

A decorative graphic consisting of overlapping blue triangles and trapezoids, creating a layered, geometric effect. It is positioned to the left of the main title.

STANDARDS FOR TEAM INTERPRETING

- by Athena Matilsky and Agustín de la Mora

RECOMMENDATIONS

Standards for Team Interpreting

By Athena Matilsky and Agustin de la Mora with participants from the California Federation of Interpreters (see end of document for complete list of names)

On October 7, 2017, during the annual conference for the California Federation of Interpreters, Athena Matilsky and Agustín de la Mora facilitated a two-part interactive workshop. The objectives were:

- 1) Review codes of professional conduct and identify existing standards for team interpreting and
- 2) Form a common understanding of the issues experienced while team interpreting in order to develop a comprehensive Team Interpreting Standard.

Fifty-seven conference attendees participated, and the names of all those who participated are listed below. Participants were asked to draw upon their own experiences and the existing body of literature in order to propose standards that can become uniform and recommended at a local, state and national level.

Team interpreting is necessary for complex or lengthy encounters, in order to provide adequate breaks for simultaneous interpretation and to ensure the integrity of the record. It also provides, "...an opportunity to be accountable, since usually when we make mistakes, we're the only ones who will know. Some people may not want someone else sitting next to them; but having someone else there improves our skills and our ethics" (direct quote from conference participant).

One table of participants unanimously agreed that in general the team interpreting environment in conference settings is better, because prep materials are provided in advance, subject matter is known in advance and interpreters know the nature of the material to be expected. It was commented that team interpreting standards, "Should be a top-down decision. Management should automatically provide us with complaints and pleadings beforehand, so we can study them beforehand."

Everyone participating agreed that a set of standards is necessary. It was agreed that we should, "Build a culture where team interpreting is the norm, and work from the top down to make sure everyone knows that this is how we do it."

There was frequent mention of interpreters being put in situations where they must work side by side with an unknown colleague. Differences in professional practice frequently arise, with

respect to everything from where to place themselves in the courtroom, to how to pass the mic and whether or not they should leave the courtroom when the other interpreter is actively interpreting. Given the differences in personality and general practices, when working together it was agreed that teammates should have a set of standards so that they can both be on the same page. It was recommended that these standards be prominently displayed within the courthouse.

One concept that was discussed and nearly universally agreed-upon was that of a “team pre-session.” The term *pre-session* is borrowed from medical interpreting, where interpreters are expected to meet with patient and provider before an interpreted interaction in order to set up guidelines, ensure similar expectations for performance and allow the encounter to run smoothly. In this case, the pre-session would take place *between the two interpreters*. It was agreed that especially if the two interpreters do not already know each other already, a pre-session is vital to the team interpreting experience.

Another concept was discussed but not as highly recommended: That of a post-session. It was generally agreed that after particularly challenging or emotionally charged interpreting encounters, a post-session could be helpful in order to allow the interpreters to debrief and plan for next time. If the interpreting encounter is expected to last longer than one day and the team will not remain the same, leaving notes as part of a post-session would also ease transition. New, less-experienced interpreters can also benefit from feedback during debriefings. Finally, post-sessions can allow for feedback and the discussion of such things as problematic terms. However, sometimes a post-session debriefing can simply aggravate the frustrations of the day when a real break is in order. It was decided that a post-session could be advisable under certain circumstances, at the interpreters’ discretion.

Finally, the topic of effective communication was also discussed. It was recommended that interpreters use non-confrontational language, speak with an “I” voice, and keep an open mind when interacting with their teammates.

Most standards were agreed-upon unanimously. However, one big difference of opinion arose when it came to the topic of breaks for the interpreters. Many interpreters found it advisable that both active and support interpreter stay present both mentally and physically at all times. This helps ensure accuracy, one of the gold standards for our Code of Professional Conduct. However, for sanity purposes, some disagree. It was noted that an interpreter may need a real break for fresh air, a cigarette, the bathroom, etc. It is therefore recommended that both interpreters be present physically and mentally at all times, with the exception of brief pauses.

After thorough discussion, approximately 18 different round tables presented their findings. There was strong consensus on most items. Recommendations for best practices are indicated by italics. Statements in quotations are direct quotes from presenters or participants.

Below is a breakdown of our recommendation for standards of team interpreting. The hope is that some of these may be adopted and officially turned into a set of standards to be used universally in the field of court interpreting.

Pre-session Standards

A pre-session is highly recommended in order to set expectations and ensure linguistic and structural uniformity. It should be mandatory when interpreters have never worked with one another before.

