Gift ideas for interpreters

A guide to help you find the perfect holiday gift for your linguistically-gifted friends.

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At Christmas the UK satirical magazine Private Eye carries advertisements for thoughtful seasonal gifts. Taking my cue from them, I thought I could make some useful suggestions. If your partner is an interpreter – that dashing and intrepid breed – here are some ideas to make up for disappointment if he did not like the string vest, or she was less than bowled over by the new steam iron.

JOSS STICKS: interpreters work in cramped and airless conditions, and you can lighten their load with this exciting range of aromatic sticks. Flavours include cinnamon, light garlic and Paris Metro.

COMPUTER PROBLEMS? This mobile phone with a dedicated line to Peter Sand is the answer to your prayers. Peter is delighted to receive technical queries at any time of the day or night, and he comes with a great track record and many celebrity endorsements:

“He sorted out my problems and got me surfing within a month”
“Without Peter I would never have switched my computer off”

This gift comes with a downloadable cheat so that Peter Sand pays all the call charges. This must-have accessory is a snip at € 3000.00

PENCIL SHARPENER: blunt pencils causing embarrassment and generally letting the booth down? Our fully programmable pencil sharpener uses state-of-the-art Hawaiian miniaturisation technology. Insert pencils, program the system using handy 98-page manual and, hey-presto, your pencils are sharply pristine (and pristinely sharp) in 3 hours. As used in all the Accession Country booths.

HELPFUL FLASH CARDS: in-booth banter is difficult when delegates insist of talking. These flash cards cover the usual messages interpreters need to exchange during the meeting. For example:

“Nice one”
“Fancy a coffee?”
“Mixed metaphor”
“You’re talking crap”

PHONETIC TRAINER: All interpreters sometimes feel the need to pep up the lives of dozing delegates. This system is an easy to learn method so the interpreter can provide output in an exciting range of regional dialects. The following examples are just a fraction of the total offering:

French (from Canada)
Bavarian
Swiss (advanced students only)
Porteño (Tango module available)
Glaswegian (subject to psychometric testing)

AIIC SCREENSAVER: real time download of the Nuremberg trials. This is where it all started

STANDARD HOAX LETTER: keep up the tradition of tempting colleagues to delete parts of their computer operating system. The letter comes in template form and can be completed according to the level of threat you wish to make. Have hours of fun waiting to see how long it takes the threat to come back to you.

FOLDAWAY WHEELCHAIR: avoid the crowds queuing at the airport by unfolding your chair and sailing to the front of the line. Win brownie points by asking a colleague to push you.

OXYGEN BOTTLE: newly published research on our workload has shown that we produce too much CO₂, with resultant listlessness and lethargy. A quick swig of refreshing oxygen puts the dopiest interpreter back on his or her feet.

HEAT TENT: generally male interpreters are warm in the booth and the women are cold. Materials scientists have now invented the personal heat tent so that each person can work within their own temperature-controlled environment. Styles include tepee and marquee.

GENUINE YURT: delivered direct from the factory in Central Asia, this nifty invention will allow you to save on per diems and cut down on all the hassle of ringing 50 hotels for one night in Schaarbeek. You can pitch it in local parks or on the beach. Yak butter not supplied.

FENG-SHUI: at last an expert has spent time analysing our needs, so we now know the optimum position for the water jug and the importance of keeping our pencils straight.

GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM: with the addition of new languages within the EU, we will probably have about 18 people in the E/F/D booths as of about 2004. This will make individual interpreters hard to locate, but this handy GPS will mean that you won’t have to miss a call and that you can be reunited with your family.

EARPHONE DISINFECTORS: we are all at constant risk that poorly cleaned earphones will cause such prostrating conditions as glue ear, water on the brain and woodworm. It is vital to keep our headsets clean at all times now that the Technical Committee is planning random swoops. The wipes are available in an exciting range of fragrances: violet, fruits of the forest and rampant pheromones.

NOISE ZONING KIOSK: you know that late evening call we all make to our beloved family having fun in the fog at home whilst we slum it at a meeting. They need to think your nose is truly to the grindstone 24/7 and this marvel of polymer science allows you to create your own small acoustic environment. You can call home from a noisy bar, but your loved ones will hear only the gentle clack of computer keys and sub-acoustic buzz of working interpreters. This tried and tested method covers the noise of music, dancing and Steve Dempsey shouting for another round.

Phil Smith is a UK-based freelance who is still trying to discover how you say “fuite-en-avant” in English.

Recommended citation format: