

Atlanta, GA 2026 | June 5-7

# BEYOND AI

The Irreplaceable Human Element



## JUNE 5 PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

### Workshop Pricing

*(prices are per workshop)*

	NAJIT Member	Non-member
Early-Bird Registration (now - May 8)	\$155	\$225
Regular Registration (May 9 - May 25)	\$180	\$250
Late Registration (May 26 - June 7)	\$205	\$275

### Workshop Topics

#### Assessing Quality and Justifying Decisions

Presenter: Jeffrey Killman

Co-presenters: David Gilbert, Christina Guerrero Harmon, Melissa Wallace, Chantal Portillo, Andrew Tucker

#### Civil Commitment and Mental Health Proceedings

Presenter: Jason Knapp, CT, FCCI

#### Deaf Immigrants Face Layered Communication

Presenter: Celena Ponce

#### Full Body Simultaneous Interpreting Workout for Conference and Court Interpreters

Presenter: Niery Grace Bardakjian, MA, MBA, PhD

Co-presenter: Lili Selden, PhD

#### Level Up Your Simultaneous Interpreting: Deliberate Practice for Court Interpreters

Presenter: Carola Lehmacher

#### Note-taking For Witness Testimony: Enhancing Your Technique

Presenter: Gabriela Espinoza Siebach, MATI

#### The Mirror of Reality: Overcoming the Dunning-Kruger Effect

Presenters: James Plunkett and Agustin De La Mora

## Pre-Conference Workshops, June 5

Morning Track - 9:00am - Noon

### The Mirror of Reality: Overcoming the Dunning-Kruger Effect

**Presenters:** James Plunkett and Agustin De La Mora

**Location:** Buckhead A

#### Session Description

The Dunning-Kruger Effect—where individuals overestimate their abilities due to limited self-awareness—can pose challenges for professionals who rely on accurate self-evaluation to improve their skills. This workshop examines how the concept applies to interpreting practice and introduces structured methods for assessing performance more objectively.

Participants will work with exercises in simultaneous, consecutive, and sight translation modes while applying techniques designed to help bridge the gap between perceived and actual skill. Through guided self-audit and analysis of common “trap” structures that may lead to language interference, attendees will explore strategies for identifying errors, improving accuracy, and strengthening professional performance.

This hands-on session encourages reflective practice and provides interpreters with practical tools to evaluate their work more critically and refine their interpreting techniques across multiple modes. Participants should bring a recording device, headphones, and writing materials for note-taking and exercises.

#### Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Explain how the Dunning-Kruger Effect can influence self-assessment in interpreting practice.
- Apply structured self-audit techniques to evaluate performance in simultaneous, consecutive, and sight translation modes.
- Identify and interpret common language-interference “traps” found in legal texts.
- Practice self-correction strategies to improve accuracy and clarity in interpreted renditions.
- Recognize relevant professional ethics principles, including Canons 1, 2, 6, 7, and 8, and apply them when evaluating interpreting performance.



James Plunkett

James Plunkett is a nationally recognized interpreter instructor and trainer of trainers. He also trains judges and court staff on effective collaboration with court interpreters. He is certified by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts as a Spanish/English court interpreter and serves as a rater for a national interpreter credentialing program.

Over more than three decades of professional experience, he has worked as a court interpreter for the 13th Judicial Circuit in Florida and as Coordinator of Interpreting Services and the Language Access Program for the District of Columbia Courts. He currently serves as a staff interpreter for the U.S. District Court in Tampa, Florida. Mr. Plunkett holds a BA in General Social Studies from Providence College and was raised in Lima, Peru. In addition to Spanish and English, he communicates in Portuguese and has working knowledge of French and Italian.

## Pre-Conference Workshops, June 5

Morning Track - 9:00am - Noon

### Level Up Your Simultaneous Interpreting: Deliberate Practice for Court Interpreters

**Presenter:** Carola Lehmacher

**Location:** Buckhead B

#### Session Description

Simultaneous interpreting is cognitively demanding and requires ongoing practice to maintain and improve performance. In addition to preparing for case-specific terminology and subject matter, court interpreters must regularly refine the techniques that support accuracy, processing speed, and delivery in the simultaneous mode.

