



International Standard

ISO 13611

Interpreting services — Community interpreting — Requirements and recommendations

*Services d'interprétation — Interprétation de service public —
Exigences et recommandations*

**Second edition
2024-02**

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Published in Switzerland

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO document should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 37, *Language and terminology*, Subcommittee SC 5, *Translation, interpreting and related technology*.

This second edition cancels and replaces the first edition (ISO 13611:2014), which has been technically revised.

The main changes are as follows:

- the document has been elevated to an International Standard;
- the structure of the text has been modelled on ISO 18841:2018;
- the content has been streamlined for clarity.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

This document was developed in response to a worldwide need to accommodate the growing linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity of people who interact via spoken and signed communication. Community interpreting, also called “public service interpreting”, is essential to enable people to access community services available to members of society, which they would be otherwise unable to access owing to a language barrier as a result of not understanding the language of service delivery.

Such community services can occur in several communicative settings and can include, amongst others, the following:

- public institutions (local authorities, schools, universities, community centres, etc.);
- social services (refugee boards, self-help centres, etc.);
- business and industry services (housing, real estate, insurance, financial services, etc.);
- faith-based organizations (rituals, ceremonies, etc.);
- media organizations (television, internet broadcasters, etc.);
- emergency services (natural disasters, pandemics, etc.).

Community interpreting can include services provided in legal settings (police stations, courts, prisons, etc.) to facilitate equal access to justice. Legal interpreting is addressed in ISO 20228. In a number of countries, legal interpreting, a broad field that includes court interpreting, is not considered part of community interpreting. Similarly, healthcare interpreting is addressed in ISO 21998. In a number of countries, healthcare interpreting is not considered part of community interpreting. However, in several countries, community interpreting includes services provided in legal and/or healthcare-related communicative events, with acknowledgement that these services require additional training.

Community interpreting has become established as a profession. There are various codes and standards for specific settings but there are currently no universally agreed requirements for community interpreters. It is important to stress that interpreting differs from translation as it deals with oral or signed communication occurring in real time.

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Interpreting services — Community interpreting — Requirements and recommendations

1 Scope

This document specifies requirements and recommendations for the provision of community interpreting services. It establishes the foundational principles and practices necessary to ensure quality community interpreting services for all language communities (spoken and/or signed), for end users, as well as for clients, and for community interpreters.

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 20109, *Simultaneous interpreting — Equipment — Requirements*

ISO 20539, *Translation, interpreting and related technology — Vocabulary*

ISO 24019, *Simultaneous interpreting delivery platforms — Requirements and recommendations*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO 20539 and the following apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminology databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <https://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1 Terms related to interpreting activities

3.1.1

interpret

render spoken or signed information from a *source language* (3.4.3) into a *target language* (3.4.4) in spoken or signed form, conveying both the meaning and *language register* (3.4.9) of the *source language content* (3.4.6)

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.1.10]

3.1.2

interpreting

interpretation

rendering spoken or signed information from a *source language* (3.4.3) into a *target language* (3.4.4) in spoken or signed form, conveying both the meaning and *language register* (3.4.9) of the *source language content* (3.4.6)

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.1.11]

3.1.3

community interpreting

public service interpreting

interpreting (3.1.2) that enables people to access services available to society as a whole, and which they would otherwise be unable to access owing to a barrier to communication resulting from the use of different languages

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.27, modified — “owing to a language barrier” changed to “owing to a barrier to communication resulting from the use of different languages”.]

3.1.4

mode

established method for the delivery of spoken language *interpreting* (3.1.2) and signed language interpreting

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.11]

3.1.5

consecutive interpreting

mode (3.1.4) of *interpreting* (3.1.2) performed after the *speaker* (3.4.7) or *signer* (3.4.8) pauses

Note 1 to entry: *Interpreters* (3.3.2) can use *note-taking* (3.1.10) to help in rendering lengthy passages.

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.13]

3.1.6

simultaneous interpreting

mode (3.1.4) of *interpreting* (3.1.2) performed while a *speaker* (3.4.7) or *signer* (3.4.8) is still speaking or signing

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.12]

3.1.7

whispered interpreting

chuchotage

simultaneous interpreting (3.1.6) where the *interpreter* (3.3.2) speaks very quietly in close proximity to the listeners and uses no *interpreting* (3.1.2) equipment

Note 1 to entry: Whispered interpreting is used for interpreting to a very small number of listeners, ideally one or two.

