

THE INTERPRETERS VOICE

Newsletter of the Interpreters Division of the American Translators Association



SUMMER 2009

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DEAR COLLEAGUES:

As we proudly present our Summer 2009 newsletter, we are focused on commitment to our members. This year we are initiating our administration by introducing an improved and completely revised website.

During the past ATA 49th Annual Conference, the Interpreters Division was able to secure seven presentations. A wide-ranging variety of topics included: revealing essential qualities that a conference interpreter possesses, how the profession has evolved, examining the importance of peer-to-peer support, improving simultaneous court interpreting techniques, challenges and pitfalls faced by interpreters and an in-depth look at the National Code of Ethics developed by the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC). Following these successful sessions, it is our goal to continue bringing high quality presentations for the benefit of our members, as we look forward to the forthcoming 50th ATA Conference celebration in New York City.

The Interpreters Division announces that thanks to the initiative of our past ID Administrator, Armando Esquerro Hasbun, an Informal Interpreters Division Advisory Committee has been established, which is comprised of colleagues who are willing to lend their helping hands, share experiences and provide advice. We welcome Steven Mines, Armando Esquerro Hasbun, Giovanna Lester, Katharine Allen, Helen Cole, Ines Swaney and Diane Teichman. We appreciate their dedication and volunteerism.

We are confident to represent the best possible leadership with a diversity of experience and opinions, which in turn will allow us to best serve our membership.

ID EDITORIAL STAFF

EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to a new issue of the Interpreters Voice. We are back with a new look and a new administration.

The Division held its annual meeting during the 49th ATA Annual Conference in Orlando and elected Robert K. Brara for Administrator and Thelma Ferry for Assistant Administrator. The meeting which was attended by 75 members addressed several issues of interest to our profession including but not limited to working with ATA's Board to have the

word 'interpreters' added to its name. The attendees also addressed the following topics: 1) ATA's Certification of interpreters which could take up to four years to develop, 2) Health insurance for ATA's members which is being considered by the Board.

In cooperation with the Medical Division, the Interpreters Division is organizing a Mid-Year conference (details in this issue) in Washington, DC on July 18th, 2009. A pre-conference

program includes visits to the Georgetown University Hospital and the National Center for State Courts. Please make an effort to attend.

We are looking forward to your suggestions and contributions to future issues of *The Interpreters Voice* newsletter.

Sincerely
Nabil Salem



Meet Your Administrators

Administrator



Robert K. Brara, an ATA Active member since 2000; is a certified court interpreter and translator with over 25 years of industry experience and has attained an institutional graduate degree in English from his native India with language expertise in Hindi, Punjab and Urdu. Since 1995 he has dedicated his extensive knowledge of language to managing

his own interpreting freelance business devoting his talent and linguistic knowledge to translating and interpreting for medical institutions, major corporations, advertisement entities, independent companies, law firms and for Federal and State Courts throughout the United States. His specialization focuses on medical and administrative judicial proceedings. Robert became a certified court interpreter by the State of California in the year 2000 and has served as past ID Assistant Administrator.

Assistant Administrator



Thelma Ferry has more than 18 years of experience as a language consultant, managing her own linguistics consultant firm servicing multinational corporations, State and District Courts. Her career as a Spanish translator -interpreter began at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in her native country of Panama and she has served as an expert witness in criminal and civil cases and court interpreter-translator under contract for the United States District Court in the Southern District of Texas. Her specialization is conference interpreting in the legal and medical fields. She is a Texas licensed staff court interpreter, working at the Council of Judges Administration-El Paso, Texas. As an educator, she has contributed as a language instructor for English as a Second Language, sharing her approach to language teaching experiences through workshops by writing articles offering field-tested teaching techniques conducting seminars to professional and academic groups. An advocate for the profession and the concept of team inter-

preting in the courtroom; she has recently presented at the International Translation-Interpretation 2008 Conference Expo (ITICEX), the American Translators Association 49th Annual Conference and the 29th Annual National Association of Judiciary Interpreters (NAJIT). She is also a member of the Translators and Interpreters Guild, the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters (NAJIT) and the Asociación Panameña de Traductores e Intérpretes (APTI). A founding member of the Texas Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (TAJIT), she serves as President of El Paso Interpreters and Translators Association (EPITA). An Active member of the American Translators Association (ATA); she also holds membership to the Medical, Spanish and Language Technology Divisions.

