

# NAATI Standards of Ethical and Professional Behaviour

Bilingual workers use language skills in a very different way to professional interpreters which can make it personally challenging to maintain clear boundaries between their task as facilitators of communication through message transfer, and other job-related tasks as mandated by their particular employment arrangements. The following Standards of Ethical and Professional Behaviour are designed to assist bilingual workers to better understand their role and how this interacts with the role of Interpreters.

The Standards of Ethical and Professional Behaviour below should not be considered a prescriptive set of rules, but rather a set of principles and values which should be inherent in professional practice.

**Check your workplace information for details on what language services your organisation provides and the role description of a bilingual worker in your organisation.**

---

## 1. Clarity of Role Boundaries

It is important that the role boundaries of bilingual workers are clear to staff, customers and clients.

As a bilingual worker, occasionally there is no clear demarcation between your task as facilitator of communication and any job-related tasks that may be undertaken by you or other parties in the workplace. Bilingual workers are employees and are accountable to their organisation and as such bilingual workers are not impartial participants in exchanges with customers and clients.

Therefore, in situations where:

- there is a real or perceived conflict of roles/interest – i.e. people can perceive a conflict of interest in a bilingual staff member who fulfils both the role of decision-maker and language facilitator
- discussions that inform or include decision-making or signing of agreements
- discussions or information are legally binding
- there is a high risk of miscommunication or for misunderstandings to occur
- a high degree of confidentiality/sensitivity is required or
- information may place the bilingual worker, customer/client or organisation at risk (this is not an exhaustive list)

In these situations, organisations have a responsibility to refer these more complex, sensitive or technical matters to a professional interpreter. This may include matters that take a long time to resolve, involve a third party, require an in-depth or formal interview or involve a dispute.

---



---

## 2. Professional Conduct:

Bilingual workers need to consider the limitations of their linguistic abilities, knowledge and the resources available to them when engaging with customers and clients. Being proficient in a language other than English is not the same as having the ability to accurately convey complex information from one language to another. What may begin as a simple communication with a customer or client may become a complex conversation. It is vital that when communication exceeds a bilingual worker's capability and assessed level of language competence, a professional interpreter should be engaged.

Bilingual workers should:

- take responsibility for their work and conduct
- only undertake language assignments they are competent to perform in the language(s) for which they have been assessed as competent
- decline assignments beyond their competence or refer them to a professional interpreter
- use their best professional endeavours in remaining faithful at all times to preserve the content and intent of the source message.

## 3. The Principle of Competence:

(source ASLIA):

Bilingual workers should accept full responsibility for the quality of their own work and will refrain from making inaccurate statements regarding their language competence. Bilingual workers should not engage in, nor allow, the use of statements regarding their competence that are false, misleading, incomplete, or likely to mislead customers, clients or members of the public.

