

Paris, 6th July 2015

Hello Agnieszka,

I want to thank you once again for a superb translation.

I actually learned some things from you. This helped me think about the ideal profile for future translators for BIB Science Seminars – modelled on you!

Like many speakers, I've been exposed to "Simultaneous interpretation" (the interpreter listens to the speaker and translates at the same time – usually with special equipment when many people are to listen), "Summary interpretation" (where the interpreter listens to a lengthy series of sentences and provides a shorter summary) and "Consecutive translation" (where the translator listens to a short speech segment and translates it).

In all cases of course, a knowledge of the vocabulary, preparation and experience are essential - but even this may not be enough.

In the case of the type of "Consecutive translation" we had for the BIB Science Seminar in Poland, the translator is in front of the room with the speaker and the eyes and ears of the audience is very much focused upon the translator – often even more than on the speaker.

If you remember, before the seminar, we had a conversation as to whether or not a translator should improve on what the speaker says or remaining entirely neutral – making little attempt to eliminate slips of the tongue or to make sure concepts are expressed clearly.

I said that I preferred improvement and clarity even if that meant that the translator was a better speaker than the source.

I realized however as the day went on in Poland that there was far more to it than simply expressing words or even improving clarity.

If the audience is expected to stay seated & listening for most of the day (without falling asleep) they must find whatever said (and who is saying it) interesting.

If all that is provided by the translator is a series of dull, monotonous words – the presentation will be boring regardless of how accurate the translation happened to be.

In your case you put your own unique personality into it. I do not understand any Polish but I could tell that it was "Agnieszka" up there providing "her" version of what I said and you even added whatever special tonal stress on words that you felt would best get across the meaning. This active (rather than passive) participation on your side made it far livelier and kept the audience involved. You are indeed a better speaker than myself but rather than being disturbed by this, I relished the way you performed.

We do not know the future of translation but I expect that, like for many services, there will increasingly be machines doing the work. Rather than pay for a person, a robot will perhaps soon be the translator. Maybe even “speakers” like myself will be replaced by machines as technology further develops.

The point I would like to make is that it would be far easier to replace a verbatim style, neutral translator than one with a real personality - if personality matters and I believe strongly (especially since the seminar in Poland) that it does. There should be a future for “Agnieszka” in this world even if robots replace many of the other translators (or speakers for that matter).

As a possible twist (perhaps material for science fiction) we could imagine a situation where, as mentioned, “speakers like myself will be replaced by machines as technology further develops” but a human translator (such as yourself) is still retained to infuse warmth and personality into the presentation.

Thank you for teaching me this,

Patrick Shea

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