

Cross-Cultural Perspectives from the Director



Interpreter or Interrupter?

Interpreters are the key to a successful ministry of preaching and teaching in a cross-cultural setting. Initially you may think, “Interpreter or interrupter?” Give it time and practice. Before long you will not even realize you are using an interpreter, will come to enjoy it, and find it difficult to function without one.

1. Get to know your interpreter:

- A. If you are acquainted with several interpreters, select the one you feel most comfortable with.
- B. Like begets like: A male probably will do better with a male interpreter. A preacher does better with a fellow preacher.
- C. As you get to know each other, the interpreter will develop a feel for you, your accent, and how your words flow.

2. Pray with your interpreter:

- A. Ask that there be clarity and understanding in what is being said.
- B. Thank the Lord that you have a voice in the culture that can interpret your words for the hearing of the people.
- C. Ask that there be a flow of the Spirit; that your words and the interpretation would mesh together as one.

3. Go over your message:

- A. If there is a theme or a recurring word that is important in your message make sure you make this clear to your interpreter.
- B. Let him read your notes.
- C. Keep your points to a minimum and as simple as possible.
- D. Avoid big words. One vehicle sported this sign “No big English spoken here!” Keep that in mind in preaching and teaching.

- E. Make sure your interpreter is aware of technical terms.
- F. Do not use clichés or terms that are cultural specific to you and not to those you are trying to reach.
- G. Reveal your key text to your interpreter so he can familiarize himself with the passage.
- H. Do you want him to read the text simultaneously with you or when you have completely read the scriptural passage?
- I. Do you want him to preach simultaneously with you or when you have completed your sentences?

4. Tips while preaching or teaching:

- A. Watch your hearers to determine if they are grasping your ideas or illustrations.
- B. Repeat key thoughts using different words.
- C. When making an important statement, look right at the interpreter. It is easier for him to interpret when he sees your mouth.
- D. It is best if the interpreter is not receiving help or correction from those behind him on the platform or those sitting in the congregation. This creates chaos and confusion. It is also distracting and disrupting to the congregation.
- E. If interpreters change several times during your message it is not an indication of power or unprecedented anointing on you. It is a sign that your host is trying to find someone capable of interpreting your heavy duty words.
- F. Should you see your interpreter having difficulty, slow down and announce your words carefully. Do not rush through what you want to say.
- G. When the interpreter is silent, looks at you puzzled, or says “Excuse me!” these are indicators that he is not getting it.
- H. If there is a possibility that someone in the audience will not understand what you are saying, it is best to have an interpreter.
- I. Keep in mind that interpretation can be longer or shorter than the words or phrases you are speaking. Interpreting is not the same as translating. Translation is literal: word for word. Interpretation focuses on the meaning of what the speaker is saying and not just his words. In translation we look for literal accuracy. In interpretation we need comprehension. It is an explanation of what is being said.
- J. If there is only one microphone available it is best for the interpreter to use it.
- K. Never recite poems. They are nearly impossible to interpret.
- L. Check comprehension of your message. Ask a child or a blue collar worker, “What did I preach?” If they couldn’t explain, you know you’ve missed the mark.