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SUBMISSIONS

Please send your submissions electronically in word format to the editor at nabilsalem@gmx.net. Articles should include the author's name, a short biography, any appropriate copyright notes and other notations.

For colleagues with ATA Certification as translators: Remember that publishing an article on translation and/or interpreting will earn you two (2) points of Continuing Education per published article, with a maximum of eight (8) points allowed per reporting period.

DISCLAIMER

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not reflect those of the Editor, the Interpreters Division or the American Translators Association.

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Quality & Availability of Interpreters



by Bruce Downing

Minnesota Group Promotes Quality and Availability of Interpreting.

The Interpreting Stakeholder Group (ISG) is a Minnesota coalition that has taken the lead in advancing language services in the state. Officially, the ISG is a committee of the Upper Midwest Translators and Interpreters Association, an ATA chapter. The ISG has a broad multidisciplinary membership, however, and its own special mission: to improve the delivery of spoken language interpreter services in Minnesota and to promote the professionalization of the interpreting industry as a whole.

The ISG recently completed the two-year project "Linking Voices," funded by the Bush Foundation of Saint Paul. Carried out principally through a collaboration between Century College, Saint Paul, and the Program in Translation and Interpreting at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, the project primarily addressed the quality, extent, and availability of training:

Three-day interpreting "orientations" were offered in several Minnesota towns (Willmar, Crookston, Worthington, and Mankato) where interpreter training had

previously been unavailable; Interpreters in the Crookston, Willmar, and Mankato areas received scholarship support to enroll in two credit-bearing semester courses (Introduction to Interpreting and Consecutive Interpreting) offered by the Program in Translation and Interpreting using interactive television (ITV) hookups.

Qualified interpreters from across the state participated in one of two 2-week Interpreter Trainer Trainings at the University of Minnesota and are now prepared to contribute to future training to be offered in their regions and in languages including Hmong, Oromo, and Somali as well as Spanish;

"Instructors Manuals" for Introduction to Interpreting and Consecutive Interpreting, the two basic courses in the U of M Certificate Program, were revised and expanded and are now available for use in trainings offered in any location (<http://www.cce.umn.edu/pti>);

Additional practice materials for interpreter skills building were created in Hmong, Somali, and Spanish versions; these will be used in a new Century College curriculum to be offered starting in September 2009;

A flexible training on How to Work Effectively with Interpreters was created and is now available for presenters on the ISG web site <http://www.umatia.org/ISG.html>

In addition, the ISG hosted an Expert Panel on Community Interpreter Testing and Certification in June 2007. The Expert Panel brought together leading experts and stakeholders for a three-day discussion of certification methods and issues prior to the formation of the National Coalition on Healthcare Interpreter Certification (NCC). The final report of the Expert Panel is available on the UMTIA web site, at <http://www.umatia.org/resources/resources.html>. The ISG is now a member of the NCC, working with other organizations toward a broadly recognized certification process.

A 2008 Minnesota law calls upon the ISG to advise the Department of Health on the creation of a roster of interpreters and later a registry (with minimum requirements for listing) to make it easier for healthcare providers and well qualified interpreters to reach each other. The state roster and registry of interpreters are viewed as first steps toward a recognized certification process for healthcare interpreters.

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Bruce Downing is an Emeritus Professor of Linguistics and Director-Founder of the Program in Translation and Interpreting at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Downing has published numerous articles on linguistics, refugee resettlement, translation and interpretation. A founding member of the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care, he serves on its Committee on Standards, Training and Certification.



ATA Mid-Year Conference for Interpreters and Medical Divisions

July 18, 2009, Washington, DC



At long last, we have selected Washington, D.C. as the site for the mid-year conference. As previously announced, this will be our first joint conference with the Medical Division, so both medical translators and interpreters will benefit from the presentations and the optional, preconference tours of Georgetown University Hospital and the National Center for State Courts.

