

## ATA Interpreters Division

### Report to ATA Board of Directors May 2015 Survey Results, Conclusions and Recommendations

N= 536 ATA ID members  
Number of questions: 36  
Tool used: Survey Monkey

On May 2015, the Interpreters Division, in collaboration with ATA headquarters, developed a survey intended to gain insight into the state of our profession. The following are the results, conclusions, and lessons learned in the following rubrics:

- 1) Demographics
- 2) Education and Credentialing
- 3) Professional Interpreters' profile
- 4) Areas of Interpreting
- 5) Language Combination

We hope these conclusions will serve as the basis for ATA leadership's future marketing and strategic planning endeavors.

#### A Snapshot of the Stereotypical ATA ID Member

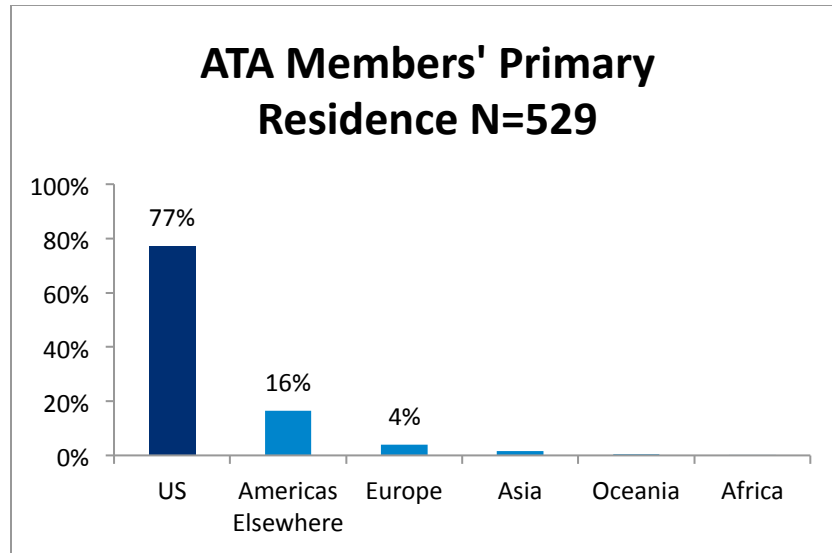
*The stereotypical ATA ID member is a highly educated, very flexible, independently minded and experienced middle-aged female, spoken language, credentialed interpreter living in the US who is also a translator. ATA ID members do not work in a single area of interpreting. While all ATA ID members render their interpreting services on-site, one-third also renders them remotely. About half of ATA ID members are Spanish <> English court certified interpreters.*

#### Survey Results:

##### 1) Demographics:

###### a. Place of Residence

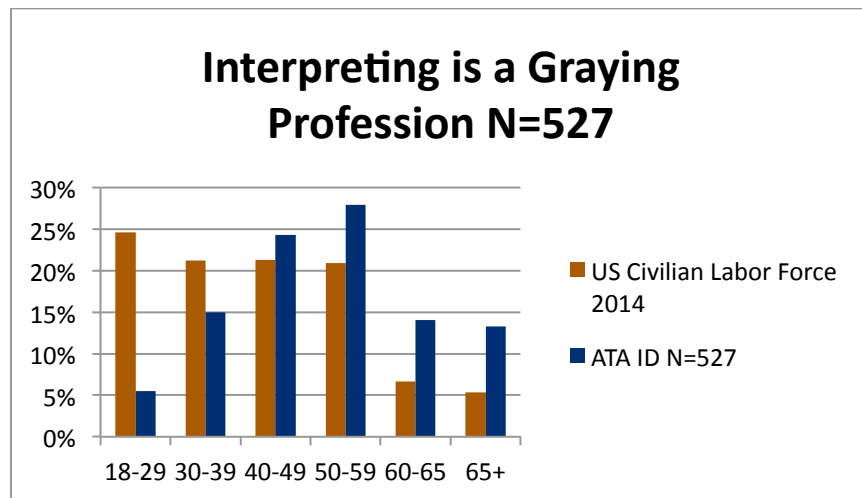
The vast majority of ATA ID members (77%) live in the US. Those living in Africa (1) and Oceania (2) represent less than 1% of those surveyed.



