

BORDERLESS DEFINED

Newsletter of Borderless Interpreting & Translation, LLC



Outage and Disruption

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I have been thinking about the words "outage" and "disruption" for quite some time, longer separately than the two of them together.

More recently, however, I developed this urge to understand their difference(s) when I realized I should have interpreted "障害" as "outage" instead of "disruption" in English. (To provide a bit more context, I was interpreting into English when the speaker was discussing online service outage in Japanese. I had interpreted this as "disruption" but later heard an English-speaking individual use the word "outage" instead.)

So, my mind inevitably turned to the question, "why was "disruption" inadequate in this case?"

First, here are how the two words are defined in some of the mainstream monolingual dictionaries.

Outage

[Lexico](#)

A period when a power supply or other service is not available or when equipment is closed down.

[Collins Dictionary](#)

An outage is a period of time when the electricity supply to a building or area is interrupted, for example because of damage to the cables.

[Cambridge Dictionary](#)

a period when a service, such as electricity, is not available

Disruption

[Lexico](#)

Disturbance or problems which interrupt an event, activity, or process.

[Collins Dictionary](#)

When there is disruption of an event, system, or process, it is prevented from continuing or operating in a normal way.

[Cambridge Dictionary](#)

the action of preventing something, especially a system, process, or event, from continuing as usual or as expected

Based on these definitions, I think it is fair to conclude that outage refers to a time period during which a supply of something is unavailable (as the word suggests!). I suppose the only question is how long it lasts.

On the other hand, disruption can be a complete disconnect or hindered operation of something. For this reason, it might be necessary to discern, at least from an interpreter's standpoint, whether a given instance of "disruption" is limited to "乱れ" or if it has reached the level of "停止," "中断," "遮断," "断絶," etc. (I personally picture a road, and with "disruption," it could be completely or partway blocked.)

In retrospect, I think it makes sense that the English-speaking individual used "outage" in the interpreting example above as they were referring to an event during which the service was completely unavailable.

The next Borderless Defined will be in your inbox in the week of July 18, 2022.

Thanks for reading!

Noriko Rogers
Borderless Interpreting & Translation, LLC

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