

CODE OF ETHICS FOR COMMUNITY INTERPRETERS

Preamble

Community Interpreters work in hospitals, garda stations, the courts, on Safepass courses, driver theory tests, for social welfare, with solicitors and GPs. Without the help of community interpreters, people with limited English could not communicate and English speakers could not carry out their work.

This code outlines the elements which make up best practice in the profession of community interpreting and will serve as a guide to users of community interpreting services as to what they may expect and to practitioners of community interpreting as to how they should conduct themselves.

1. The role of a community interpreter

The primary aim of the community interpreter should be to facilitate communication between two persons who do not speak the same language:

Therefore, a community interpreter:

- should never act on behalf of the user and should never speak on behalf of either party.
- is not employed by the beneficiary and should not act as their advocate.

While a community interpreter is expected to have a general understanding of the cultural background of both parties s/he is not a cultural expert and should be wary when offering cultural advice.

If asked to provide a written translation of a document, a community interpreter should refuse this task, as this is the role of a translator, and not an interpreter.

2. Confidentiality

The mutual trust and uninhibited transfer of information essential for effective community interpreting is dependent on confidentiality.

Therefore:

- Nothing said in the session will be communicated outside the session.
- A community interpreter will not reveal personal information gained from work that may lead to the identification of the parties involved.
- A community interpreter will not reveal information about either party learned from any prior meeting.

The only exception being when either party is in immediate danger.

3. Impartiality

Impartiality is essential to ensure the transfer of an undistorted message.

Therefore, a community interpreter will:

- disclose any prior acquaintance with either party.
- decline to interpret where a family or close personal or professional relationship may affect impartiality.
- inform the beneficiaries and users prior to the communication process that everything said during the exchange will be interpreted, even when they say something not meant for interpretation.
- not impose his/her philosophical, religious or political views on any interpretation.
- not offer advice or personal opinions either on own initiative or when asked.
- never correct erroneous facts or statements that may occur, even though the error is obviously unintentional. Neither should s/he infer a response, that is, if the beneficiary is asked to clarify a prior response, the interpreter should pose the question as asked and not volunteer what he or she thought the person meant.
- bear in mind that lengthy conversations with a speaker can lead to suspicion and distrust of the interpreter by the other party in the communication process, thus leading to incorrect perceptions as to his or her objectivity.

4. Accuracy

Accuracy is essential to ensure the transfer of an undistorted message.

Therefore, a community interpreter should always use direct speech, using the first person as if the interpreter does not exist. All parties involved in the communication process should be informed of this, so as to avoid confusion.

An exception may be made in mental health interpreting, including counselling, psychological or psychiatric sessions and assessments, where the interpreter may choose to use either the first or third person singular, as considered appropriate by the community interpreter and the clinician involved in the communication process.

If a community interpreter needs to refer to him or herself, s/he should do so in the third person as "The interpreter". This distinction is made so as to eliminate any confusion.

A community interpreter should:

- interpret in a clear voice accurately, completely and objectively everything that is said, without adding, omitting and changing anything.
- not emulate the gestures made by the speakers; they have already been seen.
- emulate the inflections and intonations of the speaker, in order to reinforce the meaning and stresses of the speaker's words.
- reflect the person's way of speaking as accurately as possible. The interpreter will therefore interpret obscenities and colloquial language and will not simplify language used.
- acknowledge and correct promptly any interpreting errors made.

If one of the parties speaks too fast or for too long, a community interpreter should stop them as appropriate in order to interpret as accurately as possible.

If a message is unclear the interpreter will ask for repetition or rephrasing where necessary with the knowledge of all parties.

Should a serious communication problem arise between the interpreter and one party the interpreter should bring this to the attention of the other party.

5. Professional Conduct

A community interpreter is a professional and should act accordingly at all times.

Therefore, a community interpreter will:

- always interpret to the best of their ability.
- have a good command of both languages including specialist terminology, current idioms and dialects.
- maintain and develop their command of both languages
- keep up to date with the relevant procedures of the particular area in which they are interpreting.
- participate in continued professional development.
- behave in a courteous, polite and dignified manner at all times.
- aim to establish a compassionate but professional relationship with beneficiaries.
- be on time and prepared for all assignments.
- dress appropriately for the particular assignment.
- not accept any gift in return for interpreting services from either party.
- charge an appropriate fee for their services dependent on experience, certification and the nature of the assignment. Services should only be provided free of charge in exceptional circumstances.
- not make any personal gain from any information learned on an assignment.
- follow the code of ethics and conduct at all times.

6. Rights of an Interpreter

The rights of a community interpreter must be respected at all times.

Where possible, a community interpreter should receive accurate and sufficient information from the user or agency regarding the assignment, place, time as well as an indication of the duration of the assignment at least 48 hours before the assignment is due to take place. This is so the interpreter can prepare for the assignment.

A community interpreter has the right to withdraw from an assignment if it becomes apparent that expertise beyond their technical or language competence is required, or if an interpreter has been given incorrect information or insufficient time to prepare for an assignment.

If a community interpreter feels exploited or discriminated against during the assignment s/he has the right to withdraw his or her services. All parties must be advised of this decision i.e. the users as well as the agency.

A community interpreter may refuse an assignment. S/he must advise the agency in advance.

Any change or cancellation should be made known to the user or agency the day before the assignment and failure to do so will result in the client being billed for the service. Last minute cancellations should incur a minimum payment for the interpreter.

If the parties are late, the cost will be based on the hourly rate established in advance.

The session should not last longer than previously established without the interpreter's consent.

If asked to provide a sight translation of technical documents, a community interpreter is quite justified in saying that unless given adequate time and without proper preparation any translation can at best be provisional.

Interpreters' travel expenses should be reimbursed. This includes a proper mileage rate for those travelling by car and the reimbursement of all train, bus, Luas and Dart tickets. Payment should also be made for time spent travelling to assignments.

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