Graphic 1

**b. Age**

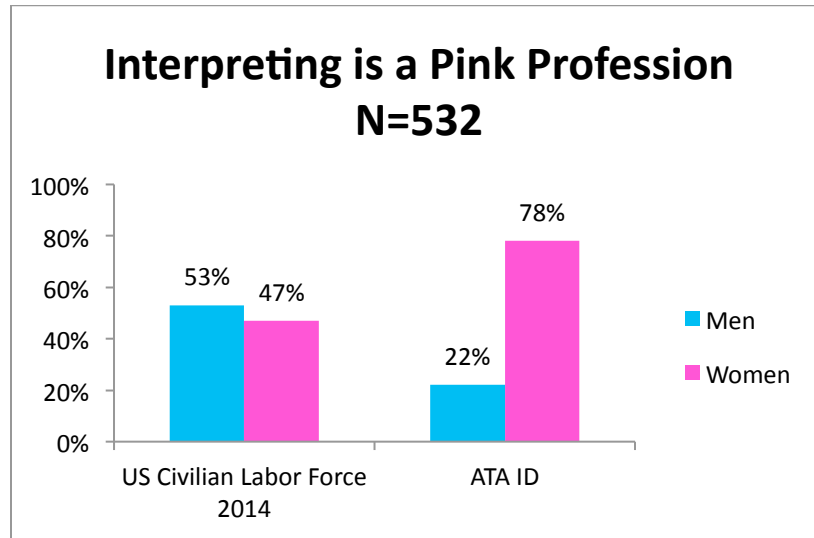
In contrast to the US Civilian Labor Force, where the most prominent age group is 18-29, most ATA ID members are between 50 to 60 years old.



(Graphic 2)

**c. Gender**

While the US Civilian Labor Force is almost evenly split between genders, 78% of ATA ID members are women.

