

PROTEUS

Volume XXVIII | Conference 2026 Edition



Beyond AI: The Human Standard

Standards, Service, and the Future of Court Interpreting & Translation



NAJIT

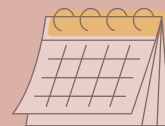
Empowering Interpreters &
Translators Worldwide™

*Thank you to all contributors, editors, reviewers, and volunteers
whose time, insight, and dedication made this issue possible.*

EVENT CALENDAR



Events You Won't Want to Miss



June 5–7, 2026

National Association of
Judiciary Interpreters and
Translators
Atlanta, GA

June 9–11, 2026

LocWorld
Dublin, Ireland

June 15–18, 2026

European Association for
Machine Translation
Tilburg, Netherlands

June 24–27, 2026

NeTTT Conference
Dubrovnik, Croatia

June 25–26, 2026

Linguist Education
Online

July 1–2, 2026

Institute of Translation and
Interpreting
Milton Keynes, UK

October 28–31, 2026

American Translators Association
San Francisco, CA

If you have an event to add to
the calendar for our community,
please reach out:
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WHY JOIN NAJIT?

Stronger together  *The Human Element*

As a NAJIT Member, You Gain Access to:



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High-quality, relevant training from industry experts.



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Earn CEUs and stay current in a constantly evolving profession.



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Belong to a community that understands the work.



**THE FUTURE OF LANGUAGE ACCESS
NEEDS HUMAN VOICES.**

Be part of the conversation



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Letter from the Chair

Dear Reader,

There are moments in an organization's history when simply gathering together begins to mean something more.

This year's conference feels like one of those moments.

Over the past year, NAJIT has experienced change, transition, rebuilding, and reflection. Through it all, this community continued to show up for one another, for the profession, and for the people who rely on meaningful language access every day. That commitment is what continues to move this organization forward.

As we gather in Atlanta for NAJIT's 47th Annual Conference, I am reminded that organizations are not sustained by logos, titles, or institutions alone. They are sustained by people. By members who volunteer their time, share their knowledge, ask difficult questions, mentor others, and continue believing in the importance of this work even during periods of uncertainty.

This issue of *Proteus* reflects many of those voices. It captures our community navigating change while continuing to protect the standards, ethics, and human connection that remain at the center of your work.

Like the phoenix, renewal requires endurance before it becomes visible. I believe NAJIT is entering that renewal now, stronger because of the challenges we have faced together and deeply grateful to still be in the room, continuing the conversation.

Thank you for being part of this community. I look forward to seeing you in Atlanta.

Mayra Cardona, PhD
NAJIT, Chair

Letter from the Editor



Dear Reader,

This issue of *Proteus* was shaped by a question that continued to surface across conversations about artificial intelligence, professional standards, and language access: what must remain unmistakably human?

The articles featured throughout these pages examine a profession navigating rapid change while continuing to defend the principles that give the work meaning: preparation, accountability, ethics, research, and human judgment. Together, these pieces reflect a field actively documenting its present while negotiating its future.

As NAJIT gathers under the theme *Beyond AI: The Irreplaceable Human Element*, this conference edition serves as both reflection and record of a profession in motion.

Julli Jaramillo, MS
Editor-in-Chief, Proteus

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We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Proteus team members who came before us and laid the foundation for this publication. Your hard work and dedication have allowed our community to grow, evolve, and continue building upon your legacy.

!Obrigado! Cnacubo ! (Shukran) شكراً ! Thank you! ¡Gracias! Merci! Xie Xie

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THE SSTI RESEARCH CORNER: REINTRODUCING SSTI

The Society for the Study of Translation and Interpretation



“SSTI aims to create spaces where research and the practice of interpreting and translation in legal and judiciary contexts can intersect, and where the exchange of ideas and information can actively contribute to higher performance standards and further research in the field.”

WHAT IS SSTI AND WHAT DO WE DO?

SSTI is the non-profit educational and research foundation of the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT). We aim to promote research on judiciary interpreting and legal translation which includes collaboration in the development of guidelines for clients of interpreting services as well as activities and projects that bridge the divide between research and practice. Current SSTI Board members bring a wealth of knowledge, skills and experience to our research, practice, and teaching activities as we strive to improve standards and conditions of the translation and interpreting professions. As we rely on collaboration with NAJIT members and allied professionals, we believe that our team is your team. Therefore, we would like to (re)introduce ourselves to you as a way of bringing our NAJIT family closer together.

For this edition of *Proteus*, we are excited to introduce the two newest members who have recently been appointed to the SSTI Board.

Dr. Chantal Portillo was born in the USA and raised in Spain, which provided her with a bi-cultural and bilingual family background from a young age. At the age of 12, a documentary on the interpreters of the II World War during the Nuremberg trials sparked an interest in the translation and interpretation field, which then led to a BA in Translation and Interpretation, and later to a master's and PhD in fields related to intangible heritage, sustainable tourism, and intercultural interpretation in translation. During the first 10 years of her professional career, Chantal was a conference interpreter in Spain. Also, during that time, she was certified by the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a judicial translator and interpreter. After moving to the US and working as a certified medical interpreter for a year, Chantal got certified as a judicial interpreter with the Oregon Judicial Department (OJD) and started working in 2015 as an independent contractor for local agencies and the courts. In 2020, and after 23 years of being an independent contractor, Chantal was hired by Court Language Access Services (CLAS), within the OJD as a staff interpreter, her current placement.