Pre-Conference Tours:

Friday, July 17, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
(Free)

Georgetown University Hospital has five centers of excellence: The Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center, Neurosciences, the Institute of Transplantation, Hepatobiliary Diseases, Gastroenterology, and Peripheral Vascular Surgery, in addition to a well-established International Services Department. To register for this tour, **contact Esther Diaz at mediaz@austin.rr.com**.

The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) houses the world's largest collection of resources on judicial administration. In keeping with its

7:30 -9:00	Continental breakfast & registration				
9:00 -10:00	Welcome and open plenary session Language Access Program at Georgetown University Hospital Jessica Jones M.A.				
10:00 -10:15	Break and exhibits				
	Translation track			Interpreting track	
10:15 -11:15	Terminology presentation mental hlth Maria Rosdolsky M.D.			Interp. in Speech Language Therapy Katherine Langan, Ph.D.	
11:15 -11:30	Break and exhibits				
11:30 -12:30	Spanish	French	German	Intl	Ensuring Acces and equal justice Carola Green FCCI
12:30 -1:30	Lunch and exhibits				
	Translation track			Interpreting track	
1:30 -2:30	Role of medical linguists in disease preparedness, outbreaks, and risk Communication: update on H1N1 Swine Influenza Patricia Thickstun, Ph.D.			Note-taking in consecutive interpreting Virginia Valencia, M.A.	
2:30 -2:45	Break and exhibits				
2:45-3:45	Presentation by Georgetown University Hospital Physician, TBA			Community interpreting challenges & compliance with the code of ethics Thelma Gomez Ferry FCCI	
3:45-4:30	Closing plenary session				
5:00 – 7:00	Reception				
Register online or by mail by downloading the registration form at http://www.atanet.org/divisions/ID_MD_conference.php For further information, contact Thelma Ferry at (956) 393-9977					

mission, the NCSC continues to improve the administration of justice through leadership and service to state courts, developing court standards, promoting the use of technology to improve court operations, facilitating information sharing among member states as well as

entities and increasing interpreter professionalism. To register for this tour, contact **Thelma Ferry at topinterpreter@stx.rr.com**
Details on parking and gathering spot for both tours will be provided upon registration.



Healthcare Legislation in Texas



By Esther Diaz, Texas Association of Healthcare Interpreters and Translators [TAHIT]

According to the National Health Law Program:

All 50 states have enacted laws concerning language access in health care settings. California continues to have the most laws; however, every state now has at least two such laws. A limited number of states have enacted comprehensive laws while most states' provisions focus on a particular type of health care provider, service, payer, or patient group. Some of these laws provide detailed guidance; others note the importance of language access but do not specify activities to improve it. Recent trends include provisions addressing cultural competency training for health professionals and Medicaid funding for language services.

Recent legislation includes:

California – HMOs required to provide language assistance effective January 1, 2009

Minnesota – Interpreter Services Quality Initiative, May 2008

New York – New York State Health Care Regulations, September 2006

Oklahoma – Health Service Interpreter Certification Program, September 2005

Texas has eleven laws relating to language access in health care settings. Seven of these address provision of written information in Spanish and other languages used by a significant percentage of the community served by the facility. Four laws address provision of oral information directly in Spanish (most likely by bilingual staff). One law requires nurse consultation services by phone with English and Spanish speaking nurses and other languages available through a translation or interpretation service. Another law relating to Medicaid funding for language services authorized a pilot program at five hospital districts to provide Medicaid recipients with oral and written language services. However, because of the way that Medicaid is set up in Texas, the pilot would only apply to the 'fee-for-service' population. Unfortunately, that population is so small in the pilot areas that a decision was made not to proceed with the pilot. It is interesting to note that the capitated fee currently paid to managed care organizations and the PPCM fee that providers receive include payment for interpreter services for their Medicaid enrollees. This fee covers only a small percentage of the actual cost of interpreter services and is not widely known.

