

CODE OF ETHICS FOR COMMUNITY INTERPRETERS

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Community interpreting means interpreting a transaction dialogue (interview, court hearing, negotiation, inquiry, a conversation for solving or settling affairs and exchanging information, etc.) between an authority or a private individual and a client. Interpreting is usually consecutive, but it can also be simultaneous. The different transactions may also include monologues (presentation, lecture, speech, notification, etc.). Community interpreters (who, in the code, are referred to as “interpreters”) are persons who function as interpreters in the afore-described situations of community interpreting.

1. This code of ethics is applied if not otherwise regulated by acts or decrees
2. Interpreters maintain professional confidentiality.
3. Interpreters do not misuse any information received in connection with the interpreting assignments.
4. Interpreters do not accept assignments for which they do not meet the competence requirements or about which they are biased.
5. Interpreters do not accept assignments that can be disadvantageous for the profession or reduce respect for it.
6. Interpreters show solidarity to their fellow professionals.
7. Interpreters ensure that the working conditions are suitable for interpreting.
8. Interpreters draft written contracts on interpreting assignments beforehand and pay attention primarily to the recommendations given by the unions. If a written contract cannot be made, the interpreter and the commissioner may make an oral contract.
9. Interpreters prepare for the assignments carefully and in time.
10. Interpreters aim at comprehensive interpreting and do not leave out anything or add anything irrelevant.

11. Interpreters are impartial, remain outsiders to the situation, and do not let their personal attitudes or opinions affect their work.
12. Interpreters do not function as assistants or representatives to the persons they interpret for.
13. During assignments, interpreters are not obligated to take care of any other tasks besides interpreting.
14. Interpreters show consideration for the nature of the situation through their conduct in connection with assignments.
15. Interpreters improve their professional skills continually.

The following parties have contributed to the creation of the Code of Ethics for Community Interpreters: The Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters, The Finnish Union of Translators, The Finnish Association of the Deaf, the Finnish Association of Sign Language Interpreters, Helsingin seudun asioimistulkikeskus [Community Interpreting Centre for the Helsinki Area], Turun seudun tulkikeskus [Interpreting Centre for the Turku Area] and Lingua Nordica Oy.

Guidelines For Community Interpreting

Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to clarify the Code of Ethics for Community Interpreters in order to make the co-operation between the interpreter and the other parties involved in an interpreting transaction successful.

The following parties have contributed to the creation of the Code of Ethics for Community Interpreters and the Instructions for Good Interpreting Practice (Hyvä tulkkaus käytäntö -opas): The Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters, The Finnish Union of Translators, The Finnish Association of the Deaf, the Finnish Association of Sign Language Interpreters, Helsingin seudun asioimistulkikeskus [Community Interpreting Centre for the Helsinki Area], Turun seudun tulkikeskus [Interpreting Centre for the Turku Area] and Lingua Nordica Oy. We want to thank Ms. Kaarina Hietanen, a lecturer from the School of Modern Languages and Translation Studies of the University of Tampere, for her valuable expert help.

The Code of Ethics for Community Interpreters and the Good Interpreting Practice are public information. The members of The Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters, The Finnish Union of Translators, and the Finnish Association of Sign Language Interpreters should operate within these guidelines and inform their colleagues and clients so that the interpreters' clients are also aware of the principles guiding a community interpreter's work.

GENERAL ASPECTS

The Code of Ethics for Community Interpreters and the Good Interpreting Practice are both made to promote an individual's linguistic equality when transacting with authorities.

When is a community interpreter needed and what is community interpreting?

An interpreter is needed when people do not share a common language. The interpreter's aim is to facilitate successful communication over linguistic and cultural boundaries. The interpreter is an essential link between the communicating parties, since the interpreter helps both parties to express themselves to the full extent of their mother tongue.

Through interpreting, individuals are fully able to perform their duties and secure their rights in a multicultural society. A professional interpreter can also help authorities to make fair decisions even if they do not understand their client's language or know enough about his or her cultural background. Interpreting enables the making of fair and, from the individual's perspective vital, practical and legal decisions.

Community interpreting can mean interpreting between an immigrant and a Finnish authority. It is needed in everyday life, for example in educational or medical settings. In most cases, it is a question of situations which might have a crucial effect on the entire life of a person, including people who receive psychiatric treatment or asylum seekers. Community interpreters have their own professional role, which is purely communicative. Community interpreters do not transact. They merely interpret the discussion in a transaction. They also clarify the cultural backgrounds that are essential for understanding. Interpreters are entrusted to convey messages, meanings and thoughts.

