



COMMISSIONING INTERPRETING SERVICES

make sure you understand and are understood

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What is interpreting?

Interpreting is the process where one spoken or signed language is transferred into another spoken or signed language. The professional interpreter deals impartially with spoken/signed language in interactions between those who do not share a common language. Such interactions will often be in a business context, either face-to-face, over the telephone, or in a conference. In addition, interpreters are frequently engaged to assist in the public services, particularly in court cases or in hospitals.

When the interpreter is well prepared and the interpreting well executed, there are benefits for all concerned: for businesses, such benefits will be commercial; for an individual in the judicial or medical system, they may well be life-saving.

This guide is intended to promote a greater understanding of the techniques of spoken language interpreting, and of the requirements placed on the interpreter, the commissioning organisation, and those involved in the event itself.

Advice on using British Sign Language/English interpreting services is available in a separate publication, *How to Work with BSL/English Interpreters*, available from CILT, the National Centre for Languages and the (Regional) Language Networks.

More detailed technical information on the role of interpreters can be found in the national occupational standards for interpreting.

Business interpreting

There are four main types of business interpreting: consecutive (liaison) interpreting, simultaneous (whispering/chuchotage), simultaneous with equipment, and phone interpreting. Each has advantages and disadvantages, and businesses should take informed decisions about which type is most appropriate for their needs. Typically, businesses may need the services of an interpreter for negotiations, factory tours, training sessions, or trade fairs.

Consecutive (liaison) interpreting

Consecutive interpreting is often used in group situations, such as business negotiations and factory tours. During the dialogue, each speaker pauses after a few sentences to allow the interpreter to render the speech into the other language. Consecutive interpreting gives those present at the meeting the opportunity to provide an immediate reaction to what is being said, but you will need to allow sufficient time for the interpreter to do his or her work.

WHAT IS IT?

Simultaneous (whispering/chuchotage)

This type of business interpreting is most often used when the majority of participants speak the same language and only one or two are unable to communicate in the chosen tongue. The interpreting is simultaneous: sitting behind the listeners, the interpreter will whisper to them, allowing them to follow the discussions. The disadvantage of this technique is that the foreign language speakers are not able to participate in the discussions; if this is a requirement, then liaison interpreting is required. Sometimes, this method is called chuchotage (from the French verb chuchoter, to whisper).

Simultaneous interpreting with equipment

This method requires specialised equipment. The system involves a radio microphone for the interpreter and headsets for the listeners, who receive the interpretation simultaneously. Again, foreign language speakers are not able to participate.

Phone interpreting

Telephone conference calls involving an interpreter, an English-speaking service provider and a non-English-speaking customer can be set up immediately, without prior notice. If you are in the UK and your potential client is in the Far East, for example, phone interpreting may be the preferred option, particularly if negotiations are at an early stage and you wish to progress them before committing yourself to an expensive visit. 'Three-way' teleconferences are used when all the parties are at different locations,

such as when a non-English-speaker calls a 24-hour helpline. 'Two-way' telephone interpreting is used when the English-speaking service provider and the non-English-speaker are at the same location, such as a reception desk. In two-way calls, the service provider and the non-English-speaker may share a speakerphone or pass the handset back and forth between themselves.

A Daventry-based firm had been pursuing business with a company in the Czech Republic for a number of years.

The contract had been produced in both languages, and when three Czech contacts – only one of whom spoke English – visited Daventry to finalise the agreement, a qualified interpreter was engaged through the Chamber of Commerce to assist in ironing out the details. The contract, worth £400,000, was redrafted and signed the next day.

Conference interpreting

While many of the aspects of business interpreting are relevant to conference interpreting, they are two different techniques. Conference interpreting, as its name implies, would typically be used at a multinational conference or large business gathering.

Conference interpreting can be simultaneous or consecutive. The former will often involve a team of interpreters, sitting in booths in the meeting room or conference hall. Speakers are interpreted simultaneously and the sound is relayed to delegates via headphones, so there is no time loss.

With consecutive interpreting, the interpreter will listen, may take notes, and render the speech in the target language once the speaker has finished. This does not require specialised equipment or booths, but of course it requires double the amount of time; it is not always suitable for events with several foreign languages or when lively discussion is to be encouraged.

