

# COMBATING PERFORMATIVE ACCESSIBILITY

## The Do's and Don'ts When Working Virtually With Spoken and Signed Language Interpreters

The world of interpreting has been reimagined as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Being essentially forced into a virtual world, geography no longer is a factor when considering access to information. Combined with worldwide social movements there has been an international push for inclusion and accessibility. People all over the world scrambled to quickly learn to navigate the many different platforms for the unique and individualized needs of their businesses, companies, and organizations. With technological advances, many virtual platforms have integrated interpretation features to accommodate the increased demand for accessibility. However, providing “access” has seemingly become a trend, ignoring the new set of physical, mental, and cognitive demands it puts on interpreters and the consumers who rely on their services. Oftentimes interpreters are requested for their presence, without considering what it entails to fully realize accessibility. Simply having interpreters for the sake of access without investing the time and resources to make the access effective is **performative**—and *the performance ain't even good!* The goal of this document is to help facilitate a proactive approach to making language accessibility a fundamental part of the virtual event planning process, rather than an afterthought.



## WITHOUT LANGUAGE ACCESS THE CONTENT WON'T MATTER TO THOSE WHO NEED TO BENEFIT FROM IT

There is an obvious lack of research done on the part of organizations and entities requesting virtual interpretation regarding the accessibility needs of their (potential) consumers. This lack of initiative then becomes an additional cognitive and emotional load interpreters are expected to carry during and often once the assignment has been completed. In this document we provide a list of considerations as well as do's and don'ts, based on some common occurrences we have experienced as Trilingual Interpreters working in a variety of virtual spaces and platforms. Having worked in the signed and spoken language roles, whether as bilinguals or trilinguals, we have noticed a common assumption. It is believed that the needs of interpreters across modalities are the same. This is an oversimplification of a very complex process.

## Why are you providing access?

- ? Was it requested? If so, by whom?
- ? Do you simply want your event to be accessible by a particular community?
- ? Are you willing to put in the work to adequately prepare the interpreters facilitating (or providing) access?

## What is the Cost of Access?

- ? Have you considered that providing access may require your time? It is important to invest time to understand your consumer's needs
- ? Have you considered what is needed to accommodate their needs in a virtual space, and educate all presenters to navigate them? Below are some suggested presenter guidelines which should be communicated when they agree to participate:
  - Your presentation will be interpreted into different languages
  - Be mindful of your talking speed, especially when reading scripts and presenter biographies
  - Take pauses. It will benefit all audiences, not just those receiving the interpreted message
  - Acronyms are culturally and contextually based. They do not translate equally into other languages
- ? Have you considered:
  - Additional fees involved with recording and archiving these accessible events?
  - That the interpreter should be paid for additional time dedicated to attend tech checks with organizers & reviewing prep materials if/when provided?
  - Requesting post-event feedback from the consumers about their overall experience including access?
  - Hosting a (paid) debrief with the access team?

**DO NOT MINIMIZE OR JEOPARDIZE THE QUALITY OF ACCESS DUE TO A LACK OF PREPAREDNESS.  
ACCESSIBILITY IS NOT PART OF A CHECKLIST; IT IS AN EMBODIED PRACTICE.**

## Preparation Materials (Prep)

Prep includes but is not limited to: Presentation slides, videos, biographies, scripts, run of show, list of important vocabulary/organization names, and the like. Prep is crucial for effective communication and access; however, it is important to understand that though the same prep is provided for signed and spoken languages its use is drastically different due to the linguistic and cultural differences that must be embedded into the interpretation, including different standards by which interpreters have to abide while rendering their interpretation.

## Presenter Guidelines

Presenters on virtual platforms should be made aware that their presentation will be interpreted in several languages AND actually make the necessary collaborative modifications so that access is indeed provided.

### Before Presenting

#### DO

- Send the interpreters the PowerPoint presentation, scripts, bios that will be read, and videos that will be shown/used
- Caption the video(s) you plan on showing

#### DON'T

- Withhold prep materials - it's counterproductive
- Send prep materials to interpreters at the last minute

### When Presenting

#### DO

- Speak slowly and take pauses
- Check in with the interpreter when you are speaking fast to make sure they have caught up
- Consider the quality of your sound/acoustics

#### DON'T

- Rush through the material for the sake of time
- Have a "something is better than nothing" attitude. Automatic captions and transcripts are only roughly 80% accurate
- Stop live captioning when sharing (uncaptioned) videos

### When Addressing Technical Difficulties

#### DO

- Hire a professional tech expert who knows the ins and outs of the virtual platform your company/organization is using to consult with your team prior to the event or to be present at the start of your event
- Have a tech runthrough several days before your event. Be prepared to potentially compensate the interpreter for their time

#### DON'T

- Put the additional layer of stress on the interpreter to also be in charge of tech (unless previously agreed upon)
- Go on without resolving access concerns if/when a problem arises

### When Working With Interpreters

#### DO

- Provide all accessibility instructions at the start of your session in all of the interpreted languages being provided
- Make sure the platform you're using is optimal for the type of access you want to provide (account type/level, settings, interpreter-friendly, etc.)
- Make sure your client (and the interpreters) have the most up-to-date links (in the event of any last-minute hosting changes)

#### DON'T

- Extend the event beyond the scheduled time without confirming the interpreters' availability
- Quickly list proper names (e.g., organizations, sponsors, locations, etc) and acronyms as those are taxing and require additional time to interpret into other languages
- Have several speakers making overlapping comments as the interpreter(s) will have the burden of selecting which speaker to prioritize and the audience will not have full access to the dialogue

**PLAN YOUR EVENT TIME WITH ACCESS IN MIND!**