(Finnish National Board of Education: Further Qualification for Community Interpreters; Tutkinnon perusteet, 2001 [Basis of the Degree])

The term community interpreter is used here to refer to a person who serves as an interpreter in the community interpreting situations defined above. Community interpreters are professionals in speaking. They are expected to be suited for and experienced in face-to-face communication, to articulate clearly and to have an undisturbing and pleasing verbal expression. All in all, community interpreters have better linguistic, cultural and communicative skills than average language speakers. The professional skills of community interpreters are acquired through education. Academic education is organised in interpretation (the dominant European languages) as well as upper secondary education in both vocational adult education and in the private sector. (Finnish National Board of Education: Further Qualification for Community Interpreters; Tutkinnon perusteet, 2001 [Basis of the Degree]) Sign language interpreters are educated in polytechnics. Interpreters have to be of legal age and legally competent. Near relatives or friends of the people who take part in the transaction should not be used as interpreters, and on no account should children serve as interpreters.

The interpreter's occupational title is not protected in Finland. The commissioner must make sure that the interpreter is a professional interpreter who knows the requirements of the profession and the code of practice and professional ethics.

The interpreting situation is a communicative situation where different parties interact. This includes:

- the interpreter and two people to interpret for
- **or**
- the interpreter, speaker and listeners

Each party contributes to the success of interpreting. It would be wise to clarify each party's role in the interpreting situation before starting the actual interpreting.

Paragraph 1

- * This code of ethics is applied if not otherwise regulated by acts or decrees.

Paragraph 2

- * Interpreters maintain professional confidentiality. Interpreters inform their clients of the fact that interpreters are bound by professional confidentiality defined in the code of ethics for interpreters. Interpreters' professional confidentiality also pertains to the material they receive beforehand.

Paragraph 3

- * Interpreters do not misuse any information received in connection with the interpreting assignments. Interpreters do not seek to further their own interest in an interpreting situation in order to gain financial or other benefit. Nor will interpreters use the information received in an interpreting situation for the benefit of others or in order to harm others. Interpreters conform to contractual obligations towards their employers or commissioners.

Paragraph 4

- * Interpreters do not accept assignments for which they do not meet the competence requirements or about which they are biased.

Interpreters do not accept assignments for which they do not meet the professional competence requirements (see the section entitled *General Aspects*). If something hindering successful communication appears or occurs during an interpreting situation, the interpreter must stop interpreting and discuss the matter with the people he or she is interpreting for. This kind of situation can occur, for example, if the topic or the language is not the same as has previously been agreed on; if the vocabulary of the topic becomes unfamiliar to the interpreter (special field language, jargon); or if the manner of interpretation is different from what has been agreed on beforehand (cf. paragraph 7).

An interpreter is considered biased and should not accept an assignment if it involves such a conflict of interests that the objectivity of the

interpretation is endangered. The conflict of interests may include cases where the interpreter is concerned in the situation, a near relative of the people he or she is to interpret for, the interpreter has strong emotional bonds towards the parties, he or she is in debt to the people being interpreted, or if the interpreter is in a quarrelsome relationship with the people being interpreted or if any of them is in debt to the interpreter (see *Administrative Judicial Procedure Act, Section 77*).

Paragraph 5

- * Interpreters do not accept assignments that can be disadvantageous for the profession or reduce respect for it.

Interpreters have to act in a way that promotes respect towards the profession. They have to conform to the law and regulations while practising their profession. If the interpreter, when accepting an assignment, has reason to suspect that there are criminal activities or activities that violate human rights related to the assignment, he or she must not take the assignment.

Paragraph 6:

- * Interpreters show solidarity to their fellow professionals.

The interpreter should respect his or her fellow professionals. For instance, following the *Code of Ethics for Community Interpreters* is a clear expression of solidarity towards the interpreter's colleagues.

The interpreter should not make evaluative or critical comments about another interpreter, nor should this type of commenting be demanded of the interpreter. If an interpreter, however, finds another interpreter acting unprofessionally, he or she should point this out to the colleague in question, and if necessary, also inform the interpreting centre or the trade union and, when Sign Language interpreter is in question, the *Interpreting Cooperation Team [Tulkkitoiminnan yhteistyöryhmä]* of the misconduct. If an interpreter is given feedback about another interpreter, the person giving the feedback should be instructed to give the feedback directly to

the interpreter in question and/or his or her commissioner.

