

THE COMMUNITY INTERPRETER[®]

An International Textbook

Marjory A. Bancroft, MA, Sofía García-Beyaert, MA, Katharine Allen, MA,
Giovanna Carriero-Contreras, Denis Socarrás-Estrada, MA

Dedication

For community interpreters, who give voice, dignity and humanity to so many individuals
around the world.

To our families, who have supported us during our work—even when they missed us.

The Community Interpreter®

An International Textbook

Preface.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	iii
About the Authors.....	iv
Glossary	vii
Ethics and Standards	1
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY INTERPRETING	33
Learning Objectives.....	34
Introduction.....	35
Section 1.1: The Profession of Community Interpreting.....	36
Section 1.2: Interpreter Credentials	58
Section 1.3: Ethics and Standards for Community Interpreters	68
Section 1.4: Application of Ethical Principles	89
Section 1.5: Applying Ethical Principles	98
Section 1.6: Reflective Practice	105
Chapter 2 INTERPRETING PROTOCOLS AND SKILLS.....	115
Learning Objectives.....	116
Introduction.....	117
Section 2.1: Stages of the Encounter.....	118
Section 2.2: Four Protocols for Community Interpreting	125
Section 2.3: Memory Skills.....	136
Section 2.4: Message Transfer Skills.....	142
Section 2.5: Modes, Summarization and Mode Switching.....	154
Section 2.6: Note-taking for Community Interpreting	174
Chapter 3 STRATEGIC MEDIATION	191
Learning Objectives.....	192
Introduction.....	193
Section 3.1: Unconscious Bias	194

Contents

Section 3.2: Deciding When to Intervene.....	214
Section 3.3: Scripts for Mediation	226
Section 3.4: The Strategic Mediation Model.....	237
Section 3.5: Cultural Competence and Strategic Mediation	245
Section 3.6: Culturally Responsive Mediation	258
Chapter 4 PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY.....	271
Learning Objectives.....	272
Introduction.....	273
Section 4.1: Professional Identity and the Community Interpreter	274
Section 4.2: Professional Practice.....	290
Section 4.3: Legal Interpreting	304
Section 4.4: Emerging Specializations.....	320
Section 4.5: Preparing Terminology.....	339
Section 4.6: Remote Interpreting.....	347
Chapter 5 THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY INTERPRETER.....	359
Learning Objectives.....	360
Introduction.....	361
Section 5.1: Communicative Autonomy and the Role of the Community Interpreter	362
Section 5.2: Interpreting and Mediation.....	371
Section 5.3: Advocacy and the Community Interpreter	380
Section 5.4: Standards of Practice.....	394
Section 5.5: Self Care and Personal Wellness	415
Section 5.6: Professional Development and Continuing Education	432
Bibliography.....	443

PREFACE

How to use this textbook

Community interpreting is a young profession. In many countries around the world, it has developed at high speed. Today, there is an urgent need for clear guidance for trainers and instructors of community interpreters, and for interpreters themselves, who may lack access to quality training.

This textbook represents the first publication of its kind: a textbook designed for community interpreters who practice in different countries around the world. The book can be used:

- As a training manual to guide short programs.
- As a textbook for use in universities, colleges and other institutions of higher education.
- For self study.
- To support the development or delivery of online training programs for interpreters.

Together with a companion workbook, entitled *The Community Interpreter®: An International Workbook of Activities and Role Plays*, this textbook can be used to create and deliver an entry-level program for community interpreters in almost any country.

Each country, of course, has diverse professional practices: one textbook cannot claim to address the unique professional work environment of community interpreters in all nations. This book does, however, purport to tackle many of the most persistent challenges in the field and proposes practical, easy-to-implement strategies based on the highest professional standards. It also guides interpreters on how to develop problem-solving skills and use decision-making tools that they can apply almost anywhere.

Thus, the authors hope that interpreters and trainers in the field will find valuable tools, models, strategies, techniques and decision-making guidance in this book that will help them adapt its content to their local context. Every situation in community interpreting is unique. The best solution to each challenge will also be unique. This book is intended to focus on solutions that make sense in the local context while supporting, at each stage, the right of the participants in the interpreted encounter to have control of, and take responsibility for, their own communication, a concept referred to here as “communicative autonomy,” which is a fundamental principle for this textbook.

