



Being heard while using an interpreter

1. Speak in complete thoughts and sentences.

A bit ago, someone asked an interviewee, “How do you see God at work in our lives.” He answered this way: “We should work hard...” I translated a bit confused and wondered if my initial phrasing was correct.

Then he continued “...because God is our boss and oversees and guides everything we do.” His answer made sense in a complete thought but no sense with just the first part.

2. Avoid expression and colloquialisms.

“Cat got your tongue”, “Frog in your throat”, “Break a fever”, “Born again Christian”. These can be highly contextual and muddle what you need to say. “She’s hot” can mean she’s fevered, angry, sexy, or warm. “Cat got your tongue” can be pleasant or accusatory depending on your inflection. Some interpreters might pick up your meaning correctly or maybe put a different spin on it.

3. Be prepared for a 15 min warm up before getting to the heart of what needs to be communicated.

- a. Everyone needs to know who is who. Authority is important to establish. Is that a secretary or a supervisor? This is especially true if in a traditional culture and you are in a unique position. For example, female doctors, male secretaries, young professionals may actually be the key person but someone may focus his or her attention on someone else based on preconceived notions.
- b. Often there are social contract questions that must be politely addressed before any conversation can really start. The quicker you accept this, the faster and smoother the dialogue will be.

4. Write your key questions /phrases down.

This will help you articulate the underlying thoughts. It will also keep you on task. Using an interpreter can be difficult and it gets easy to lose your place.

5. Parse out touchy questions ahead of time.

What kind info are you trying to extract?

What are you trying NOT to say?

How far into the conversation should this come up?

For example, when talking about a difficult subject such as abuse. You want to find out if a woman is being abused by her husband. You might want to ask a broad question like “Have you ever been in a relationship where you were hurt?” How long has it been since that relationship” and then work up to “Is that happening now?” A direct question like “Is your husband hitting you?” might bring things quickly to a halt.

6. Assume that they will take you literally. Avoid puns. Puns are bad and don't translate. Sarcasm and dry humor is also very difficult to translate. NO PUNS.

7. Consider prepping your interpreter.

- a. I went on a trip a couple of years ago with a team of developmental pediatricians to work with special needs kids. The biggest stumbling block was the equipment used in rehab. "Verticalizer", "voicer", "therapy ball", "bubbles", and "slide" are all words that made me stumble. Watch for theological, medical, and unusual vocab.
- b. Always explain medical procedures.
- c. Lay out the meeting flow to the interpreter ahead of time if possible.

8. Translation (written) and Interpretation (spoken) are different.

Translation is usually more formal and requires more education. Interpretation is faster and more fluid. Some people can only do one or the other. Don't assume someone can do both.

9. Speak to the person or pt not the translator.

When talking to the interpreter use their name and look at them directly. The interpreter should speak in first person.

10. Restate and ask for restatement

11. Ask for feedback from the interpreter.

They may have insight that they couldn't share about the person while in the room or tips on how to improve the next session.

12. We aren't tape recorders.

If the conversation is fast paced many of us don't retain what's being said. Often for every sentence you say I've considered 3-4 different ways of expressing an idea or various synonyms. We're thinking sentence to sentence and may get lost in the bigger conversation. If you don't remember something ask the person for restatement.

13. Ask the interpreter.

They can guide you with articulation of a difficult question.

14. Be careful what you say-

Many people who use translators may speak some English so.

15. Ask one question at a time.

It may seem like a time saver but asking multiple questions at the same time, makes it more awkward and increases the likelihood of a misunderstanding or a misinterpretation.