While there is a law requiring court interpreter licensing in Texas, there is no such law for healthcare interpreters. As a result, untrained interpreters are used throughout the state. Only 19 hospitals in Texas have full-time staff interpreters. None of these are in the Rio Grande Valley or El Paso where the Spanish-speaking population exceeds 30%.

TAHIT has proposed legislation to remedy this situation. In 2009 (81st Regular Session of the Texas Legislature) Rep. Eddie Rodriguez of Austin introduced H.B. 233 relating to the creation of an advisory committee to establish and recommend qualifications for certain health care translators and interpreters. This bill calls for the Executive Commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission to establish the Advisory Committee on Qualifications for Health Care Translators and Interpreters. This committee must include representation from: professional translators and interpreters associations; health care interpreters; mental health services providers; hospital risk managers; the insurance industry; business entities that provide translators and interpreters to health care practitioners; organizations that provide services to immigrants and refugees; institutions of higher education; and at least one health care practitioner.

The proposed Advisory Committee will be responsible for establishing and recommending qualifications for healthcare interpreters and translators that include: the ability to fluently interpret another language into and out of English; training in anatomy, physiology, medical interpretation and ethics; and practical experience as a translator or interpreter. The bill stops short of requiring certification for healthcare interpreters.

TAHIT will closely monitor the progress of this bill and will provide updates at www.tahit.us.



Calendar of events

July

06-09 International Association of Forensic Linguists (IAFL)
9th Biennial Conference on Forensic Linguistics/Language
and Law, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Tel: (+31) - (0)20-598 6539
iaf09@let.vu.nl

11-12 American Translators Association (ATA)
Assn of Translators & Interpreters in the San Diego Area (ATISDA)
Professional Development Seminar: Medical Translation
San Diego,
Tel: (619) 239-6800
www.atasda.org

18 ATA Medical Division (MD)
ATA Interpreters Division (ID)
2009 Joint Mid-Year Conference
Washington, DC.
Tel: (956) 393-9977
http://www.atanet.org/divisions/ID_MD_conference.php

20-25 Chicago Area Translators & Interpreters Association (CHICATA)
Simultaneous Interpretation Seminars
Chicago, IL
Tel: (312) 836-0961
www.chicata.org

30-01 August ATA Translation Company Division (TCD)
10th Annual ATA-TCD Mid-Year Conference
Smart Strategies for Tough Times: Translating Words Into Profit
Quebec City, Canada
Tel: (732) 432-0174 www.ata-tcd.com

August

3-5 Localization Industry Standards Association
(LISA) Berkeley Globalization Conference:
LISA @ Berkeley
The Business Impact of Operating
Without Standards
Berkeley, CA
Tel: (312) 212-3585
admin@lisa.org

29 Northern California Translators
Association (NCTA)
ATA Certification Exam Workshop
San Francisco, CA
Phone/fax: (510) 845-8712
ncta@ncta.org

Developing the Interpreter's Voice

By Michelle Lambeau

Some interpreters come to the profession by being called upon to give voice to their translations. Others spend months, even years, studying to earn certifications and degrees. Many training institutions around the world typically focus on linguistic and cerebral skills and the vast breadth of knowledge necessary to succeed in the profession, but pay little or no attention to vocal development. And yet the mastery of even a few basic vocal techniques can provide a tremendous payoff in terms of volume, euphony, and endurance. Improved vocal skills will also enhance an interpreter's self-confidence and it will be readily apparent to the audience that they are listening to quality work.



Those who depend on their voice for a living need to strive to enhance their vocal ability. This includes learning to maintain a pleasant voice quality in any setting. Most of us never know when the call will come in that takes us to a wholly new environment where we have never worked before. I am sure we can all remember situations where we have suffered the furrowed brows of people who could

not make out what we were saying (Did I get it wrong? Should I speak even louder? Is there something wrong with my clothes? How well do they understand the language anyway?). There have also been times when we experienced insecurity, had laryngitis the next day, or lamented a missed opportunity. Overcoming these obstacles takes preparation and practice. Here are a few things to remember for your next interpreting assignment, including tips on how to keep your voice in top form.

