



# Handbook

## for Interpreters in Asylum Procedures



*“It is a fiction  
that I am neutral  
and invisible.”\**

\* Comment of an interpreter at asylum interviews

#### IMPRINT

Edited by UNHCR Austria & Sonja Pöllabauer

**Project team:** Annika Bergunde, Sonja Pöllabauer & Lilian Hagenlocher, Ursula-Stachl-Peier

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# Preface

“It is a fiction that I am neutral and invisible.”<sup>1</sup>

Interpreters play a crucial, yet often underestimated role in asylum interviews. An asylum applicant who does not speak the language of the country of asylum will be reliant on an interpreter to present their claim accurately. Similarly, if the interviewer is to assess the applicant’s claim effectively and fairly, they have to rely on the interpreter to facilitate communication<sup>2</sup>. As it is often not possible for applicants to provide written evidence to corroborate their claims, their oral accounts of what has happened to them are usually the sole basis for an official’s decision and ultimately a pivotal point in the applicant’s life. These oral accounts are rendered by the interpreters between the official language of the proceedings (that is to say, the language(s) of the host country) and the applicant’s language (the applicant’s mother tongue or another language used by the applicant).

It seems obvious that such a critical situation calls for a well-trained and professional interpreter who has the requisite linguistic, cultural and technical skills and is aware of their role and the enormous responsibility they bear towards the other parties involved. In many countries, however, interpreters have not had specific training to prepare them for work in an asylum context. This handbook, now in its second edition, was developed for interpreters wishing to find out more about the challenges and skills requirements of this field and for trainers who need inspiration and materials for their courses.

The course materials were originally drafted in German, within an UNHCR-led project entitled QUADA (“Qualitätsvolles Dolmetschen im Asylverfahren”, literally: quality interpreting in the asylum procedure). The curriculum and content were designed between January and December 2014, in cooperation with experts in the field. The project was co-financed by the European Refugee Fund and the Austrian Ministry of the Interior.

In 2017, the German version was adapted and modified for use in international contexts, with the help of international experts in cooperation with the Department of Translation Studies at the University of Graz and financed by UNHCR. In 2021, the German handbook was revised to reflect changes in procedures and two new units (on Remote Interpreting and Interpreting for Groups) were added. This new English edition incorporates these amendments and also updates the sections written specifically for the English version.

The handbook provides a comprehensive theoretical overview of the field, as well as activities and exercises enabling experiential and interactive learning. It can be used by interpreters who wish to gain a deeper insight into the complexities of interpreting in asylum contexts and find out more about what knowledge and skills are needed for successful performance. The structure of the handbook, with detailed instructions for group discussions and role-play scenarios, also makes it a useful tool for facilitators and trainers in training courses. The handbook can also be profitably used by asylum authorities and interviewers, offering guidance on how they can support interpreters.

We hope that this second edition will, like its predecessor, assist efforts to promote the use of trained and qualified interpreters in asylum interviews.

**Christoph Pinter, Annika Bergunde,  
Lilian Hagenlocher**  
UNHCR Austria

**Sonja Pöllabauer**  
Centre for Translations Studies (University of Vienna)

**Ursula Stachl-Peier**  
(Editorial team)

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1) *Comment of an interpreter at asylum interviews*

2) *For ease of reading, the term “interviews” is used for all three of the following situations: initial asylum screening interviews, where the admission of an applicant’s claim or their return to a safe country is determined, the personal interview, where the applicant gets an opportunity to describe their reasons for claiming asylum, and interviews in the appeal process against negative decisions. Accordingly, a state official conducting any one of these interviews is referred to as “interviewer”.*


# How to Navigate the Handbook


The handbook consists of an introductory unit on role playing exercises in interpreter training and 12 units covering different aspects of interpreting in the asylum context<sup>3)</sup>:



1. Asylum and International Protection
2. The Personal Interview and Interview Techniques
3. The Basic Principles of Interpreting
4. The Interpreter's Role
5. Professional Ethics and Professional Conduct
6. Interpreting Modes
- 6.1. Interpreting for groups
7. Note-taking
8. Sight Translating Interview Transcripts
9. Interpreting for Vulnerable Applicants
10. Interpreters as Experts in Multi-lingual and Transcultural Communication
11. Information Mining for Interpreters
12. The Interpreter's Emotional Experience
13. Distance Interpreting



All units follow a similar format. Specific symbols help readers and users to navigate the content more easily.


▶ **Learning Outcomes:** This bullet-point list indicates the knowledge, skills and understanding that users can develop by means of the teaching and learning activities.

**Theory:** Each unit starts with the theoretical background of the topic tackled in that unit, which is usually divided into sub-sections. These sections are based on current research in this field. The information is presented in a way that it is understandable to readers with little background knowledge of the topic (for example, including explanation of technical terms and definitions of specific terms), while at the same time being precise and focused. Sometimes, more detailed and additional information is presented in a separate  **Fact Box**.

 **Country-Specific Information:** Some aspects of asylum procedures and interpreting in the asylum context are largely shaped by national regulations and practice. Since these regulations and practices can differ significantly across countries, answers to certain questions may vary in different countries. Country-specific information boxes list questions that should be tackled by trainers in the particular national context in which the handbook is being used.

 **Literature and Links:** This section presents literature used in the theory section ("References") and lists materials and sources of information so that more can be learned about the different topics ("Basic Reading", "Further Reading"). It also includes a list of relevant **websites** .

 **Activities:** This section offers diverse training activities and exercises. It also includes ready-to-use  **worksheets and templates** for trainers.

 **Test yourself!** This section invites readers to reflect critically on what they have learned in a specific unit. It is a mixture of questions (in an open and/or closed question format), examples and scenarios that can be analysed and reflected upon. The questions can be reflected on individually or discussed in plenary sessions.

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<sup>3)</sup> While we have taken every care in compiling this handbook, we cannot guarantee that the information it contains is accurate, complete and up-to-date.

# Role-Playing Exercises

Mira Kadrić

Translation: Sylvi Rennert

## ROLE PLAYING IN INTERPRETER TRAINING

Role playing and simulation games have their origins in the field of psychology, particularly in Jacob L. Moreno's **psychodrama** (Moreno 1959), which was initially used in psychotherapy. Although the later development of role-playing methods has been increasingly influenced by theatre pedagogy, the fundamental psychological aspects of psychodrama are still apparent in all later role-playing approaches used in interactive education.

One thing all pedagogical applications of role playing have in common and what is, in fact, a fundamental aspect of role playing, is the **complete involvement of the individual, encompassing their body, their emotions, and their social and communicative needs**; there is a mix of intellect and emotion, the embedding of rational thought into an emotional frame. The aim of role playing is to practise the interplay of emotion, identification and reflection, with a **focus on reflection** (Schmidt 1998). The active, cognitive side and the emotional side of the learning process complement each other and create a holistic learning environment.

Role playing as a teaching tool has become an inextricable part of modern interpreter training, particularly with the advent of new work settings, especially interpreting in an institutional context.

Institutional communication is not only characterised by the clash of different types of language and text – with technical terminology clashing with everyday language on a regular basis – but it is also in the nature of any institutional communication that concludes with an official decision that the participants attempt to influence their counterpart in various ways to achieve their goals. Both the institution and the client are “negotiating” in the broadest sense, since they have different goals, and trying to advocate for their cause. The “negotiation”, which has its own rules, can be addressed in role playing from different perspectives.

In role playing, as in every game, it is essential to have fixed rules. They should include a concrete scenario, thoroughly described roles and clearly defined evaluation criteria.

Exercises in dialogic settings (as opposed to conference settings) are best done with **scenarios rather than prepared scripts**. The scenarios should ideally be based on participants' experiences (Kadrić 2011). This gives them authenticity and credibility – two factors that are important in role playing. When a script or situation that has been learned by rote is presented as “truth”, the consistency of expression is compromised, while an authentic scenario allows the three dimensions of emotion, identification, and reflection to develop optimally.

For this reason, the role-playing situations are based not on prepared scripts but on scenarios that the participants have encountered in their own life. This exercise is always based on a concrete case. For example, participants could describe interpreting situations they have experienced that were difficult or problematic for them. When people are faced with a concrete problem they can relate to personally, they become creative. Being confronted with an interpreting scenario with a resolution that does not satisfy them encourages them to find creative solutions. Experiencing a scenario in a training setting will help them when confronted with similar situations in their work, as the memory of their experience will help them predict the course of the interaction and apply the solutions developed in the exercise.

A central component of role playing is the **evaluation**. Since the exercise is a “game” and composed of oral and, therefore, ephemeral communication, there is a risk of getting distracted by the game and making it all the exercise is about. Therefore, it is very important to have clear evaluation criteria, both for individual sequences and for the scenario as a whole. Only if the interpreter's words and actions are analysed in detail can they be discussed and improved. In terms of methodology, it is important to evaluate systematically; it should be clear who is to evaluate which parts, and the selected evaluation criterion should be applicable to all parts of the role-playing scenario, that is, both the textual components and the situations. Simply playing out a scenario without a clearly defined evaluation system has no didactic value.

## STRUCTURING CONTENTS IN ROLE PLAYING

Role-playing exercises can be conducted **in any interpreting mode or language combination** (including monolingual interpreting at the beginning), and the method is suitable for both oral and signed languages. This exercise can be applied to any interpreting setting, text type, and, in particular, any role of the interpreter in the social interaction. In the exercise, text and interactivity are equally important.

The **text** in the broadest sense includes all **deliberate and unconscious verbal and non-verbal communication signals**. Verbal communication in this context refers to language as a whole, with the full range of semantic, lexical, syntactic and pragmatic aspects. It includes idioms as well as terminology and expert knowledge, but also extends to conversational skills, argumentation techniques, and verbal communication strategies, as well as unusual grammatical features. Non-verbal communication includes gestures and facial expressions, pauses and silence (intentional and unintentional), volume and pitch of voice, clarity of articulation, speed, emphasis, intonation, rhythm of speech, sitting position, gaze behaviour, posture, proxemics (i.e. interpersonal distances) and physical contact/touching while speaking.

**Interactivity** includes all extra-lingual, situational factors, particularly conversation management and actions that enable (or limit/prevent) successful communication, as well as the conduct of the interpreter with regard to the technical and ethical principles and standards of interpreting.

In the role-playing exercise, the “cast” rehearses for a “performance” at a later date. Role playing is usually done with individual scenes (e.g. part of an interview in the asylum procedure, an unusual linguistic feature, conflict potential, or a certain attitude) rather than the entire interview. The next didactic step after successful role playing is simulation. While role-playing exercises are conducted without external participants, simulations involve someone who really works in the field. For example, an actual employee of the asylum authority might participate in the simulation of an interview situation. In simulations, the group practises the entire communication situation, for example a complete interview. It is in this follow-up step as simulation, or “dress rehearsal”, that role playing truly shows its full effect as a didactic tool.

## AUGUSTO BOAL'S THEATRE PEDAGOGY APPROACH

This section discusses a type of method used in theatre pedagogy that is particularly suited for role playing because it gives the participants the opportunity to try out different forms of both action and expression: **Augusto Boal's “Theatre of the Oppressed”**.

Augusto Boal (1989) was one of the major practitioners of theatre pedagogy of our time and developed a new methodological approach with his Theatre of the Oppressed. By employing methods from the world of theatre, it gives participants insights into their own behaviour and knowledge and allows them to question social constraints and try out completely new approaches. It deals with situations in which there is either deliberate or unconscious pressure on people (to which they usually yield) or situations in which work is complicated by factors that are not addressed and that prevent tasks being performed in a satisfactory manner. Therefore, the exercise always starts with a scenario from participants' lives in which they are faced with a problem.

**Forum theatre** is one of the main forms of Theatre of the Oppressed. The techniques of forum theatre are those of intervention; scenes dealing with a concrete problem are repeated until a solution has been found that is satisfactory for everyone involved. This is done in a “forum”, which means that everyone involved participates, either by acting or by evaluating a scene.

In translator and interpreter training, this type of exercise can be applied to both the textual and the interactive level, making it useful as a way of practicing expression and behaviour.

The roles are divided into **“oppressors” and “oppressed”**. Following the approach of the Theatre of the Oppressed, from the point of view of the interpreter, both the interviewer and the applicant are their “oppressors”, because both the interviewer and the asylum-seeker have interests that cause them to exert some form of pressure on the interpreter. In forum theatre exercises, the interpreter is, therefore, always in the role of the “oppressed”.

What does that mean? Although the basic structure of the conversation is that the interviewer dictates the topic of discourse and regulates the exchange of information due to their dominance in terms of hierarchy and expertise, this does not, from the perspective of the interpreter and the translation, necessarily mean that only this side dominates and the other has to yield (although this is frequently the case); the (hierarchically speaking) weaker applicant can also assume a strong position with regard to the interpreter.

Individuals who have no structural power can still exert pressure on the interpreter. This becomes particularly evident in constellations when emotions play an important role and in situations where people see no way out or have nothing to lose. Role playing allows interpreters to identify such structures, nullify or mitigate pressure from the outset, and practise how they would approach (in terms of expression and behaviour) such a situation in reality.

In a communication situation, various factors can cause “oppression”, such as complex technical texts, dialects, comments and interruptions during the interpretation, or comments from one of the participants that they would not normally make in a direct conversation without interpreter mediation, but that the interpreter nevertheless has to interpret. All of these are irritating factors that can exert strong pressure on the interpreter, which can have a negative impact on the interpretation as a whole.

In this approach, the premise is that the “oppressors” will not (or do not want to) change. Therefore, the goal is not to try to influence the “oppressors” to do something, but rather to try out different solutions and alternative ways for the “oppressed” to behave. In the “forum”, participants try out **alternative approaches, behaviour**, and verbal and non-verbal messages of the “oppressed”. When dealing with a given topic or problem, the same people play the “oppressors” every time; their behaviour and lines remain the same in every iteration. However, the role of the “oppressed”, in this case the interpreter, changes every time so that all participants can try out new solutions. **The role of the “oppressors” is fixed, that of the “oppressed” is flexible and variable.**

The preparation for the roles should consider the personal characteristics of the participants or their wishes concerning what they can or want to portray, such as distant, friendly, unfriendly, formal, relaxed or subservient.

## EXAMPLE SCENARIO

Let us illustrate the forum theatre method with the following example:

This concrete example (or “scenario”) is the starting point of the role-playing exercise. The group **alternates between reflecting on the scenario and trying out different actions.**



\* Source: Picture based on UNHCR. 2009. Interpreting in a Refugee Context. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/49b6314d2.html> (Accessed January 15 2022)

First, the scene is performed once to present the problem. This first performance is done without changes to the script, so that the group can see the original version and its verbal and non-verbal aspects and can discuss them briefly. This first scene is a re-enactment of the situation described in the picture: a short utterance by the applicant that is rendered incorrectly by the interpreter and an interviewer who reacts to what he has heard with a questioning glance.

Despite the clearly incorrect interpretation, the interpreter is the “oppressed” in the scenario. Interviewers are often pressed for time and expect quick proceedings. Interpreters frequently experience pressure – at least subjectively – to speak quickly and briefly and often feel as if they should choose words that can be recorded in the transcript verbatim to save time (see also Unit 8).

This example initially deals with the **textual level**. After the first run-through, the group discussion will probably focus on questions like the following: (i) Did the interpreter provide a complete rendition or was information lost? (ii) **Was the content interpreted correctly?** (iii) Which **speech register** did the interpreter choose – did she convey the applicant’s informal language or did she use a formal register or “transcript-ready” language?

This example poses the fundamental question of whether it is legitimate to change the speech register and reword informal language into technical jargon. Which consequences might different approaches have?

Next, the **scene is repeated** with a different participant playing the interpreter. In this new version, the interpreter takes the preceding discussion into account and can **try out different ways of interpreting**, e.g. different speech registers or expressions. The intention is not to address the amount of text interpreters have to deal with but to look at a concrete, albeit small, problem from all sides. The role playing-aided analysis is intended to support this process and show alternative solutions.



Even this short scene provides a good basis for discussing different ways of rendition, for example based on the following **criteria** (Wadensjö 1998, 107):

- A close rendition, which has the same interactive function as the preceding original utterance;
- A reduced rendition, which includes less explicitly expressed information than the preceding original utterance;
- An expanded rendition, which includes more explicitly expressed information than the preceding original utterance;
- A substituted rendition, which consists of a combination of an 'expanded' and a 'reduced' one;
- A summarized rendition, where the interpretation is an abbreviated version of the original utterance;
- A rendition with gaps (zero rendition), where parts of the original utterance are left untranslated.

In this example, another obvious topic to discuss is the role of the interviewer, who reacts with a questioning or confused glance. The scenario can be developed further in several iterations, for example by adding a line for the interviewer (he might ask: "Is that how she said it?" or "Which traffickers' hideout?"). Then, again, the lines of the applicant and interviewer would remain the same for several iterations while the interpreter tries out different approaches (alternative interpretations). The **script can be expanded** in this way, but it should be kept in mind that the purpose of the exercise can generally be achieved with relatively short scenes. The focus should certainly not be on learning lines but rather on analysing and trying out different forms of expression and behaviour.

## EVALUATION

As discussed above, the evaluation is an indispensable part of this exercise. To facilitate the evaluation, two participants should keep minutes and write everything down like stenographers. This is important in order to **document the individual scenes**, as participants often experience a scene in different ways.

Role playing also makes it possible to **analyse the non-verbal dimension** of communication. The non-verbal dimension is an intrinsic part of any communication situation. This important form of expression can, at times, be more significant than verbal language: People always express more than they say with words. The evaluation of the scenes should therefore also encompass this aspect.

For example, two participants might focus on observing and making notes on body language. Observing and analysing visual non-verbal communication helps to uncover automatic behaviour and, if necessary, change one's body language.

Boal focuses on non-verbal expression, because feelings are expressed much more clearly through body language than through words and embedded into the entirety of communication signals. In situations in which someone's emotional state plays an important role, the share of non-verbal communication increases considerably. The information thus transmitted is generally related to the relationship level. It reflects – and can influence – emotional valuations and attitudes. These signals also show how the communicating parties "identify" with each other. These exercises are not about suppressing one's behaviour or forcing it onto others but about making new, different experiences and trying out desired changes in one's own behaviour.

## SUMMARY

The central message of the approach suggested here is **that there is an alternative to every action**. Every decision, every event, every story could have had a different outcome. The possibility of change has always been and will always be present. This approach is also intended to allow us to detect acquired stereotypes and learned behaviour and to observe them in a creative way.

In our example, the interpreter is obviously trying to phrase the interpretation in a formal style. She may assume that the interviewer expects this, when he does not. It is possible that the interviewer would prefer the original language register of the applicant, that is, informal language, for both the interpretation and the transcript. The interviewer's questioning glance might, for example, be caused by doubts that the applicant really used expressions like "traffickers' hideout". Any other ways of reacting that are specific to the situation, aspects of conversation management, and any unusual aspects of the relationship or in initiating contact with the communicating parties are left up to the "interpretation" of those playing them. This freedom of interpretation is all the more reason to stick closely to the few rules that do exist for role playing and evaluation.

Role playing is based on the concept of **dialogic learning**, where all participants are part of the teaching and learning process. The **"production" is teamwork**; the trainer is looking for creative potential in the group and is therefore always working with the group dynamics. The trainer is the "director" of the play and tries to create a situation that allows creative action.



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## Basic Reading

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# Unit 1:

## *Asylum and International Protection*

UNHCR Austria & Margit Ammer  
Translation: Ursula Stachl-Peier

*“We are facing the biggest refugee and displacement crisis of our time. Above all, this is not just a crisis of numbers; it is also a crisis of solidarity”*  
(Ban Ki Moon, United Nations Secretary General, 2016)

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will be able to

- » describe the different reasons that force people to flee their home country or to migrate to another country;
- » read and interpret worldwide refugee statistics;
- » understand the Geneva Refugee Convention;
- » describe the different criteria for determining refugee status and illustrate their applicability;
- » explain national asylum procedures;
- » name other forms of protection and residence.



## International Protection

### GLOBAL DISPLACEMENT

Since the beginning of this millennium, the number of armed conflicts and the atrocities associated with them has risen markedly, forcing an ever growing number of people from their homes.

In 2015, forced displacement reached its highest level since World War II. Worldwide, 65 million individuals were forcibly displaced by war and persecution, including 21 million refugees registered under the UNHCR’s mandate, 3 million asylum-seekers and 40 million internally displaced persons. Between 2010 and 2020, the number of forcibly displaced persons doubled. In 2020, over 82 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced by war and persecution, including over 26 million refugees registered under the UNHCR’s and UNRWA’s mandates, four million asylum-seekers and 48 million internally displaced persons, as well as over four million Venezuelans who fled their country.

### GENEVA CONVENTION ON THE PROTECTION OF REFUGEES (GRC; “THE CONVENTION”)

The Geneva Convention on the Protection of Refugees (also called “Geneva Refugee Convention” or “1951 Refugee Convention”) was signed on 28 July 1951. Originally designed as an instrument for the protection of European refugees in the aftermath of World War II, today it is **the key legal document and basis for the protection of refugees worldwide**. The Convention defines the term ‘refugee’ and outlines the legal obligations of the signatory States for their protection.

Its core principle is the obligation of **non-refoulement**, which asserts that no refugee should be returned to a country where they face a threat to life or freedom. The Convention explicitly excludes certain groups, such as war criminals.

**Recommended citation:** UNHCR Austria, and Margit Ammer. 2022. “Asylum and International Protection.”

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The Convention also lays down minimum standards for the treatment of refugees, including access to the courts, healthcare, social assistance and primary education, and outlines the duties of refugees towards the hosting country.

The Convention does not set out details of the procedures that should be used by a signatory State to determine whether or not a person is a refugee.

## WHO IS A REFUGEE?

Article 1a of the Convention defines a refugee as any person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country”.

According to this definition, a refugee is someone who

- is **outside their country of origin**,
- has a **well-founded fear of persecution** because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion,
- is **unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country**,
- and who is **not excluded from protection** because they have committed a serious crime or are guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations (see Fact Box “Exclusion and Cessation Grounds”, p. 19).

### » Grounds for Protection

- **Race:** Race as a concept refers to common ethnic, linguistic or cultural characteristics and distinction from others by physical characteristics, such as the colour of skin.
- **Religion:** The concept of religion includes freedom of thought, conscience and religion as well as a person’s right to follow or not to follow a religion, to express personal beliefs, to manifest their religion in public, to marry a person not belonging to the same religion and the freedom to change their religion or belief.
- **Nationality:** Nationality encompasses membership of an ethnic group, citizenship and statelessness, that is to say lack of citizenship.
- **Membership of a particular social group:** Members of a social group share an innate characteristic or common background that cannot be changed or is so fundamental to the identity of a person or their conscience that they should not be forced to renounce it, such as gender, sexual orientation and family membership.
- **Political opinion:** This concept refers to a person’s opinion, thought or belief in relation to (potential) persecutors and their policies. It is immaterial whether the person actually holds or has publicly expressed this political opinion or has acted upon it, provided (potential) persecutors have accused the applicant of holding this opinion or acting on it.



### FACT BOX

## *Forced Displacement vs. Migration*

A distinction is normally made between forced displacement and voluntary migration. Individuals who have been forced to leave their countries by war, conflict and persecution are protected by international treaties, in particular the Geneva Refugee Convention (GRC) and international human rights treaties. All EU member states are signatories to the GRC and certain international human rights treaties, such as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and are therefore obliged to guarantee a person protection against being returned to a country where they have reason to fear persecution or other serious harm (Principle of Non-Refoulement). The situation is different in the case of migrants. As a rule, countries are free to decide how many migrants they want to allow on their territory. An exception is family reunion, where the unity of the family is protected under international law.

## Seeking Asylum in the European Union

In 2015, nearly 1.4 million applications for international protection were filed in the EU+ (EU member states plus Switzerland and Norway), representing both the highest number and the sharpest year-to-year growth (+110 % compared to 2014) since the beginning of EU-level data collection in 2008. In 2020, 472,000 applications for international protection were lodged in the EU, a decrease of 32% compared to 2019. The majority of people applying for international protection were citizens of Syria and Afghanistan, followed by people from Venezuela and Colombia as well as Iraq and Pakistan. The EU countries receiving most applications for international protection were Germany, Spain and France.

All EU member states are signatories to the Geneva Refugee Convention (GRC) and have committed to granting protection to persons who have a well-founded fear of being persecuted upon return on grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Moreover, all EU member states have signed the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which specifies rights for everyone living in the EU, such as the right to be protected from refoulement. EU member states are also bound by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (EU CFR) specifying some important rights for refugees and asylum-seekers, such as the right to asylum, the principle of non-refoulement, the right to an effective remedy and rights of the child.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Facts and Figures

- What events have had an impact on the number of refugees in your country?
- How many persons filed an asylum application last year?
- What are the countries of origin of the asylum-seekers?
- What is the ratio of female to male applicants for international protection?
- How many unaccompanied minors applied for asylum?
- What percentage of the total population are refugees?

In 2020, the number of refugees in EU countries accounted for around 0.6 per cent of the EU's total population. However, the vast majority of refugees, namely 86 per cent, were hosted in developing countries. Over 5.5 million refugees fleeing from the war in Syria found refuge in the countries neighbouring Syria and more than 3.6 million in Turkey (UNHCR "Figures at a Glance" (<https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>) as well as data. [unhcr.org](https://www.unhcr.org)).

In addition, the European Union has adopted a number of directives and regulations governing asylum-related issues. These include the **Reception Conditions Directive** (see p. 14) setting out minimum material reception conditions for applicants of international protection, the **Asylum Procedures Directive** (see p. 14) which sets minimum standards for asylum procedures, the **Qualification Directive** which sets out the conditions for the qualification and status of nationals of non-EU countries or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection (that is to say, refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection), and the **Dublin III Regulation** (see p. 14). These directives and regulations must be interpreted in light of the EU Fundamental Rights Charter and must be in line with international treaties such as the GRC or the ECHR. All EU member states also have national laws that further regulate the asylum procedures in their country.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### National Laws and Asylum Procedure

- Which national laws regulate the asylum procedure in your country?

## Asylum Authorities and Asylum Procedures



All EU member states must ensure that applicants for international protection have **access to effective asylum procedures, including the right to appeal**, regardless of whether an application is made in the territory of the country, at the border, in territorial waters or the transit zones of the member states. The common standards on procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection are set out in the **EU Asylum Procedures Directive** (APD 2013/32/EU). This Directive lays down procedural guarantees for applicants for international protection, such as the right to a personal interview, the right to receive information and the right to appeal. It also stipulates that each EU member state must ensure that an asylum authority “is provided with appropriate means, including sufficient competent personnel, to carry out its tasks” and that “the personnel [...] are properly trained”.

That is to say, the asylum authorities do not have to examine in substance whether the applicant qualifies for international protection.

An application may be considered inadmissible only: if another member state has granted international protection; if a country which is not a member state is considered as the first country of asylum, or a safe third country; if a subsequent application lodged after a final decision presents no new facts; or if a dependant family member lodges an application and their situation would not justify a separate one.

Applicants have the right to remain in the country while their application is being examined. Exceptions may be made in the case of a subsequent application.

