Guide to the **CILISAT** Test

CISOC

CISOC'S Background

Established in July, 1993, the Cultural Interpretation Services for Our Communities (CISOC) is a non-profit, charitable organization that strives to provide the highest quality interpretation and translation services in order to facilitate equitable access to health, legal, social, educational, community and other services to non-English- or non-French-speaking clients. The agency, which offers services in over 60 languages, 24 hours per day, seven days per week (including holidays), is governed by a voluntary board of directors.

The organization was the result of collaboration amongst several committees and agencies. Since 1993, CISOC has worked, successfully, as an independent provider of interpretation and translation services to a broad spectrum of organizations and individuals. The agency currently responds to approximately 1,100 calls for interpretation and translation requests each month and is well-respected for its dedication to maintaining excellent service standards.

In 1994, at the request of Ontario's Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, CISOC developed the Community Interpreter Language and Interpreting Skills Assessment Tool (CILISAT). The tool evaluates the language and interpretation proficiencies of people applying for certification as community interpreters in any of 44 high-demand languages. CISOC manages and administers CILISAT certification in these 44 languages throughout Ontario, as well as in two centres in Alberta, two in British Colombia, and one centre each in Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan.

Introduction to the CILISAT Tests

The Community Interpreter Language and Interpreting Skills Assessment Tool (CILISAT) is a provincially recognized testing system that allows potential interpreters to acquire professional accreditation and certification in any of the following 44 languages and dialects:

- Albanian
- Amharic
- Arabic
- Bengali
- Burmese
- Cambodian/Khmer
- Cantonese
- Dari
- French
- Greek
- Haitian-Creole
- Hindi
- Italian
- Japanese
- Karen
- Kinyarwanda
- Korean
- Kurdish (Kurmanji)
- Kurdish (Sorani)
- Lingala
- Mandarin
- Nepali

- Oromo
- Pashto
- Persian/Farsi
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Punjabi Gurumukhi
- Punjabi Perso-Arabic
- Russian
- Serbo-Croatian
- Sinhalese
- Somali
- Spanish
- Swahili (Central African)
- Swahili (East African)
- Tagalog
- Tamil
- Tigrigna
- Turkish
- Twi
- Urdu
- Ukrainian
- Vietnamese

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The CILISAT Test

The CILISAT offers recruiters and service providers a snapshot of an individual's current ability in consecutive interpreting and sight translating.

The Test Format

Each test consists of three units: two sight translations and one interpreted dialogue:

Sight Translation Tests
- One test from English into the selected CILISAT language
- One test from the selected CILISAT language into English

Dialogue Interpreting Test
- One dialogue requiring interpretation from the selected CILISAT language into English and from English into the selected CILISAT language

The tests have been reviewed for their cultural and linguistic neutrality and are intelligible across all dialects.

The Test Grading System

All CILISAT tests are graded by trained and experienced markers according to a performance matrix which identifies two distinct threshold levels of skill - with two cut scores - as follows:

A cut score of 70% represents minimal competence for entry into interpreter training.

A cut score of 75% represents minimal competence for eligibility for a certificate.

CILISAT was designed to contain more than one cut score to allow raters to determine degrees of skill. With adequate process – e.g. applying Angoff methods to determine minimal competence for a different (criterion-referenced) skill level - the tool could be expanded to include a more challenging cut score.

The test measures knowledge and ability in five major competency categories (general vocabulary, technical terms, grammar, register, and pronunciation).

Mistakes are graded according to degree of seriousness: vital points, important points, and minor points. In order to be eligible for CILISAT certification, the candidate must score 75% or higher in the two primary testing areas.
If a candidate scores below 70% in any of the test components - even if the candidate achieves an overall average of 75% or better, he or she will not be eligible for certification.

Raters provide additional performance-related feedback that is given to the test coordinator and may be used to provide advice on remedial measures should candidates wish to improve skills.

