

## **Predictors of Successful Performance on U.S. Consortium Court Interpreter Certification Exams**

Melissa Wallace

University of Wisconsin, U.S.A.

mwallace(a)uwlax.edu

### **ABSTRACT**

Performance assessment in the realm of interpreting studies is a vitally important area of inquiry, especially as it pertains to qualifying exams such as the certification exams used in the field of court interpreting. In the United States, with 44 out of 50 states holding membership in the Consortium for Language Access in the Courts, the court interpreting certification exam administered by this entity holds absolute primacy and is the most important gatekeeper to the profession.

This study seeks to discern whether or not success in one mode of interpreting on Consortium oral certification exams could potentially indicate performance aptitude for the other two modes. To answer this question, a three-pronged approach was used. First, recent scholarship which examines the three modes of interpreting was examined, considering case studies and theoretical models in order to break down each mode into discrete domains of skills and abilities which may or may not predict success on the Consortium certification exam. Next, a study was carried out in which over 36% of court interpreters in one U.S. state in the Spanish / English language pair at three levels of expertise (as evidenced by differentiated classifications on the state's official roster of interpreters) articulated their *perceptions* of the three modes of interpreting in relation to their experiences in testing and training, their use of the three modes while practicing in court, and perceived levels of difficulty of each mode. The perceptions articulated by practicing professionals did *not* wholly align with the outcomes one would expect based on theory, making the posing of questions of aptitude on an empirical level more urgent.

Having established a clear need to put theory and perception to the test, officials from the Consortium for Language Access in the Courts became involved in the project by providing almost 6,000 raw exam scores. This enormous Consortium data set spans some fifteen years and consists of the oral exam scores of all member states in the Spanish/English language pair. In sum, the present study teases out the ambiguities that arise upon examining practicing professionals' perceptions of the three modes as indicators of aptitude in light of current theory, and also with those that arise in comparison with the reality of empirical evidence. By looking candidly both at qualities of interpreters and their own perceptions of their skills and performance, implications of a bifurcated testing model which posits the simultaneous mode as an indicator of aptitude on the Consortium exam are examined statistically. With substantial data supporting the relationship between success in the simultaneous mode and overall success on the Consortium certification exam, the implementation of a bifurcated model could have a very real impact on the way the Consortium exam is administered, especially for languages of lesser diffusion for which full versions of oral exams do not yet exist.

**KEYWORDS:** abbreviated testing models, bifurcated testing, certification exams, court interpreting, performance assessment.

Completion of Thesis

Place: Universidad de Alicante, Spain

Year: 2012

Supervisor: Dr Cynthia Giambruno