



MICHAEL R. DILIBERTO, ESQ.



Interpret This

Negotiating with other cultures can present various complications, such as facing a language barrier. When one negotiator does not speak the other negotiator's language well, you should consider hiring a translator (or one for each language, if necessary). The presence of translators changes the negotiating environment significantly. For example, instead of getting to know one another directly, parties become acquainted through the interpreter, which, depending on the interpreter, may or may not provide a clear lens between the parties. Tufts University professor Jeswald W. Salacuse offers these six rules to make your translated negotiations more productive:

1. Hire your own translator. Don't rely on the other party's choice of translator. Find a qualified interpreter yourself and confirm his credentials from independent sources.
2. Brief your translator in advance. Because your translator is unlikely to know much about your business, spend some time to discuss the purpose of your talks and any special terminology. Also, explain what type of translation you expect. For example, if you want a word-for-word translation rather than a summary, make that requirement clear.
3. Identify conflicts of interest. Some interpreters, because of personal interests or ego, will try to take control of negotiations or slant them in a particular way. Stay alert for unnecessary information a translator might add to the conversation.
4. Don't talk so fast. Try to speak slowly and in short phrases, to ensure that your translator does not make mistakes. Try to avoid using jargon, slang and abbreviations.
5. Give your translator a break. Interpretation is difficult and tiring work. Give your translator a break at least once every hour.
6. Respect your translator. Develop a friendly, respectful relationship with your translator, who may be able to provide invaluable information about your counterpart and her culture. Being respectful to your counterpart's translator may bring dividends, as your counterpart may seek her translator's opinion about you (such as whether you seem trustworthy, truthful, or reliable).

Consider these six rules so your negotiations don't get lost in translation.