

Notes on:
INTERPRETING BY INTERPRETERS & INTERPRETING BY NON-ACCREDITED BILINGUALS
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What is Interpreting?

Within a linguistic context,

1. **Gentile, Ozolins & Vasilakakos, Liaison Interpreting – A Handbook, pg 5, define interpreting as:**

“The oral transfer of messages between speakers of different languages...”;

2. **Pöchacker’s definition [see S. Hale, Community Interpreting, pg 5] of interpreting:**

“Interpreting is a form of Translation in which a first and final rendition in another language is produced on the basis of a one-time presentation of an utterance in a source language.” ; and

3. **S. Hale’s [see S. Hale, Community Interpreting, pg 3] definition of interpreting:**

*“... A number of authors have provided different definitions of translation as a **conversion process from one language to another, in either the written or the spoken mode**. More specifically, **Interpreting refers to the translation of the spoken word and Translation to the translation of the written word.**”*

4. **AUSIT brochure: Interpreting – Getting it right**

“The act of providing spoken [or signed] versions in one language that convey, in another language, the content and intentions of the statements by a speaker.”

Why are these definitions relevant?

Because, by association, when a person is ‘conveying something’ said in one language by one person (party) to another person (party) in another language, **the act of interpreting** is indeed, happening.

- a) If the person in question is accredited and adequately credentialed, s/he will be able and empowered to deliver interpreting services according to a certain standard, which includes taking into account a set of behaviours as prescribed by Codes of Ethics of the interpreting profession (expected and accepted worldwide).
- b) If a person is not accredited or trained, even if that person is a good bilingual, they will be interpreting in the best manner they know how to, which may not be what the community expects or to the appropriate standard, including important ethical considerations, as foreshadowed in a).

However, if something went wrong as a result of the 'interpretation' scenarios above, both persons (interpreter and bilingual) could be found negligent and thus legally liable – whether they were a qualified interpreter or not.

In other words, anyone engaged in the act of interpreting, should be aware of: a) the expected standards and ethical principles expected from them and, b) their boundaries and limitations, which will be defined according to the complexity, context, requirements of the interpreting setting and the messages needed to be conveyed.

When is a person NOT interpreting?

Basically, when the communication between persons (parties) is taking place in the same language and **only** in that common language. For example: a bilingual support worker speaking a Language Other than English (LOTE) to a person who also speaks that language and showing them how to take public transport to TAFE, how to take their children to school, where to buy a Go-Card, all the while speaking the same LOTE.

The assistance provided by bilingual support workers in the above fashion is a most valuable service, it can mean the difference for recently arrived CALD community members to settle less stressfully in Australia, as they are shown essential processes and systems in our society in a language they are familiar with.

In other words:

The conundrum is not really about 'who' is an interpreter and who isn't, but 'whether' a person at any given time IS delivering interpreting services (dealing in two different languages) or NOT (dealing in one language only).

If the person is delivering 'interpreting' according to the definitions above, there are many considerations to be taken into account, including:

- It may seem easy, but **interpreting** is not an easy task. Many cognitive skills come into play and not all bilingual people can engage in interpreting adequately, especially without training;
- In Latin America, Europe, Japan and China, interpreters working at an equivalent level of community interpreting as we do in Australia, need to study a full-time 4 to 5 year degree course at a tertiary institution;
- Australia, being the recipient of refugees and migrants from everywhere, has waived this educational requirement *somewhat*, as it would be near impossible for every interpreter to comply with this, and our universities and TAFEs are not prepared to offer degrees in all the languages spoken (and needed by the linguistically and culturally diverse communities) in Australia,
- That's why NAATI (National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters) was created, to provide testing for those aspiring to be interpreters. This at least gives the recipients of interpreting services some idea of the tested skills of NAATI accredited or recognised interpreters and a minimum benchmark of competence and accuracy.

- Sometimes bilingual workers do indeed perform 'interpreting', whether they are accredited or not to do it;
- Ideally only accredited interpreters should be doing this work, because of the knowledge and skills required and the professional ethical obligations involved, which take years of specific training and experience to learn and to apply, and because they would have the appropriate Professional Indemnity Insurance (and in some cases Public Liability Insurance), to protect them and their employers/agencies in case of litigation;
- However, cost and sometimes convenience propel bilingual non-interpreters to act as interpreters;
- Sometimes the risk of providing interpreting without the minimum credentialing requirements is lower than at other times, for example, when the content of messages to be exchanged is very simple. However, it is very difficult to ascertain when any content of any exchange will be **and remain** simple throughout the exchange. The risk will always be there as parties cannot be assured that what they have said has been accurately rendered into the other language;
- Staff from NGOs, settlement agencies and others, and bilingual workers themselves should be empowered to know the difference in complexity and risk of different interpreting contexts; and
- Decline to undertake any interpreting tasks that go beyond a simple conversation, without prejudice to or belittlement of the bilingual worker; as
- Anyone who engages in interpreting, whether they have accreditation or not, may be subject to legal liability, as mentioned above .

In summary, whoever is providing interpreting services should:

- Be empowered to decline requests for doing interpreting jobs that may put them and their clients at risk;
- Endeavour to sit and pass the required NAATI tests (or Recognition, if available in their language) to obtain a credential for their skills in interpreting;
- Be aware of at least the '*dos and don'ts*' of interpreting to minimise risk to all parties involved; and
- Seek or be provided training to ensure the appropriateness and suitability of the services they deliver.