Paragraph 7:

- * Interpreters ensure that the working conditions are suitable for interpreting.

The interpreter should make sure that a working space which enables interpreting is available. The interpreter will agree on the place where he or she will stand or sit during the interpreting transaction. The interpreter should have unrestricted visual contact with the people he or she is interpreting for. The acoustic conditions should be such that audibility is not impaired and the interpreter can hear all the speakers. If necessary, sound reproduction equipment should be used. In remote interpreting (e.g. phone, video-conference or videophone) one must make sure that the conditions for interpreting are as favourable as possible.

The interpreter should choose such a place that his or her safety at work is guaranteed and that there is no health risk. What is meant by risk here is aggressive clients and exposure to hazardous chemicals or infectious diseases. Other factors diminishing safety at work are noise, tobacco smoke and other such hazards. The interpreter has the right to protect oneself from the aforesaid risks or decline to take part in the interpreting situation, unless the interpreting conditions can be altered to suit the interpreting situation.

The interpreter has the right to work uninterrupted. Interpreting requires full concentration. The interpreter's concentration is disturbed by movement or background noise (e.g. radio, traffic noises from an open window).

During long interpreting transactions, the interpreter has the right to rest. The interpreter's work strain depends on the situation. Uninterrupted interpreting for more than one hour is not recommended. It is good to agree on the breaks beforehand. During the breaks, the interpreter should have a chance to relax and prepare for the next part of the interpreting situation. The best place for an interpreter to rest is in a separate resting area or a lounge.

Paragraph 8:

- * Interpreters draft written contracts on interpreting assignments beforehand and pay attention primarily to the recommendations given by the unions. If a written contract cannot be made, the interpreter and the commissioner may make an oral contract.

It is recommended that a written contract is always drafted for each assignment. When making the contract, one should especially take into consideration each union's recommendations, as they contain the minimum criteria the interpreter and commissioner should agree on. Such criteria are the overall length of the interpreting situation and the necessary breaks. When there is written documentation of the assignment (a contract), it is, at any given time, easy to check what was agreed on.

If a written contract cannot be made due to the urgency of the assignment or for some other reasons, it is possible to make an oral agreement. It is important, however, for the interpreter and the commissioner always to agree on the details of the interpreting situation as exactly as possible, either orally or in writing. If the contract is made orally, it is good for the interpreter to make notes on the agreed matters.

When the interpreter is accepting the assignment, he or she should evaluate whether the assignment can be realised with the planned number of interpreters. Interpreting situations vary greatly; nevertheless, what is common to all situations is the fact that they always require complete concentration from the interpreter. In many consecutive interpreting situations only one interpreter is enough, but sometimes either the nature or the length of the situation requires two or more interpreters.

The recording of the interpreting situation and the further use of the recording is to be agreed on beforehand.

Paragraph 9:

- * Interpreters prepare for the assignments carefully and in time.

Preparing means that the interpreter familiarises oneself with the topic and the

vocabulary of the interpreting topic in both languages and finds translation equivalents for the terms to be used in the transaction. It is particularly important to prepare beforehand if a special field interpreting transaction is in question.

The interpreter must prepare for the transaction beforehand in order to reach the goal of the interpreter's work, that is, to convey a message and enable linguistic equality between parties. Before the interpreting situation begins, the interpreter must know what the topic, exact location and time of the interpreting situation are, and who the commissioner and the user of the service (if other than the commissioner) are, and their contact information so that the interpreter may contact them if he or she needs further information. It is in the best interests of both the commissioner and the client (see: L812, Chapter I, Section 1) that the interpreter prepares for the interpreting situation. The interpreter should be provided with as much information and material related to the transaction as possible. The schedule for delivering the information to the interpreter should be agreed on together with the commissioner. Preparing well for the situation ensures the quality of the transaction.

The interpreter will not accept an assignment for which he or she cannot properly prepare. Refusing to accept the assignment in this case shows that the interpreter knows his or her limitations. The interpreter will only accept the kind of an assignment the interpreter can handle, that is, to appropriately convey the message.