The **Reception Conditions Directive** (RCD, 2013/33 EU) lays down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection, including housing, food, clothing, and a daily expense allowance (see also p. 16). Member states must ensure that asylum-seekers have the right to access material reception conditions while they are waiting for a decision under the Dublin III Regulation.

Member states must **inform** applicants within 15 days after an application has been lodged of any **benefits** that they are entitled to and any **obligations** relating to reception conditions. Furthermore, they must ensure that applicants are provided with information on who provides legal assistance and who can provide help or information about available reception conditions.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Asylum Authorities

- Which official authority is responsible for the asylum procedure in your country?
- What is the structure and internal organisation of the asylum authority?

### APPLICATION AND ADMISSIBILITY PROCEDURE

The Asylum Procedures Directive contains very specific rules on how an application for international protection has to be processed. For instance, it stipulates that an application made to the asylum authority that is competent under national law for such applications must be **registered** within three working days after the application is made. Member states must ensure that applicants have “an **effective opportunity to lodge it as soon as possible.**” Member states may require, however, that an application is lodged in person or at a designated place. If asylum-seekers do not lodge their application, member states are allowed to consider such applications as withdrawn.

The **Dublin III Regulation** establishes the criteria for determining which EU member state is responsible for examining an application for international protection (see also p. 15).

If a member state to which an application was submitted decides that another member state is responsible, it can state that the application is **inadmissible**. Inadmissible applications do not have to be examined on their merits.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Filing an Application and Admissibility Procedure

- Where are applications for international protection to be filed?
- What happens after the lodging of an application for international protection?
- If an admissibility procedure exists: What happens in the admissibility procedure?
- Where are asylum-seekers accommodated during the admissibility procedure?
- Can asylum-seekers be expelled during the admissibility procedure?

## » Dublin III Regulation and EURODAC

The **Dublin III Regulation** establishes the criteria for **determining which EU member state is responsible** for examining an asylum application that has been lodged in one of the member states by a third country national or stateless person. Its aim is to ensure that asylum applications are examined in substance in only one member state, and that individuals do not submit asylum applications in multiple countries.

Dublin III also sets out in detail the hierarchy of the criteria and types of evidence which are to be considered when an application is examined. These include proof that an application is under examination in another member state, that the applicant entered a member state illegally from another member state, the presence of family members or issuing of a visa or residence document. These criteria are applied to the first application lodged by the applicant in a member state.

Member states also use the data supplied by **Eurodac**, the European Database storing fingerprints of foreign nationals who are present illegally in an EU country as well as of asylum-seekers. If tickets, invoices and other documents suggest that the applicant previously entered another EU member state, a request is sent to this member state asking the state to take back the applicant. If a category 1 match is found by Eurodac which proves that the applicant has previously lodged an application in another Dublin III country, a request to take back the applicant is sent to the member state. If a Eurodac search returns a category 2 match (has illegally crossed the external border of the EU) or category 3 match (has been found to be illegally present in the territory of an EU country) and not submitted an application for international protection, the applicant may be allowed to submit an asylum

application. Moreover, EU member states are allowed to initiate Eurodac searches on an asylum applicant if the data are relevant to the examination of the application.

When determining the responsible member state, an important consideration must be whether the transfer of an applicant to that member state might lead to a risk of a violation of the applicant's **fundamental rights or human rights, in particular the right to private and family life** (Article 7 EU CFR, Article 8 ECHR) or **freedom from torture and inhuman and degrading treatment** (Article 4 EU CFR, Article 3 ECHR). To avoid any such risk, the Dublin III Regulation contains provisions which allow and even oblige the member states to **take on the responsibility** for examining the application for international protection lodged with them (see the 'dependent persons clause' and 'discretionary clauses' of the Dublin III Regulation).

Moreover, all member states can agree to examine an application lodged in another member state, if they have received a request from the responsible member state before a first decision regarding the substance has been taken, provided the asylum-seeker has given their consent in writing. They can also take charge of an applicant on humanitarian grounds in order to bring together family members.

The **transfer of an applicant** to the member state responsible for examining the application has to be carried out within six months of the responsible member state accepting the request. If the transfer is not carried out within six months, the responsible member state is no longer obliged to take back the applicant and responsibility is transferred to the member state that made the request. If the transfer could not be carried out because the applicant was imprisoned, the time limit may be extended to 12 months; if the applicant absconded, the time limit may be extended to 18 months.

### FACT BOX

## *Unaccompanied and Separated Children and Age Assessment*

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other international instruments define the child as a person under 18 years of age. In some countries, a distinction is made between children under 14 years of age and children over 14.

Unaccompanied and Separated Children enjoy particular procedural guarantees in asylum procedures. Member states must, for example, ensure that minors are represented by a legal representative. Member states must also respect the specific needs and rights of children. →



When assessing a minor's eligibility for refugee status, states must be aware that an act of violence not considered as persecution where an adult is concerned, may be considered persecution when perpetrated against a child. Many children are victims of specific kinds of persecution, such as recruitment as a child soldier, child trafficking, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, forced labour, forced marriage, or sexual exploitation. The best interests of the child must be the primary consideration for the member state. Interviews must be conducted in a manner that ensures that account is taken of the minor's age and maturity, and by a person who is familiar with the needs of minors (see Unit 2).

In the absence of identity documents, and if there are doubts concerning the applicant's age, the asylum authorities of EU member states may carry out an **age assessment**, for example medical examinations, to determine whether an applicant is under 18. Currently there is **no method which can exactly identify the age of an individual and there are concerns about the invasiveness and accuracy** of the methods used. In any case, methods should be respectful of individuals' human dignity.

In all actions and decisions concerning a child, states are required by international and EU law (e.g. EU Convention of Fundamental Rights, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) to show due consideration of the best **interests of the child**. If there are any doubts as to how old a person is, he or she should be treated as a minor. This principle is also reflected in the APD, which states that if any doubts remain concerning an applicant's age after an age assessment, the member state must assume that the applicant is a minor.

A comprehensive publication on age assessment practice in Europe has been published by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO 2013). It also provides an overview of national legal and policy frameworks and of the age assessment methods in use in different countries



## COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

### Age Assessment

- Is there a legal provision that regulates age assessment? If yes, which legal provision regulates age assessment?
- Which age assessment methods are used in your country?
- What happens if an expert opinion states that a person is over 18 but doubts remain?

**The Reception Conditions Directive (RCD)** sets out standards for the material support, documentation, accommodation, access to education and access to the labour market of asylum-seekers. EU member states must provide material reception conditions **as soon as persons apply** for international protection. These reception conditions must provide an **adequate standard of living** "which guarantees their subsistence and protects their physical and mental health". Moreover, asylum-seekers are entitled to "necessary **health care**, which must include, at least, emergency care and essential treatment of illnesses and of serious mental disorders". Support must also be provided for persons to which the Dublin III Regulation applies. Member states are allowed to restrict the provision of material reception conditions to applicants who lack sufficient resources.

All persons lodging an application for international protection must receive, within three days, a **document** which certifies their status as an applicant or states that they are allowed to stay on the territory of the member state while the asylum application is being examined.

## RECEPTION AND DOCUMENTATION

Everyone, including applicants for international protection, has the right to an adequate standard of living, including accommodation, food and water (Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ICESCR). Individuals' rights, such as the protection of human dignity (Article 1), the right to physical integrity (Article 3) and the right to healthcare (Article 35) are also recognised in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (EU CFR).





## COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

### Reception of Applicants for International Protection

- Where are applicants for international protection accommodated during the admissibility procedure?
- Where are applicants for international protection accommodated after the admissibility procedure?
- Which material support (e.g. food, clothing, money) do asylum-seekers receive?
- Do asylum-seekers have access to health care?
- Which laws regulate reception conditions for applicants for international protection?



## COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

### Outcomes of the Asylum Procedure

- What are the possible outcomes of asylum procedures? Please also explain the legal basis for these.
- In which order are the possible outcomes determined?



## COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

### Further Competences of the Asylum Authorities

- Which further competences does the asylum authority have?

## EXAMINATION PROCEDURE

Unless an application for international protection is declared inadmissible, EU member states must “process applications [...] in an **examination procedure**” in accordance with the basic principles and guarantees of the APD. A decision on the application must be taken **as soon as possible** but no later than **six months after the application was lodged**. This time limit starts on the day the member state responsible for the examination is determined and the applicant is on the territory of that member state and has been taken charge of by the competent authority. The time limit may be extended in exceptional cases, for instance if complex issues of fact or law arise or if the delay is caused by the failure of the applicant to comply with the obligation to cooperate with the competent authorities. However, all examination procedures must be concluded within 21 months from the date the application was lodged.

Decisions must be communicated **in writing** and must provide **information** on how they can be challenged.

The APD stipulates that the authority must “**first determine** whether the applicants qualify as **refugees** and, if not, determine whether the applicants are **eligible for subsidiary protection**”. Additionally, decisions must be taken “individually, objectively and impartially.” The applicant must be given the opportunity of a **personal interview** on the substance of the application. The determining authority must obtain **information from various sources**, such as the EASO, the UNHCR and relevant international human rights organisations, as to the general situation prevailing in the countries of origin.

The **Qualification Directive (2011/95/EU)** contains qualification criteria for the persons entitled to asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.

### » Refugee Status Determination

Establishing whether a person has a **well-founded fear of persecution** always involves **anticipatory decision making**. The concept of fear of persecution hinges on the existence of a real risk of persecution, that is, on the question of whether or not the applicant is likely to be persecuted after their return to the country of origin. This risk does not relate to events in the past but is based on an assessment of the future. Any persecution suffered by the applicant in the past can be considered an indicator of likely persecution in the future. Even if an applicant was not persecuted in the past, there may be reasonable grounds to fear persecution in the future. Even post-flight reasons, that is circumstances that occurred or activities the applicant has been engaged in since they left their home country, may be reasons for granting asylum. Examples include fear of persecution when the applicant converted to a different religion in the country of asylum. The assessment hinges on judgements of the applicant’s need for protection at the time of assessment.

Applicants do not need to provide evidence to support every claim, if they have made a genuine effort to provide evidence and substantiate their application, if the lack of relevant evidence can be sufficiently explained or if the statement that was put forward was found to be plausible and coherent (see Article 4 Section 5 of the Qualification Directive).

If there is reason to believe that the applicant risks persecution only in some regions of the country of origin, an **internal flight or relocation alternative** may exist. An internal flight or relocation alternative exists if there is a region in the country in which the applicant will not be persecuted, to which they can travel safely and legally, to which the applicant can reasonably be expected to move,

that is to say where their economic survival is guaranteed, and where permanent protection is afforded. Both EU law and international human rights law recognise decisions by states to provide an internal flight or relocation alternative. However, in keeping with international human rights law, the applicant must be in a position “to safely and legally travel to and gain admittance to that part of the country and can reasonably be expected to settle there”. If this is the case, the application for international protection would need to be rejected.

The Qualification Directive also sets out standards relating to the content of refugee status. Persons entitled to asylum must receive renewable **residence permits** valid for at least three years and are entitled to **travel documents**. They must also be granted **access to employment** and training as well as procedures for the recognition of qualifications. Persons granted refugee status are entitled to the same **social assistance** as is provided to nationals of that member state and have **access to healthcare** under the same eligibility conditions as nationals. The Directive contains also provisions on access to integration facilities and access to accommodation.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Rights and Obligations of Persons entitled to Asylum

- What are the rights and obligations of refugees in your country?
- Are they the same as the rights and obligations of nationals?

### » Determining Subsidiary Protection Status

The GRC does not include regulations for subsidiary protection. The subsidiary protection regulations originally derived from judgments and decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which were subsequently integrated into the EU Qualification Directive. The Directive states that an applicant who does not qualify for refugee status or whose refugee status has been withdrawn may be **eligible for subsidiary protection**. This is applicable if the applicant would face a **real risk** of suffering serious harm if they return to the home country. **Serious harm** is defined as facing the death penalty or execution, torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. It also includes serious threats to the individual because of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict (i.e. ECHR), Article 2 - Right to life, ECHR, Article 3 - Prohibition of torture, or the Protocols No. 6 and No. 13 to the Convention). Just as asylum decisions, the decision as to whether an applicant is

granted subsidiary protection hinges on whether or not the applicant is likely to face a real risk of suffering serious harm after their return to the country of origin.

Even though beneficiaries of subsidiary protection have similar protection needs as people with refugee status, the Qualification Directive still differentiates between these two groups in relation to their access to social welfare as well as the issuing of residence permits: Member states are allowed to limit social assistance to core benefits for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. Residence permits for persons with refugee status must be valid for at least three years, whereas such permits for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection must be valid for only at least one year (and in case of renewal, for at least two years).

Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are entitled to **travel documents**, if they are unable to obtain a national passport. They must also be granted **access to employment** and training as well as be allowed to apply for the recognition of qualifications. Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection **have access to healthcare** under the same eligibility conditions as nationals of the member state. The Directive also obliges states to grant access to integration facilities and accommodation.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Subsidiary Protection

- Which additional national rules apply when decisions are taken whether or not subsidiary protection should be granted?
- How long are beneficiaries of subsidiary protection entitled to reside in the country?



## Exclusion and Cessation Grounds

The Qualification Directive contains **exclusion grounds** which relate to Article 1 D, E and F of the Geneva Refugee Convention (GRC).

Refugee status is not granted to persons who either **do not need** it or **do not to deserve** it because there are serious reasons to believe that the person has committed a crime against peace, a war crime or a crime against humanity; a serious non-political crime outside the country of refuge prior to admission; or an act contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

However, the Qualification Directive also contains rules on revocation, ending of or refusal to renew refugee status which are not compatible with the GRC. For example, the Qualification Directive deprives persons of refugee status if they are regarded as a risk to the security of the member state.

The Qualification Directive contains exclusion grounds in relation to subsidiary protection that reflect the exclusion clauses in Article 1 F of the GRC. Moreover, an applicant can be excluded from subsidiary protection for other reasons not contained in the GRC, for example if they constitute a danger to the community or to the security of the member state in which they are present.

Persons who fall under the exclusion clauses are not considered refugees or persons entitled to subsidiary protection. However, since the prohibition of torture takes precedence under international human rights law, even a person who is not entitled to international protection may still not be returned to their country of origin. The standards for procedures for withdrawing international protection are set out in the Asylum Procedures Directive (APD).

The Qualification Directive also sets out **cessation grounds**, that is the conditions under which beneficiaries of international protection cease to be refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. They state that a person **ceases to be a refugee** if they voluntarily enjoy again the protection of the country of origin or have acquired a new nationality and enjoy the protection of this country; if they have voluntarily re-established themselves in the country of origin; or because the situation in the country of origin has changed so significantly, and not only on a temporary basis, that the fear of persecution can no longer be seen as well-founded. These provisions mirror the **cessation clauses under Article 1 C of the GRC. A person ceases to be eligible for subsidiary protection** when the circumstances which led to the granting of protection no longer exist or have changed so significantly, and not only on a temporary basis, that protection is no longer needed.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Further Exclusion Grounds

- Do national laws include provisions for further exclusion grounds? If yes, which grounds are listed?

## » Right to Reside on Humanitarian Grounds

People who have not been granted refugee or subsidiary protection status may still be granted leave to remain on humanitarian grounds. According to Article 7 EU CFR and Article 8 ECHR, everyone has the right to respect for their private and family life. States therefore have to provide persons who are staying irregularly with a residence permit if there would otherwise be a breach of Article 8 ECHR. Although Article 8 ECHR does not guarantee the right to a particular type of residence permit, the ECtHR has stressed that the holders of a residence permit must be allowed to reside in the country and be given the right to private and family life.

The right to remain on humanitarian grounds is determined by the domestic law of a member state and may differ between EU member states.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Right to Reside on Humanitarian Grounds

- Which national laws regulate the right to a residence permit on humanitarian grounds?
- Which groups of people are entitled to obtain a residence permit according to the laws?
- What are holders of a residence permit granted on humanitarian grounds entitled to (e.g. work permit)?

## APPEALS PROCEDURES

According to EU and international law, individuals must be entitled to appeal against decisions denying them international protection. This right to appeal is generally referred to as “effective legal remedy”.

With reference to Articles 13 and 3 ECHR, the ECtHR has explained what an effective remedy is for asylum-seekers

facing expulsion. In order for a remedy also to be effective in practice, the following safeguards must be in place: sufficient time to file an appeal, sufficient time to notify asylum-seekers of a decision or of their right to appeal or automatic suspensive effect. In addition, Article 47 EU CFR states that everyone has a “right to an effective remedy and to a fair trial”. This means that the review must be conducted by a tribunal. It thus contains wider safeguards than Article 13 ECHR.

The APD also includes regulations for appeals procedures. It states that applicants for international protection have the **right to an effective remedy before a court or tribunal** if they have been refused international protection. The review must include a **full and ex nunc examination** of both facts and points of law, including those that were unknown at the time the decision was taken. Time limits must be reasonable. The Directive requires EU member states to **allow applicants to remain in the country** until the time limit to lodge an appeal has expired and until the outcome of the appeal has been decided. There are some exceptions to this regulation, for example when applications are considered manifestly unfounded or inadmissible.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Appeals against Denial of International Protection

- What are appeal procedures like in your country?
- How long do applicants have to submit an appeal?
- With which authority does an appeal have to be lodged?
- Which authority has the competence to examine an appeal?
- Are applicants allowed to include new facts and evidence in the appeals procedure?
- What are the possible outcomes of an appeal?
- Can a further appeal be filed against the new decision? If it can, what is the procedure like and which authorities are involved?

## Legal Assistance and Representation and Other Actors in the Asylum Procedure

### LEGAL ASSISTANCE

To guarantee a fair procedure, applicants for international protection need to have access to legal assistance. Article 47 EU CFR provides that “[e]veryone shall have the possibility of being advised, defended and represented [...]” and that “[l]egal aid shall be made available to those who lack sufficient resources in so far as such aid is necessary to ensure effective access to justice [...]”.

The APD obliges EU member states to ensure that **free legal assistance and representation** is granted in the appeals procedures if requested by the applicant. This assistance must include the preparation of the required documents. Moreover, a legal representative must be available in the appeals procedure who can participate in the hearing before a court or tribunal on behalf of the applicant. However, member states do not have to grant free legal assistance and representation if the appeal is deemed not likely to be

successful by a court or other competent authority. Member states may also demand proof that the applicant lacks sufficient financial resources, or may impose financial and/or time limits.

The APD further stipulates that applicants must be given the opportunity **to consult, at their own cost, a legal adviser** on matters relating to their applications **at all stages of the procedure**, including personal interviews.

These legal advisers must have access to the information in the applicant's file and to closed areas, such as detention facilities and transit zones, for the purpose of consulting the applicant.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Legal Assistance/Representation

- Which laws regulate legal assistance for applicants for international protection in your country?
- In which phases of the procedure do applicants have the right to legal assistance?
- Can applicants obtain legal assistance apart from state-provided legal assistance (e.g. NGOs, attorneys)?

### EXPERT WITNESSES

According to the APD, member states must ensure that decisions on applications for international protection are taken after an appropriate examination. To that end, member states must ensure that the personnel examining applications and taking decisions can **seek advice from experts** on particular issues, such as medical, cultural, religious, child-related or gender issues.

Experts can also provide evidence relating to the effects of the persecution on the applicant, on the situation in the country of origin, or evidence of the existence of a certain social group to which the applicant claims to belong.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Expert Witnesses

- Which laws regulate the involvement of expert witnesses?
- What evidence can expert witnesses provide?
- Give examples of expert witnesses' contributions.

## UNHCR

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees was established in 1951 by the United Nations General Assembly. Its mandate is set out in the UN's statute of 1950. In accordance with the Geneva Convention on Human Rights, UNHCR's primary purpose is to protect and support refugees, stateless and internally displaced people, asylum-seekers as well as people who want to voluntarily repatriate. UNHCR also supports states in their efforts to find permanent solutions for refugees. If a voluntary return to the country of origin is not possible, UNHCR supports the integration of refugees in the first country of asylum or resettlement to a third country.

In cooperation with numerous NGOs and UN partner agencies and organisations, UNHCR also supplies food and technical equipment, for example for the construction of wells or agricultural machinery, and the construction of homes, schools and hospitals. There are now UNHCR offices in over 138 countries with more than 17,000 staff. The tasks and activities of UNHCR vary significantly between the different countries and settings.

During times of displacement, UNHCR provides emergency assistance and arranges transport and assistance for people who wish to return home. In countries without functioning national asylum systems, UNHCR undertakes refugee status determination. In Europe, UNHCR offices focus on monitoring national asylum procedures to make sure they take account of applicants' need for protection. UNHCR also tries to ensure reception standards that respect applicants' dignity, and promotes long-term solutions.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### UNHCR

- Is there a UNHCR representation in your country?
- How does UNHCR support the asylum procedure in your country?



## Literature

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## Useful Links

### LEGAL DOCUMENTS

- » **International (incl. GRC, UNHCR-Statute, ECHR and Protocols)**

**Refworld:** <http://www.refworld.org>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

- » **EU**

**Asylum Procedures Directive (APD):** Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection (recast) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013L0032&from=en>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

**Qualification Directive:** Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (recast) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:337:0009:0026:en:PDF>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

**Reception Conditions Directive (RCD):** Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013L0033&from=en>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

**Dublin III Regulation:** Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:180:0031:0059:EN:PDF>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

These instruments are also available at Refworld:  
<http://www.refworld.org/publisher/COUNCIL.html>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

## STATISTICS

EUROSTAT

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/statistics-illustrated>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

UNHCR

<http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

## AUTHORITIES, COURTS, NGOS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

EASO (European Asylum Support Office)

<https://easo.europa.eu>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

ECRE (European Council on Refugees and Exiles)

<http://www.ecre.org>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

IOM (International Organisation for Migration)

<http://www.iom.int>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)

<http://www.unhcr.org>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

## INFORMATION AND TRAINING MATERIALS

EASO. *Training and Quality.*

<https://www.easo.europa.eu/asylum-support-training/asylum-processes-quality>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

UNHCR. 1989. *Determination of Refugee Status, Training Module.*

<http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3ae6b35co.pdf>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

UNHCR. 2005. *Self-Study Module 1: An Introduction to International Protection. Protecting Persons of Concern to UNHCR.*

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/4214cb4f2.html>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

UNHCR. 2005. *Self-Study Module 2: Refugee Status Determination. Identifying who is a Refugee.*

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/43141f5d4.html>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

UNHCR. 2019. *Handbook and Guidelines on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees*, reissued 2019.

<https://www.unhcr.org/publications/legal/5ddfcd47/handbook-procedures-criteria-determining-refugee-status-under-1951-convention.html>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)



## Activities



### Activity 1: Analysis of case studies

1

**Form of activity:** Individual work and/or group work, discussion in plenary session.

**Duration:** 60 minutes (15 minutes per case, 30 minutes for presenting and discussing the results in the plenary session).

**Description:** Participants are given case studies (see printable worksheet “Activity 1: Case studies”, p. 25) and are invited to decide individually or discuss in groups whether the individuals in the examples are refugees. To help answer these questions, they may refer to the Geneva Refugee Convention and other international instruments of human rights law. Possible questions to be discussed: Do the individuals portrayed in the case examples fear persecution? Is their fear of persecution well-founded? If they are persecuted, is the kind of persecution they are exposed to related in any way to the grounds laid down in the Convention?

The results are then presented to the plenary session.







## Printable worksheet **Activity 1: Case studies**

### Case study 1

#### **IS MR. H. A REFUGEE?**

Mr. H, a farmer with no political opinions, belonged to an ethnic minority, many members of which wanted more autonomy compared with the ethnic majority governing the country. In support of their ideas certain members of the minority undertook guerilla activities. Each time one of these guerrilla actions took place Mr. H., because of his ethnic origin, was threatened by some of his neighbours belonging to the ethnic majority. He asked the authorities, composed of people from both ethnic groups, for protection; however, they were so overcome by the events they could not grant the protection requested. In addition, Mr. H. also received threats from extremist members of his own ethnic group who blamed him for not taking their side.

Tension grew in the country, provoking the deaths of many citizens. Following the murder of three members of his family living in the same village without the perpetrators being identified, Mr. H. obtained a passport, left his country of origin by plane and arrived in a third country where he requested asylum.



### Case study 2

#### **Is MS. C. A REFUGEE?**

Tired of economic restriction imposed by the government in her country, Ms. C decided to seek bluer skies. She left her country after obtaining a passport and exit visa valid for 3 months and travelled to country X. In country X, she met an old friend who had fled her country because of political problems and who had received refugee status in X. Her friend continued her political activities against her country and soon convinced Ms. C. to participate in them.

Ms. C. took part in several public demonstrations against her government. After remaining in X for four months she claimed refugee status, indicating that her photo had been taken during a recent demonstration and had appeared on the front page of the local paper. Even without this, she said that the authorities had been made aware of her political activities outside the country. She also added that she would be imprisoned for six months to one year for having overstayed her visa.

Source and analysis of case studies: UNHCR. 1989. "Determination of Refugee Status (RLD 2)". <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3ae6b35co.pdf> (Accessed January 15 2022)





## ***Test yourself!***



### ***Please answer the questions below briefly!***

- 1.** What does “subsidiary protection” mean?
- 2.** What defines a “refugee”?
- 3.** Which group of individuals are excluded from refugee status?
- 4.** What is the difference between “migrants” and “refugees”?
- 5.** Define the principle of “non-refoulement”.
- 6.** What is the Dublin III Regulation?



# Unit 2:

## *The Personal Interview and Interview Techniques*

Klaus Krainz & Alexandra Bergaus

*“The interview is the core of the asylum procedure!”*

(Klaus Krainz)

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will be able to

- » describe the phases of the interview;
- » understand the interview techniques employed by asylum authorities;
- » adjust their own behaviour to interviewers' interview techniques;
- » understand applicants' rights and obligations.



### *Interview Techniques in the Asylum Procedure*

The police, asylum authorities and courts (Fisher and Geiselman 1992; Geerds 1976) apply several investigative interview protocols. The interview technique modules developed by EASO, the European Asylum Support Office (for example, the modules on Interview Techniques, Interviewing Children and Interviewing Vulnerable Persons) are all based on the **Asylum Interview Method (AIM)**. These modules have been implemented by many EU member states where AIM is now a standard interview technique. .

#### **ASYLUM INTERVIEW METHOD (AIM)**

The Asylum Interview Method (AIM) is based on research by the Norwegian educationalists Åse Langballe and Kari Trøften Gamst into the communication between police interviewers and children testifying about their experience of violence or sexual abuse. The interview model they developed was called Dialogical Communication Method (DCM). It was subsequently tested in a variety of police and child social welfare interviews where it proved a valuable tool for communication (Thoresen, Lønnum, Melinder, Stridbeck, and Magnussen 2006; Gamst and Langballe 2004).

Although DCM was developed for use with child witnesses in criminal proceedings, it soon became apparent that this method also lent itself well to interviewing of unaccompanied minors in an asylum context, many of whom had witnessed or been victims of violence in their country of origin or during their journey, and to vulnerable applicants in general. Vulnerable applicants are applicants with special needs, such as persons with mental health problems, persons who have been subject to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual abuse or elderly people, who may not be able to present their claims in a detailed and coherent manner without appropriate support (see Unit 9).