To take place during a pre-session:

- Discuss any previous knowledge about the case, including any relevant vocabulary. *When possible, interpreters will ask for and familiarize themselves with this information in advance of the interpreting encounter. It is recommended that a folder be established for multiple-day encounters, for each trial, including information such as police reports, copies of complaint, jury instructions, names and addresses. This is especially important for ensuring consistency of linguistic terms.*
- Decide who will interpret first. *Recommendation: The interpreter with prior knowledge of the case should begin interpreting first.*
- Agree on how switches will take place for simultaneous interpretation. *Recommendation: Switch every 20-30 minutes. Let judge know how switches will take place. It is recommended that the support interpreter keep track of the time. When time is up, he or she should indicate this to the active interpreter and then at the soonest natural pause, the active interpreter can pass the microphone. If the active interpreter strongly prefers to keep track of time, they must not allow their turn to go longer than the recommended simultaneous session (20-30 minutes). It was noted that sometimes both interpreters are interpreting simultaneously for different people (i.e. witness and defendant). If such is the case, breaks will be necessary. However, using equipment can enable one interpreter to provide services to multiple individuals and remove this issue entirely.*
- Establish proximity to one another in the courtroom, allowing for effective communication between interpreters. *“Allow for interpreters to be physically and mentally present with one another.”*
- Agree on how to handle errors, including how to signal to interpreters on and off the witness stand in order to make a correction or pause to consult one another. *“Etiquette: If the mistake is substantive, slip a note to the colleague, give them the chance to correct themselves on the record. This maintains the record and their dignity.”*
- Decide if and how equipment will be used. Test the equipment beforehand.

Standards for Team Interpretation

- Interpreters shall strive to work together with respect, consideration and sincerity.

- Interpreters shall remain non-confrontational and non-judgemental. Work together to maintain the integrity of the record.
- Codes of ethics shall be adhered to and used as a norm for resolving disagreements in the team. *The accuracy standard can be referred to if an interpreter objects to having a team.*
- Any interpreter not sufficiently familiar with the subject matter or techniques necessary to ensure an adequate interpretation shall recuse him/herself.
- Professionalism standards of dress and hygiene shall be upheld.
- Pre-session shall be conducted.
- Support interpreter shall stay mentally and physically present, unless a quick break is necessary, to help with terms, batteries, equipment and more. *If there is more than one co-defendant, the support interpreter can help from time to time with attorney-client interpretations while the active interpreter continues on the record. Recommendation: if the active interpreter is struggling due to speed or sound quality, the support interpreter can bring this to the judge's attention so as not to interrupt the flow.*
- After an encounter, the interpreters' area shall be tidied. An interpreting folder, if applicable, shall be updated and left accessible for the next days' team.
- In the case of an encounter where team interpretation is recommended but not provided, the interpreter shall state on the record, "Due to the lack of a team, the interpreter cannot guarantee the accuracy of my interpretation."

*List of participants, in alphabetical order

		Anna-Marie	Klimkova	Daniel	Tamayo
Ivonne	Abrojan	Bao N	Luu	Jorge	Tuma
Mjirian	Alvarez	Marilyn	Luong		Veit-Bermudez
Natalia	Becerra	Stephany	Magaña	Gabrielle	Vidrio
Maricarmen	Bellver	Anil	Mehta	Eugenio	Watté
Alicia	Benson	Adele	Negro	Michelle	Zollingek
Laura	Boykin	Brenda	Oliver		
Robert	Brara	David	Ortiz	Mehram Sheikholeslami	
Floryan Ashley	Bussey	Martha	Paredes		
Kathy	Chang	Amanda	Peeters		
Luba	Chernon	Cristina	Perez		
Mariana	Cruz	Scott	Pham		
Silvana	Earetz	Pedro	Ramirez Navas		
Eva	Ford	Teresa	Ramos		
Marianne	Franco	Carmen	Ramos		
René	Garcia	Sandra	Rojas		
Sofia	Gutierrez	Karla	Romero		
Joe	Harvin	Pedro	Sahagún		
Cosme	Hozven	Mariana	Sandris		
John K	Johnston	Mary Jane	Shubow		
Kamal	Judge	Edward	Silva		
Hardil	Judge	Kathleen	Sinclair		
Daniel	Kaufman	Jennifer	Stead		
Gurpreet	Kaur	Izumi	Suzuki		
Harinder	Kaur	Anthony	Tam		