

The Entrepreneurial Linguist

Judy Jenner



Small Talk Tips for Translators

The old industry adage might be spot on: most interpreters are fairly extroverted, while most translators tend to be introverts. That's an oversimplification and I know that there are always many exceptions, but during my years in the industry, I've noticed that translators struggle more with one important thing than interpreters do: small talk.

Do you hate small talk? If yes, read on. I know small talk can be painful, but you can make it easier on yourself by keeping a few things in mind.

1. Keep it short. At networking events, no one wants to hear long, complicated stories. Be succinct and interesting, but resist the urge to tell your life story.

2. Work on your conversation starters. The easiest way is to introduce yourself and say something simple along the lines of "I'm new to this event" or something similar. Experienced networkers will get the hint and will introduce you to others. Another good way to start a conversation is to ask questions: about the

organization, about that particular event, and about the person to whom you're speaking.

3. Learn to listen. The best relationship builders are people who truly listen and who are not obsessing over what they can sell, but rather how they can help the other person. It's a powerful thing to think long-term and big picture rather than short-term and project-based.

4. Don't monopolize people. Once you get comfortable talking to one person and your nerves settle down a bit, you might want to hang on to that person for dear life because it's scary to start over with another person. However, remember that everyone is there to mix and mingle and that you are not the only person to whom they want to speak.

5. Brush up on current events (including sports). Even if you don't like baseball, you'd better have something to say if you're at an event during the World Series. And while local politics might not be all that interesting (mostly), it would still be

good to know that a big new company is investing \$100 million in your state. You don't have to know everything, but the bottom line is to be informed so you can participate in conversations.

6. Avoid certain topics. It's usually best to steer clear of politics, religion, and highly personal matters. Sure, there's always an election around the corner, and it's perfectly fine to have an opinion, but I prefer to talk about more neutral matters with people I don't know or barely know.

7. Get the introductions out of the way. It can be awkward when another person walks up when you're already engaged in conversation and you don't know the names of either the first or the second person. In my experience, it's usually best to be honest and say "I'm sorry, we just met, would you mind telling me your name again so I can introduce you to ...?" It's horrifying to stand next to people all evening without knowing their names, so it's good to get the introductions out of the way early. And it's fine to admit you don't remember the person's name. Just ask again. Get a business card and try to remember one particular thing about the person to help you remember (e.g., her purse, his shirt, her cute earrings, his Boston accent).

Small talk is similar to translation in one way: it's art, not science. And just like translation, it usually gets easier the more you do it. Happy small talking! ■

Information and Contacts

This column is not intended to constitute legal, financial, or other business advice. Each individual or company should make its own independent business decisions and consult its own legal, financial, or other advisors as appropriate. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of ATA or its Board of Directors. Ideas and questions should be directed to judy.jenner@entrepreneuriallinguist.com.

Judy Jenner is a court-certified Spanish interpreter and a Spanish and German translator in Las Vegas, Nevada, where she runs Twin Translations with her twin sister. She is a past president of the Nevada Interpreters and Translators Association. She hosts the translation blog, *Translation Times* (www.translationtimes.blogspot.com). You can also find her at www.entrepreneuriallinguist.com. Contact: judy.jenner@twintranslations.com or judy.jenner@entrepreneuriallinguist.com.