This session introduces the concept of deliberate practice as a structured approach to strengthening simultaneous interpreting skills. Participants will examine methods for evaluating their own performance, including the use of a practical rubric to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The workshop will also present targeted exercises designed to help interpreters address common challenges and refine specific aspects of their technique.

Through guided discussion and practical examples, participants will gain tools to support reflective practice and develop individualized strategies for continuing skill development in simultaneous interpreting.

#### Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe the principles of deliberate practice and how they apply to simultaneous interpreting.
- Evaluate their own interpreting performance using structured assessment criteria.
- Identify common challenges in simultaneous interpreting and strategies to address them.
- Apply targeted exercises to strengthen key simultaneous interpreting skills.
- Develop a personalized practice plan to support ongoing professional growth.



Carola Lehmacher

Carola Lehmacher is a multilingual freelance translator and interpreter with more than fifteen years of experience working with government and industry clients at executive and operational levels. She holds two university degrees in Translation Studies and a master's degree in Conference Interpreting.

Carola is a Federally Certified Court Interpreter (FCCI) and a Master Licensed Court Interpreter in Georgia. In addition to conference interpreting for local and international clients, she also provides voice work for a major news network. She is a licensed trainer for The Community Interpreter® International and serves as Chair of the AAITE Ethics and Standards Committee, an advisory member to the Georgia Commission on Court Interpreters, a member of NAJIT's Position Papers Committee, and President of AAIT, the Georgia chapter of ATA.

## Pre-Conference Workshops, June 5

Morning Track - 9:00am - Noon

### Full Body Simultaneous Interpreting Workout for Conference and Court Interpreters

**Presenter:** Niery Grace Bardakjian, MA, MBA, PhD

**Co-presenter:** Lili Selden, PhD

**Location:** Heritage C

#### Session Description

As advances in AI prompt renewed discussion about automation in language services, interpreters must continue strengthening the professional skills that define their work. While conference interpreters often work primarily in the simultaneous mode and court interpreters more frequently in the consecutive mode, practitioners in both fields benefit from shared training techniques that support memory, accuracy, and cognitive endurance.

This interactive, language-neutral workshop introduces practical exercises designed to strengthen the core skills used in both conference and court interpreting. Drawing on the presenters' collaborative practice as long-term online study partners, the session explores the distinct yet overlapping cognitive demands of different interpreting modes and demonstrates effective strategies for skill development.

Participants will engage in guided warm-ups and hands-on exercises—including shadowing, memory-building drills, vocabulary substitution, vocal experimentation, and role-play scenarios. Designed for interpreters at all experience levels, the workshop provides practical tools and structured practice methods that participants can incorporate into their regular professional training routines. Attendees are encouraged to bring a recording device (such as a smartphone), notepad, and pen or pencil and should be prepared to participate actively and exchange constructive feedback with peers.

#### Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify key cognitive and performance challenges associated with simultaneous interpreting in conference and court settings.
- Practice foundational interpreting exercises, including shadowing, dual-tasking, word substitution, and grammar substitution drills.
- Apply memory-building and vocabulary-development activities designed to strengthen processing speed and linguistic flexibility.
- Engage in structured role-play exercises that simulate interpreting scenarios and support self-assessment.
- Develop a practical "interpreting workout" routine that incorporates regular skill-building exercises into ongoing professional practice.



Niery Grace Bardakjian

Niery Grace Bardakjian, MA, MBA, PhD, is a conference and liaison interpreter based in Armenia who also coaches English, conference interpreting, test preparation (TOEFL and GMAT), and music (piano and voice) both locally and online. She is the founder of Grace+ful Learning, which provides interpreting, translation, and technical support for events.

In addition to working with corporate clients, she interprets for Armenian government officials, as well as for United Nations and European Union representatives and diplomats posted to Armenia. Her conference interpreting work has focused primarily on politics, education, economics, and development. Dr. Bardakjian is also a singer, voice-over actor, and award-winning choral conductor, and she is currently studying to become a legal interpreter.

## Pre-Conference Workshops, June 5

Afternoon Track - 2:00pm - 5:00pm

### Civil Commitment and Mental Health Proceedings

**Presenter:** Jason Knapp, CT, FCC

**Location:** Buckhead A

#### Session Description

Civil commitment and mental health proceedings require interpreters to navigate rapid shifts between legal standards, clinical testimony, and lay descriptions of symptoms—often within the same exchange. This session provides court interpreters with practical strategies for maintaining neutral, formal, and internationally intelligible Spanish, with particular attention to proceedings involving Cuban witnesses.

