



There is More Translation Than Words: Social Work Continuing Education Presentations in Foreign Language Countries

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There is More to Translation Than Words: Social Work Continuing Education Presentations in Foreign Language Countries

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Social workers are increasingly being asked to share information and provide staff development to professionals in other countries. In some instances, the first language of the audience is different than the social worker's first language. Individuals are often employed to translate the social worker's words into the first language of the audience. An ordinarily dyadic presentation of a social worker with her/his audience becomes triadic. The manner of presentation becomes more complex.

The social worker may be unfamiliar with the experience of delivering information through a translator. The translator, in turn, may or may not be as familiar with the presentation subject matter as the social worker. While the translators may have some familiarity with proper syntax, she/he may lack the intimate understanding of concepts or semantics of particular expressions of the social worker's professionally developed, perhaps culturally specific, and expert use of words or phrases. Translators may or may not have been exposed to the type of audience or venue for presentation. The audience, as well, may be unfamiliar with the experience of a lecture or presentation delivered through translation. Some preparation work between the social worker and the translator may be helpful toward the process of the delivery of the continuing education presentation and the subsequent audience understanding of the material.

The process of delivering professional continuing education presentations through the use of a translator is not ordinarily taught in social work programs. An invitation to present in a foreign language country and to deliver information in the native tongue requires the social worker to either

learn the language or use a translator. The authors of this paper have taught continuing education seminars and given professional conference presentations with the use of translators. Through trial-and-error, we have learned that there are a number of ways in which the social worker can prepare in order to make the presentation enjoyable, effective, and low-stress for the presenter, translator, and audience. These preparations can be characterized as action-tasks. The first action-task is selecting a translator. The second is examining one's presentation style and adjusting it to the special challenges of translation. Preparing with the translator is the next action-task. The fourth relates to ideas for keeping the audience's attention. The final action-task is building the relationship with the translator.

Action Task # 1 Selecting a Translator

We arrive at the site of presentation, are introduced to the translator, and five minutes later begin the presentation. The audience includes social workers, teachers, psychologists, medical doctors, and agency directors. We deliver a paragraph of our presentation, and then we are silent while the translator translates. However, the translator frequently clarifies with us in English what a specific word means. It seems that the translator has never been exposed to the concepts we were expressing. In the meantime, the audience members begin to have sidebar conversations.

Speak with the seminar organizers ahead of time

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about the selection of the translator. Even though it is highly unlikely that a translator has the same familiarity with the subject matter as you, it may be worthwhile to inquire about translators who are trained in, work in, or have had experience with the presentation topic.

Professional versus amateur translators

Find out whether your translator is an experienced, professional translator. Working with a professional translator is easier than working with an inexperienced, amateur translator, particularly because a professional translator is more likely to be a simultaneous translator. S/he can listen to you and translate to the audience at the same time, creating a rhythm that sounds similar to conversation, thus more likely to hold the audience's attention. This short sound-byte approach also allows the audience to sense the affect behind your words, since the translator cannot communicate your emotions. In contrast, the inexperienced or non-professional translator typically wants to hear more of what you have to say before making the translation, perhaps listening to a whole paragraph before translating. This process creates a different rhythm and results in longer 'down time', as well as possible loss of information and audience interest.

Translation versus interpretation

Translation is "to express in another language; change into another language" (Funk & Wagnall, 1984, 720), while interpretation is "to give the meaning of, explain" (340). Before the translation experience begins, the translator and presenter should determine whether translation and/or interpretation will be the chosen style. Cultural understandings can become very important at this point. Interpreting or synthesizing is a very complex process.

One of the authors of this paper had an alarming experience with a translator who decided to interpret. The author had said to an audience member, who had made a peculiar observation, "This is an interesting point of view; I don't think anyone has expressed it before." When the

presentation was finished, another member of the audience, who had knowledge of English, informed the author that the translator, acting as 'interpreter', had said: "You (the audience member) should have your head examined!"

One should keep in mind that the translator, acting as an interpreter, has a broader understanding of her/his culture, and may have to use that information to convey your ideas. In this example, the translator knew that the culture valued blunt honesty over politeness and could see that the audience disagreed with the individual's statement. The translator was trying to be helpful to the presenter by 'interpreting' her reply. On the other hand, the translator as interpreter may misrepresent the presenter's values, attitudes, or meanings, and the social work presenter will never know whether s/he has been accurately understood. It is therefore important to discuss the parameters of interpretation, for instance, whether and/or when it may be appropriate.

Action Task # 2

Adjusting One's Presentation to the Fact of Translation

The social work presenter specialized in gerontology. She introduced concepts about the older population in her country, one of which was depression. When she used the word 'depression' she found that the translator needed a further explanation of the concept. The explanation was given and translated to the audience. The audience then had a great number of questions about the concept.