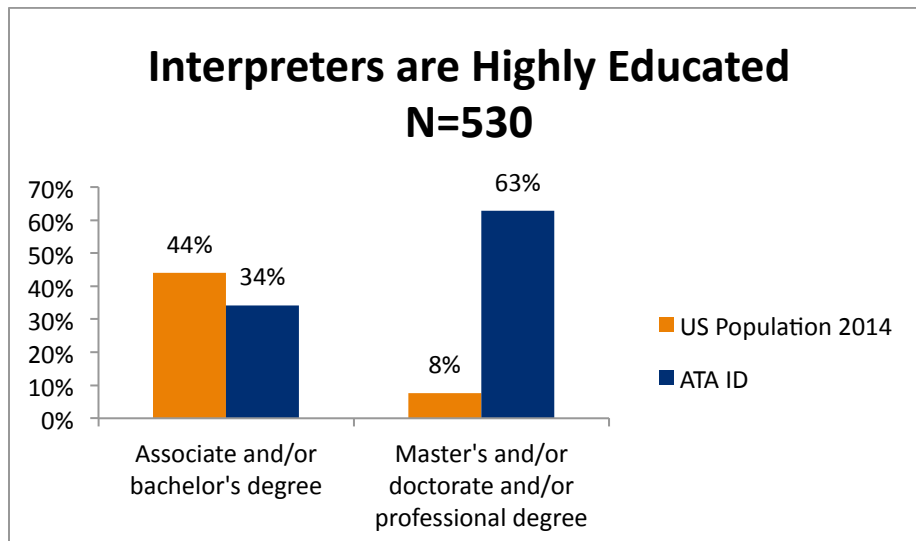


Graphic 3

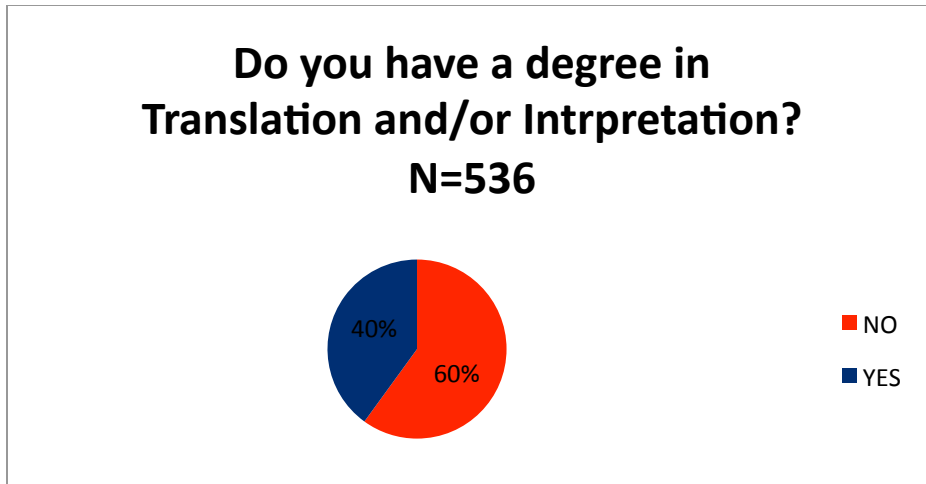
**2) Education and Credentialing**

**a. Level of Education**

63% of ATA ID members have a master's or doctorate degree. When compared with information on Educational Attainment gathered by the US Department of Commerce, it is clear that ATA has a much higher concentration of highly educated professionals than the average population<sup>2</sup>. However, only 40% of these professionals have a degree in Interpretation or Translation.



Graphic 4

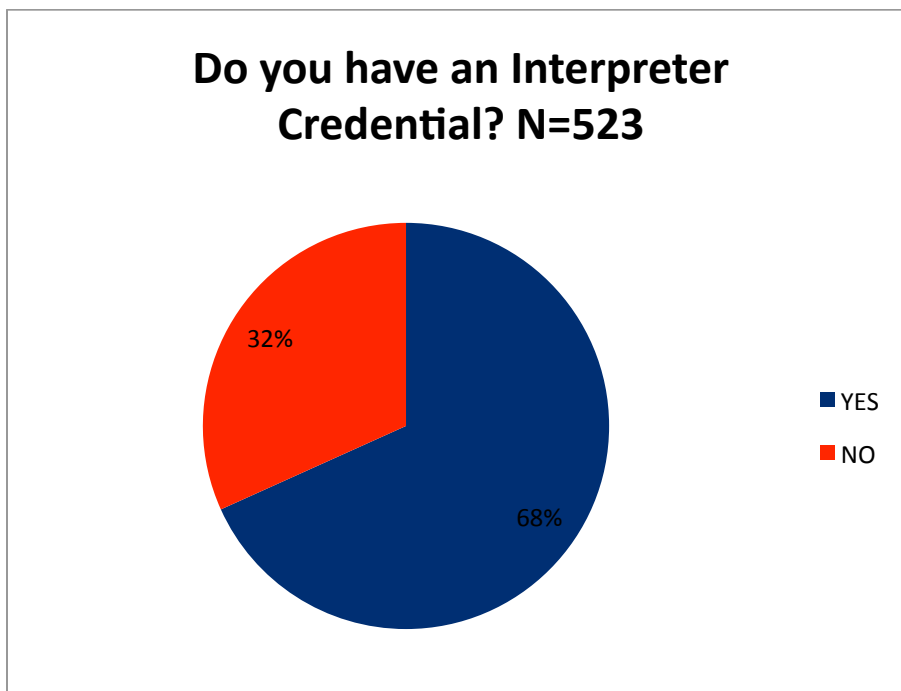


Graphic 5

**b. Credentialing**

The vast majority of respondents (68%) have an interpreting credential in their language combination. Credentialing in interpreting is available in only some languages; thus, the percentage of interpreters without a credential (32%) could indicate one of two things:

