

Interpreter's Digest

April 2009

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Great Pass Rate for the February 2009 Written Exam!

There were twenty-one individuals that took the last written exam on February 19 and 20, 2009. Of those, eighteen passed. That is a pass rate of 85%! Congratulations to the Workshop providers and to the test takers!

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The All English Practice Examination Kit is now available from the National Center for State Courts. You can find this at the following website:

http://www.ncsconline.org/D_Research/CIPEK-ENG.asp

You can order ONE copy of the kit online (and pay via a shopping cart using Visa or MasterCard). If you want to order more than one copy, there is a form provided that must be filled out and mailed or faxed. Payment for multiple orders can be made by MasterCard, Visa, or money order.





Newly Credentialed Interpreters

The Tennessee Court Interpreter Program is pleased to announce our newly credentialed interpreters as of January 2009: Registered Spanish Interpreters: Daniel Chapman, Mercedes

Peralta, Alba Ponce, Kurtis Snyder, Felix Valdes, Irma Rose Venegas, Wendy Willis, and Randall Wittig. Congratulations to all!

Transcription and Translation of Forensic Recordings: Not for the Faint of Heart

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As court interpreters many of you have undoubtedly watched with some anxiety while a zealous attorney tries to strip an expert witness of his or her credibility – you may even have thought, “What if that were me? Would I be able to keep my composure under a grilling like that?”

The field of Forensic Transcription and Translation (“TT”) could, in fact, put you into exactly that position. If you have been asked to transcribe and translate an evidentiary recording, will you know what to do when you are put on the stand to defend your product? This is just one of the questions you must ask yourself before accepting such a task.

More and more often we are seeing taped or digitally recorded evidence being brought into court, and more and more often this evidence contains foreign language speech. When law enforcement officers record interpreted interrogations and statements, when undercover recordings are made during drug deals among non-English speakers, when telephones are tapped and foreign language conversations are recorded, the resulting recordings cannot be

understood by English-speaking litigants and juries and therefore their content must be presented in the form of a translated transcript in order to be admitted into evidence.

It is common for attorneys and judges to assume that a person trained in court interpreting should be able to “interpret” the content of a recording in court, on the spot, with no particular preparation or specialized equipment -- yet nothing could be further from the truth! The transcription and translation of forensic material can take up to one hour of an expert’s work for each minute of recorded conversation (even more if the recording is particularly bad as in the case of body wires). Given the challenges involved, any attempt to give an “on-the-spot” interpretation of recorded foreign language content cannot hope to be more than guesswork and evidence obviously must rise to a higher standard than mere “guesswork”.

Thus the first hurdle to be faced is that of convincing lawyers, judges and/or law enforcement agencies that (1) the onsite, simultaneous interpretation of a recording cannot be done, (2) a thorough and accurate written transcript of the recording’s contents must be made and (3) only then can a written English translation of such content be attempted after

appropriate terminology research efforts have been carried out. (Support for this position can be found in the NAJIT publication “Onsite Simultaneous Interpretation of a Soundfile is not Recommended” available for downloading at [Onsite Simultaneous Interpretation of a Soundfile is not Recommended](#).)

Moreover, the work of transcribing and translating foreign language recordings is a specialized field involving very specific formats, procedures and protocols that must be learned and practiced. Without such knowledge and training, the TT product could be flawed in ways that ultimately serve to jeopardize the outcome of a case. Training courses for Transcription and Translation work are scarce but Tennessee court interpreters have been afforded unique opportunities through TAPIT, which sponsored such a course in 2009 during the January Martin Luther King Holiday. It will be for 3 days during the same holiday, next year, January 16-18, 2010, in Nashville. Interested persons should check periodically on the TAPIT website (www.tapit.org) for future workshops. NAJIT is another source for information in the field of forensic transcription and translation (www.najit.org) and last but not least, there is always the possibility of seeking out people who have long years of experience in this field for their advice and mentoring.

In Tennessee, it is likely that agencies and persons seeking transcription/translation of forensic materials will continue to request such services from the state’s growing pool of credentialed court interpreters, not knowing that there is nothing in the current court interpreter training or



testing program that prepares interpreters for this task. It is important that we all be prepared to inform judges, attorneys and law enforcement personnel that TT is very specialized field – one

which requires specific training, skills, knowledge and experience.

Before accepting TT assignments, court interpreters should ask themselves: “Do I have the requisite knowledge and experience to do this project? Am I familiar with the correct protocols and procedures? Do I know how to make my TT product as “bullet-proof” as possible so I can properly defend it on the stand?” If the answer to any of these questions is “No”, the interpreter should refuse the assignment – BUT... then he or she should do everything possible to train and learn and practice so that at the next opportunity, the answers can be “Yes”! Only in this way can we be sure that the justice system is being well served.



Upcoming Written Exam, Spanish Oral Exam and LOS Oral Exam

Registration forms are available on the AOC website at www.tncourts.gov to register for upcoming May written exam (space is only available for May 21, 2009), and June Spanish oral exam.

To register, please follow the steps listed below:

- 1) Select Programs and Services
- 2) Click on Court Interpreters
- 3) Scroll down and select the exam and date under Registration Forms and Information
- 4) Submit registration form

Please note that the deadlines are coming up quickly for the registrations!

Interpreter Availability

Reminder - Effective immediately, if you are no longer available to interpret in court due to temporary or permanent circumstances, please notify the AOC of your availability. When selecting interpreters, court personnel will be able to identify those that are available and contact them for upcoming cases.

ID Badge Usage

Don't forget – you need to use your interpreter badge – let everyone know you are credentialed! Remember, if you are in need of a photo id, and find it difficult to stop by the AOC, you may send us a scanned photo image along with a copy of your driver's license and your badge will be mailed to you.

Abbreviated Exams in Additional Languages

The National Consortium of State Court Interpreters (which the AOC belongs to and it is

the Consortium that provides the interpreter exams for the state members) has developed abbreviated models of oral examinations in the following languages: Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Chuukese, and Turkish. The Consortium is in the process of developing abbreviated exams for Hindi, Marshallese, and Panjabi-Eastern.



AOC Update

The Tennessee Municipal Court Clerks' conference recently held in April had a session on interpreter issues as presented by Rex Barton of Municipal Technical Assistance Service. The AOC will also be presenting an interpreter session at the Tennessee Court Clerks' Conference in May and June. The session will provide information about the credentialing process and the Court Rules.

The AOC continues to have quarterly meetings with members of TAPIT (Tennessee Association of Professional Interpreters and Translators) concerning interpreter issues. If you have any issues you would like discussed during these sessions or are interested in being involved in these discussions, please contact Mary Rose Zingale at Mary.Rose.Zingale@tncourts.gov

