

LINGUISTIC JUSTICE

2024 Update

LINGUISTIC JUSTICE PRINCIPLES

Best practices for co-creating language justice

[LINGUISTICJUSTICE.COM](https://linguisticjustice.com)



IRENE GOTERA

FOUNDER OF LINGUISTIC JUSTICE

We envision a diverse and truly inclusive society where **non-dominant language speakers and signers are given the tools to understand and participate at the same level as dominant language users.**

We boldly seek to create a society where **the right to communicate in one's preferred language is a human right**, fully protected by law as a fundamental component of our **human dignity, freedom of speech and assembly, and non-discrimination.**

IRENEG@LINGUISTICJUSTICE.COM

KEY TERMS

Before we get started, we want to define two terms that are often used interchangeably, but mean two distinct services. The skills and training for each vary greatly, and both should only be performed by qualified individuals.

SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION

Simultaneous or conference interpreting is the rendering of one spoken or signed language (source language) into another (target language) when running renditions are needed at the same time. The interpreter speaks virtually at the same time as the source language user. When done properly, it is a true and accurate interpretation of one language to another, done without additions, omissions, or embellishments, in a culturally appropriate manner, so that the parties can understand one another in real-time.

TRANSLATION

The linguistic and cultural transfer from one language (source language) into an equivalent written text in another language (target language).



BEST PRACTICES FOR MULTILINGUAL ZOOM EVENTS

Linguistic Justice Principles

[LINGUISTICJUSTICE.COM](https://linguisticjustice.com)

1

INTENTIONALITY AND RELATIONSHIP- BUILDING



Linguistic Justice will work with potential collaborators to find time to connect before any virtual event. Establishing a meaningful connection with collaborators is paramount in building a sense of community, facilitating effective collaboration, and creating a more productive team effort. During our event preparation meeting, we will focus on the following areas:

- Relationship and team-building
- Co-designing the environment in which we will co-create language justice
- Getting familiar with the technology that will be used
- Setting clear expectations for our collaboration and clearly defining everyone's role in creating a language justice environment

- Identifying challenges and co-creating efficient strategies to proactively address them
- Understanding best practices for multilingual engagement through language justice practices
- Addressing any questions or concerns

Intentionally connecting before a virtual event allows collaborators to get to know each other and build trust, which can then help break down barriers and create a more inclusive environment. This is particularly important for events that involve participants from different backgrounds, languages, and cultures.



2

EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF POWER VIA LANGUAGE

As an organization advocating for language justice, collaborators are encouraged to consider how to best create a multilingual space where no language has more power over another. In instances of workshops or training, that means distributing the event speakers by participating language so that all languages present can be heard or signed as the main language for some time. Creating this humbling experience where the main language is distributed will allow ALL participants to a) understand and participate through the interpreters, and b) hear and understand in their mother tongue during a portion of the event. This distribution of power via language happens organically when the event is participatory by nature and the attendees use different languages.

3

LINGUISTIC JUSTICE ANNOUNCEMENT



Encourage equitable distribution of power from the beginning of the event by having the interpreters make a language justice announcement at the very top of the meeting, both in the dominant language and in all languages that will be spoken and signed during the event. During the announcement, the interpreters will provide specific instructions about language accessibility which will ensure that all participants can understand each other during the multilingual exchange. In said announcement, the interpreters can provide accessibility instructions including how to: choose a preferred language on Zoom, locate the sign language interpreter's screen, access Closed Captioning and others.

Accessibility instructions will also be included via chat message in all appropriate languages to help facilitate access.

It's our experience that a language justice announcement at the top of the event sets the tone for equitable language access for the duration, and encourages a collective responsibility toward building and practicing language justice for all.



4

CHOOSE A PREFERRED LANGUAGE

For virtual interpretation to work properly, all participants must choose their preferred language on Zoom, including facilitators, interpreters, and all other attendees.

Participants who fail to do so will not be able to hear attendees when they are participating through the interpreters. Failure to select a preferred language prohibits a multilingual exchange from occurring. Ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak to each other by emphasizing the need for all participants to choose their preferred language.

