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Standard Practice for Language Interpreting¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This practice defines the minimum professional standard for quality services in language interpreting. It is intended for use by stakeholders with varying levels of expertise in the field of interpreting.

1.2 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ISO Standards:*²

ISO 2603 Booths for Simultaneous Interpretation—General Characteristics and Equipment

ISO 4043 Mobile Booths for Simultaneous Interpretation—General Characteristics and Equipment

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions:*

3.1.1 *Interpreting*—the process of first fully understanding, analyzing, and processing a spoken or signed message and then faithfully rendering it into another spoken or signed language.

3.1.1.1 *Discussion*—Interpreting is different from translation which results in the creation of a written target text.

3.1.2 *Modes of Interpreting:*

3.1.2.1 *Simultaneous Interpreting*—the rendering of a speaker's or signer's message into another language while the speaker or signer continues to speak or sign.

3.1.2.2 *Consecutive Interpreting*—the rendering of a speaker's or signer's message into another language when the speaker or signer pauses to allow interpreting.

3.1.2.3 *Sight Translation*—the rendering of a written document directly into a spoken or signed language, not for purposes of producing a written document.

3.1.3 *Areas of Interpreting:*

3.1.3.1 *Diplomatic Interpreting*—interpreting performed to facilitate communication between governments and/or international organizations or both.

3.1.3.2 *Liaison Interpreting*—interpreting generally performed in the consecutive mode while escorting visiting individuals or groups.

3.1.3.3 *Conference Interpreting*—interpreting performed primarily in the simultaneous mode for persons attending congresses, conventions, seminars, summits, or other meetings

3.1.3.4 *Media Interpreting*—interpreting performed for media outlets such as television networks, radio stations or the Internet.

3.1.3.5 *Business Interpreting*—interpreting performed in the course of business activities.

3.1.3.6 *Labor Relations Interpreting*—interpreting performed for negotiations between management and their workers, and unions and their members.

3.1.3.7 *Community Interpreting*—interpreting (in community settings) for the purpose of outreach, information, community relations and community services.

3.1.3.8 *Social Services Interpreting*—interpreting in settings where human services programs are provided.

3.1.3.9 *Healthcare Interpreting*—interpreting in settings where medical services are provided.

3.1.3.10 *Educational Interpreting*—interpreting in settings where educational services are provided.

3.1.3.11 *Legal Interpreting*—interpreting in settings where proceedings related to the administration of justice are performed.

3.1.3.1 *Discussion*—Legal Interpreting is divided into Court Interpreting and Out-of-Court Interpreting.

3.1.3.12 *Court Interpreting (also referred to as judicial interpreting)*—interpreting in the courtroom.

3.1.3.1 *Discussion*—Depositions fall into this category because testimony is given under oath, and afforded the same weight as testimony given in the courtroom.

3.1.3.13 *Out-of-Court Interpreting (also referred to as quasi-judicial interpreting)*—interpreting of interviews and hearings in settings that may have a bearing on legal proceedings.

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee F43 on Language Services and Products and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee F43.01 on Language Interpreting.

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² Available from American National Standards Institute (ANSI), 25 W. 43rd St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10036, <http://www.ansi.org>.

3.1.3.1 *Discussion*—These proceedings include, but are not limited to interpreting for attorney- client interviews, criminal justice or law enforcement agencies, administrative agencies, as well as boards, commissions, or licensing bodies. Quasi-judicial proceedings affect fundamental individual rights and may give rise to an appeal at the state or federal levels. For this reason, the interpreting of out-of-court hearings and interviews shall be of the same quality and accuracy as that rendered in court.

3.1.3.14 *Security-related Interpreting*—interpreting performed in support of government agencies working in law enforcement and national security.

3.1.3.15 *Military and Conflict Zone Interpreting*—interpreting performed in support of the armed forces and their mission and of individuals affected by armed conflict.

3.1.3.16 *Disaster Relief and Humanitarian Interpreting*—interpreting performed in support of humanitarian operations and of individuals affected by disaster or other emergency situations.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 This practice is intended for all stakeholders of interpreting services.

