WHOSE TRAUMA IS IT?
Vicarious Trauma and its Impact on Court Interpreters
Sonali Rana, Purvi Shah, and Kajori Chaudhuri

For the numerous individuals with limited English capacity who find themselves grappling with the American legal system, court interpreters are often the only means of accessing justice. Court interpreters can have a permanent impact on the cases of limited English proficient (LEP) individuals — and their lives. With such high stakes, the interpreting profession clearly offers many satisfactions to its practitioners. On a daily basis, interpreters enable court users to access the vast, complex, and often intimidating court system by being their voice in a setting in which court users are generally quite vulnerable. As one interpreter attests, “The reason I love it is that we have a wonderful privilege that we are a bridge between people. And it’s very beautiful to be a bridge. Not everybody can do it.”

However, along with professional joys, court interpreters deal with long hours with few — if any — breaks, little or no support, emotionally trying content, and the exercise of intense concentration that leads to exhausting days. These conditions can give rise to negative feelings and symptoms, and may even manifest as vicarious trauma. One interpreter underscored the difficult context of court interpreting, observing, “I also have a lot of cases that [when] I go home, I feel pretty sad about. But I can’t talk about it to anybody because lots of times it is personal and confidential. So I ended up having upset stomach... You know, the voice needs to be heard. And it’s wonderful to help the respondent in the courtroom to be heard...[by] the judges and attorney, and prosecutor, and so on...But sometimes I also kind of take it a little bit personally. I mean it’s hard to program yourself like a rock, a stone face in a courtroom and not worry about [it] going home... We don’t have a support group where we can talk about [it]. [As] a freelance[r], we don’t have that.”

Sakhi for South Asian Women, a non-profit community group seeking to end violence against women, has conducted broad research, outreach, and policy advocacy to highlight the injustice and barriers that South Asian immigrant survivors of domestic violence face when trying to navigate the legal system. We found that interpreting services in the courts play a central role in the ability of survivors to access legal remedies in their journeys to safety. We therefore realized how important a court interpreter’s work is, and have begun to understand issues and hurdles interpreters encounter in their professional lives. As a result, we discovered that a vital connection exists between the well-being of survivors and the strength of the court interpretation profession.

In May of 2009, at the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) 30th anniversary conference, Sakhi aimed to raise awareness about this issue through a presentation entitled, “Skills Building for Interpreters: Tools for Advocacy Change and Addressing Vicarious Trauma.” The presentation was received with great enthusiasm. One participant exclaimed, “What a magnificent insight. You have encountered something very important in the interpreter profession through your domestic violence advocacy. Having brought this issue to us in this forum is really a great contribution.”

Although vicarious trauma has been studied in other professions, there has been limited acknowledgment. 

> continues on page 6
MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

The leaves have started turning, at least here in New England, and NAJIT has reached a turning point as well. After thirty years of slow and steady growth, from a small group of dedicated court interpreters in New York to a national organization with some 1,300 members, NAJIT is ready to branch out, taking proactive measures to become the national’s "go-to" organization on all matters concerning judiciary interpreters and translators.

On September 21, 2009, the board of directors met at headquarters in Washington, D.C., for the first-ever strategic planning meeting. Guided by our able executive director, Robin Lanier, and assisted by our ever-efficient administrator, Christina Filipovic, we spent an entire day brainstorming to define our mission statement, identify concrete goals and objectives, and develop plans to attain them by target dates over the next few years. The fruits of our labor have been organized in a case statement (the non-profit equivalent of a business plan), which is still in the process of being refined. Eventually, it will serve not only to keep us focused on our goals, but also to inform other entities in government, the legal system, and academia, among others, of who we are, what we do, and why our work is so important. This will not be a static document, but will continue to develop as new needs and goals are identified.

Since our annual conference in Scottsdale, a lot of other activity has begun. Over the summer, the advocacy committee developed a survey, spearheaded by Christina Courtright, on the utilization of certified and non-certified interpreters, which was sent out to all members. Hopefully, you all responded and we'll be able to compile data regarding states and federal districts in order to identify problem areas where we should focus educational efforts. This information will also be useful in the preparation of a position paper on the use of certified interpreters. Concurrently, the position papers committee is developing another paper on the "scope of practice" canon of the code of ethics. The board, with the help of advocacy chair John Estill, prepared and sent a letter to California State University, Long Beach, to support the retention of its program in interpreting and translating.

On the road: In July, I was privileged to attend a meeting at the Department of Justice, focusing on LEP issues. NAJIT was one of the few, if not the only, non-governmental organization invited to attend. In October, director Peter Lindquist and former chair Alex Rainof represented NAJIT at the Translation Summit meeting in New York, which immediately preceded the ATA meeting, at which director Loie Feuerle was our representative. Also in October, former chair Isabel Framer gave the keynote speech, entitled "Language Access Across the Justice System" at New Mexico's Certified Court Interpreters' Conference.

NAJIT is as vibrant as its members, and it's time for you to shine. I'm sure that many of you are participating in important and exciting activities that help promote our profession. Let us know what you're doing and we'll share it with the rest of our colleagues in a special column. Please send a summary of your activities to proteus@najit.org. Who knows what you might inspire.

I wish you all the best during the holiday season and the coming new year.

Rosemary W. Dann
Chair, NAJIT Board of Directors
LANGUAGE AND LITIGATION
What judges and attorneys need to know about interpreters in the legal process

Judith Kenigson Kristy

1. Use credentialed, preferably certified, court interpreters for in-court and out-of-court events. Verify the interpreter's credentials. If it is an in-court proceeding, make sure the interpreter is sworn in before the proceeding begins.
   - Verify credentials by consulting your state or federal court roster, or by calling your local court (clerk's office or interpreter's office). Judges should conduct a voir dire of the interpreter and ask for credentials to be stated on the record.
   - Do not use untrained bilinguals. It is inappropriate to use family members, children, foreign language students or teachers, court staff, or law enforcement officers as interpreters.
   - Don't allow defendants to bring their own interpreters — not only does this practice create potential conflicts of interest, but the ad hoc person acting as "interpreter" may not be trained or competent.
   - Don't ask for a translator when you need an interpreter — they are not interchangeable. Translators work with written communication. Interpreters work with oral communication.

2. Be aware that an interpreter creates an even playing field for limited-English speakers; an interpreter provides no advantage or disadvantage.
   - Interpreters should never interject their own knowledge, comments, or opinions into the interpretation. Interpreters are prohibited from advocating for any party.
   - Don't ask interpreters what they think a defendant or witness might or might not have understood; it is not their area of expertise.

3. Use the interpreter to facilitate direct communication with limited-English proficient parties, not as a "go-between."
   - Address the client directly in English, as if he understood everything you are saying. The interpreter will then repeat what you have said in the required language. This avoids the use of indirect speech (e.g., "Ask him if..." or "He says that..."), which can create confusion and a flawed record.

4. Check to make sure that all speech, by all parties, is being interpreted.
   - If someone is speaking and the interpreter's mouth is not moving, there is a problem. If someone makes a lengthy statement and the interpretation is a few words, or vice versa, there is a problem. The interpreter's job is to interpret everything that is being said — no omissions, modifications, or additions.
   - In court, an interpreter should be interpreting simultaneously for a defendant. If a non-English speaking witness testifies, an interpreter should interpret the questions and answers consecutively so that a clear record may be made.

5. To be understood, speak clearly at a moderate speed and an audible volume.
   - Unclear speech cannot be accurately interpreted. Avoid interruptions and overlapping voices. Avoid long, convoluted questions. Unfamiliar jargon or acronyms may cause a problem for the interpreter.
   - Although reluctant to interrupt the give-and-take of courtroom exchanges, interpreters have an ethical obligation to ask for a repetition if speech is too low, too fast, too lengthy or incomprehensible (due to the use of unknown references, heavy accent, jargon, abbreviations, or acronyms). Very long or complex questions and answers can result in interruptions or incomplete rendering by the interpreter, causing confusion.

6. The interpreter's only task is to interpret. In order to conserve impartiality and confidentiality, the interpreter should not be asked to be alone with a defendant. Whenever possible, the interpreter will exit the room when the attorney exits the room.
   - Interpreters may not reveal information they have interpreted, but no privilege protects them if communication occurs when the attorney is not present. Any explanations that need to be made should be made by the attorney and then interpreted. The interpreter may, however, note and report to the attorney any confusion due to culture or vocabulary, and make an appropriate request for clarification.