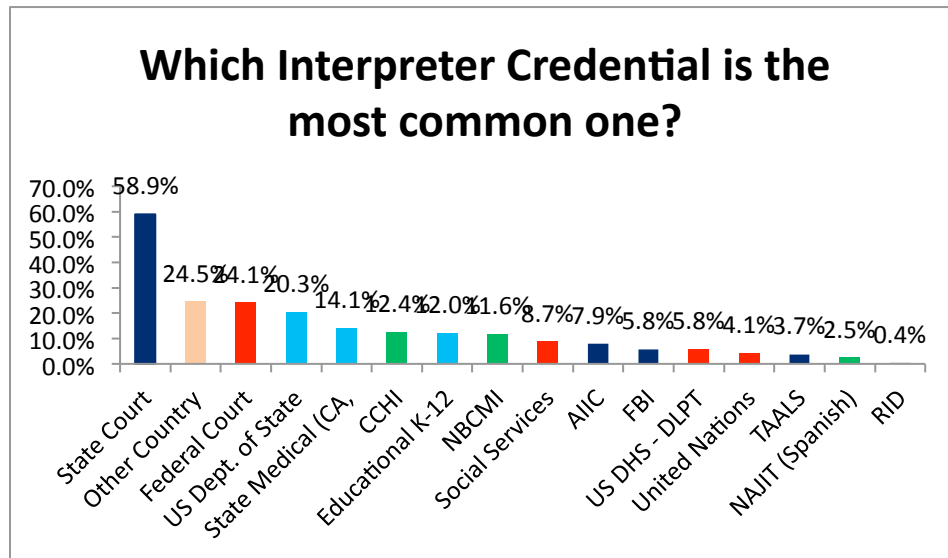
- 1) They work in a language combination that does not have a credential yet; or
- 2) They haven't obtained a credential yet even though it exists for their language combination.



Graphic 6

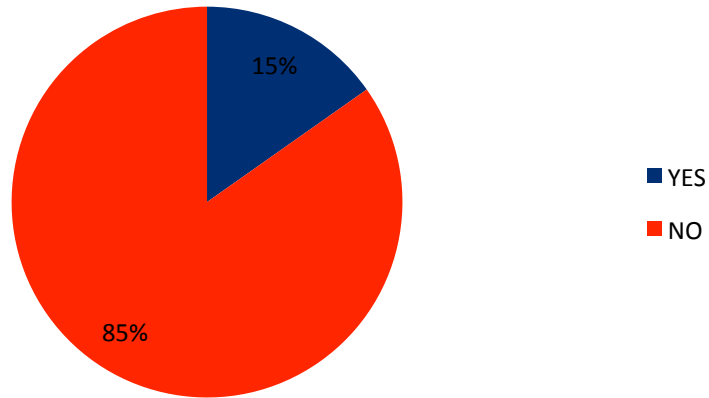
| Interpreter Credentials    | N= 241 |     |
|----------------------------|--------|-----|
| State Court                | 58.9%  | 142 |
| Other Country              | 24.5%  | 59  |
| Federal Court (Spanish)    | 24.1%  | 58  |
| US Dept. of State          | 20.3%  | 49  |
| State Medical (CA, OR, WA) | 14.1%  | 34  |
| CCHI                       | 12.4%  | 30  |
| Educational K-12           | 12.0%  | 29  |
| NBCMI                      | 11.6%  | 28  |
| Social Services (WA)       | 8.7%   | 21  |
| AIIC                       | 7.9%   | 19  |
| FBI                        | 5.8%   | 14  |
| US DHS - DLPT              | 5.8%   | 14  |
| United Nations             | 4.1%   | 10  |
| TAALS                      | 3.7%   | 9   |
| NAJIT (Spanish)            | 2.5%   | 6   |
| RID                        | 0.4%   | 1   |
|                            | 217%   | 523 |

Table 1



Graphic 7

**Do you have an Interpreter Credential  
in your Second Language Other Than  
English? N=348**



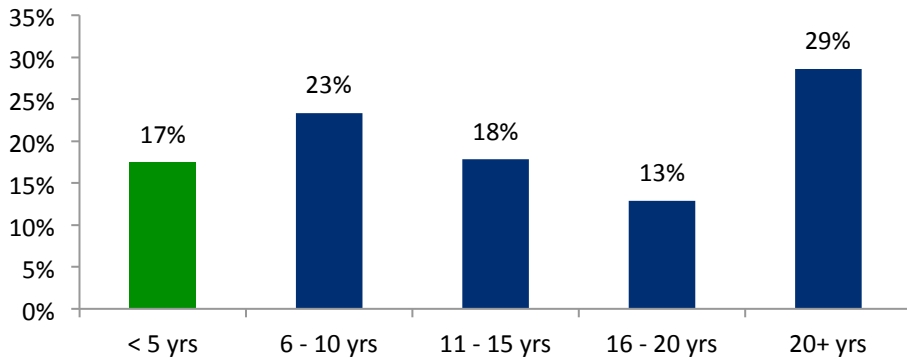
Graphic 8

**3) Professional Interpreters' Profile**

**a. Experience**

Almost half of ATA ID members (44%) has between 6 to 20 years of experience and about one third (29%) has more than 20 years of experience.

**ATA Members are Experienced  
Interpreters  
N=528**

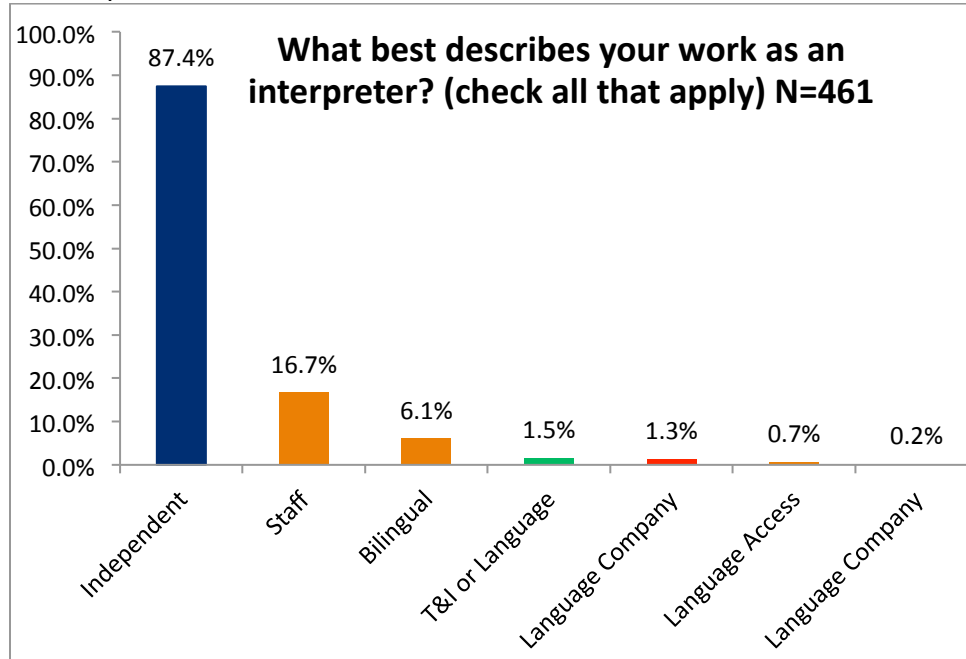


Graphic 9

## b. Interpreters' Work Status

The vast majority of ATA ID members (87%) work as freelancers. Remarkably, as the totals show, some employees and language company owners also moonlight as freelancers. This reflects the latest trends in the US labor market. A 2014 independent study commissioned by the Freelancers Union and Elance-oDesk<sup>3</sup>, found 34% of the U.S. workforce (53 million people) working as freelancers. The survey defined “freelancers” as individuals who have engaged in supplemental, temporary, or project -or contract- based work in the past 12 months.

See Graphic 10



Graphic 10

**40% or 21.M Independent Contractors.** These “traditional” freelancers don’t have an employer and instead do freelance, temporary, or supplemental work on a project-to-project basis.

**27% or 14.3M Moonlighters.** Professionals with a primary, traditional job who also moonlight doing freelance work. For example, a corporate employed web developer who also does projects for non-profits in the evening.

**18% or 9.3M Diversified Workers.** People with multiple sources of income from a mix of traditional employers and freelance work. For example, someone who works the front desk at a dentist’s office 20 hours a week and fills out the rest of his income driving for Uber and doing freelance writing.

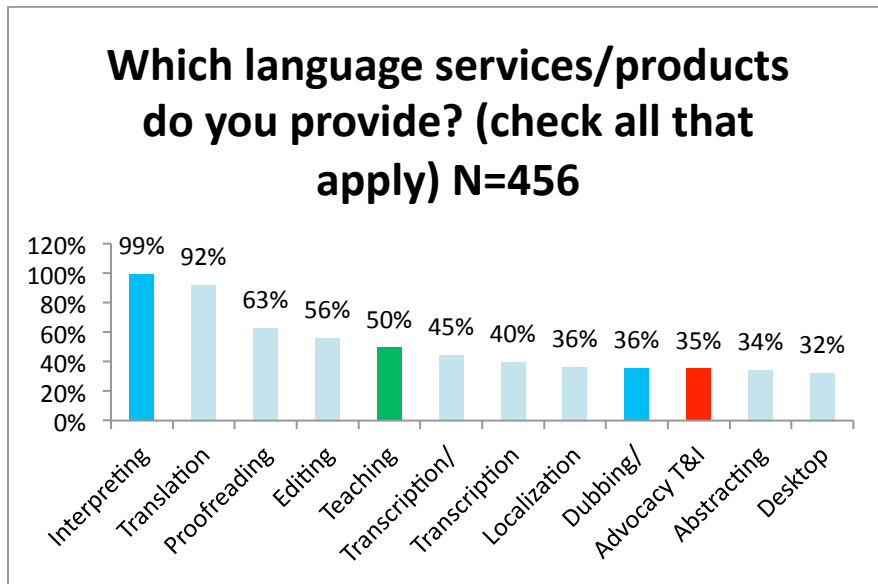
**10% or 5.5M Temporary Workers.** Individuals with a single employer, client, job, or contract project where their employment status is temporary. For example, a

business strategy consultant working for one startup client on a contract basis for a several month-long project.

**5% or 2.8M Freelance Business Owners.** Business owners with between one and five employees who consider themselves both a freelancer and a business owner. For example, a social marketing guru who hires a team of other social marketers to build a small agency, but still identifies as a freelancer.

**c. Other Language Services Offered by Interpreters**

ATA ID members offer multiple services. The vast majority of interpreters (92%) also work in translation. It is noteworthy that 50% of respondents teach and 35% do advocacy, two activities that have the potential to improve the profession as a whole.

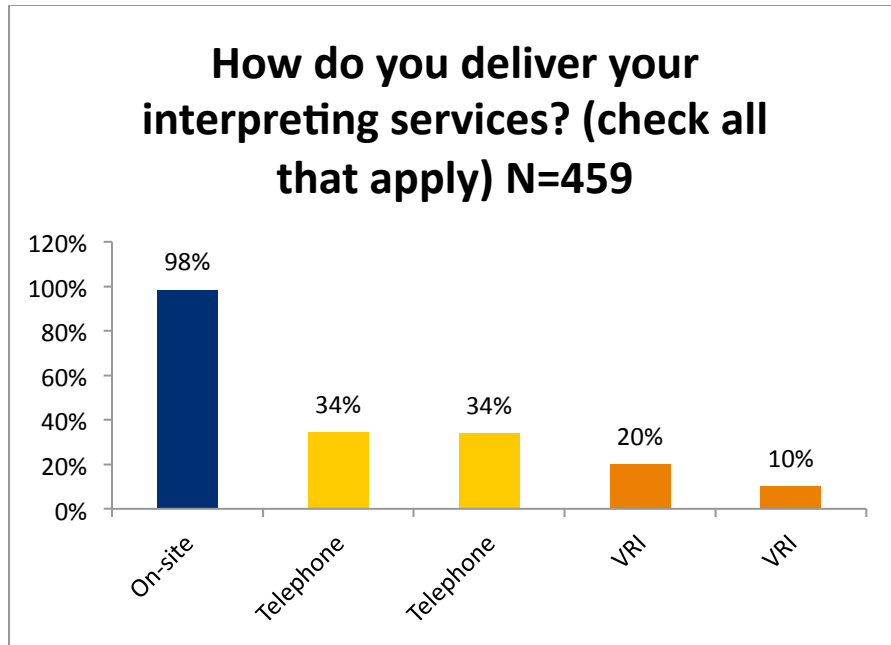


Graphic 11

**d. Interpreting Services Delivery Modalities**

While almost all ATA ID members deliver their interpreting services on-site (98%), a third also delivers them remotely by telephone and/or video.





Graphic 12

#### 4) Areas of Interpreting

ATA ID members do not seem to specialize in any particular area of interpreting; instead, they appear to work in many areas at a time. This validates the popular industry belief that “interpreting is interpreting is interpreting.”<sup>4</sup> An interpreter’s choice to work in a particular area of interpreting probably highly correlates with payment rates, the interpreter’s credentials, and the market’s demand for each language in particular. For example, an interpreter in a Language of Limited Demand can ill afford specializing in one particular area of interpreting.

|                   |     |     |
|-------------------|-----|-----|
| Judiciary         | 65% | 300 |
| Healthcare        | 60% | 278 |
| Conference        | 50% | 231 |
| Community         | 47% | 214 |
| Business          | 47% | 214 |
| Liaison or Escort | 25% | 117 |
| Labor Relations   | 22% | 100 |
| Law Enforcement   | 22% | 99  |
| Diplomatic        | 17% | 80  |
| Media             | 12% | 53  |
| Humanitarian      | 8%  | 37  |
| Military          | 7%  | 32  |
| Educational       | 3%  | 13  |
| Conflict zone     | 2%  | 11  |
| Religious         | 1%  | 5   |
| Sports            | 0%  | 2   |
| N=460             |     |     |

Table 2

#### 5) Language combination

Almost half of ATA ID interpreters (48%) work in the Spanish <> English language combination followed very distantly by Portuguese <> English (7.5%) then French (6.3%) and Russian (6.3%).

|            |        |     |
|------------|--------|-----|
| Spanish    | 48.0%  | 243 |
| Portuguese | 7.5%   | 38  |
| French     | 6.3%   | 32  |
| Russian    | 6.3%   | 32  |
| German     | 4.2%   | 21  |
| Japanese   | 3.2%   | 16  |
| Arabic     | 3.0%   | 15  |
| Italian    | 2.6%   | 13  |
| Mandarin   | 2.6%   | 13  |
| Chinese    | 1.4%   | 7   |
| Farsi      | 1.4%   | 7   |
| Korean     | 1.4%   | 7   |
| Dutch      | 1.2%   | 6   |
| Cantonese  | 1.0%   | 5   |
| Bengali    | 0.8%   | 4   |
| Czech      | 0.8%   | 4   |
| Romanian   | 0.8%   | 4   |
| ASL        | 0.6%   | 3   |
| Polish     | 0.6%   | 3   |
| Urdu       | 0.6%   | 3   |
| Croatian   | 0.4%   | 2   |
| Greek      | 0.4%   | 2   |
| Gujarati   | 0.4%   | 2   |
| Hebrew     | 0.4%   | 2   |
| Hungarian  | 0.4%   | 2   |
| Thai       | 0.4%   | 2   |
| Turkish    | 0.4%   | 2   |
| N=506      | 100.0% | 506 |