Whichever method you decide on, many of the conditions highlighted in the section on business interpreting are also relevant to conference interpreting. In particular, if booths and headphones are used, then a competent technician must be on hand at all times to deal with any difficulties and to ensure that there are as few interruptions as possible

Public service interpreting

Public service interpreting is mainly used in court, local government settings such as housing and benefits offices and in hospitals. In these

circumstances, the two main interpreting methods are simultaneous (whispering/chuchotage) and consecutive interpreting. Both these methods have been described previously in this publication (see page 5), and the requirements for participants are equally valid in the public service field as in the business environment.

Once again, attention to key areas will help in ensuring a successful outcome: briefing the interpreter to allow good preparation; allowing appropriate breaks; attention to acoustics and sight lines; and avoidance of jargon. However, there are also considerations which are often particular to the public service field.

One such consideration is the cultural/political aspect. Languages are constantly changing, often along socio-political lines. Sensitivities may arise, for example, between speakers of the Bosnian and Croatian languages. In court, it is vitally important that the interpreter is perceived by both parties to be impartial. Where there is more than one non-English speaking defendant, each should have their own interpreter to work with them taking instructions from their client and other work which takes place outside the court itself. The Court's interpreter should not undertake this work as it puts their perceived impartiality at risk. In both courts and hospitals, concerns may centre around gender, religion or politics. Advice on selecting a suitable public service interpreter can be found at the end of this booklet.

In the public service, there may be a need to render written documents into the target language. This could include texts such as patient information leaflets, instructions on medications, or witness statements. This is translation, which is a different

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skill to interpreting; however, if the text is reasonably short (300-400 words), and non-technical, it would be reasonable to expect the interpreter to carry out this task. If the document is longer or technical, a translator should be engaged.

In 1981, Iqbal Begum was imprisoned for murdering her husband after years of domestic violence. An untrained interpreter was engaged for the trial: they did not speak the same dialect and she understood nothing of her trial. This was not realised at the time. She was released on appeal in 1985, but had by then been disowned by her family. Some years later, desperate, she took her own life.

What can the commissioning company do to help things run smoothly?

As a company commissioning interpreting services, there are a number of things that you can do to make sure the interpreters are well prepared and that the event runs smoothly.

Reserve and brief interpreters as far in advance as possible. Many interpreters are freelance, with slack and busy periods.

Agree an hourly or daily rate and discuss travel

expenses and accommodation; if the assignment runs over, then overtime should be paid. If you require the interpreter to stay for a client dinner in the evening, you should make this clear and agree payment.

Book sufficient interpreters. For a meeting lasting no longer than an hour, one interpreter will be sufficient; longer meetings will need two interpreters, who will take it in turns to interpret for between 10 and 20 minutes each.

Be aware that while business interpreters will have a good general commercial awareness, they will not necessarily have detailed knowledge of your company. You should send company and contextual information in advance: include any technical terminology and acronyms. In addition you should signpost any websites that may be useful to help them prepare their work.

Discuss in advance seating positions so that the interpreter has a clear view of participants and presentations, and can hear clearly what is being said.

If you are using equipment, ensure that it is working properly and that appropriate technical assistance is available.

Remember that interpreters will need breaks for drinks and meals, when they can rest and eat with no demands for interpreting.

What can participants do to help things run smoothly?

Brief everyone before the meeting starts about the interpreter's needs. Depending on what type of interpreting you are using, you may have to ask participants to pause after every few sentences. If you have to pause for interpreting, make sure that you 'finish the thought' before you do so. Make people aware that if everyone speaks at the same time, it will not be possible for the interpreter to successfully do the job.

- Speak slowly, clearly and concisely at all times.
- Avoid using jargon and colloquialisms
- Avoid puns and jokes; as these are often not transferable into another language.
- Don't turn away from the interpreter while talking.

Selecting an interpreter – where to go next

It is vital that you engage qualified professional interpreters who can deliver a reliable and high-quality service. The following websites and organisations are a good starting point in your search.

Chartered Institute of Linguists

The Chartered Institute of Linguists serves the interests of professional linguists throughout the world and acts as a respected language assessment and awarding body:

www.iol.org.uk

Institute of Translation and Interpreting

An independent professional organisation of practising translators and interpreters in the UK:

www.iti.org.uk

International Association of Conference Interpreters

The worldwide association for conference interpreters

www.aiic.net

National Register of Public Service Interpreters

The registration and professional standards body for spoken language public service interpreting in the UK:

www.iol.org.uk/nrpsi

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WHERE NEXT

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CILT, the National Centre for Language and it's Regional Language Network provide a range of support services and products for business.

For more information, go to www.cilt.org.uk/rln

Notes



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