

SECTION 2

Interpretation and Advocacy

Bilingual service providers are often required to serve as interpreters as well as advocates. These two roles are not a natural combination. An advocate works to impact service; advocates are invested in outcomes. An interpreter's role is to remain neutral to outcomes and transmit information. The existence of transforming communities due to immigration makes this difficult combination a reality. It requires a high level of skill and discipline to effectively combine advocacy and interpretation.

COMBINING THE ROLES

You are completely an interpreter when you are acting as an interpreter. When you switch to the advocate role you are completely an advocate. You cannot be half and half. Conflicts in the ethics between the two roles highlight areas where both roles are necessary.

Inform meeting participants what "hat" you are wearing at all times. This means that you must let meeting participants know when you are speaking as an advocate, and say the same thing in both languages. When you have completed your thought, let everyone know that you are switching back to your role as an interpreter.

"I would like to speak as an advocate at this time."

Share your thoughts in one language. Share your thoughts in the second language.

"Okay, I will now switch back to my role as an interpreter."

This requires a high level of skill and conscious discipline.

EXAMINING THE ROLES

Ethics

Advocate: An advocate is involved in an interaction because one of the parties requires assistance in pleading and/or arguing their case. The client trusts that the advocate will support their best interests. In addition, within the context of human service provision, an advocate also works to pass on the skills of self-advocacy to their client.

Interpreter: When the decision is made to involve an interpreter, the clients enter into an act of trust. They trust that you, the interpreter, will accurately transmit what each party shares without altering the content or intent.

Discretion/Empowerment

Advocate: If you are working to empower people in your work as an advocate, you have spent time with your client prior to the session helping them to prepare to take the lead as much as possible. Therefore, you are still being discreet; your verbal advocacy within meetings should reduce over time. The ultimate goal of an advocate working to empower the people they serve is to "graduate" clients so that they can move on and serve the many other people in need.

SECTION 2

Interpretation and Advocacy (continued)

Interpreter: As an interpreter your goal is to facilitate communication between individuals and or groups who do not speak a common language. The individuals communicating should remember each other and their conversation. You should be a part of the background.

Confidentiality

Advocate: As an advocate you can discuss what is said in meetings with your colleagues for case management and with the person you are serving for ongoing planning. For example: It is okay to discuss a parent/teacher meeting with the parent who was absent; it is not okay to discuss the meeting with other relatives. If you are working as an advocate for an individual being abused, it is not okay to reveal the information to other family members.

Interpreter: As an interpreter, everything is confidential. There is *never* a reason to repeat anything that went on in a meeting.

Accuracy

Advocate: Accuracy for an advocate means that you are expert in the rules, regulations, and/or protocol of the systems you advocate within as well as the needs of your client.

Interpreter: For an interpreter, accuracy means taking the meaning and intent of the speaker's language and translating that to the listener's language. Generally that means word for word translations, however there are times that the word used does not exist in one of the languages. Sometimes long conversations may be

needed to communicate what seems to be a simple point.

Proficiency

Advocate: As an advocate, proficiency means remaining updated on any changes in rules, regulations and/or protocol of the systems you advocate within. It also means understanding the wants and needs of your client.

Interpreter: Proficiency means knowing all of the words in both languages you will be using. An ethical interpreter will accept only those assignments that are within their level of expertise. There are occasions when there is not sufficient preparation to learn the discipline-specific vocabulary in time for an assignment.

- Take time for research and preparation. A CSE meeting, superintendents hearing, and a doctor's appointment each will require different language.
- Be informed of the concerns of all of the people involved in the session to be interpreted. It is important to call the meeting participants in advance so that you are prepared to interpret.
- Identify words that will be understood by the ethnicity of your clients.
- Bring a bilingual dictionary.

Impartiality

Advocate: An advocate's job is to assure that their client's needs are met. An advocate is *not* impartial; he/she is fully invested in the outcome.

SECTION 2

Interpretation and Advocacy (continued)

Interpreter: Impartiality is critical to quality interpretation. An interpreter is not a part of the interaction, and should decline any requests for his/her opinion, advice or recommendation.

THE MEETING

Pre-Meeting Contact with the Recipient of Service

It is important to meet with your client prior to any occasion where you will be providing interpretation and advocacy. Switching between roles as described above is very difficult. In order to be as effective as possible, it is critical that you plan in advance.

1. Review the role of an interpreter with your client. Discuss the impact of quality interpretation on their ability to be seen as an empowered person in control of their life. For example, in a parent-teacher conference a teacher should make a primary connection with the parent, not the interpreter.
2. Review the role of an advocate with your client. Discuss the importance of developing the skills for self-advocacy.
3. Review the purpose of the meeting. Ask your client what their concerns and expectations are. Share your concerns and expectations.
4. Use “Client/Advocate Pre-Meeting Planning Form” (p. 23 English, p. 25 Spanish) to prepare for the meeting. Role plays are an effective strategy for helping individuals gain skills for self-advocacy.

Explaining Your Roles at the Meeting

Introductions are especially important when interpretation is involved. It is important for an interpreter to introduce themselves and their role at the beginning of a meeting. A clear introduction can eliminate inappropriate expectations.

Example: “Hello, today I will be serving as both an interpreter and an advocate. As an interpreter, when either of you talk, I will translate what you say. You can speak directly to each other in your usual way. My role is to strictly translate information. I am bound as an interpreter to translate everything that is said. If the meaning is not coming across in either direction, I will let you know. As an advocate, I will participate in the meeting supporting Ms. X in getting her needs met. I will try to make it clear which role I am speaking from at all times.

Repeat your introduction in the language you will be translating in.

Note: As an advocate you can stop the meeting and speak with your client privately to address any unexpected issues that arise.

By: Betty García Mathewson, New York State Migrant Education Diversity Project

Adapted from: *Interpreting: An Introduction*, Chapter 6, Role, Ethics, a Interpreting, Nancy Frishberg, 1990, RID

Additional resources: Kathy Miraglia, B.A., C.S.C., Coordinator of Interpretation, University of Rochester, Patricia Leadley, Spanish Language Interpreter, University of Rochester, NYSME : workshops 1997 to 2005.

Updated: 12-05