Interpreters are generally recruited on the basis of their language combination, place of residence, knowledge of the subject and all round good looks. But of course any selection process is something of a lottery, so what do you think about casting sessions for interpreters?

After all there is something actorly – even histrionic – in what we do, so isn’t it the next logical step in this world of quality assurance, tendering and 97-page compliance reports?

I heard about the idea of casting a few weeks ago. Apparently – this is third hand – there had been a complaint that one of the interpreters had a scratchy or hoarse voice, and the organizer came up with the idea of weeding out non-dulcet tones by holding casting sessions. But how would they work and when would we fit them in to our overcrowded schedules what with all those newspapers to read and Pilates classes three times week?

We talk often and movingly about professional quality, but would this be the way to achieve it? I decided the time had come for intrepid investigative work, so equipped with pen and clipboard I visited the neighbouring booths to get some feedback by playing word association with the colleagues, thereby obtaining spontaneous answers and saving the research committee travelling expenses.

You know the routine: someone says a word and you say the first thing that comes into your head: Monkey > Banana, Knife > Fork, Chair > Meeting, Children > Bankruptcy.

Here were some of their responses to the word “casting”:

- Pearls before swine
- A shadow
- Your net
- A long shadow
- For trout
- Model
- Movie
- Couch

Come clean. As soon as you heard the word “casting” the image of a couch appeared in your mind’s eye. It’s fair to say that casting’s acquired a racy reputation. But should we not give the idea a fair wind?

On television it is already established practice for men to interpret men and women the women. This
is eminently sensible because to do otherwise would confuse the watching public. But outside the television studio it would simply not be possible in a profession where most freelances are women. We lads would never be able to slope off for an uplifting coffee or banter around the drinking fountain.

Casting will be about voice, which will call for capacity building and quite possibly a road map. As we speak AIIC Training – fresh from past triumphs such as “pencil sharpening in a high wind” and “essential packing for that 3-day trip” – is planning voice-enhancement courses at which experts will tell us to deepen our output (deep = trustworthy), breathe slowly, and drink plenty of water to keep the vocal chords in moist and quivering readiness. The improved tone and timbre will give you confidence and presence.

On the subject of voice preservation, I have to admit to being a literal and metaphorical sucker for those little boiled herbal sweeties that have been lovingly cooked and individually wrapped in the high Alps, probably by Heidi. Try the gentian and musk ox flavour.

What about some voice-enhancing food? We learned as children that carrots were good for the eyes (they used to ask if we’d ever seen a rabbit wearing glasses – we chortled our way through the 1960s), so what about the voice? When you’re feeling a bit crook you can drink hot whisky, which is lemon juice, honey, cloves and whisky[1], or a warming cup of 1,2,3-trihydroxypropane. But what about other gentle foods like mashed potato or tadpoles in aspic, stuff you can just feel slipping down without bothering the voice box?

If obtaining contracts is to depend on successfully completing a casting procedure, we are going to have to get ourselves into shape. The trick is to be called to the casting session in the first place – years ago I failed to get an interview for a job because the potential client was impressed by a colleague’s sonorous Welsh name (Arianrhod Gwenghwyyvar), since when I’ve been painfully conscious that my own moniker suffers from a kind of stumpy inconsequentiality. I may be wandering slightly off the subject, but I once heard that your natural porn star moniker is a combination of your mother’s maiden name and the name of your first pet. So I’d be Topaz Casey. Not quite G8 material, is it?

We need to know what may lurk around the corner for us. Recruitment of interpreters has become more complicated than it used to be, so who’s to say that we will never be called to a casting. You know that you must glug water by the litre to keep the voice supple, eat gentle foods, sing, stay out of drafts and avoid stress. However castings being after all castings, I’m going to join a gym. It could all come down to the glutaeus maximus.

[1] AKA Irish penicillin

Recommended citation format: