



***THE TERMINOLOGY
OF HEALTH CARE INTERPRETING
A glossary of terms***

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Introduction

Health Care Interpreting is an emerging profession in the United States. This glossary defines commonly used terms from the language industry as they are used in the interpreting profession today. Terms and definitions were collected from many sources. The NCIHC gratefully acknowledges the contributions of those sources, particularly ASTM International. The goal is to provide the end user of interpreting services and professionals in the field with the vocabulary necessary to engage in meaningful dialogue. It is our hope that such dialogue will contribute to the advancement of culturally competent professional health care interpreting and equal access to health care for individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP).

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS RELATED TO INTERPRETING IN HEALTH CARE

“A” language	a language in which the interpreter has native proficiency in speaking and listening [ASTM]. See “B” language .
accreditation	a term usually referring to the recognition of educational institutions or training programs as meeting and maintaining standards that then qualify its graduates for professional practice. See certified interpreter .
ad hoc interpreter	an untrained person who is called upon to interpret, such as a family member interpreting for her parents, a bilingual staff member pulled away from other duties to interpret, or a self-declared bilingual in a hospital waiting-room who volunteers to interpret. Also called a <i>chance interpreter</i> or <i>lay interpreter</i> . See certified interpreter, qualified interpreter .
advocacy	any action taken (by an interpreter) on behalf of an individual that goes beyond facilitating communication, with the intention of supporting good health outcomes. In general, advocacy means that a third party (in this case, the interpreter) speaks for or pleads the cause of another party, thereby departing from an impartial role. See transparency .
advocate	a person who acts to further the interests of another party. When taking an advocacy role, the interpreter may speak in their own voice in order to “plead a cause” or attempt to “right a wrong”
“B” language	a language in which the interpreter has full functional proficiency in speaking and listening [ASTM]. See “A” language .
back translation	translation of translated document back into the original language. Often used to check the accuracy of the original translation, although professional translators do not use this process to check the accuracy of a translation.
bi-directional interpreting	interpreting between two languages where each functions as both a source and target language
bilingual	a term describing a person who has some degree of proficiency in two languages. A high level of bilingualism is the most basic of the qualifications of a competent interpreter but by itself does not insure the ability to interpret.
bilingual provider	a person with proficiency in more than one language, enabling the person to provide services directly to limited-English-proficient patients in their non-English language
bilingual worker / employee	an employee who is a proficient speaker of two languages and may provide direct services in both languages, but who without additional training is not qualified to serve as an interpreter
certificate	a document, such as a certificate of attendance or completion, that attests to participation in a course of study and attainment of some

learning objective. A person who holds a certificate related to interpreter training is not thereby **certified**. See **certification**, **certified interpreter**.

- certification** a process by which a certifying body (usually a governmental or professional organization) attests to or certifies that an individual is qualified to provide a particular service. Certification calls for formal assessment, using an instrument that has been tested for validity and reliability, so that the certifying body can be confident that the individuals it certifies have the qualifications needed to do the job. See **certified interpreter**.
- certified interpreter** an **interpreter** who is certified as competent by a professional organization or government entity through rigorous testing based on appropriate and consistent criteria. Interpreters who have had limited training or have taken a screening test administered by an employing health, interpreter or referral agency are not considered certified. See **ad hoc interpreter**; **qualified interpreter**.
- community interpreting** interpreting that takes place in the course of communication in the local community among speakers of different languages. The community interpreter may or may not be a trained interpreter. Community settings include schools, social service agencies, clinics, legal services, and businesses that serve a diverse clientele. See **qualified interpreter**.
- consecutive interpreting** the conversion of a speaker or signer's message into another language after the speaker or signer pauses, in a specific social context [ASTM]. See **simultaneous interpreting**.
- cultural and linguistic competence** a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enables effective work in cross-cultural situations. 'Culture' refers to integrated patterns of human behavior that include the language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups. 'Competence' implies having the capacity to function effectively as an individual and an organization within the context of the cultural beliefs, behaviors, and needs presented by consumers and their communities. (CLAS Standards, adapted from Cross, 1989)
- cultural broker(ing)** any action taken by the interpreter that provides cultural information in addition to linguistic interpretation of the message given. See **transparency**.
- cultural consultant** a person with the ability and experience to conduct training for health care providers on how to provide culturally sensitive care to their ethnically diverse patient population
- dual-role interpreter** a bilingual employee in health care who has been tested for language skills, trained as a medical interpreter and assumes the task of part-time medical interpreting willingly. See **ad hoc interpreter**.

face-to-face interpreting	interpreting in which the interpreter is present in person with both, or at least one, of the persons for whom interpreting is provided. See remote interpreting, telephonic interpreting .
first-person interpreting	the promotion by the interpreter of direct communication between the principal parties in the interaction through the use of direct utterances of each of the speakers, as though the interpreter were the voice of the person speaking, albeit in the language of the listener. For example, if the patient says, “My stomach hurts,” the interpreter says (in the second language), “My stomach hurts,” and not “She says her stomach hurts.”
health care interpreting	interpreting that takes place in health care settings of any sort, including doctor’s offices, clinics, hospitals, home health visits, mental health clinics, and public health presentations. Typically the setting is an interview between a health care provider (doctor, nurse, lab technician) and a patient (or the patient and one or more family members). See medical interpreting .
interpreter	a person who renders a message spoken or signed in one language into a second language, and who abides by a code of professional ethics. See ad hoc interpreter, certified interpreter, qualified interpreter .
interpreting	(noun) the process of understanding and analyzing a spoken or signed message and re-expressing that message faithfully, accurately and objectively in another language, taking the cultural and social context into account [ASTM] The purpose of interpreting is to enable communication between two or more individuals who do not speak each other’s languages. (adjective) concerning or involved with interpreting. Examples: <i>interpreting services, interpreting issues</i> .
interpreting assignment	a period of time during which an interpreter performs his or her duties. An interpreting assignment may involve multiple encounters with patients and providers.
interpretation	See interpreting . While the two words have the same meaning in the context of oral/signed communication, the term <i>interpreting</i> is preferred, because it emphasizes process rather than product and because the word <i>interpretation</i> has so many other uses outside the field of translation and interpreting.
interpreting services	services that provide an interpreter to facilitate communication between an English-speaking provider and a patient/client/resident who has limited English proficiency or is deaf/hard of hearing. An interpreter is a person who renders a message spoken or signed in one language into one or more languages. Unlike translation, which works only with written text, interpreting works only with spoken or signed communication.
interpretive	See interpreting . Like the word <i>interpretation</i> , <i>interpretive</i> has many meanings and is often unclear when used in the context of oral/signed communication. It is preferable to use <i>interpreting</i> as an adjective, e.g. <i>interpreting services, interpreting issues</i> .

language combination	the set of working languages of an individual interpreter [ASTM]. An interpreter may be able to interpret both <i>into</i> and <i>out of</i> some languages but only interpret out of one or more others because of more limited productive skills in those languages. See source language, target language .
language pair	the two languages that serve as source and target languages for an individual interpreter in a particular encounter
licensed	having official permission or authority to perform some professional role, such as interpreting
licensure	the process of obtaining an official license or authorization to perform a particular job. A mandatory process by which a governmental agency grants time-limited permission to an individual to engage in a given occupation after verifying that he/she has met predetermined and standardized criteria [NOCA].
limited English proficiency (LEP)	a legal concept referring to a level of English proficiency that is insufficient to ensure equal access to public services provided in English without an interpreter [ASTM] This is a term used in the Policy Guidance of August 29, 2000 published in the Federal Register, by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) of the US Department of Health and Human Services.
literal translation	a form of rough translation in which every word or word-element is translated in sequence without regard to how the message would normally be expressed in the other language, giving insight into the workings of the source language. Example: (<i>French</i>) “ <i>Il y avait beaucoup de gens,</i> ” literally “It there had many of people,” which means “There were lots of people (there).” Literal interpreting is not considered useful or part of professional interpreting; literal translations (written) are sometimes useful for analysis of the source text, but are not suitable when the aim is to assist communication.
machine translation	translation that is accomplished by entering text in one language into a computer software program and obtaining a computer generated translation in a second language. Machine or computer translation programs have difficulties recognizing idioms, context, regional differences and metaphorical language and tend toward literal translation.
medical interpreting	interpreting that takes place in medical settings. See health care interpreting .
multi-lingual	a term used to describe a person who has some degree of proficiency in two or more languages. A high level of bilingualism is the most basic of the qualifications of a competent interpreter, but by itself does not insure the ability to interpret.
national origin discrimination	violation of the ‘national origin’ clause of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which states that “no person in the United States shall, on grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, or be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal

assistance.” The OCR Guidance Memorandum of August 2001 (DHHS) details how national origin discrimination may be avoided through the use of qualified interpreters.

on-site interpreting	interpreting done by an interpreter who is directly in the presence of the speakers. Also called <i>face-to-face interpreting</i> . See remote interpreting, telephone interpreting .
parties	individuals present during an interpreted encounter
pre-session	a short discussion, held prior to the interpreted session, between the interpreter and the service provider or between the interpreter and the limited-English-proficient patient. With a patient, the pre-session serves to introduce the interpreter, establish rapport, inform the patient as to how the interpreter will work, and allow the interpreter to assure that (s)he can understand the patient’s speech. With a provider, the pre-session serves to introduce the interpreter, establish a collegial relationship, inform the provider as to how the interpreter will work, and provide the opportunity for the provider to share any information about the upcoming session that might be helpful to the interpreter. Depending on the context and the time available, pre-sessions can be as short as 30 seconds or as long as 15 minutes.
proficiency	the quality or level of a skill or competence acquired through training and practice
proficient	exhibiting a level of competence characterized by facility and correctness in performing a skill such as speaking a non-native language or interpreting
professional interpreter	those who abide by a code of professional ethics
qualified interpreter	an individual who has been assessed for professional skills, demonstrates a high level of proficiency in at least two languages and has the appropriate training and experience to interpret with skill and accuracy while adhering to the National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice published by the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care. See interpreter; ad hoc interpreter .
register	a style of speaking or writing (intimate, casual, vulgar, formal, etc.) or a way of communicating associated with a particular occupation or social group (slang, criminal argot, medical jargon, business jargon, legal language, etc.). Interpreters are generally expected to maintain the register of the person whose utterances they are interpreting.
registration	the governmental process by which a governmental agency grants a time-limited status on a registry, determined by specified knowledge-based requirements (e.g., experience, education, examinations), thereby authorizing those individuals to practice, similar to licensure [NOCA—one of three basic meanings]
relay interpreting	an interpreting process in which two individuals attempting a conversation communicate through two interpreters, each of whom speaks only one of the two languages required as well as a common

third language. Examples of this would be interpreting Quechua into Spanish, which in turn is interpreted into English or interpreting an idiosyncratic sign language into ASL and then into English.

