

Working with Interpreters and Translators

It is necessary to know some basics when working with those who speak in different languages. Each language has its own distinctive characteristics. Although you may not learn the language or all of the rules of grammar, it is important for the best and most effective communication that you know how to work with those who will be assisting you in the translation of a language.

Please keep in mind that besides oral communication, there are physical communications in each country. It is important for us to know what these are as well as what is not acceptable in physical actions. For example, in the country of Albania (except among the young), a thumbs-up sign is very offensive. We must remember to adapt ourselves in the ways of the culture to the country. We are the visitors. We must always remember that we are being observed. We are easily recognized as foreigners.

Paul said in Philippians 4:9, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do...."

We are advertisements not only for Jesus but for our countries. We desire to always represent both well in all we do and say.

All do not use the same definitions, but for these instructions, the following definitions will be used:

INTERPRETER:

- One who has a good command of both languages being used. They are able to flow well with a public message.

TRANSLATOR:

There are two types of translators: oral and written.

- **Oral:** One who is capable of assisting in communication between several people in a conversational method. They are not interpreters.
- **Written:** One who is fluent in each language, with a good understanding of the grammar rules of each, who is able to transfer the written word from one language to the other.

Just because an individual is capable of speaking in both languages does not mean they will be proficient in any of these methods. It is also uncommon to find those who are proficient in all of these areas of communication. Please do not force someone to interpret who is not comfortable with this method communication. If you ask, they will

seldom refuse but will be ashamed because they are not capable to do it. It will be an embarrassment to them and your message may not get across properly. Therefore, when at all possible, ask someone who knows the people about who should interpret. Remember, everyone does not feel comfortable in front of a group of people. Interpreting is a very difficult and challenging task. This is a time of great pressure, especially on the interpreter, so choose wisely and use the tips below.

BASIC TIPS ON WORKING WITH INTERPRETERS:

(Some apply also to oral translators)

- If at all possible, use someone who is a Christian to interpret or translate. It is very difficult to have an interpreter who is unfamiliar with Christian terms, and a non-Christian is more apt not to translate the concepts of the message which you are trying to bring across. It is important that the people understand both the words and the concepts of the message. If all they have is words, they do not have the Word.
- Before you even try to work with an interpreter, learn about the particular language. Do you need to speak in phrases, sentences, or complete thoughts?

Remember, sentence structure is different in many languages. Are there any particular sounds or words that are difficult for them to understand?

- Try to spend some time speaking with your interpreter before you begin. This gives him or her a chance to listen to the way you speak and pronounce words. We all have accents of one type or another. Your interpreter needs to become accustomed to yours.
- Explain anything that you plan to do which may be different from giving a regular message. For example, whether you are going to use any objects or actions, and whether you tend to walk around when you speak. Ask them any questions you may have. Make sure they are comfortable with what you plan to say. Be willing to take their suggestions. They know the nationals, the culture, and what may be understood or offensive. The Holy Spirit may be using them to assist you to be most effective. Interpreters often look at your mouth when speaking. Ask if you need to stand where they can see you. Let them know if you plan to do any personal ministry such as praying for people or giving a word of knowledge or word of wisdom.

- Speak clearly and distinctly. Do not use contractions or run your words together. Pronounce your words correctly and use correct grammar. Speak slowly but not too slow.
- Do not listen to the interpretation; think about what you intend to say next. You will find that listening to the interpretation may cause you to forget where you are.
- Sometimes a particular portion takes a very short or a very long time to interpret. They may have one word which explains the entire concept, or your interpreter may need not only to interpret your words, but also explain the concept. Be patient.
- Let the interpreter complete their part before you begin speaking again.

DON'TS

- Do not prove your right to be ministering. You are called and equipped by the Holy Spirit, whether you feel like it or not. Just speak with authority.
- Do not talk about politics or how bad they have had it. They do not need reminding.
- Do not treat them as if they are children (the adults, that is). Do not speak down to them; treat them with respect.
- Do not use idioms or common American expressions. These will not make sense to those listening.

By using these simple tips, you can be effective when using an interpreter. God knows that you are working with an interpreter. After all, it is He who confounded the languages in the first place! Give one sentence at a time and allow your interpreter to tell the people the message. Working with an interpreter can be a good experience for you, the interpreter, and the nationals.