7. Provide interpreters with the information and support needed to get the job done.
   - The more information an interpreter has about a case, the better he or she can interpret. Arrange for interpreters to receive or have access to documents related to the assignment: complaints and indictments with supporting documents, investigative reports, motions and responses, witness and exhibit lists, bank and telephone records, PSRs, etc. Whenever possible, try to use the same interpreter for both in-court and out-of-court events in a given case.

> continues on next page

The National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators

Volume XVIII, No. 4
8. In order to ensure an accurate record, provide a team of two interpreters for any lengthy or complex proceeding.
- Studies have shown that interpreters, no matter how experienced or competent, suffer mental fatigue after about 30 minutes of continuous interpreting. The use of a team prevents interpreter fatigue and ensures accuracy. Teams act as a safety net, so that any errors may be corrected and terminology queries answered. When a large number of defendants will be present at a proceeding, it may be necessary to hire more interpreters to facilitate attorney-client consultations.

9. A conflict of interest is not the same for an interpreter as for an attorney. An interpreter can work for either side or both sides of a case. The only prohibition is that an interpreter cannot be a witness in the same case in which he is acting as a proceedings interpreter.
- Interpreters cannot be advocates or take sides. They are neutral officers of the court and thus may work for either side, or both sides, of a dispute. A proceedings interpreter should reveal to the judge and parties any prior contacts with the case. However, a conflict does arise if an interpreter may be called by one of the parties as a witness. An interpreter cannot testify as an expert witness and also work as a proceedings interpreter in the same case.

10. Foreign-language evidence should be handled appropriately. The party offering the evidence should obtain prior transcription and translation of any tape recordings. Foreign-language documents introduced into evidence should be accompanied by a translation. (The translation may be stipulated, or authenticated through testimony.) A sound file or tape recording should never be translated "on the spot" in court.
- Just as there are experts in fingerprint identification, there are experts in transcription and translating recorded material for evidentiary purposes. Find and use an expert for this kind of work. Never ask an interpreter to render a simultaneous interpretation of recorded material in court—at best, the results will be approximate and guesswork, not evidence.

Interpreters are support staff for your court: please help promote an atmosphere of consideration, respect, and cooperation among those who work with them. When interpreters work in the judicial system, they need a table in the courtroom for notebooks or laptops, a cup of water, a place to store their belongings, and a place to rest when off duty. Your kindness is much appreciated.

© 2008. May be reproduced for educational purposes with permission of the author. Email: judithk@bellsouth.net. 

---

**Wireless Communications Equipment for Interpreters**

The use of wireless equipment for simultaneous interpretation frees the interpreter from having to sit next to the listener. The interpreter can now move to a spot offering the best hearing and visibility, where the interpreter can concentrate on the message without interruptions or distractions.

Although some courts provide this type of equipment for its interpreters, availability is not always guaranteed. And many courts and other venues don't even offer it.

For less than $100, interpreters can now have their own set of wireless transmitter and receiver, including microphone and earphone. In many instances, the rental of similar equipment for just one day exceeds this purchase cost.

TN Communications offers dependable, long-lasting wireless equipment. Equipment is very light and small and easily fits in a shirt pocket. Transmitters and receivers come with a one-year warranty.

In addition to our VHF single-channel equipment, we offer VHF 3-channel equipment and our newest addition, UHF 16-channel equipment. We also have battery chargers and rechargeable batteries and charging boxes for the 16-channel sets. Optional headset microphones and headphones are also available.

Visit [www.tncommunications.com](http://www.tncommunications.com) for product specifications and availability.

You may call: 1-888-371-9005, or email: info@tncommunications.com for more information.
Japan’s New Jury System
Andrew Meehan

In May 2009, Japan re-introduced the lay judge system which had been in effect prior to World War II. Based on my work as an instructor at interpreter orientation seminars for the Japanese courts, I recently posted a comment on the NAJIT listserve, and was asked to describe my experience more fully for the readers of Proteus. I hope the following will be of interest.

Japan’s new lay judge system is still very experimental, in that it is a hybrid jury system. The jury is composed of 3 judges (professionals) and 6 jurors (amateurs). Jurors work like any juror in the American legal system, with the remarkable difference that they are permitted to ask the defendant questions, with no restrictions imposed on these. In the first few trials under this new system, questions by some jurors turned into ordinary conversations about the defendant’s upbringing and mental state. Since questions may be posed throughout the proceeding, there can be a high level of interaction. At one trial, an observer in the gallery became infuriated by the incessant questioning by some jurors, and shouted out, “This is torture; the defendant is being ridiculed and humiliated for show.” This man was subsequently removed from the courtroom. Because juror behavior is not strictly regulated, some jurors become emotional, bordering on furious, when they directly interact with the defendant, particularly at murder trials.

Japan has a tripartite system of judges for most trials, where one judge is chairman and others, vice-chairs. These judges are not as short-tempered or relaxed about major or minor distracting behavior by jurors, compared to, let’s say, courts in New York. More importantly, perhaps because judges in Japan appear not to be trained on judicial protocol under this new system, or perhaps because Japanese culture is generally non-confrontational, rarely do the judges utter common managerial courtroom edicts to keep jurors and others under control, such as an instruction along the lines of “The jury will disregard the last comment.” The unclear boundaries make for a volatile juror system, in the opinion of this writer.

The courts believe that the new system places more emphasis on oral proceedings, for the jurors’ benefit; but I have yet to see this. Opening statements and other supplemental briefs are often provided in advance to the interpreter, but only about 30 minutes before the hearing. Most documents are still provided in the course of the proceeding. In Japan, a substantial amount of sight translation is required of courtroom interpreters. This is perhaps due to the fact that Japanese lawyers prepare briefs and other documentation in advance, then proceed to read straight from these papers during the proceeding. At trial, or even at a sentencing hearing, pages and pages of text are read, which the interpreter must sight translate.

As we know, sight translation requires a set of skills distinct from those employed for consecutive or simultaneous interpretation. Where documentation contains extensive medical reports, it is brutal, and on more than one occasion I’ve seen courtroom interpreters quibble with judges for requiring the interpreter to do this on the fly. In Japan, as in the United States, judges sit on the highest pedastal in the courtroom, but judges are often apologetic when interpreters register these legitimate complaints.

I work as an English-Japanese interpreter for the Tokyo district court system, among other courts, and for the police department. Over the past few years I’ve also been a seminar instructor on ethics and technique for interpreters of all languages. This seminar, which serves as an orientation course, is held annually in a few cities of Japan and is usually team-taught.

There have been guidelines on hiring interpreters in Japan. However, it appears that the guidelines are adopted in major cities like Tokyo and Osaka, but not yet widely followed across Japan. However, because the court system is archaic in some places (and very much so in some smaller cities), competent interpreters prefer not to work for the courts. My co-instructor and I often have to grandfather interpreters into the system, particularly for cases desperately needing interpreter service. The guidelines or admissions procedure for interpreters is usually comprised of an interview with a judge and clerk, covering ethics, fundamentals of court room interpretation, interpretation background, why the person wants to work for the courts, and a sight translation test in both directions in the presence of the judge and clerk. Prior to this interview, the candidate must observe some hearings mediated by an interpreter and submit an essay on his/her impressions. A completed application form must also be submitted for pre-screening.

When I took the test four years ago, I was befuddled by the fact that they only administered a sight translation test. It soon became clear why the court wished to gauge this skill over consecutive and simultaneous interpretation abilities: trials with and without jury in Japan are sight-translation intensive, due to the sheer volume of documentation that is routinely utilized.

> continues on next page
The results of the very first jury trial under the new system (a case that did not require interpretation) were pessimistically received by the public. In the media, opinions were split. The defendant was given an approximately nine days sentence by the jurors, while the judges favored something less. The system is in the process of working out how to balance the judges’ verdict against the jurors’ final decision. (The verdict is being appealed.) However, it is widely believed that on appeal, the verdict in this very first jury case will most likely be upheld to support this new system.

Currently, the general feeling in Japan is that if you are ever tried by jurors and convicted, you are likely to receive a harsher verdict than otherwise. Perhaps when jurors can interact with a defendant directly by asking questions, a more emotional bond to the tragedy (murder, for example) is created, and the likelihood of an emotionally biased decision increases.