Interpreters can influence – wittingly or unwittingly – the course and the success of an interview, so it is essential for them to be familiar with interview techniques. In order to be able to convey important nuances, the interpreter should be aware of the interviewer's strategies and aims at every phase of the interview.

The objective of the AIM is to give the applicant the opportunity to provide relevant evidence. Following the sequential phases of the AIM helps interviewers to maintain focus and obtain accurate and reliable information.

**Main Principles of the AIM:**

- The interview is seen as a dialogue characterised by a harmonious relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee;
- The dialogue is conducted in an empathic manner. The interviewers should maintain an open approach to the information that is given and be prepared to entertain new hypotheses;
- The interviewer starts by giving a clear and detailed description of the purpose of the interview. The interviewer asks open questions and uses a method of communication that maximally supports the accurate and complete disclosure of information.

**Phases of a Personal Interview Conducted according to AIM** ▼**ASYLUM INTERVIEW METHOD (AIM)**

The interview is a dialogue between two people who can influence and modify each other's behaviour during the conversation; therefore, both influence and contribute to the outcome of the interview.

The effectiveness of the interview and the quality and quantity of the information gathered are significantly influenced by whether or not rapport can be built between the interviewer and the applicant. When interviewers use an empathic approach they are oriented towards the applicant, who is in focus, and willing and able to view the applicants' experience from their perspective rather than through a "Western European" lens. An empathic interview style further implies that the interviewer observes the applicant's verbal and non-verbal communication and seeks to integrate such behaviour into their rapport-building techniques, and that they are aware of the effects of their own verbal and non-verbal cues on the applicant's behaviour.

**The phases of the AIM are:**

1. Preparation
2. Opening the interview
3. Conducting the interview
4. Substance of the application
5. Closing the interview

**PHASE 1:****PREPARATION**

Interpreters are crucial for successful communication in asylum interviews and must therefore be included in all considerations in every phase of the interview.

In the preparation phase, such considerations concern the suitability of the interpreter, whether they are proficient in the applicant's language or dialect, and in cases of gender-based persecution, whether the applicant has made a request for a gender-specific interpreter (see Unit 3). Ideally, the issue of bias should already be addressed at

this stage: the interpreter should be asked whether the applicant is a family member or whether any other form of close relationship or dependency exists which might affect the objectivity of the interpretation. Such grounds for bias should be disclosed by the interpreter when the interpreter is contacted for an assignment or at the latest, before the start of the interview.

**COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION****Legislative Bases for the Provision of Interpreters**

- Which national laws regulate the provision of interpreters for personal interviews in your country?
- Should interviews with victims who have suffered infringements of their right to sexual self-determination be interpreted by interpreters of the same sex?
- What other national procedural guarantees are in place?

Involving the interpreter in the preparation phase also ensures that the interpreter can prepare properly for the interview. If the interviewer knows that themes will be addressed which may require terminological research, such information should be passed on to the interpreter. An applicant may, for example, argue that s/he is a nuclear physicist, so questions to assess the applicant's credibility may relate to nuclear physics.

If written information is available detailing the applicant's rights and obligations, this should also be consulted by the interpreter (see Useful Links).

Advance knowledge of the case facts and thorough preparation are some of the factors that help ensure the success of the interview. Another factor is proper organisational planning including the prior preparation of the interview room.

The ideal **seating arrangement** for the interview is a **triangle** (see diagram below), with the interviewer (and, if present, their typist) sitting on one side, the applicant and their representative on another side and the interpreter on the third side, at an equal distance from the applicant and the interviewer. Although it might sometimes seem more practical if the interpreter were to sit next to the interviewer, so they can assist in, for example, recording the names of persons and places correctly, this seating arrangement is likely to make the applicant feel that the interviewer and interpreter are collaborating and that they are alone against a mighty (institutional) opponent.

## PHASE 2:

### OPENING THE INTERVIEW

**Good rapport** between the applicant and the interviewer and a **trust-based environment** will put applicants at ease and help them to begin to talk. In a constructive and trust-based environment, applicants will also be more likely to disclose information about sensitive issues and find it more difficult not to tell the truth.

Before the start of the interview, the interviewer and the interpreter could meet the applicant in the waiting area and invite them into the interview room. This approach has several important advantages: it ensures a **respectful welcome**, it allows for a relaxed start with some small talk, and it establishes and makes visible the leading role of the interviewer.

Applicants should be welcomed in a culturally appropriate way. If there is uncertainty as to what is appropriate, interpreters with the same cultural background as the applicant might be able to give valuable tips.

The interview opens with an introduction of **the people present in the room** and an explanation of **their functions as well as their rights and obligations**

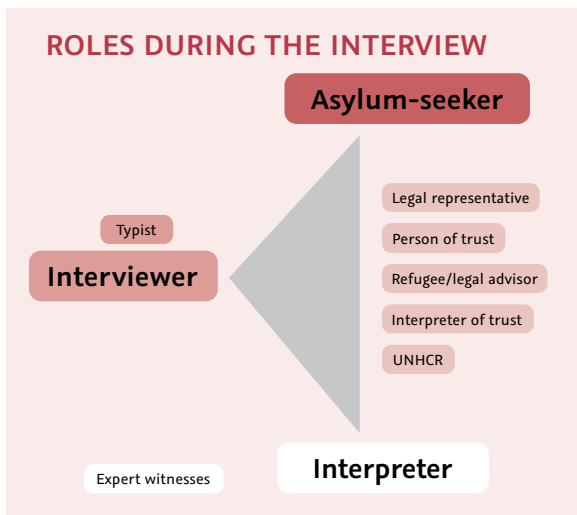
(specifically, the obligation to maintain complete confidentiality). Next, the applicant is asked whether they object to the presence of any person in the room; this mainly relates to whether there is any potential conflict of interest. This is the last opportunity for the interpreter to inform the interviewer of any personal relationship with the applicant or other potential bias.

The applicant will be reminded that they can **ask questions should communication problems arise**. The interviewer will check at the start and again at end of the interview whether the interpreter and the applicant can communicate effectively with each other. If any doubts arise, mutual understanding can also be checked during the interview.

For a successful interview, it is vital that interpreters immediately address any language and/or communication problems, and if necessary, suggest that a different interpreter be recruited. Failure to report communication problems (e.g. because of financial considerations), in an interview that provides the basis for the assessment of the credibility of the applicant's account and is decisive for their future, can have serious repercussions and, ultimately, may even lead to the deportation of the applicant to their country of origin.

In this phase, the focus is on **the establishment of trust** between the interviewer and the applicant. This can be done by engaging in small talk about neutral topics such as hobbies, the weather, the applicant's accommodation or journey to the place where the interview is being conducted. This basis of trust can only be created if the interpreter mirrors the positive and open tone of the interviewer. Notwithstanding their important contribution to rapport building, interpreters must not themselves engage in small talk with the applicant or ask independent questions, try to control the interview or engage in banter with the interviewer (see Unit 5). Interpreters are contracted by the authorities, yet they are expected to act as neutral language mediators without any personal interest and they are sworn to confidentiality.

To put the applicant at ease and provide orientation and direction, Interviewers should also **give information about the purpose and significance of the interview in the asylum process** and briefly outline its structure of the interview: The applicant will first be asked for their personal details before they are invited to talk about their reasons for seeking asylum. This is important because many applicants want to immediately talk about what for them is at the core of the interview, namely their reasons for fleeing their country. Similarly, applicants that have experienced traumatic events and have received professional counselling usually want to talk about their experiences and get the interview "over with" as quickly as possible.



The interviewer should also inform the legal representative of the applicant that at the end of the interview there will be an opportunity for them to ask questions and submit claims. This helps to avoid representatives asking questions during the interview which might undermine the positive atmosphere that has been built.

At this stage, standardised information about the asylum procedure and about the applicant's rights and duties should also be provided. This information should not be read or sight-translated from a written document by the interpreter. It is easier for the applicant to understand if **the applicant's rights and duties** are explained by the interviewer in non-bureaucratic language. This information should include a description of the role of the interpreter (that they adhere to a code of professional conduct and are bound to impartiality, confidentiality and provision of accurate and precise interpretation), the applicant's obligation to cooperate and tell the truth, the consequences of false information, support of counsellors or legal advisers, back-translation of the transcript (including that the applicant will have the opportunity to add or correct information in the transcript), duty to report to the authorities as well as consent to inquiries being made in the country of origin of the applicant (see Useful Links).

Furthermore, the applicant is informed that all information about their case will be kept confidential. If the claim involves sexual assault, not even the applicant's husband/wife will receive any information about the case.

The interviewer also points out (which is especially important with unaccompanied minors) that it is better to admit to having forgotten some details than to relate some invented facts just in order to fulfil what they surmise are the interviewer's expectations.

Finally, the interviewer should mention that refreshment is provided and remind the applicant that they may request a break. As the quality of an interview suffers if the interviewer, applicant or interpreter is tired or overwhelmed, a break should be taken every hour.

The way interviews are recorded varies across countries (see Unit 8). If recording is permitted, the applicant needs to be informed in this phase that the interview will be recorded.

### PHASE 3:

#### CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

After the introduction, the applicant is asked about their reasons for leaving their country of origin. The interviewer listens actively, acknowledging the applicant's narrative through non-verbal backchannelling to confirm

understanding and encourage them to give as complete an account as possible. Leading questions should not be asked at this stage as these might unduly influence the applicant and distort their account.

Interpreters also need to listen actively and use non-verbal backchannelling cues to confirm understanding. They should also take notes (see Unit 7) so as not to forget important details. Interpreters usually work in consecutive mode in asylum interviews and translate relatively short sections of two to three sentences in order to render the applicant's account as fully and accurately as possible (see Unit 6). This presents a problem in this phase of the interview when applicants should not be interrupted so as not to stop the flow of their narrative and negatively affect memory recall. A better option here would be simultaneous interpreting which both avoids interruptions and makes it possible for the interviewer to steer applicants back to the topic should they deviate.

### PHASE 4:

#### SUBSTANCE OF THE APPLICATION

The way we remember and recall past events leads to natural gaps and inconsistencies which in themselves should not be considered as lies or untruths. During Phase 4, the interviewer tries to fill these gaps and clarify inconsistencies by asking probing questions. The interviewer may also find it necessary to address (additional) important topics. The aim is to gather sufficiently detailed and reliable information for an assessment to be made as to whether or not the applicant meets the criteria to be granted international protection.

At this stage, the interviewer should use questioning techniques that can help the applicant to recall information. They should adapt their language to the needs of the applicant (age, level of maturity) and generally use simple and clear formulations, specifically when explaining complex concepts or legal terms. Particular attention should be paid to potential cultural misunderstandings. It is within the remit of the interpreter, who acts as a language and cultural mediator, to draw the interviewer's attention to such cultural differences and misunderstandings.

Interviewers should also observe the applicant's body language, to see whether they are getting tired, emotional or losing concentration, and suggest a break if necessary. Interviewers and interpreters also need to be aware of their own body language and avoid signals that may be perceived as lack of interest or as time stress.

If an applicant pauses, the interviewer can rephrase the applicant's narrative in their own words to check that they have understood correctly and also encourage the applicant to proceed. Interviewers – and interpreters – need to tolerate silences and should not immediately jump in and

ask a question. Silences give applicants time to retrieve facts from memory and can motivate them to continue with their account.

If inconsistencies are noticed, interviewers should not immediately confront the applicant with such discrepancies. Inconsistencies may also arise when the applicant has misunderstood the question, through inaccurate interpretation or when it was difficult to properly hear or understand what was being said. If applicants are to be confronted with inconsistencies this should be done at the end of the (final) probing phase. Such confrontations may be perceived by the applicant as being accused of lying which is likely to destroy the atmosphere of trust.

Interviewers use different types of questions depending on what is best suited to the situation (see FACT BOX: Types of Questions). Interpreters need to be aware of what question type is used and employ the same type so as not to jeopardise the outcome. Interviewers, and interpreters, must not use suggestive questions which imply that a certain answer should be given. Such questions may distort the applicant's memory.

Interviewers should avoid asking multiple questions at once, since often only one of these (usually the simpler and less difficult question) is answered while the rest are forgotten. Detailed probing into details, chronologies, emotions and memories associated with the event allows the interviewer to confirm the veracity of the account.

Before moving on to the next topic, the interviewer needs to review whether everything that is relevant has been addressed. Not until all topics have been dealt with in this way and all misunderstandings have been clarified and gaps filled does the interviewer address discrepancies and ask the applicant for explanations.

## PHASE 5:

### CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

When the interviewer feels that they have obtained a comprehensive understanding of what has happened, they should summarise the results for the applicant and confirm that all essential facts were addressed and recorded (e.g. by asking "Are these all your reasons?"). Applicant and can distort the communication process.

The closing phase is **largely shaped and regulated by national regulations and practice**. The EASO practical guide "Personal interview" (EASO 2015, 22-25) lists the following elements in the closing phase of the interview:

- "Ensure that all relevant aspects of the application have been covered
  - Summarise all reasons provided for the application for protection and ask the applicant if the summary is correct

- Ask the applicant if there is any additional information s/he would like to add
- Re-verify the understanding between the interpreter and the applicant
- Where applicable, offer others an opportunity to exercise their rights (e.g. legal advisors, representatives, guardians)
- Inform the applicant about the next stages in the process
  - When will the decision, approximately, be taken?
  - How will the applicant receive the information about the decision?
  - If relevant, who will make the decision?
  - The right to appeal in case of a rejection of the application
  - If the response is positive: documentation, family reunification, the right to work, etc.
- If applicable, rights and benefits while waiting for the decision
- If applicable at this stage, give the applicant an opportunity to comment on the interview report
- Offer the applicant an opportunity to ask questions"
 

The interviewer may also make the applicant aware of the **country of origin information (COI)**. This can be done by summing up relevant parts, handing over a copy or sending the information via email. At the end, the interviewer should remember to **thank the applicant, so as to end the interview in a courteous and professional way.**



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Closing the Interview, Country of Origin Information (COI), Interview Transcript

- What happens in your country, after all questions have been asked and all statements by the applicant have been made?
- In what way does the interviewer discuss the COI with the applicant?
- Does the applicant and/or their representative have the right to comment on the COI?
- Do representatives or persons of trust accompanying the applicant have the right to ask question or make comments?
- In what way is the interview recorded?
- Is a translation of the transcript provided to the applicant after the interview?
- Does the applicant have the opportunity to make changes or amendments to the transcript?
- Who signs the transcript?

## POST-INTERVIEW ACTIONS

After the interview, the interviewer should take time to **reflect** whether or not they have obtained all relevant information needed to decide on the application and plan the next procedural steps. This phase also includes **self-reflection** and **self-evaluation**.

The interviewer and the interpreter should provide each other with **feedback**, especially when they have not worked together before. Post-interview actions may also include preparing payment forms.





## Types of Questions

### Productive Questions

- **Open questions:** Aim at getting as much information as possible.

*"Please tell me what you have experienced that made you leave your country."  
"Please tell me more about the day of the demonstration."*

- **Closed questions:** Give specific facts and offer no alternatives; most closed questions can only be answered with YES or NO.

*"Are you Christian?"  
"Did you participate in the fights that day?"*

- **Probing questions:** Aim at getting a more detailed description by making the applicant talk in more depth about the issue at hand.

*"You told me that you were arrested during the demonstration.  
Tell me what happened in the police station."*

- **Clarifying and reflective questions:** Aim at eliciting a correct description of the actual event.

*"When you said they were dangerous, what did you mean?"  
"Did I understand you correctly, you said you were arrested five days after the demonstration?"*

### Non-productive Questions

- **Judgemental questions:** Express an opinion and make the applicant defensive.
- **Suggestive questions:** Aim at leading the applicant to the desired or expected answer.
- **Plural questions:** Two or more questions wrapped in one complex query.
- **Multiple choice questions:** This type of questions usually limits the person in their answer. They might refrain from giving the correct (but not offered) third answer.



## References

- » Asylum Procedures Directive (APD): Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection (recast). Accessed January 15 2022. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013L0032&from=en>
- » European Asylum Support Office (EASO). 2015. *EASO Practical Guide: Personal interview*. Accessed January 15 2022. <https://easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/EASO-Practical-Guide-Personal-Interview-EN.pdf>
- » Fisher, Ronald P., and R. Edward Geiselman. 1992. *Memory Enhancing Techniques for Investigative Interviewing: The Cognitive Interview*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas.
- » Gamst, Kari, and Åse Langballe. 2004. *Children as Witnesses. An Empirical and Theoretical Investigation of the Communication between Interviewer and Child in Interview Situations: Development of Interview Methodology*. University of Oslo, Department of Special Needs Education: Dissertation.
- » Geerds, Friedrich. 1975. *Vernehmungstechnik* [Interview techniques]. Lübeck: Schmidt-Römhild.
- » Thoresen, Christian, Kyrre Lønnum, Annika Melinder, Ulf Stridbeck, and Svein Magnussen. 2006. "Theory and Practice in Interviewing Young Children: A Study of Norwegian Police Interviews 1985–2002." *Psychology, Crime & Law* 12 (6): 629–640.

## Basic Reading

- » European Asylum Support Office (EASO). 2015. *EASO Practical Guide: Personal interview*. Accessed January 15 2022. <https://easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/EASO-Practical-Guide-Personal-Interview-EN.pdf>



## Useful Links

EASO.

<https://easo.europa.eu>

(Accessed January 15 2022)

EASO. *Training Modules*.

<https://training.easo.europa.eu/lms>

(Accessed January 15 2022)

UNHCR. 1995. *RLD4 – Interviewing Applicants for Refugee Status*.

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ccea3304.html>

(Accessed January 15 2022)

UNHCR. 2009. *Self-Study Module 3: Interpreting in a Refugee Context*.

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/49b6314d2.html>

(Accessed January 15 2022)

## Activities



### Activity 1: Reflection and discussion

1

**Form of activity:** Plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 30 minutes (15 minutes for each example).

**Description:** Based on the two cases (see printable worksheet “Activity 1: Reflection and discussion”, p. 36), the participants discuss the function of interview techniques and assess the interviewers’ approach and technique. In this context, there should also be discussion of how interpreters can react if an interviewer’s way of interviewing is inadequate. Personal experiences should be shared with the other participants. For discussion of the cases, refer also to Units 4 and 9.





## Printable Worksheet **Activity 1: Reflection and discussion**

### Example 1

#### **Opening and establishing rapport**

Compare and discuss the consequences of the following approaches: One interviewer continues, after an initial short welcome and introduction, with the question "Describe the reasons why you left your country", while another female interviewer spends a lot of time in creating a atmosphere of trust before turning to the reasons for applying for protection.



## Printable Worksheet **Activity 1: Reflection and discussion**

### Example 2

#### **Procedure with victims of sex-related violence**

After subtle hinting that her reasons for fleeing her country have to do with sexual violence, the interviewer asks the applicant right away: "Have you been raped?" Discuss this strategy.





## Test yourself!



*Are the following statements true or false? Explain why the statement is true or false.*

1. Suggestive questions are good for obtaining as much information as possible.

True       False

2. The Dialogical Communication Method (DCM) is based on an empathic communication style.

True       False

3. The DCM has six phases.

True       False

4. The phases of the DCM can be applied in any order.

True       False

5. The interpreter has to be informed in advance about specific terminology that might be needed for the interview.

True       False

6. The applicant has to be informed at the beginning of the interview that they should say whenever there are communication problems.

True       False

7. The “free narrative” phase can be completely replaced by the “probing” phase 5.

True       False

8. The seating position in an interview is a classical triangle seating position.

True       False



# Unit 3:

## *The Basic Principles of Interpreting*

Elvira Iannone, Emanuel Matti, Ursula Böser,  
Maggie Sargeant & Eloisa Monteoliva

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will be able to

- » recognise what an interpreter does and the areas in which interpreters work;
- » give an overview of the training provision for public service interpreters;
- » understand the functions and value of professional bodies generally;
- » understand in which stages of the asylum application process interpreters are needed;
- » demonstrate knowledge of the legal status of the interpreter in asylum settings;
- » demonstrate awareness of the potential reasons for and consequences of conflicts of interest they may encounter;
- » calculate fees for interpreters working on a freelance basis;
- » recognise issues relating to liability;
- » express and evaluate the required competencies of interpreters.

### *Profession: Interpreter*

Interpreting is often described as the world's **second oldest profession**, although the significance of the role of the interpreter has been subject to various changes throughout history. As different languages have developed, people have managed to communicate across language barriers. However, only since the end of the 19th century has the profession of interpreter been established as an occupation in its own right (Roland 1999). The **professional title** of “interpreter” continues to be unprotected. In other words, anybody can claim to be an interpreter.

In common usage, an interpreter transfers the meaning of spoken words from one language to another, hence they deal with **oral communication**, in contrast to a translator who works with written (specialised) texts (for example, the translation of user manuals, contracts or novels). The generic term for both activities is “translation”. However, the terms “interpreter” and “translator” are often used imprecisely: “the translator” may be used when “the interpreter” should be used, or “the interpreter translates” may be used instead of “the interpreter interprets”.

Interpreting does not only refer to oral communication, but also to the transfer to and from sign languages. The oral versus written dichotomy commonly used to distinguish between interpreting and translation does not take into account such specialised practices nor does it account for activities such as sight translation (see Unit 8) or live subtitling (Pöchhacker 2004).

Interpreters are employed at international academic and political conferences, in business negotiations and at trade fairs, cultural events and so forth. Particularly when the event is more “official” and/or the interpreting is provided simultaneously in a booth, or consecutively (see Unit 6), the function is described as “**Conference Interpreting**”.

During conference interpreting, communication is usually between one person or several people and their audience or the press (for example, as they deliver a technical lecture or participate in a panel discussion). However, interpreting at a hospital or police station, as well as when assisting tourists, migrants or in the context of asylum proceedings, is seldom planned in advance and is mostly

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done ad hoc. Such conversations are almost exclusively between a professional and a client and always involve a smaller number of people. In these contexts, the work of the interpreter is often referred to as “**Community Interpreting**” or “**Public Service Interpreting**” (PSI) (Pöchhacker 2004, 15). The interpreter is referred to as “Community Interpreter” (Jacobsen 2009) or “Public Service Interpreter” (Hale 2011, 347). The terms medical, legal or social interpreting are frequently used to describe interpreting within particular areas of the public service. Hereafter, the interpreter will be referred to as “interpreter in asylum proceedings”.

## TRAINING

The professionalisation of interpreting only took place in the mid-20th century. For this reason, the establishment of **training institutes** in most European countries dates back to this period.

The practice of interpreting has only been subject to theory-based reflection since the end of the 1980s or beginning of the 1990s. This led to the establishment of **interpreting studies** in Europe. Initially, the focus of the discipline was conference interpreting; however, community interpreting and interpreting within specific areas of public service have been an important part of interpreting studies for more than 20 years now.

Training provision for public service interpreters is subject to **considerable variation across Europe** (ranging between, for example, countries with no training or very little training for public service interpreting and countries with full-scale training at postgraduate or university level; in between are countries offering sporadic training, such as small-scale training courses or in-house training). With the exception of a small number of countries that have been offering training for quite some time (for example, Sweden and Australia), training has long taken place **outside academic contexts**; only over the last few years have universities or colleges started to offer more and/or more extensive public service interpreter training. Some universities include modules on asylum interpreting in interpreter training programmes and offer training to future lawyers as part of Law degrees, such as Ghent University. If training is available, it often differs in content, duration, entrance and admission criteria, evaluation and assessment (Ozolins 2000). Recently, blended-learning formats (combining online media and classroom methods) have been used more regularly. The existing lack of trainers is sometimes addressed with train-the-trainers courses; sometimes training is also combined with train-the-user workshops. To cater for different language groups, training is also often non-language specific or combined, offering non-language specific sessions and some language specific sessions for practice.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Interpreter Training

- What types of training courses for (Public Service) Interpreting at postgraduate level are offered in your country?
- Which languages are covered in (Public Service) Interpreting courses in your country?

Following Hale (2007, 163), **challenges with regard to community interpreting training**, which also apply to asylum interpreting, fall into four major categories: a) general lack of recognition of the need of training, b) lack of compulsory pre-service training for practitioners, c) lack of adequate training programmes and d) considerable differences between training measures in terms of quality and effectiveness.

With respect to training in **asylum-related contexts**, **only a few specific training programmes** are available internationally. UNHCR, for instance, has been offering self-study modules (UNHCR 2009; see useful links) or booklets (UNHCR 2005; see useful links) for interpreting in a refugee context, or training workshops, mostly in-house and short-term, for interpreters (non-language specific). Apart from UNHCR, national asylum authorities may also provide in-house training for their interpreters. A small number of other non-profit or tertiary education institutions have also been providing training for the field (for example, inZone and the Cairo Community Interpreter Project; see their respective websites).

In an asylum context, we find interpreters with full-scale training, sworn and certified interpreters (who, depending on the respective national contexts, may or may not have undergone training), interpreters with some sort of training (in-house and/or small-scale) and interpreters with no training at all.

One challenge with regard to training is that it is hardly possible (due to rapidly changing geopolitical situations and crisis zones) nor financially feasible to offer full-scale training **for languages of limited diffusion**, which, however, are often needed in an asylum context. This complex language situation makes it necessary to use interpreters with a lower degree of training for languages where no full-scale training is available.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Training for Interpreters in Asylum Proceedings

- What types of specialised training courses for interpreters in asylum proceedings are offered in your country?

## PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

International, national and regional (conference) interpreter and translator associations have been established since the 1950s. They **represent the interests of the interpreting and translation profession, codify professional practice** and encourage the **professional development** of their members. The activities and services provided vary across professional organisations. They may include directories of members, job postings, professional development courses, advice on legal matters, defence of professional interests, education of the public and of clients about the importance of training and qualification of interpreters, and active representation in professional bodies and in negotiations with governments and administrative bodies. Professional associations also **act as gatekeepers** by setting criteria for membership (for example, work experience, academic qualifications, certifications and recommendation). For individual interpreters, being a member of an interpreter association can **signal professional status** (Pym, Grin, Sfreddo, and Chan 2013).

Some countries have professional associations that focus specifically on the interests of community or public service interpreters; in other countries, professional associations for interpreters mostly focus on aspects that are relevant for conference and business settings. To our knowledge, in none of the European or industrialised countries has a professional association been established that focuses exclusively on the interests of interpreters in asylum proceedings.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Professional Associations

- What professional associations for interpreters exist in your country and/or region?
- What are the admission criteria for new members?
- Do your national professional associations offer courses for professionalisation and further training which non-members can attend?

## Interpreters in an Asylum Context

During the asylum process, a decision is taken on whether a **claim for international protection** is valid in terms of the account given, and, if so, whether the asylum-seeker is therefore eligible for asylum and/or subsidiary protection (see Unit 1). This decision is based on the facts as determined by the authority or court to which the asylum-seeker has been able to respond. The statements made by the asylum-seeker in the interviews which form part of the inquiry are of central importance. Asylum-seekers need only to provide credible assertions relevant to their claim for asylum and do not have to provide proof. This means that the extant threat of persecution must be presented as authentic, real, and consistent but there is no need to provide evidence.