5

ADDRESSING IMPEDIMENTS LIVE



Choosing a preferred language has a direct impact on how the interpreters are able to communicate with the speakers; because of how the Zoom interpretation setting works, attendees can only hear the interpreters when they have chosen a language (or Zoom channel). This is particularly relevant whenever the interpreters have to address challenges live, such as pace or asking for repetitions. In these instances the interpreters will make the request to the speakers when necessary.



6

THE ACTIVE ROLE OF THE INTERPRETER

It's common in the language access industry to encounter interpreters who play a passive role while rendering their services. This attitude often stems from feelings of complacency and a sense of detachment from the impact their work has on the recipients of their interpretation. It can also result from a lack of education on ethical principles by which they should abide, or conversely, from the education received around mandates of invisibility for interpreters.

However, this passive behavior may also come from fear of standing up for themselves, their work, and their communities.

In white and English-dominated spaces, there is a legitimate fear of being overridden and dismissed. Many interpreters represent the culture—and ethnicities—associated with their working languages and are in a vulnerable position, subject to micro-aggressions and other discrimination practices, routinely.

During events with Linguistic Justice interpreters, we apply a different approach: interpreters play an active role as they render their work. Our interpreters participate on equal footing with the rest of the speakers in the following ways.

Before the Event

- They provide facilitators with education and support so they understand how to efficiently work with simultaneous interpreters.
- They meet with facilitators so they have the opportunity to ask questions and address any concerns.

During the event

- Upon arrival, the interpreters will do a sound check to ensure that they're able to properly hear the facilitators and that sound is optimal. The use of headphones is strongly recommended to achieve the clearest sound quality.
- The interpreters will be assigned as co-hosts upon arrival. As equal participants in the event, they should have access to all the same Zoom platform capabilities as the host and other facilitators.

- Once the event has started, the interpreters will communicate any impediments to their work to ensure the integrity of their rendition, including asking for the speakers to slow down and repeat themselves when necessary.

Once the language justice announcement has been given by the interpreters in all participating languages, the meeting host or designated person will assign the interpreters to their appropriate channels. The host will also make sure that interpreters have been set up correctly before starting to share event information or before giving any other introductory remarks.

Intentional efforts should be made to ensure that all participants understand the need to select a preferred language on Zoom so they can fully access the event in their preferred language.

7

MODERATE YOUR SPEAKING PACE



To ensure that nothing gets lost in the interpretation process, speakers should significantly slow down their speaking pace.

While slowing down may sound odd to your ear, it will help the audience participating in the same language as you are using understand you better, and give the linguists time to provide a quality interpretation into other participating languages. True language inclusion, and therefore, language justice, requires an active compromise from all participants in terms of speaking pace and overall meeting dynamic.

Speaking too quickly will result in an inaccurate or unintelligible presentation for participants receiving the interpretation.



8

LAG TIME AND TURN TAKING

Interpreters are always a few seconds behind the speaker. They leverage these few seconds to smoothly and simultaneously build accurate sentences into another language.

In many monolingual meetings, participants organically respond to one another, or talk over each other. But in meetings with more than one language, that overlapping speech results in unintelligible gibberish for participants receiving the interpretation.

To avoid this, allow a one or two-second pause in between speakers and utilize the hand-raising feature to better manage participant questions and comments, and prevent overlapping speech.

9

ONE MIC



All microphones must be muted when the meeting starts, except for the speaker and the interpreters. Collaborators are to assign a dedicated person to close microphones during the meeting as it is a role that interpreters cannot take on while interpreting.

Multiple mics open create listening impediments such as background noise, static, and overlapping speech that might prevent the interpreters from providing an accurate rendition.



10

READING PACE AND SLIDE USAGE

Having content that is read, rather than spoken, is strongly discouraged during a meeting with simultaneous interpreters.

Most people's reading pace is more than double the pace of regular and organic conversational speech pace. When participants read the content of a slide or notes, the conversation loses its natural cadence.

