

### *Interpreters* ♦ ♦ ♦

Whether you speak Mandarin or not, you will find good interpreters useful. They can communicate in a style that is acceptable to Chinese people and can help you understand Chinese responses, no matter how subtle. The interpreter may also help you determine the power structure or decision-making process in a group. In order for your interpreter to be an asset, however, you must first develop a close and trusting relationship. This may take considerable time and effort on your part.

Here are some tips in dealing with interpreters:

- ♦ Avoid colloquialisms, culture-bound humour, and cultural references.
- ♦ Break frequently to ensure the interpreter has not lost his or her train of thought.
- ♦ Engage more than one interpreter for long sessions.
- ♦ Speak slowly, especially when referring to numbers.
- ♦ Before you begin, meet with interpreters to put them at ease. Explain that you don't mind being interrupted to clarify points. If you have a speech or presentation material, give a copy to the interpreter in advance.
- ♦ Always address your remarks to the person you are talking to, not the interpreter. It shows your respect for the other party.
- ♦ Listen attentively to the response in Chinese, even if you don't understand a word.
- ♦ For a variety of reasons, your interpreter may not be accurate. If there is evidence you are being misunderstood, express your message a different way.
- ♦ If you are negotiating a contract or covering technical ground, consider finding a trained technical interpreter. CIDA has trained technical interpreters in a number of sectors. Find out if you have access to them.
- ♦ If you have colleagues in the audience, check with them during a break to see if the interpretation is accurate. Ask questions that would reveal whether your message was understood. One Canadian technical advisor spent half a day talking to thirty people who did not understand a word he was saying. The interpreter was not technically competent, and the audience did not want him to lose face by pointing it out. At lunch, the Canadian found out what was going on, thanks to a colleague. The interpreter was told that he must have been very tired after the morning session, and that someone was willing to help out. The colleague took over for the afternoon.