4.2 *Interpreting Supply Chain:*

4.2.1 *Customer*—The person(s) or entity that pays for the interpreting services.

4.2.2 *Requester*—The person(s) or entity that places the order for interpreting services.

4.2.3 *End User or Consumer*—The person(s) in need of interpreting services.

4.2.4 *Interpreting Services Provider*—The person(s), interpreter(s), organization, or language services company (LSC) making arrangements for the provision of interpreting services including, but not limited to, selecting, contracting, scheduling, invoicing, and paying the interpreter.

4.2.5 *Interpreter*—Person who performs the interpreting service.

NOTE 1—The above categories of stakeholders are not mutually exclusive.

4.3 *Characteristics of Interpreting*—Interpreting is a professional activity resulting in a first and final oral/signed rendition of the message from the source language into the target language. It does not serve the same purpose as, nor should it be compared to, an edited, written translation or a scripted voice-over. Interpreting is performed in real time or immediately after a speaker pauses to allow for interpreting.

5. Interpreter Qualifications

5.1 *General Qualifications*—A high level of proficiency in two or more languages, is a necessary prerequisite, but not sufficient by itself to provide quality interpreting. Active working languages shall be at the level of an educated native or near-native speaker. Interpreting is a complex demanding task that requires much more than an excellent command of languages. The interpreter shall have skills and abilities specific to interpreting, a broad general education, and knowledge of the subject matter, including relevant terminology.

5.2 *Interpreting Skills and Abilities*—The interpreting process requires the following skills and abilities that may be acquired through formal training or experience in the professional arena (documented through testing, degrees, certifications, and professional credentials).

5.2.1 *Concentration*—Ability to remain focused for extended periods of time.

5.2.2 *Knowledge of Subject Matter*—The interpreting process requires knowledge of the subject matter and terminology. This shall be supported by thorough preparation.

5.2.3 *Research Skills*—Ability to find and assimilate information on a broad range of topics in support of the interpreting assignment.

5.2.4 *Comprehension*—Ability to fully comprehend meaning, subject matter, pragmatic intent, and cultural subtext of the source message.

5.2.5 *Analytical Skills*—Ability to construe the meaning of the source language message completely and accurately and find target language equivalencies while under severe time constraints.

5.2.6 *Short-term Auditory and Visual Memory*—Ability to retain the source message and reproduce it accurately in the target language.

5.2.7 *Consecutive Note Taking*—Specialized technique used to record key concepts and other information to aid in the reconstruction of the source message.

5.2.8 *Cultural Awareness*—Knowledge of culture-specific references and concepts that allow the interpreter to render the message faithfully.

5.2.9 *Clear Delivery and Signing*—The interpreter shall have public speaking skills such as good enunciation and voice projection and, in the case of sign language, make proper use of sign production, sign space, and affect to render the message faithfully.

5.2.10 *Interpersonal Skills*—Courteous and professional attitude towards peers and others.

5.2.11 *Flexibility*—Ability to adjust to unexpected events or rapidly changing circumstances.

5.3 *Competency Levels or Qualifications:*

5.3.1 Post-secondary education or its equivalent,

5.3.2 Successful completion of interpreter training by a recognized post-secondary institution,

5.3.3 Endorsement by a certifying/credentialing body or professional organization,

5.3.4 Qualifying scores as established by industry recognized certifying bodies (see “Related Material” at the end of this standard) in language proficiency tests,

5.3.5 Qualifying scores as established by industry recognized certifying bodies (see “Related Material” at the end of this standard) in interpreting tests as required by specific areas of interpreting; and

5.3.6 Evidence of expertise and competence in interpreting demonstrated through a performance examination or experience or both as accepted by professionals in the field.

5.4 *Protocol*—The interpreter shall be cognizant of what constitutes appropriate behavior, customary practices, and what practical arrangements may be required for optimal performance.

6. Interpreter Certification and Credentialing

6.1 *Sign Language Interpreting Certification*—Sign language interpreting certification is available for sign language interpreters at the national level from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and individual states. RID offers a number of generalist and specialist certifications including, but not limited to the National Interpreter Certification, Specialist Certificate: Legal (SC:L) certification, and the Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) certification (see “Related Material” at the end of this standard).

