

Canon 1. Accuracy and Completeness

Interpreters shall render a complete and accurate interpretation or sight translation, without altering, omitting, or adding anything to the meaning of what is stated or written, and without explanation.

(Added effective January 1, 1996.)

Commentary

The interpreter has a twofold duty:

1) to ensure that the proceedings reflect in English precisely what was said by a non-English speaking person, and

2) to place the non-English speaking person on an equal footing with those who understand English.

This creates an obligation to conserve every element of information contained in a source language communication when it is rendered in the target language.

Therefore interpreters are obligated to apply their best skills and judgment to faithfully preserve the meaning of what is said in court, including the style or register of speech. Verbatim, "word for word" or literal oral interpretations are not appropriate when they distort the meaning of what was said in the source language, but every spoken statement, even if it appears non-responsive, obscene, rambling, or incoherent should be interpreted. This includes apparent misstatements.

Interpreters should never interject any statement or elaboration of their own. If the need arises to explain an interpreting problem (e.g. a term or phrase with no direct equivalent in the target language or a misunderstanding that only the interpreter can clarify), the interpreter should ask the court's permission to provide an explanation. Spoken language interpreters should convey the emotional emphasis of the speaker without reenacting or mimicking the speaker's emotions, or dramatic gestures. Sign language interpreters, however, must employ all of the visual cues that the language they are interpreting for requires -- including facial expressions and body language, in addition to hand gestures. Judges, therefore, should ensure that court participants do not confuse these essential elements of the interpreted language with inappropriate interpreter conduct. Any challenge to the interpreter's conduct should be directed to the judge.

The obligation to preserve accuracy includes the interpreter's duty to correct any errors of interpretation discovered by the interpreter during the proceeding. Interpreters should demonstrate their professionalism by objectively analyzing any challenge to their performance.

The ethical responsibility to accurately and completely interpret includes the responsibility of being properly prepared for interpreting assignments. Interpreters are encouraged to obtain documents and other information necessary to familiarize themselves with the nature and purpose of a proceeding. Prior preparation is especially required when testimony or documents include highly specialized terminology and subject matter.