

The need for specialist legal interpreters for a fairer justice system

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Interpreters are crucial in situations where the participants of an interaction do not share a language they all understand and speak. Such situations become more pronounced and significant in high stakes settings, such as police interviews and court proceedings, where the consequences of miscommunication can lead to incorrect legal outcomes. However, the term 'interpreter' has often been used loosely to refer to anybody who speaks two languages and 'helps out', regardless of their qualifications. Such good intentioned bilinguals can often do more harm than good, as they often do not have the linguistic and technical competence to provide accurate interpretations, do not understand their role boundaries and are not familiar or bound by a professional code of ethics. This paper will argue for the need for specialist legal interpreters to guarantee the delivery of competent interpreting services that allow for all participants to exercise their basic human right of understanding and being understood, which will contribute to a fairer justice system.