In 2020 Chantal also obtained the ATA certification as an English to Spanish translator, and became certified as a judiciary interpreter in both California and New Mexico. Since 2021, Chantal has presented in state conferences in Oregon for OJD and the Oregon Society for Translators and Interpreters (OSTI), and at the national level for NAJIT in 2024 and ATA in 2025. Chantal loves to give back to the community and is involved in two NAJIT committees, the Advocacy Committee and the Position Paper Committee. She is also a volunteer localization translation reviewer for the Secretary of Oregon's translations review committee of materials used for Oregon elections.

THE SSTI RESEARCH CORNER: REINTRODUCING SSTI

The Society for the Study of Translation and Interpretation

In her free time, Chantal loves hiking, doing Pilates and yoga, roller skating, furniture refurbishing and crafting with recycled materials and nature's bounty. Chantal brings a unique academic perspective and a wealth of professional experience to our team.

Dr. Andrew Tucker was born in Alabama, where hearing classmates speak Spanish sparked his interest in languages. A high school career assessment later suggested he shared many traits with translators, prompting him to explore the field more seriously. With no translation programs available nearby, he pursued Spanish instead, ultimately earning a BA in Spanish and a Master of Hispanic Studies from Auburn University. During his studies, he spent time in Mexico, fell in love with the country, and decided to move there after graduation to seek translation work. He began his career as an in-house translator at a law firm in Mexico City, where he worked for several years. During this time, he completed a translation certificate through New York University and transitioned into full-time freelance translation.

His clients included law firms, multinational companies, and translation agencies throughout the Americas and Europe. Andrew also discovered an interest in teaching translation, which led him to pursue a PhD in Translation Studies at Kent State University.



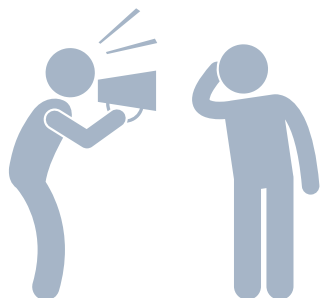
There, he conducted research on translation pedagogy and served as an interpreter for migrant workers seeking medical care in Northeast Ohio. In total, he has taught or developed legal translation coursework for four universities, including Southeast Missouri State University, where he currently teaches Spanish grammar, translation, interpreting, and terminology as an assistant professor. In his free time, he enjoys taking long walks and building model starships. He is excited to work with SSTI and NAJIT and to contribute to initiatives that strengthen the visibility of court interpreters and legal translators nationwide. Andrew's depth of knowledge about pedagogy as well as his experience as a translator enrich SSTI's collective areas of expertise.

Chantal and Andrew join Dave Gilbert, who specializes in researching translated intercept evidence and loves to run marathons; Jeff Killman, whose publications address translation and interpretation in legal contexts; and Christina Guerrero Harmon, who recently passed the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination and has too many knitting projects in her bag.

Chantal and Andrew enhance the capabilities of SSTI to serve you better. We will shine the spotlight on other SSTI Board members in future editions of *Proteus*, and we look forward to your ideas and contributions as NAJIT becomes increasingly stronger.

Look for us in Atlanta at NAJIT's 47th Annual Conference.

We can't wait to meet you!



WHO SHAPES THE FIELD?

Reflections on research, practice, and leadership in judiciary interpreting & translation

Conversation Between Julli Jaramillo, MS & Melissa Wallace, PhD

The Society for the Study of Translation and Interpretation has long worked at the intersection of research and practice in judiciary interpreting and translation. Its mission has been to create space for collaboration between scholars and practitioners, recognizing that the knowledge produced in the field must reflect both academic inquiry and lived professional experience. Through initiatives such as the SSTI Research Collaborative, the organization has supported efforts to bring these perspectives together in ways that strengthen both research and practice.

In this reflection, a former SSTI leader looks back on a period of growth, collaboration, and challenge. The conversation highlights the importance of mentorship, the need to expand who participates in research, and the realities shaping the field today. It also speaks to a broader question that continues to surface across the profession: who defines the standards, priorities, and direction of judiciary interpreting and translation as it moves forward.

Q: When you reflect on your time as President of SSTI, what moments or accomplishments stand out to you most now, in hindsight?

A: I joined SSTI in 2015. I joined at a time when Janis Palma was the president, and the other board members were also giants in our field: Aída Martínez-Gómez, Susan Berk-Seligson, and Holly Mikkelsen. It was a rare opportunity to work toward advancing the confluence of research and practice with a group of groundbreaking women who had each, in her own way, shifted the conversation about ethics, training, and research in judiciary translation and interpreting. SSTI, at the time, was forging a new path with this confluence in mind, motivated by the belief that research could be useful to inform our practice as translators and interpreters, and that the lived experience, wisdom, and knowledge of practitioners was vital to the work of scholars.

SSTI's greatest success to date, from my personal perspective, has been the SSTI Research Collaborative, a multi-year project which created and mentored research teams comprised of legal translation and interpreting practitioners, early-career researchers, and seasoned scholars. These diverse research teams worked in several language combinations including ASL, Spanish, Farsi, and Dari, and to date have

presented their findings at two international TIS conferences. Furthermore, four peer-reviewed publications have stemmed from this mixed-team mentorship experience. This remarkably intense and fruitful program (which took place over a full year and a half of the pandemic) aimed to create synergies between researchers, a powerful national professional association (NAJIT), emerging and veteran scholars, and practicing legal interpreters and translators.

The SSTI Research Collaborative was more than a mentoring project—it was a bold intervention aimed at reshaping the contours of research legitimacy in our field. We sought to equip “invisible” researchers—often seasoned practitioners—with the tools and support needed to co-create research that addresses the real-world challenges of language access and legal interpreting. Our motivation stemmed from a critical recognition: that research agendas in translation and interpreting studies are often set by academic insiders, which can lead to systemic exclusions that silence practitioner voices and sideline urgent, practice-based questions.