A special note about legal interpreting and this textbook

Community interpreting supports the access of immigrants and refugees, indigenous populations and the Deaf and hard of hearing to basic and often vital community services. As a profession, it includes sub-specializations such as medical, educational, social services and faith-based interpreting. Whether or not legal interpreting is considered to be part of community interpreting is a controversial question.

In practice, both within and across countries, it is often unclear whether legal interpreting should be considered part of community interpreting. For example, in the United States legal interpreters base their conduct on ethics, standards, protocols, requirements, best practices and professional cultures that are quite different from those for community interpreters. Yet in Canada, legal interpreters are expected to follow the same national standards of practice for community interpreters that medical and social services interpreters follow (HIN, 2007).

As a result, this book addresses all the specializations of community interpreting listed above, including legal interpreting, with the caveat that legal interpreting is a special case where interpreters must first and always follow any accepted standards for legal or court interpreters that exist in their areas of practice.

Community interpreting ethics

Although young, this profession has grown at such speed that many questions have arisen about what constitutes appropriate conduct by community interpreters in the field. No international code of ethics yet exists for community interpreters. Thus, the five authors of this textbook have taken it upon themselves to craft a document listing what they consider to be key community interpreting ethics and standards of practice for training purposes. This document precedes the first chapter of the book, and the rest of the textbook builds on that foundation.

As a profession, community interpreting does not yet exist in many countries. Often, family members, friends and even children are pulled in to interpret whether in hospitals, government agencies, police stations, shelters for abused women or other services—even courtrooms. It will likely be some time before the world comes to understand the urgent need to rely on *professional community interpreters* for any area of community services where language barriers arise. This textbook, with the ethics and standards document it is based on, is one paving stone on the road to professionalization for the field at large.

How to contact the authors

The five authors of this book found it an extraordinary adventure to write this book. Although each chapter has a listed author or authors, all of us collaborated intensively as co-creators and co-editors. To a considerable degree, this textbook is a joint effort. The conceptual journey it entailed, unparalleled in our professional experience, surpassed anything imagined at the inception of the project.

We hope this textbook is of practical use for interpreters and those who educate, employ and support them. The authors remain available for questions, concerns or comments. Please call us, email us or write to us care of the publisher at:

Culture & Language Press
10015 Old Columbia Road, Suite B-215
Columbia, Maryland 21046
USA
clp@cultureandlanguage.net
+1 410-312-5599

**ETHICS AND STANDARDS
for The Community Interpreter®
An International Training Tool**



by *Sofía García-Beyaert, Marjory A. Bancroft, Katharine Allen,
Giovanna Carriero-Contreras, Denis Socarrás-Estrada*

The Community Interpreter's Pledge

A pledge is a commitment. The following pledge for community interpreters captures key ethical principles for the profession and involves a conscious intention to take action.

“As a community interpreter, I will support the **COMMUNICATIVE AUTONOMY** of the parties I interpret for. To help them maintain responsibility for and control over their own communication, I will:

Observe confidentiality

Strive for accuracy

Display impartiality

Ensure transparency

Promote direction communication

Respect professional boundaries

Support intercultural communication

Maintain professional conduct

Ethical Principles and Standards of Practice

The Community Interpreter's Pledge above lists the eight ethical principles that this document addresses. For each ethical principle there is an explanation of the principle itself, a commentary section, a set of standards of practice that show how the community interpreter can adhere to and support each ethical principle, and two examples of situations showing how each standard could guide the interpreter's conduct in real life.

A Code of Ethics for *The Community Interpreter*[®]

Confidentiality

The community interpreter does not disclose private or proprietary information learned during the execution of his or her professional duties, except where disclosure is required by institutional regulations or by law.

Accuracy

The community interpreter strives to interpret every message without omissions, additions, distortions or any other changes to the original message.

Impartiality

The community interpreter refrains from allowing personal beliefs to manifest in his or her professional conduct, especially when rendering the content and tone of the message.

Transparency

The community interpreter interprets everything that is said to ensure that all messages expressed during the encounter are communicated to all parties.

Direct communication

The community interpreter initiates and actively supports practices that enable service users and providers to engage in direct communication.