In place of an orientation session, a leaflet is given to the jurors, which only describes very generally what is expected from them as jurors. Japan seems satisfied with preparing the jurors rather minimally, even when the case involves substantial potential punishment such as in murder trials.

I look forward to seeing improvements in the Japanese jury system. Perhaps my colleague and I can suggest certain procedures that have been proven effective in U.S. courts, which are the ones most familiar to me. Fortunately, Japanese judges are rather amenable to suggestions by interpreters. In Japan, interpreters are respected nearly as highly as doctors and lawyers.

----

**SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION EQUIPMENT**

**INTERPRETER KITS FOR SALE OR RENT**

2 Tuneable FM Transmitters  
- Mobile and stationary use  
- Battery or AC power  
- Broadcast via microphone or existing PA system  

**6 Orpheus Receivers**  
- Fully tuneable  
- Compact  
- Cost effective  

E-mail: info@landmarkfm.com  
Call: 888-677-4387  
www.landmarkfm.com

---

**VICARIOUS TRAUMA continued from page 1**

ment of this issue in the field of court interpreting. However, we at Palm Springs, recognize that without adequate training and supervisory support in dealing with vicarious trauma, interpretation work can take too heavy a toll—can even impede an interpreter’s ability to continue performing an essential job.

To further our goal of raising awareness of vicarious trauma throughout the court interpreter community, this article will discuss exposure risks and the reasons why court interpreters may exhibit signs of vicarious trauma. Moreover, we will also examine ways of alleviating the problem. Based on our direct services experience, we will also provide tips and tools to lessen the impact of vicarious trauma.

**Vicarious Trauma**

Many court interpreters derive great fulfillment from their work giving a voice to people who otherwise would not be able to tell their stories. As one interpreter noted:

"I enjoy doing witness work. And whether I agree with the witness or not, it's the experience of being able to have someone feel like their voice is being heard...especially when it's been someone who has felt like their voice has not been heard for a long time—or never heard. Some of the people I've voiced I was vehemently opposed to what they did, but to know, to have the satisfaction that they get to say what they wanted to say and they felt like they had been heard the way they wanted to be heard, to me is the most pleasurable part.”

Working to enable justice to be carried out also comes with risks. One such risk is vicarious trauma, defined as a "process through which the therapist's inner experience is negatively transformed through empathic engagement with the clients' trauma material, including graphic descriptions of traumatic events, descriptions of people's intentional cruelty to one another, and traumatic re-enactments." In other words, vicarious trauma is the cumulative impact a professional experiences when being continuously exposed to another person's traumatic event(s).

At Salk's 2009 NAJIT focus group for court interpreters, participants discussed at length the issue of vicarious trauma. For example, one participant observed:

"As professionals...you don't get emotionally involved, because you have no vested interest in the outcome of a case. I remember a wrongful death case—it was a civil case...I believe it was the son who was testifying about the loss of his father and he was crying. And it just hit me—it's like...What if your dad died? And I was about to go over. I was about to cross that line and start crying...And I reeled myself back in and was like, 'No, I can't cry.' This is not something we do, when you convey the emotion."

This first-hand account depicts how the nature of the work of court interpretation—the interaction with court users as well as the cumulative exposure to traumatic testimony—can take a toll on the mental and physical well-being of any person. Any given day for a court interpreter can consist of interpreting victim
accounts—including minute details of sexual assault, child abuse, human trafficking, domestic violence, murder, or other violent acts. Additionally, interpreting calls for the information to be processed and conveyed to various parties at a high standard of accuracy and skill, thus requiring significant attention and energy.

An interpreter is the only one who initially understands the LEP individual. Moreover, the interpreter speaks in the first person, which sometimes can inadvertently create an emotional bond. This can make it more difficult to separate professional and personal feelings, and the outcome of a case can affect an interpreter long after the case is completed. This is particularly significant since empathy, or the ability to identify and understand another’s emotions and situation, is a skill commonly utilized when performing interpreter services.

During one of Sakhi’s August focus groups for court interpreters, an interpreter who interpreted for a sexual abuse case related the following:

“The other day I interpreted a forensic examination and it was a young man from the Dominican Republic and it was his story... It came out that he was sexually abused and physically abused. I mean, it was horrific... It took a lot — physically and emotionally for me, because I’m only human. And he’s getting emotional. And of course interpreting is a fine line between interpreting and acting because we take on the spirit of the signer. So if he’s standing there and he’s talking about an abuse experience, I have to vocalize that, so there’s some transference there and I don’t have any outlet and the court doesn’t provide that for me because they don’t understand... They don’t get it. And after interpreting that, it was a good hour, I had to walk around, I had to go out, I had no one really to talk to... So I called a former supervisor of mine and I was able to discuss this with her, and felt better afterwards.”

In cases of domestic violence, survivors may receive help in dealing with trauma, but the interpreter must remain “invisible,” at times resulting in trauma being internalized. Warning signs of vicarious trauma may then go unnoticed and untreated. Adding to this unseen “I” position of the interpreter are high workloads, infrequent breaks, public scrutiny, and regular exposure to trauma victims. Therefore, not surprisingly, interpreters can be vulnerable to vicarious trauma. As Blair and Ramones cited in the Translation Journal, assert, “The endless stories of violence, cruelty, exploitation and atrocity; the emotional impact of experiencing another’s terror, pain and anguish; and the continual exposure to the darkest aspects of the human condition can produce symptoms strikingly similar to the post-traumatic stress syndromes of their patients.”

The Challenges of Addressing Vicarious Trauma

Addressing vicarious trauma may be a challenge to the individual or to the legal system itself. Although court interpreters may experience stress reactions from constant interaction with trauma victims, many do not connect these feelings with vicarious trauma. Some interpreters are completely unaware of the condition.

As one seasoned court interpreter stated, it is important to teach others the value of refusing an assignment:

“I tell students and beginning interpreters you have to refuse yourself... Intellectually everybody’s like, ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.’ And inside everybody’s going, ‘If I ever do that, I’ll die. They’ll never call me again.’... No matter if you think you’re right or wrong... you’re always going like, ‘What are they going to say? I’m not being a team player.’... We also hold ourselves up to a much higher standard so it’s really hard to say, ‘I can’t do this — today.’ And it’s learning to say, ‘It’s just today. I may be able to do it 6 months down the road, a year down the road, or maybe never, who knows? But today I can’t do this.’... and having the freedom to say that... for a lot of interpreters is very difficult and very hard to learn to do. And, first time I did it, it was terrifying.”

Thus, there are conflicted feelings about the impact of vicarious trauma in this line of work. During one of our August focus groups, there was much debate on this topic. One interpreter noted that the traumatic content is not heard by interpreters alone, observing,

“In a sense, even though we’re there interpreting, and interpreting every word, let’s say in a horrific trial, then again, every other court personnel is in the same room that you are — listening to the same thing. So you can’t say, ‘Ok, I should be treated differently and receive some sort of... counseling.’ Because everybody heard it. The judge heard it. The attorneys heard it... It’s a matter of individually how you deal with it. I just am not sure that I would even know what to ask the state for.”

Another interpreter argued that unlike others in the courtroom, interpreters are active participants who speak in the first person when narrating the story. She argued, “We hear it twice... Every single thing that others hear once, we hear twice. I don’t know if it makes a difference. Maybe it does.”

Given such differences of opinion in the court interpreting profession, education on and exposing vicarious trauma can be vexing. In addition to divergent opinions within the profession itself, court administrators may fail to acknowledge vicarious trauma as something that especially affects interpreters. The Vicarious Trauma Institute has stated that professionals often prefer to receive blame for stress responses, rather than acknowledge that these responses are natural and offer opportunities for exploration and dialogue. An absence of training and support groups can impede progress in treating vicarious trauma in this field, as noted by an interpreter in the NAJIT focus group:

“We’re trained so much on confidentiality... And it is important... But just like every other profession that hears the not pretty side of human life, everybody else is taught that they need to create a support group, either professionally or nonprofessionally and how to get that outside of you. Where a lot of interpreters are not taught that and so they struggle with keeping it all inside. And that’s not good because that will affect your work. And I think that’s a shortcoming in interpreter training — that we’re not teaching future interpreters how to deal with fatigue, how to deal with the emotional wear

> continues on next page
and tear... how you can handle it and still remain within your
ethics. I think that is a major issue for all interpreters, and
unfortunately some of them have done what other professions
have done... they just die inside, and then become very distant,
which is not good either, because it affects their interpreting."