However, an asylum procedure can also lead to the decision that the applicant is not in need of protection and must, therefore, leave the country. This may result in deportation, provided that the appropriate travel documents and replacement travel documents are available and that the asylum-seeker will not leave the country voluntarily. Given the significant consequences of such decisions during the asylum procedure, **interpreters carry a great burden of responsibility** both in terms of their behaviour (see Units 4, 5 and 9) and with regard to the quality of interpretation (see Units 6 to 8).

Interpreting in asylum settings poses a great **challenge** to interpreters, one which is not only of a technical, but also

of a social or personal nature. Violation of human rights is often discussed in interviews. Applicants have often been traumatised and are victims of torture, physical, psychological and sexual violence. To deal with these difficult situations and to be able to protect themselves, interpreters in this field should be familiar with appropriate techniques to enable them to distance themselves from the events (see Unit 12). This is particularly relevant to interpreters who have been refugees themselves.

This is why the **professionalisation of interpreters in asylum settings** is so essential for trained and untrained interpreters. In order to deliver “good” interpretation, underpinned by an interpreter’s linguistic and technical skills, they must also be able to apply the appropriate techniques to maintain a professional distance and manage stress, and they must be acutely aware of professional ethics and what constitutes the role of the interpreter (see Units 4 and 5).

Interpreters may be required in **different stages** of the asylum application process, most importantly during the **initial asylum screening interview**, where the admission of an applicant’s claim or their return to a safe country is determined (Dublin Regulations; see Unit 1), **the personal interview**, where the applicant gets an opportunity to describe her/his reasons for claiming asylum (see Unit 2), and the **appeal process** against negative decisions. Where required, interpreters



may also provide interpreting services **during and after language analysis interviews**. Language analysis for the determination of origin is not used to determine the interpreting language required for interpreting purposes, but when an individual's claimed origin is in doubt. In a wider sense, interpreters in an asylum context also work for **border, visa and immigration authorities, legal advisers and representatives** and so-called **"hotspots" where refugees first enter Europe**. Usually, interpreters involved in the asylum application process work on a freelance basis for the competent asylum authorities, either directly or via a third party agency.

Interpreter recruitment is usually managed by national asylum authorities. National statutory **requirements or policies may stipulate the requirement to work as an interpreter in asylum proceedings**. Although the use of certified and/or trained interpreters is required in some countries, using untrained interpreters at asylum procedures is common practice, particularly as a result of shortage of trained interpreters in a required language pair, often for languages of limited diffusion.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Requirements for Interpreters in Asylum Settings

- What are the requirements for working as an interpreter in an asylum procedure (for example, training, certification, membership of an interpreter registry or aptitude tests)?
- How are interpreters for asylum interviews recruited in your country?
- Who decides which interpreters are called upon?

### THE SUBJECTIVE RIGHT TO AN INTERPRETER

The asylum procedure is usually conducted in the host country's official language(s), and protocols are written in this language. Where applicants for asylum lack the degree of proficiency in this language needed to enable them to take part in the hearing, the presence of an interpreter will be required.

According to the Asylum Procedures Directive of the EU (revised version 2013/32/EU; see Unit 1), the right to an interpreter is **regulated by EU law**, and as such it is closely related to **the right to a fair trial** (Article 47 Charter of Fundamental Rights) and the **right to good administration** (Article 41 Charter of Fundamental Rights). Article 15 Section 3 Paragraph C of the Asylum Procedures Directive (2013/32/EU) states that:

Member States shall take appropriate steps to ensure that personal interviews are conducted under conditions which allow applicants to present the grounds for their applications in a comprehensive manner. To that end, Member States shall:

(c) select an interpreter who is able to ensure appropriate communication between the applicant and the person who conducts the interview. The communication shall take place in the language preferred by the applicant unless there is another language which he or she understands and in which he or she is able to communicate clearly. Wherever possible, Member States shall provide an interpreter of the same sex if the applicant so requests, unless the determining authority has reasons to believe that such a request is based on grounds which are not related to difficulties on the part of the applicant to present the grounds of his or her application in a comprehensive manner (Asylum Procedures Directive (2013/32/EU).

Furthermore, national laws regulate the provision of interpreters (see Unit 2, "Legislative Bases for the Provision of Interpreters", p. 28).

In most countries, applicants do not have the right to be interviewed in their mother tongue, but in a language they can "understand". However, language choice is an important factor as it may determine how adequately applicants can express their claims and how well they are interpreted. In this context, it is worth noting that applicants seeking protection often do not have sufficient knowledge of one language which they are able to use in any context. For this reason, it is necessary to take account of the **individual's language repertoire**. The options chosen, in terms of expression and understanding in the interpreted language, must allow the applicant to be able to describe the event that has caused them to seek refuge.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Language of the Asylum Procedure

- In which way is the interpreted language chosen? Do national laws regulate the interpreted language?
- Do asylum-seekers have the right to choose the language?
- How and when do asylum authorities establish whether applicant and interpreter understand each other? What happens if there are communication problems (for example due to different dialects)?

In individual cases, an interpreter for a specific language combination may not be available at short notice. In such cases, two interpreters are required, with one interpreter passing on the message to the other by way of so-called **relay interpreting (using a “pivot language”)**. For example, in an English-speaking country this can be the case for interpretation from Multani via Punjabi into English or from Somali via Arabic into French.

*EXAMPLE: An applicant seeking asylum in Ireland speaks only Multani. The interviewer speaks English, so the interpreter interprets his speech into Punjabi; then the relay interpreter who does not know English interprets for the applicant from Punjabi into Multani.*

That is why it may be necessary to rely on family members to provide relay interpretation, in the case of preliminary police questioning. However, this may seriously jeopardise the establishment of relevant facts, since **this approach to interpreting is particularly prone to error.**

Article 15 Section 3 Paragraph B of the Asylum Procedures Directive provides that an applicant may request an interviewer of the same sex. The asylum authority must comply, wherever possible, unless they have reason to believe that the request does not relate to the applicant's ability to express their grounds for asylum. As mentioned before, Paragraph C provides that an applicant may request an interpreter of the same sex, and comes with the same proviso (see also Unit 2). This reflects the understanding that interviewees will be more likely to disclose certain types of information to an interlocutor of the same gender.

The Asylum Procedures Directive (Article 17 Section 2) foresees that member states may provide for audio or audiovisual recording of the personal interview. Some countries also include specific regulations regarding the recording of interviews in their national laws.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Recording Personal Interviews

- Do national laws in your country provide for the video or audio recording of personal interviews at asylum procedures?
- Are interviews actually recorded?

## THE LEGAL STATUS OF INTERPRETERS

In most countries, the interpreting profession is largely unregulated, with no statutory requirements for the work of interpreters. While in general there is often no need to be certified or sworn-in in order to work as a professional interpreter (with the exception of court interpreting), some individual employment sectors and registration bodies stipulate training requirements or registration in professional associations for interpreters.

There are differences in the legal status of interpreters in the asylum context across countries. In some countries, the legal status of interpreters depends on the interpreter's type of appointment (for example interpreters employed as regular employees by asylum authorities, as opposed to contracted freelance interpreters), other systems categorise interpreters based on their registration with interpreter registers. In some jurisdictions, (court) interpreters are treated as expert witnesses. This however does not mean that interpreters should act as expert witnesses and assess the credibility of applicant's claims, provide details on the applicant's origin or assess their language. Giving such expert opinions is not the role of the interpreter (also see Unit 4 and 5).



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### The Legal Status of Interpreters

- Which national laws govern the legal status of interpreters in your country?
- Does the law distinguish between different types of interpreters (for example, certified interpreters, registered interpreters, trained interpreters and untrained interpreters)?

## BIAS

As a general rule, an interpreter must always remain impartial, suspend any personal views and reflect what was said without any amendments or omissions in favour of one of the parties involved. In particular where interpreters are acquainted with or related to an applicant for asylum or anyone associated with a particular case, they must turn down an assignment and give their reasons for this. The same applies where interpreters have any personal or financial interest in the outcome of an interview (see also Unit 5).

## LIABILITY

Issues of liability arise where a person or entity suffers loss or damage through the negligent act of another, and an injured party is entitled to damages. Generally, interpreters may be held liable for their actions. National contract laws and tort laws differ considerably, however, and are outside the scope of this handbook.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Liability

- What are the general regulations for liability and tort law in your country?
- Are there specific regulations relating to the liability of interpreters in your country?
- Are there examples in your countries where interpreters have been held liable?

## RATES OF PAY FOR INTERPRETERS

Rates of pay for interpreting in an asylum context differ from country to country. They have also been subject to discussion in various countries. The fee structure and fees for sign language interpreting may also differ from the fee structure applicable to spoken-language interpreting. Generally, asylum and migration are matters for central government, and fees are often paid by the respective departments of the interior or internal affairs (or home office). Interpreting fees are often composed of an hourly (or half-hourly) rate for interpreting, plus other cost factors (for example travelling costs, costs for waiting times, and costs for the translation of additional documents or the on-sight translation of the written record/transcript).



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Rates of Pay

- What are the fees for interpreting in an asylum context in your countries?
- What is the specific fee structure?
- Who pays interpreters employed at asylum interviews?

## Competencies

What are the characteristics of a good interpreter? What skills do they need? Further to speaking two or more languages, other competencies are required to ensure high quality interpretation. That is why only trained, professional interpreters should be employed in asylum settings.

### A PROFILE OF THE IDEAL INTERPRETER'S PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

Kautz's handbook for the teaching of translators and interpreters (2002, 21-26) provides an extensive list of personal attributes and social competencies which interpreters and translators should bring to their work. While some of these may be rather generic or overly specific in relation to interpreting in an asylum context, they all merit consideration:

#### Intellectual traits

- Logical and forward thinking, with a highly developed ability to assess and analyse
- Ability to be highly creative
- Intuition
- Ability to be self-critical
- Ability to quickly gain an overview of a new subject area and to be motivated and interested

- Ability and willingness to communicate (including oral and written expression, open-mindedness, capacity for empathy, and rhetorical and discursive skills)

#### Psychological and physical traits

- Psychological and physical stamina (including ability to concentrate, perseverance, self-composure, high frustration threshold, and sensitivity)
- Flexibility
- Ability to show empathy with the unfamiliar

#### Traits relating to professional ethics

- Sense of duty and responsibility
- Loyalty
- Adaptability
- Discretion
- Ability to be modest yet self-confident
- Good manners

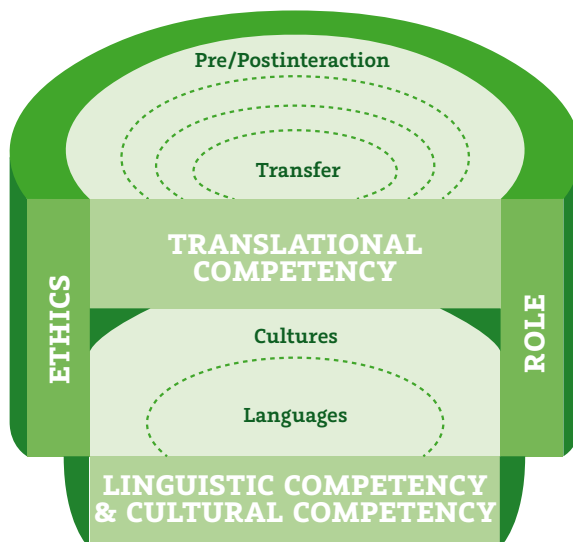
#### Specific requirements for interpreters

- Ability to work in a team
- A sense of tact
- Good presence
- Appropriate voice
- Memory
- Responsiveness
- Ability to work competently with modern communication technology

## A COMPETENCY MODEL FOR INTERPRETING

Pöchhacker's competency model for interpreting (Pöchhacker 2000) is a good graphic representation of what makes a good interpreter. It is not only a list of individual competencies; the diagram (see below) also demonstrates the relationship between the competencies. "The relationship, presented in the shape of a cylindrical section, is between basic **linguistic and cultural competency** (the base of the cylinder) and **translational competency** which forms the top of the cylinder. This is embedded in **problem awareness and professional ethics**. In this way, the model aims to show the gradual development of competency from the "bottom" to the "top", as well as the development from **linguistic competency to cultural competency or transfer competency to behavioural competency**" (Pöchhacker 2000, 45; own translation).

Besides linguistic, cultural and transfer competency, the most important prerequisite for a good interpreting performance is the capacity to **critically reflect upon one's own actions**. This awareness requires the ability to acknowledge one's weaknesses with respect to certain competencies. This should not be considered as negative, but rather as an opportunity to realise one's potential for enhancing individual competencies and to work on improving these competencies (see Unit 5 and 12).



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Norms and Competencies

- Do your national professional associations state what personal attributes and/or competencies interpreters need to have?
- Are there standards on interpreting issued by a national standards body in your country? If yes, do these standards address skills and competencies of interpreters?



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## Useful Links

### Videos and Training Resources

Cross-Cultural Communications. *Resources for Interpreters*.  
<http://www.cultureandlanguage.net/resources-for-interpreters>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

EU Directorate General for Interpretation. YouTube Channel.  
<https://www.youtube.com/user/DGInterpretation/videos>  
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Interpreter Training Resources. *Interpreter Training Resources*.  
<https://interpretertrainingresources.eu>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

ORCIT - Online Resources for Conference Interpreter Training  
<https://orcit.eu>  
(Accessed December 12 2021)

SCIC Interpretation Toolbox  
[https://ec.europa.eu/info/education/skills-and-qualifications/develop-your-skills/language-skills/interpretation-training-toolbox/scictrain-training-modules-interpreting-students\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/education/skills-and-qualifications/develop-your-skills/language-skills/interpretation-training-toolbox/scictrain-training-modules-interpreting-students_en)  
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<http://www.refworld.org/docid/4214cb4f2.html>  
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<http://www.refworld.org/docid/43141f5d4.html>  
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<http://www.refworld.org/docid/49b6314d2.html>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)



### Activity 1: Professional interpreter and competencies

1

**Form of activity:** Film clip and analysis with subsequent discussion in a plenary session.

**Duration:** 20 minutes (10 minutes film clip, 10 minutes group work).

**Description:** First the participants watch the following film clips. They then discuss the questions below in relation to the clips.

#### Film sequence 1:

*"President Obama's Anger Translator"* (by TDC)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6NfRMv-4OY>

- What happens in the video? What is the punch line?
- What does this video tell us about what is essential in the work of an interpreter?

#### Film sequence 2:

*"Never Take an Irish Person Literally"* (by Foil Arms and Hog)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9CV-aQ45VE>

- What happens in the video? What is the punch line?
- Which competencies would an interpreter need to have in a similar situation, i.e. what must an interpreter be able to do?

Next, the participants should discuss which competencies are the most important and how they interconnect, using the competency model (see p. 44). Personal experience may be used to illustrate this discussion.



## Activity 2: Payment

2

**Form of activity:** Individual work followed by presentation to the group and discussion.

**Duration:** 30 minutes (10 minutes individual work, 20 minutes group work).

**Description:** Calculation of an invoice for interpreting assignments.

An interpreter is called out on a weekday to assist with an asylum interview. The interview starts at 5.30 pm and finishes at 7.25 pm. To get to her destination, she has to travel 48 miles one way. She incurs parking costs of £15. On completion of her assignment, the interpreter is asked to make herself available for another hearing early the next day and is informed that she will be eligible for the overnight subsistence allowance.







## Test yourself!



1. What is the impact on asylum proceedings of the lack of institutionalised interpreter training and of the lack of protection for the profession of “interpreter”?
2. In which stages of the asylum process are interpreters required, and how/by whom are they recruited for each stage in your country?
3. Read the following example and answer whether the interpreter can be held accountable by the applicant and why.

*In an asylum interview, a freelance interpreter renders an applicant's year of birth incorrectly due to carelessness. The applicant is a minor; however, now the asylum authority assumes the applicant to be of legal age. As a result of this assessment, the applicant is no longer entitled to the full range of benefits.*

4. What are some of the challenges faced by interpreters in the asylum process?
5. What general competencies are required for interpreting? To what extent do these also apply to interpreters in asylum settings? Give examples.

# Unit 4:

## The Interpreter's Role

Sonja Pöllabauer

Translation: Ursula Stachl-Peier

*"I could of course say that interpreters have to be neutral and impartial. But the reality is different. You know that."*

*(Comment of an interpreter at asylum interviews)*



### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will be able to

- » describe and define the concept of role;
- » use it to describe the behaviour of interpreters in different situations;
- » develop an awareness of the challenges of interpreting at asylum interviews;
- » describe what role conflicts are;
- » discuss different solutions and strategies for solving role conflicts.

## Role

**Role** has been a central concept in social science and applied within a variety of academic disciplines including anthropology, psychology and sociology. The concepts of **role** and **role theory** were developed as a theoretical perspective in the 1950s and 1960s. Over the years, several theoretical approaches have emerged which focus on different aspects of role (Calhoun 2002).

Role is generally understood to refer to the position and status of a person in a particular social system (Baert 2006). It is the **set of norms** that guides people's behaviour in a given situation or context. When people interact, they adopt roles and perform these roles when interacting with others (Goffman 1961). Usually, there is an interdependence between different roles; for example, the role of "mother" is closely related to the role of "child". In many contexts, people have different, and occasionally even mutually exclusive roles, which Goffman called **role segregation** (Goffman 1961).

Roles are always associated with certain **expectations** concerning certain behaviours, rights and duties that a person has to fulfil. People learn, mostly unconsciously,

what expectations are associated with a given role as they grow up, and then expand this knowledge and accumulate more roles as they encounter new situations over the course of their lives. This learning of various roles is also called **socialisation** or **enculturation**.

Role expectations steer our own behaviour and also guide our expectation of how other people should behave in a certain context. Sometimes people are expected to take on multiple, and often conflicting, roles in a particular situation. This is also referred to as **role overload**. If people feel that the expectations associated with one role are incompatible with those of another, **role conflict** can occur (Baert 2006; see also Unit 5). Generally, people try to act in accordance with role expectations and conform to roles (Goffman 1959/1999). In some contexts, a person may feel particularly committed to one role and try to fulfil all expectations associated with this role. However, in critical situations the performed role may collapse and people adopt a pattern of behaviour that is unexpected. In this way, they deliberately separate themselves from a particular role and create what Goffman (1961) called **role distance**.

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Roles do not remain static but evolve and change over time through interaction and social contacts, just as people do not rigidly conform to expected role behaviour but adapt and expand their roles according to the demands of the context (Baert 2006). Llewellyn-Jones and Lee (2014) use the concept of “role-space” to describe the varying roles of interpreters during an interaction. The role-space is dynamic and is „created and inhabited“ by the interpreter in any given situation. The space is determined by different factors. These factors can be described along three major “axes”: the axis of participant alignment, that of interaction alignment and that of the presentation of self.

In all interpreted interactions, interpreters have to decide where they position themselves along these axes. When the interpreter is introduced at the beginning

of the asylum interview, there is little scope for self-presentation. All they will do is acknowledge that their name has been called. In a less formal situation, when e.g. an interpreter meets a client in a doctor’s waiting room, they may exchange information about where they come from, where they live and about their hobbies.

During Phase 3 of the interview the interviewer seeks to build an atmosphere of trust and rapport (see Unit 2), using verbal and non-verbal cues to show that they understand. The interpreters will also use more backchanneling cues but limit their alignment with the applicant to the degree necessary to support the interviewer. Interaction is equally restricted, with interaction management by the interpreter largely limited to incidents when the interpreter needs to ask for clarification.

## FACT BOX

### *Normative versus Typical Roles*

The roles that people perform in a given situation can be normative or typical (Goffman 1961). **Normative roles** define behaviour that the role performer and the role-others expect and consider appropriate in a certain context. What constitutes “correct” and “incorrect” behaviour in a given situation is usually set out in codes of conduct or professional ethics (see also Unit 5) and taught in training courses. There are, however, many situations when people choose not to fulfil this normative role and deliberately distance themselves from it. The behaviour that they actually adopt and perform in a given situation is referred to as the typical role (Goffman 1961). Role distance is therefore a typical, not a normative, aspect of role (Goffman 1961).

If we apply the role concepts to interpreting then interpreters that try to abide by their professional code can be said to enact their normative role. If this is impossible in a given situation or if the professional code provides no guidance (see Unit 5), they will have to find other strategies to resolve the conflict. The solution may involve deviating from the normative role and adopting a role that can be seen as the typical role of the interpreter in a given context (Wadensjö 1998).

*EXAMPLE: An interviewer uses an insulting form of address when addressing the asylum-seeker. The interpreter asks the interviewer before she interprets whether she should also use an informal and impolite mode of address. In her normative role, the interpreter could simply translate the interviewer’s contribution without asking for clarification. Yet the interpreter feels that one aspect of her typical role is to help create an atmosphere of trust based on mutual respect. Through her question she makes it clear that the interviewer’s form of addressing the applicant is disrespectful.*



## The Interpreter's Role

The primary task of interpreters is to **enable communication** between participants who do not speak the same language and do not share the same cultural background. This means that interpreters

- translate what has been said without adding or omitting anything or changing the content,
- reproduce the content of the source text completely and accurately in the target language,
- pay attention to participants' non-verbal behaviour and culture-specific formulations and modes of expression, in order to better understand their utterances. For this, they need to know about intercultural differences in non-verbal communication.

Interpreters are only able to produce a correct and complete translation if they understand what the speakers mean and ask for clarification if something is not clear. The **context** in which the interaction takes place, knowledge about the nature and communicative norms of this type of interpreting event and information provided during the course of the conversation provide vital cues to the interpreters and help them comprehend the meaning of what is being said. When they have understood, they can reformulate the content in the target language. Generally, there is not just one correct and complete interpretation. The original message can usually be reproduced in the target language in many different ways, and all these translations can be correct and complete.



### FACT BOX

#### *Word-for-word vs. Complete and Accurate Translation*

Interpreting word-for-word, or literally or verbatim, may be an appropriate strategy for certain terms, culture-specific idiomatic expressions or proper names, or for very short utterances. Normally, however, languages have very different syntactic structures, so that word-for-word translation is not possible or does not produce meaningful sentences. For this reason, interpreters do not give a verbatim translation but strive to produce a translation which completely and accurately reproduces the content of the source language utterance and also preserves the style and register of the original.

To ensure that interpreted interaction is successful, interpreters need to (and should) manage the conversation using **verbal and/or non-verbal cues**. This is necessary

- if the speakers do not pause to allow the interpreter to interpret what has been said,
- if several people are speaking at the same time so that the interpreter finds it impossible to follow,
- if the speakers speak too quickly and the interpreter is unable to follow.

When interpreters need to intervene in order to seek clarification they should inform all participants that they are asking a question and why.



## FACT BOX

### *Turn-taking Management and Coordinating Talk*

When interpreters intervene in a conversation, it is to coordinate talk and manage turn-taking so that they are able to produce a correct translation.

They ask for clarification when they do not understand the participants because

- the speaker speaks too fast, too slowly or does not speak audibly,
- the speaker speaks a dialect, with which the interpreter is not familiar,
- the speaker uses expressions which the interpreter does not understand,
- the interpreter wants to check they have correctly understood the meaning of an utterance.

Interpreters DO NOT intervene to

- pose their own questions,
- amend or complement the interviewer's questions,
- add questions or comments,
- amend or rephrase the asylum-seeker's answers,
- comment on the interview or how it is conducted,
- disagree with what has been said or express belief that the interactants should give different information or are making untrue statements.

### CULTURE-SENSITIVE TRANSLATION

Language and culture are inseparably linked (see also Unit 10). Our culture influences our thinking, our language and the choices we make.

Culture can be defined as the **norms, conventions** and **beliefs** which guide the behaviour of individuals or a social group. Many of these norms, conventions and beliefs are culturally determined, that is they differ significantly between cultures.

The participants in asylum interviews are usually from very different cultural backgrounds. Often there are no equivalents in the target language for terms denoting concepts and practices in the asylum-seeker's culture, and many asylum-seekers do not understand the format and purpose of the asylum interview.

Interpreters do not translate de-contextualised words but they mediate between different cultures; they are also **cultural mediators**.

They

- know and can identify culture-specific concepts and references and are aware of culturally determined behaviour that may be misread,
- draw participants' attention to culture-specific concepts that may give rise to misunderstanding,
- ask a participant to explain culture-specific concepts and references and then interpret these for the other interactant(s),
- seek clarification if they feel that they do not (fully) understand interactants because of their use of culture-specific expressions and concepts.

Cultural mediation DOES NOT MEAN that interpreters intervene to offer their own opinion or comment and pass judgement on whether an interactant's culturally determined behaviour is "correct" or "incorrect". If interpreters ask for clarification, they need to inform all participants about the questions they have posed and answers they have received.

## The Role of Interpreters at Asylum Interviews

Asylum interviews cannot (normally) be conducted without an interpreter. Interpreters have a **crucial role** in asylum procedures; they mediate between the asylum-seeker and the interviewer, who would not be able to communicate without the help of the interpreter. In many asylum interviews, the interpreter is the only participant who understands everything that is being said and has access to all the information. Both parties, the asylum-seeker as well as the interviewer, need to have confidence that the interpreter reproduces their utterances correctly.

Asylum-seekers depend on interpreters to communicate the details of their claim for asylum to the official(s). They must have confidence that their statements are translated accurately and completely. A correct, or incorrect,

translation of their accounts can determine whether they receive refugee status or are deported to their home country where they may face persecution and death (see Units 1 to 3).

The interviewers are similarly dependent on the interpreters to provide an accurate and complete translation of everything that is being said in order to be able to assess the facts objectively.

Interpreters therefore not only play a major role as **mediators**, they also have a great **responsibility**. The quality of their interpretations and professional behaviour has a major influence on the work of the interviewer, the decisions these take, and the future of the asylum-seeker.



### FACT BOX

#### Role Types

Interpreters are not like machines that simply translate words from one language to another, but often adopt a much more active role than is commonly assumed. Studies and reports on the conduct of asylum interviews have shown that interpreters perform very different, often conflicting or even mutually exclusive roles (Pöllabauer 2015). Some interpreters take on the role of auxiliary officers (Donk 2000) who try to assist the police, others see themselves as advocates and helpers of the asylum-seeker. Interpreters may be perceived very differently by the participants. Some asylum-seekers see the interpreter as a confidant(e), others as a collaborator of the police or asylum court or even of the authorities of their home country (Kälin 1986). Some interviewers expect interpreters to act as their spokesperson or co-interrogator, others may question the interpreter's loyalty, in particular if the interpreter is a former asylum-seeker and from the same region as the claimant (Scheffer 2001). Some authors advocate an even more active role for asylum interpreters, that of cultural mediators who can bridge intercultural gaps and so remove structural imbalances in the asylum system (Barsky 1996).

## Role Expectations

Although interpreters play an essential part in the asylum interview and have great responsibility, their role is often not clearly defined.

