

CONFERENCE ON LANGUAGE & TRANSLATION INDUSTRY OF INDIA: OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES (New Delhi, April 17-18, 2009)

Workshop: Situations, issues, and responses: exercises in professional decision-making for bilingual language service providers

The professional translator/interpreter has a responsibility for

- 1) the *adequacy* of the translated text (written/spoken/signed) and
- 2) its *suitability* for the client.

This requires:

- 1) competence (linguistic and cultural),
- 2) ethical behaviour, and
- 3) procedural appropriateness.

We shall explore the implications of this by examining, discussing, and reporting on the 16 scenarios below.

All the scenarios are based on genuine events (the numbers refer to the sources listed at the bottom of this handout), other than those marked “8” which are fictitious but plausible, and assume that you are a qualified translator/interpreter (as appropriate), unless otherwise stated.

Most relate to interpreting (and mainly public service/community interpreting), since that provides the widest range of easily accessible situations and issues. However, other things being equal, the problems faced by other language service providers are essentially similar and the lessons learned can be easily transferred to other activities.

Procedure

- You are already divided into four groups (A-D), each of which will subdivide into five-person subgroups: A¹- Aⁿ etc.
- Each group will be assigned *four* scenarios to discuss.
- Each subgroup will discuss the assigned scenarios and make a note of their findings (five minutes)
- Each subgroup will report back to its fellow subgroups, with one individual noting common and divergent responses and passing these to an appointed spokesperson (five minutes per group = 20 minutes).
- Each group's spokesperson will present the group's findings to the remaining groups (five minutes per group = 20 minutes)
- All four groups will draw on their experiences to seek generalisable principles and practices for the professional translator/interpreter (10 minutes)

The time we have available for this exercise is very limited indeed, so it is *absolutely essential* that we keep to the timetable above. Everyone must have the opportunity to engage with the issues, come to their own conclusions, and contribute to the subgroup, group, and general discussion but we *must not and cannot overrun*.

Scenarios

Group A

1. You have been sent by a translation agency to a law firm to help them sort through documents. One of the lawyers asks you to translate an unrelated document and tells you that (s)he can pay you better rates than you get through the translation agency. How will you respond and why? (1)
2. You are a qualified and experienced business translator and have been asked to interpret for a delegation coming to India for two weeks to study satellite broadcasting equipment and techniques for possible use in their home country. How will you respond and why? (1)
3. You are offered an assignment in court interpreting but you have little experience in this field and you feel your skills are not adequate. What will you do? (2)
4. You are going to interpret for a business negotiation but you have no access beforehand to the documents and the information relevant to meeting. This means that you cannot prepare adequately for the meeting, particularly since you are unable to check specialist terminology. What will you do? (2)

[If you have finished, feel free to move on to the next group's scenarios]

Group B

5. You translated a document about the specifications for a new computer chip and submitted the translation to your client. Your client did not ask you to sign a nondisclosure or confidentiality agreement. Later, someone tries to contact you and promises to pay you a lot of money for this information. What will you do? (2)
6. You arrive to interpret at a business meeting and discover that one of the individuals your client works with is one of your family members. What will you do? (2)
7. You are translating an important document for a pharmaceutical company and want to subcontract the work to your colleagues. What should you do? (2)
8. Your client has been arrested by the police and is being charged at the Police Station. (S)he starts swearing and/or saying offensive words. What would you do? (3)

[If you have finished, feel free to move on to the next group's scenarios]

Group C

9. You are interpreting for a client who is being questioned by the Police. During the questioning, the officer says something to you and tells you not to pass the message on to the client. What would you do? (3).
10. You are interpreting for a client who is being interviewed by the Police. During the interview, the officer says something which shows that (s)he does not understand the requirements of the client's culture. What would you do? (3).
11. The police have arrested some suspected terrorists and have asked you to interpret. The suspects all claim to speak only Punjabi. Your first language is Gujarati but you understand some Punjabi. What would you do? (8).
12. The police are questioning an individual and have asked you to interpret. You are acquainted with the client: (s)he lives in the next street to you. What would you do? (3).

[If you have finished, feel free to move on to the next group's scenarios]

Group D

13. You are a certified Sign Language Interpreter engaged in a discussion in a lawyer's office concerning a possible divorce between two deaf individuals: Mr. X and Mrs. X. You are acting on behalf of Mrs. X interpreting between her husband and her lawyer. Mr. X has brought along his own (uncertified) interpreter. During the discussion it is apparent that Mr. X's interpreter is frequently failing to voice Mr. X's signed messages accurately or even at all. This has the effect of causing confusion and prolonging the argument. Should you intervene and if so how? (5)
14. Your union or professional association has told you not to interpret after office hours and the police have asked you to do so. What would you do? (3).
15. You are providing simultaneous English-French interpreting, in both directions, at a political conference. The Cameroonian delegate begins speaking in French but is completely incomprehensible. What would you do? (4).
16. The *Wall Street Journal* 22-12-1997 analysis of the policies of the in-coming Korean president President-elect Kim Dae Jung includes the comment "Concerns over Mr. Kim's economic policy, to be sure, may prove to be unfounded." The right of centre daily *Chosun Ilbo* (24-12-1997) translated the comment as: "...and the *Wall Street Journal* considers his economic policies as 'having no foundation' ". Is this an unmotivated mistranslation or a motivated (ideological) manipulation of the original message? (8)

[If you have finished, feel free to move on to group A's scenarios]

Sources

1. ATA: <http://www.atanet.org/>
2. SCRIBD: www.scribd.com/
3. Sandra Rennie Bradford & Ilkley Community College, UK
4. Sergio Viaggio: Chief UN Interpreter, Vienna
5. Lucy Lim-Yip: Interpreter, Kuala Lumpur
6. Roger T Bell: several personal sources
7. Kwanchan Lee: PhD student GSIT, HUFS, Seoul

Useful links

Academy of Language and Literature (DBP): www.dbp.gov.my

American Translators Association (ATA): www.tanet.org

Association of Translation Companies (ATC): www.atc.co.uk

Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT): www.ausit.org

Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN): www.asdan.co.uk

British Medical Association (BMA): www.bma.org.uk

Business Language Information Services (BLIS): www.blis.org.uk

Institute of Linguists (IOL): www.iol.org.uk

Institute of Translators and Interpreters (ITI): www.iti.org.uk

International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC): www.aiic.net

International Federation of Translators (FIT): www.fit-ift.org

National Accreditation Agency for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI): www.naati.com.au

National Centre for Information on Languages (CILT): www.cilt.org.uk

National Institute of Translation (ITNMB): www.itnm.com.my

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