Table 3

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- 1) The majority of the information gathered in this survey is relevant for interpreters living in the continental U.S.A. Data collected from residents of other countries might have reduced the internal validity of questions associated with credentialing and employment. In the future, the survey can use skip logic for respondents outside of the continental U.S.A, or have two separate surveys.
- 2) The current labor market is very flexible and complex. Future research should be devoted to capturing the complexity of this market reality and discover the existing opportunities to develop the field of interpretation. The interpreting profession fluctuates with political and economic circumstances. Increased involvement and participation of organizations such as ATA in interpreting forums will have a positive impact on the profession.
- 3) There seems to be some confusion about the meaning of the categories describing interpreters' work status (Graphic 10). It might be helpful to include some short definitions for each category in future surveys. Please see Appendix 1 for sample questions.
- 4) Due to the variety of language services and products, future research could try to elucidate where the major source of income among these services and products comes from. This information could shape and inform institutions focused in the formation of future generations of interpreters.
- 5) Future research should use the ASTM F2089-15 Standard Practice for Language Interpreting for standard definitions and descriptions.
- 6) Future surveys should be sent to all ATA members, not just ID members. This will facilitate self-selection of interpreters and capture important information. There is the possibility that interpreters who are members of ATA have not yet joined the Interpreters Division.
- 7) Since some of the respondents are language company owners and/or teachers, and language companies do "provide" interpreting services, the first question on an interpreter survey should be: Do you yourself interpret at all? A "no" answer to this question should end the survey.

## References

- (1) US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014, Labor Force Characteristics for the Current Population Survey. Demographics 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/cps/lfcharacteristics.htm#laborforce>
- (2) US Department of Commerce, Census Bureau. Educational Attainment. All Races 2014. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/education/data/cps/2014/tables.html>
- (3) Freelancing in America: A National Survey of the New Workforce, 2014, An independent study commissioned by Freelancers Union & Elance-oDesk, Retrieved from: <https://www.freelancersunion.org/>
- (4) AIIC, Interpreting is Interpreting – or is it? (2010) Holly Mikkelson, Retrieved from: <http://aiic.net/page/3356/interpreting-is-interpreting-or-is-it/lang/1>

## Appendix 1

### Sample employment questions

What best describes your employment status as it relates to interpreting? (Check all that apply)

- Independent Contractor Interpreter aka “Freelancer or 1099er” (choose only one)
  - Full time (40+hrs/week)
  - Part Time (<40hrs/week)
  
- Staff Interpreter W-2 (choose only one)
  - Full time (40+hrs/week)
  - Part Time (<40hrs/week)
  
- Bilingual Employee W-2 (choose only one)
  - Full time (40+hrs/week)
  - Part Time (<40hrs/week)
  
- T&I or Language Teacher/Trainer (choose all that apply)
  - Employee W-2 (choose only one)
    - Full time (40+hrs/week)
    - Part Time (<40hrs/week)
  
  - Independent Contractor 1099 (choose only one)
    - Full time (40+hrs/week)
    - Part Time (<40hrs/week)
  
- Entrepreneur (choose only one)
  - Full time (40+hrs/week)
  - Part Time (<40hrs/week)

- T&I Consultant 1099 (choose only one)
  - Full time (40+hrs/week)
  - Part Time (<40hrs/week)
  
- Language Access Manager/Coordinator W-2 (choose only one)
  - Full time (40+hrs/week)
  - Part Time (<40hrs/week)
  
- Language Company Owner (choose only one)
  - Full time (40+hrs/week)
  
  - Part Time (<40hrs/week)
  
- Language Company Employee W-2 (choose only one)
  - Full time (40+hrs/week)
  - Part Time (<40hrs/week)