If left untreated, symptoms of vicarious trauma can interfere with
interpreters' ability to perform their duties to the fullest extent and
even have an impact on their lives outside of work. It is thus up
to the profession to consider how to educate interpreters about vicari-
ous trauma, and to develop strategies for response and support.

Outlined in the tables below are some of the personal and systemic
challenges various professions have faced in dealing with vicarious
trauma, as cited in wide-ranging material, including, but not limited
to, *Journal of Counseling and Development; Prehospital and Disaster
Medicine; Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human
Services; Journal of Traumatic Stress; and Transforming the Pain: A
Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization.*

**Tips and Tools for Dealing with Vicarious Trauma**

Since the challenges may manifest in personal or other arenas,
coping mechanisms will also reflect different strategies in allevi-
ating symptoms of vicarious trauma. Along with legal terminology,
skills development, and sensitivity training, education for inter-
preters on vicarious trauma must be considered—especially as a
precursor to developing tools to address vicarious trauma.

For individuals, one of the most important steps is being able
to identify warning signs. Although reactions and symptoms from
constant exposure to others' trauma can vary from person to per-
son, there are red flags that signal possible vicarious trauma. The
table below outlines a range of symptoms:

These symptoms may occur in varying combinations. Further-
more, individuals may be more or less likely to suffer from vicarious
trauma based on personal history such as past traumatic events,
personality, coping strategies, current life context, as well as training
and professional history.

One interpreter reflected on a colleague's experience by
observing,

"You have to have empathy for the person no matter how ugly
what they've done is. If you isolate yourself and have no empa-
thy, then you can't do justice by them. And I think the hardest
thing I've tried to... get students to learn, is a) isolation doesn't
work, but you also have to learn what you limits are. And I
think the perfect example's a colleague of ours who had done,
as a freelance, divorces her entire life. That was her bread and
butter — that's what she did. Never bothered her, nothing.
Never even thought about the fact that she was going through a
divorce, that it might affect her work. And she's 6 months out
of her divorce, she's interpreting at the witness stand, and all of
a sudden the testimony is so close to home that it hit. And she
was... totally unprepared because she'd done it so long that it
never even... would cross her mind — to give ourselves the free-
dom to say, 'I can't do this today'... and recuse yourself."

Each person bears responsibility to recognize vicarious trauma
symptoms, acknowledge one's own response to trauma, and seek
support if needed. Organizations must also play their part in
easing court interpreters' stress. As explored in the *Translation
Journal,* a study by Karen Baistow, "The Psychological and
Emotional Effects of Community Interpreting," analyzed the
amount, nature, causes and extent of emotional and psychological
stress, coping strategies, supports in existence, and support needed
for public service interpreters. The study emphasized that there
was a need for a cultural shift which would enable the emotional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Challenges to Addressing Vicarious Trauma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fear of losing job and/or respect of co-workers;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feelings of shame and anxiety;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feelings that symptoms are &quot;normal&quot; part of job so should not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complain;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inability to speak about feelings and stress associated with job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>due to fear of being deemed incompetent, weak, and/or unable to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effectively perform duties; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of awareness of symptoms associated with vicarious trauma.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Some Symptoms of Vicarious Trauma*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Volume XVIII, No. 4
Table 3: Personal and organizational Tools in Addressing Vicarious Trauma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Tools</th>
<th>Organizational Tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy leisure activities;</td>
<td>Adequate supervision;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain healthy personal relationships;</td>
<td>Continuing education and special training which includes information on vicarious trauma;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in therapy, if helpful;</td>
<td>“Normalizing” the emotional effects of court interpreting;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay attention to your own well-being, physically, mentally, and spiritually; and,</td>
<td>Opportunities for interpreters to inform their supervisors about concerns and stresses without fear of repercussions;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try your best to balance work, play, and rest.</td>
<td>Peer training and support so interpreters are aware they are not alone and can discuss fears and coping strategies openly and honestly; and,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured stress management.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Effects of community interpreting to be ‘normalized,’ that is, able to be accepted as part and parcel of everyday interpreting life. This shift, we believe would benefit both the well-being of interpreters and their work.”

There are several other steps that individuals and court administrations can take to combat the emotional stress on interpreters caused by disturbing content. A variety of tools are listed in the table 3.

**Next Steps for the Field**

In our work to promote access to justice for limited-English-proficient court participants, we will continue to air issues — such as vicarious trauma — that can affect the court interpreting profession. In their quests for justice, survivors depend on court interpreters, and court interpreters need to provide a clear line of communication between individuals and the courts. Just as we support survivors, we support comprehensive training, continuing education, and much-needed organizational assistance for court interpreters. Most importantly, we must remind ourselves that we are all human beings, and as humans we have the capacity to feel a whole array of emotions as a part of everyday life — even in the process of enabling justice. ▲

**REFERENCES**

6. Adapted from Saakvitne and Pearlman. 1996.

**OTHER SOURCES:**

NAJIT is excited to now offer comprehensive professional liability coverage designed for the interpreter, translator and transcription community, with special discounts for our members who spend most of their time providing services in legal and quasi-legal settings.

**PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:**

- Our program is underwritten by an A-Rated Carrier syndicate who specializes in Professional Liability coverage. Our A-Rated Carrier is recognized worldwide as one of the oldest and most stable of insurance markets.

- Three levels of liability coverage ($250,000, $500,000, or $1,000,000) and two deductible levels ($250 and $500).

- The most competitively priced premiums for all interpreter/translator categories with special discounts for legal.

- The policy form is "claims made," meaning that you have coverage for claims made against you and reported to underwriters during the policy period. If you are currently covered under another professional liability policy, our policy will cover you back to your first date of coverage (the "retroactive date").

- You, your owned company, employees, and contractors can be covered under your policy.

- The NAJIT endorsed policy protects against claims including defense costs (which can be substantial) alleging errors, omissions or negligent acts arising out of your professional interpreting or translating services. ASL interpreters are specifically included in our program.

- A streamlined application and policy issuance process. Just go to najit-ins.com and click Enroll Now. There you will find our proprietary rating tool so you can determine your tentative premium. Fill out the online application, complete your credit card information for payment and submit. After approval, your policy will be provided. It can't get any easier!

So there you have it, NAJIT's own broad, flexible, low cost, and easy to purchase Professional Liability Insurance Program. Check your existing coverage NOW for your expiration date so you will be ready to make the switch when your coverage expires, or if you do not currently have coverage, go to najit-ins.com to see just how easy it is to obtain this important and necessary coverage for your professional interpreting and translating practice.
NAJIT NEWS

NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR NAJIT BOARD

NAJIT’s next annual meeting will be on Saturday, May 15, 2010, at the Rosen Centre Hotel in Orlando, Florida, during the 31st annual conference. The terms of directors Peter Lindquist, Lois Feuerle, and Rob Cruz are expiring. Three directors will be elected for two-year terms. Members are invited to recommend potential candidates to the nominations committee, comprised of: Susan Castellanos Bilodeau, chair; Jack Jenard Navarrete; Sabine Michael; and Sylvia Sham.

The NAJIT bylaws, Article IV, Section II – Eligibility, provide as follows:

"Any Active Member who attains two years of continuous membership as an Active Member in good standing as of the return date specified on the 'Call for Nominations' shall be eligible for nomination to the Board of Directors."

Friday, December 4, 2009, has been established as the deadline for all nominations.

Members may nominate themselves or may be nominated by fellow members. Please note, however, that the nominations committee has the responsibility of proposing the names of candidates for the election to the members, taking into account the need to ensure, to the extent possible, a balanced slate as far as language, geographical location, and professional activities are concerned. Only active members who meet the criteria above—who have been active members continuously in good standing since December 4, 2007—may be nominated to the board of directors. Members uncertain as to their status may verify the facts with headquarters.

All nominations must include a short biography and statement explaining why the nominee should be on the board of directors. This information must be limited to one page, double-spaced. (Please leave one-inch margins on both sides and prepare in Times New Roman 12-point font.)

Please e-mail all nominations to the nominations committee at:
nominations@najit.org

Voter Eligibility: Members of NAJIT as of the record date of April 1, 2010, will be eligible to vote by mail ballot or online for this election.