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.15 modified — “participants” has been changed to “listeners and uses no interpreting equipment” and Note 2 to entry has been deleted.]

3.1.8

healthcare interpreting

interpreting (3.1.2) of health-related communication between patients, accompanying persons and treatment providers, or administrators, who do not use the same language

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.29, modified — Admitted term deleted.]

3.1.9

legal interpreting

interpreting (3.1.2) at *communicative settings* (3.2.2) related to the law

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.25]

3.1.10

note-taking

technique in *consecutive interpreting* (3.1.5) used by *interpreters* (3.3.2) for remembering, conceptualizing and summarizing information

Note 1 to entry: Note-taking is highly individual and can involve a mixture of symbols, abbreviations, words and diagrams.

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.14]

3.1.11

sight translation

sight interpreting

rendering written *source language content* (3.4.6) into the *target language* (3.4.4) in the form of spoken language or signed language

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.17]

3.1.12

distance interpreting

remote interpreting

interpreting (3.1.2) of a *speaker* (3.4.7) or *signer* (3.4.8) in a different location from that of the *interpreter* (3.3.2), enabled by information and communications technology

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.16]

3.2 Terms related to communicative events with interpreting

3.2.1

communicative event

encounter between two or more parties during which information is transmitted

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.32]

3.2.2

communicative setting

environment where an interaction between interlocutors takes place

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.31]

3.2.3

domain

sphere of knowledge or activity

Note 1 to entry: A domain can have its own culture, social context and linguistic characteristics.

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.2.1]

3.3 Terms related to people or organizations involved in interpreting

3.3.1

interpreting service provider

ISP

interpreter (3.3.2) or organization making *interpreting* (3.1.2) available to a *client* (3.3.4)

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.20]

3.3.2

interpreter

person who *interprets* (3.1.1)

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.1.13]

3.3.3

community interpreter

public service interpreter

interpreter (3.3.2) who specializes in *community interpreting* (3.1.3)

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.28, modified — "qualified to perform" has been changed to "who specializes in".]

3.3.4

client

customer

person, or organization, who enters into a formal agreement for the provision of a service

Note 1 to entry: The formal agreement can, for example, take the form of a contract or an interdepartmental service agreement between units of an organization.

Note 2 to entry: The client can be the *end user* (3.3.5), but this does not have to be the case.

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:—, 3.2.9]

3.3.5

end user

person or group of persons that ultimately uses the service delivered

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.2.8, modified — "a service" has been changed to "the service delivered".]

3.4 Terms related to language, language content and language competences

3.4.1

'A' language

primary language or its strict equivalent of which the *interpreter* (3.3.2) has complete command and into which the interpreter *interprets* (3.1.1) from all their other 'A' languages, 'B' languages (3.4.2) or 'C' languages

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.8]

3.4.2

'B' language

language in which the *interpreter* (3.3.2) is proficient, but which is not their primary language or its strict equivalent

Note 1 to entry: An interpreter *interprets* (3.1.1) into this language from one or more other languages.

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.9]

3.4.3

source language

language from which content is *translated* (3.5.1) or *interpreted* (3.1.1)

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.1.3]

3.4.4

target language

language into which content is *translated* (3.5.1) or *interpreted* (3.1.1)

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.1.4]

3.4.5

target language content

content *translated* (3.5.1) or *interpreted* (3.1.1) from a *source language* (3.4.3)

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.1.6]

3.4.6

source language content

content to be *translated* ([3.5.1](#)) or *interpreted* ([3.1.1](#))

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.1.5]

3.4.7

speaker

person addressing others using spoken language

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.5]

3.4.8

signer

person addressing others using signed language

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.4.6]

3.4.9

language register

language variety used for a particular purpose or in an event of language use, depending on the type of situation, especially its degree of formality

Note 1 to entry: A person usually has more than one language register in their linguistic repertoire and can vary their use of language register according to their perception of what is appropriate for different purposes or *domains* ([3.2.3](#)).

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.2.2]

3.5 Terms related to translation

3.5.1

translate

render *source language content* ([3.4.6](#)) into *target language content* ([3.4.5](#)) in written form or signed language

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.1.8]

3.5.2

translator

person who *translates* ([3.5.1](#))

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.1.12]

4 Basic principles of community interpreting

4.1 Nature of community interpreting

Community interpreting enables every person to communicate using their own language or another language agreed amongst the parties of the communicative event. The languages may be either spoken and/or signed. Both parties are users of the interpreting service.