“The SSTI Research Collaborative was more than a mentoring project. It was a bold intervention aimed at reshaping the contours of research legitimacy in our field.”

WHO SHAPES THE FIELD?

Reflections on research, practice, and leadership in judiciary interpreting & translation

These constraining attitudes and practices have come to define who is welcome in our research communities and whose research is seen as legitimate. The work of the SSTI Research Collaborative has not only impacted those who participated in the program but has also helped inspire broader conversations about equity, authorship, and relevance in translation and interpreting scholarship.

Q: In what ways did this role change or shape you—either personally or professionally?

A: As a follow-up to the previous question, working so closely with fellow SSTI board members (Aída Martínez-Gómez, Christopher Mellinger, Marianne Mason) over a period of years, in the midst of a pandemic, on such an intense project – was truly a labor of love, and it brought me immense personal and professional satisfaction. We were really building a rich, multi-layered mentorship scheme with countless moving parts from the ground up, and we never could have done it without the full support of the NAJIT board (they were all in from the beginning) and, above all, without the tremendous buy-in and support we received from CMAC. Rob Cruz and Susan Cruz were crucial in the success of the project, and the legacy of the Research Collaborative is a shared one. As proud as we all are of the inroads our research teams made, the conferences they presented at, and their wonderful publications (thanks to our senior scholars, who were crucial in this process), I think that one of the most valuable gifts that the experience gave me was the solidarity, trust and friendship forged with other board members and with members of the research teams. We were even lucky enough to later welcome Christina Guerrero-Harmon, a federally certified judiciary interpreter and Collaborative mentee, onto the Board of SSTI. We often talked about our work in terms of synergy, and it was a momentum that was truly fueled by optimism and commitment.

“Research agendas in translation and interpreting studies are often set by academic insiders, which can lead to systemic exclusions that silence practitioner voices.”

Q: As you step away from this chapter, what hopes or directions do you hold for the future of our profession and the communities we serve?

A: We are facing a relentless onslaught of uncompromising, short-sighted, discriminatory policy shifts, and language access is more precarious than it has ever been. In many ways, the communities we serve are dramatically more vulnerable than they have ever been, and we, as workers in this space, are also targets. Although some of our changes are technological, our real pain points are political. I see NAJIT fighting back on many fronts, and that convinces me that our language access colleagues are as committed to justice as they are to improving the field.

Q: If you could leave the community with one final reflection, what would it be?

A: I would begin with a sincere note of thanks to every single NAJIT member who checks the box to donate a “little extra” to SSTI when renewing their membership. Those donations allow us to support our projects in material ways that really make a difference, and donating money is one way that we can express confidence and trust in the organizations that work tirelessly to advance our profession. I am a tremendous believer in professional associations for so many reasons. My eleven years with SSTI have been a gift, and I’m excited to see what directions our current board decides to forge.

We extend our sincere thanks to Melissa for her time, dedication, leadership within SSTI, NAJIT, & the profession as a whole. Her commitment to advancing the field, uplifting the voices within it has left a lasting mark, and her impact will be felt for years to come.

CROSSROADS, WITHOUT BORDERS

Artificial Intelligence, Language Access, & Professional Responsibility Across Borders

At NAJIT's 46th Annual Conference in Indianapolis, the keynote speaker, Ellen Wingo, offered a metaphor that continues to resonate throughout the profession: *the crossroads*.

***“Our profession stands at one, too,”
Wingo stated in her keynote address.***

At the time, the remark felt cautionary.

One year later, it feels increasingly immediate.

Artificial intelligence is rapidly entering legal, educational, and language-access spaces. Courts and institutions across the world are already experimenting with machine-assisted tools, automated workflows, and AI-supported translation systems. The conversation is no longer about whether AI will enter the profession.

It already has.

The question now is what must remain unmistakably human as these technologies continue to evolve.

That question stands at the center of NAJIT's 47th Annual Conference theme: *Beyond AI: The Irreplaceable Human Element*.

***“If we stay silent, the decisions will still
be made. But they’ll be made without us”
Ellen Wingo warned in her remarks.***

For judiciary interpreters and translators, the challenge is not simply about resisting technology, but understanding how to adapt alongside it responsibly. AI may support workflow efficiency, terminology research, and accessibility, but language access requires far more than literal translation. Human interpreters navigate tone, cultural nuance, ethics, trust, and emotional context in ways technology still cannot fully replicate.

As artificial intelligence continues to evolve, many professionals are asking not how to compete with AI, but how to help shape its responsible use within legal settings.

That warning continues to frame many of the conversations taking place throughout this year's conference as professionals across the field gather to examine not only where artificial intelligence is taking the profession, but how judiciary interpreters and translators can help shape what comes next.

NAJIT 47th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Atlanta, GA 2026 | June 5-7

BEYOND AI

The Irreplaceable Human Element



Be a part of the conversation!

Leonard Morin

About seven years ago, I met a *recently* retired computer hardware salesman, who asked me what I do for a living. When I told him, “*I am a court interpreter*,” he initially was not sure what I meant. When I explained to him more explicitly what my job entails, he proudly informed me that my line of work would become obsolete within a few years thanks to the revolutionary innovations that were happening in artificial intelligence. I was skeptical about his contention, but could not refute it. For one, the fact that he referred to me as a “*translator*” instead of “*interpreter*” did not inspire my confidence in his knowledge of our profession. The following are my observations about artificial intelligence interpreting, from my perspective as an interpreter, not a computer expert. Will machine interpreting replace human interpreters? If machine interpreters develop to the point of being as accurate as or more accurate than we are, should we step aside and let the robots and the techies take over?