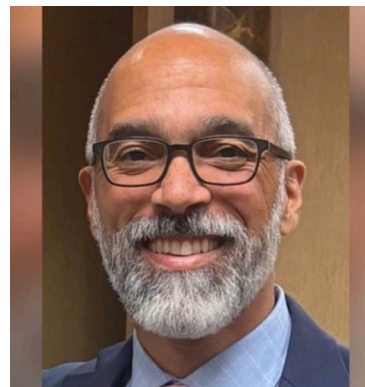
Participants will analyze common register and terminology errors, including the inappropriate transfer of criminal-law vocabulary into civil mental health contexts, and examine how these choices can affect due process and the evidentiary record. Special emphasis will be placed on register discipline—accurately distinguishing judicial findings, expert clinical language, and non-technical witness testimony without adding, omitting, or altering meaning.

Grounded in real-world evidentiary hearing scenarios, this session equips interpreters with decision-making tools that support accuracy, impartiality, and professional responsibility in high-stakes court settings.

#### Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Produce neutral, court-appropriate Spanish that is internationally intelligible and suitable for diverse Spanish-speaking populations, including Cuban witnesses.
- Recognize and avoid the improper use of criminal-law terminology in civil commitment and mental health proceedings.
- Maintain clear register distinctions when interpreting judicial findings, clinical or psychiatric expert testimony, and lay witness or respondent descriptions of symptoms.
- Render non-technical symptom descriptions faithfully without introducing legal conclusions, diagnoses, or evidentiary weight not present in the source speech.
- Strengthen the integrity of the record and interpreter credibility by aligning linguistic choices with speaker role, legal context, and professional ethical standards.



Jason Knapp

Jason Knapp is a federally certified court interpreter, an ATA-certified translator, and a conference interpreter rostered with the U.S. Department of State at the Seminar level. He is active in several professional associations and currently serves on NAJIT's Forensic Transcription Translation Standards Committee and the Nominations Committee.

## Pre-Conference Workshops, June 5

Afternoon Track - 2:00pm - 5:00pm

### Note-taking For Witness Testimony: Enhancing Your Technique

**Presenter:** Gabriela Espinoza Siebach, MATI

**Location:** Buckhead B

#### Session Description

Omissions are among the most common errors in consecutive interpreting and often occur when key information is not fully processed or retained. Effective note-taking can help interpreters capture essential details, support memory, and improve overall accuracy during witness testimony.

This hands-on workshop focuses on developing concise and organized note-taking techniques tailored to legal settings. Participants will examine strategies for structuring notes, identifying key information, and balancing listening, analysis, and writing during consecutive interpreting.

Through guided practice and realistic scenarios, attendees will strengthen their ability to record and retrieve information efficiently, supporting clearer, more complete renditions and higher-quality interpretations in courtroom and legal proceedings.

#### Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Develop a systematic approach to capturing and organizing key information during witness testimony.
- Identify effective note-taking strategies that support accuracy and completeness in interpreted testimony.
- Apply practical note-taking techniques through simulated or real-world interpreting scenarios.
- Evaluate and refine their own note-taking methods to improve efficiency and clarity during consecutive interpreting.



**Gabriela Espinoza Siebach  
MATI**

Gabriela Espinoza Siebach, MATI, is a Spanish interpreter and adjunct professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Throughout her career, she has led the development of multiple training and assessment programs for interpreters.

Gabriela is a state-certified court interpreter in California and North Carolina and holds a graduate degree in Spanish Translation and Interpretation from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. She serves on the ATA Government Division Leadership Council and the Interpretation Profession Advisory Committee, as well as the NCIHC Policy, Education & Research Committee. She is also a member of CATI and NAJIT.

## Pre-Conference Workshops, June 5

Afternoon Track - 2:00pm - 5:00pm

### Assessing Quality and Justifying Decisions

**Presenter:** Jeffrey Killman

**Co-presenters:** David Gilbert, Christina Guerrero Harmon, Melissa Wallace, Chantal Portillo, Andrew Tucker

**Location:** Heritage C

#### Session Description

The work of legal translators and interpreters is often subject to quality assessment—both in certification exam settings and in professional practice. Practitioners may be asked to evaluate the work of colleagues or to explain and defend their own translation or interpreting choices, particularly in high-stakes contexts such as courtroom testimony or the translation of evidentiary materials.

