

Zoom vs. MS Teams vs. Webex: Interpretation

Overview of Interpretation

There are two primary modes of interpretation: simultaneous and consecutive. Simultaneous interpretation involves rendering the source language into the target language in real-time, often through headsets in a booth during conferences or events. Conversely, consecutive interpretation entails the interpreter listening to the speaker and then relaying the message in the target language during natural pauses.

Advancements in technology have enabled virtual interpretation, where interpreters operate remotely using video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Cisco Webex. In-person interpretation, on the other hand, occurs face-to-face at events, meetings, or gatherings. Hybrid interpretation is a blend of both approaches, seamlessly integrating in-person and virtual elements to accommodate diverse communication needs.

Comparison of the Platforms

Overview of the Comparison

- [Interpretation Integration](#)
- [Cost and Pricing Plans](#)
- [Channel Setup](#)
- [Ease of Use](#)

Interpretation Integration

Feature	Zoom	Teams	Webex
Simultaneous interpretation	✓	✓	✓
Bidirectional interpretation	✓	✓	✓
Sign language interpretation	✓	✓	✓
Relay interpretation	✓	✗	✓
Recording of interpretation	✓	✗	✗
Attendees can access from the web	✓	✓	✓
Interpreters can access from the web	✗	✗	✗
Interpretation in breakout rooms	✗	✗	✗
Translated closed-captioning	✓	✓	✓
Maximum amount of interpreted languages	25	16	Unlimited

Notes

- While Teams does support bidirectional interpretation, it requires two interpreters. This is because each interpreter can only speak to one channel. So if you require English to Dari and then Dari to English you will need 2 interpreters to accomplish this.
- Zoom and Webex require only one interpreter to accomplish bidirectional interpretation
- Translated closed-captioning works by using AI to translate the source language into various available languages. This is not the same as the interpreter audio being closed-captioned. Support for spoken languages varies by platform. This feature does not require any interpreters but the AI translate captions are not always very accurate.

Cost and Pricing Plans

Zoom

Zoom's interpretation feature is only accessible on the Zoom One Business plan (and above) which comes in at CAD \$27.00 /user/month and requires a minimum of 10 licenses.

Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams' interpretation feature is generally available (GA) with all paid versions of the software. The lowest tier is the Microsoft Teams Essentials package available for CAD \$5.40 /user/month.

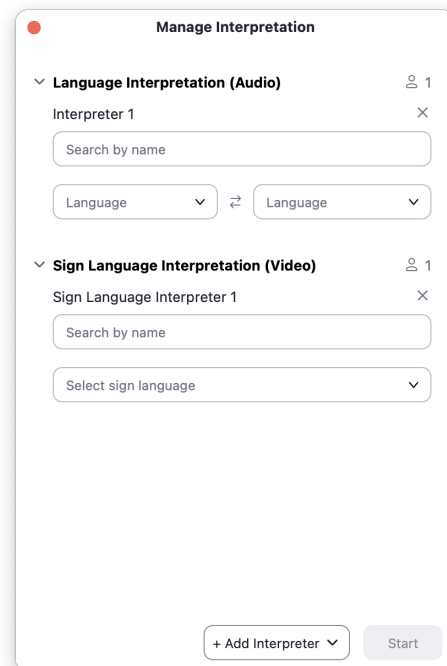
Cisco Webex

Cisco Webex's interpretation feature is only available on the Enterprise licensing options. This means that for individuals looking to utilize this feature, it's unfortunately something that you'll have to wait for Cisco to roll out as an add-on package, or add support for at lower price tiers.

Channel Setup

Zoom

Zoom's interpretation allows for multiple channels to be configured, as well as sign language interpretation. As the host, you can select which languages are available and assign interpreters to each language. From there, once the interpretation has begun the interpreters are able to select which language they listen to and interpret to. For example, an interpreter assigned to interpret English → French will have the ability to listen to the English audio channel while speaking to the French audio channel, and vice versa. If the interpreter prefers to listen to the main audio channel they can also select that option. Sign language interpretation can be configured with the same method.



Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams' interpretation, like Zoom, allows for multiple channels to be configured, as well as sign language interpretation. To configure the interpreters, the host must first enable the interpretation feature for the meeting during the scheduling process. At this time, it is not possible to add external members of your organization as an interpreter prior to the meeting. Details regarding this process can be found in the [Ease of Use](#) section.

Once the interpreter has been added and their assigned audio channel has been selected, they are able to listen to the main audio of the meeting and interpret to their assigned audio channel. Unfortunately, unlike Zoom where the interpreter is able to choose between either of the two languages they are assigned to, the interpreter can only speak in the language they've been assigned. For example, this means an interpreter assigned to interpret English → French can speak *only* to the French audio channel. In order to support bilateral interpretation, an additional interpreter assigned to the reverse direction (in this case, French → English) must be added to the meeting and configured.

Cisco Webex

Webex interpretation is closer to Zoom's than it is Teams in that it is a more well-rounded, feature-rich integration. As with Zoom, you can select which languages are available and assign interpreters to each language and, from there, once the interpretation has begun the interpreters are able to select which language they listen and interpret to. For example, an interpreter assign to interpret English → French will have the ability to listen to English while interpreting to French, and vice versa. If the interpreter prefers to listen to the main audio channel they can also select that option. Sign language interpretation can be configured with the same method.

Ease of Use

Zoom

Overall, Zoom has a rather intuitive interface. Enabling interpretation and using it in meeting requires very little work and is a very simple process. First, users must ensure the setting is enabled in their Zoom Web Portal. Once this is enabled, the option to enable interpretation in the meeting scheduler will be available.

Language Interpretation

Allow host to assign participants as interpreters who can interpret one language into another in real-time. Host can assign interpreters when scheduling or during the meeting.

Enable language interpretation by default

10 languages +

English Chinese Japanese German French Russian Portuguese Spanish Korean
Dari x

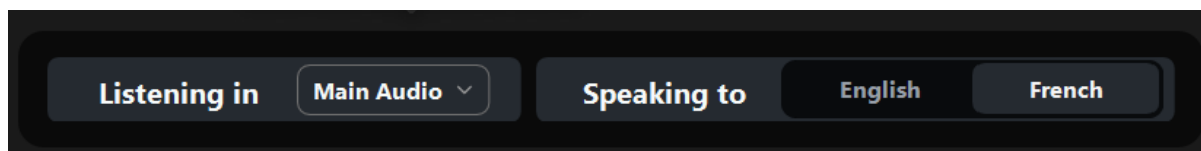
Interpretation Enable language interpretation

English v ≠ French v x

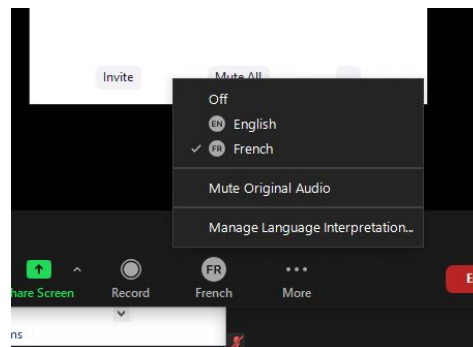
+ Add Language Interpreter

Select sign language interpretation video channels below. You can assign interpreters at any time.

Adding the interpreters email and assigning their languages can be done here. In order for the interpreter to be automatically assigned when the meeting is opened, they must sign into the meeting with a Zoom account linked to the email address they received the link at. However, if they don't have a Zoom account, the interpreter can be added directly in the meeting once they join. It's not possible to enable interpretation in a meeting without first adding an interpreter during the scheduling process, so make sure to add at least one interpreter when scheduling the meeting. **Pro tip:** enter your own email address as the interpreter and remove yourself as an interpreter once you open the meeting to bypass the need to enter an email for the interpreter.



Once the meeting is open, the host can easily assign the interpreters after they've joined the meeting. Interpreters will see a small window pop-up, allowing them to change the audio channel they are listening to, and the option to change between speaking to one of the two languages they've been assigned. Interpreters can also select other available languages to listen to, which enables support for relay interpreting.



