



**USE OF THE TERM “CERTIFIED INTERPRETER”  
IN CANADA: A GUIDE TO TERMS AND  
ACCREDITATION IN CANADA**

**AN AVLIC POSITION PAPER**

Submitted by: Ad Hoc Committee on Certification

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on behalf of the

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## INTRODUCTION

At the AVLIC 2010 AGM in Ottawa, Ontario, a motion was passed to establish an ad hoc committee to examine the use of the term “Certified Interpreter.” The motion read as follows:

*OT10G-35 Motion: I move that AVLIC strike an ad hoc committee to:*

- *Investigate the legal use of the term “Certified Interpreter” in Canada*
- *Develop a position paper articulating AVLIC’s position on the use of the term “Certified Interpreter” in Canada*
- *Review all of AVLIC’s documents to ensure that the term certification/Certified Interpreter is only used in reference to AVLIC COI*
- *Open a dialogue with sister organizations and agencies to promote the position.*

*Laura Henry (Sheila Johnston)*

The motion was prompted by the desire to strengthen recognition of our national evaluation system and to address the growing concern of members that the term “certified” was being applied to non-Canadian certification. There was additional recognition that consumers were often unsure of the difference between designations such as AVLIC Certificate of Interpretation (COI), provincial screening and registration status, status granted by accredited Canadian Interpreter Education Programs, and American or other foreign screened credentials.

The goal of this paper is to articulate AVLIC’s position on the term “Certified Interpreter” and to be an educational document accessible to consumers and employers of interpreters. To facilitate this, it is recommended that the complete document, as well as a summarized document, be available on the AVLIC website.

Upon researching this topic it was noted that additional work may need to be done to further define assessments that are currently administered by interpreter service providers or agencies. With the growing number of spoken language interpreter service providers adding ASL-English interpreters to their roster, it may be necessary for AVLIC to further clarify that certification that applies to policies and procedures of interpreter referral agencies is distinct from certification of the interpreters working for these agencies. This work is beyond the scope of this paper but may need to be included in an updated or revised document.



## USE OF “CERTIFIED INTERPRETER” IN CANADA: A GUIDE TO TERMS AND ACCREDITATION IN CANADA - AN AVLIC POSITION PAPER

The Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada (AVLIC) was established in 1979 and the membership approved the first by-laws and constitution in 1980; final ratification by Canada Corporation occurred in October 1981. Since its inception, AVLIC has clearly stated that two of its key objectives are “to promote the standardization and uniformity of the quality of interpreting services (*and*) to implement and coordinate accreditation to visual language interpreters” (AVLIC, Constitution III, updated 2012). The passing of the Canada Not-For-Profit Corporations Act has meant that the constitution is no longer in effect, however the AVLIC Mission Statement continues to note the importance of “providing and promoting the Canadian Evaluation System” (AVLIC Mission Statement, VII).

The AVLIC Canadian Evaluation System (CES) is the national certification process available to AVLIC members. AVLIC states that the CES mission is: “To accredit interpreters who demonstrate competencies that reflect the diverse communication preferences of Deaf and hearing Canadians” (Canadian Evaluation System, Objectives). Successful completion of the CES process results in the awarding of the Certificate of Interpretation (COI).

In Canada the profession of signed language interpreters is neither nationally licensed nor nationally regulated. Prior to the establishment of the Canadian Evaluation System, many Canadian interpreters looked to their sister organization in the United States as a means of evaluating their skills. AVLIC, recognizing the unique Canadian landscape in which its members work and respecting the diverse Canadian Deaf population, realized that relying on foreign evaluation systems did not meet the needs of members or Deaf and non-deaf consumers.

With a goal to developing a Canadian evaluation tool, AVLIC undertook an examination of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) evaluation process and consulted with experts in the United States. AVLIC then worked with the two national Deaf organizations, The Canadian Association of the Deaf (CAD) and the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf (CCSD), to develop a Canadian national standard. The involvement of these national Deaf organizations was critical and as noted by Russell and Malcolm (2009) “both CAD and CCSD have had representation on the Evaluations Committee since its inception in the early 1980s, and they continue to advise AVLIC on issues of test content, processes, proctoring standards, criteria and standards”(p.332). The result of this collaboration was the establishment of the Canadian Evaluation System (CES) and a national standard that “...was set to reflect a level of interpreting that would ensure consumers had access to competent interpreters. The need for the CES was well supported by members of the interpreting profession and organizations representing the Deaf community” (Canadian Evaluation System, Purpose). In fact that commitment was so strong that both CAD and CCSD provided financial support for the development of the CES, and it was through direct input from those organizations that the performance standards for national certification were set. (Russell and Malcolm 2009)

AVLIC members further confirmed their support of the CES and national certification through their endorsement of the AVLIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct. All

AVLIC members, by virtue of their membership, agree to abide by this Code. Under 2.0 *Professional Competence* the tenet states: “Members will incorporate current theoretical and applied knowledge, enhance that knowledge through continuing education throughout their professional careers and will strive for AVLIC certification” (AVLIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct, Article 2.4.1) The complete document can be found on the AVLIC website [www.avlic.ca](http://www.avlic.ca).