Robots vs. Humans

Interpreting is “*among the most complex cognitive/linguistic activities*” and is still beyond even the most intelligent robots.¹ Generative AI, which is the technology employed for machine interpreting, uses a “large language model (LLM), a computer algorithm that processes natural language inputs and predicts the next word based on what it’s already seen. Then it predicts the next word, and the next word, and so on until its answer is complete.”² The proponents of A.I. interpreting argue that it can work with great consistency and speed, that it is cheaper than humans, more flexible, and available 24/7.³ A machine interpreter is not affected by stress, nervousness, or fatigue, as human interpreters can be. Machine translation, that is straight written translation, requires human review when more than a rough rendition is necessary, but machine interpreting gives even less accurate results, due to the extra steps it involves.⁴ An interpreter who can be turned on and off like a light may look attractive to lawyers, judges, and court administrators, but, unfortunately or not, it carries liabilities.

“Interpreting is ‘among the most complex cognitive/linguistic activities’ and is still beyond even the most intelligent robots.”

A.I. has difficulty with contextual comprehension, cultural sensitivity, complex languages, industry-specific expertise, expression of emotion, and ethical subtleties.⁵ It cannot reliably disentangle non-standard speech. The existing technology always produces hallucinations, i.e. made-up extraneous information.⁶ The World Health Organization (WHO) last year performed testing on eighteen speeches among the six official U.N. languages, using a leading simultaneous machine interpretation application and found the accuracy level to be about 50% across the board. It encountered multiple other problems, including that all the tested renditions would present reputational risks for the agency using the software and a time lag of the renditions at times surpassing 32 seconds, which is antithetical to simultaneous interpreting.⁷ Fifty percent accuracy in court would certainly lead to serious injustices and 30-second lag times in interpreting dialogue would sow chaos in court proceedings. The study’s conclusion was that even the current best iterations of machine simultaneous interpreting systems are grossly inadequate for use in WHO meetings. Even though A.I. interpreting is getting better by the day, to seriously compete with human interpreters, a paradigm shift beyond generative A.I. large language models will be necessary.⁸ Contextual awareness alone may be decades away.⁹

It may be impossible to predict what A.I. will be able to do five, ten, or more years from now, but it is safe to say that it will develop in ways we cannot anticipate. This lies in the fact that A.I.’s decision making process is opaque, due to the complex algorithms it uses to function. This leads to a twofold problem: the unpredictable nature of the software systems makes human intervention necessary when precision is at a premium¹⁰; the unpredictability of new innovations in A.I. make it necessary to adopt its use with care instead of indiscriminately embracing the newest technology.

Continued on page 10

Consider a Palestinian man who was arrested for posting “good morning” in Arabic on Facebook, which was translated into “hurt them” in English or “attack them” in Hebrew.¹¹ He was arrested, questioned, and, fortunately, released within a few hours when the police realized the mistake. Or consider an asylum case where machine translation mistakes evidently led to a man’s prolonged detention.¹² Will the human beings we interpreters are serving eventually be better off with a highly competent robot than a highly competent human being?

“Machine interpreting gives even less accurate results, due to the extra steps it involves.”

How will our replacement by robots affect the rapport that the limited English proficient (LEP) court users develop with their attorneys or other service providers?¹³ Our culture underestimates the value and abilities of human beings. The current machine interpreting technology lacks the “common sense” that a competent human interpreter would have, leading to mistakes that humans would easily spot.¹⁴ For instance, A.I. interpreting can promote bias: *“AI systems can unintentionally reflect biases from the data they’re trained on. This means that misinterpreting cultural or personal context can lead to harmful stereotypes...”*¹⁵

I queried Claude.ai a while back for a list of great jazz pioneers, and it returned an answer that included a recommendation of Bix Beiderbecke, adding that he was “one of the first great white jazz musicians,” which came across to me as a little tacky. Although human interpreters also make mistakes, contrary to machines, they often know when they are making mistakes. We also have some expectation of what kinds of mistakes a human will make, whereas it is nearly impossible to anticipate what mistakes machine interpreters will make.

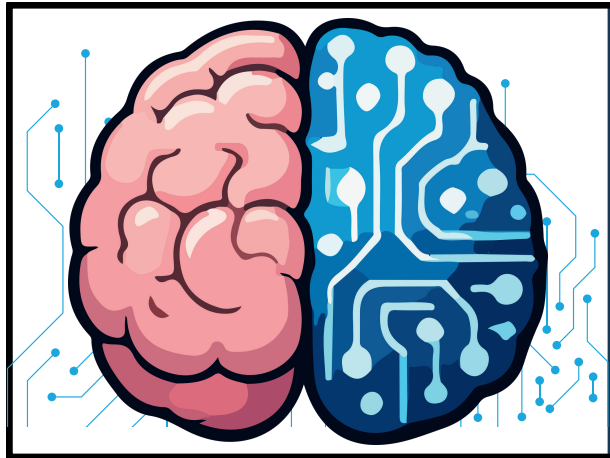
Indeed, the current machine interpreting paradigm faces many challenges: understanding nuanced meaning, unstructured or overlapping speech, accents, and unclear pronunciation. As stated above, A.I. translates based on a statistical calculation. It does not have any concept of the world and hence has trouble adapting its rendition to a given speaker or audience.¹⁶ A.I. software generally relies on a cloud server due to the huge data sets necessary for the A.I. to function, which causes negative environmental impacts. What if that server is hacked? What if the A.I. company’s data are sold to a third party?¹⁷ The implications of A.I. on confidentiality in the legal professions are alarming. What if a handful of companies have oligopolistic ownership of the machine interpreting systems, causing the prices to skyrocket?¹⁸



A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Yet, whether A.I. Interpreting technology can perform on par with human interpreters may not be the issue. The government and business are already pushing to introduce A.I. interpreting on the market no matter what.¹⁹ This is because, however inadequate A.I. interpreting may be, certain individuals or entities, such as software designers or employers, or the computer salesman I mentioned above, will stand to gain from A.I. taking over our profession. The rhetoric extolling the boundless potential of A.I. translation software has become constant, even though it debases the skills of trained and experienced interpreters. This disdain for our profession, which, incidentally, some of our colleagues have internalized, is not new, especially in this country. A new pro-A.I. ideology could drown out a rational discussion of A.I. and interpreting.

For decades, in response to the undervaluation of our skills, we interpreters have fought, individually and through our professional associations and unions (for those of us who are fortunate enough to have unions), to win respect for ourselves as a profession. The Court Interpreters Act and the first criterion-based court interpreter certification exams served as a pillar of our recognition, giving rise to higher standards in court interpreting. We are still a relatively new kid on the block in the courts and are sometimes misconstrued as advocates for disfavored ethnic or national groups. The new competition from machines, which will constitute a threat to less qualified interpreters, will compel us to adopt a renewed commitment to excellence. The A.I. propaganda is the latest challenge to our professional standing. The introduction of A.I. falls into step with an already existing line of thinking that classifies interpreting as a menial—or robotic—task.



Another concerning side effect of the A.I. hype that one can observe is that those, largely young people, who might contemplate entering this profession, are discouraged by the constant bombardment with the news that A.I. will soon replace us. The number and quality of court interpreting programs surged in the last twenty years or so and now we may be seeing a reverse trend.²⁰ A colleague who teaches two introductory court interpreting classes at a university here in New York City told me that both classes were canceled last fall due to low enrollment, which she told

me she had never seen happen before. This trend could favor the introduction of A.I. interpreting due to a greater shortage of human interpreters, caused precisely by the A.I. hype, thereby making our obsolescence a self-fulfilling prophecy. This gradual elimination of live interpreters could ultimately become the death blow to the profession, as disastrous as this might be for society. We will become dependent on A.I. interpreting simply because no one has been trained to interpret; no one knows how. This would degrade the administration of justice, which is particularly alarming because it was flawed to start with.

Does a Better World Lie Ahead?

Yet, besides being court interpreters, we are also human beings and citizens. If A.I. Interpreting is better for society, should we not embrace it? If it becomes more accurate and reliable, cheaper, more available, if there are no longer ethical barriers, then should we not support our own replacement by A.I? Interpreters are currently using A.I. as a crutch to perform more reliably and accurately. It serves for training, assignment prep, and performance enhancement.²¹ I think this is a good thing. Artificial intelligence came in very handy to me in researching this article. I think it is imperative that we, as interpreters and translators, take advantage of A.I. innovations to become even more effective. But we should also be very vigilant of it, educating ourselves and other stakeholders about the pitfalls of its use.

According to some studies, A.I. can decide ethical dilemmas as reliably as or better than human beings in some instances and can explain the moral reasoning behind its choices.²² Would you want A.I. to replace philosophers, politicians, priests, or other professionals who make far-reaching decisions over our lives? I think that for us to really consider A.I. interpreting substituting us, it would—at minimum—have to overcome the hurdles discussed in this article. It would have to be able to operate without human oversight, which in itself is inherently problematic.

Continued on page 12

Further, if the advance of technology allows us to obtain better results, more quickly and cheaply, shouldn't we be becoming more prosperous? For one, we should be working shorter hours without financial loss. Isn't that what progress is? If it becomes easier and cheaper to produce everything we need and we continue to struggle as much as ever to survive, maybe we're barking up the wrong tree. We have been fooled before. Technology has advanced by leaps and bounds since the advent of the home computer, but real wages have remained stagnant at best.²³ Experience has shown that training and economic incentives lead to human interpreting that is superior to machines. Maybe we should invest our resources in a larger and more qualified workforce of human interpreters, who will outperform the machines for the foreseeable future.

I thank Tom Hafner, Alex Wieder, and Álvaro de Prat for reading previous drafts of this article and giving their valuable feedback.

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Leonard Morin is a state and federally certified Spanish interpreter and staff interpreter at Manhattan Criminal Court. He previously worked as a freelance translator and interpreter from 2004-2015. Leonard interprets Spanish and translates chiefly legal documents from Spanish, Dutch, and German into English. He served as a Delegate and subsequently as Court Interpreter Chapter Chair of Local 1070, District Council 37, of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the union that represents court interpreters in New York City's state courts. Prior to that, he served separate terms as President and Secretary of the New York Circle of Translators. He earned a propeduse degree in law in the Netherlands and graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. in Latin American Studies from Columbia University, where he won the 2004 Dr. Antonio G. Mier Prize for Excellence in Spanish and a Certificate in Recognition of Outstanding Achievement in the Study of German Language and Literature. Leonard also obtained certificates from the University of Arizona Court Interpreter Training Institute and the Southern California School of Interpretation. He has published numerous articles about translation, interpreting, and the T&I industry.

THE EVOLVING STANDARD OF CARE:

How Court Interpreter Certification Requirements Are Changing Across State Lines

Alexandra Kaplan

A certified court interpreter shows up for a deposition in New Jersey. She has been working as a court interpreter in California for eleven years, holds her California state certification, and has interpreted in hundreds of legal proceedings. The New Jersey firm that retained her assumes her credentials transfer. They don't.

California certifications issued prior to 2011 are not recognized for reciprocity purposes in New Jersey. The interpreter is not on the state roster. The deposition proceeds, but the record is now vulnerable. If opposing counsel digs into her credentials and challenges her standing, the firm has a problem.

This scenario is not hypothetical. It plays out across the country as law firms, corporations, and government agencies retain interpreters across state lines without fully understanding how court interpreter certification actually works in each jurisdiction. And as individual states continue updating their requirements, the standard of care is shifting in ways that matter for everyone who relies on professional interpreting services.



Why Certification Does Not Transfer the Way People Assume

The core issue is that court interpreter certification in the United States is not a national credential. It is a state-by-state system with a patchwork of requirements, reciprocity agreements, and credentialing categories that vary significantly by jurisdiction.

The National Center for State Courts develops oral certification examinations that many states use as the basis for their programs. But each state is solely responsible for credentialing interpreters to practice in its courts. Passing the NCSC examination in one state does not automatically qualify an interpreter to work in another. Reciprocity is available in many cases, but the conditions vary. Some states require that the interpreter completed the entire certification process in one sitting in one state. Others require minimum scores on all sections. Some states, like New Jersey, simply do not recognize credentials from certain states at all, regardless of the interpreter's experience level.

For law firms handling matters in multiple jurisdictions, and for the legal interpreting services providers they work with, this creates real exposure. An interpreter who is fully credentialed in one state may be working outside their authorized scope in another, and no one in the room may know it.

The Credential Categories Are Not Equivalent

Adding another layer of complexity: even within a single state, not all court interpreter credentials are equivalent. Most state programs include multiple tiers.

- In California, interpreters are designated as certified or registered, with court certified interpreters required for most court proceedings.
- In Utah, the tiers are certified, approved, and registered, each with different examination requirements and different rules about when they can be appointed.

Continued on page 14

THE EVOLVING STANDARD OF CARE:

How Court Interpreter Certification Requirements Are Changing Across State Lines

Continued

What this means in practice: the term "*certified court interpreter*" does not mean the same thing everywhere. A certified interpreter in one jurisdiction may hold a credential that is equivalent to a provisionally approved interpreter in another. For legal professionals booking interpretation services, verifying the credential tier matters as much as verifying that a credential exists.

States Are Updating Their Requirements

The landscape is not static. Several states have made significant changes to their court interpreter certification requirements in 2024 and 2025, and more updates are expected.

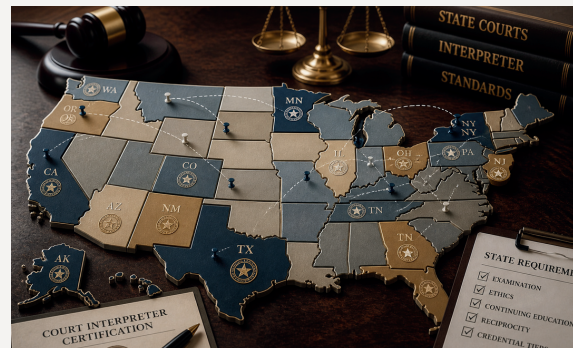
- California implemented new compliance rules effective January 1, 2025, under AB 1032. The changes restructured how interpreters are classified and compensated, introduced a new intermittent part-time interpreter category, updated continuing education requirements, and revised the penalty structure for compliance failures. Interpreters who miss compliance deadlines now face suspension rather than permanent revocation, a shift designed to keep qualified professional interpreters available while maintaining accountability standards. These changes directly affect California interpreting services providers and the law firms they serve.
- Ohio adopted amendments to its court interpreter rules effective November 2025, including new standards for professional conduct, continuing education requirements, and guidelines for the use of artificial intelligence in interpretation and translation services.

These updates reflect a broader trend: state court systems are raising the standard of care for legal interpretation in their jurisdictions, adding requirements around ethics, technology, and ongoing credentialing rather than treating certification as a one-time event.

What This Means for Legal Professionals

For attorneys and legal operations teams that regularly engage interpreting services, the practical implications are straightforward.

Credential verification should happen at the jurisdiction level, not just at the interpreter level. Confirming that an interpreter is certified is not enough. The verification should confirm that the certification is current, is the appropriate tier for the proceeding type, and is recognized in the specific jurisdiction where the matter is taking place.



Reciprocity should not be assumed. When a matter involves an interpreter working across state lines, the agency or attorney responsible for securing the interpreter should confirm that the credential is accepted in the destination jurisdiction. Many states provide public registries that allow credential verification before the proceeding.

Continuing education compliance matters. Several states now require ongoing continuing education as a condition of maintaining certification. A certified interpreter whose credential has lapsed due to a missed compliance deadline is not the same as an interpreter in good standing, even if they hold the same credential designation. Confirming current compliance status, not just credential type, is part of due diligence.

Documentation should be ready before the proceeding, not after. If credentials are challenged on the record, having documentation available immediately prevents delays and protects the integrity of the transcript.

THE EVOLVING STANDARD OF CARE:

How Court Interpreter Certification Requirements Are Changing Across State Lines

Continued

“Understanding how those standards vary across state lines is no longer optional knowledge for legal interpreting professionals. It is the baseline.”

The Broader Standard of Care

For professional interpreters working across multiple jurisdictions, these changes signal a higher ongoing compliance burden. Certification is increasingly treated as a continuous professional obligation, not a credential earned once and held indefinitely. Ethics refreshers, continuing education credits, compliance cycles, and conduct standards are becoming standard features of state credentialing programs rather than optional professional development.

For the profession, this trend is positive. A higher standard of care for court certified interpreters and the interpretation services they provide protects the integrity of legal proceedings and creates clearer accountability when something goes wrong.