Professional boundaries

The community interpreter should maintain professional boundaries, both during and outside the interpreted encounter.

Intercultural communication

The community interpreter intervenes to promote meaningful communication across cultural differences only when necessary for clear communication and without articulating the interpreter's beliefs or speculations about any of the parties' cultures.

Professional conduct

The community interpreter's conduct should reflect the highest standards of the profession by showing adherence to professional ethics and best practices.

1.6 Reflective Practice

Overview

“Reflective practice” is critical to your success. It will help you become a professional interpreter and maintain a high skill level. Reflective practice refers to the process of examining your work experiences critically to identify the lessons learned to improve your professional performance. Does that process sound simple? It is, yet it is incredibly important. Many professions have integrated reflective practice into their training and continuing education programs.

The ability to analyze your performance to identify specific areas where you need improvement is essential if you want to enhance your skills. Getting feedback from your peers can be a second powerful tool for getting a better understanding of your strengths and weaknesses. Finally you can also learn from the experience of your colleagues. Focusing on these three skills sets, this section will give you the tools to help you assess and improve your own performance.

Reflective practice and the community interpreter

Why reflective practice matters

Since the majority of community interpreters do not have a chance to pursue a university interpreting degree, or even a long training, many learn their skills on the job. Most are adult learners. Adults learn differently than children in a classroom setting. How adults learn, and how to teach them most effectively, can be distilled into several key points (Tusting & Barton, 2003; Bancroft, 2014). Most adults:

- Want knowledge related to their experience and real lives.
- Are more self-directed than children: they can learn on their own.
- Can reflect on their own learning process.
- Learn best by doing and from real-life experiences.

In addition, adult learners tend to reflect on their own experiences and view them from different perspectives.

Learning Objective 1.6

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- Explore the concept, meaning and application of “reflective practice” for community interpreters.

Why reflective practice matters

Self-examination

How do we analyze our performance and give ourselves useful feedback? First, it is helpful to step back a moment and realize how we observe ourselves. Some of us are incredibly self-critical, while others prefer to see only our best points. When we give ourselves feedback on our professional performance, for example, by listening to a recording of our own interpreting, the key is to maintain *neutrality, objectivity and balance*. We are balanced when we do not feel either the desire to be perfect or disappointment at our mistakes but instead can focus on what we actually did and what to do better.

It is part of human nature to dislike criticizing our own performance, and especially when we do so during training programs: with others listening to our performance, we tend to want to justify our decisions. People drawn to language-related professions are often perfectionists.

In this context, “smart failure” is an interesting concept: making errors is necessary to develop skills. There are many ways to incorporate reflective learning into your practice. For the solo interpreter, getting into the habit of regularly recording yourself and listening to your interpreting is perhaps the single most accessible and effective strategy—but even better is recording yourself on video.

That said, not all of us like the sound of our own voice on a recording, much less watching ourselves on video. It can make us feel self-conscious and uncomfortable, which is why many of us avoid ever getting into this habit. Overcoming that obstacle is one of the simplest, most important steps you can take to support your interpreting practice. The rest of this section provides concrete guidelines for how to integrate reflective practice into your interpreting.

Constructive feedback

Why constructive feedback is essential

Interpreting is a skill that needs constant practice, refining, and learning. It also requires complex cognitive processes to function well. Interpreting is fundamentally a public-speaking and performance skill. If you cannot deliver your interpretation smoothly and intelligibly, it makes no difference if you are accurate, because no one will understand you clearly.

Community interpreters need concrete, specific strategies that allow them to observe all those cognitive processes as well as their public-speaking skills so they can improve them. These techniques can be of great service to you. Integrating reflective practice into your learning journey as an interpreter from the start will shorten the time it takes you to master the core skills and go further.

One of the best ways to achieve reflective practice for community interpreters is through *constructive feedback*. Learning proper constructive feedback techniques will allow you to evaluate your own performance and do the same for others. Knowing how to *receive* such feedback from others is just as important.



2.4

Message Transfer Skills

Overview

Visualization is just one memory tool. If it doesn't work for you, try others.