6.2 *Spoken Language Interpreting Certification*—There is no one single spoken language certification available at the national or state level. However, there is certification available at the national level in specialized fields such as court and medical interpreting. Most states offer certification for court interpreting and a few states offer certification for medical and social services interpreting (see “Related Material” at the end of this standard).

6.3 *Spoken Language Credentialing:*

6.3.1 In the absence of national and state level interpreter certification, interpreters may use the results of interpreting tests administered by federal agencies as a valid credential.

6.3.2 Conference interpreters may use membership in professional associations of conference interpreters with stringent peer review admission procedures as credentials (see “Related Material” at the end of this standard).

6.4 *Requirements for Certification and Credentialing*—Government agencies, and other entities that receive public funds, may find themselves bound by legislation and funding conditions to only hire interpreters who have been appropriately certified or credentialed. Private sector entities may also find themselves bound to comply with requirements set by their own industry accrediting organizations (see “Related Material” at the end of this standard).

6.5 Attention should be given to the standard of accuracy and skill that is required for an assignment, and every effort should be made by the stakeholders to match the requirements of the assignment to the level of professional skill of the interpreter, as evidenced by his/her professional credentials or certification.

7. Needs Analysis

7.1 This section describes the factors that customers, requesters, interpreting service providers, and interpreters shall take into consideration in planning for interpreting event. To ensure high-quality interpreting, coordination, and agreement between the above-named parties is essential. All stakeholders shall always respect the interpreter’s code of professional conduct (see Section 8).

7.2 *Event Characteristics*—Event characteristics will determine the delivery modality, mode of interpreting, number of interpreters, type of interpreter credentials, equipment, attire, security clearance, and immunizations.

7.2.1 Setting(s) including, but not limited to:

- 7.2.1.1 One-on-one meeting,
- 7.2.1.2 Group meeting,

7.2.1.3 Hearing,

7.2.1.4 Presentation,

7.2.1.5 Conference,

7.2.1.6 Trial,

7.2.1.7 Media, and

7.2.1.8 Depositions.

7.2.2 Venue(s) including, but not limited to:

7.2.2.1 Conference center,

7.2.2.2 Meeting room,

7.2.2.3 Courtroom,

7.2.2.4 Correctional facility,

7.2.2.5 Police stations,

7.2.2.6 Detention centers,

7.2.2.7 Educational facility,

7.2.2.8 Office,

7.2.2.9 Theater,

7.2.2.10 Television/radio studio,

7.2.2.11 Healthcare facility,

7.2.2.12 Business/industrial complex, and

7.2.2.13 Agricultural/outdoors.

7.2.3 *Areas of Interpreting*—See 3.1.3.

7.2.4 *Delivery Modalities of Interpreting:*

7.2.4.1 On-site interpreting provided by interpreters present in the same physical location as speakers and the audience.

7.2.4.2 Remote interpreting provided by interpreters not present in the same physical location as the speakers or the audience or both:

(1) Videoconference interpreting provided by interpreters having a video-mediated view of the speakers or the audience, or both and

(2) Audio-conference interpreting provided by interpreters having an audio feed of the speakers or the audience, or both.

7.3 *Working Languages*—Necessary to determine team composition.

7.3.1 *Language Pair(s).*

7.4 *Interpreter-Specific Requirements:*

7.4.1 *Credentials*—Pursuant to federal and state regulations, certain assignments may require specific credentials.

7.4.2 *Security Clearance*—Certain assignments may require different levels of security clearance.

7.4.3 *Immunizations*—Some interpreting assignments may require proof of health screening and immunization for all employees and independent contractors working at certain facilities.

7.4.4 *Appropriate Attire*—The setting will dictate the type of appropriate attire.

7.5 *Modes of Interpreting*—See 3.1.2.

7.6 *Number of Interpreters Required*—To reduce the risk of error resulting from fatigue, during lengthy assignments interpreters should work in teams and alternate at regular predetermined intervals. Interpreting is extremely mentally taxing because the interpreter is under pressure to preserve the form and full content of the source language message.

7.6.1 *Consecutive Interpreting:*