The patchwork nature of state certification requirements remains a real challenge for everyone in the field. But the direction of travel is clear: states are taking court interpreter credentialing more seriously, updating requirements more frequently, and holding certified interpreters to higher ongoing standards than they did a decade ago.

Understanding how those standards vary across state lines is no longer optional knowledge for legal interpreting professionals.

It is the baseline.



Alexandra Kaplan grew up in Dallas, Texas, in a multilingual environment that included Spanish, English, Arabic, and Italian. After moving to Venezuela, Spanish became her primary language. She holds a Master's degree in Healthcare Administration from Washington University in St. Louis and is a California court-certified and medical interpreter.

She is the founder of Kaplan Interpreting Services, an interpretation and translation agency built on a protocol-driven model that emphasizes credentialing, assignment-specific interpreter selection, and structured client support. Her work has focused on advancing professional standards and accountability within the language services field. Her experience includes high-level interpreting assignments in government, corporate, and international settings, including facilitating a conversation between President-elect Joe Biden and Pope Francis, as well as engagements with Nike and the Summit of the Americas. These experiences have informed her continued emphasis on consistency, preparation, and risk management in professional interpreting practice.

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SPAIN RETREAT 2024: INTERPRETER TRAINING

A Continuing Education Experience in Comparative Legal Systems

Vicki Bermúdez



AS court interpreters in the United States, much of our professional training centers on accuracy and completeness. Yet accuracy does not exist in a vacuum. It is shaped by legal systems, procedural norms, and cultural frameworks. One often overlooked challenge is the structural difference between the U.S. common law system and the civil law systems of many Spanish-speaking countries represented by Limited English Proficient (LEP) speakers in our courts.

In 2024, I participated in a six-day continuing education program titled, *Spain Retreat 2024: Interpreter Training*, organized by Prof. Karen Borgenheimer of Interpreter Translation, LLC. The experience offered 20 instructional hours (16–20 CEUs) focused on comparative legal systems, translation practices, terminology precision, and courtroom observation in Spain. What distinguished this program was not only its academic rigor, but the opportunity to contextualize our work within the broader framework of civil law.

The retreat was held at the Real Centro Universitario (RCU) María Cristina in San Lorenzo de El Escorial, a historic university campus near Madrid. Alongside classroom instruction, participants engaged in cultural-visits which deepened our understanding of Spain's judicial structure.

Civil Law and Common Law: A Comparative Lens

An in-depth and thought-provoking session led by Dr. Susana San Cristóbal, Dean of the Law School, examined structural differences between Spain's civil law system and the U.S. common law tradition.

The United States operates under common law, derived from England, where judicial precedent and case law shape our legal interpretation of laws. Here, judges serve as neutral arbiters, and their rulings contribute to the evolution of legal standards.

In contrast, Spain follows the Roman civil law system grounded in ancient codified statutes. Judges act as triers of fact, actively questioning witnesses and directing proceedings. Thus, legislative action, rather than judicial interpretation, drives legal change.

Observing the Audiencia Provincial

The highlight of the program was our visit to the Audiencia Provincial in Madrid, where we observed portions of several trials. One fascinating case involved a defendant accused of double homicide, who escaped to another country, thus evading authorities for *twenty years*!

The proceedings demonstrated several procedural distinctions from U.S. trials:

- Judges led witness questioning as primary examiners.
- Interpreters interacted more directly with defendants.
- Jury members were permitted to pose questions.

“Accuracy does not exist in a vacuum. It is shaped by legal systems, procedural norms, and cultural frameworks.”

- Victims were represented by government-provided legal counsel empowered to advocate *formally* for them.
- Deliberation and sentencing occurred very swiftly.
- Jury trials are limited according to specific legal requirements.

For interpreters trained within the U.S. system, these structural contrasts were illuminating.

Continued on page 18

Terminology, Precision, and Professional Growth

Seeing the civil law model in practice gave me a greater appreciation for our common law system.

The retreat also included practical sessions for translators and interpreters. One workshop addressed the requirements for internationally-produced, legally binding translated documents that comply with strict US certification standards.

Another session, “¿Correcto o Excelente?” led by Alberto Gómez Font, examined lexical precision in court interpreting. Participants explored alternatives to frequently overused or misleading terms and false cognates such as: *nominar*, *clasificar*, or *realizar*. The exercise reinforced the richness of the Spanish language and the responsibility interpreters bear in selecting terminology that is accurate, *fresh*, and contextually appropriate.

Xosé Castro Roig presented research tools and digital resources to improve efficiency in complex translation projects. Antonio Martín offered a thoughtful discussion on the use of plain language in legal contexts, arguing that accessibility promotes democratic participation. His presentation prompted reflection on the balance between linguistic precision and clarity in legal communication.

“Interpreting does not occur solely at the level of language. It occurs at the intersection of legal culture, institutional structure, and human experience.”

Crime Scene Analysis and Investigative Insight

On the final instructional day, Chief Inspector Enrique González Reales of the National Police’s Organized Crime Unit guided participants through a case analysis, demonstrating investigative techniques used to reconstruct crime scenes. The session underscored the importance of understanding investigative procedures to enhance our interpreting skills.



Historical Context and Cultural Immersion

The retreat included visits to San Lorenzo de El Escorial and Segovia. Touring San Lorenzo de El Escorial, a 16th century edifice built as a monastery, palace, basilica, and royal mausoleum, offered historical grounding in Spain’s institutional development. The Royal Library, Renaissance architecture and vast collection of paintings by the masters, provided a powerful reminder of Europe’s intellectual and artistic contributions.