Interpreting requires a great deal of mental, physical and emotional energy. It also involves a number of cognitive processes, such as:

- Attention (e.g., attentive listening to absorb messages and their meaning and catch subtle cues such as body language).
- Flexibility (to avoid errors, adapt to surprises, engage in multitasking, reformulate messages that seem unclear and manage the flow).
- Sensory storage (taking in environmental factors, including hearing or seeing the message).
- Working memory (to find the right terms, concepts and idioms) and long-term memory (for understanding the message, context, service systems, cultures, etc.).
- Problem solving (identifying communication barriers, assessing options and making decisions).
- Speed (your reaction time, efficient processing and conversion of meaning and the ability to deliver messages at an appropriate pace with sufficient clarity).

This section explores how you, the interpreter, can take current research about cognitive strategies and apply it to interpreting. Often, you may be unaware of just how much work is involved for your mind. This section will open your eyes to a new appreciation of the amazing brain you have—and the work you do each time you interpret.

The interpreter's cognitive processes

Humans draw inferences and make decisions under the constraints of limited knowledge, resources, and time.

(Hoffrage & Reimer, 2004)

Learning Objective 2.4

After completing this section, you will be able to:

Objective 2.4 (a)

- Practice three cognitive processes: anticipating, multitasking and message analysis.

Objective 2.4 (b)

- Explore two interpreting skills-building strategies: parroting (shadowing) and paraphrasing.

Decision-making is a complex process that requires the orchestration of multiple neural systems... [It] is believed to involve areas of the brain involved in emotion (e.g., amygdala...) and memory (e.g., hippocampus).

(Gupta, Kosciak, Bechara, & Tranel, 2011)

As we mentioned in Chapter 1, about half your work as a community interpreter depends on your interpreting skills. The other half involves effective decision making. Both are important. In general, community interpreters need to work on enhancing accuracy by focusing on their message transfer skills. This section will introduce you to strategies that will enhance your accuracy.

Three message transfer skills

Anticipating

Why anticipation matters

You are interpreting for a patient who is talking about symptoms, such as a headache, earache and sore throat. You know from experience that the nurse is going to ask how long this problem has been going on. You are pretty sure that the patient, instead of giving a direct answer, will tell the nurse a story, discuss some family matter or say anything except a simple answer such as “three days,” the kind of answer the nurse expects.

Knowing roughly what the nurse will say, and being emotionally prepared for her frustration, will help you to be more accurate. You will be ready to handle the verb tenses she might use. You know what the patient might answer, based on your past experience. That knowledge gives you time to plan a strategy. For example, when the patient goes on for three paragraphs instead of answering the question, will you:

- Simply interpret what the patient says? (Acceptable option.)
- Ask the patient to get to the point? (Unacceptable option.)
- Tell the nurse, “She doesn’t really understand you.” (Unacceptable option.)
- Explain to the patient, “In this healthcare system, you should give a direct answer to a direct question or providers can get annoyed.” (Unacceptable option.)

If you are curious about why these options are labeled acceptable or unacceptable, see Chapter 3. Meantime, by planning mentally in advance, you can maintain accuracy and plan how to handle your own impatience or emotions.

How anticipating works

Anticipating as applied to interpreting means that you can foresee what is probably about to happen or be said (at least roughly), then plan for it. For linguistic accuracy, interpreters anticipate the word or phrase to come that will complete an expression or sentence, which helps you to interpret accurately in a way that is easy to understand. For decision making, if you know what is about to be said, you can plan whether or not to intervene and what kind of mediation to perform if you do. From a linguistic perspective, this technique is helpful when taking notes for consecutive interpreting (see Section 2.6) and also when using simultaneous mode. The ability to anticipate what will come next can be trained; it can also come from experience.

For example, a first-time encounter interpreting for magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) can be difficult to anticipate unless you have done excellent preparation, but after interpreting for a few MRI exams, you can anticipate much of what will be said from experience.

Anticipation benefits

Anticipating can help you to:

- Improve your focus.
- Respond in a timely manner.
- Calculate quickly.
- Make appropriate decisions.
- Multitask without errors.
- Remember concepts.
- Be more articulate and smooth in your delivery.

The last point is important. A number of providers complain they cannot easily understand interpreters. Some of this problem is due to interpreters' accents and foreign intonations, but often it is due to choppy or poor delivery. Smooth delivery nearly always makes it easier for service users and providers to understand you.