To further support its members in achieving national certification, AVLIC has established a comprehensive four phase process. This process includes testing on knowledge as well as skill. The four phase model “is based on a philosophy of supporting interpreters developing the skills necessary for success on the Test of Interpretation (TOI)” (Canadian Evaluation System, Current Process and Phases). The AVLIC Strategic Plan lays out the five year goals and strategies for AVLIC and was ratified by the membership in July 2010. Goal #1 is “Increased number of interpreters achieving the Certificate of Interpretation (COI)” (AVLIC Strategic Plan, Five Year Goals and Strategies). The five strategies that support this goal are listed in the strategic plan <http://www.avlic.ca/about/strategic-plan>.



## USE OF THE TERM “CERTIFIED INTERPRETER” IN CANADA

AVLIC, and its partners the Canadian Association of the Deaf (CAD) and the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf (CCSD), endorses the Canadian Evaluation System and a national certification whose designation is termed the Certificate of Interpretation (COI).

Interpreters who have achieved their COI have successfully completed a Written Test of Knowledge (WTK), two discourse analysis workshops, and a skill-based Test of Interpretation (TOI) administered by AVLIC. In Canada, only Active members of AVLIC who have successfully completed the CES process should call themselves ASL-English Certified Interpreters or Certified ASL-English Interpreters. This is supported by the Code of Ethics and Guideline for Professional Conduct, tenet 5.2 *Accurate Representation of Credentials*: “Members will refrain from making inaccurate statements regarding their competence, education, experience or certification. Only members certified by AVLIC (COI) may use the term “certified” in printed, electronic, signed or oral transmission. This may include, but is not limited to, interpreter directories, business cards and forms, promotional materials, resumes or publications they have authored”(AVLIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct, Article 5.2.2). All AVLIC members abide by the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct.

AVLIC recognizes that some provincial jurisdictions are seeking, or have been successful in obtaining, protected title for terms such as Registered Sign Language Interpreter, Registered ASL-English Interpreter, and Registered Visual Language Interpreter. Provincial legislation that protects the titles Certified ASL – English Interpreter, Certified Sign Language Interpreter, or Certified Visual Language Interpreter should only refer to the AVLIC Certificate of Interpretation (COI).

AVLIC acknowledges the American Deaf and interpreter communities’ expertise in evaluating their own members and recognizes these designations in the American context for which they

were developed. There is no reciprocal agreement between AVLIC and any American certification or designation. AVLIC's COI is not recognized as an equivalent designation in the United States nor are any of the certifications or designations from the United States recognized as equivalent to Canada's COI.

While some members may seek one or more American certification, in order to work in the United States or for personal interest, these certifications or designations do not equate to Canadian certification. In order to avoid confusion only interpreters who have achieved the AVLIC Certificate of Interpretation (COI) should call themselves, or be recognized as being, Certified ASL-English Interpreters (or any of the other variations of this title) in Canada. This is supported by tenet 5.2 of the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct, *Accurate Representation of Credentials* which notes: "Members shall not by any means engage in, nor allow the use of statements that are false, misleading, incomplete, or are likely to mislead consumers or members of the public" (AVLIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct, Article 5.2.1).



## **ADDITIONAL DESIGNATIONS IN CANADA**

In Canada there are a number of interpreter agencies, employers, and referral agencies that have screening/assessment tools as part of their hiring process. These agencies may grant a designation that acknowledges the interpreter has undertaken and passed a specific screening or assessment based on the minimum requirement for that agency. This may include government agencies such as the federal Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC), or may be a legal arm of a provincial government such as a Ministry of Attorney General; it may be a referral agency or an educational institution. The PWGSC screens interpreters to work in federal government institutions and may also require security clearance. All other screening/assessment tools are provincial in nature. All of these screenings, assessments, and designations apply only to the agency or organization that administers them.

Graduates of Interpreter Education Programs are also granted designations such as certificate, diploma, or degree.

The above designations, whether through screening/assessment tools or educational institutions, do not equate to certification acquired through AVLIC's CES. Agencies, institutions, or organizations should not refer to their designations as certification. Interpreters who have achieved these designations should not market themselves as being "certified" interpreters.

Some agencies, colleges, and universities also offer general sign language or American Sign Language courses. These courses are for individuals wishing to develop conversational sign language. Completion of these basic sign language courses often result in a "certificate of completion". These courses do not qualify individuals to be recognized as interpreters. People who have completed these basic sign language courses should not market themselves as interpreters or "certified" interpreters.



## CERTIFICATION OF AGENCIES AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

There are a number of Canadian and international certification programs for the provision of interpreting and translation services. Examples of these certifications are ISO 9001:2008 Registered, CAN/CGSB-131. 10-2008, EN 15038, AILIA-NSGCIS, LICS-CISP. These standards and certifications are for administrative standards or quality management systems. These standards or certifications *do not* apply to the interpreters working at the agency. Agencies advertising staff or freelance interpreters as being certified ASL-English Interpreters (or any variation of that term) should do so only if the interpreters are certified by AVLIC. When advertising that the interpreters are certified by AVLIC they should clearly indicate that by using the appropriate designation – AVLIC Certificate of Interpretation (COI). Canadian agencies or institutions should not refer to foreign credentials as equivalent to Canadian certification as these credentials have not been endorsed by the national Deaf Canadian organizations CAD and CCSD or by AVLIC.





## REFERENCES

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