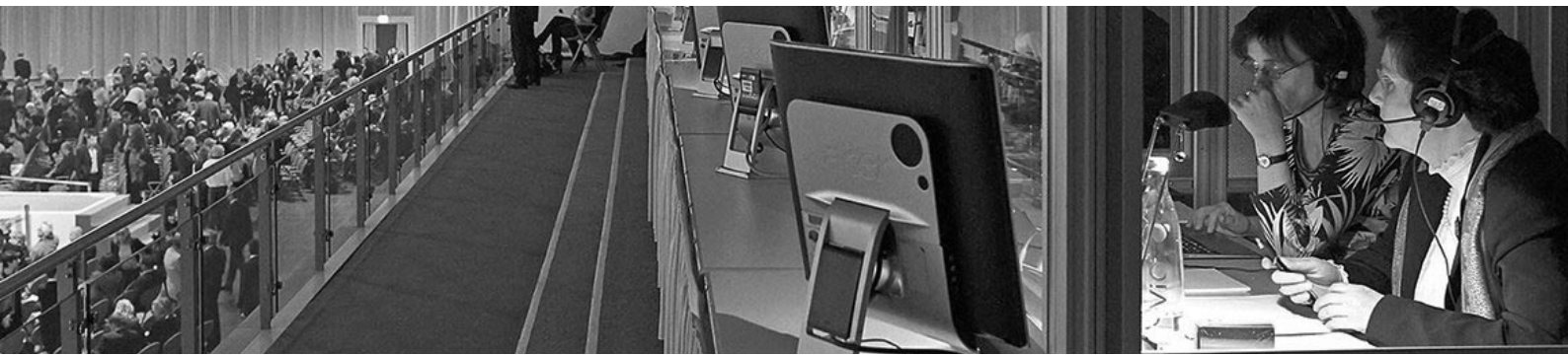


The people in the booth



Talking through an interpreter

Best practice and guidelines
for a smooth multilingual experience



Marion Nuding

Interpreting - Translation

Copywriting - Liaison

www.french-interpreter.com

www.french-interpreter.com
marion@frenchmarketing.co.uk

© 2024

***“It takes more than having two hands to be a good pianist. It takes more than knowing two languages to be a good interpreter”
(François Grosjean)***

Interpreting is the art of breaking the language barrier by simultaneously conveying one person's speech into another person's language.

It's not so much a job as a highly skilled performance.