Easy patterns to be anticipated

Learn to anticipate the following patterns you might encounter daily:

- Common collocations (words often spoken or written together, e.g., “consent form”)
- Grammar (the usual tenses, noun endings, syntax, etc.)
- Phrasal verbs (e.g., “fill out,” “hand in,” “turn away”)
- Idioms (e.g., “He’s feeling blue” can refer to someone who is sad or depressed)
- Dates (different order in different languages, which can be a problem when sight translating: in the Czech Republic, for example, 18.6 would mean June 18)
- Series of similar or related words (synonyms, etc.)
- Proper nouns (names of people, places or things, e.g., Memorial Hospital)



The Risks of Anticipation in Medical Interpreting

Interpreters should train and learn this skill, including medical interpreters. Many medical encounters follow set routines that become easy to learn over time, especially in such common specialties as pediatrics, prenatal and family medicine.

But be careful of overconfidence that could lead to mistakes and subsequent backtracking and self-corrections, which could affect the quality of your interpreting. Or you might not even notice your mistake, which could have serious medical consequences. Every medical case is unique, despite common patterns. Of course, the same can be true in other settings, but not always with such serious potential consequences.

Multitasking

What multitasking means

Multitasking is the ability to do several things at once. We all do it some of the time. Interpreters have to multitask whenever they interpret. You might need to take notes and interpret from them. In simultaneous interpreting, you listen *while* you interpret. You need to read body language to assess comprehension, detect possible misunderstandings and intervene appropriately to prevent miscommunication. In short, successful community interpreting requires both cognitive and emotional involvement—at the same time.

On the one hand, finding language equivalences in a target language means you have to assess possible meanings and registers while making the best choices in a millisecond. On the other hand, interpersonal interactions require your awareness of others' feelings in addition to your own self-awareness, empathy, personal detachment and emotional balance. This emotional and linguistic complexity helps to make community interpreting a rich and fascinating profession. Few community interpreters complain that they are bored!

The interpreter's multitasking checklist

Based on Gile's review of his Effort Models (Gile, 1999), enhanced by (Zhang, 2012), the box on the next page shows you a list of techniques that professional community interpreters use during any session, even if they are not intentionally aware of them. As you look at this list, think of the respect everyone should have for community interpreters!



Message analysis

Your miraculous brain

It is amazing what you and your brain do every time you interpret. You already have nearly all the skills you need to interpret. Now put them into play.

The steps in this section for message analysis may look complicated, yet they are simple. You already perform them every day. For example, any time you take a class and learn something new, hear a story or find out how to apply for a driver's license or cook a new recipe, you use your brain in the same ways that you will need to interpret.

The trick in interpreting is to make the process of understanding and acting on a message more *intentional* and *immediate*, because you have to perform the analysis on the spot.

THE COMMUNITY INTERPRETER'S CHECKLIST

Before the encounter

1. Get your pens, notepad and terminology resources ready.
2. Analyze what the session is about to help you prepare and focus.

At the beginning of the encounter

3. Scan the room to make a decision about which unobtrusive position to adopt.
4. Smile and use body language to create rapport and show empathy.
5. Use a calm, firm voice to help establish trust, credibility and professionalism.
6. Give a professional introduction to establish clear parameters for the session.
7. Listen to and analyze the service user's language and regionalisms.
8. Discriminate other surrounding noise.

While interpreting

9. Engage in active listening.
10. Read body language (eye cues, hand gestures, leg positions, etc.).
11. Use imagery to aid in retention.
12. Replicate or take into account the speakers' tones, volumes and gestures.
13. Reorganize and reformulate the message based on *meaning* (not the words).
14. Remember to use direct speech (first person).
15. Deliver the message in the target language in a clear, understandable voice.
16. Become aware of, assess and do not act on your own biases.
17. Avoid eye contact while interpreting.
18. Take notes as needed; recognize and interpret from notes.
19. Maintain objectivity, detachment and regard for safety.
20. Maintain utmost accuracy.
21. Engage in problem solving and decision making as needed.
22. Switch to indirect speech (third person) if direct speech is problematic.
23. Read body language and contextual cues (without making eye contact).
24. Monitor your output.
25. Intervene to correct yourself, if necessary.
26. Manage turn taking.
27. Maintain impartiality.
28. Identify communication barriers. As needed, plan how to address them.
29. Intervene only if the consequences of a miscommunication are serious.
30. Switch back smoothly to interpreting after mediating.
31. Maintain transparency: report even your own interventions.
32. Avoid side conversations.
33. Check a dictionary, glossary or other resource, if necessary.
34. Switch modes as needed.
35. Assess whether or not to perform a sight translation, if so requested.
36. Change position as needed.