Note
Passing the CILISAT offers only a threshold measure of a person's current skill. CISOC, for instance, retains the services of only those interpreters who have:

- Passed CILISAT;

- Completed a mandatory 70 hour training program; and

- Scored 75% or better on an end-point Community Interpreter examination. For more information on the Training Program and Exam, please go to www.cisoc.net/training.

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CILISAT Reliability

The rating units used to produce CILISAT scores represent points that can be objectively identified and measured for quality and frequency (e.g. verb tense, verb-subject agreement, gender, etc.). Both the sight translation scripts and the dialogue are, for marking purposes, divided into segments that contain rating units.

Each CILISAT test is marked by two trained markers – one native English speaker and one native speaker of the selected CILISAT language – working independently of each other and thereby increasing inter-rater reliability.

The Test Administration Supervisor reviews both sets of scores to determine the extent of agreement/disagreement between the markers' scores. It is very rare for significant discrepancies to be noted. However, when this happens, the raters are asked to discuss their findings and reach an agreement. If they cannot agree, a second pair of raters re-marks the test. [The discrepancy is noted by the Test Administration Supervisor in an incident book.]

Raters evaluate relative balance between languages by comparing sight translation scores.

Approximately 73% of candidates taking the CILISAT pass the test. This is within an acceptable statistical range and indicates that the test is neither too easy nor too difficult. A factor affecting this value is the kind of pre-screening agencies perform before administering the test. At CISOC, for instance, the test is only administered to candidates who have gone through a pre-test interview.

CISOC recently investigated the relationship between pre-interpreter-training CILISAT scores against post-interpreter-training CILISAT scores. In the cases assessed (32), CILISAT scores were higher after training.

What the CILISAT Does Not Measure

The CILISAT measures language knowledge in two languages and general interpreting ability in consecutive mode. The CILISAT does not measure:

- Simultaneous interpreting skills
- Interpersonal communication skills
- Subject-specific language
- Satellite knowledge attendant to interpreting (professionalism, code of ethics, etc.)
- Aptitude for interpreting

Security

It must first be noted that the security procedures CISOC employs for its own administration and storing processes may be different from those used by external agencies who administer the CILISAT tests within their own domains. CISOC cannot monitor the security measures instituted by third party agencies.

Process

The following procedures are standard for CILISAT administration at CISOC:

- All candidates must bring acceptable photo identification (license, passport)
- Candidates are not allowed to bring bags, briefcases, coats or other concealing items into the testing room
- The invigilator must be an unobtrusive presence
- Candidates are not allowed to take copies of materials from the testing room
- Candidates are not allowed to take their notes from the testing room
- Candidates must pledge not to discuss the content of their tests with others
- All completed tests and test materials are stored under lock with single-point access

Standardized Testing Environment

Maintaining a standard environment and standard testing procedures are important to the reliability of the test. Candidate experience must be as uniform as possible.

- Tests must be carried out in a quiet area where there are no ambient noises and distractions

- The testing room, including the seating arrangement, chairs, lighting and temperature must be comfortable

- The candidate is given water, paper and two pencils

- The invigilator follows a prescribed routine for setting up, monitoring and collecting the test, and dealing with unusual situations (e.g. a person fails to commence, stops the process, etc.)

Access to Personal Information

Candidates' personal information is not collected by CISOC. All completed tests use alphanumeric codes in place of names. This protects privacy and also prevents potential bias on the part of raters who might recognize names.

Access to Test Material

CISOC leases CILISAT test kits to a variety of agencies across Canada. In these instances, CISOC can do little to ensure security beyond supplying guidelines for maintaining standard procedures.

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Mitigating Points

CISOC cannot monitor the storage and handling of CILISAT tests by outside agencies. However, because these agencies generally use the CILISAT tests to ensure the quality of their own interpreting services, it is in their best interests to protect the integrity of the test materials on their sites.

Because a portion of the interpretation test uses a recorded dialogue (one of several, randomly selected) - which has no accompanying script - a candidate would have to memorize all the dialogues and still perform well under pressure in order to fool the system. This is unlikely.

Performance tests are not generally subject to the same level of security risk as other tests. Knowing the content of the dialogue test will not help the candidate to improve his/her performance.