Understand Acoustics

In order to succeed as an interpreter, a basic understanding of acoustics is essential. A heavily draped room full of people will absorb sound and calls for greater volume and projection on your part. This is true even if the room

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Developing the Interpreter's Voice

does not seem particularly large when you first enter it. An auditorium with uncovered structures and lots of empty space will cause sound to reverberate and requires sharper, almost staccato, delivery to keep your words distinct and easy to understand without wearing out your listeners. Were you counting on the sound equipment to do that for you? Don't. There may not be any. Besides, you have no control over the quality of the equipment being used, and even if it is state-of-the-art, it can always break down.

Protect Your Voice

Skill, experience, and luck play a key part in any interpreter's success, but your voice is crucial to professional survival. Understanding its physiology is useful and interesting. Protecting it at all times is essential and easy. Do not smoke. Refrain from shouting. Keep hydrated. Be prepared to deal with allergens and germs. Protect yourself from drafts and air conditioning by buttoning up or wearing a scarf. And always, always warm up before you begin interpreting.

Work on Vocal Quality

Vocal quality is a distinct and crucial part of the interpreter's toolkit, and where the fun really begins. The issue of quality can be approached in a number of ways, and numerous qualified specialists have compiled many fascinating manuals and treatises on the subject. Here is a

simple rundown of some of the friends and enemies of good voice work.

Friends: Your best friends are practice, a voice recorder, and the sound technicians you may have the good fortune to work with.

- Devoting a few minutes each day to keeping your vocal apparatus supple and keen will stand you in good stead when called upon to use it professionally.

- Listening to recordings of your voice will tell you everything you want to know about potential areas in need of improvement. If sound technicians are present on the job, consult them. They are probably the best experts you could hope to meet and can provide the advice and make the adjustments that will allow you to sound your best. So arrive early, test the equipment with them, and value their input. They make all the difference in the world.

- If possible, consider taking acting or singing lessons and working with a voice coach. The first will provide confidence and practice in the disciplines of diction and projection, the second confidence and joy, and the third special attention to your specific needs.

Enemies: Stress and neglect are the enemies of the interpreter's voice.

- There is no way around the fact that

interpreting is a stressful occupation. Stress has a cumulative effect over time that successful interpreters have learned to manage, though few would ever claim to have eliminated it altogether. Beginning students of interpreting or linguists considering branching out into the profession must learn early on whether they are able to function optimally under pressure—the client has a right to expect it. Those who find the demands too overwhelming would be wise to consider a different field, as interpreting may well fail to bring the professional fulfillment we all want from a career.

- An inexperienced, unpracticed, mistreated voice becomes an unwelcome distraction from an otherwise strong linguistic achievement. It can hinder the audience's ability to follow what the speaker is saying, and it will do nothing to mask any discomfort you might be feeling as a result of your performance. There is also a good chance that the client will look elsewhere for an interpreter next time. Practice and prevention can do a lot to avoid this situation.

Conclusion

Working with the voice is fun, infinitely rewarding and a wonderful asset to offer your client.

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Developing the Interpreter's Voice

Quick Tips to Protect Your Voice

- Do not smoke.
- Refrain from shouting.
- Keep hydrated.
- Be prepared to deal with allergens and germs.
- Protect yourself from drafts and air conditioning by buttoning up or wearing a scarf.
- ALWAYS, ALWAYS warm up before you begin interpreting.

Suggested Reading

Lessac, Arthur. *The Use and Training of the Human Voice* (McGraw Hill, 1997).
 Nowak, Achim. *Power Speaking* (Allworth Press, 2004).
 Machlin, Evangeline. *Speech For the Stage* (Routledge, 1980).
 Dolar, Mladen. *A Voice and Nothing More* (The MIT Press, 2006).

