

THE INTERPRETER'S VOICE

Useful Phrases for Formal Settings

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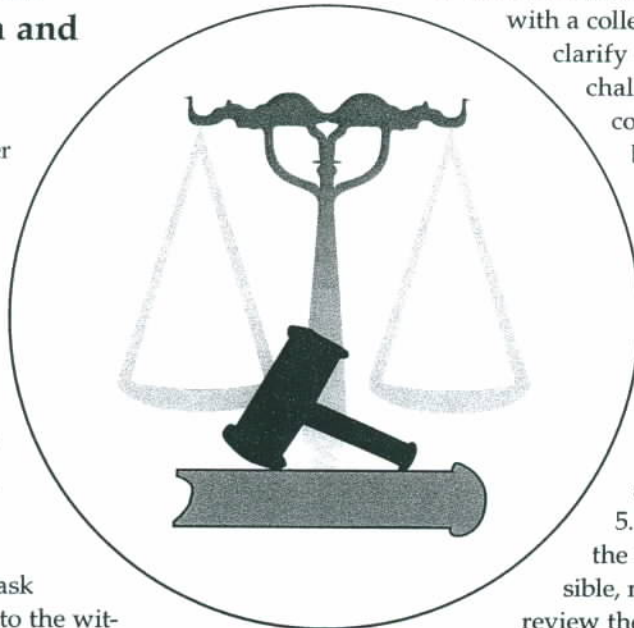
Court interpreters are often faced with the challenge of working with clients, including judges and attorneys, who are unfamiliar with our role. Over the years I've developed some useful phrases to convey proper interpreter protocol and avoid ethical dilemmas. Using these phrases illustrates the neutral and objective role that the interpreter plays, *defining by example* my function in the formal and adversarial setting of a courtroom.

For matters dealing with interpreter preparation and protocol:

1. Your Honor, may the interpreter have a moment outside to meet the witness and become familiar with his speech patterns?
2. Your Honor, in order to provide accurate interpreting for the record, may the interpreter have a moment to review the indictment? [and/or case file, preliminary hearing transcript, police reports, pre-sentence report, etc.]
3. Your Honor, would the Court ask counsel to direct the question to the witness in the first person, rather than prefacing the question with "Ask him...."
4. Your Honor, could the witness be instructed to answer in the first person, rather than beginning his answers with, "Ma'am, tell him that...."
5. Your Honor, the interpreter cannot hear counsel clearly. Would the Court request that she speak louder?
6. Your Honor, the interpreter needs a break. Is this an appropriate time?
7. Your Honor, the interpreters are experiencing problems with the electronic equipment. May we have a brief moment to correct the problem?
8. Your Honor, the interpreter requests that the question be repeated.
9. (When finishing an assignment) Your Honor, will there be any further need for the interpreter at this time?

For matters dealing with language, challenges & expertise:

1. Your Honor, there is a word here. May the interpreter inquire?
2. Your Honor, the witness has used a term with which the interpreter is unfamiliar. May he/she clarify the meaning with the witness?
3. Your Honor, may the interpreter consult briefly with a colleague? [For your own need to clarify a word or phrase, or if you are challenged by anyone, including a colleague. Such challenges should be made privately, at side bar, and not in open court.]
4. Your Honor, may the interpreter approach side bar with counsel? [For urgent matters that arise unexpectedly during a case such as conflicts of interest, or to deal with challenges of any type. These should always be handled outside of the presence of the jury.]
5. Your Honor, in order to render the most accurate translation possible, may the interpreter have time to review the document and consult reference materials? [This applies in particular to sight translation of difficult documents. Such documents should be translated in written form, not sight translated in open court.]
6. Your Honor, due to the technical nature and specialized vocabulary involved, the interpreter is not fully prepared to interpret for an expert witness in this field. A brief recess is requested to make alternative arrangements. [Such arrangements might include time to adequately prepare or to obtain a replacement interpreter with the requisite technical knowledge.]



[The author is a consultant, trainer and certified Spanish interpreter for the U.S. Courts and Oregon state. She can be reached at alee2000@open.org. Interpreters are encouraged to add phrases appropriate to their own jurisdictions.]