Please contact headquarters with any questions on voting eligibility or the nominations process.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

- Texas News | Thanks to Gloria Keller, TAJIT Secretary. |
  Despite the watering down of House Bill 4445, which concerned licensed court interpreters, during the Texas 81st legislative session, we have made exciting progress in other areas. The University of Texas at Brownsville now offers a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish Translation and Interpreting, thanks mainly to the hard work of Professor Jose Davila, who believes in and supports our profession. See: www.utb-translation.org/ and www.tajit.org for more information.

  Thanks to a push from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission Civil Rights Office, Texas House Bill 223 passed during the 81st Legislature, setting standards for health care translators and interpreters. They are quickly moving forward by creating an Advisory Committee on Qualifications for Health Care Translators and Interpreters. www.hhsc.state.tx.us/about_hhsc/AdvisoryCommittees/HCT/default.shtml

  For information on licensed court interpreters in Texas, visit: www.license.state.tx.us/court/lcfaq.htm

- ATA president writes to the White House

UPCOMING CONFERENCES


A LEXICOGRAPHER’S LAIR

CUTTING-EDGE LEXICOGRAPHY: WORDNIK ON THE WEB

Dennis McKenna

Change is afoot in the English dictionary world: publishers have hired a whole new batch of tech-savvy wordsmiths. In 1999, the OED hired Jesse Sheidlower, then just 32, to be the first North American editor. Up until then Sheidlower’s greatest claim to fame was The F-Word, a 240-page treatise on one of the English language’s most enduring swear words. Sheidlower’s web page lists his passions as rowing, guitar, bespoke tailoring, and “various computing activities, especially involving Perl, Emacs, and Unix-derived operating systems” (www.jessesword.com/about.html). Then there’s Grant Barrett, 39, author of The Official Dictionary of Unofficial English. Barrett has a language blog called the Lexicographer’s Rules (www.doubletongued.org/index.php/grantbarrett/) and is co-host of public radio’s A Way With Words radio program (www.waywordradio.org/).

Publishers at the dawn of the 21st century clearly realized they needed new blood to keep their dictionaries alive. A century ago, dictionary publishers bragged that their editions included thousands of new words related to electricity and mechanics; now they are wooing the public with hip, social networking experts of the wired age.

Perhaps the most noteworthy of the young lexicographers is Erin McKeen. Her quirky good looks and engaging personality serve her well at speaking engagements. At the age of 29 she was named editor-in-chief for American dictionaries at Oxford University Press, and she soon hit the road to speak directly to the public about what exactly lexicographers do (www.wordnik.com/pages/team). She has written articles for the New York Times and been featured in the Christian Science Monitor. This role of “dictionary evangelist” is one that she relished as she ventured far and wide from her Chicago base to discuss fact and fiction in the world of dictionaries and lexicography. Soon she was a speaker at the TED Conference in 2007 in Monterey, California. TED stands for technology, entertainment, and design. Their annual conference is by-invitation-only, its stated goal is to discover and propagate good ideas, “to change attitudes, lives, and ultimately, the world” (http://www.ted.com/pages/view/id/5). McKean’s talk energized the audience and led her to find Silicon Valley in her future.

At Oxford University Press, McKeen saw the digital writing on the wall. As she now explains to anyone who will listen, most consumers judge a dictionary by the number of entries. This has led to all major U.S.-based English-language dictionary publishers (The American Heritage, Webster’s New World, The New Oxford American Dictionary and Merriam-Webster) to cram more and more entries into a limited number of pages, at the expense of the sentences that provide guidance on usage (Moore 2009). This and other facts of life about books vs. digital reference works caused Erin to jump ship from print to web media. In March of 2007, she left Oxford and assembled a team of digital and lexicographic heavyweights, including Grant Barrett of public radio fame, to embark on a new journey into uncharted waters.

Her brainstorm is called Wordnik and is not, strictly speaking, a dictionary. It is nothing like www.dictionary.com or other online reference sites—these suddenly seem awkward and ancient compared to the sleek new Wordnik. McKean didn’t just get ideas in Silicon Valley; she also built relationships with deep-pocketed investors and Internet innovators. Having first wowed the media with clever banter about dictionaries, now she appears poised to take language reference on the Web to new heights.

Test Drive

When you look up a word on Wordnik, you find a useful definition (often based on the American Heritage Dictionary or Wordnet). Parallel to this is a full treatment of usage based on printed matter, much of which has been taken from Project Gutenberg (a digital archive of mostly public domain books), newspapers, and magazines. Then you see real-time examples of usage from Twitter, based on the idea that it’s much easier to learn a word if you can see a variety of examples of real usage. Below that are synonyms from Roget’s II, Third Edition (www.wordnik.com/pages/faq).

Only highly unusual words are not accompanied by a definition. But the program still provides you with sample sentences and Tweets. To get an idea of what something looks like, the user sees images from Flickr. Thus, you can type in a word, say “shiner,” and you will see eighteen images, six of which are of people with black eyes. I don’t know how Wordnik does this, but it is light years ahead of Google Images, which returns 423,000 images for “shiner,” nearly all of which are of Shiner beer; a common shiner (the fish, whose scientific name is Liuxius cornutus); a product to shine cars; or some other unrelated item. Only one in ten images on Google Images portrayed a black eye, the most common referent for the word “shiner.”

Phonetic symbols in print dictionaries are helpful, provided you can remember what the symbols mean. But Wordnik has a better idea: every word will eventually have a sound file with pronunciation. One of the most up-to-date features is the user is also invited to make contributions. This follows the Wikipedia model whereby obsessive users helped put the Encyclopedia Britannica on the ropes.

Talk about features! We also see a graph displaying a word’s frequency of use over the last 200 years. If you look up the word

Erin McKeen
"filch," it shows heavy usage starting around 1800, to the middle of the graph, around 1900. After that, it tapers off sharply. The synonym section shows that "snatch" can also be used informally for "steal," with snatch scoring far higher on the frequency scale over the past decade. This kind of information can be extremely useful to an interpreter or translator looking for the best word to fit a particular context. (And literary translators will find this feature a gold mine for indications of historical usage.)

In all fairness, paper dictionaries far outperform online dictionaries in one major way: their ability to absorb our attention by random perusal, whereby words immediately above or below the word we are looking up can suddenly interest us, taking us down unexpected byways. Surely no digital product could ever do that.

Incredibly enough, McKeen and company even found an answer to this desire—or is it a need?—to linger over words for no apparent reason. She calls this the "serendipity feature." Words from the same letter of the alphabet are set off to the margin, so they can distract you from what you’re doing if you want them to. Quite an achievement! As if this weren’t enough, there are also headings for “recently viewed” and “favorite words.” So go ahead, knock yourself out reveling in the world of words.

The “related word” section shows words related to your search because they often appear in the same context. This is especially useful for translators and interpreters. Also under this heading are anagrams. To my surprise, the anagram for demurrer is murderer. Fun stuff. You can delve into a word’s etymology as well. But first you should know McKeen’s rule number 9 about dictionaries: If the etymology seems too good to be true, it probably is. (Watch her on YouTube as she discusses the rest of the ten things everyone should know about dictionaries.) For example, for years I had heard the theory that the British term “posh” stands for port outward, starboard home (POS) on the first class steamship tickets for trips from England to India during the mid-nineteenth century. Wordnik registers this theory, but finally concludes: “No known evidence supports this theory, however.” Instead, the probable derivation of posh is given as originating in the Romany (Gypsy speak) word for money, the same as “shiv.” Romany for blade.

All of this is enormously exciting and — dare I say? — awesome. I only utter this last overused word so I can check Wordnik’s frequency chart (one hundred times the expected rate). I also can’t help checking out the Tweets of the folks who are using it as I write.

- JordieRaeBishop: @KayteeHutto haha yesh yesh im very very awesomesauce. LOL. (6 seconds ago)
- RiskyBusinessMB: @esmeeworld Hey you ready to ROCK tomorrow? Gonna be awesome. HONOR SOCIETY + ESME = the hottest fall tour. (6 seconds ago)

[Tweets from Wordnik on 9/27/09 at 4:00 p.m. PST]

**Going to the Source**

Referencing Twitter for word usage seemed odd to an old fart like me. And some examples of standard usage culled from Project Gutenberg appeared dated. So I wrote to Wordnik to see if I could speak directly with the wizard, Erin McKeen. Here’s an edited version of our phone interview on September 25, 2009:

**DM:** Court interpreters and translators are often looking for words and phrases having to do with crime, drugs, and other topics often omitted from standard dictionaries. Why does Wordnik leave many terms undefined, while providing sample sentences and Tweets?