At the same time, the growing use of translation technologies—including machine translation and large language models—means that language professionals are increasingly called upon to evaluate the quality of automated outputs as well.

In these varied scenarios, the ability to assess quality and clearly justify translation or interpreting decisions is essential. But what does “quality” look like in different contexts? What criteria should guide an assessment when more than one solution may be viable? And how can practitioners effectively explain or defend one approach over another?

This workshop will explore practical frameworks, methods, and theoretical perspectives that can support quality assessment and help practitioners articulate well-reasoned translation and interpreting decisions across a range of professional situations.

#### Learning Objectives

In this SSTI-sponsored workshop, participants will:

- Examine different criteria used to assess translation quality in complex legal contexts.
- Analyze translation solutions in situations where a single straightforward answer may not be possible.
- Develop strategies for clearly explaining and justifying translation or interpreting decisions.
- Apply assessment frameworks through hands-on exercises and collaborative discussion.

Participants will work with workshop materials and engage in group activities that draw on their own professional experiences to deepen learning and discussion.



Jeffrey Killman

Jeffrey Killman, PhD (Universidad de Málaga), is an associate professor of Spanish at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, where he teaches translation and interpreting in legal and other specialized domains. His research focuses primarily on legal translation and translation technologies, and his work has been published in numerous international journals and edited volumes.

He is co-guest editor of a special issue of *Llengua i Dret/Language and Law* on legal translation and interpreting in the digital age. Dr. Killman is also a state-certified Spanish court interpreter.

## Pre-Conference Workshops, June 5

Afternoon Track - 2:00pm - 5:00pm

### Deaf Immigrants Face Layered Communication

**Presenter:** Celena Ponce

**Location:** Augusta

#### Session Description

Deaf immigrants often encounter layered communication barriers in legal and immigration systems, including diverse sign language backgrounds, limited formal education, and language deprivation. These factors create interpreting challenges that frequently require strategies beyond standard ASL interpretation. This session provides an overview of best practices for supporting Deaf immigrants in court proceedings, asylum interviews, proffers, and community-based legal settings.

Participants will explore practical methods for assessing linguistic needs and distinguishing among home signs, international or regional sign languages, and non-standard signing systems. The session will also address effective teaming with Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDIs), trauma-informed communication approaches, and collaboration with attorneys and service providers while maintaining professional ethics.

A portion of the session will examine the role of AI and language-access technologies from the perspective of an electrical engineer and computer scientist specializing in these tools. Participants will gain an accessible overview of technologies such as machine translation, sign-recognition models, and automated captioning, including their potential benefits, limitations, and risks for Deaf immigrant populations.

By integrating linguistic expertise, cultural awareness, and technological insight, this session equips participants with strategies to strengthen accuracy, support due process, and promote equitable language access for Deaf immigrants in evolving legal environments.

#### Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify key linguistic, cultural, and educational factors that influence communication with Deaf immigrants in legal settings.
- Distinguish among home signs, international and regional sign languages, and non-standard signing systems, and understand how these differences affect interpreting accuracy.
- Apply effective teaming strategies with Certified Deaf Interpreters and incorporate trauma-informed communication practices.
- Explain the basic functions, limitations, and potential risks of AI-based language-access technologies in legal contexts involving Deaf immigrants.
- Apply best practices that support equitable language access and protect due process in legal interactions with Deaf immigrant communities.



**Celena Ponce**

Celena Ponce is a trilingual interpreter, electrical engineer, and advocate specializing in language access for Deaf immigrants. She is trained through Villanova University's VIISTA immigration advocacy program and regularly consults with immigration attorneys on best practices for working with Deaf and hard-of-hearing clients from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

As founder and director of Hands United, she leads national programs that support Deaf immigrants through ASL education, digital access, and culturally responsive resources. Her work includes extensive experience interpreting at USCIS appointments, with a focus on navigating language deprivation and non-standard sign systems.

With a background in electrical engineering and computer science, Celena also integrates her expertise in AI and language technologies to improve communication equity. She is committed to bridging gaps between the legal, linguistic, and technological worlds to help ensure fair and accessible experiences for Deaf immigrants.