If presenters or participants need to read briefly a slide or notes, they shall do so at a significantly slower pace and should take a quick pause in between sentences. However, a true and accurate interpretation cannot be guaranteed by Linguistic Justice® when content is presented via reading.

During events where strategic reading is desired, Linguistic Justice® might recommend preparing a translation for this content before the event, in which case the interpreters will be in a much more suitable position to read off of a previously translated document while the source speaker is presenting this information by reading it.

11

USING VIDEO(S) IN YOUR PRESENTATION



Accurate simultaneous interpretation for the video content will require prior transcription work, followed by its translation.

If speakers wish to use videos during their presentation, Linguistic Justice® recommends providing linguists access to the videos before the scheduled event.

Videos shown during a meeting without prior transcription and translation work might not be interpreted and, therefore, will not be fully accessible to all participants.

Depending on the event type and the participating audience, a strongly encouraged alternative is to present all videos with subtitles in the audience's preferred languages. Subtitles will also allow video language access for people who are hearing impaired.



12

SOUND QUALITY

Simultaneous or conference interpretation requires doing three tasks—listening, processing into another language, and speaking—all at the same time.

Since the initial component (listening) is heavily impacted by any background noise, static, and/or any other sound challenges, participants should be given guidance on how to prevent listening impediments. This will allow the interpreters to hear clearly and thus provide an accurate rendition.

13

INTERPRETERS' SCREEN



The value of video conference interpretation—for people without vision impairment—is that they can see the visual cues from the interpreters and follow along with their rendition and body language usage as they convey the message.

When working with sign language interpreters during your event, arrangements should be made before the event regarding how to pin the signed language interpreter's screen, their turn-taking, and the Zoom settings most appropriate to allow for their accurate rendition.

These arrangements might include agreeing on the instructions that will be given during the language justice announcement at the top of the meeting. For example, instructing language signers to choose the Zoom setting “Speaker Side-by-Side”, and pointing spoken language audiences to choosing “Gallery View” instead.



14

TIMELY CONTENT ACCESS

Give your interpreters content access to any materials that will be used or referenced during the event with enough time to prepare key vocabulary and challenging terms.

15

SCHEDULING



Whenever scheduling a meeting where interpreters will be working with you, plan for additional time to accommodate for any delays that could occur from technology glitches and interpretation set-up.



16

TRANSLATION OF ALL WRITTEN MATERIALS

Before the event, allocate ample time and resources for the translation of any materials that will be used. Planning is fundamental, and this often means preparing documents and slides ahead of time - ideally weeks in advance of a meeting or event - so that the translators have sufficient time to prepare their written work.

Whenever presenting slides during the virtual event, collaborators are encouraged to present them in all participating languages, side-by-side on each slide. In instances where more than two languages are participating, our recommendation is to limit the number of words in the slides, and instead rely on images and interactive graphics to convey the message or other relevant concepts.

17

SMART AND INCLUSIVE OUTREACH



Create strategies for doing outreach and publicity in communities that speak the languages represented at the event. Professionally translated texts, social media invites, and/or flyers are crucial to this effort. Without inclusive outreach, it's likely that you'll arrive at your event and there will be few, if any, people who do not use the dominant language.



18

USE PLAIN LANGUAGE

To communicate effectively in multicultural environments, use jargon-free language in your spoken and written message(s). Choosing clarity over business speak and idioms will ensure that your audience receives your message clearly. This includes:

- Refraining from using witty cultural nuances that are only understood by other native speakers of your language. In English, for example, instead of saying “pain points” say “challenges”, and say “important points” instead of “key takeaways”.
- Refrain from using acronyms and initials assuming that they’ll be understood. Instead, use the acronyms or initials followed by a quick explanation about what they stand for.
- Refrain from using sarcastic humor as it communicates the opposite of what you’re really trying to say. Instead, communicate clearly by using a positive and empathetic language, such as personal pronouns “we” and “us”.

19

LANGUAGE REPRESENTATION



Often bilingual collaborators are accustomed to defaulting to the dominant language. This is partially true because using a non-dominant language is often misread as a sign of inferiority or inability.

