

THE BATTLE FOR ENGLISH: INTERPRETATION FRONT

This article discusses the continued importance of professional interpretation in today's world. Interpretation skills and abilities differ substantially from language competence and proficiency of any level. Interpreter community as any other guild aims to deliver the top quality services at all times. Respect to professionals in any field is the key to success in any business.

Key words: *interpretation (of tongues), speaking in tongues, interpreter protocols, business English.*

У статті обговорюється важливість професійного усного перекладу, що не втрачає актуальності сьогодні, як і завжди. Навички усного перекладу і професійна здатність перекладати усний текст суттєво відрізняються від мовленнєвої компетенції та володіння мовою будь-якого рівня. Перекладацька спільнота, так само як і професіонали в інших царинах, завжди намагаються надавати послуги найвищої якості. Повага до професіоналів кожної сфери слугує запорукою успіху у будь-якому бізнесі.

Ключові слова: *усний переклад (тлумачення мовлення), мовленнєва компетенція, протоколи (норми поведінки) усних перекладачів, ділова англійська.*

В статье обсуждается профессиональный устный перевод, не утративший своей актуальности и сегодня. Навыки устного перевода и профессиональное умение переводить устный текст существенно отличаются от речевой компетенции и любого уровня владения языком. Переводческое сообщество, как и любая другая профессиональная группа, всегда старается предложить услуги высочайшего качества. Уважение к профессионалам любой области — залог успеха любого бизнеса.

Ключевые слова: *устный перевод (толкование речи), речевая компетенция, протоколы (нормы поведения) устных переводчиков, деловой английский.*

Interpreting today becomes a battle for English. A battle waged against globalized pidginized version of international gobbledygook vaguely resembling the English language. «The language of international business now,» a British executive once said, «is broken English, an English with a profusion of accents, cadences, and syntaxes.»

In practical terms the battle for English very often means proving the worth of what interpreters pronounce (doing their immediate job) and beating off feeble attempts of some parties to conversation «to assist» interpreters by offering what they sincerely believe a befitting word or phrase.

There is neither time nor place, at negotiation table, to explain what «interpreting» is. It is important, nevertheless, to emphasize here that interpreting is NOT about literal word-for-word conversion of one language to another. Interpreting requires an understanding of subject matter, a high degree of skill and proficiency in comprehending, listening and speaking. Alas, what happens nowadays is that people with various degrees of proficiency in English believe they know enough words and grammatical constructs to replace professional interpreters (or assist them by amending interpretation).

Language proficiency and professional interpretation skills are different whatsoever. Both may be viewed as «gifts»¹ that people are blessed with: «...and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues <...>» (1 Corinthians 12:10, KJV)².

Caveat is in order: for the sake of argument, and keeping in mind that we do not stand to offer or prove any theological or theoretical doctrines, rather to give some practical pointers, let us differentiate between what the Bible says about speaking in tongues (language proficiency or competence) and interpreting of tongues (interpretation skills). «Thus we see that speaking in tongues has both a private and a public aspect to it. Privately, it is for your communion <...>, and for your own edification. (1 Corinthians 14:5)»; «...Publicly, it is to be accompanied by the manifestation (gift) of interpretation of tongues, so that those present are edified and enriched...» (1 Corinthians 14:2 and 4, KJV).

So, for the purpose of argument, *speaking in tongues* is seen as general linguistic skills, proficiency (of any level) in a foreign language, whereas *interpretation (of tongues)* is a set of professional skills and abilities gained through focused multi-annual theoretical and practical training.

Interpreters are people specially trained to do the job of interpreting. Also, they are trained to:

- a) **cope with culture clashes.** They understand and overcome such factors as time constraints, deadlines, distractions, and emotions;
- b) **reduce the possibility of cultural misunderstanding.** Interpreters think through negotiation-sensitive factors, i.e., location and setting, members of the team, and communication agenda. Seasoned negotiators often tell stories about unethical behaviors of people of other nationalities, and it is interpreter's job to amend the situation by guiding and navigating the communication;
- c) **research counterparty's background and experience;**
- d) **pay close attention to unfolding negotiation dynamics. This means** targeted listening during talks and, in cases when the answers are obscure, reframing the questions and putting them again.

Apart from training requirements, interpreters must abide by the code of conduct, as any other business professionals. There are «musts» and «must nots» for interpreters (Protocols-Interpreters, 2017). The «musts» include:

- i) ask information regarding the nature of their assignment in advance in order to be able to research and adequately prepare for the assignment;
- ii) abide at all times with the National Standard Guide for Community Interpreting Services — NSGCIS;
- iii) always arrive ahead of time for their assignment as that time is strictly followed. Clients expect interpreters to be on time. The interpreter must be at the assigned room 10 to 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time;

¹ To update the Bible term “gift(s)”, a modern, notoriously *en vogue* term “competence(s)” shall be meant

² Several versions of the King James Bible (KJV) were produced in 1611, 1629, 1638, 1762, and 1769. The 1769 edition is most commonly cited as the King James Version (KJV). Citations herein abide by this text.

- iv) remain at the appointed location until the encounter ends or until dismissed by the assigned contact person;
- v) remain and wait at the assignment location for the full booked time even if the assignment does not start on time, until dismissed by the assigned contact person;
- vi) at the end of the interpretation assignment, thank all parties involved;
- vii) report the assignments on time (within 24 hours of completion);
- viii) dress and behave in a business-like manner;
- ix) properly introduce himself or herself to all parties and explain the role of the interpreter.

