



# To B or not to B?

Is your C language good enough for a 'retour'?

Sophie Llewellyn Smith

# Everyone wants a B...

Does B stand for bilingual?

- ‘Native’ or ‘near native’ is an aspiration for many - but is it **necessary**?
- Bilingual does not equal biactive.
- Forget the dream - you need a return that is **fit for purpose**. Think in **functional** terms. Do you **need** to ‘get rid’ of your accent?
- ‘Perfect linguist’ vs **problem-solver**.



So..

do you WANT to do it?

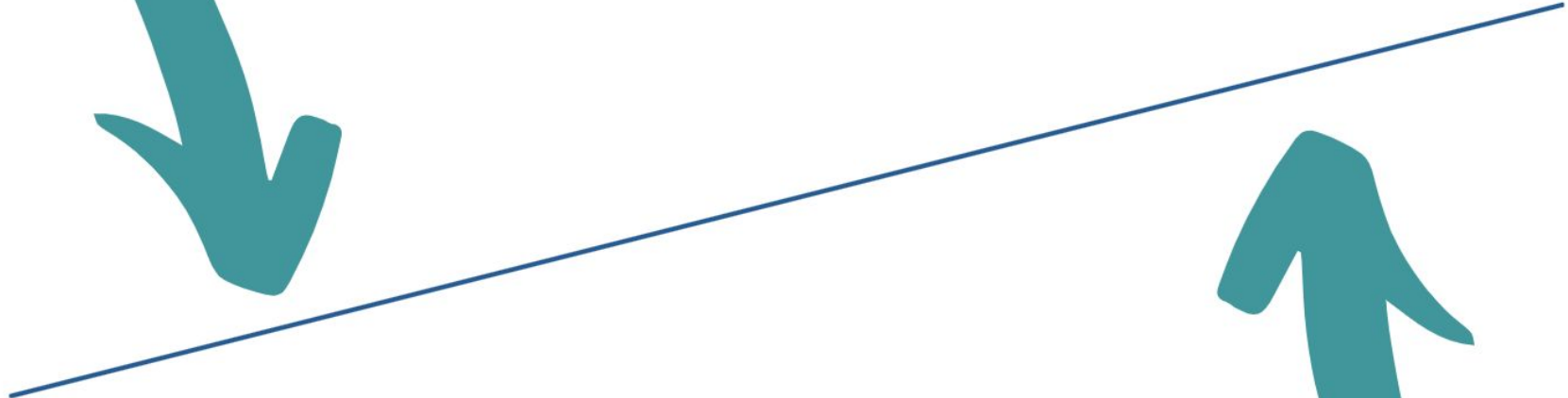
# Everyone wants a B... but

- What market are you aiming at (UN/EU/NATO, private market, community settings)? Acceptability of non-native features
- What type of interpreting would you do (legal, medical, humanitarian)? Breadth of vocabulary
- How much will you use your retour? Maintenance & stress

# The difficult questions

- How good do you want to be??
- How much maintenance will it require? (your background, your living situation)
- How does it make you feel?

**Linguistic ability**



**Commitment &  
consistency**

# Commitment and consistency

- To work on your B language regularly (how?)
- To practise interpreting regularly

You need to

- Listen differently
- Practise differently



So..

CAN you do it?  
Time for a diagnostic test



# Stress test - what happens? What do we lose?

- At speed: self-monitoring? Does syntax suffer?
- Technical/subject-specific terminology: big gaps?
- Figures?
- Geography, names?
- Formal speech?
- Slang, vulgarity, intimate/taboo subjects?
- Culture-specific references?
- Sport, art, theatre?
- Flowery or descriptive language?

# Diagnosis and reflection 1

1. What are the problems? (get help from a native speaker)
2. How frequent/intrusive are they?

# Diagnosis and reflection 2

How **intractable** is the weakness, vs how **significant** (comprehension, acceptance)?

Examples

## Putting it all together into a roadmap:

- Goal
- Timescale
- Decide what needs addressing and how realistic it is



How successful  
are you likely to be?

# What do I look for?

- Awareness (Sprachgefühl) - e.g. register, subtleties
- Curiosity - to keep improving
- Consistency - use it or lose it
- Mental distance; going beyond labels and working on **chunks** (dealing with abstractions, emotion, culture-specific aspects to convey **ideas**)
- Ability to let it go (perfectionism of saying everything vs. pragmatism - get the job done)



In freeing yourself from translation, you leave room for creation with your linguistic resources, i.e. sounding **natural**.

# Retour is like a haiku

At worst, your limits are a straightjacket .

At best, there is satisfaction and beauty in overcoming obstacles while working with a more limited toolkit; you need to cultivate a **can-do mindset, rather than seeing what you produce as 'inferior'**.

**Does it fulfil its purpose?** In that case, be unselfconscious about it (although not uncritical) and focus on the message, not the words.



# So...is your C language good enough for a B?

Are YOU able to SHAPE your C into a B that is appropriate for the settings and expectations you will encounter (yours, your client's, your customer's)?

The answer will be different for each interpreter, depending on their market, goal, self-awareness, and **mindset**.

Embrace workarounds; embrace being canny rather than perfect. A B is a B, not an A.



Any comments or  
questions?