

# Business Interpreting

**A guide to commissioning an excellent service**

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The Institute of Linguistics is delighted to endorse this brochure because a greater understanding of how businesses view interpreting and what constitutes it will enable both those commissioning interpreters and the interpreters themselves to work more effectively. Thoroughly prepared and properly executed interpreting benefits the economic well-being of all concerned. We are indebted to CiLT: the National Centre for Languages and the RLN NW for sponsoring this brochure, for without their help it would not have been possible to print.

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An interpreter was hired to assist a company with a presentation to a group of potential clients. She was informed that this would be done by the CEO, in the boardroom. Mindful of her role, she dressed smartly for a formal business occasion. On arrival she realised that a tour of the site and its installations was planned, and she found herself being required to scale gantry ladders while wearing a straight skirt, and high-heeled shoes. Since that proved impossible, the alternative was to walk round the factory with the party. But this involved a hard hat, which is not designed to accommodate a chignon. Had the words "factory tour" or "site visit" been mentioned in the briefing, she would have been appropriately dressed!

**Interpreting deals with the spoken word at meetings both face to face and over the telephone, in situations when both you and your customer need to understand clearly what is said.**

N.B. Business Interpreting is sometimes subcategorised as an aspect of conference interpreting, but this is not correct. They are two very different techniques.

## Areas of work for a business interpreter are, for example

- Trade fairs
- Exhibitions
- General business meetings
- Business negotiation meetings
- Accompanying business people on trips
- Factory tours
- Training sessions
- Voice-overs

## Business Interpreting Tales

At a small airport, there was a dispute between a client who owned a little airbus and a company based at the airport that had repaired it recently. The issue was whether parts had been supplied by reputable suppliers. An interpreter was called in without being briefed. Although she was English, she lived a considerable distance away and had never heard of the companies or the places in question. So she was unable to recognise and reproduce these names when the non-English speaking client pronounced them. This caused delay and offence to this speaker, who was doing his best with difficult names, and there was the potential for serious misunderstandings.

**How many interpreters do I need to book?** For a meeting lasting no more than 1 hour, 1 interpreter will be sufficient. For a meeting taking any longer than this, you will have to book 2 interpreters, who will take it in turns to interpret for between 10 to 20 minutes each.

Cutting costs by employing only one interpreter places undue pressure on the interpreter and will have serious implications on the quality of the overall interpretation. Interpreting should be seen as a cost-effective element of your international communication needs.

## **Techniques Used in Business Interpreting**

1. **Liaison Interpreting (sometimes referred to as consecutive interpreting)**
2. **Whispering/Chuchotage**
3. **Simultaneous Interpreting with a tour-guide system**
4. **Phone Interpreting**

## 1. Liaison Interpreting (also ad-hoc interpreting)

Liaison interpreting is often referred to as consecutive interpreting. This can be confusing, because in conference work, consecutive means the interpreter listens to quite a long speech, while taking notes, and then renders it into the other language. Business liaison interpreting is different: the interpreter translates a few sentences at a time for his/her interlocutor or group of interlocutors, alternating with the person who is talking whilst acting as an intermediary to the listener or listeners.

This interpreting technique is widely used in court, business negotiations or factory tours.

**Advantage:** immediate reaction to what is being said.

**Disadvantage:** double the amount of time is needed.

## Organising a conference lasting one or more days.

Here you require fully trained Conference Interpreters and not Business Interpreters who do not have conference interpreting training. Simultaneous interpreting must be used here. For this interpreting to be seamless, booths must be provided to isolate the interpreters. A technician must be employed to control the sound and manage the headsets which enable participants to choose the language they want to hear. This equipment and the associated services are available for hire. Some business conference venues can offer the service as part of the conference package.

**Organising a small but prestigious conference.** You will need conference interpreters, using simultaneous interpreting with booths.

## Some practical advice on the type of interpreter you need

**Meeting a foreign partner.** You need a liaison interpreter who works without equipment and who enables you to converse directly with the person you are dealing with.

**Meeting several foreign partners/going on a factory visit.** You need a liaison or simultaneous interpreter. This interpreter will either whisper for up to two listeners, or will need to be equipped with a tour-guide system (transmitter and headsets) to interpret for a larger number.

**Organising a small meeting with foreign visitors.** In this case the interpreters can work with a tour-guide system. Two interpreters will be necessary if the work-time exceeds one hour, as they will work in approximately 20 minute turns.

## 2. Whispering / Chuchotage

Whispered interpreting is used when the majority of participants speak the same language and only one or two speak a different language. In this case the interpreter whispers to the foreign language speakers. If there is a maximum of two listeners, the interpreter will sit behind them, interpreting simultaneously.

**Advantage:** there is no loss of time as the interpretation is done simultaneously.

**Disadvantage:** not appropriate when the foreign language speakers wish to participate, not just listen. In this case liaison/ad-hoc interpreting has to be used so that their contribution can be interpreted to other participants. Whispering interpreting is an extremely tiring technique. It is necessary to work with two interpreters and is only possible at events with a relatively small number of participants.