The interpreter «must nots» are as follows:

- i) receiving phone calls or beeper alarms during an assignment within or outside the booked time (if within the premises);
- ii) eating during the assignment within or outside the booked time (if within the premises);
- iii) conducting personal or other businesses while on an interpreting assignment, handing out business cards;
- iv) bringing any other parties to the assignment within or outside the booked time (if within the premises);
- v) providing personal information to any of the parties involved (Protocols-Interpreters, 2017).

To conclude briefly: there are no random people in professional interpreting.

Parties present at negotiation table are trained to do business of all walks of professional life: advisory committees of dental establishments, dumping at sea regional offices, arable crops departments, dairy cattle farming and milk marketing sector, financial rehabilitation for economy's revival working groups, food additives and contaminants divisions, in short, *nomen illis legio*. The difference between interpreters and other business professionals is that the former major in philology and linguistics, whereas the latter major in their respective business domains.

A huge number of business professionals now employ English (in various degrees of proficiency) for business purposes. Therefore, their English skills may be regarded as a very valuable, but only an additional competence, to their majors. To piggyback: interpreters are trained to interpret, businesspeople are trained to do business (and speak in tongues, if they choose to).

Now, having said that, let us again turn to the Bible verses on interpreting of tongues and speaking in tongues. «All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?» (1 Corinthians 12:30, KJV). In our humble opinion, the above means that all people are gifted differently, and this is what makes life on Earth so varied and interesting to explore, investigate and discover. A place where everyone speaks one language (behaves in the same way, possesses same gifts as qualifications, etc) is a very dull place indeed. Therefore, cheers to variability and difference, and let everyone practice what one is best trained to do.

Being professional in one's trade is an eternally valuable ability or gift. As to other qualifications gained through life-long education — let us be fair with ourselves: perfect skills in multiple fields of theoretical knowledge or practical experience are characteristics of only chosen geniuses. Humility becomes us all.

In a world where English is everywhere, is interpretation still needed and important? Is it even necessary when so many non-English speakers speak English for themselves?

English today is the third most widely spoken language in terms of native speakers (a rough estimate gives some 330 million). Adding to this number all the people who speak English as a second language, it is the most popular language in the world. So, why is interpretation so important? Despite the growing ubiquity of the English language we may offer several reasons why interpretation remains to be in need for and important and will remain in demand for many years to come.

A. Interpretation is important because (surprise, surprise!) not everyone speaks English. Even though English spoken across the globe, that does not mean one can disregard all the people who do not speak it at all or do not wish to speak their broken English.

And, just because a person can speak some English, that does not necessarily mean they can speak it well enough to cope in all situations. For example, a 2012 survey from the European Commission found that only a quarter of Europeans were able to understand English well enough to follow an English-language news broadcast (Special Eurobarometer 2012, 386). Holding a basic conversation is one thing. Easy, efficient and fruitful communication is another.

B. Interpretation is important because people (generally) prefer their native languages to speak their mind. It is also true that people typically respond better to the language they grew up speaking. For effective communication, it is not enough to speak a language people understand, especially if their understanding of the language is limited. Moreover, if their understanding of a subject matter is also limited — we end up with real trouble. One must speak to them in the language their heart and soul speak.

We adhere to the idea that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language. To add: the next sweetest sound is a person's native language.

A study from found that 75 % of customers and consumers of goods, works and services «prefer products, goods and services in their native language.» (CSA-survey, 2018).

C. Interpretation is important since it acts as a connection tool for global economy. Demand for interpretation services of high quality is booming even despite the fact that English has long been established and crowned as «the language of global business» (Yakowicz 2019).

Any business seriously contemplating its international growth in today's uncertain environment (Brexit, EU perspectives, the rise of Asia, etc) needs to build a strong partnership with a professional language services partner-company capable of managing the whole process of «doing business» from start to finish. So, interpreting services remain a vital part of doing efficient and productive business around the world.

Emerging markets mean emerging languages, so even though English is on top of the world *now*, there are doubts this situation continues in future. Other languages are growing in importance as developing countries take their places in the global economy and their citizens gain Internet access. For example, most of the world's web content used to be in English (Zuckerman 2013). Now, the pendulum has swung back. Speakers of English as SL (second language) generally prefer to read, watch and shop in their first language.

D. Interpretation assists spreading ideas and information across cultures, and, to a degree, changes history.

Interpreting dates back to Ancient Egypt during the 3rd millennium B. C. A strong importance of good business changed the way communication was carried out, and gestures were no longer enough, and this is when interpreters made their first appearance. «Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.» (1 Corinthians 14:13, KJV).

Throughout the dark Middle Ages interpreters continued to be employed: monks of different nationalities interpret in monasteries; preachers of foreign lands interpret in high halls, and some individuals interpret during business expeditions, military campaigns and diplomatic meetings.

During the Age of Discovery, the use of new and different languages had greatly changed the way we see interpretation today. Christopher Columbus on his first voyage noted that his Arabic and Hebrew-speaking interpreters were not very helpful in communicating with the Indians. After this voyage he decided to capture some Native Americans and teach them Spanish so they could help him as interpreters on his next expedition. «...But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.» (Daniel 5:16, KJV). This is a testimony of interpreter's value and necessity to employ as a professional in the search of truth, faithfulness, and harmony among parties to communication and communion.

There is no denying the power of the English language, and the modern English Tower of Babel is not coming down anytime soon. At the same time, interpreter community continues to wage its battle against «creolization» of spoken English at business communication level. To receive precise and trusted (in terms of facts and figures) interpretation and to succeed in any business one must engage professional interpretation service providers.

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