A translated presentation calls for a careful examination of your materials to identify potential problems. It is important that you (1) be precise and parsimonious in the points you make, (2) break down complex ideas, and (3) identify and plan an explanation of concepts that your audience might not ordinarily use in their language or country. Our experi-

ence is that, unless we plan the presentation with unusual precision, we spend valuable presentation time 'explaining' to the translator, and the translator 'explaining' to the audience. The presentation itself becomes more stressful, and the audience loses interest during the social worker-translator 'explaining' time. Under ordinary circumstances, the presentation itself can fill only half the allotted time; the rest will be needed for translation. Any further clarifications or 'explanations' will reduce the time available to transmit the prepared information.

A useful exercise to engage in before the professional event is to videotape yourself as you practice your presentation. When you examine the videotape, pay attention to your lecture style and ask yourself these questions: Do you tend to speak rapidly, in long paragraphs, barely taking a breath? If so, the translator will have to work very hard and the audience will be listening for long periods to a language they do not understand. Next, view the videotape without the sound. Observe your pacing, use of your hands, and facial expressions. Try to identify the emotion that is being transmitted through the use of these nonverbal cues. Can you identify the content of the lecture?

Turn on the sound, without observing the video itself. This will allow you to hear your cadence and tone of voice, how you phrase, and whether the emotion you intended to relay was indeed what you heard. The audience will be 'reading' these cues as you speak in your language, and expect the content to be congruent with the emotion you are expressing.

This initial preparation at home will help you understand more about yourself in relation to your presentation style. In addition, after observing your presentation style, you may notice that you will have to revise your presentation to the context of another individual actually delivering the information. This could include your making slash marks for phrasing, notes regarding emphasis, underlining or more fully explaining complex concepts, words, or phrases. This behind-the-scenes work will be useful in your on-site preparation with the translator.

Action Task # 3 Preparing With the Translator

The translator had not been involved in the organizer's pre-seminar preparation. The presentation topic was domestic violence. Over the course of the seminar, the young translator spent 40 hours translating for the social worker. It was only after the close of the experience that the translator mentioned that her mother and father had frequent physical altercations. She indicated that throughout the seminar, while she learned about the dynamics and treatment possibilities for domestic violence, she had initially felt very unsure of her ability to do her job. She stated that she had never been exposed to the language concepts surrounding domestic violence, even though she had the personal experience of it in her home.

If at all possible, ask the seminar or conference organizers to allow you and the translator time together before and after the presentation. This will improve the quality of the presentation and result in a less stressful experience for you and the translator. Give the translator a copy of your paper, and review the general subject matter as well as particular words, concepts, or phrases that you will use. If possible, give the translator a list of key concepts and definitions of those concepts. At the same time, ask the translator to teach you strategic concepts and words in the audience's language. Using these words will build rapport with the audience, and recognizing those words in the presentation may help you grasp the sense of the audience's questions and discussions.

Given the subject matter of the presentation, the gender of the translator may also be an important consideration. Male translators may or may not be optimal for subject matter that is representative of violence in the family including domestic violence or male-perpetrated child sexual abuse. The age of the translator must also be considered. The point is

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that the tone of the translation or use of words in translation could be influenced by any number of circumstances, some of which can be minimized through advance preparation.

Most presentations involve the use of visual aids, participant activities, and references to statistical results or survey instruments. These teaching strategies should be used in a manner that will enhance audience understanding, in light of the challenges of translation. Some suggestions include:

- Visual aids can be helpful toward reemphasizing verbal explanations.
- Role-play activities can be used, but one should keep in mind that this could necessitate additional translation time. Additionally, the nuances of words may be lost in the complications of some role-play activities.
- Frequently referred to or emphasized material should be made readily accessible to the translator. Flip chart information should appear in both languages, especially concerning the use of strategic concepts, words, or phrases. It may be useful to write out more involved concepts on a dry erase board or black board so that the translator can easily refer to, and read-in-translation, the concept. An example may be the criteria for a DSM-IV-TR diagnosis. If the syndrome is going to be frequently referenced, it should be visually available to the translator either in hand or on a board/flip chart.
- If a particular instrument or scale is an important topic area for the presentation, it could be useful to have the instrument or scale translated ahead of time, copied, and handed out to the audience. Again, this can speed up the presentation of the material and will probably result in a clearer audience understanding of the document.
- When discussing policy, avoid references and charts that point only to your country's statistics or currency amounts. Translate financial items into the audience's currency.
- While examples are useful in first-language

lectures, they are often too contextually specific. If you feel the need to use examples, clarify the example for cultural relevance and ask the advice of the translator ahead of time.

- If you do not hear well, be sure to let the translator know. If you wear a hearing aid, use it and give instructions to the translator about a comfortable tone of voice for your hearing aid.
- Bring at least two copies of your paper and/or the materials, one for you and one for the translator. If possible, provide such materials to the translator before the day of the presentation.

Finally, clarify ahead of time whether the translator will be available to meet with you after the presentation. Often, this time is not set aside unless specifically requested, but it is worthwhile for several reasons. First, audience members may stay afterward to ask questions. Second, time for debriefing with the translator enables you to reflect on key themes covered, topics that generated the most interest or confusion, and how your partnership together might be improved. The translator may also want additional information or explanation about a particular topic, or may need to share emotional reactions to the presentation topic. Time to debrief is always useful, but it is particularly important if you will be working together with the same audience on subsequent days.