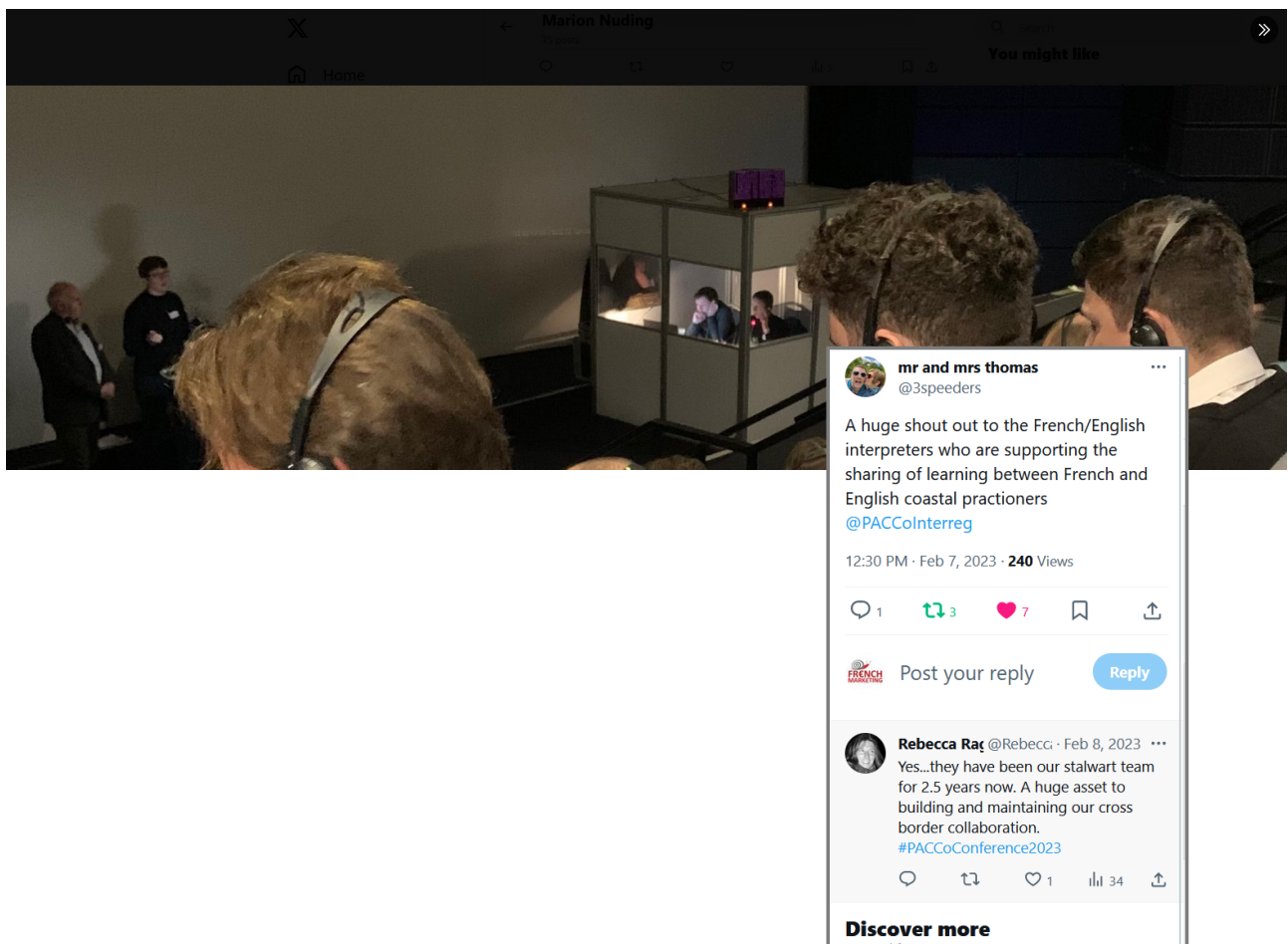


Table of Contents

Presenting through an interpreter	4
What you need to know about interpreters	5
Finding and selecting interpreters	6
Technology	7
Preparation	8
How to talk	9
Principles of public speaking	10

Presenting through an interpreter

When you find yourself facing a room or a screen full of people who have come from all around the world to hear what you have to say, it helps to have a good working relationship with the people in the interpreting booth.

Some public speakers might hope that they can simply talk as they normally would and their interpreters will do the rest. That is relatively close to the truth, but there are a few things you can do to make sure that your foreign audience understands your message and enjoys your presentation almost as well as if you could talk their language.

A few questions I often hear:

Should I stop talking after a few words? No!
Should I just pretend you're not there? No...
How can you listen and talk at the same time?? Well...

This guide wants to answer these questions and many others that should be asked.



What you need to know about interpreters

They work in pairs

Interpreting is a cognitively heavy task, and even the best interpreters can only do it for so long, which is why it's common practice for them to work in pairs and switch every 30 minutes or so. The passive interpreter tends to support the active interpreter by offering terminological information or dealing with any technological issues.



Don't worry, they'll take care of the handovers without your intervention. Online, they may have to use hand-signals or turning their camera on/off to communicate, so don't worry if you see them waving on the screen!



Interpreters work in pairs. They take it in turns to interpret, but they also support each other by looking up terminology and jotting down names and numbers.