**EM:** It's highly unlikely that all these terms would be included in standard dictionaries. The number of words we've found so far is well beyond the number of words in the largest English dictionary. We've found over two million words and don't think we've done yet. So at that scale, it's not really practical to define every word. For most people, if they can see several examples of a word in context, they can get a good enough idea of what the word means.

**DM:** Your system also invites participation from users. So could somebody like me sign up and log on and give a possible definition?

**EM:** Yes, absolutely. We call them “notes.” So you can leave a note on an entry and it will show up right now on the notes page. We're working on a system where the users can read each other's notes so that the best note will get shown on a summary page.

**DM:** But would it ever get approved and included as a definition?

**EM:** Possibly. We haven't worked that out yet because we don't know at what scale people will want to add things. As you know, lexicography is not easy work. Only a small subset of people will leave notes, and a smaller subset will write definitions in those notes. But if we find good content, we'll definitely do our best to promote it.

**DM:** So might you follow the same route as Wikipedia, with volunteers generating a good deal of the content?

**EM:** Yes, that's certainly a possibility. We want to make sure that the site is useful even if Wikipedia numbers of people don't help us out. So we're working to add as much data as possible to show more examples for every word.

**DM:** What about getting more standard examples of usage?

**EM:** That's my number one task right now. I'm reaching out to a lot of publishers and we're getting great responses to show sentences from news articles or novels and more closely edited text. We're looking at getting more of that into the corpus so we can list more and more standard example sentences.

**DM:** It's my understanding that what you're using now is from Project Gutenberg.

**EM:** Yes, a lot of our text is from Project Gutenberg, and while a lot of that text is highly edited, a lot of it is also fairly old. We're also using some blog text, although we have a ranking system in place to identify sentences that are better than others. But if there are only a couple sentences, we'll show you whatever we've got, even if it ranks terribly.

> continues on next page
DM: Is that system automated?

EM: Yes, some info is better than no info.

DM: And why include Tweets?

EM: Traditional dictionaries miss a real-time component. If a word is in a breaking news story, it can't be updated in a print dictionary, but with Twitter we can show how people are using this word.

DM: But how do you assess the reliability of Tweets?

EM: Most people—particularly translators—are very sensitive to the non-linguistic information about a word's use, especially source information. We'd be more likely to take seriously a Tweet from "ProfJones" that didn't use a lot of extra punctuation or SMS-speak than one from "BabyKitty45" larded with exclamation points and LOLs. Because we can rely on people's judgment, and because we show the source links, we can get information from a lot of different sources and let people make up their own minds as to the acceptability of a word or use.

DM: Are you planning on moving into other languages? I've already started to use your system for Spanish because the Flickr images sometimes have a tag in Spanish.

EM: Eventually we hope that the Wordnik system will be used for most languages. Certainly for any Romance language it would work. We haven't started to build that capability. Because it's based on accumulating large amounts of data, we wanted to start with English. English language text is the most available roman character language on the Web. But we would love to partner with someone who has a good, large corpus of Spanish text, to see if our techniques work for Spanish.

DM: Wordnik readers are always asking me about handheld devices. Is there a streamlined format in the works, something that could be read easily on a small screen?

EM: We're hoping to make a version for cell phones—those smart phones. Especially the iPhone and the Palm Pre.

DM: And organizing things whereby the word's most characteristic meaning is featured first, like you did at the New Oxford American Dictionary, would work really well.

EM: Yes, we're working on ways to show that through the sample sentences. So especially using tools like collocation so that if you were interested say in the word "panel," we could sort the sentences that use "panel" with "judges" as opposed to all the sentences that use "panel" with "wall."

DM: Or "car," as in "quarter panel."

EM: We're working on that. It probably won't be ready before the end of the year.

Eventually, with Wordnik you'll be able to navigate through the sentences based on their collocations and by phrases.

DM: Maybe instead of one entry box, you could have two—one word plus another word.

EM: That wouldn't be hard to do. You can sneakily use Wordnik like that now: you can look up more than one word and we'll pull sentences if we've got them.

DM: Was it the TED conference that caused you to look to Silicon Valley for new ideas?

EM: It was the TED conference that made me realize Silicon Valley would support my new ideas—because traditional publishing didn't want to. The help that we have gotten and just the excitement about Wordnik is fantastic, incredibly gratifying.

DM: People here in California are receptive to new ideas. Are you in the Bay Area?

EM: Yes, just this week we moved into our office in San Mateo.

DM: You have said that dictionaries are the vodka of literature. If Wordnik were a drink, what kind of drink would it be?

EM: Uncondensed.

DM: Do you have any advice about reference materials for my colleagues?

EM: We hope that interpreters and translators really enjoy using Wordnik, because they know best how context makes all the difference.

DM: One last thing. How did you ever come up with the name?

EM: We wanted a name with "word" that sounded fun and light-hearted, and was short, for URL purposes. The -nik suffix can mean "someone obsessed with," so we thought Wordnik fit the bill.

This column was written in late September, on the basis of Wordnik's open beta version. By the time you read this, more content will have been added, making it that much more powerful. Even now, Wordnik is a viable alternative to Google for word searches. Wordnik just might turn out to be to dictionaries what a smartphone is to the old rotary model. Erin McKeen is definitely taking dictionaries into the 21st century. Go to www.wordnik.com and see for yourself. And remember: you read it here first.

REFERENCES:
www.doubletongued.org/index.php/grantbarrett
www.jessesword.com/about.html
www.ted.com/pages/view/id/5
www.waywordradio.org/
www.wordnik.com/pages/faq
www.wordnik.com/pages/team
www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCBSTGTeYQ
If you are a court interpreter in California, by now you know about, or have experienced firsthand, being furloughed without pay on the state’s new “court-closure days.” In July, legislation passed mandating that all courts in the state close down one day per month, whether they have financial need or not. The legislation provides that when the courts are closed for the transaction of judicial business one day per month, that day be treated as a holiday.

The intent of the legislation is to save the state money, but the debate has been heated over whether closing the courts to the public is a reasonable cost-cutting step. Throughout the legislative process, the California Federation of Interpreters (CFI) and other unions representing employees in the courts worked together to retrieve millions of dollars from resources allocated for a computerized case-management system and put the money back into court operations in an effort to lessen the negative impact on the courts and to avoid layoffs.

While it is beyond doubt that the state is experiencing an unprecedented financial crisis, many, including judges, have been wondering out loud whether the money saved by these mandatory court closures can justify delaying or denying justice for tens of thousands of Californians. Adding to the skepticism is the fact that many counties are financially stable, and their courts do not need to close. In most of those courts, doors will be closed to the public but employees will still be allowed to come in to do “catch up” work.

As a result of the closures, hundreds of interpreters across the state will take a financial hit at the same time as they are laboring under increased workloads. Cases will not just disappear because courts aren’t open. Interpreters can’t come in to do catch-up work because when the courts are dark, there is no one to interpret. Only time will tell how the closures will affect citizens’ access to justice. There is a real concern that, unless courtrooms are adequately staffed on days they are open, the negative consequences will extend beyond the actual closure days.

The legislation remains in effect until July 1, 2010, and its impact may be reviewed as early as January 2010. ▲

[The author is president of the California Federation of Interpreters.]

---

The Blogosphere

(Posted to the Birmingham news commentary page on October 8, 2009.)

The Alabama judicial system deserves congratulations for starting to certify court interpreters, ensuring they actually can speak the language they are interpreting (“Alabama beginning to certify court interpreters,” News, Saturday). Competent court interpreters are essential to the administration of justice. Without them, judges and juries cannot understand critical testimony in cases before them. The result can be serious errors, and even the conviction of innocent people.

But certification is just a start. The article noted the courts do not provide interpreters in civil cases, and that even in criminal cases, judges can require defendants to pay for their own interpreters. According to a recent Brennan Center report, “Language Access in State Courts,” both practices violate Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act.

Although interpreters cost the courts money, holding court without them can be even costlier. When language misunderstandings lead to children being placed in foster care unnecessarily or to criminal defendants spending unnecessary time in jail, the human and fiscal costs can be enormous.