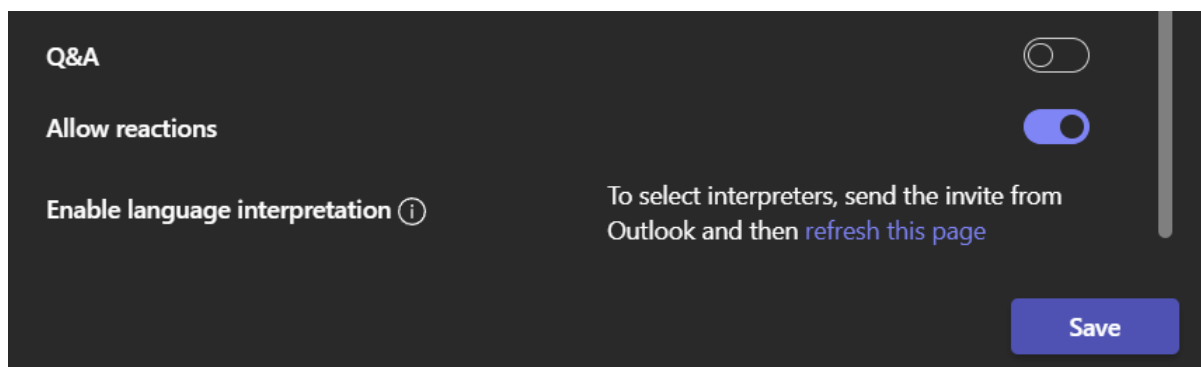
In meeting, the options for the attendees to select an audio channel are simple - click the interpretation button and select your audio channel. From there, they can choose to mute the original audio channel, which is by default enabled but at about 25-50% volume so you can still clearly hear the interpretation channel. Attendees can switch between available languages at any time by clicking the globe icon in the Zoom toolbar.

A recurring confusion that comes up in many of the events we've hosted is how to hear the interpreter relay a question in a different language. For example, if the default language in the meeting is English and there is an English ↔ French interpreter, when an English speaker talks it is interpreted to the French channel for those listening to the French audio. When the French speaker talks, they will also be speaking on the main audio channel, but when the interpreter switches from speaking from the French channel to English channel, people listening to the main audio channel will not hear them. People must select the English audio channel in order to hear the interpreter relay the question. This may seem odd, but it makes sense. In order for people to hear the French → English interpretation, they must select the English audio channel.

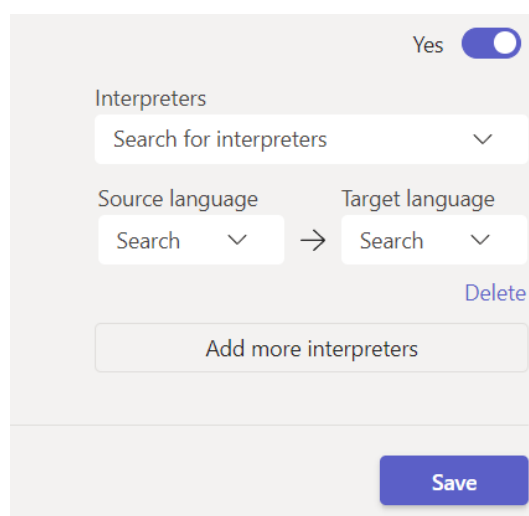
While the *default* language in the meeting is English, that does not imply that the main audio channel is the same as the English audio channel. In order for people to hear the interpreter they must select one of the available channels.

Microsoft Teams

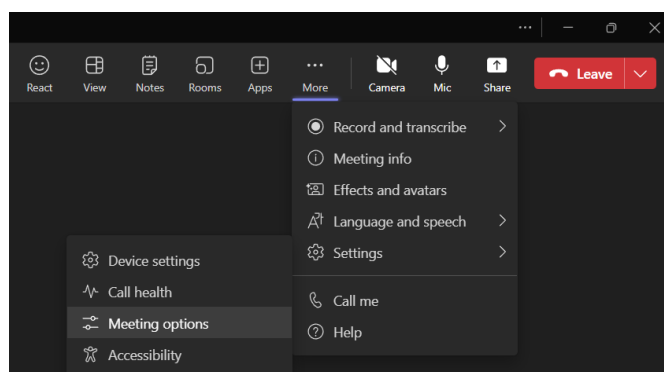
Microsoft Teams is a powerful, but less intuitive platform. Throughout testing these platforms, Teams was quite difficult to navigate and get working. Firstly, as with all platforms, one must enable interpretation in their settings. After that, the option to enable language interpretation will appear in the meeting scheduling options. For Teams, this isn't as clearly defined as it is with Zoom and Webex. Users must navigate to Meeting Options in the scheduler to access the setting. However, that's not all there is to it - users must first invite people to their meeting, save and send the invitation, then go back to edit the meeting and go to Meeting Options again in order to add interpreters.