They tend to specialise

Not only do interpreters have to train in the skill of simultaneously listening/understanding/translating/talking, it is not unusual for conferences to involve presentations from very specialist speakers using niche terminology. It is therefore very helpful to work with interpreters who have prior knowledge of the topic. Ideally, once you found interpreters who know your subject matter and do a good job, try and retain their services for the next talk.

They'll get to know you

If you've met people with a different accent to yours, you might have noticed that you understand them better after a while. The same goes for interpreters. They become used to your voice, your style and your vocabulary.

Try to find interpreters already specialised in your field, and to retain the same ones for your next events.



Finding and selecting interpreters

Simultaneous interpreting is the closest thing to talking in the same language. With a good interpreter on your side, your conversation can feel almost as natural as it would without the language barrier. It helps to ensure you work with a qualified interpreter who has some understanding of your field and topic.

When it comes to selecting your interpreters, you have several options:

Consultant interpreters

Some interpreters (me, for exemple) offer project management services : they take care of finding you a team, hiring the equipment and tracking your budget.

Freelancers

Look for qualifications such as a DPSI or an interpreting degree in the correct language pair and for experience of conference interpreting at events relating to your industry.

Most countries will also have organisations regulating the profession, and they generally offer a directory of their members.

UK - Chartered Institute of Linguists - www.ciol.org.uk

USA - International Association of Conference Interpreters - <https://usa.aiic.org/>

Germany - Association of Conference Interpreters - <https://bdue.de>

Italy - Associazione Italiana Traduttori e Interpreti - <https://aiti.org/en>

France - Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence - <https://aiic.fr/>

Asociacion de Interpretes de Conferencia de España - www.aice-interpretes.com

Language providers

Translation agencies can often organise complete interpreting teams for big events, and may be quicker to replace one of them in case of emergency. They may also apply a generous mark-up to the interpreter's fee.

Conference venues

Talk to your venue about the need for an interpreter - they may have a list of providers which they have worked with before.



To keep costs down, you can use Zoom interpretation to stream a live event through to interpreters working remotely.



Sound quality is paramount

This is the main factor that will make or break any conference, but it is particularly important when someone is interpreting what you're saying. It pays to put technology on your side.

In a live event, either use a venue equipped with interpreting booths, portable equipment or remote interpretation software and make sure everyone is wearing their headphones. This is particularly relevant if your meeting is likely to involve discussions for the participants, in which case don't hesitate to remind the audience to all wear their headphones, even if they speak the same language as the presenter.

If possible, use a clipped-on microphone. Failing that, be sure to talk directly into your hand-held microphone. No mic? Look ahead, project your voice and enunciate clearly and loudly. Not only will this help your interpreters, it's the basics of public speaking.

Interpreters booth

Your venue may already be equipped with a permanent interpreting infrastructure. Alternatively, you can hire a portable sound booth or tour guiding equipment. Either way, be sure to have a technician onsite during the entire event to address any technical issues.

Remote Simultaneous Interpreting

Headset

Online, present from a quiet room and prefer a headset with integrated microphone if possible. Failing that, be sure to talk directly towards your laptop's integrated microphone and don't turn your head away whilst talking.



Internet connectivity

It goes without saying that broken connection and lagging sound is likely to be problematic for your interpreter as well as your audience. Ideally, find a plugged-in Ethernet connexion or a reliable wi-fi.

Software

Zoom and Kudo are particularly well set-up for live simultaneous interpreting, whilst MS Teams, Facetime or most other video call applications will require consecutive interpreting.

Preparation

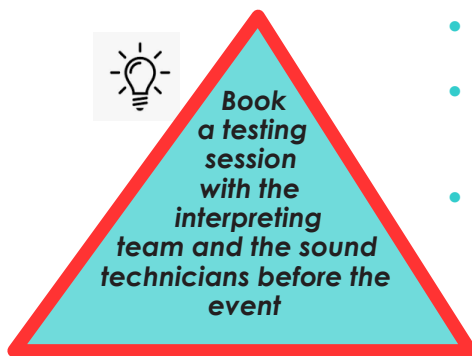
Translate your visual resources

If you're sharing visual information with your audience, your interpreter won't be able to translate it whilst they're interpreting what you're saying. Presenting slides in your language alone is effectively removing all that information and expecting your foreign audience to go without. Ideally, have them translated ahead of the event and either show all languages on the same screen or share them with the foreign speakers through a different interface or on paper.