Asylum interviews represent a very specific setting, which differs from other types of bilateral interpreting in many ways, including the nature and format of the interview, interactants, asymmetrical power relations and hierarchies, conversational topics, purpose of the interview and potential consequences. Frequently, clients' expectations about how interpreters should act are also different than in other settings. Tipton and Furmanek (2016, 88), for instance, also point out that interpreters' solidarity with the other interactants in an asylum interview tends to shift along a continuum (from high to low), depending on their own and the participants' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, whether they have received training, the overall expectations with regard to the roles that are ascribed to or expected by the different participants and the norms that are thought to govern that specific setting, or trust issues.

In asylum interviews, interpreters interpret between two, or occasionally more, participants who may have very different, perhaps even **contradictory expectations**. Typically, these expectations are not explicitly stated, yet it is implicitly assumed that the interpreters know what they are expected to do. In other words, interpreters are expected to be able to "guess" how the interactants want them to act and that they will behave "correctly", that is, as expected. These interaction constellations are complex, and interpreters often feel they have to position themselves as "knowledgeable agents" (Tipton 2008, 12) and make sure that their professional status is not corrupted.

Interpreters have to decide for themselves whether or not they can fulfil all the interactants' expectations. However, in order to be able to manage different expectations they need to know what their rights and duties are (see Unit 5).

### ROLE EXPECTATIONS: THE INTERVIEWER'S PERSPECTIVE

Interviewers no doubt expect that interpreters will provide a correct and complete reproduction of the original utterance which also preserves its register and tone. Some may also expect that interpreters will speed up proceedings and summarise the asylum-seekers' accounts and explanations, or independently pose questions to elicit further details and so assume the role of an expert or co-interrogator (Donk 2000). These are expectations which the interpreter cannot fulfil (see printable worksheet "Role expectations", p. 56-57).

### ROLE EXPECTATIONS: THE ASYLUM-SEEKER'S PERSPECTIVE

Asylum-seekers are in a difficult position. They have been forced to leave their home countries and are seeking refuge in an unfamiliar country. Experiences at home or on their journey may have left them sad, grieving or traumatised. They often do not understand the format, structure and communicative norms of asylum procedures. For them, the interpreter is often the first person with whom they can communicate in their native language, or a language they understand, and who can explain the procedure (Barsky 1994).

Asylum-seekers expect above all that the interpreter will treat them with respect and will interpret everything they say, as well as the interviewer's questions and explanations, completely and accurately. Some asylum-seekers also expect that interpreters will "help" them and provide support and assistance after the interview (see printable worksheet "Role expectations", p. 56-57).

### ROLE EXPECTATIONS: THE INTERPRETER'S PERSPECTIVE

Interpreters rarely talk about their expectations, nor are these addressed by the other interactants, even though these are likely to have an impact on the interview and its structure.

Interpreters presumably expect that their professional status and position as interpreter will be respected and that their interpreting skills will not be questioned by the interactants (Tipton 2008). Most expect that they will be able to convince the authorities through their behaviour and quality of interpretation that they should be employed again in the future (see printable worksheet "Role expectations", p. 56-57).



## Printable Worksheet: *Role expectations*

For the asylum authorities, interpreters are an essential component in the most important part of the asylum procedure: the interview. This interview, also referred to as the “core element” in the whole investigation proceedings, provides the information necessary for the decision-making process. It is where the applicant is given the opportunity to convince the authorities of the credibility of their need to flee and receive protection. This comprises both the applicant’s own (personal) credibility and also the soundness of the content of the applicant’s assertions. Both of these aspects can only be properly evaluated by the interviewer if the interpreter, as a mediator for both language and culture, provides a sufficient amount of information to act as the basis for decision. For this reason, it is necessary to have an objective and unbiased attitude, discretion, and an accurate and complete interpretation, possibly with explanations by the interpreter of cultural peculiarities and misunderstandings that might arise.

Interviewers often ask interpreters for indications regarding the applicant’s command of language and dialect, which can help to draw conclusions regarding their place of origin. This, however, creates an (unacceptable) blending of the interpreter’s role with that of a linguistic expert.

Interpreters working at asylum interviews must have very good knowledge of both the source language and the target language, and knowledge of dialects is also desirable. It is also very important that interpreters understand the asylum process and procedure as well as the legal framework, as this can improve the quality of the interpretation.

Klaus Krainz  
Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum

As an interpreter, you should always make sure that your interpretations are neutral, impartial and correct. Every single word that is said has to be conveyed exactly and nothing should be left hanging in the air or untranslated. As an interpreter in asylum procedures, I always try to interpret every word that is said because nobody knows in advance whether or not a single word or sentence might be relevant to the procedure. Apart from that, I am obliged to interpret EVERYTHING.

This situation sometimes results in major conflicts with the asylum authorities. I know that, due to the time restrictions many interviewers face, I am expected to interrupt the asylum-seekers when they talk for too long. I, on the other hand, don’t regard this as one of my duties. Very often, I am desperate and don’t know how to react to that. If I meet the interviewer’s expectations, it means I have not interpreted everything, and something important might have been lost. On the other hand, if I don’t meet the interviewer’s expectations and let the asylum-seeker finish, I am criticised for not doing my work properly. Asylum-seekers, in turn, expect me to support and help them as a compatriot. Sometimes they even express this wish directly in the course of the interview, which can again lead to a major conflict because I have to “interpret everything that has been said”. They also expect me to correct or even omit potential contradictions in their statements: For instance, I once had to interpret for a Pashtun person during an asylum interview. At the beginning of the interview, he was asked whether he was single or married. He looked at me and asked me what he should state, “single or married?”. I had to interpret his question for the interviewer which was very unpleasant in that situation because I knew that his asking me would get him in trouble, which was indeed the case in the end.

I understand both sides, but it is my task to remain neutral and repress my feelings because neutrality and emotions are not compatible.

It is also essential that interpreters only accept assignments of which they are capable. In asylum procedures for individuals from Afghanistan, for instance, the authorities sometimes use interpreters, who in fact don’t have the necessary language skills to interpret for this group of asylum seekers. For example, an asylum-seeker told the police officer in his initial interview that he was in contact with his family by telephone. The police officer then asked him, with whom in his family he had contact by phone. The asylum seeker replied that he usually talked to his children – even though he had stated before that he only had a six-months-old baby. However, his statement did not mean that he actually talked to a baby on the phone. In Afghanistan, it is quite common not to explicitly mention one’s wife to strangers. If these people talk about their wives, they often use the term “children”. This cultural distinction doesn’t exist in Iran. If Iranian interpreters were to interpret this statement literally, without pointing out the cultural difference, the interrogating police officer would suspect this man of not telling the truth. In this particular case I interpreted the statement word-for-word but pointed out to the police officer that this was a cultural particularity. This example shows clearly that it is not enough to understand the language (as was the case with the Iranian interpreters), but that it is also essential to know the cultural particularities regarding the use of certain words and phrases.

Sara Kondert  
Interpreter at asylum procedures in Austria





I can still remember my first interview very clearly. After a long wait in the waiting room, I was collected by a man and led to a room. I had seen this man for the first time. We didn't talk. After a while, two more men came into the room. One sat down next to me, the other one behind me. I felt fear grow inside me. I was thirteen years old at the time and felt like a criminal at that moment. Never before had I found myself in a similar situation. The man, who had collected me, started to introduce himself and the two other men. When he mentioned that the man next to me also spoke Dari, my mother tongue, I was a bit relieved. I felt somewhat happy to sit next to an adult, who understood me and whom I understood. At first, it gave me a sense of security because I was able to tell him about my situation. But it soon became clear that we had communication difficulties. He came from Iran and spoke Farsi.

When the conversation was translated back to me at the end of the interview, I noticed that some sentences were not correct. I told the interpreter that these sentences were not what I had said. He looked at me and told the first man, who replied that no corrections would be made. Because of these mistakes, my asylum procedure lasted four years.

In my opinion, interpreters have a wide range of duties: Their task is not only to translate from one language into another but also to work fairly. I believe that they should be neutral. They also have to be able to cope well with emotions, be honest and be familiar with both languages in the best possible way. I also find it important that they keep everything that's being said in the interviews confidential. As far as I know, breaking this rule is a criminal offence.

To me, it is especially important that interpreters never voice their own opinion or make comments or the like during the interview. Unfortunately, this happens rather often – it also happened in one of my interviews. Interpreters should under no circumstances interfere in the interview and must act impartially in any case. If they take the ethnicity, religion or nationalities of the asylum seekers into account no matter whether in a positive or in a negative sense – the procedure cannot run fairly anymore. That is why interpreters should break off the interview, if they find that for some reason they cannot cope with the situation.

If the interview takes a long time, it is important to take breaks.

I find it a good thing for interpreters to have a brief conversation with the asylum seekers before the start of the interview. That way, they can make sure that they are actually able to translate the interview correctly and fully. Mastering a language professionally means that the interpreters will have to be familiar with the culture of this language. For example, interpreters need to have a good grip on the different dialects, if they wish to work with the various dialects. A major problem, which I also experienced, is that Iranian interpreters are assigned to interpret for Afghan asylum seekers. Even if Farsi and Dari are similar, there are still several differences.

Many different dialects are spoken in Afghanistan. Sometimes, people from different regions won't understand each other. The ethnic group Hazara has its own dialect, just as the ethnic groups of the Pashtuns, the Tajiks and the Uzbeks have their own dialects. This can lead to serious difficulties, if a Pashtun interprets for a Hazara in an interview.

I also think it is crucial that the interpreters are well informed about the history, the culture and the current situation of the relevant country. Therefore, interpreters should regularly attend seminars, events and workshops about the country of their working language. Being in regular contact with people who speak the language can also help to understand the special characteristics and developments of a language.

Mojtaba Tavakoli  
Person entitled to subsidiary protection



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## Further Reading

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## Useful Links

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## Activities

### Activity 1: Life-roles

1

**Form of activity:** Individual task with subsequent plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 20 minutes (10 minutes for individual task, 10 minutes for plenary discussion).

**Description:** Participants first write down the different roles they perform in different life-worlds or social systems, including their roles at work, at home, in their relationship with their partner and family, during leisure and cultural activities (see printable worksheet “Activity 1: Life-roles”, p. 61; activity adapted from Schaller 2001).

Source: Schaller, Roger. 2001. Das große Rollenspiel-Buch. Grundtechniken, Anwendungsformen, Praxisbeispiele. Weinheim: Beltz.

During the plenary discussion, the participants explain how they shape these different roles, where problems may arise, what roles seem difficult or impossible to reconcile and when and how they distance themselves from certain roles.

### Activity 2: Social atom

2

**Form of activity:** Group work followed by plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 30 minutes (15 minutes for group work, 15 minutes for plenary discussion).

**Description:** For Jacob L. Moreno (1953/1993) the “social atom” was the smallest social unit, that is to say the “nucleus”, in which people had to be embedded in order to survive. Outline the “social atom” for the situation below.

Source: Moreno, Jacob L. 1953/1993. Who shall survive? Foundations of sociometry, group psychotherapy and sociodrama. Roanoke, VA: Royal.

**Setting:** Interview of an unaccompanied minor asylum-seeker.

**Participants:** Asylum-seeker, interviewer, the asylum-seeker’s legal representative, a secretary/clerk, and a UNHCR representative who is also present in the capacity of observer.

#### Version 1:

Sketch the social network. You could for example use triangles for male participants and circles for female participants and indicate the power and status of the various participants by drawing larger and smaller shapes. Position shapes nearer to, or further from one another to represent emotional closeness or distance. Use different lines to represent different relationships between the participants.

#### Version 2:

Use different coins to represent the different participants. The value of the coin could be used to represent the status and power of the various participants. To see what relationships can exist between them, move the coins around.

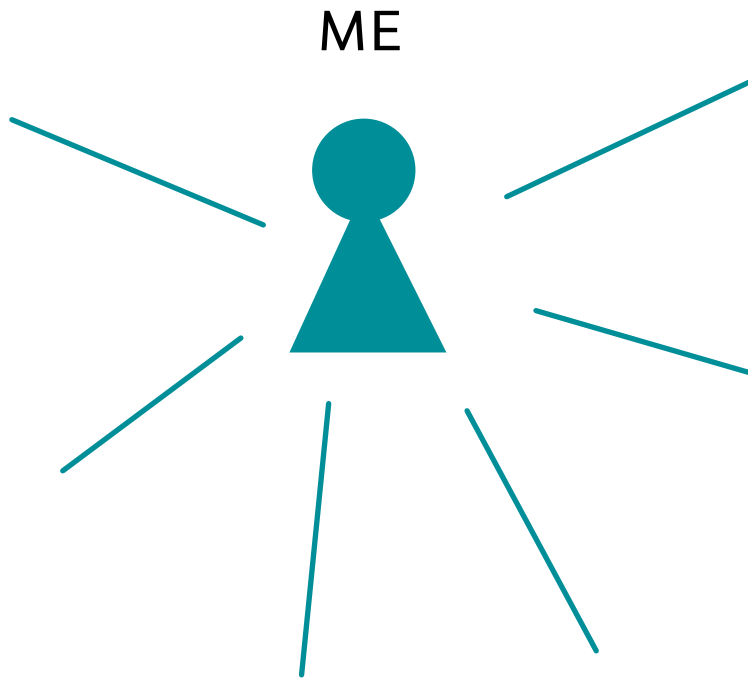
In the subsequent plenary discussion, the groups should explain their social networks and give reasons for their decisions.





### Printable Worksheet **Activity 1: Life-roles**

Write down the different roles that you perform in different life-worlds or systems. These can be your role(s) at work, at home, in your relationship with your partner and family, during leisure and cultural activities. Reflect on how you shape and perform these different roles, where problems might arise, what roles seem difficult or impossible to reconcile, and when and how you distance yourself from certain roles.





### Activity 3: Double-bodied figure (“Janus”-faced interpreter)

3

**Form of activity:** Pair work with subsequent plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 30 minutes (10 minutes for pair work, 20 minutes for plenary discussion).

**Description:** The partners discuss which of the persons depicted in the frieze is the interpreter and what the picture tells us about contemporary perceptions of the role of the interpreter (see printable worksheet “Activity 3: “Double-bodied figure”, p. 63).

In the plenary discussion, the results are presented. The participants also compare the perceived role of the Egyptian interpreter with the role of interpreters in asylum interviews and explain where they see similarities and differences.

The scene shows an interpreter mediating between Horemheb and envoys from Asia who plead for clemency. Their appeal is passed on by Horemheb to Tutankhamun and his wife (who is not shown in the picture) (for details see Kurz 1986).

Source: Kurz, Ingrid. 1986. “Das Dolmetscher-Relief aus dem Grab des Haremhab in Memphis. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Dolmetschens im alten Ägypten.” *Babel* 32 (2): 73–77.

### Activity 4: “So you DO want me to translate?”

4

**Form of activity:** Small groups followed by plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 20 minutes (10 minutes in small groups, 10 minutes for plenary discussion).

**Description:** Take a look at the cartoon from Asterix. The Legionary (see printable worksheet “Activity 4: Asterix. The Legionary”, p. 64) and discuss the differing expectations of the interpreter’s role. Summarise the results of your discussion briefly in the plenary.





Printable Worksheet **Activity 3: Double-bodied figure**



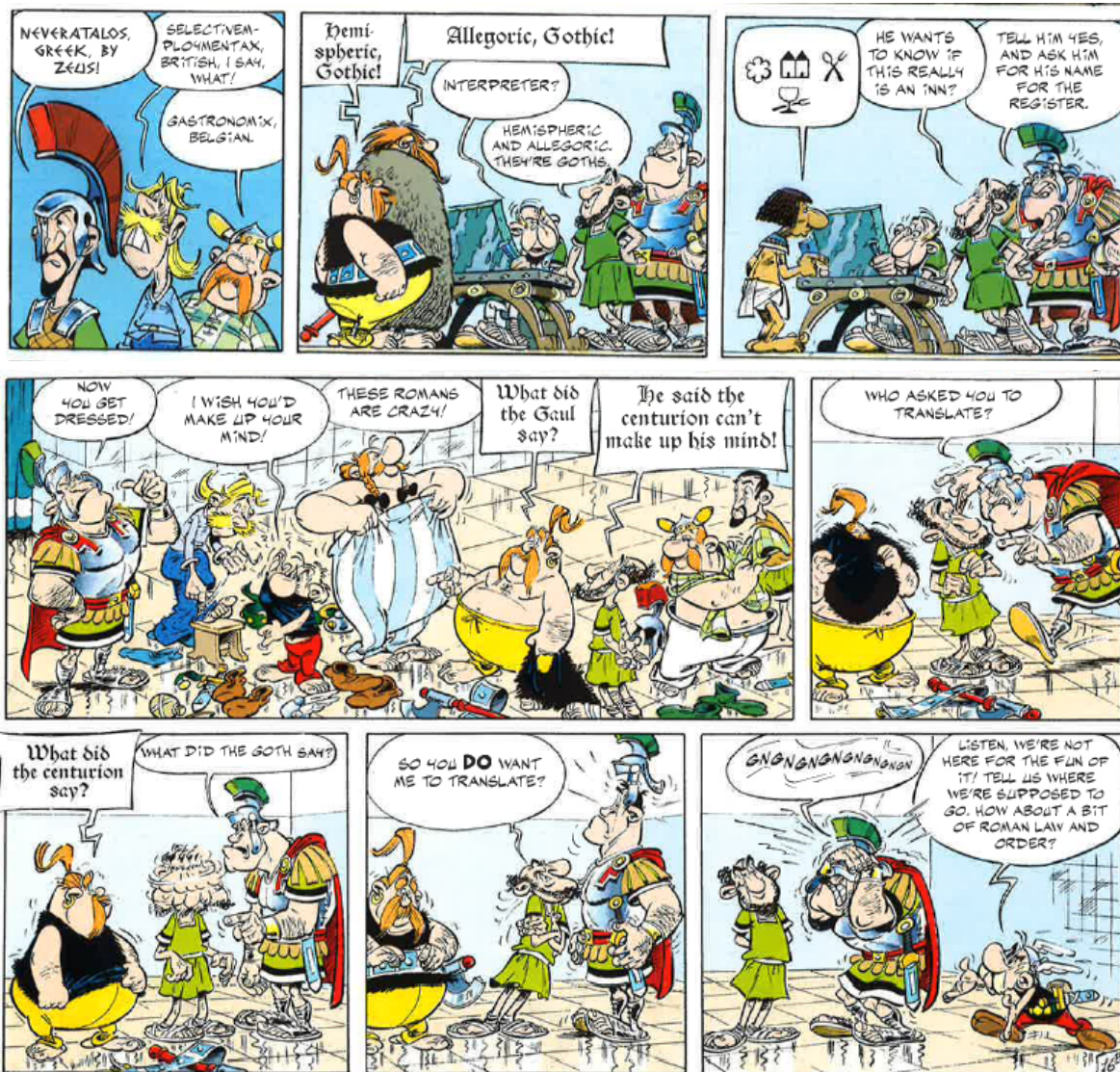
*Bas-relief on the tomb of Horemheb at Saqqara, dating from around 1330 BCE*

Source: Delisle, Jean, und Judith Woodsworth, eds. 1995. *Translators through History*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 279.





### Printable Worksheet **Activity 4: Asterix. The Legionary**



Source: Goscinny, René, and Albert Uderzo. 1967/2004. Asterix. The Legionary. An Asterix Adventure. Translated by Anthea Bell and Derek Hockridge. London: Hachette (p. 18 and p. 20).



## Activity 5: Interpreters in films

5



**Form of activity:** Film clippings and analysis and discussion in small groups and/or plenary discussion.

**Duration:** Approx. 30 minutes (5-10 minutes for film, 15-20 minutes for discussion).

**Description:** Watch one (or more) of the films listed below and discuss the questions below in small groups or as a plenary discussion:

**Film 1:** “Paris at last” from I love Lucy (1951-1957), 1:50’,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xle3l-5nfpl>

- What do you think of the interpreters’ behaviour?
- Do you feel it is adequate? Why? Why not?
- Do you think the information gets across?

**Film 2:** “Sign Language Interpreter at Nelson Mandela Memorial”, Report on Jimmy Kimmel Live, 3:21’,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-DxGoIVUWo>

- What role does this interpreter have?
- What consequences does his role performance result in for the interpreting profession?

**Film 3:** “Catherine Tate: Interpreter”, by David García González, 2:48’,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNKn5ykPgPU>

- What is the interpreter’s role in this film clipping?
- What does this clipping say about role perceptions that outsiders may have about interpreters?

**Film 4:** “Ethical Challenges for Court Interpreters”,  
by Open Learning Agency and Vancouver Community College, 3:18’,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgiofAJ-9FA>

- What is the interpreter’s role in this film clipping?
- What are the challenges for the interpreter in this sequence?

Alternatively, you may also want to show DVDs or series episodes where interpreters have a role and discuss the role of the interpreters in those specific film sequences.

## Activity 6: Analysis of interpreting situations

6

**Form of activity:** World café with two small groups per example situation and subsequent presentation of results by “hosts” of the world café, followed by a plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 40 minutes (10 minutes in small groups, 20 minutes for presentations and discussion).

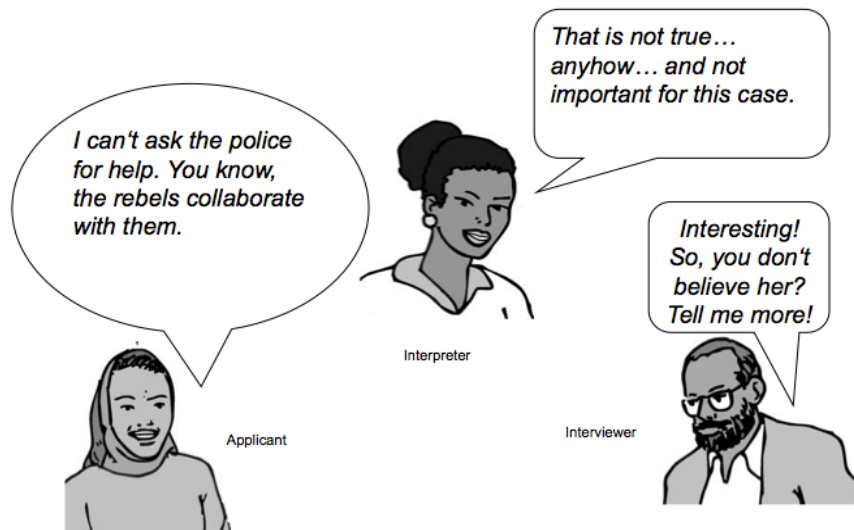
**Description:** Discuss in two small groups (per example situation) what role the interpreters have in the examples given (see printable worksheet “Activity 6: Interpreting situations”, p. 66). Discuss in groups whether you agree with the interpreter’s behaviour or not and what you would do differently (you may also want to refer to the content of Unit 5).

The world café “hosts” moderate the discussion in the small groups. Based on the world café method, the “guests” then change to the other group after 10 minutes; the hosts stay the same. The hosts then present the major discussion points to the other groups; central aspects are then discussed in the plenary.



## Printable worksheet **Activity 6: Interpreting situations**

### Example 1:



Source: Picture based on UNHCR. 2009. Interpreting in a Refugee Context. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/49b6314d2.html> (Accessed January 15 2022)



### Example 2:



Source: Picture based on UNHCR. 2009. Interpreting in a Refugee Context. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/49b6314d2.html> (Accessed January 15 2022)

## **Activity 7: Text analysis**

### **“Poor interpreters put asylum seekers at risk”**

7



**Form of activity:** Discussion in small groups with subsequent plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 30 minutes (15 minutes in small groups, 15 minutes for plenary discussion).

**Description:** Read the newspaper clipping (see printable worksheet “Activity 7: Poor interpreters put asylum seekers at risk”, p. 68) and discuss:

- How does this article describe the role of interpreters? Do you agree?
- What do you think is necessary to train interpreters for asylum hearings?
- What consequences does a erroneous translation have for the applicants, the interpreters and the interviewers?

You may also want to use other similar texts for the activity.



## Poor interpreters put asylum seekers at risk

A lack of compulsory education for interpreters in Denmark could lead to errors translating interviews with asylum seekers, with potentially fatal consequences.

Asylum seekers are placed at risk due to the poor quality of interpreters on offer to them, according to an editorial published last Friday in Politiken newspaper. The two authors, Enhedslisten MP Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen and Michala Clante Bendixen from Refugees Welcome, referred to a report released earlier this year that exposed the poor level of training required for Danish interpreters. The report from the Department of Business Communication at Aarhus University found that 80 percent of interpreters used by the national police, Rigspolitiet, in court cases had no education in interpretation and that judges had reported problems associated with this deficit.

In the editorial, the two authors argue that asylum seekers are also at risk because the Udlændingestyrelsen (Immigration Service) and Refugee Appeals Board used the same interpreters as the Rigspolitiet.

*“Asylum cases are not about guilt or punishment but often about life or death, as it is up to the Udlændingestyrelsen and Refugee Appeals Board to decide whether the life of an asylum seeker is at risk if they returned to their home country,”* the two authors wrote.

The authors identified two problems: firstly that interpreters are only required to complete a one-day course to become qualified for the police’s list of interpreters, and secondly there is not enough training available for interpreters. Those that do become qualified can also expect low salaries. Asylum seekers often have their applications rejected because they are considered untrustworthy, which can happen if their story differs in the three interviews they give to the police, the Udlændingestyrelsen and Refugee Appeals Board. Refugees Welcome finds this unacceptable, given that asylum seekers are often given different interpreters for the three different interviews. They argue that as a result, asylum seekers could have their cases rejected because of variation in the interpretations of their stories. But speaking to Politiken, immigration lawyer Anne Osbak argued that problems with interpreters are rare.

*“I have not had any cases where I could say that the interpreter affected the outcome,”* said Osbak, who has represented asylum seekers through the Refugee Appeals Board for the past 15 years. *“You could certainly be assessed as being untrustworthy by the Udlændingestyrelsen, but then I would simply add a reply on behalf of the Refugee Appeals Board, in which I explain the situation.”*

Asylum cases that are rejected by the Udlændingestyrelsen are automatically appealed by the Refugee Appeals Board, which manages to overturn about a quarter of all rejections. Helge Nørrlung, an immigration lawyer with over 20 years of experience, can remember at least one instance where poor translators may have contributed to a failed asylum case, however. He recalls a case of an Afghani man that had an Iranian translator for his first interview with the Udlændingestyrelsen even though they spoke very different dialects of Farsi. The Refugee Appeals Board employed a different interpreter that was trained in both dialects and revealed mistakes made by the Iranian translator.

*“We managed to prove to the Udlændingestyrelsen that three or four words he used actually had a totally different meaning from what his police translator had interpreted,”* Nørrlung told *The Copenhagen Post*. *“It could have been the reason why he appeared untrustworthy.”*

According to Nørrlung, interpreters in Denmark should be forced to take more stringent training like that found in other European countries, though he fears the issue is too low priority for most politicians.

*“We had a period where interpreter training was state-controlled but this was abandoned,”* he said. *“Now they don’t want to invest in it so their attitude seems to be: ‘It’s only foreigners; never mind!’”*

Nørrlung added that he has encouraged the Udlændingestyrelsen to tape interviews so that interpretation errors can later be discovered.

## Activity 8: Role-space

8



**Form of activity:** Role-play followed by reflection

**Duration:** 30 minutes (shorter if based on prerecorded material)

**Description:** The participants stage a role-play and discuss the interpreter's role using Llewellyn-Jones/Lee's (2014) role-space model.