Michelle Lambeau retired in 2006 as Senior Interpreter after a 20-year career at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. She went on to create Lambeau Services to provide US clients and students with quality language services and training while focusing on her passion for studying and teaching voice for interpreters. She has written and lectured for the American Translators Association. She currently lives in Sedona, Arizona.



by Ines Swaney

The first time I remember hearing about TWITTER was at the November 2008 ATA Conference held in Orlando, Florida. While listening to a presentation, I came up with and shared the idea of using TWITTER as a means for us interpreters to quickly communicate amongst ourselves for purposes of mutual assistance.

When you search online and try to find out what TWITTER is, the following definition usually appears: Twitter is a free service that lets you keep in touch with people through the exchange of

Shall we TWITTER?

quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing? However, you'll soon discover that dealing with this particular question is really unnecessary. TWITTER is a kind of social media limited to 140 characters, and is available to you through your computer and also via your cell phone. So you could say it is a sort of text messaging, but the sender is one individual and the potential recipients can be many. And the message received can be resent to others.

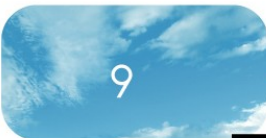
This is where I envision an ideal scenario for helping each other remotely when we're interpreting and would like assistance with some challenging terminology. Interpreters working in pairs can decide that the idle partner will send out a text message from a cell phone, via twitter, inquiring from other interpreter colleagues as to the best way to render a certain term or expression that has come up during this particular assignment. Other interpreters "out there," already signed up with twitter, could receive this request for help and immediately respond via twitter, either with suggestions or providing the perfect solution. Here's something

I found online, with comments on how TWITTER can be and has been used.

<http://www.doshdosh.com/ways-you-can-use-twitter/>

My idea is just that. Harness the power of our interconnected world in order to enrich our working vocabulary by helping each other in virtually real time. Somebody in cyberspace is likely to be connected at that very moment and could provide the needed help, or know exactly who to turn to. Those 140 characters should be sufficient. Now, will someone come forth and help figure out the nuts and bolts on how to make this really happen?

Ines Swaney is a California and Federal Certified Court Interpreter, Conference Interpreter, ATA-certified translator (Eng>Spa and Spa>Eng) and a voiceover talent. She also teaches continuing education workshops.



Team Interpreting In The Courtroom

NAJIT POSITION PAPER

The information provided in NAJIT position papers offers general guidance and practical suggestions regarding the provision of competent language assistance to persons with limited English proficiency. This information is intended to assist in developing and enhancing local rules, policies and procedures in a wide range of settings. It does not include or replace local, state or federal policies. For more information, please contact: National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators, 202-293-0342 or visit the NAJIT website at www.najit.org

Introduction

In court settings, team interpreting refers to the practice of using two rotating interpreters to provide simultaneous or consecutive interpretation for one or more individuals with limited English proficiency.

Team interpreting is recommended for all lengthy legal proceedings and is an effective tool in the administration of justice. With team interpreting, the non-English speaker or person of limited English proficiency hears the proceedings without interruption or diminution in the quality of interpretation.

How does team interpreting work?

Team interpreting is the industry standard in courtrooms, international conferences, negotiations and other venues where continuous interpreting is required for periods of over one hour. The typical team is comprised of two interpreters who work in tandem, providing relief every 30 minutes. The interpreter engaged in delivering the interpretation at any given moment is



called the active interpreter. His job is to interpret the court proceedings truly and accurately. The other interpreter is called the support interpreter. His job is to (1) interpret any conversation between counsel and defendant while the proceedings are taking place; (2) assist the active interpreter by looking up vocabulary, or acting as a second ear to confirm quickly spoken names, numbers or other references; (3) assist the active interpreter with any technical problems with electronic interpreting equipment, if in use; (4) be available in case the active interpreter has an emergency; and (5) serve as an impartial language expert in the case of any challenge to interpretation at the witness stand.¹ Team interpreting enables court sessions to proceed at the pace the judge requires without a need for extra breaks.

Why use team interpreting?

The advantages of team interpreting are many, and the reasons for it are

compelling. Team interpreting is a quality control mechanism, implemented to preserve the accuracy of the interpretation process in any circumstances.

