

Checklist for TV interpretation

Indispensable Requirements

A sound-proof booth. Under no circumstances should interpreters accept doing simultaneous interpretation on the set without a booth (this has happened!).

One chair per interpreter, preferably not a bar stool without a back.

Earphones:

individual volume control,
simultaneous interpretation type earphones, for example AKG, and under no circumstances earphones with thick cushioning of the type used by singers (these are very popular with TV technicians).

Microphones:

one microphone per interpreter,
possibility of switching your own microphone on and off

Sound:

interpreters must hear all persons being interviewed and all persons doing the interviewing. If there is cross-discussion between several people on the set (type "Apostrophes"), interpreters must hear everyone involved,
interpreters should never ever hear their own voices in their headsets (many technicians fail to see why not).

Sight:

Interpreters must have a full view of the set, i.e. of the interviewers, interviewees and, if necessary, of other persons who may be involved in the discussion. It is sometimes better to use a good color TV monitor than to have a partial view of the set, hampered by props, overhead lights, etc. Ideally, each interpreter should have two TV monitors, one focussed constantly on the guest to be interpreted - this makes it possible to know whether the person is on the set, has put his/her earphones on, seems to not hear, etc. - and one giving the picture which the TV viewer receives at home.

Contacts with technicians:

All equipment must be tested under "live" type circumstances before the program, and early enough for changes to be made if necessary. It is particularly important that the guest tests his own earphones - programs are often "botched up" simply because the guest's volume control button is not working or because he is not aware that it exists.

There must be a direct connection between the interpreters and the sound technicians throughout the program. Discussions between interpreters and technicians must not be broadcast (this happens all too often).

Credits:

Interpreters' names and reference to AIIC must be shown - this is not a favor but a right, just as it is for electricians, camera-men etc. The ideal solution is for the names to be flashed across the screen during the interpretation, but they can also be put in the general credits at the end of a program. If the anchorman/woman is particularly urbane, names will be stated and a word of thanks expressed during the program - this happens from time to time, believe it or not.

Helpful "Extras"

Water and glasses. When in doubt, bring your own! (just water, please).

A continuity script (log) of the program. It's always helpful to know when the guest is coming on the air.

A press file containing interviewees' latest books, records or whatever and a brief CV, if possible a few days before the program! If this is not available, the guest's impresario, manager etc. usually tags

along and is willing to answer your questions. You can also sometimes manage to see the guest while he/she is being made up.

A brief discussion with the guest(s) on the set before the program is very useful. You can tell the person all about how interpretation works - for many people this may be their first contact with simultaneous interpretation - and at the same time try and find out what is going to be discussed. It is often useful to hear the guest's voice and accent before the show. It is also very useful to have a little talk with the anchorman/woman. They sometimes have a written set of questions which the interpreters should get.

When interpreters are in separate booths, i.e. one per language, it is useful to have a relay button so as to be able to hear what the colleagues are saying - not to spy on them but to use the same terminology. It is also important to see the other colleague(s) just in case something happens... Booths should therefore be built of glass or at least have a "window" looking on to the other booth(s). TV sound technicians do not seem in many cases to be familiar with the notion of 2 persons working in the same booth into 2 languages with 2 headsets, 2 microphones, etc. It is useful to explain this to them (many many times, if necessary).

There should be a "cough button" - it is not very pleasant for millions of TV viewers to learn that so-and-so, their favourite interpreter, has a bad cold or cough.

Special situations

Pseudo-live pre-recorded programs

Make sure before the program that the questions and answers have been well synchronised. Pre-recorded interviews sometimes use inserted visual sequences. Make sure that your interpretation is over before a visual sequence with its own sound-track begins. In order for this to work, it is necessary to have seen the entire video tape before interpreting. The interpreter should note the first and last sentence of each sequence and their duration.

Duplex or Multiplex programs

This is the situation where the greatest number of problems are most likely to occur. Therefore, everything said above concerning testing of equipment, contact with technicians, etc. is even more important. Even when the technicians are in a van or anywhere else, it must be possible to contact them at all times during the program. Silly as this may sound, it might be useful to tell the organisers of the program to make sure the guest who is not on the set has a proper headset. This is not always the case, believe you me!

NB:

Getting reasonable working conditions on TV is an uphill struggle. It is usually necessary to explain everything many (hundreds...) times before people begin understanding our special needs. This is made more difficult by the fact that there seems to be a constant rotation of technicians (at least on French TV) and that when you have managed to explain everything to one team, another team crops up the next time. Interpreters should remember that it serves no purpose getting angry and yelling at technicians - this is probably counter-productive. Just like interpreters, they have their needs, their problems, their unions with their own special working conditions (a sound technician, for example, will never deal with anything but sound - there's no point in asking him to fix your TV monitor, get you a bottle of water, etc.). Technicians, just like interpreters, appreciate people recognising them, knowing their names, shaking their hands or, in other words, they like to be treated like human beings.

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