### 3. Simultaneous Interpreting with a Tour-guide System

A so-called tour-guide system is used for this type of interpreting. This includes a radio microphone for the interpreter and headsets for the listeners. The interpreter listens to the speaker via his/her headset and speaks into the microphone for the foreign-language listeners who listen via their own headsets.

**Advantage:** fewer acoustic problems – easier listening, no loss of time.

**Disadvantage:** equipment is needed, which can sometimes be difficult to get hold of as it is not as widely used as simultaneous interpreting booths.

- Be aware of cultural differences and the implications such differences may have for what you say at multinational meetings.
- Avoid using jargon, colloquialisms, plays on words or puns. The latter in particular are often untranslatable.
- When telling a joke speak very slowly and be aware of the fact that the joke may not translate at all.

In desperation at a conference in China a translator is reported to have asked the audience to laugh explaining that the speaker had told a joke that could not be translated into Chinese!

these to be interpreted to your foreign visitor(s), to whom they also apply. **It's a good rule of thumb to 'finish the thought' before you pause for interpreting.**

- Don't turn away from the interpreter when talking – here it makes sense to place the interpreter between the negotiating parties so everything can be heard.
- When using abbreviations or acronyms for the first time, explain them for the interpreter's benefit. A reference sheet in advance is helpful.
- The same is true for technical terminology. Here it would be useful to brief the interpreter on company specific and other technical terminology in advance.

## 4. Phone Interpreting

This type of interpreting is used for business negotiations/talks when great distances are involved, e.g. one client is based in Japan another in the UK. It is also used during preparations for business meetings when arrangements for the meeting have to be made between the business partners. Three-way teleconferences are the preferred option for this method of interpreting.

**Advantage:** prior arrangements can be easily made, costs are lower than organising a full meeting.

**Disadvantage:** visual contact is missing

## Interpreter Requirements

Interpreters need:

- **Active knowledge of both working languages, as they will be interpreting both ways, e.g, from French into English and from English into French.\***
- **Technical knowledge of the field they will be working in, such as background information on the company they will be working for, the industrial or other context, etc.**
- **General business knowledge.**
- **A professional manner.**

\* Passive knowledge of a language means that the interpreter will only interpret out of this language never into it. Active knowledge means that the interpreter can interpret out of and into this language, e.g. a British interpreter with active knowledge of Spanish and passive knowledge of Portuguese will interpret out of/into Spanish, but only out of Portuguese.

## Some advice for those using business interpreters

- Speak slowly, clearly and concisely at all times. The interpreter may, otherwise, have to ask you to repeat parts of what you have said.
- If negotiations become heated, do not forget to pause for the interpreter – the longer you keep going, the more likely it is that there will be omissions.
- Ensure that all the people involved in the meeting are aware of the interpreter's needs before the meeting commences. Tell participants to pause after every few sentences, point out that if everyone speaks at the same time, the interpreter will not be able to interpret. By making these recommendations at the beginning of the meeting, you will be allowing

- Ensure that the interpreter is seated in a place where s/he can hear everything they have to interpret without any disturbing background noise.
- The interpreter also has to be able to see from where s/he is sitting PowerPoint presentations, other large screens, OHPs, etc, that form part of the meeting. If possible speakers' faces should be visible to the interpreter as well (this will help the interpreter to concentrate better).
- Be aware of the fact that your best source of information and advice will often be the interpreter as s/he can point out to you where to place the delegates s/he is interpreting for, and where s/he should be seated to be able to be most effective, as well as other important details.

## How can you help the interpreter do an excellent job?

- Send detailed company information to the interpreter in advance and as much information as possible about the content of the meeting they will be interpreting in. Let them know about websites (your own and related websites) so they may do their own background research on your company terminology and topical issues.
- If you are using equipment, ensure it is working in advance and does not have to be tested just before the event. If you are using a tour-guide kit, you will need a fresh microphone battery every day, for optimum performance, and the headsets will need recharging daily.

- Do not expect the interpreters to assemble the tour-guide system, as they are not technicians.
- Freelance interpreters have an irregular work schedule, with slack periods and busy seasons. For this reason, clients should reserve and brief as far in advance as possible.
- Freelancers work on the basis of individual contracts. A regular working day consists of up to 8 hours.
- Interpreters are often paid hourly, but sometimes a full day/half day fee is agreed. Any overtime is added on at an hourly rate.
- If you have a client dinner planned at the end of the evening and you require the interpreter to stay for this, inform him/her in advance and agree overtime payment.
- Interpreters will need coffee breaks and lunch breaks to recharge their batteries and should not be expected to interpret throughout them. If interpreters are asked to interpret through meal breaks they are unlikely to be able to eat (as they are either listening carefully or interpreting what is said). They need time to rest and eat when no demands are being made on them.
- Travel expenses are paid in addition to the fee. Accommodation (if required) and meals for the interpreters are provided by the client, preferably at the venue itself.