remote interpreting	interpreting provided by an interpreter who is not in the presence of the speakers , e.g., interpreting via telephone or videoconferencing [ASTM]. See telephone interpreting, video interpreting, on-site interpreting.
sight translation	translation of a written document into spoken/signed language [ASTM]. An interpreter reads a document written in one language and simultaneously interprets it into a second language.
simultaneous interpreting	converting a speaker or signer’s message into another language while the speaker or signer continues to speak or sign. See consecutive interpreting.
sign(ed) language	a language expressed through hand gestures, facial expressions, and body movements used by people who are deaf or hard of hearing and for communication between hearing people and deaf or hard of hearing people
source language	the language of a speaker/signer who is being interpreted [ASTM]. See target language.
summarizing	a limited interpretation that excludes all or most details focusing only on the principal points of the interpreted speech — not a full interpretation
summary interpretation	See summarizing.
target language	the language of the person receiving interpretation [ASTM]; the language into which an interpreter is interpreting at any given moment. See source language.
telephone interpreting	interpreting carried out remotely, with the interpreter connected by telephone to the principal parties, typically provided through a speaker-phone or headsets. In health care settings, the principal parties, e.g., doctor and patient, are normally in the same room, but telephone interpreting can be used to serve individuals who are also connected to each other only by telephone. See remote interpreting.
translation	the conversion of a written text into a corresponding written text in a different language. Within the language professions, translation is distinguished from interpreting according to whether the message is produced <i>orally</i> (or manually) or <i>in writing</i> . In popular usage, the terms “translator” and “translation” are frequently used for conversion of either oral or written communications.
translation services	services that provide <i>translation</i> of written documents into other languages. See translation, translator.
translator	a person who translates written texts, especially one who does so professionally. See translation, interpreter.

transparency	the principle that everything that is said by any party in an interpreted conversation should be rendered in the other language, so that everything said can be heard and understood by everyone present. Whenever the interpreter has reason to enter into a conversation by speaking directly to either party in either language, the interpreter must subsequently interpret both his/her own speech and that of the party spoken to, for the benefit of those present who do not understand the language used. Transparency is maintained when everything said by any party present, including the interpreter speaking for him/herself, is interpreted into a language that others present can understand.
treating team	all health care providers involved in the care of a particular patient within a single facility
TTY relay	a service enabling telephone communication between TTY/TDD customers (who are usually deaf or hard of hearing) and hearing people
unidirectional interpreting	interpreting from only one source language (usually found in conference interpreting)
video conferencing	remote conference utilizing televideo technology. See remote interpreting, video interpreting .
video interpreting	interpreting carried out remotely, using a video camera that enables an interpreter in a remote location to both see and hear the parties for whom he/she is interpreting via a TV monitor. The interpretation is relayed to the principal parties by speakerphone or through headsets. Two-way interactive television can also be used, so that the other parties can interact with the interpreter as if face-to-face. See remote interpreting .
working language	a language an interpreter uses professionally [ASTM]; a language into and/or out of which an interpreter interprets. See language combination .

Some definitions (marked [ASTM]) have been borrowed or adapted from the ASTM *Standard Guide for Language Interpretation Services* (F 2089-01 (reapproved 2007)). For information on obtaining this document, contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org or go to the ASTM web site, <http://www.astm.org>.

Some definitions (marked [NOCA]) have been taken from the NOCA *Guide to Understanding Credentialing Concepts, 2005*. This document can be downloaded from the NOCA website, <http://www.noca.org/Resources/Publications/tabid/77/Default.aspx>.

COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS

ACTFL	The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
ASTM	ASTM International
ATA	The American Translators Association
CAL	The Center for Applied Linguistics
CHIA	The California Healthcare Interpreters Association
CIT	The Conference of Interpreter Trainers
DHHS	The federal Department of Health and Human Services
IMIA	The International Medical Interpreters Association (formerly MMIA)
LTI	Language Testing International
MMIA	The Massachusetts Medical Interpreters Association (See IMIA)
MAMI of CNY	The Multicultural Association of Medical Interpreters of Central New York
NCIHC	The National Council on Interpreting in Health Care
NOCA	National Organization for Competency Assurance
OCR	The Office for Civil Rights (DHHS)
OMH	The Office of Minority Health (DHHS)
PALS	Pacific Asian Language Services
MING	The Medical Interpreter Network of Georgia
SOMI	The Society of Medical Interpreters