In Segovia, we explored the impressive 1st century Roman aqueduct, the medieval Alcázar, and the historic center’s narrow streets. These cultural experiences reinforced the meaning that civilizational context lends to understanding contemporary legal institutions.

A Diverse Professional Cohort

Participants ranged from early-career interpreters to seasoned professionals and retirees. Some were federally certified, while others were state-certified. Collectively, we represented more than a dozen U.S. jurisdictions and a wide range of backgrounds.

The professional camaraderie we developed was transformative. Engaging deeply with colleagues from different regions and practice settings broadened our perspectives.

One participant embraced the importance of professional self-advocacy, giving her the confidence to request repetitions or clarifications without qualms. Another reflected on how personal interaction with fellow interpreters reshaped her understanding of the profession's diversity.

“It reaffirmed the value of stepping outside familiar systems to deepen our understanding of the work we do every day.”

Conclusion

Continuing education often focuses narrowly on technique. This program offered something broader: comparative legal insight, linguistic refinement, and renewed professional perspective.

By situating our work within the civil law tradition, observing courtroom practice abroad, and engaging with colleagues in a concentrated academic setting, we were reminded that interpreting does not occur solely at the level of language. It occurs at the intersection of legal culture, institutional structure, and human experience. For me, the retreat was both intellectually rigorous and personally transformative. It reaffirmed the value of stepping outside familiar systems to deepen our understanding of the work we do every day.



Vicki Bermúdez is a freelance interpreter from Wisconsin who is state-certified in court interpreting and nationally certified in medical interpreting through CCHI. Before entering the interpreting profession, she spent many years working in construction and real estate, negotiating bids, sales, and financing, before unexpectedly taking a position delivering mail for the USPS. In 2006, she explored interpreting as a career and immediately discovered a passion for the work, prompting her to leave the stability of the USPS to pursue the more unpredictable path of entrepreneur-interpreter.

After gaining experience in medical, community, and educational interpreting, Vicki became certified for court interpreting in 2007 and later served as the first staff interpreter in Racine, Wisconsin. That role gave her valuable insight into the legal process from case initiation through final disposition, deepening her understanding of courtroom procedure and the law. Today, she continues freelancing and enjoys both the diversity of the profession and the constant challenge of studying terminology, while also making time for gardening, grandchildren, and gallivanting around the world.

BEYOND AI: THE IRREPLACEABLE HUMAN ELEMENT

Conference Word Search Challenge

y r o m e m z b b c o g n i t i o n y c m h m q f n d y d r
d n a j i t w a i n u a n c e m y c o o u o g k o d e y e p
p e j l e g i s l a t i o n e r a m i m h g o i i n v t i g
r c c i n e y d i a p m v d a r m n a m d u t r r l e h f l
o u r o t a l s n a r t i s u u c n m u g a a o t r s l i q
t t c h d i f h g c h c s c n l e b e n n t t j p r a s t c
e y i w d i g g u i a o c i u l r p i i r t x r o b u n r o
u c z n o h n r a l l a t s e i r n m c a j e t r d o o e n
s m w u p x t g l g i y i m e o e a c a c t n e e i l i c s
y t i n a m u h i i k o e f c t x c m t n e v l t a y t w e
y k f n t k d l s a n n i e s e i p u i m n i a r t d a h c
n t q c s w o i m f t n s i y n b h l o o b c u i i e t n u
c o i y t i u q e f g s l a e p p a y n e i t l i j f i y t
n o i l h e c n a i l p m o c o r p s r f l a p b i e d y i
g o l t i a d j u d i c a t i o n l a i u i s h j x n e e v
n m i l a b j w u a c u l t u r e t r c t o q c e f d r c e
i o x s a c i u h v r v f l v g i a s n f n t u i y a c n i
l o n d n b i s s i z l a g a o l s e p s a r g y h n c e n
a r x o b e o f s t y f q l n c o d i s c o u r s e t a r t
i n e c i o h r i e i c t d e r i c o n s e c u t i v e e e
t o c u x t a e a t c c n h c f w g n i n o i t p a c l f r
n i n m b c a d r t r c e e n b i a s j n h e a r i n g n p
e t e e k i p r v p i e a o u b n o i t i s o p e d a h o r
d i d n e s l o t o m o c j z l n m e d i a t i o n v t c e
e s i t y n o i l i c o n u n o f x y t i v i s u l c n i t
r o v a n e h o n i b a c n g s t t r u o c l a r e d e f i
c p e t o r x p h g c r c j u d i c i a r y i f l m k s z n
f e l i t o v k p z u y a y u z f a c i l i t a t i o n o g
y d z o e f w s a p a a r e t e r p r e t n i t r u o c o i
r d x n i m p a r t i a l i t y j u r i s d i c t i o n a i

Find the conference-related words hidden above.

**Words may appear horizontally, vertically,
diagonally, forwards, or backwards.**

**Terms are drawn from our judiciary
interpreting & translation field.**

Good luck, and enjoy the challenge!

WORD BANK

accessibility	deposition room
accreditation	dialect
accuracy	discourse
adjudication	documentation
advocacy	due process
affidavit	equity
ai ethics	ethics
appeal	evidence
arbitration	examination
asylum	facilitation
attorney	federal court
bias	fluency
bilingual	forensic
bilingualism	glossary
briefing	hearing
captioning	human element
certification	humanity
certified	impartiality
clarification	inclusion
cognition	inclusivity
collaboration	interpreter
communication	judiciary
community	jurisdiction
compliance	justice
comprehension	keynote
conference	legal
confidentiality	legislation
consecutive	listening
consecutive	mediation
interpreting	medical
context	memory
court interpreter	mentorship
courtroom	najit
credentialing	nonverbal
cross cultural	nuance
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