Community interpreting takes place in a communicative event of at least three parties:

- a) one or more persons seeking access to services available to society as a whole, which they are unable to access owing to a barrier to communication resulting from the use of different languages as a result of not understanding the language in which the service is provided;

EXAMPLE 1 A parent who needs to communicate with school authorities.

- b) one or more persons using the language of service delivery;

EXAMPLE 2 A public service employee, a counsellor or a teacher using the language in which the services are delivered.

- c) one or more community interpreters who provide interpreting services.

Community interpreters are able to use the language registers of two or more languages (spoken, written or signed) and can interpret communication between people using those languages. Community interpreters can deliver services using consecutive or simultaneous interpreting modes and can also provide sight translation of documents and whispered interpreting. Community interpreting can be performed at the location where the communicative event takes place, or it can take the form of distance interpreting. Community interpreting enables every person to communicate using their own language or a language of their choice.

4.2 Interpreting service providers (ISPs)

Interpreting service providers (ISPs), whether individuals or organizations, shall use only the services of community interpreters meeting the requirements of this document. In all cases, ISPs shall demand proof of competences required for the assignment, as well as references. Qualifications shall be verified.

4.3 Code of ethics and guidelines for professional practice

Community interpreters shall understand and conform to the applicable code of ethics and/or code of conduct and the principles that are relevant to their sector and geographical area. This includes observing the principles that relate to their own professional integrity, respecting that of those with whom they work, and the integrity of the interpreting profession. A key component of being a professional community interpreter is to recognize professional limitations and to refrain from accepting interpreting assignments when lacking the competences, skills, or abilities required by the assignment.

4.4 Competences

4.4.1 General

There are multiple pathways to becoming a community interpreter, from short-term training to full degree programmes. [Subclauses 4.4.2 to 4.4.7](#) outline the core competences that are required to provide effective community interpreting services.

4.4.2 Linguistic competences

Community interpreters shall have at least two 'A' languages or one 'A' language and one 'B' language.

Community interpreters shall demonstrate linguistic competences at the level required for the communicative event. This means that community interpreters shall be able to comprehend and interpret accurately for people of different educational and cultural backgrounds. Community interpreters shall exhibit an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the linguistic varieties of their working languages (e.g. dialects, regional varieties, idiomatic expressions) and the required range of language registers. Community interpreters shall also have knowledge of the domains in which they work and the relevant terminology in their working languages. When interpreting, they shall use the same language register as the speaker or signer, taking care to reflect accurately features such as prosody, irony or sarcasm, as well as the manner in which the speaker's or signer's personality, emotional state or chosen emphasis affects their language use.

4.4.3 Interpreting competences

Community interpreters shall be able to render the source language content into the target language content while preserving the meaning and language register and fulfilling the same communicative function as the source language content.

Community interpreters shall use the most appropriate mode of interpreting and use note-taking techniques when necessary to support the accuracy in the case of consecutive interpreting. Community interpreters shall sight-translate text-based materials according to their competences.

Community interpreters shall have sufficient knowledge and understanding of their role and responsibilities in the communicative event, including the competence to manage that role as required, to intervene when

necessary, and to support direct communication and the autonomy of the parties using the interpreting service. To do this, community interpreters shall apply critical thinking and decision-making skills throughout all aspects of an interpreting assignment.

4.4.4 Information acquisition competences

Community interpreters shall be able to:

- a) request and gather information about the upcoming communicative event to determine if they possess the competences required of the assignment; this may include information about the communicative setting, subject, mode, the linguistic needs of the parties, the number of community interpreters required for the assignment, working hours and conditions, remuneration and invoicing parameters, and other relevant details prior to accepting the assignment;
- b) acquire information to prepare for the communicative event, such as details about the communicative setting and content, the space and, if applicable, technology/equipment required for face-to-face events and for distance events;
- c) acquire the linguistic, terminological, and specialized knowledge necessary to interpret. This also includes the use of (digital) research tools and the development of suitable strategies for the efficient use of the information sources available (e.g. terminology databases, parallel texts, and other sources which potentially contain the relevant terminology in a domain in which they are interpreting).

4.4.5 Interpersonal and intercultural competences

Community interpreters shall show respect, courtesy, tact, empathy, impartiality and sound judgement throughout the interpreting assignment. Community interpreters shall develop and hone their professional communication, interpersonal skills and intercultural proficiency to work effectively as a community interpreter.