Laura Abel
Deputy director, Justice Program
Brennan Center for Justice at New York University
School of Law New York
GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

STARTING A TRANSLATION BUREAU
Maria Cristina de la Vega

The first step in deciding whether or not to establish an agency: conscientiously examine your personality and ask yourself some questions. Do you have the drive to structure a company and sustain it? Do you enjoy working with people? Do you have or are you willing to acquire the means to obtain and screen a network of linguists that you can rely on? It is advisable to start a venture with at least one partner so that one is not wearing all the hats in the business simultaneously, which can become overwhelming. Preferably, one of the partners should have a background in business and another in languages, to cover all the bases.

In order to determine the scope of the business, the investment required, and the feasibility of opening doors at a given location, you must do some form of market research and prepare a business plan. This will help you determine the need for services, who your competition is, prices, and so on. Local universities can oftentimes serve as a resource to guide you with the former through marketing majors if you cannot spend the money to hire a company that specializes in that field. A business plan model can also be downloaded for a fee on the Internet or purchased in a bookstore. It would behoove you to have a CPA examine the finished product to verify that your assumptions are valid and that financing will be available to the extent that you need it.

Once the viability of your plan has been confirmed, I would encourage you to implement a quality management system from the start. It is much easier to do this in the beginning than to design a retrofit. A system of clearly defined criteria for both product and management will be an invaluable tool to stimulate growth, measure progress, and correct problems. Google “ISO certification.” ISO is the global acronym for the International Organization for Standardization. The name does not change depending on the language. The widespread adoption of international standards means that these suppliers, who meet criteria that have wide international acceptance in their sectors, can compete in many more markets around the world. Read up on the process and locate a consultant in your area to assist you in planning and implementation so that you can pass a certifying audit without setbacks. State governments often provide funds to help you in this endeavor in order to have more ISO-compliant firms in their area to boost productivity and income.

The quality management system will supply a template that you can use to draft pertinent policies, job descriptions, and procedures. In this manner, whatever you ultimately do will follow ISO guidelines for international best-in-class procedures. You need to determine what type of a structure you will create to deliver services. Traditionally, language bureaus retain some linguists in-house in order to have flexibility and control, which would be sacrificed if all the work were outsourced. The downside of total outsourcing is that you depend wholly on third parties beyond your direct supervision to provide your work product from start to finish. On the other hand, if the hired in-house personnel doesn’t have pertinent industry certifications, be it ATA for translators, NAJIT for legal interpreters or A1IC for conference interpreters, you must establish an additional line item in your budget (not included in salaries) to provide them with the necessary training to bring them up to speed. Your agency’s reputation will ultimately be based on your work product; credentials are an assurance that the output of your providers meets industry standards. This is imperative to substantiate reliance on the finished product in the open market or in a legal context, should that be necessary.

Marketing your company effectively is an important priority. Products and services, regardless of their quality, are not accessed until their existence is made known. Hire a professional to design your logo, brochure, and website. Have an ongoing marketing plan that you adhere to, but which is flexible enough to be adjusted if a particular approach is not meeting expectations. Do not dismiss new social media such as Twitter, blogs, etc., until you determine whether or not they provide a positive means to “keep in touch” with your clients. Keep abreast of developments in this area, as these currently fringe services are becoming an acceptable part of mainstream marketing.

Bear in mind that in addition to marketing, you have to plan to make sales. This involves calling prospective clients to inform them of what you can do for them, then visiting them to establish a personal relationship whereby each side puts a name to a face. In the beginning, this should be the main function of one of the principals; as you grow, this task can be delegated to a dedicated sales staff.

Next you must dive into the basic components of a bricks and mortar office. The current market is skewed in favor of the buyer, so it will be relatively easy to find office space at a good price in comparison to past years. In the beginning, you may consider sharing space with an existing company that has extra room available. They may be able to give you a better rate than the open market in order to generate extra cash flow to pay their own rent. When you design a computer network for your business, make sure you allow for a few additional machines beyond what you planned, to accommodate the extra translator who may be needed from time to time to do a rush assignment at the office. All of which leads us to the importance of researching exactly...
STARTING A TRANSLATION BUREAU continued from page 16

what software you want to purchase. The basic items you need are the programs to facilitate Computer Aided Translation (TRADOS and the like); translation management software; plus scheduling and other software to handle accounting, contact management, and customized e-mails. When dealing with any product you are not personally familiar with, perform due diligence and ask manufacturers to provide you with personal references. It can be very disheartening to make a big investment and subsequently find out that the product does not have the capabilities, training modules, or support that you envisaged.

Let’s not forget the professionals you will hire to act as consultants in key areas. Find a bank nearby that can guarantee all the services you need. Select an attorney who can handle general business issues and who is willing to take on collection proceedings—not all attorneys provide this service. As you grow, you will definitely need a reliable IT consultant who can respond on a timely basis to an emergency. Remember that your network is the lifeblood of your business.

I have found it very useful to belong to peer groups such as, in my case, the Women Presidents Organization and The Commonwealth Initiative, both of which are national associations. Peer groups come in all flavors. These associations provide a forum for professional business development and mentoring, and they generally meet monthly in groups of ten to fifteen CEOs in the geographical area. These meetings provide opportunities to discuss general business topics, as well as to address any specific concern that a participant may have. In this respect, professional groups are like an unofficial board of directors you can lean on for support. Everything discussed is completely confidential and there cannot be two people in one group who are in the same industry. This is an invaluable tool when you need professional advice outside of your company, which happens often, and it can greatly reduce your learning curve regarding common problems in the business world. Most of these entrepreneurs have been successful in business for many years and have faced the same problems that you may be encountering. Our mandate is to network to help each other, which is of great benefit to our respective companies.

Starting your own business is certainly a tall order. You must have a positive vision of what you want to accomplish, be convinced at the beginning that you will achieve your goals, and be exceedingly tenacious and disciplined in order to get the job done. It is a difficult road, and you will end up working many more hours than you ever expected. However, it is fulfilling and rewarding to be the master of your own financial destiny, to have the freedom to work in the manner you decide upon, and to be able to offer interesting work and sustenance to talented individuals. Companies fulfill valuable personal as well as social needs, so long as you enjoy the work and have the will and persistence to thrive.

Music, Language, Memory, and the Brain
This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession
Daniel J. Levitin
$24.95 (Hardcover); Also available in paperback

You know when a song sticks in your head and you can’t get it out? Why does the brain tenaciously hold onto that musical tidbit? This is just one of the questions addressed by Daniel Levitin, associate professor and director of the Laboratory for Music Perception, Cognition, and Expertise (Department of Psychology, McGill University) in This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession. A former musician, recording engineer, and record producer, neuroscientist Levitin effectively presents two subjects that might prove challenging for the layperson: the interplay of music and neuroscience. Through analogies and illustrations drawing on common experiences, his disquisitions on pitch and the role of the hippocampus in memory retrieval are made quite accessible.

Levitin begins with the origins of his interest in these two fields, which apparently sit at opposite ends of the academic spectrum. Readers will identify with that moment in the author’s life as a young man when he first became enthralled with the depths and nuances of music. Throughout, Levitin interweaves personal music and research experiences with actual musical examples ranging from classical to rap. The result is a readable and understandable exploration of the ways in which music affects our brains and ultimately, our lives.

By comparing music and language in the context of brain theory, Levitin’s conclusions will be of particular interest to interpreters. Just as language production and comprehension do not occur in a single location in the brain, music listening and production take place in multiple loci as well. Drawing on Noam Chomsky, Levitin posits that all humans are born with the capacity to understand and learn any music in the world, just as they have the capacity to understand and learn any language at birth. In both cases, the individual’s interaction with language or music shapes his acquisition of it. As the author notes, “No human has ever learned language by memorization” (255), and by extension, humans do not learn music by memorization, but rather, through exposure and assimilation of forms. Just as young children learn the grammatical foundations of a language, they learn the musical structures of their culture, and when still young — by the age of two, according to the author — children demonstrate personal musical preferences (224). Despite these similarities, research has...
BOOK REVIEW continued from page 17

shown that language and music systems function independently within the brain, as demonstrated by individuals who suffer injuries causing damage to one or the other system but not to both.

Language and music often work in an inter-related fashion to express the human condition. One such example is great epics set to music in order to enhance memory, both for performance and for passing tradition to future generations. The author sums up this relationship best by saying, “As a tool for activation of specific thoughts, music is not as good as language. As a tool for arousing feelings and emotions, music is better than language. The combination of the two—as best exemplified in a love song—is the best courtship display of all” (261).

