
Lingua Franca

A FIELD GUIDE TO TERMS & PHRASES USED
IN THE LANGUAGE SERVICES PROFESSION



LUNA | Language
Services

OVERVIEW

To assist in better understanding some of the terminology used in the language services field, this short guide defines some of the most commonly used words and phrases.

DEFINITIONS

Effective Communication

“Effective communication” means that the written or spoken word must be as clear and understandable to people with disabilities (including the Deaf and hard of hearing) as it is for people without disabilities.

Interpretation

Interpretation is the act of listening to the spoken word in one language (the source language) and orally converting it to another language (the target language) while retaining meaning and cultural context.

Modes of Interpretation

Modes of interpretation include **on-site** (or in-person), **telephonic**, and **video remote** (VRI). **Consecutive interpretation** is a mode of interpreting performed *after* the source-language speaker or signer pauses. **Simultaneous interpretation**, on the other hand, is a mode of interpreting performed while the source-language speaker is still speaking or signing. Simultaneous interpretation may require the use of special equipment, such as headsets or interpreter booths. Because fatigue is a factor in this type of interpreting, it is often performed in teams.

Performed simultaneously or consecutively, **escort interpretation** is when a qualified interpreter accompanies a person or delegation on a visit, tour, meeting, or interview.

Community interpretation is a mode of interpreting often used to facilitate social service access in language minority communities. This mode can encompass work in legal, education, health, housing, social security and other service areas.

Finally, **voiceover interpreting**, sometime referred to as “dubbing,” is a technique that records the voice of an interpreter over the original audio track. This method of

interpreting is often used for films in lieu of subtitling.

LEP Persons

Limited English proficient, or LEP, persons are individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English. LEP individuals may be competent in English for certain types of communication (e.g., speaking or understanding), but still LEP for other purposes (e.g., reading or writing).

Meaningful Access

Language assistance that results in *accurate, timely, and effective* communication with the LEP individual. For LEP individuals, meaningful access denotes access that is not significantly restricted, delayed, or inferior as compared to programs or activities provided to English proficient individuals.¹

Qualified Interpreter

For individuals with either limited English proficiency or who are Deaf or hard of hearing, a **qualified interpreter** is an interpreter who via remote service or on-site appearance (1) adheres to generally-accepted professional ethics principles, including client confidentiality; (2) demonstrates proficiency in speaking and understanding both spoken English and at least one other spoken or signed language; and (3) interprets effectively, accurately, and impartially to and from the source and target languages using specialized vocabulary as necessary.

Qualified Translator

A qualified translator means a translator who (1) adheres to generally-accepted professional ethics principles, including client confidentiality; (2) demonstrates proficiency in writing and understanding both written English and at least one other written language; and (3) translates effectively, accurately, and impartially to and from the source and target languages using specialized vocabulary as necessary.

¹ See Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons, 67 Fed. Reg. 41,456 (June 18, 2002).

Transcription

Transcription is the rendering of spoken word, audio, or video from a source language into a written transcript in either the original source language or a new target language (translation-transcription).

Translation

Translation is the replacement of written text from one language (the source language) into an equivalent written text in another language (the target language).

Translation Techniques and Processes

Editing, or double-checking, occurs when a second qualified translator reviews the source document and the original translation to ensure the accuracy, completeness, and readability of the final documents.


Sight translation is an oral rendering of written text into spoken language by a qualified linguist, while retaining meaning, based on a visual review of the original text.

Localization refers to the process of translating and adapting a product or content (websites, advertisements, etc.) to a specific locale or market.

Vital Documents

A document is generally considered “vital” if it contains information critical for accessing a federally-funded entity’s services or benefits. Vital documents include, among other things, applications; consent forms; complaint forms; intake forms with potential for important health consequences; patient discharge forms; letters or notices pertaining to eligibility, reduction, denial or termination of services or benefits or that require a response; and notices affecting parental custody or child support.

Non-vital information, by contrast, includes documents that are not critical to access such benefits and services. Advertisements of federal agency tours and copies of testimony



presented to Congress that are available for information purposes would be considered non-vital information.²

Classifying a document as vital or non-vital is sometimes difficult. The classification ultimately depends upon the importance of the program, information, encounter, or service involved, and the consequence to the LEP person if the information in question is not provided accurately or in a timely manner.

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Image Credit: *People with Speech Bubbles*, via Freepik.com.



² U.S. Dep't of Health & Hum. Servs., Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons, 68 Fed. Reg. 47311, 47319 (Jan. 6, 2004).