Users may experience some confusion as the meeting options open natively in Teams when scheduling, but open in the browser when editing the already scheduled meeting. Teams also doesn't let you add external users of the organization as an interpreter. Therefore, users must add a colleague within their organization as the interpreter in order to schedule meetings with interpretation. Once this has been completed, the interpretation feature will be available in the meeting and the colleague invited as an interpreter can be removed.



Once the interpreter joins the meeting, they can then be assigned interpretation privileges. After that, the host must navigate to More > Settings > Meeting options to access the meeting options panel. From there, anyone given interpreter privileges can be made an interpreter. It's important to note that the host must grant interpreter privileges to an attendee before they can be assigned an audio channel to interpret.

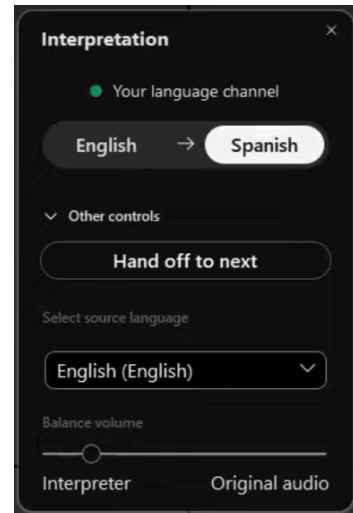


The interpreter may notice that they aren't even able to see what language they're interpreting, they don't get any option of which audio they're able to listen to, and they can't select which language they are speaking in. People are able to see what language the interpreter is speaking by looking at the participants list, but that's all. The host has exclusive control over who the interpreters are and what language they are able to speak. That is, if a meeting requires simultaneous bidirectional interpretation, then the host will need to assign a second interpreter to speak in the reverse direction.

For attendees, the options are pretty intuitive, you simply select which channel you will be listening to and can change it at any time. However, you can't mute the original audio, the interpreter audio is simply overlaid on the main audio channel just at a slightly louder volume. Using MS Teams for simultaneous interpretation is not ideal.

Cisco Webex

Interpretation with Webex operates nearly identically to Zoom. The standout feature that Webex has which Zoom does not is the handover feature. With Webex, interpreters assigned to the same audio channel are actually able to hear each other, and directly send a handoff request all within the platform. This intuitive little feature is absolutely key for seamless transitions between interpreters. The hand off feature sends a request to the other interpreter, notifying them that they are being requested to take over. If they accept, they automatically come off mute and can begin speaking, however, the interpreter who sent the request still needs to manually mute themselves. It's not consistent, but often the requesting interpreter will receive a notification reminding them to mute themselves after the handoff.



Another neat feature is the ability to adjust the balance between interpreter and original audio. Interpreters can also select other available languages to listen to, which enables support for relay interpreting. Combining the volume balancer with the ability to select different source languages makes relay interpreting that much easier as interpreters can drown out the original audio and listen directly to the interpreter on the selected source audio channel.

The audience has a similar interface to that of the interpreter, less the ability to select an audio channel to speak to and the hand off button. Attendees will have the ability to select the source audio channel of their choice based on available language channels created by the host, as well as adjust the volume with the audio balancer to favour the interpreter or original audio source.

Much like with Zoom, a recurring confusion that comes up in many of the events we've hosted is how to hear the interpreter relay a question in a different language. For example, if the default language in the meeting is English and there is an English ↔ French interpreter, when an English speaker talks it is interpreted to the French channel for those listening to the French audio. When the French speaker talks, they will also be speaking on the main audio channel, but when the interpreter switches from speaking from the French channel to English channel, people listening to the main audio channel will not hear them. People must select the English audio channel in order to hear the interpreter relay the question. This may seem odd, but it makes sense. In order for people to hear the French → English interpretation, they must select the English audio channel.

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