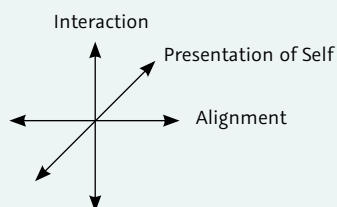
For the role-play, any of the examples and ideas given in this handbook may be used (for instance Unit 6, Activity 8). You may also use existing material for this activity (video clips, recorded role-plays/activities from other training units).

### Material for discussion:

Prepare a flip-chart or a PowerPoint presentation to show a diagram of the three-dimensional model of the interpreters' potential role-spaces.

The model below (Llewellyn-Jones/Lee 2013, p. 67) shows the three axes of "Interaction", "Presentation of Self" and "Alignment" (see UNIT 4/51) that may be used for the discussion. The interpreter's role-space may vary from high (top/right side of the axes in the picture) to low (bottom/left side of the axes in the picture).

- Either show the participants this diagram and discuss the interpreter's behaviour based on this illustration;
- Or hand out printouts of the role-space worksheet and ask the participants to mark the interpreter's position on this worksheet. Use the participants' suggestions as a basis for the discussion (see printable worksheet „Role-space model“, p. 70).



Source: Llewellyn-Jones, Peter & Lee, Robert G. 2013. "Getting to the Core of Role: Defining Interpreters' Role-Space." *International Journal of Interpreter Education* 5 (2): 54–72.

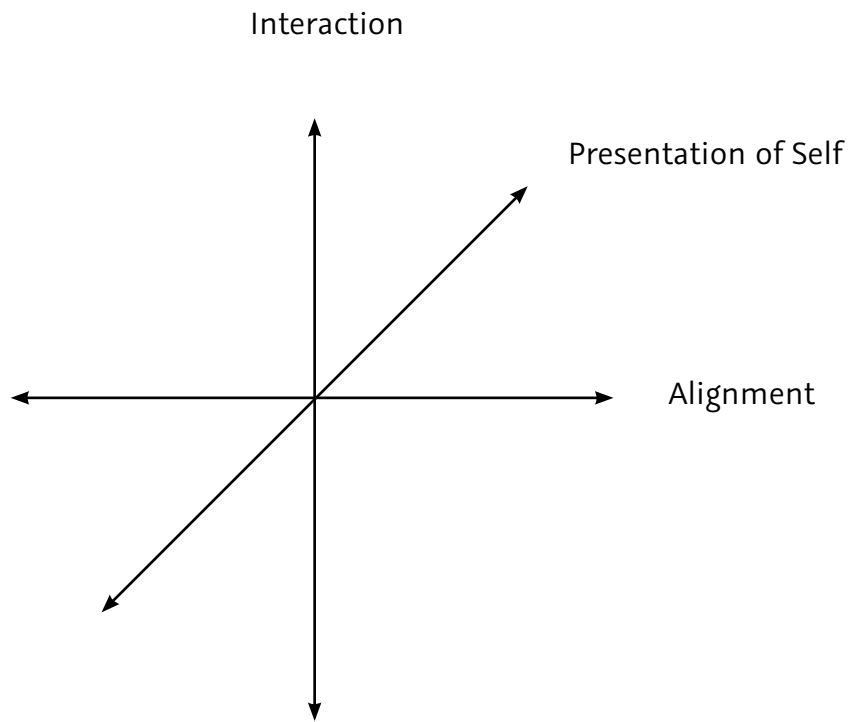
### Questions for discussion:

All or some of these questions may be used as prompts for the discussion. You may also choose to focus on one specific aspect or one axis only, though the different axes are, of course, linked. The list of questions below is not exhaustive. Depending on the situation, additional questions may be helpful.

- **Axis of "Interaction":**
  - How does the interpreter manage turn-taking?
  - How does the interpreter cope with overlapping talk?
  - How does the interpreter signal understanding or misunderstanding?
  - How does the interpreter address the other speakers?
  - Does the interpreter intervene (overtly or covertly)? If yes, how and why?
- **Axis of "Presentation of Self":**
  - Does the interpreter present herself/himself?
  - Does the interpreter introduce herself/himself?
  - Does the interpreter explain her/his role and function?
  - Does the interpreter show commitment, empathy, or emotions?
- **Axis of "Alignment":**
  - How actively does the interpreter interact verbally and nonverbally with the other speakers?
  - How actively does the interpreter participate in the encounter?
  - What does the interpreter's behaviour say about how she or he perceives her/his role?
  - How does the interpreter react to the other speakers' behaviour?
  - Does the interpreter appear to react to specific expectations of one of the parties?
  - Does the interpreter appear to side with one party?
  - Where does the interpreter position herself/himself?



Printable worksheet **Activity 8: Role-space model**



Source: Llewellyn-Jones, Peter & Lee, Robert G. 2013. "Getting to the Core of Role: Defining Interpreters' Role-Space." *International Journal of Interpreter Education* 5 (2): 54-72.



## Test yourself!

1. Where does the “role” concept stem from? Can you briefly define what can be understood by “role”?

2. What does the following quote say about the concept of “role”?

*And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages.*

(Shakespeare, As You Like It, Act II, Scene VII)

3. What is “role segregation”?

4. What is “role distance”?

5. What is the difference between an individual’s “normative” and “typical” role?

6. What is a “culture-sensitive” translation?

7. What are the expectations of the different participants in an asylum hearing?

8. If interpreters do not understand a speaker, they guess what they want to say.

True       False

9. Interpreters leave out swearwords or insults to protect the participants’ feelings.

True       False

10. Only a verbatim translation is a correct translation.

True       False

# Unit 5:

## *Professional Ethics and Professional Conduct*

Gernot Hebenstreit,  
Alexandra Marics & Jim Hlavac



### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will be able to

- » be aware of the general principles of professional ethics specific to interpreting;
- » describe key aspects of professional behaviour and its application;
- » understand and have reflective knowledge of specific professional codes of ethics;
- » respond to moral dilemmas;
- » display competences required of professional, practising interpreters.

### *Basic Principles of Professional Ethics*

#### A LITTLE THEORY TO START YOU OFF

The manner in which we shape or are permitted to shape the way we live together in communities is subject to a number of behavioural norms and constraints. These serve to ensure the preservation and general well-being of each social group. Moral norms, as well as legal norms, are of key importance in human behaviour and co-existence, particularly when problems and conflicts occur.

What is **morality**? “Morality is all valid societal norms taken as a whole that have a normative influence on human co-existence and that serve to protect individuals who may be potentially affected by the actions of others” (Fenner 2010, 6f; own translation).

The concept of morality provides a behavioural code containing both imperatives and prohibitions; these reflect both the values of a particular group or community and its concept of self. The meaning of ‘moral’ therefore arises from a group. Groups themselves may vary in size, as may the criteria for (self-)inclusion. As far as members of a particular profession are concerned, it is morality in an occupational sense that guides their workplace behaviour.

To understand concepts of morality, it is important to keep in mind that while there are imperatives and prohibitions in sets of rules that may constrain an individual in their freedom to do certain things, it is equally important that these rules are not perceived to have been imposed by others or outsiders. They function as a “guarantee so that all members of a group may enjoy the greatest degree of freedom” (Pieper 2007, 20; own translation).

The purpose of a **system of rules** is to protect the interests of people with regard to their own actions and to enable the development of a fair and just society. What is important is that a person in such a group or society should display **appropriate and responsible behaviour when dealing with others**. This touches on the following questions: How should I behave? How should we behave as a group? How can I justify my behaviour? These questions are fundamental ones in a philosophical sense, and especially with reference to ethics.

#### AN ETHICS OF VALUES

One premise of an ethics of values is that any moral judgement of actions is based on hierarchically structured values. In Western, democratically structured societies



such as those in most predominantly anglophone countries, the following assumptions are thought to apply (Pieper 2007):

- At a primary level on the hierarchy, there are **basic ethical values** rooted in the inviolability of human dignity. These include: the concept of freedom – personal freedom, freedom of worship, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, scientific freedom, freedom of artistic expression; the concept of equality – equal rights and opportunities; and the concept of justice.
- At a secondary level, there are **moral values** that exist so that members of a community may live a fulfilling life. Examples of individual values are: self-determination, self-responsibility, love, friendship, quality of life, and the enjoyment of good health. Examples of social values are: solidarity, fairness and a sense of collective responsibility, while sustainability is an example of an ecological value.
- At the next level, there are **commercial values**. These include a belief in a free market, freedom of contract, earning capacity, the concept of commercial added value, property, commercial goods and money.

Value hierarchies such as these serve many purposes, not least in moral dilemmas (see below the section on dilemma situations, p. 76-78). As for the field of translation, theorist Andrew Chesterman postulates the following key values at the secondary level (Chesterman 2016):

- **Clarity** is a linguistic value that is intrinsic to interpreting and translation
- **Truth** is a value that enables an equivalence to be established and maintained between the source text and the target text
- **Trust** is an inter-personal value
- **Understanding** refers to the sense of responsibility that one has to other parties in the process of communication. This includes the duty to avoid potential communicative suffering. Translation can thus be said to be a preventive as well as a productive activity.

## FACT BOX

### *Ethics and Morality – What's the Difference?*

In everyday language the two terms ethics and morality and their adjectival forms ethical and moral are often used as synonyms for each other. The difference between the two is that moral justifications are used to define actions in a particular way: as either good and appropriate and therefore to be lauded, or as bad and improper and therefore to be condemned. Moral justifications can be achieved in different ways: through indicating the possible consequences, or via reference to a moral code or to role-models whose behaviour shapes our own conscience. In contrast, ethical justifications seek not so much to validate individual actions but to determine why a person should behave morally and how the morality of actions can be accounted for (Pieper 2007). In debating and arguing these matters, ethicists have developed a range of approaches and theories over the last 2,000 years. Some of these may be incompatible, or even contradictory to one another (Nida-Rümelin 2005; Pieper 2007).

## VIRTUE ETHICS

The basis of **virtue ethics** is that appropriate behaviour is grounded in the virtues displayed by protagonists. Virtues here refer to protagonists' attitudes, dispositions and actions. Our own moral judgements relate not so much to an individual's actions as to the nature of their actions, or in other words, to how they think, consider things and

behave, taken as a whole. These virtues are acquired in real-life contexts, usually through replication of those concepts of virtue that are socially established, rather than through an understanding of moral principles as such. In such real-life contexts, a protagonist is put in the position of having to choose courses of action appropriate to the situation (Nida-Rümelin 2005). Virtuous actions are the key to a responsible and happy life. Virtues classically

considered relevant are intelligence, a sense of justice, courage and moderation.

Applying the concept of virtues to the professional activities of interpreters and translators, Chesterman (2001) identifies the following as virtues characteristic of practitioners:

- fairness
- truthfulness
- trustworthiness
- empathy
- courage
- determination

**Fairness** presupposes, to a great extent, a sense of impartiality – that is, that actions must not be deliberately biased. Among those things associated with **trustworthiness** are the capacities to display a degree of reliability and to justify the decisions made in interpreting or translation. What is meant by the concept of **empathy** in communication is readiness to put oneself in the position of other participants in the interaction. Willingness to accept certain risks on behalf of trusted persons is an example of **courage**. **Determination** is displayed in an interpreter's or translator's persistence in attempting to come to an optimal solution.

Among qualities that interpreters need in order to practise, it is important to identify competencies as a separate category to virtues. Competencies include linguistic, specialist and cultural knowledge, as well as technical and research skills.

## Ethical Principles for Interpreting in Asylum Procedures

In this section, four principles of professional ethics are discussed that are of key importance when interpreting in asylum procedures: **confidentiality**, **impartiality**, **accuracy** and **integrity**, as well as professional conduct with other participants in the communicative interaction. These principles are commonly found in the specific professional codes of ethics or codes of conduct applying to interpreters. From an ethical perspective, these principles can, to an extent, be considered to be virtues as well as values.

Confidentiality is a virtue promoting individual values such as confidence and self-determination, and, in relation to the primary level of hierarchically structured values, it corresponds to those values to do with equality. The same applies to the virtue of impartiality, which at the same time promotes another value, that of fairness. Accuracy and integrity are manifestations of the individual values of truth, clarity and understanding that can be classified under the values of justice and equality. Accuracy and integrity can also be classified as virtues or as examples of honesty, determination and fairness.

We examine these four principles here by firstly giving a brief definition of what they are. This is followed by a discussion about them, after which examples from real-life situations are provided. In the examples provided, comments focus on the principle that applies in each of them. Examples presented in the practice exercises should be examined keeping all four principles in mind (see "Activity 2: Hypothetical situations", p. 81).

### CONFIDENTIALITY

Interpreters do not pass on to others information that they gain in interpreted interactions.

The principle of confidentiality has a number of implications:

- Interpreters are not permitted to pass on to others details, either of a personal or general nature, which they learn of in the course of a communicative interaction.
- Interpreters are not permitted to pass on to interviewers any confidential or personal information about applicants that they may have acquired (either during interpreted interactions or through other means).
- Interpreters are not permitted to pass on to applicants any confidential or personal information about interviewers that they may have acquired (either during interpreted interactions or through other means).

*EXAMPLE: An interpreter, who himself is a migrant, is called upon to interpret for an applicant who is from the same country. After the interview, the interpreter by chance meets a person who is also from the same country. The interpreter mentions to this person that he has just interpreted for a newly arrived applicant who, in the opinion of the interpreter, appears to be encountering great difficulties.*

**Note.** In this example, the interpreter has contravened the principle of confidentiality by mentioning details of an interview to an outsider.

*EXAMPLE: An interpreter finds herself called upon to interpret at an interview for an applicant for whom she has already interpreted. The previous interpreted interaction was with a legal advisor. From this previous interaction, the interpreter learnt of information relating to the applicant's occupational background. At the interview the interpreter provides, of her own accord, information in relation to the applicant's background.*

**Note.** The interpreter has broken the principle of confidentiality by relating details learnt about in another interpreting assignment.

## IMPARTIALITY

Interpreters do not take the side of any participant in an interaction. The quality and accuracy of interpreters' interpretations are not influenced by personal opinions, attitudes, value judgements or other preconceptions.

The principle of impartiality is the basis for the following **behavioural norms**:

- Interpreters neither favour nor prejudice any of the participants in an interpreted interaction.
- Interpreters allow other participants in a communicative interaction to express their own opinion. They do not limit their freedom of expression and do not offer advice to others.
- Interpreters do not express any personal opinions, attitudes, value judgements or preconceptions.
- Interpreters do not make pejorative comments about other participants in the communicative interaction.
- Interpreters do not engage in conversation with any participant in the communicative interaction about other participants present. They do not make fun of others or look down on them.
- Interpreters refrain from using words, gesture or body language that reveal their own value judgements about the statements or behaviour of others.

*EXAMPLE: An applicant claims to be from a country that is experiencing civil war. The interpreter is well informed about the situation in that region. In the course of the interview, the applicant is asked questions that seek to confirm his place of origin. The accent of the applicant and his apparent lack of knowledge of the conditions in the area lead the interpreter to the following conclusion: that the applicant is probably from the country that he claims to be from and that he speaks the language that is spoken there, but that he comes from an area*

*not sufficiently affected by conflict for this to be grounds for an asylum application. Without being asked, the interpreter expresses this view and is openly derisive about the applicant.*

**Note.** It is not the responsibility of the interpreter to evaluate the accuracy of reported information. Where the interpreter does this, she is taking on the role of one of the parties to the communicative interaction and showing preferential treatment towards them.

*EXAMPLE: An applicant gives an account of how his family was tortured before his own eyes and then set free. The applicant relates this without showing any emotions. The interviewer finds this account hard to believe and makes her doubts known to the applicant in very clear terms. She also addresses the interpreter personally, expecting him to confirm her view of the situation. The interpreter states that it is not part of his work as an interpreter to judge others.*

**Note.** The interpreter acted appropriately. It is not part of an interpreter's work to provide comments or judgements on those present in the interaction.

## ACCURACY AND COMPLETENESS

Interpreters provide accurate and complete interpretations of spoken and signed language into the other language. The work of interpreters includes explanation of culturally-specific background information and conveying the affective meaning of interlocutors' speech or signing, where this aids comprehension.

The principle of accuracy and completeness is the basis for the following **behavioural norms**:

- Interpreters retain the content of others' speech or signing. They do not allow their own ideas of the accuracy or veracity of others' speech or signing to influence their interpretations. The content of others' speech or signing remains unchanged, even where this is personally unpleasant to the interpreter, for example use of swear words, obscenities or blasphemous language.
- Interpreters retain the stylistic characteristics of the type of expression used by the interlocutors in the communicative interaction, for example formal and informal means of expression.
- Interlocutors may use terms that are highly specific to their culture, background or occupational role, so much so that they cannot be readily interpreted via direct equivalents but through longer paraphrases or through accompanying explanation. Where such paraphrases or accompanying explanation serve the purpose of fully conveying to the other interlocutor what has been said or signed, they are not to be considered "additions" or "alterations". In such

situations, the interpreter may use their discretion in conveying to the source speaker/signer that the interpreter employed paraphrase and/or explanation in their interpretation.

- Where necessary, interpreters seek the agreement of the interviewer or the applicant when requesting clarification.

The role of explaining culturally-specific information does not mean that interpreters take on the role of expert witnesses.

*EXAMPLE: An applicant becomes increasingly agitated with the interviewer in the course of the interview and uses a variety of abusive terms. The interpreter finds this unpleasant, as she never actively uses these words when communicating with others. As a result, she omits these words in her interpretations.*

**Note.** It is the responsibility of the interpreter to provide a complete and unaltered rendition of what others say or sign, even when the interpreter finds this uncomfortable or embarrassing. It is important for all participants in the interaction to register that another participant is upset and how they are expressing themselves.

## PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Interpreters show respect towards all participants in the interaction. Interpreters seek to facilitate interactions in which participants show respect towards each other.

The principle of professional conduct is the basis for the following **behavioural norms**:

- Interpreters conduct themselves in a dignified and respectful manner towards all applicants, interviewers and other persons present, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, age, skin colour, religious or cultural convictions, political or ideological beliefs or their social status.
- Interpreters may question statements that appear disrespectful to other participants before interpreting them.
- Interpreters are conscious of their own appearance and endeavour to minimise the possibility that this may be disrespectful to others.

*EXAMPLE: The interviewer addresses the applicant by his first name. The interpreter asks the interviewer if he would like the interpreter to use the first name in her interpretation when the applicant is being addressed. The interviewer says no.*

**Note.** The interpreter acted appropriately. She recognised a lack of respect in a statement of one of the participants to the interaction. By asking this question about which

form of address should be used in the interpretation, she made the interviewer aware of a potential problem. In so doing, she contributed to the interaction being conducted in a respectful manner.

*EXAMPLE: The interpreter appears at the interview in a t-shirt. It has a caption printed on it that angers both the applicant and the interviewer.*

**Note.** Interpreters should not dress themselves in a manner that shows disrespect to the other participants of the interaction.

## PROFESSIONALISM

Professionalism refers to the particular manner in which one carries out one's duties. Professionalism is shown when a person fulfils the requirements of their occupation and displays field-specific knowledge or capabilities. Further to this, professionalism is understood to be the ability to employ specialist problem-solving skills, to follow field-specific behavioural norms and to be able to perform things that cannot be expected of lay people.

In real terms, what this means for the asylum procedure is the following:

- The interpreter is aware of their role as an interpreter and conscious of the duties that this involves. The interpreter does not go beyond the bounds of this role and, where appropriate, clarifies their role to others.
- The interpreter observes all principles mentioned above.
- The interpreter may decline or withdraw from an interpreting assignment where their own personal suitability for the specific interpreting assignment is called into question.
- In instances in which the interpreter has a relationship to another participant that could influence the interpreter's impartiality or lead to doubts about the interpreter's impartiality, then this needs to be declared. In some cases, it may lead to the interpreter declining or withdrawing from the assignment.
- Preparation for interpreting assignments. Preparation in many areas of competence is necessary, so that the interpreter has the following:
  - a good knowledge of the asylum procedure system as a whole and of the significance of individual interactions within it; the interpreter should also be familiar with the structure of asylum interviews.

- timely access to information relevant to their work as interpreters in an interaction. Interpreters should insist on the right to access information that enables them to prepare for the interaction and may request access to relevant documents to achieve this.
  - ability to pre-empt difficulties that could be encountered in the interpreted interaction, such as specific terms or constructions, and to have strategies to deal with these.
  - resources and support materials that, at the same time, do not needlessly delay or impede the communicative interaction.
- An interpreter draws on all of their physical and mental capabilities when working on an interpreting assignment. It is incumbent upon interpreters themselves to structure their work duties so that they are able to use the above-mentioned capabilities.
  - Interpreters should ensure that their working conditions are adequate with regard to physical constellation, working space at their disposal and length of assignment.
  - Errors or mistranslations that the interpreter becomes aware of should be immediately and clearly conveyed to other participants in the communicative interaction, and a corrected interpretation should be provided.

*EXAMPLE: After an interview has already commenced, the interpreter discovers that the applicant speaks a dialect that is barely comprehensible to the interpreter. The interpreter informs the interviewer of this.*

**Note.** The interpreter acted professionally. If the interpreter does not possess the necessary competence to perform their role, then the interpreter should withdraw from the assignment.

*EXAMPLE: An interpreter arrives late to an interview, and the interviewer and the applicant are already waiting for her. Due to being in a rush, the interpreter forgets to switch her mobile telephone to “silent” and her mobile telephone starts ringing in the middle of the interview. Instead of switching off her mobile phone, the interpreter answers the call.*

**Note.** The interpreter’s behaviour is unprofessional in many ways. Her late arrival may have led to less time being available for the interview to take place. A feeling of insecurity, time pressures and the feeling of a lack of respect towards the other participants or a lack of confidence in others often has a negative impact on the dynamics of the interaction. In addition, this kind of unprofessional behaviour does a disservice to others and leads to interpreters as a whole gaining a bad reputation.

*EXAMPLE: In the list of information and responses prepared for an interview transcript, one piece of information remains missing, as this was not asked of the applicant. The interpreter becomes aware of this and draws the attention of both interviewer and applicant to this.*

**Note.** The interpreter is required to interpret only the question or statements made by the participants in the interview. If the interviewer omits to ask a question that is typically asked at an interview, this is the responsibility of the interviewer, not the interpreter. The interpreter does not take it upon themselves to remind the interviewer of information that they may have missed. Similarly, the interpreter does not take it upon themselves to remind the applicant of details that they may have omitted to mention. Participants may choose not to ask or not to disclose certain information. That is their right as participants in the interaction. If an interpreter intervenes to volunteer questions or responses on behalf of others, they are overstepping the role boundaries set by codes of ethics that require impartiality and to interpret only what is said by others. Responsibility of the content of an interview lies with the parties for whom the interpreter interprets, not with the interpreter themselves. In cases where the interpreter is required to sign a transcript as the person who provided interpretation, the declaration that the interpreter signs typically specifies that the interpreter has accurately and/or faithfully interpreted the speech or signing of all participants. Such a declaration relates to the accuracy and faithfulness of the interpreter’s interpretations, not to the accuracy of the transcript.

In some countries, the asylum procedure may require the interpreter to provide a declaration not only of the accuracy of their interpretations, but also of the accuracy of the transcript itself. This places the interpreter in the position of being co-responsible for the content of what is recorded in a transcript (see also Unit 8 on sight translating interview transcripts).

*EXAMPLE: An interpreter is required to sign a transcript to declare that the transcript is accurate. She becomes aware that the transcript contains a piece of information that was not asked of the applicant. She draws the attention of both interviewer and applicant to this.*

**Note.** If the interpreter is required to declare not only the accuracy and faithfulness of her interpretations but also the accuracy of the transcript itself, she should alert the interviewer and applicant that the transcript contains a piece of information that was not asked and interpreted. By doing so, she protects herself and acts professionally.

## Professional Codes

A **professional code** contains occupational-specific instructions and prohibitions. It is usually an authorised group of practising professionals within a professional association who draft such a code, which also needs to reflect a consensus of thought amongst professionals as a whole. Where comment on the morality of certain types of behaviour form part of the code, then the professional code also takes on the function of a **professional code of ethics** (Pieper 2007).

Professional codes have a function **within** each professional group, and they also have a function to those who are **outside** the professional group (Ko 2006). They serve to:

- Protect the rights of clients or users of services who rely on the interpreter's expertise but who are unable to judge this;
- Protect the interests of the members of the profession;
- Ensure a standard of quality in the practice of interpreting or translation;
- Advance the profession in a broad sense.

The general standing and status of the profession is of particular importance to all members of that professional group. Those who contravene rules of the profession damage not only their own personal reputation but that of the entire profession. The responsibility that a practitioner has towards the standing of their profession is usually explicitly mentioned in professional codes (Rudvin 2007).

Professional codes for interpreting and translation may be structured in different ways, but generally contain **explicitly formulated norms** (directions on how to conduct oneself). It is less common for the actual values these norms are based on to also be explicitly mentioned (Hoza 2003). In addressing moral issues that can come up at the workplace, these values are an important basis upon which to examine specific problems, in particular to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. In many real-life situations, these **norms** may not be able to provide a conclusive guide on how to act. When this is the case, it is important to keep sight of the overall situation and to consider occupation-specific morals as well as universal moral or ethical values. When faced with a moral dilemma, it is important to draw on these to arrive at a considered course of action. (See below the section on moral dilemmas, p. 77)

At most, professional codes can only explicitly record what is widely recognised as being the general and occupational-specific concepts, values and norms that are accepted as the "collective good" of the profession. As a result of their formalisation, those values and virtues that are codified automatically assume a status that is above that of those values and virtues that are not recorded in the professional codes. For this reason, a professional code has the potential to exercise a normative influence on practitioners, even amongst those who are not formal members of the professional association (Hebenstreit 2010).

## Dilemma Situations

A **dilemma** is understood here to be an "unavoidable conflict between values or duties" (Vorstenbosch 2006; own translation). Such a conflict arises when a number of courses of action appear possible on the basis of particular

values and duties, but only one course of action can be undertaken. In opting for a particular course of action, one is compelled to disregard the values and duties that underlie another course of action.



## FACT BOX

### Moral Dilemmas

In the study of human ethics, there are different schools of thought about what to do in a moral dilemma. (In fact, some schools of thought dispute whether moral dilemmas even exist.) Regardless of questions relating to various schools of thought, moral dilemmas happen in our private and in our work lives. Not everything that appears to be an insoluble conflict of duties, values or interests is necessarily a moral dilemma. This is especially the case when, on closer examination, apparently competing values and duties need not actually conflict with each other on the same level.

In the first place, there are no “quick-fix” solutions for. What is important here is to be able to look at the “right” and “wrong” courses of actions (there are at least two and usually more of these) and to make a decision in an unbiased way. The best way to solve a moral dilemma is to make a decision that is based on clear and informed reasoning. Attributes such as common sense and the ability to think critically and to self-criticise, as well as to think logically, are prerequisites (Smallwood 1995).

