret from English into a designated language and from that language into English. Definitions for “language skilled” vary from state to state and do not follow a universal standard. For the federal courts, 28 USC Section 1827 mandates that the Director of the AO provide guidelines to the courts for the selection of otherwise qualified interpreters. (See also: NAJIT’s position paper on Preparing Interpreters in Rare Languages under “Publications” at www.najit.org)

Remote Interpreter: An interpreter who is not physically present, but is interpreting from a remote location via special telephone or videoconferencing equipment. Qualifications of remote interpreters should be established following the same protocol as for ‘live’ interpreters. It is generally agreed that remote interpreters should only be used for short (under 30 minutes) interpreted sessions, and before the session need to be provided with any written material to be referred to. Remote interpreters generally have to be specially trained in protocols for remote interpreting and in the types of events they will be asked to interpret, i.e. emergency room, police jargon, legal language, etc.

RID Certification: Certification testing administered by Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). There are different levels of certification. Only those outlined below are acceptable credentialing for interpreters serving in a legal or quasi-legal setting.

Certified ASL Interpreter: Interpreters who hold a *Specialist Certificate: Legal* from RID, specifically geared to testing courtroom skills.

Qualified ASL Interpreter: Interpreters holding a *Comprehensive Skills Certificate (CSC)*, *Certificate of Interpretation (CI)*, *Certificate of Transliteration (CT)* (both CI and CT are required), or Certificate of Deaf Interpreting. For additional requirements and definitions, please contact RID.

ASL Skilled Interpreter: An American Sign Language skilled interpreter is someone who lacks training to be considered qualified,

but who can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the court the ability to interpret sign language. For additional requirements and definitions, please contact RID.