NOTE Intercultural proficiency includes the interpreter's professional understanding of cultural factors that can affect cross-cultural interactions (i.e. tone, gestures, behaviours, linguistic differences, etc.).

Community interpreters shall be able to apply these skills when intervening to address communication breakdowns or the need for clarifications. Community interpreters shall also develop a sense of self-awareness to reduce the possible impact of any kind of bias.

4.4.6 Technical competences

When accepting work that requires the use of technology, community interpreters shall be able to use interpreting equipment (such as a microphone and audio/video conferencing technology). When working with distance interpreting equipment and/or platforms, community interpreters shall demonstrate the ability to use the equipment and/or platforms that are necessary for the provision of interpreting services. If simultaneous interpreting delivery platforms are used, they shall conform to ISO 24019, and the use of audio/video, microphones and headphones shall conform to ISO 20109.

4.4.7 Evidence of competences and qualifications

Community interpreters shall be able to provide upon request documented evidence of their competence to provide a service conforming to the requirements and recommendations of this document. Community interpreters shall keep on file and produce on request evidence that attests to their qualifications. In addition, community interpreters shall provide documented evidence of at least one of the following criteria:

- a) a recognized degree (at least a bachelor's degree) in interpreting from an institution of higher education or a recognized training certificate in community interpreting from a post-secondary institution;
- b) an attestation of competence in interpreting (such as a positive result in a test for community interpreters held by an international organization or a national government agency or department or interpreter certification organization) awarded by a public authority or professional body with the authorization to do so;

- c) a recognized degree in any other field from an institution of higher education plus proof of language proficiency and a certificate from a government accredited training institute/organization that verifies the competences of interpreting;
- d) a recognized degree in any other field from an institution of higher education and 150 hours of continuous experience (obtained over six consecutive months) in community interpreting in the case where a) to c) cannot be reasonably met.

5 Role and responsibilities of the community interpreter

5.1 Role

Community interpreters shall accurately render the content between languages for people who do not share the same language. This includes applying critical thinking and problem-solving strategies to meet the needs of the parties in the communicative event. The community interpreter competences are demonstrated as specified in this document.

5.2 Responsibilities

Community interpreters shall be able to take responsibility to provide accurate interpreting; this can include regulating the speed at which the parties communicate, requesting clarification from the parties when barriers to communication arise, and taking turns as appropriate for the communicative setting and mode of interpreting. This includes being able to identify and render the content and the intent, choosing the closest meaning-based target-language equivalents for the source language used by the parties.

Community interpreters shall abide by all ethical tenets. In addition, community interpreters shall explain the communication principles and practices that can contribute to appropriate and accurate interpreting, i.e. that one party speaks/signs at a time, confidentiality is assured, etc. They shall also maintain a schedule that accommodates for sufficient time between assignments (e.g. rest/travel time/preparation, etc.).

If requested or appropriate, community interpreters shall intervene to identify the existence of a cultural barrier when it can result in miscommunication or misunderstanding, being careful not to provide explanations but to identify the basis of the misunderstanding so that the parties can explore and clarify the misunderstanding with each other.

EXAMPLE Cultural barriers can include cultural customs, health beliefs, or practices (e.g. some ethnic groups can refuse surgery based on their convictions).

During the assignment, community interpreters shall monitor their own performance, correcting errors and clearly identifying if they are stepping out of role as the interpreter. They shall not offer opinions or advice (even when requested to do so) or act as an advocate.

Community interpreters shall decline any assignments in which a conflict of interest, the perception thereof, or any other obstacle to impartiality could arise. Community interpreters shall also decline assignments where separate qualifications or standards are in place, including but not limited to conference interpreting, healthcare interpreting or legal interpreting, unless their qualifications extend to those specific communicative settings.

Community interpreters shall access additional training and/or obtain qualifications for working in specialized communicative settings and improve performance through continuous self-care and ongoing professional development.

NOTE See ISO 20228 regarding legal interpreting and ISO 21998 regarding healthcare interpreting.

Community interpreters shall collaborate with interpreter colleagues working at the same event, and clarify to all parties the role of the community interpreter. Community interpreters shall also follow the protocols, terms and procedures established/agreed upon, including agreements regarding photographing, recording and distribution of the interpreting. Community interpreters shall raise issues with the ISP and/or client that arose in the context of the assignment and seek the support of professional resources for post-assignment support as needed, e.g. to debrief after demanding or highly stressful assignments.