

The Six Key Qualities of a Good Interpreter



An Introduction

While translation is rendering written text from a source language into a target language, interpreting is essentially a spoken form of translation, which allows real-time verbal translation to occur in settings where two or more people need to communicate their conversations.

This may be face-to-face or over the telephone and involves the interpreter translating what was said in one language into another so that the correspondence is understood by both parties.

Be an extremely good listener

Interpreters need to pick up on every word, every intent and every meaning. They must make sense of a message composed in one language while simultaneously constructing and articulating the same message in another tongue.

Have excellent sensory, motor and cognitive skills

All of these skills need to work in unison to ensure that not only language, but all nuances and idioms are picked up on and relayed in a comprehensible way, al

Have an extensive vocabulary of multiple languages

Because interpreters are working in real-time, they can rarely consult a trusted dictionary or reference materials. Therefore, good interpreters will have to have a very good knowledge of the subject-matter and the language and abbreviations or jargon associated with the subject.

Be culturally aware

Just as specialist subject knowledge is very important, interpreters must also be aware of the culture of the languages they are interpreting from and into. If a political reference is made in one language, for example, a good interpreter will be ready to transform this into a comparable statement that the target audience can understand.

Cope with stress and self-control when dealing with difficult speakers

Not everyone speaks with precision and clarity and of course accents can be difficult to discern. Interpreters therefore need to keep their cool and remain relaxed, even in seemingly tough situations.

Show emotional resilience

Legal and medical interpreters are often involved in cases that are high-profile or difficult to witness, such as murder trials, emergency medical situations or even deaths. In such instances, they have to show high levels of resilience and control with the people they are there to represent.

Ready to translate

Why Is Simultaneous Interpreting Challenging?

The challenges of simultaneous interpretation depend on several factors which may or may not turn an interpreter's job into a nightmare. Some people feel attracted to the unknown and take each opportunity as a test – of both their knowledge and adaptability to a non-familiar environment. Others have cold feet any time they get a new assignment, worrying about the complexity of the job, the speaker's language (or dialect) and even their own concentration level for the day. Thus, more often than not, certified translators/interpreters will claim that working in the comfort of your office on a text to translate (which you have already had the chance to skim and form an opinion of) is preferable to getting on your feet and running to an event not always knowing how long you are supposed to be at the employer's beck and call and what exactly is in store for you.

In spite of the huge amount of scientific material, legal matter and business papers to translate, professionals cannot avoid interpreting assignments very often. There are many instances in which face-to-face interaction occurs with poor or non-speakers of the target language – which is where you, the interpreter, will come to the rescue.

There are conferences where contributors and audience need to share a common language in order to understand each other and interact. They may be knowledgeable in their field but their ethnicity and/or lack of ability to express in the language of the conference will make communication impossible. So, a team of interpreters will be hired and kept in their booths for the speeches and discussions to be instantly made available in the language of each participant. If you have never done that, you might think that the privacy of a booth can provide the perfect environment for an interpreter to concentrate and do the proper job. Indeed it is a plus compared with the instant interpretation of someone's words when the speaker is three feet away from you.

Unfortunately, things are far more complicated than that. Speakers at a conference do not pause. They focus on delivering a coherent speech and you can't pause either. While listening to their words you are expected to provide their very speech in the target language, preferably at the same level of fluency. If you have a break, you will miss parts of sentences and the overall meaning (or beauty) of the discourse will be chopped off. Besides correctness you will also have to take 'tone' into account and perform accordingly.

It stands to reason that proficiency in both languages involved is a must. You will have to anticipate what the speaker has in mind judging by his/her intonation, segments of sentences or just parts of collocations. In this way you can keep up with the speaker and deliver a high-quality version of their speech. Of course, some speakers are easier to follow than others, which is something you have no control of. The bright side of the job would be that no matter what challenges simultaneous interpreting at a conference may imply, at least you know the specific language area to be employed and you can brush up your lexis a bit in advance.

Many interpreters prefer to work for the Home Office which is generally less stressful than interpreting the words of politicians, economists and different other brilliant minds in their field. In most cases, the people you are likely to meet and talk to at an airport, at the police headquarters or at a backstreet shop which is under suspicion of hiring illegal workers are common men and women so their plain language (if it happens to be your mother tongue) will cause little or no misunderstanding

Thank

you

