

# Translation and Interpretation Essentials

## (with examples from Russian, Belarussian and English)

*(A 30 min lecture sketch with a slide show)*

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## Translation n interpretation essentials

There are 3 different things about learning a foreign language that require different skills

- Learning to become a **speaker**
- Learning to become a **teacher**
- Learning to become a **translator or interpreter**

One shall remember of the three different reasons to study a foreign language that involve different skills of a learner and thus – different activities, organized by a teacher. Though these activities may overlap, it is vital to know that a learner who wants to become a teacher needs different essentials than a person that wants to become a translator or just wants to learn to speak the language fluently or simply better.

So, let's concentrate on what is important for translators and interpereters.

## What is needed for a translator

Good command of the working **languages** (e.g. E-R)

Good understanding of **culture & history** issues making context

Good **dictionaries** (mono n biligual)

Good understanding of the **subject** (e. g. the way described technology works)

**Computer literacy** (text editors, image processors, web-browsers, e-mail)

## What is needed for an interpreter

Good command of the working **languages** (e.g. E-R)

Good understanding of **culture & history** issues making context

Good **memory** & fast **reaction**

Good **dictionaries** (mono n biligual)

Good understanding of the **subject** (e. g. the way described technology works)

As we can see both written translating and oral interpreting, require from a person to know both the languages well (say, English and Russian) as well as the important culture issues of the countries involved and the subject of what is being translated (interpreted) and also to have good professional dictionaries, preferably computer-based or easily accessed on-line from a smart phone or any similar device.

A translator shall be computer-literate and an interpreter needs to have a good memory and fast reaction.

## Personal characteristics needed

***Punctuality*** (meeting deadlines, being on time, etc.)

***Modesty*** (being ready to ask questions, admit mistakes, drawing as little attention to your person as possible)

***Patience*** (when dealing with difficult situations or people)

***Honesty*** (when one is caught lying he/she will be never trusted)

Some personal characteristics also contribute to being a good professional. Among traits needed one can mention punctuality, modesty, patience and honesty as they are explained in the slide.

# What's the most important

**The key issue** of any translation or interpretation is **to give the main idea** of the thing that is why you can make some **transformations** to have a **thought** of language 1 **"sound" good** in language 2

*Sometimes* this main idea may be "squeezed" into **a few sentences** but *in most cases* you ought to **save as many details as possible** (usually, translation saves more precise details than interpretation)

As you can see the most important about the work of a translator or an interpreter is to give the main idea of the things being translated. It may require transformations at times when the exact word order can't be kept due to the languages' syntax differences or when literal translation can look weird or misleading. But a good professional tries to save as many details as possible no matter if it's done orally or in writing (but the latter tends to save more details due to processing less information within the given time framework).

Now, let's talk about the order of importance of what is needed.

# Further talk structure

## ISSUES IMPORTANCE GRADATION

Lexical essentials

Grammar essentials

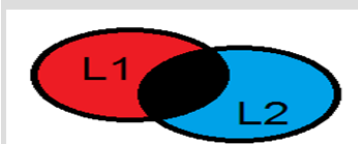
Stylistic essentials

As you can see, the most important issues for a translator (an interpreter) are about words and their meanings. Then come grammar essentials – those that can change the meaning of a word. Finally, we have some stylistic issues that can spoil the effect of a good job, when neglected.

## Lexical essentials

### Word matching

Красна девица vs. red maiden



Words & phrases of 2 languages generally correspond in some meanings; there're few full synonyms

Always remember that words and phrases of language 1 /L1/ (let's make it Russian) and language /L2/ (let's make it English) do not always match in all their meanings. Only rare things, like numerals match each other completely, most others just have some meanings in common. So, in the example translating Russian phrase «красна девица» into English literally is absolutely misleading for th phrase is about a *beautiful girl*, not a *red-haired maiden*.

## Lexical essentials

### Phrases translation

(on E-R examples)

Adj+N

Free will – Свободная воля

N+N

Tuition fee – Плата за обучение

Set phrases

Once in a blue moon – Когда раз свистнет; почти никогда

When translating phrases from Russian into English or vice versa one shall distinguish Adjective+Noun and Noun+Noun phrases from set phrases (when the meaning of a phrase is not the sum of the meanings of its word components, these shall be translated with corresponding set phrases or with brief explanations). Note that the translation Noun+Noun phrases may require a different word order and presence (absence) of prepositions.

