

BMT 2 - The Interpreter's Introduction

"Gentlemen, I'm a registered interpreter and I have been allocated to interpret for you today. I will interpret everything you say and everything that is said to you, without changing, omitting or modifying anything in any way. I am bound by my professional code to keep any information I am party to in the discussions strictly confidential and any notes that I take will be destroyed at the end of the meeting. If, at any point, you don't understand something, or you would like me to repeat, please say so. It may be that I will have to ask you or Mr. Garcia to pause to allow me to interpret. If I do, I will hold up my hand, like this.

Finally, I would ask you to address yourself directly to Mr Garcia, rather than to me. I will then interpret exactly what you say. I will now tell Mr. Garcia what I have just told you, then we will be ready start".

Key points in the interpreter's introduction

Point 1: Everything, and anything, that is said (i.e. any utterance that is 'voiced') will be interpreted. In the context of the interpreted encounter, there can be no private exchanges between participants in either language that will not be interpreted. Similarly, there can be no modifications or editing of the language used or the tone or manner of any speaker. The interpreter will try to be a 'speaking mirror' for each speaker in turn.

Please note, this includes extreme language as well. If someone chooses to be rude or aggressive or to use obscene language, the interpreter is bound to interpret what they have said just as they have said it, (however uncomfortable that may be). Remember, it is not the interpreter who is choosing that linguistic behaviour. Responsibility for what is said, and how people express themselves, remains with the principal speakers, just as it does in an exchange when speaking the same language.

Point 2: All participants in the interpreted event can be assured of the interpreter's commitment to confidentiality. This is a point of professional practice for the interpreter. If s/he is registered with an independent professional regulator, (such as the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (UK) or equivalent bodies in other member states), failure to keep strict confidentiality is a serious breach of professional practice and renders the interpreter subject to disciplinary proceedings. This is a good reason to ensure that you only use registered interpreters!

Point 3: If you don't understand something the interpreter says, for whatever reason, please say so! Interpreters have various 'repair' strategies for aiding comprehension, but they can't use them if they don't know you are having difficulty understanding.

Point 4: It is to be expected that an interpreter transferring complex messages back and forth between different languages will, at some point, need to ask for clarification of something that has been said; in a heated or technically complex exchange this may happen more than once. Watch out for a signal that the interpreter is intervening to ask for a 'replay' or rephrasing of an utterance, so that s/he can interpret it successfully.

Point 5: Speak directly to your opposite number as if you were speaking the same language. Resist the temptation to address yourself to the interpreter, or to use questions forms such as "please ask him if....." Use the 'I' form (1st person form of address) when you speaking to your other language interlocutor.

BMT 2 - The Interpreter's Introduction

A good 'rule of thumb' for communicating through an interpreter is to speak to your opposite number just as you would if you both spoke the same language. The interpreter can then 'voice' what you have said, just as you have said it. This will enable you and your other language interlocutor to have a much fuller and more natural communication, complete with all the nuances of natural speech and behaviour, even though you have a 'language barrier' between you.

Point 6: A key function of the interpreter's introduction is to set the ground rules for all parties to the interpreted communicative encounter. It is, therefore, very important that the rules of the interpretation, as explained in the introduction, are voiced in both languages. Having done so, the communicative exchange can go ahead.