If the interpreter has not been able to prepare for the interpreting situation beforehand due to the lack of material, the interpreter has the right to look into the matter and required terminology during the transaction, which will naturally prolong the length of the interpreting situation.

The interpreter may also look for further information in leaflets from offices or agencies, the Internet, glossaries and court documents.

Paragraph 10:

Interpreters aim at comprehensive interpreting and do not leave out anything or add anything irrelevant.

- * An interpreter's task is to convey both linguistic and culturally bound non-linguistic messages as comprehensively as possible while the contents are left unchanged. If the interpreter cannot find an equivalent for proverbs, figures of speech, rare terms, abbreviations, etc., or if there are no counterparts for them in the target language, the interpreter asks the speaker to clarify his/her message and informs the listener about this. However, interpreters do not explain anything on their own initiative on behalf of either one of the persons representing the interpreter's working languages.

Before the commencement of the interpreting assignment, the interpreter agrees with the participants that they will speak in turns and for such periods of time that the interpreter will be able to interpret comprehensively. If the accuracy in conveying the message suffers due to the overlapping or the length of the speaking turns, the interpreter should interrupt the conversation to get an interpreting turn.

Paragraph 11:

Interpreters are impartial, remain outsiders to the situation, and do not let their personal attitudes or opinions affect their work.

- * When accepting an assignment, as well as during and after the assignment, interpreters have to function impartially in order to achieve good and confidential relations with their clients.

Interpreter's impartiality means that interpreters' personal opinions or attitudes do not affect the quality of their work. If the matters discussed in an interpreted situation are against the interpreter's own morals or ethics, the interpreter does not let this show through gestures, tone of voice, or word choices.

If the interpreter, prior to the assignment, knows that he or she cannot remain an outsider to the situation or impartial in relation to the topic or the persons that are being interpreted, the interpreter should refuse to accept the assignment. If, for instance, the topic that is to be interpreted generates such deep feelings of hatred, disgust, empathy, etc. that they might reflect in the interpreting output, the interpreter should refuse

to accept the assignment or quit an assignment already begun.

When interpreting, the interpreters function as message conveyors and do not take a stance on the topic under discussion. However, the interpreter is one of the parties of the communicative situation, and thus his or her presence affects the situation.

Paragraph 12:

- * Interpreters do not function as assistants or representatives to the persons they interpret for.

An interpreter's responsibility is to convey the message. Interpreters do not give advice or guidance about the transactions to the persons that are being interpreted.

Paragraph 13:

- * During assignments, interpreters are not obligated to take care of any other tasks besides interpreting.

In an interpreting situation, the interpreter's task is to convey the message in order to achieve linguistic equality between the persons that are being interpreted. Interpreters' tasks do not include transporting or accompanying the clients or filling in forms for them. Written tasks, such as translations, are always to be negotiated separately (see attachment: Recommendations).

Interpreters convey messages in interpreting situations only; outside the interpreting situation, they do not discuss the matters brought up in the interpreted discussion.

Paragraph 14:

- * Interpreters show consideration for the nature of the situation through their conduct in connection with assignments.

Prior to the assignments, interpreters find out about the nature of the interpreting situation in order to adjust their performance and dress to the occasion.

Different interpreting situations require different type of conduct. Interpreters adjust their conduct to the cultures present in the situation. Interpreters' conduct is not to interfere with the

fluency of the situation; flexibility and situational awareness are needed.

Interpreters dress according to the cultural aspects as well as other circumstances (e.g. the weather when interpreting outdoors) of the assignment. Moreover, interpreters have to dress according to the situation in order not to attract unnecessary attention.

Paragraph 15:

- * Interpreters improve their professional skills continually.

In addition to good language and interpreting skills, professional interpreting skills include a command of interpreting techniques and a broad knowledge of general subjects. Interpreters are to practice and develop these skills actively.

Languages change and develop with the changes in society. Interpreters develop their language skills by following the media and cultural life of their working languages and by taking part in training opportunities offered in their working languages. Interpreters also do continuous terminology work (including new terms and their counterparts).

Interpreters develop their interpreting skills by taking part in training offered to interpreters. Interpreting skills can also be developed independently (or together with colleagues) by studying one's own interpreting output with the help of feedback.

Interpreters recognize their personal limits. They take care of their psychological and physical well-being in order to maintain their working capacity and to assure the quality of their work.