The structure of music is what allows it to exert such an impact on our emotions. Just as we make assumptions according to the grammatical structure of the language(s) we know, we make musical predictions based on the musical structures we have learned. It is the manipulation of these structures and our expectations—whether they are met or not—that gives music its emotional impact. Consider, for example, the musical soundtrack of a movie such as Jaws. The music announces before the visual reinforcement that danger is immediate and impending.

The way in which we remember music is another area of interest. Levitin reviews various theories of memory, ultimately advocating for the research-supported model of “multiple-trace memory.” This model holds that a memory is not located in one specific location in the brain, but is “encoded in groups of neurons that, when set to proper values and configured in a particular way, will cause a memory to be retrieved and replayed” (161). The context of the event being remembered is crucial, and any aspect of that context may serve as a cue to trigger memory. Music-bound memories are rich in context, and the musical aspect of the memory is linked to other elements that are coded in different ways in the brain (162). So intrinsic is this link that, as Levitin maintains, “[m]emory affects the music-listening experience so profoundly that it would not be hyperbole to say that without memory there would be no music” (162).

So what about those songs that stick in your mind? The so-called “earworm” (from the German, Ohrwehrn) or “stuck song syndrome,” while not highly researched, can be explained in terms of neuron patterns. When we remember something, neurons fire in the same pattern as when we first perceived that thing. In the case of earworms, it appears that this pattern is repeatedly firing—something similar to a scratch on a record that causes the same phrase to play repeatedly. The simpler the piece of music, the easier it is for the phrase to turn into an earworm; television jingles, for example, can linger long after we have heard them.

Finally, Levitin addresses the role music has played throughout history. While some maintain that music is a non-adaptive practice embraced by humans merely because it is pleasurable, Levitin argues that music is an evolutionary adaptation, just as language is. Archeological findings of musical instruments support this view, as do various theories of the role of music in ancient civilizations, including dance as an indicator of physical prowess, music’s role in social bonding, and music as part of courtship ritual. Levitin also suggests that music may have continued its evolutionary adaptation because it supported the development of other cognitive skills, including language. Above all, he cautions, we must not view music in terms of what we know today, but according to the role it served 50,000 years ago, since that is the lag time necessary for evolutionary adaptations to manifest.

This is Your Brain on Music is a thought-provoking look into music, language, memory, and brain theory. While terminology-heavy at times, this study is highly accessible to the non-expert in music or neuroscience. Music is a highly personal experience, memory-laden and colored by individual taste. We are all expert music listeners, usually by the time we are six years old, according to Levitin (216). In helping us to understand the ways in which music affects the brain, and ultimately alters mood and calls up memories, this interdisciplinary read truly strikes up the band.

For more information, visit the book’s website at www.yourbrainonmusic.com.

[This column inaugurates a new regular book review feature, edited by Julie Sellers. She is a Colorado certified judicial interpreter working in Laramie, Wyoming. Her book, Merengue and Dominican Identity: Music as National Identifier was published in 2004.]

WEBSITES OF INTEREST

http://forvo.com/ Forvo is the largest pronunciation guide in the world. Ask for that word or name, and another user will pronounce it for you. You can also help others by recording your pronunciations in your own language.


http://unprofessionaltranslation.blogspot.com/ Blog by Brian Harris [Thanks to Ruth Morris.]

Enter “NY Times + language” in Google and the first hit will take you to the collection of all the “On Language” columns by the late William Safire and guest writers.

Register as a TED translator at www.ted.com

2010 NAJIT Scholars: Students of translation and interpretation programs are invited to apply to be a NAJIT 2010 Scholar. Applications for NAJIT Scholars are due by February 19, 2010. Please pass this on to any potential scholars you may know. Tell them to go NAJIT’s home page (www.najit.org) for more information.
NAJIT's activities are supported by membership dues and member donations. While there are no formal requirements for joining other than an interest in legal interpretation and/or translation, most of our members hold professional credentials such as federal and/or state court interpreter certification, national judiciary interpreter and translator certification by NAJIT, interpreter certification by RID (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf), translator certification by ATA (American Translators Association), approval by the U.S. Department of State (for escort, seminar, or conference interpreting), and/or other credentialing by government agencies or international organizations.

Anyone who shares NAJIT's interests and objectives is welcome to join. Our membership categories are: Active, Associate, Corporate, Corporate Sponsor, Organizational, and Student. Please refer to our website for a full description of the membership categories and fees, www.najit.org.

The benefits of membership are many. When you join, you will enjoy, among other things:

- Full listing in NAJIT's Online Membership Directory
- Subscription to ProRex, NAJIT's quarterly newsletter dedicated to court interpretation and legal translation
- Subscription to CyberNews, NAJIT's automatic e-mail updates on training opportunities, meetings, and other matters of professional interest
- NAJIT position papers on topics of critical interest to the profession
- Electronic access to NAJIT publications, including archived materials available at the Members' Portal
- Right to use the NAJIT logo on your business card
- Reduced-rates for language-specific interpreting and translation skills-building workshops, including preparation courses for certification tests
- Access to reduced-price professional liability insurance and disability insurance
- Access to required continuing education sessions at reduced rates
- Membership registration rates for NAJIT conferences and for regional and local workshops
- Right to vote and hold office (active members only)
- Opportunities for committee membership and participation in NAJIT special projects
- Opportunity to chair committees and to be actively involved in NAJIT's decision-making and long-term planning
- Participation in NAJIT's lively and informative members' listserv, where members share expertise, information, and resources. Through this e-mail discussion list, members exchange terminology, discuss transcription and translation standards, and confer on ethical and professional dilemmas and association matters.
- Active involvement in state and national legislative matters and issues affecting the community of interpreters and translators
- Opportunity to present at NAJIT conferences, workshops, and training events
- Networking and collegial relationships
- Participation in a national and international network of professionals
- Access to employment opportunities posted on the website and in special bulletins

Dues may be deductible as an ordinary and necessary business expense to the extent permitted under the IRS Code.
APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Last name __________________________ First name __________________________ Middle initial ______
Title __________________________ Company name __________________________
Address __________________________ State/Province ______ Zip code ______ Country ______
Cty __________________________ Office tel: ______ Cell: ______ Fax: ______
Home tel: __________________________ Pager: __________________________
E-mail: __________________________ Website: __________________________
Referred by: __________________________

Languages (if passive, prefix with P-) __________________________

Credentials: □ NJITC: Spanish __ □ Federal Court certification: □ Haitian Creole __ □ Navajo __ □ Spanish __
□ State court certification: From which state(s)? __________________________
□ ATA: What language combinations? __________________________
□ U.S. Department of State: □ Consecutive □ Seminar □ Conference __________________________

Academic Credentials: Instructor at __________________________

I am an □ interpreter □ translator □ freelance instructor □ Corporate Sponsor □ Corporate □ Organizational (nonprofit)

I am applying for the following class of membership: □ Active □ Associate □ Student (NAJIT may validate applications for student membership.)

(Corporate sponsors receive a longer descriptive listing on the website about their organization, one face quarterly page print ad in Proteus per year, and the grateful thanks of fellow members for their support of NAJIT and our profession.)

□ Check here if you have ever been a NAJIT member. □ Check here if you do NOT wish to receive e-mails from NAJIT.

□ Check here if you do NOT wish to be listed in the NAJIT online directory. (Student and associate members are not listed in the NAJIT online directory.)

□ Check here if you do NOT wish to have your contact information made available to those offering information, products, or services of potential interest to members.

I certify that the above information is correct and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief. I agree to abide by the NAJIT Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities.

Applicant’s signature __________________________ Date ____________

PAYMENT SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Associate</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Corporate Sponsor</th>
<th>Corporate</th>
<th>Organizational (nonprofit)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dues</td>
<td>$105</td>
<td>$85</td>
<td>$40</td>
<td>$300</td>
<td>$160</td>
<td>$115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested voluntary contribution to SSTI</td>
<td>$35</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$10</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$140</td>
<td>$110</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$400</td>
<td>$260</td>
<td>$180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PAYMENT METHOD

□ Check or Money Order (payable to NAJIT) □ MC □ VISA □ Amex

Card number __________________________ Expiration date / ____________
Credit card verification value __________________________
Signature __________________________ $ ______ Amount ______

Contributions or gifts to NAJIT are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes. However, dues payments may be deductible by members as ordinary and necessary business expenses to the extent permitted under IRS Code. Contributions to the Society for the Study of Translation and Interpretation (SSTI), a 501(c)3 educational organization, are fully tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.