After the session

37. Leave the room whenever the provider leaves.
38. Avoid being alone with the service user, if possible.
39. Debrief with the provider (if possible) if the session left an emotional impact.
40. Practice self care strategies, as needed.

The more you can identify strategies that help you analyze what you are hearing, the better you will be able to convert what you hear into the target language.

Four steps for basic message analysis

Your goal is to find words, concepts and structures that are *equivalents* of the original message in a target language. This section offers you a basic introduction to the concept of message analysis within the pragmatic framework of four steps:

- Listen to the message.
- Extract the meaning.
- Find equivalent target-language concepts to reformulate the message.
- Assess the rendered message.

An example of message analysis

Let's say a service user states, "I threw up the whole week long" to a therapist. You listen to the message and notice that "I threw up" (vomited) and "the whole week long" are two pieces of meaning that do not make literal sense put together in this context. You realize this problem is due to cultural linguistic meaning: in the patient's country and language, "I threw up" does not always refer to literal vomiting. It can mean, "I was so upset I couldn't eat, and every time I tried to, the food wouldn't go down because I was too stressed."

You then search for equivalents in English. You decide to say "all week" (very close to the original) but you convert "I threw up" into three possible reformulations:

1. "I was too stressed to eat."
2. "I was too stressed to keep food down."
3. "I was so stressed I couldn't swallow a bite."

Now you have to choose the rendition that feels *most accurate in this context*. You decide to deliver the message in an anxious tone of voice (to replicate the speaker's tone) by saying, "I was too stressed all week to eat."

Afterward, you evaluate the message for accuracy. If you change your mind about the option you chose, you can correct yourself by saying to both parties, "The interpreter should have said just now that the patient stated, 'I was so stressed all week I couldn't keep food down.'" Or, instead, you could intervene to suggest that the provider ask the patient to clarify the meaning of "I threw up all week long." Either strategy might work well, depending on the context and situation.



Step 1: Listen

It sounds so easy: “First, listen to the message.” But this step is harder than it appears. Even for a simple sentence like, “You have no idea!” the interpreter must listen very actively and carefully to take into account the following:

Attention and focus

How often does our mind wander? All the time. Yes, that can happen while you interpret—with disastrous results. You might be tired. Perhaps you have a new baby. If you interpret traumatic content—for example, in psychiatric hospitals, prisons, war zones or refugee camps—you might find that your mind is wandering because you need to distance yourself from the content. For accuracy, you will still need to focus.

Context

Any aspect of the content could affect meaning. The environmental, social, professional, personal, cultural and even religious context can affect it. For example, the word *shahada* in Arabic has a rich cultural and religious meaning that could never be adequately rendered by a single word in a European language. Technically, *shahada* means something like *testimony*. In reality, a book could be written about its meaning.

Body language, gestures and tone of voice



It is not your job to interpret body language or gestures (and a legal interpreter should almost never do so) unless the result is a communication barrier. However, you will constantly need to assess the meaning inherent in body language, gestures and tone of voice to help you find adequate equivalent messages in the target language. For example, if a Spanish speaker in parts of Latin America says *pie* (which means *foot*) but points to his leg (because in certain countries, *pie* may often be used colloquially to refer to either *foot* or *leg*), seeing that gesture may affect your interpreting decisions.

In another example, if an Asian speaker is asked by a healthcare provider to assess her pain and says, “It’s not too bad” in a quiet voice, but you can hear the acute pain in her voice through your cultural and social knowledge, you might choose to interpret the statement in a louder tone that reflects some of the pain you hear, because the provider could otherwise miss those nuances. Such nuances can be important for diagnoses and decisions about managing pain and prescribing medications (including dosages).