These ideas find expression in some of the guidelines that are developed for medical interpreting. The guidelines of the California Healthcare Interpreters Association (CHIA 2002) serve here as an example. They recommend the following:

1. Ask questions to **determine** whether there is a problem,
2. **Identify** and clearly state the problem, considering the ethical principles that may apply and ranking them in applicability,
3. **Clarify** personal values as they relate to the problem,
4. **Consider alternative actions**, including their potential benefits and risks,
5. Decide **to carry out the action** chosen,
6. **Evaluate the outcome** and consider what might be done differently next time.

In real-life situations, decisions usually have to be made on the spot without the option of deliberating over things. This makes it all the more important that interpreters approach moral dilemmas in a self-aware way. They need to exercise reflection and sensitivity about the various courses of actions open to them, and to be prepared to account for what they do.

*EXAMPLE: The interviewer speaks to the applicant using a form of address or expression that is normally considered disrespectful by native speakers of the language that the interviewer is speaking. The interpreter asks the interviewer if he would like the interpreter in her interpretations to use this disrespectful form of address or expression when interpreting to the applicant. The interviewer says no.*

In this example, the principles of accuracy and completeness on the one hand conflict with the principle of professional conduct on the other. Possible options include the following:

- To render the use of the disrespectful form of address or expression in the target language, whenever the interviewer uses these forms in his language.
- Not to render the use of the disrespectful form of address or expression in the target language, and instead to use an appropriate form of address or expression.
- To choose a form of address or expression that is appropriate and to inform the applicant that the interviewer used a less respectful form of address or expression.
- To render the disrespectful form of address or expression in the target language and alert the applicant that this form of address is a disrespectful form of address in the language of the interviewer.
- To refuse to interpret and to advise the interviewer that you as the interpreter will not interpret language that is disrespectful.

Each option has different consequences on the mutual perceptions of each other held by all three participants in the communicative interaction, and the perceptions that they have of themselves. Each option also leads to different consequences for the subsequent course of the communicative interaction. The decision by the interpreter to prioritise a “smooth conversational climate” over content accuracy can be rationally justified.

*EXAMPLE: In the course of the interview, the applicant breaks down in tears. She had suffered physical violence in her country of origin and is now in a state of despair. The interpreter feels great empathy for the applicant and spontaneously reaches out and holds her hand to comfort her. On the basis of her knowledge of cultural norms, the interpreter strongly feels that the applicant will not be able to compose herself if either she, the interpreter, or the interviewer simply sit there impassively, doing nothing. At the same time, the interviewer reminds the interpreter that she should behave in a neutral way.*

In this case, the universal virtues (or duties) of readiness to help others, assisting the victim of a crime, and empathy are in conflict with professional ethical principles. What also needs to be considered here is the interpreter’s knowledge of culturally-specific forms of behaviour that may positively influence the course of the interaction, but which stand in potential conflict with the principle of impartiality.

Occupational-specific principles usually take precedence over personal values in work-place settings. However, in cases such as this, it is important to consider whether principles such as confidentiality need to be adhered to, when the well-being or even the life of a person is potentially threatened.





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## Useful Links

### Internet addresses of codes of ethics in six predominantly Anglophone countries:

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### Activity 1: Professional codes

1

**Form of activity:** Participants initially work in small groups and come together at the end of the activity for plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 45 minutes (30 minutes in small groups, 15 minutes plenary discussion).

**Description:** Participants first read and acquaint themselves with the relevant professional codes or interpreter codes of ethics that apply to the country that they work in. A list of codes of Ethics is given above for the following, predominantly Anglophone countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, United Kingdom and United States. If participants are working in a country other than these, they should refer to the appropriate professional code that applies in their country or region.

After participants have read and acquainted themselves with the relevant code, the following questions are discussed, firstly in small groups, then in plenary discussion.

1. What kind of instructions and prohibitions are contained in the code?
2. What aspects of the code are relevant to some of the examples discussed above?

### Activity 2: Hypothetical situations

2

**Form of activity:** Participants initially work in small groups and come together at the end of the activity for plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 20 minutes per scenario (10 minutes in small groups, 10 minutes plenary discussion).

**Description:** Participants discuss the hypothetical situations presented below (all adapted from authentic sources; see printable worksheet “Activity 2: Critical reflection on hypothetical situations”, p. 82-83). Participants discuss these first in small groups, and the issues brought up are then presented at the plenary session.

Just under the captions that contain the hypothetical situations are further points marked as Further questions and What should I do? These can serve as further points of discussion.

The main aim of discussing hypothetical situations is to develop or increase participants’ awareness and sensitivity. This is done firstly by identifying values and principles relevant to the hypothetical situations, and secondly by discussing the various courses of action that could be followed and assessing their advantages and disadvantages.

The hypothetical situations described here are based on real-life ones and are not made up. In many cases, more than one value or principle may apply to a situation, and participants are therefore encouraged to explore all key values and principles. Where participants are unclear about some details or where further information about the situations is not available, participants may supplement these with details of their own. This can broaden the discussion with further scenarios, for example: “If it were the case that...”



## Printable Worksheet **Activity 2: Critical reflection on hypothetical situations**

(adapted from authentic sources)

**Hypothetical Situation 1:** During the course of the interview, the applicant becomes quite emotional and speaks at a speed that is difficult for the interpreter to work with. The interpreter does not share the same first language as the applicant, and it is hard for him to understand and note down all the things that the applicant says. With the agreement of the interviewer, the interpreter asks the applicant to speak more slowly and reminds him that he would like to be able to fully and correctly interpret all of the words of the applicant.

### Further questions

- How do you think that the interview will proceed after this request from the interpreter?
- What kind of reactions could be expected from the applicant, the interviewer and the interpreter?
- What are the implications of this for interpreters who are not native speakers of the language used by the applicant?
- Are there any implications from this for interpreters who are not native speakers of the language used by the interviewer?

### What should I do?

- Ask the applicant to speak more slowly without involving the interviewer?
- Restrict my interpretations of what he says to those parts that are clear and that I can understand?
- Add the phrase "I think what he's saying is..." at the start of my interpretations or say something like "... but I couldn't really understand when/what/who/why/where..."



**Hypothetical Situation 2:** An interpreter is required to interpret for an applicant who comes from the same country as her, but who belongs to a different ethnic group. The interpreter is very familiar with the format of the interview and knows that certain questions are asked in a particular order. She therefore anticipates a question and asks it without it being asked by the interviewer. The interviewer had actually intended to ask a different kind of question, not the one asked by the interpreter. Just before the applicant leaves the room in which the interview takes place, he asks the interviewer through the interpreter how long it will take before a decision is made about his application. The interpreter is in a hurry and she refuses to interpret this question as she also knows that the interviewer will not be able to answer this question anyway.

### Further questions

- What sort of an impression would the interviewer and the applicant have of the interpreter? The interviewer may think that the interpreter has taken too many liberties in interpreting questions that were not asked in the first place. The applicant may gain the impression that the interpreter is, in some way, prejudiced against him on the basis of ethnic or gender differences, or for some other reason.
- In your opinion, what are some of the issues that can arise when the interpreter comes from the same country as the applicant but has a different religious or ethnic background?
- What is the length of time that an interpreter should make themselves available before or after the interview? What are the time boundaries of an interpreting assignment?

### What should I do?

- At the start of the interview, the interpreter brings up the topic of different ethnic groups for the benefit of the interviewer.
- The interpreter explains to the applicant that in the interpreter's experience, there are many questions to which the interviewer cannot provide an answer.
- The interpreter says to the applicant that she has no further time for him because she has to go somewhere else.



**Hypothetical Situation 3:** The interviewer and the interpreter know each other well and engage in a brief chat about personal things just before the interview. At the same time, the applicant is waiting nervously for his interview to begin.

#### Further questions

- How do you think the applicant would have felt in this situation?
- Which principles are being contravened here?
- As an interpreter, are you obliged to interpret things that are said outside the interview?

#### What should I do?

- Have a short chat with the applicant as well?
- Tell the applicant that he needn't feel nervous?
- Tell the applicant that the conversation with the interviewer was just about the weather?



**Hypothetical Situation 4:** An applicant says that he had to leave his country of origin because he was subject to persecution as a convert to Christianity. The interviewer then asks the applicant some questions related to the Christian faith. The interpreter is not Christian and not familiar with vocabulary to do with Christian theology. The interpreter interprets the interviewer's question "What is Christian scripture?" as "What is Christian handwriting?" In answer to the question which part of the Bible is his favourite one, the interpreter interprets the applicant's response as "The Gospel of David" instead of "The Psalms of David". In response to a question from the interviewer about "the last book of the Bible" (ie. the 'Revelation of John' or the 'Book of Revelation'), the applicant is able to answer correctly. However, the interpreter does not understand the applicant's response and says "I don't know". A further question from the interviewer about the meaning of the Immaculate Conception is not understood at all by the interpreter, and he is unable to interpret this. As a person with a particular responsibility who speaks the same language as the applicant and who is aware of mistakes in his interpretation, the interpreter warns the applicant that these mistranslations may have a negative impact on his application for asylum.

Example: Anna Maria Jalalifar

#### Further questions

- What is your assessment of the behaviour of the interpreter with respect to ethics and professionalism?
- What would you do as an interpreter if you were not able to interpret what you heard?
- How would others react to this? What would the effect of your actions be on the interaction?
- To what extent is it important that professional interpreters are proficient in specialist terminology?
- To what extent can one's own religious background have an effect on understanding the speech of others and on one's ability to interpret this?

#### What should I do?

- Tell the others that I don't know the terms used?
- Say to the others that I do not have good knowledge of some aspects of the Christian faith?
- Ask the interviewer whether the applicant can be asked for clarification of what he said, in order for it to be interpreted?
- Suggest to the interviewer that the responses from the applicant be recorded in writing via a phonetic transcription of what the applicant has said?
- Suggest to the interviewer that the interview be rescheduled and another interpreter with a more detailed understanding of this topic area be requested for the interview.



## Test yourself!

**Answer the following questions in plenary discussion. Feel free to talk about the issues and circumstances that influence your responses to the questions.**

1. Are there types of clothing, jewellery or other physical adornments that may be problematic for the cultural groups for whom you interpret?
2. Which of the following tasks are those that can reasonably be expected of an interpreter? Which ones cannot? Consider those that you are able to answer unequivocally and those about which you may be less certain. What are the reasons that you can think of that would guide you in how you respond?
  - sight translation of written documents belonging to the applicant
  - data entry of statements made by the applicant onto a computer
  - an exact back-translation of the contents of the interview transcript into the language of the applicant
  - a word-for-word translation of the statements made by the applicant
  - checking the veracity of statements made by the applicant
  - translation of written grievances made by the applicant
  - accompanying the applicant through various administrative hurdles
  - translation of written documents belonging to the applicant
  - thinking up questions that the applicant could possibly be asked
  - informing relatives or friends of the applicant of the progress of the asylum application
  - providing truthful interpretations of the information provided by the applicant
3. What options are available to the interpreter in the following scenarios? Consider arguments for and against particular options, and provide reasons for your responses.

**Scenario 1:** An interpreter is called to interpret for an applicant's asylum procedure. As the interpreter approaches the building in which the interview takes place he notices a distant relative of his (the interpreter) standing nearby. As soon as this relative sees the interpreter, he recognises him and quickly turns his back to him. At the reception, the interpreter enquires as to the name of the applicant for whom he will be interpreting. It turns out that the interpreter has been called to interpret for that person who happens to be a distant relative of his.

**Scenario 2:** An interpreter's services are requested for a particular date and at a particular time for an asylum procedure interview. Just before this date, the interpreter receives a request from another government authority to interpret on the same day for a few hours but at a time later on after the first interview. The person making this request says that she is in great need and unable to source another interpreter, and the interpreter agrees to her request. When the interpreter arrives at her first interview that day, she realises that it will last much longer than expected and that she will now be very pressed for time.

# Unit 6:

## Interpreting Modes

Ursula Stachl-Peier &  
Sonja Pöllabauer

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will be able to

- » distinguish between different interpreting modes, that is consecutive interpreting with and without notes, simultaneous interpreting, chuchotage or whispering interpreting, and sight translation;
- » define interpreting competence;
- » describe the different phases of the interpreting process, that is source text analysis, comprehension, processing of meaning, translation into the target language, memorising and note-taking;
- » develop controls for managing an interpreted conversation, including preparation for the assignment, management of turn-taking, speakers' speaking speed and pauses;
- » develop an awareness of potentially problematic situations and intervention options;
- » find out more about mnemonic techniques and ways of further improving your interpreting performance and conversation management strategies.



## Interpreting Modes

This unit briefly describes the different interpreting modes and the settings in which they are normally used.

A basic distinction is made between **consecutive** and **simultaneous modes of interpreting**. In consecutive interpreting, a speaker presents a short text or section of a text, the interpreter listens, takes notes and, when the speaker pauses, interprets the text into the target language. In simultaneous interpreting, the speaker and the interpreter are speaking "simultaneously" (see for instance Kautz 2002, Jones 2002, Gillies 2013). Both techniques can be used in **mono-directional** and **bi-directional** settings. In mono-directional settings, the interpreter translates only from the source language into the target language, which is typically the case in conference interpreting. In bi-directional settings, the interpretation is from and into the source language. The choice of mode in a particular setting depends on a variety of factors, including the interpreters' experience with a given technique, the participants' personal preferences and, of course, the availability of the necessary technical equipment. For simultaneous interpreting, booths, microphones and headphones for the listeners or portable equipment are needed.

### CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING

#### » Uni-directional Consecutive Interpreting

In uni-directional interpreting, translation is provided only from the source language into the target language. The speakers address an audience made up of a larger group of people. The interpreter listens actively and analyses the content of the speech in order to be able to understand its meaning and correctly translate the content into the target language. The speakers pause at regular intervals to allow the interpreters to render the text in the target language. The length of the interpreted sections can vary significantly, ranging from just a few sentences to passages of five minutes or more. Often, interpreters and speakers agree in advance when the speaker should pause. If only shorter sections are translated, interpreters usually rely on their memory to reproduce the text and do not take notes. If longer text passages are presented, interpreters usually take notes, which facilitates text analysis and helps them to recall the content and structure of the source text accurately (see also Unit 7).

Today, consecutive interpreting in uni-directional settings is generally seen as **taking up too much time** and therefore is restricted to very few settings such as dinner speeches, welcome addresses, speeches at award-winning ceremonies and press conferences.

### » Bi-directional Consecutive Interpreting

In bi-directional consecutive interpreting, the interpreter translates between **two or more participants from and into both languages**. The interpreters begin to interpret when the speaker pauses or has finished their contribution. Usually, the participants and the interpreter(s) are present in the same location. However, interpreting can also be provided via telephone or video-conference link.

Above all, bi-directional consecutive interpreting is used for meetings, talks and negotiations. **It is also the most common mode in asylum procedures.**

The literature (e.g. Jacobsen 2012) distinguishes between **short consecutive** and **long consecutive**. In short consecutive mode, the speaker pauses after one or two sentences to give the interpreter the opportunity to translate. The interpreter listens actively and memorises the content of the text; they do not take notes. In longer consecutive mode, the presented sections of text are too long for the interpreter to be able to remember and reproduce their meaning accurately in the target language. Interpreters therefore take notes. In asylum interviews, most speakers' contributions are short. At times, however, speakers present longer sections, and interpreters need to take notes. If speakers continue for too long, and there is a risk that their contribution cannot be exactly and faithfully reproduced, interpreters can and should communicate this to the speaker. They can either attract the speaker's attention non-verbally, by gaze or body language, or ask the speaker to pause so as to allow the interpreter to translate what has been said. It is always better to ask speakers to stop rather than try to memorise or note down a long speech. Accurate interpretation is not possible when there is memory overload or when the notes are not decipherable.

## SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING

In simultaneous interpreting, the speaker and the interpreter speak **almost simultaneously**; that is, the interpreter is a **few seconds behind the speaker** while the speech continues. Simultaneous interpreting is challenging; the interpreter must listen actively, understand the meaning of the text, translate it into the target language and speak, all at the same time. For simultaneous interpretation to function smoothly, interpreters need proper **interpreting equipment** with headphones, microphones, volume regulators, etc. If the sound quality in the booth is poor and the speaker is difficult to hear, the interpreter must devote most of their

mental energy to trying to make out what the speaker is saying. As a consequence, they have less mental capacity available for text analysis, translation and text production in the target language.

With the development of portable interpreting equipment, simultaneous interpreting has become the preferred mode in most settings. Today, simultaneous interpreting is used for conferences, lectures, international meetings and talks, training workshops, presentations and also guided tours. It is rarely used for interpreting in asylum interviews.

## CHUCHOTAGE

Chuchotage is a special type of simultaneous interpreting. The interpreter sits (or stands) beside or behind the person or persons who need(s) interpretation and whispers the translation to the client while the speaker continues. **No interpreting equipment** is available that could facilitate the interpreter's processing task, which can negatively affect the quality of the interpretation. Still, some interpreters prefer chuchotage over consecutive interpreting, particularly if their note-taking is inadequate (Jacobsen 2012).

In asylum interviews, chuchotage is sometimes used by trained interpreters. Chuchotage may be unfamiliar to participants who are not used to interpreting and/or working with interpreters. Some may therefore regard it as disturbing and annoying and prefer the consecutive mode.



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Chuchotage

- Is chuchotage used at asylum interviews in your country?

## SIGHT TRANSLATION

Despite its name, sight translation is more similar to interpreting than translation (Pöchhacker 2004). When interpreters sight translate, they start reading a stretch of written text, immediately translate, or interpret, this stretch, while they continue to read the next text section. Like simultaneous interpreting, sight translation **involves multi-tasking**; the interpreter must simultaneously read the source text, analyse and comprehend its content, translate the meaning and reproduce it in the target language.

Sight translation is commonly used in asylum procedures. Interpreters are often asked to translate the interview transcript and other written material such as previous records, decisions, country-specific material and personal documents (Mikkelsen and Jourdenais 2015) (see Unit 8).



## Interpreting Competence

This section describes the different stages of the interpreting process and various distractions and problems that might arise, as well as controls and strategies which are available to the interpreter.

Interpreting is a complex and challenging process, not least for novice interpreters. It is useful, therefore, to **divide the process into different phases** and look at what demands manifest in each phase. The first phase of the interpreting process involves listening and understanding (reading and understanding in the case of sight translation). The interpreter must **analyse and comprehend** the source text, **store its content in the short-term memory**, **translate the meaning** (maybe note it down) and then **produce a text in the target language**. In real life, of course, all the processes take place almost simultaneously (Gile 2009).

Working conditions are not always perfect. Interpreters therefore need to carefully prepare for each job and the specific demands of each assignment. They need to think about what problems are likely to arise and what strategies they have available in order to cope with difficulties.

### LISTENING

Successful listening is possible only if a **number of conditions are met** (Kautz 2002):

- There are no **distractions** such as other people talking or background noise.
- The speaker speaks **loud enough** to be clearly heard by their interpreter.
- **The speaker's pronunciation is comprehensible:** the speaker does not have a speech impediment, does not have a heavy accent and has a good command of the language they are using.
- The interpreters must be in a **good physical and mental state** to be able to concentrate on the listening task.

In asylum procedures, a variety of challenges and problems can arise. Interpreters using chuchotage may be distracted by the sound of their own voice. The interviewer and/or the asylum-seeker may speak so softly that the interpreter cannot clearly make out what they are saying. An asylum-seeker may only have imperfect knowledge of the language they are using or employ region-specific terms and dialectal expressions. Towards the end of a long session, interpreters may feel physically and mentally exhausted and find it difficult to focus.

When the working conditions make good-quality interpreting difficult, the interpreters must be able to resort to resources that will help them cope with the specific demands of the situation. If, for instance, simultaneous interpreting equipment is not available, it may be better to interpret consecutively rather than use chuchotage. If the interviewer or asylum-seeker speaks too quietly, the interpreter can sometimes ask them to speak more loudly. If this is not appropriate, the interpreter can try and move closer to the speakers to ensure they can hear them. Regional expressions, dialect words and proper names that are difficult to understand when they are first uttered may become comprehensible later when more information and context are provided. If in doubt, it is always better to ask for clarification, rather than simply try and guess what has been said. If interpreters feel they are beginning to get tired and unable to concentrate, they can ask for a break.

### COMPREHENDING

Kautz (2002, 300) defines comprehending as the “partly conscious, partly unconscious understanding of the meaning of a speaker’s utterance” (own translation). What this formulation stresses is that the meaning of an utterance is never definite and unambiguous. Rather, the interpreter’s background knowledge and experience of the world have a major impact on how they understand the speaker’s words.

Let us look at an example: The word ‘breakfast’ is defined by the Collins online English dictionary as “a. the first meal of the day; b. the food at this meal; c. (in the Caribbean) a midday meal”. What image is conjured up by the word in the mind of language users will thus depend not only on individual but also on cultural preferences. For some people, breakfast signifies a quick espresso at the bar, for others it is an occasion to enjoy an extensive meal with time to read the newspaper. A typical “French” breakfast is comprised of a large cup of milky coffee with a croissant; an “English” breakfast includes fried egg, sausages and baked beans on toast, washed down with several cups of tea. If interpreters are aware of such cultural differences, they can develop strategies that bridge intercultural misunderstandings. Sometimes, it may be appropriate to explain differences, to ensure that all participants in the communication share the same knowledge. On other occasions, it may be better to explain that a term cannot be translated.

What can interpreters do, though, if they themselves have not understood an utterance and the context does not provide any cues as to what it means? The literature on conference interpreting usually recommends that

interpreters should try to predict what the speaker intended to say and translate this anticipated meaning. This is hardly an appropriate strategy for asylum interviews. Here, it is better to ask for clarification or admit that an utterance or word has not been understood, to avoid wrong associations or incorrect renditions in the target language. If information is incorrectly translated or misunderstood, this can have serious consequences for asylum-seekers, and even lead to their deportation to their country of origin and to persecution.

## MEMORISING

After the meaning of an utterance has been decoded, the message needs to be memorised until it can be translated and reproduced in the target language. In short consecutives, the **message is stored only in the memory**, in long consecutives, **in the memory and with the help of notes that act as memory prompts**. In simultaneous interpreting, the interpreter often jots down proper names and figures (see Unit 7), yet, most of the information is stored in the memory.

In research into the function of the brain, three types of memory are distinguished: **Ultra-short-term memory, short-term memory and long-term memory**. The ultra-short-term memory stores information only for as long as is needed for all the relevant information to be identified and passed on to the short-term memory for further processing (according to Kautz 2002: 310 “for a maximum of 20 seconds”). In the short-term memory, connections are established between the new information and old information that is retrieved from the long-term memory, that is to say, until the meaning of the information has been captured. Information that is considered relevant is then stored in the long-term memory; irrelevant information is erased. Our long-term memory is our knowledge base. It contains the linguistic knowledge that we regularly access and which is therefore easily and quickly retrieved. It also contains other types of knowledge, such as specialist terminology, which was memorised for a specific job assignment and which needs to be reactivated before it can be used again.

Interpreters need good memory skills. As mentioned above, information is only stored in the long-term memory if it is considered relevant. Moreover, we tend to store the processed meaning of an utterance rather than its precise wording. As the new information is integrated into existing knowledge it may be slightly “corrected” so that it fits with our own previous experiences. We also tend to rearrange disjointed utterances and store them in an order that we consider more logical, and we erase emotionally distressing information or information that seems incongruous to us.

In asylum procedures, interpreters have to translate what has been said exactly and accurately, while they must

also check that the meaning of the speaker’s utterance has been understood. This is a challenging task, which puts their powers of memory to the test (see also Unit 9). Since memory skills vary considerably from one person to another, interpreters need to know how good their memory capacity is and how much text they can remember. In other words, they need to know when they have to start interpreting, in order to be able to reproduce the content of an utterance in the target language accurately and completely. Good notes are a valuable aid to memory (see Unit 7), yet it is also important that interpreters train and enhance their mnemonic skills.

## TRANSLATION AND REPRODUCTION IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE

The final two phases of the interpreting process involve **the translation of the message and its reproduction in the target language**. For many people, these two phases constitute “interpreting proper”.

An excellent command of all working languages is essential, if interpreters are to be able to reproduce the content of the original in the target language accurately. When they formulate the target text, interpreters can employ different strategies (Kautz 2002):

- They can produce a complete and correct reproduction of the source text which mirrors all “incoherent” passages of the source and does not complete unfinished sentences, omit redundancies and repetitions or adapt the language or register to suit the addressees.
- They can paraphrase and find wordings suited to the presumed world knowledge and language level of the addressees.
- They can omit repetitions and redundancies and stress what is most relevant.
- They can provide supplementary information and explain something that was only implicitly suggested, add cohesive links (link words) and complete unfinished sentences (see also Baumgarten, Meyer, and Özçetin 2008).
- They can omit all details and provide a general summary of the content.

Which strategy the interpreter ought to choose depends on the communicative setting. In asylum procedures, the interpreter needs to avoid approaches that involve complete reformulation or reorganisation of the source text. Redundancies, implicit suggestions, unfinished sentences, detailed descriptions of an event, the language

register used by the speakers, and so on, are often useful indicators of the (psychological) state of the asylum-seeker. This information is lost when the interpreter produces a well-structured and coherent summary of the asylum-seeker's utterance (see also Units 4 and 9).

## Paraverbal and Nonverbal Communication

Paraverbal and nonverbal information play an important role in bilateral consecutive settings. Nonverbal signals, such as **gestures** and **facial expressions** (including mimicry), can be important indicators of how the speaker wants an utterance to be understood. A facial expression may even negate the verbal message that it accompanies, for instance, when someone utters a compliment with a sarcastic smile. Gestures can also be used to stress or explain details. For example, someone may use gestures to delineate the size and shape of an object. Sometimes, facial expressions and gestures may even completely replace verbal utterances. People often shake their head to indicate "no", nod to indicate "yes", shrug their shoulders to express "I don't know" or "I don't care", or sneer to express contempt. Even eye-contact and posture can provide important cues. Such nonverbal behaviour is, however, highly culture-specific and likely to be influenced by the very hierarchical structure of asylum interviews (see Unit 10).

Paraverbal signals, such as **volume, intonation and rate of speech**, also provide important information. Emotional distress and the recollection of traumatic events are likely to impact on a speaker's tone of voice; their voice may sound muffled and eventually completely stop. Frustration may lead to a speaker talking very loudly and fast. These paraverbal signals provide meaningful cues but do not need to be imitated by interpreters.

## Correct and/or Word-for-Word Interpretation

**"Correct"** interpretation is a vague term and can mean many different things:

- A complete and accurate reproduction of the source text. All the main and secondary ideas are retained, the interpreter does not omit or add anything and also includes nonverbal behaviour as well as culture-specific formulations and ways of expression (see Units 4 and 10).
- A reproduction of the main ideas of the text. The interpreter omits repetitions, redundancies and details which they consider to be irrelevant, and paraphrases and reorganises "illogical and incoherent" passages.
- A complete rendition of all the information, with supplementary information and explanations of culture-specific references.
- A word-for-word reproduction of the source text which preserves the syntax of the source language.