## Lexical essentials

### Jargon

It is vital to know the **exact equivalent** to make the translation/interpretation **smooth & understandable**

e.g. E-R

File – папка (канц), файл (комп), напильник (тех), архив (юр)

Коса – scythe (tool), sandbar (river), plait (girl)

Remember that the same word can have lots of different meanings, depending on a situation, e.g. a computer file is not the same as the one used by a mechanic.



## Lexical essentials

### Faux amis

English	Russian	Belarussian
article	Статья; артикуль	Артыкул; артыкуль
production	производство	вытворчасць

Pay special attention to *faux amis* or false friends of a translator (interpreter) i.e. some words that look like internationalisms (words having the same meaning in many languages), but do not have anything in common about their meanings or have some vital differences in meaning.

## Lexical essentials

### Culture differences

Militia vs. police

To raise a window vs. ОТКРЫТЬ ОКНО

Cutlet vs. Котлета

Make sure you audience understand the culture differences well; explain them if necessary

Culture differences may also be important. E.g. in most countries militia is the word that stands for civilians trained as soldiers but not part of the regular army, but in Belarus, Ukraine and some other countries that used to be a part of the former USSR this the name of the *police*. Thus, it shall be used with cautiousness to avoid misunderstandings. Likewise, windows in England and in Russia can be opened in a *different* way. And a cutlet in the former USSR is made from *minced meat*, while in many English-speaking countries this word stands for a *slice* of meat usually fried or broiled.

## Grammar essentials

The first thing is to find the **subject** and the **predicate** in a sentence because many E words that look the same can be absolutely different parts of a sentence as well as parts of speech ("runs" as a pl n & as a v)

e.g. The **story** **revolves** around the adventures of a small boy

When translating from English, one shall always identify the subject and the predicate to avoid misunderstandings.

## Grammar essentials

**Grammar issues are especially vital when they change the meaning of a phrase/sentence**

(on R-E examples)

Я прочитал эту книгу (год назад) – I have read this book vs. I read this book a year ago

I didn't mean to scare you — Не хотел тебя напугать

This means working a lot – Это значит много работать

It's a method, not the method – Это один из методов, но не единственный

Sometimes, some slight alterations in grammar can result in the change of the meaning, as one can find in the examples shown in the slide.

## Grammar essentials

### When the syntax (word order) matters...

- **Does** it **matter**? (question) vs. It **does matter** (emphasis)
- I like fruit **such as** bananas, apples, oranges (listing) vs. I like fruit **as such** (in & of itself)
- He answered the question **generally** (without details) vs. **Generally**, he answered the question (mostly)

The word order is also important for a translator (interpreter), since the syntax change may lead to the meaning change as the examples of this slide indicate.

## Stylistic essentials

**Never mix styles **formal**, **neutral** & **informal** by using word or phrases inappropriate for the style used in the original language**

e.g. **Dear sir**, send me the information **real quick**  
**Jack**, could you **commence** preparing the **info as soon as possible**

Another problem a translator (or interpreter) may have is using in one sentence (or situation) words of different styles. This will not cause any meaning change, but may be inappropriate in certain formal occasions (or too formal in some other cases).

## Stylistic essentials

**When there exist more than one standard of the same language a translator/ interpreter should take care not to use them in one & the same situation**

**British & American English**

The **disc** contains some important **programs**

**Old-Standard & New-Standard Belarussian**

У гэтай **калёніі** **міліцыянеры** ахоўвалі **вязьняў**  
сумлення

Since the English language has at least two widespread standards – British and American – it's not uncommon for some translators to mix words and grammar patterns of these 2 standards in one situation, which is stylistically inappropriate in most cases (except poetry and other rare cases). Interestingly, a similar problem may happen translating to Belarussian that has two slightly different standards.

## Final remarks

### When translating...

Be in touch with some people that understand the subject you are working on well &/or get extra information from the internet encyclopedias (e. g. [wikipedia](http://wikipedia)), reference books, etc.

### When interpreting...

Have a small notebook so that to jot down main ideas of the speaker if he/ she says a lot

## Good tools

- [multitran.ru](http://multitran.ru) an on-line & off-line multilingual dictionary (has "copy-paste" features to help edit texts faster, an updatable large base)
- **Abby-lingvo** multilingual dictionary (off-line versions are good usually support "copy-paste" operations)
- E. Gordon, I. Krylova. *A Grammar of Present-day English Practical Course*. (a practical grammar reference book, most issues important for translation are explained in details)
- L. Alexander. *Longman English Grammar Practice. Self-Study Edition*. (many important grammar issues such as adj word order & punctuation are well explained)
- V. S. Slepovich. *Translation course. Russian-English* (many translation methods & transformations are explained)