Long-term memory

As the interpreter, you bring a great deal of experience, knowledge and social awareness to the encounter. Use it to help you analyze the message. For example, when the service user says *brother*, does he mean a blood brother, a distant cousin or a friend? When the provider says, “Did you understand?” and the service user says, “Yes,” with a nod, does that really mean the service user understands? Can you analyze the Greek or Latin roots and affixes (suffixes and prefixes) in medical terms such as *narcolepsy* in such a way that, even if the term is new to you, you can interpret the meaning of it accurately? Your long-term memory comes to your aid constantly as you interpret.



Intent

Is the speaker angry or upset? Did she intend to say something bigoted or unkind (“Do your people always act that way?”) or was she just being insensitive? The meaning of a simple message, such as *Sure!* can be quite different, depending on whether the speaker is sarcastic, angry, sad or resigned. You, the interpreter, will have to decode the intent from the context, body language (including facial expressions), tone of voice and other factors. All of them affect how you understand and interpret the message.

Other aspects

Other aspects of language and communication that influence your understanding of a message include regionalisms, communication styles, the register, literal and figurative language, idiomatic meaning, power dynamics and cultural references.

Step 2: Extract the meaning

Whether the message is long or short, you may need to break it down into smaller parts or chunks of meaning in order to be able to accurately render it. Consider the sentence, “Although your PAP test was normal, since the colposcopy showed CIS, I’m recommending a cone biopsy be done to find out what’s really going on.” Here are a few examples of breaking that message down:

“Although your PAP test was normal...”	Do you know what a PAP test is? If not, find out (request a clarification, consult a dictionary or a device, etc.). What does “normal” mean here?
“...the colposcopy showed CIS...”	Here are two somewhat complex medical terms, one of which indicates cancer—CIS or carcinoma in situ, a diagnosis that the patient may or may not already know. Cancer is a “big” diagnosis, yet CIS is not as serious as most cancers.
“...so I’m recommending a cone biopsy be done to find out what’s going on.”	A doctor’s recommendation is the beginning of a negotiation in much of Western medicine. This recommendation contains yet another medical term that the patient might or might not know.

Step 3: Find equivalent target-language concepts to reformulate the message

The medical terms

Let's return to the example above:

- Do the names for the three medical terms (PAP test, colposcopy and CIS) exist in the target language?
- If you left a country 20 years ago, perhaps they *do* exist there now.
- **Do you have a bilingual medical glossary resource to consult?**
- Would the patient understand these terms if you interpreted them literally or would the patient understand better if you (a) kept the English name for the terms, (b) requested a clarification from the doctor and/or (c) used both the English and the target-language term when you interpret? (Answer: we recommend option (c) if you have concerns about the patient's ability to understand.)
- If you know that CIS refers to cancer, but suspect the patient does not, how will that concern affect your interpretation?

Sentence structures

English often uses a passive sentence structure (e.g., “recommend that a cone biopsy be done”), a common structure in English, if not in most other languages. Common sentence structure equivalents are something to study and practice so that you don't waste time and mental energy reformulating them. The question of equivalent sentence structures to capture meaning can be particularly important in sight translation because written texts tend to have more complex sentence structures than speech.

Lose the words, find the meaning

Focusing on words will slow you down; focusing on chunks of meaning will speed you up. You are also less likely to panic and get “hung up” on the individual words.

Step 4: Assess the rendered message

You have made your decision. You rendered the message. Now what?

The part that comes next is natural, almost reflexive. As you listen to your own interpreting (at least, in consecutive mode), you are aware of what you render. Part of you scans the message for accuracy, which is your number one concern. If you make a mistake, a warning message flashes in your mind, perhaps unconsciously. You can do a better job if you monitor your interpreting consciously to assess whether your rendition and delivery:

- *Maintains the register.* If the original message was delivered in scholarly, formal, informal, colloquial or slangy phrasing, maintain the equivalent register.
- *Captures the diction.* Did your diction (word choice) include the right words and phrases to convey the same style of communication and the impact of a message?
- *Conveys the affect, intent and tone.* Your reformulated message should reveal the emotional expressivity of the speaker or signer.
- *Prioritizes the key components of the message.* Some languages put stress on key words or word order, diction, tone of voice, etc. to highlight important parts of a message.