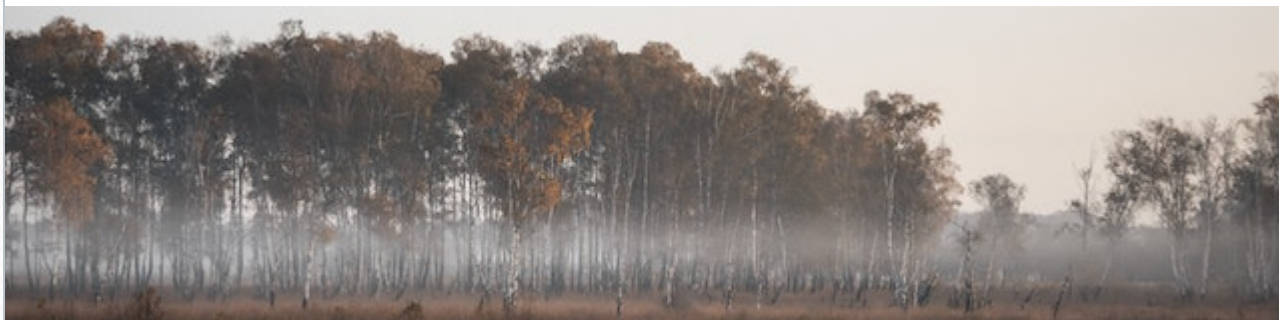


BORDERLESS DEFINED

Newsletter of Borderless Interpreting & Translation, LLC



"When" vs. "If"

Newsletter No. 122 issued by Noriko Rogers (November 3, 2022)

Recently, I interpreted a situation where a speaker was asked a question containing "if" then gave a response with "when" instead.

Here is a hypothetical dialogue to better illustrate what happened.

Person A:

-What would it mean for the department if the project is given a go-ahead?

Person B:

-When the project is given a go-ahead, it would simply mean that the department will need extra headcount.

I think it is fair to say that the level of certainty differs between the two individuals in this case. It is also likely that Person B intentionally used "when" for this effect.

Depending on how one interprets Person A, however, it might become tricky to make a clear differentiation when interpreting Person B (especially if it is in the simultaneous mode).

Another point to bear in mind is that "if" and "when" do not always point to vastly different degrees of certainty, especially when making a reference to common knowledge or a matter of highly predictable nature. Here is a hypothetical example with little to no meaningful difference.

1. If your project is delayed or cancelled, there are usually financial penalties to consider.

2. When your project is delayed or cancelled, there are usually financial penalties to consider.

In fact, I find it more rare that "if" and "when" are purposefully differentiated as shown in the first context. And because of this, I interpreted the first instance of "if" as " (承認された) 場合" (in the event that the project is given a go-ahead) without anticipating Person B to respond with "when" instead.

Although it is technically not incorrect to interpret "when" also as "場合" (which is precisely what I opted for due to limited mental resources at the time), a more faithful version in this case would have been " (承認された) ときには" to convey their conviction.

As always, your feedback is much appreciated!

The next Borderless Defined will be in your inbox in the week of December 12, 2022.

Thanks for reading!

Noriko Rogers
Borderless Interpreting & Translation, LLC

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Borderless Interpreting & Translation, LLC

Plain City, Ohio, USA

+1 (614) 705-5068

URL: www.borderlessinterpreting.com

Contact: noriko@borderlessinterpreting.com

mailer lite