Part of our work at Linguistic Justice® is creating spaces where bilingual people feel equally free to use both their languages.

This experience can be transformative for everyone: for bilingual participants, who will feel comfortable and supported in their choice to use the non-dominant language, and for dominant-language users who will gain better insight into their bilingual peers' thoughts and experiences.



20

INCLUSION CHECK

Take a minute and check in with the groups receiving the interpretation during the meeting to ensure mutual understanding. This practice will not only make them feel included, but will open up space for them to participate, share their opinions, and bring their unique perspective to the discussion.

21

ALL-IN



One of the roles of the interpreters is to convey everything that is being said, without additions, omissions, or embellishments. Be aware that it's all being interpreted into the other language(s); including hedges, intonation, tone, and negative remarks. Refrain from saying anything you would not wish to be interpreted.



22

CHAT INTERVENTIONS

Chat conversations could unintentionally exclude participating language groups.

We suggest that participants refrain from having side conversations in the chat. Whenever questions are asked in the chat or relevant information is shared, facilitators should read them slowly out loud so that they can be interpreted into all participating language(s). This practice will also allow the Closed Captioning to pick up on that message, therefore facilitating access for people with hearing impediments.

Whenever facilitators wish to share relevant information in the chat, our recommendation is for them to present it in all participating language(s).

23

EQUITABLE LANGUAGE ACCESS AS AN INCLUSION PRACTICE



Those participants who use a non-dominant language are showing up because you're giving them a chance to understand what you have to say via interpreters.

Linguistic Justice® encourages proactive collaboration to make the best out of the inclusion opportunity being provided.

This means you should make an effort to reach your audience by making adjustments in your presentation and outreach to help facilitate true inclusion for all through equitable language access.



24

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AWARENESS

Culture plays a key role in the way we perceive the world around us. When in doubt about presenting or addressing challenging topics where cultural sensitivity could be an issue, our interpreters can help you navigate and de-escalate tensions that may arise due to cultural differences.

Take a pause and be mindful of potential cultural differences. And if you expect issues to arise due to the topic(s) being presented, let the interpreters know in advance - they can be a great resource for preventing such issues in the first place!

25

IDENTIFY AND ACTIVELY COUNTERACT BIAS



Although one of the roles of the interpreters is to convey everything that is being said, Linguistic Justice® interpreters will exclude themselves from any narrative that includes remarks or behavior that Linguistic Justice® deems racist or discriminatory in nature and intent.

Any harassment or intimidation based on race, ethnicity, nationality, language, education, class, caste, tribe, religion, belief, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, physical characteristics, disability, health condition, age, lived experiences or any other dimension of diversity will not be tolerated.



26

LANGUAGE PAIRS AND COLLABORATIONS

Linguistic Justice® working language pair is EN<>SP, and it's the founder's experience with this language pair that originated the creation of the multilingual accessibility methods described herein. However, when looking to collaborate with interpreters with other language pairs, we are open to sharing our methods with our peers and co-create strategies that can lead to the multilingual and inclusive societies we are looking to contribute to.



Check out our
collaborations

27

RUN A POST-EVALUATION



Continue your inclusion practice by incorporating language justice into the post-event debrief process of your group or organization. Solicit feedback from interpreters, facilitators, and presenters on what worked well and what could be improved for future events. Additionally, Linguistic Justice® suggests that language justice-related questions are included in any event evaluation forms or activities.

Upon request, a follow-up questionnaire will be developed by Linguistic Justice® so that event participants can provide feedback on the interpreter's performance. This questionnaire can also aim to gauge the audience's understanding of the information discussed during the event.



THANK YOU!

We hope you have found these principles insightful and valuable in planning your next event.

*Additional recommendations may apply depending on the event type and participating languages.

Linguistic Justice®,
Irene Gotera

LINGUISTICJUSTICE.COM

*THIS DOCUMENT CAN ONLY BE SHARED WITH APPROPRIATE ATTRIBUTION TO ITS AUTHOR.

© CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE, LINGUISTIC JUSTICE © 2024