Share the material with your interpreters

Organising any event generally involves many people. Be sure to include your interpreting team in the loop. In particular, they'll be grateful for:



- The agenda, including a list of speakers' names
- Any slideshow, infographics or other visual resources you plan on showing
- Any video clips

As far ahead as possible please - they'll need time to read it all!

Remote Simultaneous Interpreting

Prepare a slide on interpretation

Your audience may not be aware that interpreters are available, until you tell them. Since you might not speak their language, the best way to do this is to prepare a slide showing them how to access it in as many languages as you have interpreters.



Zoom interpretation slide in French, German and Spanish

How to talk

Pace yourself

You can still talk naturally, there-is-no-need-to-talk-like-a-robot but, you know, take a breath every now and then. Some languages, (French is one of them) can take longer or require more words to translate something English speakers can say in two syllables. For example, in a formal agricultural context, the word “farm” is likely to be translated as “exploitation agricole”. If you use the term a couple of times in the same sentence, your interpreter is naturally going to need a bit more time just to say the words.

Be aware of the implications of humour

More often than not, your interpreter will find a way to convey your little jokes one way or another. The only things that may prove challenging are plays on words, because the words you’re playing with might not exist in their language. That doesn’t mean you can’t use humour, but it helps to have an awareness of these limitations so you won’t be surprised if part of your audience is a little late to the party or if your interpreter chooses not to translate it.

Avoid language hopping - trust the interpreter

If you’re comfortable in both languages, it’s often tempting to do your own interpretation - a behaviour that tends to be counterproductive as it will force your interpreter to constantly switch channels to keep up with your choice of language, and risk missing details in the process.

To avoid losing too much of your message in translation, relinquish some of the control and trust that your interpreter will convey the majority of your moods and jokes and, most importantly, all the information.

Finish your trend of thoughts

It’s common for the syntax (the order of the words) to be different in another language. This can make it difficult for the interpreter to start talking until they’ve heard a complete sentence/unit of meaning. So try not to stop half-way through.

Grab the natural pauses

Your interpreter is always a little bit behind since they have to listen first. So, it’s a good idea to give them a chance to catch up every now and again. As a general rule, before you move on to the next slide or concept, take a moment to look at your interpreter and wait until they finish talking. In fact, that’s good practice regardless of whether you’re being interpreted or not – you’re giving your audience a lot of information on your topic, so it’s always advisable to give them 10 seconds to absorb it every now and then.

Avoid reading from a script

Pre-written scripts tend to lead to unnaturally fast speech, which is an interpreter’s worst nightmare. If you don’t trust your memory, feel free to jolt down some bullet points instead. And if you really must read from a script, share it with your interpreter ahead of the event.

Principles of public speaking

Your interpreters have a job to do but they are, ultimately, part of your audience. If your intervention is articulate and well prepared, they should have no trouble in relaying it to your foreign listeners. If your delivery is rushed and unclear, their performance will naturally be affected.

Which is why it is important to remember the principles of public speaking:

- Project your voice. Start by looking in front of you rather than at your feet...
- Don't rush it, take the time to enunciate
- Avoid relying on your slides or cramming too much into them
- Breathe.
- Enjoy it!

About the author

Marion Nuding has been a professional linguist and a conference interpreter since 2012 - a career path she chose at the age of 11 after coming home from her very first English lesson in France!

She studied linguistics at Grenoble's Stendhal University, and interpreting at London Metropolitan University. She is a freelance professional translator and conference interpreter, and a member of the Chartered Institute of Linguists and of the National Register of Public Service Interpreters.

She also works as a consultant interpreter for several regular clients.

