

Delivering the intended effect

Kevin stumbled across the idea in 1998 when he was interpreting for the then Prime Minister Tony Blair during his visit to China.

When Blaire cracked a joke at the Shanghai Stock Exchange, a dozen British officials laughed. After hearing Kevin's version, in Chinese, the one-thousand-strong Chinese audience laughed.

That made Kevin realise that good interpreting could add a WOW factor to an event. An interpreter must deliver the intended effect, not just the spoken words. He started to develop the concept and honed a set of skills required.

Although humour is the most common element, it's not everything. Sarcasm, through the tone of voice, is a second. Interpreting for a confrontational conversation is a third.

When speakers clash because of their views, often, sections of arguments are interspersed with short exchanges of words, sometimes amongst three or even more people. Some of them are very emotional. Others relatively calm. When they talk via simultaneous interpreting, they, as well as their audience, rely on listening to a single interpreter to know who has said what. They rely on that to decide how to respond and to whom.

On the other hand, interpreting isn't acting or dubbing. There is no rehearsal. Interpreters use their skills to recreate, in the target language, the differences in voice - as well as tone of voice - between the speakers.

This is of course talking about scenarios where delivering the intended effect is essential. There are plenty of conferences and meetings where the need doesn't arise or where the monotonous voice of the interpreter doesn't matter. Many interpreters in the market are able to work in that way only.

If you run a high profile or high impact event, or if you know there is likely to be sharp exchange of views at your meeting, make sure you hire interpreters who know how to deliver that intended effect.