Action Task # 4

Keeping the Audience's Attention

The audience is there to hear your ideas. You are the expert on the subject. You do, though, have to be mindful of the translator's workload. For the translator, this is an endeavor that involves joining with you and with the audience. Both you and the translator are there for the benefit of the audience.

Build rapport with the audience. During the brief introduction period, learn what you can about their jobs, social service agencies, and goals for attending your presentation. The audience members may be grateful to you, and identify more with you, if you reference your discussion to their situations.

The proper pacing of your presentation, using short sound bytes, helps to keep the audience interested. If you speak too long without translation, you create stress for the translator and 'dead air' for the audience.

To encourage the audience to interact with you rather than the translator, focus your gaze on the audience. You do not have to look at the translator to hear her/his words. When an audience member asks a question, look at that person and continue communicating non-verbally with the audience member as the translator speaks. You may find that you begin to "feel" the sense of the question or comment. This practice also makes it easier to use the translator's speaking time to compose your next thought.

At some point in a presentation, the audience may wish to interact with you. A classroom situation is more difficult than a conference presentation, in which discussion is typically structured and reserved until the end of the presentation. The social worker may be an experienced teacher, accustomed to the interactive classroom environment, but this teaching style may be new to the audience members. It may take time for the audience members to become comfortable with, and to learn the 'rules' of group participation. Additionally, even the best translator has a hard time with group discussion. She/he must listen to the audience member, translate to you, translate your response, listen for further comments, perhaps simultaneously from multiple individuals, and synthesize their comments and translate to you. The process can be quite stressful.

One of the authors had the experience with a woman in a classroom situation that seemed to be difficult for the translator. The audience member was older than the translator. The audience member frequently interjected her thoughts and took a long time expressing those thoughts. The process seemed to be frustrating for the audience member and exhausting for the translator. The young translator tried to encourage

the audience member to make her point, to no avail.

Translators are typically not experienced teachers, and they may not be familiar with classroom management. Further, their social customs, such as deference to age or gender, may make it even more difficult for them to manage an interactive audience. For these reasons, it is important to use audience interaction judiciously. One can also benefit by giving the audience an overview of how much audience participation is anticipated and the points at which participation/interaction will be welcome. It could be important to discuss audience management strategies with the translator ahead of time. It might also be helpful to inquire about typical audience management techniques used in her/his country. Obviously, it is not possible to anticipate everything that might occur, so the social worker should also be prepared to provide quick guidance to, or take guidance from, the translator during the presentation.

Continuing education seminars or presentations imply that the attendees are expanding their professional education repertoire. Certificates of attendance are generally written in the language of the attendees. The authors suggest that the certificate be composed to note the certificate information in both the attendees' home language, and on the other side, the language of the presenter. The presenter's contact information would be particularly important to note, given the context of the seminar.

Action Task # 5

Building A Relationship With the Translator

One translator served as our driver as well as our translator for meetings with important community and government leaders. She was with us for 16 hours per day. We began to get to know her quite well. As she talked, we began to have a fuller understanding of her culture, which in turn influenced the quality of our presentations. She seemed to begin to more freely let us know

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how to approach our presentation topics, topics that can be difficult to talk about in any culture. We also personally benefited, in that the spirit of conviviality carried over into our communications with others in her culture.

The authors' experiences were such that we had ongoing professional contact with several translators. Some translators were with us for an entire week of seminars, some for just one day, some from year to year, and some spent time with us outside the professional setting. Where possible, begin to build on the relationship with the translator. Overall, it seemed that the fluidity of the presentations improved with the building of interpersonal relationships.

One strategy for enhancing the translation partnership is to find out about the translator's culture ahead of the trip. Various aides, including travel books and scholarly articles, can provide insights into customs and appropriate ways of interacting. Your audience will detect your understandings, and the translator may find that it is easier to translate. Additionally, your seminar examples may be more congruent with the culture and generally understandable to the audience.

Our experience has been that it is customary to give gifts to the individuals who have been helpful to us during our time in their country. Our transla-

tors were very important to our missions, and we brought them special gifts. Because of the ongoing relationships we have with the organizations that asked us to teach, we also were cognizant of the importance of bringing gifts for conference organizers, drivers, and support staff.

Conclusion

Social workers should be prepared to address audiences throughout the world. Our mission and the information that we share may reflect the concerns in many countries. As our audiences expand to include the global community, we should be prepared to deliver information to all audiences, not just those audiences that share our own first language. In order to accomplish the dissemination of information, we need to be prepared to work with translators.

The information in this paper is a compilation of the experiences of three professionals who have worked with translators in classroom continuing education seminar situations and at conference proceedings. The authors contend that social workers can prepare for this experience in a number of ways. These include selecting a translator, adjusting one's presentation to the limitations of translation, preparing with the translator, keeping the audience's attention, and finally, the importance of building a relationship with the translator.

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