Every defendant (and in some states, the plaintiff) in the United States has the right to hear and understand the proceedings against him at every stage of the legal process. When matters of life and liberty are at stake, a trained and qualified interpreter is a vital link in the provision of due process. To do his job, a court interpreter, under oath to provide a true and accurate interpretation, must maintain an intense alertness to all courtroom speech, including questions, answers, legal arguments and colloquy. The subject matter of court hearings varies, but may include legal arguments in a motion to suppress evidence; cross-examination experts;

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Team Interpreting In The Courtroom

syntactically dense jury instructions; nervous witness testimony; or a complex or under-articulated recitation of facts. There is a limit to the focused concentration needed to comprehend complex language at high speed and render it accurately in another language. Inattention, distraction or mental exhaustion on the part of the interpreter can have adverse consequences for defendants, litigants, witnesses, victims, and the judicial process in general.

Interpreters in the courtroom can play a dual role, interpreting the actual proceedings and also interpreting for attorney-client consultations when needed. Especially in multi-defendant cases, working in a team allows one interpreter to continue interpreting the proceedings while the second interpreter assists during any attorney-client discussions at defense table.²

The interpretation process

Interpreting is cognitively demanding and stressful, requiring many mental processes to occur simultaneously: the interpreter listens, analyzes, comprehends, and uses contextual clues to convert thought from one language to another in order to immediately render a reproduction in another language of each speaker's original utterances.³ In courtrooms with imperfect acoustics, cramped seating, security requirements, miscellaneous noise, mumbled diction, interruptions, the tension of litigation, and lawyers or clients who may need the interpreter at any moment for a private consultation, interpreters need to channel dozens of stimuli and effectively sort them in order to fulfill the task at hand.



Even thirty to sixty minutes of continuous interpreting leads to significant processing fatigue. Thus, simultaneous interpretation can be seen as a "cognitive management problem." After a certain amount of time on task, an interpreter inevitably reaches a saturation point, at which time errors cannot be avoided because mental circuits get overloaded.⁴

Interpreter error and fatigue

Scientific studies have shown that mental fatigue sets in after approximately 30 minutes of sustained simultaneous interpretation, resulting in a marked loss in accuracy. This is so regardless of how experienced or talented the interpreter may be. A 1998 study conducted at the École de Traduction et d'Interprétation at the University of Geneva, demonstrated the effects of interpreting over increasing periods of time. The conclusion of the study was that an interpreter's own judgment of output quality becomes unreliable after increased time on task.⁵

Remarkably, these recent studies ratify the results obtained the very first time that simultaneous interpreting was attempted at an international conference, in 1928. The engineer's report

stated: "It was observed that an average of 30 minutes of consecutive work was the maximum time during which a satisfactory translation could be done; after this time, one runs the risk of deteriorating results, due to fatigue."⁶ Empirical observations of interpreters at work in many venues have borne out the need for a relay approach to simultaneous interpreting, for the protection of both the interpreter and the end user of interpreting services.

Minimizing possibility of interpreter error

Due process guarantees the right of a litigant to see and hear all evidence and witnesses. Case law holds that on the basis of the 4th, 6th, and 14th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, a non-English speaking defendant has a right to be provided with a complete interpretation of the proceedings rather than a summary.⁷ It is unrealistic to expect interpreters to maintain high accuracy rates for hours, or days, at a time without relief.

If interpreters work without relief in proceedings lasting more than 30-45 minutes, the ability to continue to provide a consistently accurate translation may be compromised. Further, since an interpreter is under oath to provide a fair, complete and impartial interpretation, due process rights are best protected by a team of interpreters for all lengthy proceedings.⁸

Like a marathon runner who must maintain liquid intake at regular intervals during the race and not wait until thirst sets in, an interpreter needs regular breaks to ward off processing fatigue,

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Team Interpreting In The Courtroom

after which the mental faculties would be impaired. Team interpreting allows the active interpreter to remain mentally fresh, while the support interpreter takes on other functions that would lead the active interpreter to cognitive overload.

