



Tips on working with foreign language interpreters:

By Agata Baczyk

1. First and foremost, make sure you use the right source. Ask your interpreting services provider what screening process they use for interpreters they work with. Are there any requirements enforced like training, experience etc.? You would be surprised, but many agencies don't care that much about quality as about the profit. Often, inexperienced and underpaid interpreters are used to maximize profit margin while you get stuck at a deposition with an interpreter who cannot handle the legal language or pace.
2. Once you make sure your scheduler is trust worthy you can request an interpreter. Try to do it as far in advance as possible. The most experienced interpreters are the most wanted so their schedules tend to fill quickly. Avoid last minute requests, especially same day, as all you might be able to get is a novice interpreter who will struggle through your deposition.
3. Make sure you provide the interpreting agency with as much detail about your event as possible. Is it a deposition, consultation, court appearance? What is the case type: an assault, a car accident, a trip and fall, a medical malpractice etc.? What is the topic at hand? Is there any field specific terminology that will be discussed? How long do you anticipate the session will last? All those answers are very important and allow your provider to make sure that the interpreter is knowledgeable in the subject matter that will be discussed. Not all interpreters are familiar with the construction terminology or the medical field, especially when the topic is very unusual or specialized. Make sure to mention as many details as possible when booking your interpreter to ensure a smooth and problem free interpretation. Emailing the caption ahead of time might help as well and will save the time normally spent on clarifying the names and spelling.
4. Many languages are spoken in more than one region or country. Make sure you check with your witness if he/she has a preference. That is especially important for languages like Spanish or French. Not all Spanish or French speakers speak the same variety. Spanish from Spain is different than Spanish from Mexico or Puerto Rico. Another thing is to find out what the proper language is. Not all Italians speak Italian language and not all Croatians speak Croatian language. Find out beforehand, because if your witness from Italy speaks Catalan or Sicilian, or if the Croatian witness speaks Susak dialect, your interpreter will be not much more capable of communicating with them than you are. And examples of those scenarios are countless!

5. Once you finally get to the day of the deposition, make sure you work with your interpreter. There are some rules that interpreters have to obey, like interpreting everything that is being said, so please wait for the interpreter to finish interpreting before you post your next question. He/she cannot interpret your question until a full interpretation of the witness's statement is delivered. Even if it has very little to do with your question. Think about it that way; if the witness spoke English, you would have heard the entire statement and the same must be true when he/she speaks through an interpreter.
6. Allow your interpreter to take short, 5-10 minutes, breaks every hour or so. You might not be tired, but the interpreter is working twice as hard as everyone else in the room and after about 2-3h, his/her interpretation will start to decrease in accuracy if sufficient rest is not provided. Interpretation requires some tremendous brain work and sooner or later even the most brain fit interpreter will begin to slow down. If your deposition is scheduled to last all day, it is strongly advised to include a lunch break. Human brain needs food for energy! A hungry interpreter will not be a very good one. Lack of focus and fatigue will start manifesting itself very quickly. Allow at least 20-30 min to refuel before the midday crisis catches up with your interpreter.
7. Lastly, pay attention to the foreign language speaker as much as you do to the interpreter. Interpreters are supposed to include the tone of voice of the speaker in their interpretation but not the body language and gestures. Some interpretation might have to be repeated if the witness was pointing or gesticulating and you were not looking. Remember, you are speaking to the witness and not to the interpreter. The interpreter is just a conduit that enables communication. Work with the witness as if he/she spoke English and the interpreter was not even there.

Agata Baczyk is the founder and owner of Legal Interpreters LLC, interpretation and translation agency. She has worked as a professional Polish interpreter since 2006. She is a Master Level interpreter on the NJ Registry of Court Interpreting Resources, and is also court certified in NYS and PA. Additionally, she is a medical interpreter and an interpreting coach and instructor, having taught Introduction to Healthcare Interpreting at a number of CUNY schools in New York City. Born and raised in Poland, she earned a B.A. degree in Russian Language and Linguistics from Queens College and completed numerous interpreting trainings and workshops.



For help in scheduling an interpreter for your next event please email or call:

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