



National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators

1707 L St. N.W., Suite 570, Washington, D.C. 20036

Tel: 202-293-0342 · Fax: 202-293-0495 · hq@najit.org

· www.najit.org

The National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) is the largest professional organization of its kind in the United States. NAJIT's mission is to promote quality services in the field of legal interpreting and translating. Our members play a critical role in ensuring due process, equal protection and equal access for non-English or limited English proficient (LEP) individuals who interact with the judicial system.

In two recent news articles published in the Cleveland *Daily Banner*, General Sessions Judge Sheridan Randolph is quoted as saying of a court interpreter, "I have the option to appoint an interpreter upon need. I speak some Spanish and can tell he does a good job." Judge Randolph's words betray a view of court interpreting that we have continually strived to correct.

It is axiomatic in our profession that knowledge of a foreign language, even to the degree that one is truly bilingual, is only the first, basic skill requirement for an interpreter. The interpreter must also master technical and legal terminology in both languages; be ready at a moment's notice to interpret from one language into the other in either direction, use simultaneous, consecutive, or sight translation modes as needed; and render every thought and nuance that is expressed in the source language into the target language while maintaining register (from to formal to colloquial). This must be accomplished without intruding upon the communication process, throughout which the interpreter must maintain an impartial and professional demeanor. By way of analogy, although we all have two hands, not all of us can play the piano.

Similarly, it takes more than knowledge of Spanish to judge the performance of a Spanish interpreter. Several jurisdictions and organizations – the Federal government, the National Center for State Court's Consortium for Language in the Courts, several individual states (Tennessee among them) and our own organization – have dedicated years of effort, expense, and academic research to develop psychometrically tested examination instruments which evaluate the skills of would-be interpreters. In addition to the skills tested, competent interpreters are trained to adhere to a code of ethics that safeguards their impartiality, confidentiality, and professionalism. Given the complexity of effective interpreting and the very high stakes in court, the ability to speak "some Spanish" does not sufficiently prepare nor qualify a person to evaluate an interpreter's performance.

Robert L. Cruz, *C.C.I.*

Chairman

National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators

1707 L St., NW Suite 570

Washington, DC 20036

202-293-0342