Planning and coordination are needed to ensure a high level of reliability in interpreter output. Court proceedings are sometimes unpredictable. What may begin as a brief matter always has the potential to get more involved as new matters come to the court's attention. When a hearing is extended unexpectedly, if possible, a relief interpreter should be provided to rotate into the assignment. Alternatively, periodic breaks should be taken to prevent mental exhaustion by the interpreter.

Judges and interpreter administration

Judges are uniquely situated to understand the importance of language skills in the courtroom, and different courts may view interpreter administration differently. However, it is universally recognized that the team approach is the best insurance policy against errors in the interpretation process. In some courts, team interpreting is established policy and automatically coordinated by the interpreting department. In other courts, local rules state that judges "may appoint" multiple interpreters if the proceeding warrants it.

Local guidelines and practices can establish team interpreting as a necessary technique of quality control in proceedings lasting more than a certain length of time. In general, it is

recommended that simultaneous interpreters rotate every 30-45 minutes when conveying general court proceedings and every 45-60 minutes when interpreting for non-English-speaking witnesses.

The job of conveying meaning in two distinct languages at a moment's notice is unlike that of anyone else in the courtroom. It is a demanding task, and the cost of errors is high. When judges work together with interpreter administrators to ensure adequate working conditions for court interpreters, everyone benefits. From a human resources perspective, teaming also promotes the long-term effectiveness of interpreter departments by encouraging cooperation, sharing responsibility and preventing burnout or attrition.

Conclusion

Due process rights are best preserved with faithful simultaneous interpretation of legal proceedings. Court interpreters work for the judiciary and their goal is accuracy and completeness, not a particular party's agenda. In a controlled study, it was shown that interpreters' work quality decreases after 30 minutes.

In the challenging courtroom environment, team interpreting ensures that the comprehension effort required to provide accurate interpretation is not compromised. To deliver unassailably accurate language service, court interpreters work in teams.

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Glossary Corner

Legal – words

ABROGATE – To appeal or cancel an old law using another law or constitutional power.

ABROGAR – Revocación o cancelamiento de una ley antigua usando otra ley o poder constitucional.

ABSTRACT OF JUDGEMENT – A summary of the court's final court decision. Can be used as a lien if you file it with the county recorder.

ABSTRACCION DE JUICIO DE FALLO – Resumen de la decisión final de la corte. Puede ser usada como un derecho de retención si es archivada con el registro del condado.

ABATEMENT OF ACTION – A suit which has been set aside and ended.

CESACION DE ACCION – Un pleito que ha sido anulado, concluído o terminado.

ACTION IN REM – Proceeding “against the thing” as compared to personal actions (in personam.) Usually a proceeding where property is involved.

ACCION EN REM – Proceder “contra el sujeto” como comparado a las acciones personales. Usualmente un acto involucrando propiedades.

ACCESSORY – A person who helps someone else commit a crime, either before or after the crime.

ACCESORIO – Una persona que ayuda a alguien a cometer un delito antes o después del delito.

ACQUIT – To legally find the innocence of a person charged with a crime. To set free, release or discharge from an obligation, burden or accusation. To find the defendant not guilty in a criminal trial.

ABSOLVER - Legalmente declarar inocente a una persona acusada de un delito. Poner en libertad o descargar de obligación, cargo o acusación. Determinar a un acusado no culpable en un juicio penal o criminal.

AD LITEM – Comes from Latin meaning for the “purposes of the lawsuit.” For example, a guardian ad litem is a person appointed by the court to protect the interest of a minor or legally incompetent person in a lawsuit.

AD LITEM - Del idioma Latino significando “el propósito de la demanda”. Por ejemplo, un guardián ad litem es una persona nombrada por la corte para proteger los intereses de un menor o individuo incompetente en una demanda.



ANNOUNCEMENT

We are pleased to inform that the November-December 2008 issue of *The ATA Chronicle* has published an update regarding membership to the three largest divisions. The Spanish Language Division

has 4,500 members; the Interpreters Division has over 3,400 members; the Medical Division has over 2,800 members and the Interpreters Division membership continues to increase.