Any of these different approaches can produce a "correct" interpretation. In communication settings in which only the main ideas of a long, convoluted and redundant speech need to be reproduced, the interpreter is likely to choose the second option to produce a "correct" interpretation. If the addressees expect the interpreter to explain intercultural differences, the third approach will probably be best suited to produce a "correct" rendition. The fourth option will enable "correct" interpretation in cases when frequent false starts, repetitions, incoherent utterances or unfinished sentences are seen as valuable cues that need to be reproduced in the target text (see Unit 9). Mostly, however, word-for-word translation is not an appropriate strategy, since source language and target language syntactic structures are usually too different for literal renditions to produce meaningful texts (see also Unit 4). If the interpreter has been asked to produce a complete, accurate and understandable translation, then they will probably opt for the first approach, which is most likely to produce the requested "correct" interpretation.

## Turn-taking Management

Interpreting in asylum procedures is usually conducted face-to-face in the bilateral mode. Although the interviewer and the asylum-seeker are the main interlocutors, or participants, this does not mean that the interpreter is invisible and a mere conduit or translation machine. Interpreters may need to **become more actively involved and coordinate and manage the conversation** to ensure successful communication (see Unit 4). Occasionally, interpreters may even have to interrupt a speaker so that they can interpret.

The maximum length of each speaker's turn will depend on many different factors, including the complexity of the topic, the clarity and structural cohesiveness of the source text, and whether or not the interpreter takes notes. It is easier to remember long sections of a well structured narrative which has a clear thread running through it than short incoherent accounts, especially when word-for-word interpretation is expected. Dates, figures and the names of geographical areas or persons are also difficult to remember. In these cases, turns need to be short, or the interpreter needs to take notes.

Interrupting a speaker is often difficult; therefore, interpreters need to pay careful attention to those features and cues that regulate the right to speak. Such cues include

**intonation patterns** that signal the end of a turn (note culture-specific differences), **pauses** (the length of tolerated pauses is also culture-specific), **body language** (for example, when the speaker leans back), and **eye contact and gaze** (see also Wadensjö 2001 and Mason 2012).

Interpreters may also interrupt speakers to **ask for clarification or repetition** when they have been unable to hear what the speaker said because they were speaking too softly, because several people were speaking at the same time or there was too much background noise, or because they were not familiar with the speaker's accent, or did not understand idiomatic or specialist terms and want to make sure that they have understood the meaning of the utterance correctly. It is important that requests for clarification are formulated clearly and do not lead to further questions or misunderstandings. However, interpreters must not interrupt speakers in order to add their own comments and personal observations or supplementary facts (Hale 2001 and Wadensjö 2008; see also Unit 4).

Interpreters should not interrupt asylum-seekers, either, when they relate events that are **emotionally distressing** for them. In such cases, it is best if the interpreter takes notes to avoid interruptions and losing track (see also Rudvin and Tomassini 2011).



### FACT BOX

#### Phone and Video-Interpreting

Phone and/or video-interpreting is sometimes used in an asylum context. However, there is little academic research available on the use of video-interpreting in asylum procedures (Ellis 2014; Braun and Taylor 2011). For other legal contexts, for example criminal procedures, video-interpreting is used more often; it has also been the focus of research, with empirical data also available (see for instance the website of the AVIDICUS project of the University of Surrey, <http://www.videoconference-interpreting.net/index.html>, (accessed January 15 2022)).

In Europe, the General Directors' Immigration Services Conference (GDISC), a network for promoting cooperation in the field of immigration, initiated a project to promote the use of video-interpreting and "relay interpreting" (two interpreters using a pivot language) through a video link. Upon the request of Bulgaria, feedback on the project was collected. The use of remote interpreting in different EU member states varied, with differing views as to the success of using such modes (Braun, and Taylor, 41-42).



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## Basic Reading

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## Further Reading

- » Braun, Sabine, and Judith L. Taylor. 2011. "Video-Mediated Interpreting: An Overview of Current Practice and Research." In *Videoconference and Remote Interpreting in Criminal Proceedings*, edited by Sabine Braun, and Judith L. Taylor, 27-57. Guildford: University of Surrey.
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## Useful Links

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### Activity 1: Listening – comprehending – memorising

1

**Form of activity:** Group work followed by plenary discussion of the results.

**Duration:** 65 minutes (15 minutes for each exercise in the small groups, 20 minutes for the plenary discussion).

**Description:** Each group completes all three exercises. The results are summarised briefly in the plenary before some follow-up questions are discussed.

#### **Exercise 1: Reproduction of a well-structured source text**

One participant tells a well-structured (life-)story lasting approximately 2-3 minutes, which includes some dates, numbers, names of people and geographical locations. The other participants listen actively and try to remember the content. When the speaker has finished, one or several participants retell the story.

#### **Questions for discussion:**

- What details were remembered?
- Why were these details remembered?
- What details were not or were incorrectly memorised? How accurately were numbers, names of people and geographical locations reproduced?
- Why were some of these details forgotten?
- Were details missed or not heard because they were considered irrelevant for the story? Were details towards the end of the presentation missed because the retellers were getting tired and losing concentration?

#### **Exercise 2: Reproduction of a poorly structured source text**

One participant tells an incoherent (life-)story lasting approximately 2-3 minutes, which is not in chronological order and includes many asides and irrelevant digressions. The other members of the group listen actively and try to remember the content. When the speaker has finished, one or several participants retell the story.

#### **Questions for discussion:**

- How was the story reproduced? Was the original incoherent structure preserved or were the facts presented in chronological order?
- What details were remembered and what details were forgotten or incorrectly remembered? Why?

#### **Exercise 3: Reproduction with and without notes**

One participant tells an incoherent (life-)story of approx. 2-3 minutes which is not in chronological order and includes many asides and irrelevant digressions. Another member of the group listens actively and tries to remember the content; a third group member takes notes. When the speaker has finished, these two group members reproduce the story.

#### **Questions for discussion:**

- How was the story reproduced? Was the original structure preserved or were the facts presented in chronological order?
- Did the two group members' reproductions differ?
- What details were memorised/forgotten? Why?

#### **Questions for the plenary discussion:**

- Was it difficult/easy to remember the content of the texts? Why was it easy/difficult? What type of content was easy/difficult to remember?
- How did your own background knowledge help you to understand the text?
- What were the central ideas, and what information was secondary?
- When did the length of the narrative segment become too long for you to be able to reproduce the content accurately and correctly?
- Did you find that notes were a help or hindrance?



## Activity 2: Visualising information

2

**Form of activity:** Group work followed by plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 20 minutes (10 minutes of group work followed by 10 minutes of plenary discussion).

**Description:** One participant presents a detailed description of a location or scene. The other group members listen actively and try to remember the content of the description. When the speaker has finished, one or several group members reproduce the description.

**Questions for discussion:**

- What was remembered?
- What strategies did you use to memorise details? Did you try to mentally repeat what was said, visualise the scene or any other techniques?

## Activity 3: Interpreting speakers who are difficult to understand

3

**Form of activity:** Group work with subsequent discussion.

**Duration:** 20 minutes (10 minutes of group work followed by 10 minutes of plenary discussion).

**Description:** One participant tells a (life-)story approximately 2-3 minutes long, using a regional or local accent and slang or dialectal expressions, as well as many dates, numbers and proper names which are not clearly pronounced. The other group members listen actively and try to remember the content. When the speaker has finished, one or several group members reproduce the story.

**Questions for discussion:**

- How does the additional mental effort that is needed to properly hear and understand what the speaker said impact the memory?
- Was it more difficult to memorise facts?
- What details were not or incorrectly remembered?
- How did you memorise numbers and proper names?

**Follow-up discussion in the plenary:**

- What can interpreters do to make sure they will correctly and accurately reproduce the content of the source text?





## Activity 4: Chuchotage

4

**Form of activity:** Work in small groups with subsequent discussion.

**Duration:** 30 minutes (20 minutes of group work followed by 10 minutes of plenary discussion).

**Description:** One participant presents a text that includes some proper names and numbers. Another member of the group whispers the translation to the trainer or a third group member; the interpretation is recorded. The other group members listen actively and try to remember the content. When the speaker has finished, the interpreter summarises the content of the text. Then, all the group members listen to the recording and discuss problems that may have arisen.

### Questions for discussion:

- What details were memorised?
- What details were not or incorrectly remembered?
- What impact did multi-tasking, in other words that the interpreter had to simultaneously listen, memorise the content and speak, have on your memory capacity?

### Follow-up discussion in the plenary:

After each group has briefly summarised the results of their discussions, particularly problematic sections can be listened to again and discussed further in the plenary.

## Activity 5: Memory training

5

### Exercise 1: Verbatim repetition of an oral narrative

**Form of activity:** Whole group, or small groups of no more than 6 participants.

**Duration:** 20 minutes.

**Description:** Together, the group members invent a story. The first sentence of the story is presented by the trainer. One participant repeats this sentence and adds a second sentence. Then the next group member repeats both sentences and adds a third, and so on.

**Questions for discussion:**

- How much text was remembered verbatim, and when did you start to summarise the content?

### Exercise 2: Verbatim repetition of a written text

**Form of activity:** Pair work, followed by plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 20 minutes (10 minutes of pair work, 10 minutes of plenary discussion).

**Description:** Work in pairs. Partner A first reads out a text in its entirety (see printable worksheet “Activity 5: Memory training”, p. 97); Partner B listens actively. Then A reads out the first few sentences of the text; B tries to repeat the text verbatim. Then A reads the first few sentences again PLUS another short section of the text. B repeats both sections. Continue until B has repeated the entire text.

**Questions for discussion:**

- How much text can be memorised and reproduced verbatim?





## Printable Worksheet **Activity 5: Memory training**

### **Example 1:**

*A copy of the decision was forwarded to the appellant on 20 July 2016. It was not returned to the Authority. The following month, on 5 August 2016, the appellant notified the Authority of his change of address. There was some ensuing correspondence with the appellant and a representative instructed briefly by him before 7 September 2016, when that representative advised the Authority that the appellant had been arrested and detained, his permit having expired.*

*Pursuant to the Authority's jurisprudence, where it has previously dismissed an appeal without a hearing on the basis of non-appearance, the Authority will consider an application for a new hearing of the appeal. The application must be accompanied by an affidavit setting out the reasons for the non-appearance. The Authority, in determining whether to grant the application, will consider both the reasons for non-appearance and the substantive merits of the case.*

Source: Refugee Status Appeals Authority New Zealand. "Refugee Appeal No. 74813".  
<http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/477e10ce2.pdf> (Accessed January 15 2022)

## Activity 6: (Re-)production

6

Interpreters should never paraphrase or modify the register of the source language unless this has been agreed in advance with the interviewer. The aim of the following activities is to raise awareness of how even minor modifications can have serious consequences and result in misinterpretations and mistakes.

### “Working WITHOUT a text....”

**Form of activity:** Plenary or small groups.

**Duration:** 20 minutes per task.

#### **Description:**

##### **Task 1: Reformulating complex language in a simpler register**

One participant or the trainer presents a text which uses highly complex syntax, a very formal register and specialist terminology. The other group members reformulate the text using a lower register and simpler syntax.

##### **Task 2: Reformulating simple language in a higher register**

One participant or the trainer presents a text with many colloquial expressions, simple syntax and unfinished sentences. The other group members reformulate the text using a higher register, more complex syntax and specialist terminology.

#### **Questions for discussion:**

- What was easy and what was difficult to reformulate?
- Did the paraphrased text preserve the initial message?
- What are the advantages of paraphrasing and what could be potential risks?

### “Working WITH a text...”

**Form of activity:** Plenary or small groups.

**Duration:** 20 minutes per task.

#### **Description:**

##### **Task 1: Dealing with non-standard language**

The participants read a text (see text example 1 or 2, printable worksheet “Activity 6: (Re-)Production”, p. 99) and discuss (in small groups or plenary) how the applicant’s statement could be rendered for the interviewer and how changes to the style and register might affect the content and the perception of the applicant. In their discussion they should also focus on the interpreter’s role, for example, when it comes to changes in the style and register of a message.

##### **Task 2: Dealing with very formal and formalistic language**

The participants read a text (see text examples 3, 4 or 5, printable worksheet “Activity 6: (Re-)Production”, p. 99) and discuss (in small groups or plenary) how the interviewer’s statement could be interpreted and which strategy they would chose.





## Printable Worksheet **Activity 6: (Re-)Production**

### Text example 1:

Interviewer: „Why did you leave your country?“

Applicant: „Because I'm afraid, if I stay there, they will kill me.“

Interviewer: „Why didn't you report this incidence to the police?“

Applicant: „The police cannot do anything.“

Interviewer: „Why would you have been killed?“

Applicant: „Because my junior brother, they killed.“



### Text example 2:

Interviewer: Why didn't you claim asylum in Italy or Spain?

Applicant: 'I was never alone in any of these countries, always agent was with me and he was a frightening character. I had never been in contact with this kind of person.'

Interviewer: You say you left Iran because your life was in danger yet you did not claim asylum whilst in safe countries, this makes it hard for me to believe your claim, can you explain?

Applicant: 'I was on my own for just a few hours in Spain. I had been told that if you go anywhere else that we give you the ticket for, they will send you back to Iran. I have never been around this kind of people. For nearly two months I was on my own and I didn't have the courage to do anything apart from what they asked me to do.'



### Text example 3:

The questions I am about to ask you relate to your identity, background and travel route to the United Kingdom. The information you will be asked to provide will be used mainly for administrative purposes. You will not be asked at this stage to go into detail about the substantive details of your asylum claim as, if appropriate, this will be done at a later interview. However, some details you will be asked to provide may be relevant to your claim. The information you give us, including biometrics data such as fingerprints, will be held in confidence. However, this may be disclosed to other government departments and agencies, local authorities, law enforcement bodies, international organisations and asylum authorities of other countries that may have responsibility for your asylum claim. This is to enable them to carry out their functions, including the prevention and detection of fraud.



### Text example 4:

You must answer the questions fully and truthfully. Failure to do so may damage your credibility and may affect the outcome of your asylum application. You should also be aware that making a false statement or representation may constitute an offence under immigration legislation and may, therefore, render you liable to prosecution and imprisonment.



### Text example 5:

It is considered you have failed to substantiate this aspect of your account. Whether your brother was arrested will therefore be left in the balance and consideration will be given as to whether it would be right to advance you the benefit of the doubt when your claim is considered as a whole. [...] It is considered that you have failed to meet condition 339L(v) [transposing Art. 4 (5) (e) QD]. It is considered that your behaviour falls within Section 8(4) of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004. Section 8 (4) explains that it is damaging to a claimant's credibility if they failed to take advantage of a reasonable opportunity to make a claim for asylum in a safe country. It is noted that you passed through Italy and Spain before arriving in the UK and claiming asylum. It is considered that you do not meet all the conditions laid out in Paragraph 339L of the Immigration Rules. Consequently, there is no requirement under the Immigration Rules to accept as true the unsubstantiated claim you have made in paragraph 41.

## Activity 7: Coordinating talk

7

**Form of activity:** Individual or group work followed by plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 10 minutes per task (5 minutes individual or group work, 5 minutes plenary session).

**Description:**

### Task 1: Interrupting speakers

The participants analyse an interpreting scenario (see printable worksheet “Activity 7: Coordinating talk”, p. 101) and discuss when they would have interrupted and started their interpretation.

Questions for discussion:

- When would you have stopped the interviewee and begun to interpret?
- What strategies could you adopt for interrupting the speaker?

### Task 2: Signalling that the interpreter intends to interrupt the speaker

The participants analyse an interpreting scenario (see printable worksheet “Activity 7: Coordinating talk”, p. 101) and discuss when they would have signalled to the speakers that they should stop and allow the interpreter to render the message.

Questions for discussion:

- What could you do to signal that you intend to interrupt the speaker?
- Can you complete what the interpreter was about to say to the interviewer?
- How long do you think you could listen to someone with the help of your notes?

## Activity 8: Managing turn-taking

8

**Form of activity:** Role-played interview in small groups followed by plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 30 minutes.

**Description:** All the participants read through the text and role-play the interview (see printable worksheet “Activity 8: Managing turn-taking”, p. 102). They then split up into smaller groups. One participant adopts the role of the interviewer, one that of the asylum-seeker, one participant acts as interpreter; the other group members observe. The interviewer should try to interrupt the asylum-seeker and comment on what is being said or ask further questions; the asylum-seeker should continue speaking and refuse to be stopped.

Questions for discussion:

- What can interpreters do, when two speakers overlap or interrupt each other?
- How can interpreters manage turn-taking?
- What strategies were used by the interpreters in the role-play? How successful were their strategies?



Printable Worksheet **Activity 7: Coordinating talk**

**Task 1**



Source: Picture based on UNHCR. 2009. Interpreting in a Refugee Context. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/49b6314d2.html> (Accessed January 15 2022)



**Task 2**



Source: Picture based on UNHCR. 2009. Interpreting in a Refugee Context. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/49b6314d2.html> (Accessed January 15 2022)



## Printable Worksheet **Activity 8: Managing turn-taking**

### Example

**Interviewer:** Describe your journey and name the different types of transport you used en route to Austria.

**Applicant:** *Nine months ago, I left Ghazaouet and went to Almeria in Spain. I was hidden in the back of a lorry. I spent around 30 hours hidden in the lorry, which drove on board the ship as soon as I had climbed onto it. Then I left the lorry and stayed on the boat for around 8 hours. Then a person saw me and asked what I was doing on the ship. This person then locked me in a room. When we got to Almeria, he handed me over to the police. The policemen went to a car with me. I was handcuffed, and I escaped before getting into the car. In Almeria it is easy, I rang a friend. I can't tell you what his name is. He came and took me to his home. There, I rested for a little while. Then he took me to the north of Spain. I paid for it. I was in a town called San Sebastian in Spain. In San Sebastian, I stayed about three days in the house of a friend of this first friend. This friend of the first friend said that he was prepared to help me and took me to another friend in Bilbao in Spain. Bilbao is on the border between Spain and France. There I stayed for around three months. The friend from Bilbao drove me to Brussels in Belgium in a car. The journey lasted three to four days. We stopped several times. The driver knows many shortcuts. In Brussels, I stayed in the house of my friend from Bilbao for three months, without documents. These friends said I must not tell their names to anyone. I will not tell you their names. The friend that has a house in Brussels has Belgian nationality. For him, it is not a problem to cross country borders. From Brussels in Belgium we drove to Ulm, Germany. That took us three weeks; we stopped several times. My friend was getting phone calls from his contacts that told him if there were police checks on the way or whether the road was clear. My friend, who drove me to Stuttgart, took me to the train station where I got out of the car. He said "ciao" and drove away. He was afraid of the police, that's why he drove away. The total cost was 1500 euro. I arrived in Stuttgart about 20-25 days ago. I spent three days on the street and in the train station. Then I got on the train and went to Vienna. I changed train four or five times. The journey took two days. I spent one day in Vienna and spent the night on a train that went back and forth. It was cold outside. I had no money for a hotel. In the morning I asked a man that was passing by where I could get help, and he explained how to get here. That was about three days ago. I arrived in Vienna about five days ago. I won't give the names of the traffickers. I wanted to travel to the USA. I won't give any information about the vehicles the traffickers used. I can't tell you. I'm afraid I will get killed if I give this kind of information. I fear for my life if I say anything.*





## Test yourself!



1. Describe the difference between consecutive interpreting with and without notes, chuchotage and sight translation.
2. When is it best to use consecutive interpreting without notes?
3. When is it best to use consecutive interpreting with notes?
4. When is it appropriate to use chuchotage?
5. What makes interpreting a complex mental process?
6. What problems can arise in the different phases of the interpreting process and what strategies can interpreters use to solve the problems?
  - Listening to an utterance
  - Understanding the content
  - Memorising information
  - Translation and production in the target language
7. How would you describe “correct” interpreting?
8. What is turn-taking management?
9. Can, may and should interpreters manage turn-taking?

# Unit 6.1:

## Interpreting for Groups

Ursula Stachl-Peier und  
Sonja Pöllabauer

*When interpreting for a group [of clients], there are a number of practical factors to be taken into account as the interpreter needs sufficient time and quiet to do their job properly. (Raissa de Keyser, 2004: 11, our translation)*

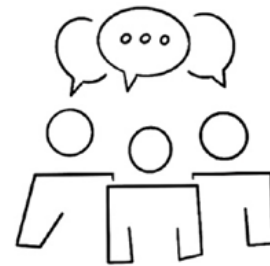


### LEARNING OUTCOMES

- » describe different settings in which interpreters interpret for larger groups;
- » understand the specific challenges of group settings;
- » select suitable interpreting techniques and strategies for group settings.

### Interpreting for Groups

Interpreting in asylum settings usually involves bilateral interpreting, that is the interpreter interprets a conversation between two people. Occasionally an interpreter may also be asked to interpret for a larger group of asylum seekers. Such situations often concern the interpretation of information for a group of asylum seekers that have just arrived in a national reception centre or reception and identification centre (hotspot), for people waiting to be registered at a border check point or during training workshops and information events.



Picture 1: Triadic constellation  
(© Lilith Hoffmann 2021)

#### Have you ever interpreted for a larger group?

- Did you feel that interpreting for a group was different from interpreting for two people? If you did, what was different?
- How did you prepare for the assignment?
- What specific challenges did you encounter?
  - How did you resolve these?
- Would you act differently in future? If so, why?



Picture 2: Group constellation  
(© Lilith Hoffmann 2021)

Interpreting for larger groups is usually **one-way** and done in the **consecutive** mode (see also Unit 6). Consecutive means the interpreter listens to the speaker and, when they have finished, the interpreter renders the message in the other language. One-way means that the interpreter interprets just in one direction, that is the presenter's

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contributions are translated for the audience. Sometimes in group settings, the interpreters may also be asked to translate questions from the audience for the presenter.

**Groups** are often very **heterogeneous** and comprise listeners from different countries with different levels of proficiency in the language into which the interpreter interprets. The listeners may also have different educational backgrounds. It is therefore important that interpreters find out in advance the size of the group and its composition.

Another important aspect is the distribution of responsibilities between the presenter and the interpreter: The **presenters** are responsible for the **content** of their contributions and for **managing the interaction**. The **interpreters** must ensure that the **content is accurately reproduced** in the target language. To be able to do so they need to be well prepared:

Obtain advance information about the topic of the presentation and compile a glossary of technical terms (see also Unit 11). Agree with the presenter where the two of you will position yourselves, whether you will stand or sit, so that the audience can see and hear both of you. Also discuss with the presenter how long the passages for interpretation should be and when the presenter should pause and allow you to translate.

The **length of the passages for interpretation** depends on a variety of factors: Some speakers prefer interpretation after each sentence, others want interpreters to interpret longer units. The advantage of interpreting sentence-by-sentence is that it is easy for the interpreter to remember the content of a short utterance. Sometimes, however, isolated sentences may not provide sufficient context making it difficult for the interpreter to understand the

speaker's message. Longer units provide more background and make it easier to comprehend the message. When longer passages are interpreted the interpreter usually takes notes in order to be able to remember and reproduce all details (see Module 7).

Interpreting for groups often occurs in noisy environments. Ask the presenter to **speak loudly and clearly**. Only if you can hear them properly will you be able to accurately reproduce the message in the target language. When presenters open up for questions or discussion, it is their responsibility to manage and coordinate the interaction so that overlapping talk can be avoided.

**Equipment** such as microphones and headphones can facilitate the interpreter's task. Make sure you are familiar with the technology that is available. Technical problems are distracting and make it more difficult for the audience to hear and understand you.

Whenever possible, contact the organisers and/or presenters in advance and ask for a meeting to discuss:

- The role(s) and responsibilities of the interpreter and of the presenter(s);
- the introduction of the interpreter: Who introduces the interpreter?
- the positioning of the interpreter: Where should the interpreter stand or sit?
- the management and coordination of the discourse: What mode of interpreting should the interpreter use? What should the interpreter do when the content is not clear or when he or she does not understand the terminology? When can the interpreter interrupt the speaker? How can the interpreter resolve misunderstandings?
- any other likely challenges in that particular setting.

## Interpreting for Groups: Different settings

### RECEPTION CENTRES

Reception centres may require interpretation (Tipton 2018; 2021) for a larger group of applicants who are to be given general information about the facility, house rules and procedures.

The topics addressed in **reception centres** range widely and typically include:

- Provision of general information about the centre for new arrivals;
- introduction to house rules and procedures;
- explanation of the regulations designed to prevent the spread of infectious diseases such as Influenza or Covid-19;

- information about the asylum procedure and resettlement procedures;
- training workshops or other group activities organised by the centre.

The size of the groups can vary, from just a handful of people to large groups of over 50 people. Sometimes the interpreter may also be asked to act as a **pivot** for other interpreters in **relay interpreting**. Relay interpreting is a two-stage process in which the first interpreter interprets the presenter's utterances into his or her target language. This interpretation is then interpreted into a further



### Questions:

- What specific challenges might you encounter in these settings?
- How can you best prepare for these settings?
- What strategies could you use if problems occur?

### Answers:

- Some of the topics involve highly complex information. It is therefore essential that interpreters prepare carefully for the assignment, obtain advance information about the content and compile a glossary of terms.
- Most groups are not uniform and comprise people from different linguistic and educational backgrounds. The interpreter therefore needs to use clear and understandable speech.

Ask the presenter to speak loudly and clearly and to intervene when several people start asking questions at the same time. Also talk to the presenter about how long the passages for interpretation should be, if he or she prefers a sentence-by-sentence interpretation or the reproduction of longer units.

## TRAINING WORKSHOPS



Interpreters may also be asked to interpret for larger groups during training workshops that are organised by governmental or non-governmental organisations (Tipton/Valero-Garcés, 2018).

### Questions:

- What specific challenges might you encounter in these settings?
- How can you best prepare for these settings?
- What strategies could you use if problems occur?

### Answers:

- The groups are often very heterogeneous. They comprise people from different social and educational backgrounds and with different levels of proficiency in the language into which you interpret.
- The expectations of the group members may also vary with regard to what they see as the interpreter's role (Chen/Chen 2020). Some may want the interpreter to be an advocate who provides advice and support. This is often the case when the interpreter is of the same ethnic group. Others may see the interpreter as a helpmate or collaborator of the authorities whom they distrust.
- The presenters may also have varying expectations. Some may see the interpreter as their assistant and expect them to provide information about the culture and background of the listeners or mediate in conflicts. It is therefore important that you explain about the boundaries of your role. The interpreter's responsibility is to reproduce the original message accurately in a linguistically adequate and culturally appropriate way, but you are not a conflict mediator (see also Unit 4).

- If technical equipment is available make sure you familiarise yourself with how it works before the presentation. If no technical equipment is available you will need to protect your voice. If you regularly interpret for groups you might find it useful to do voice management training.
- Ask the presenter to speak loudly and clearly and to intervene when several people start speaking at the same time. Also ask the presenter before the start of the training session if he or she wants you to interpret after each sentence or prefers interpretation of longer units.
- When listeners ask questions it is the presenter's responsibility to manage and coordinate the interaction to prevent overlapping talk.

When instructions or directions have to be interpreted it is important that interpreters are aware of the function of different directives. They need to understand the exact meaning of verbs such as "instruct", "direct", "order", "forbid", etc. and be able to adequately reproduce these in the target language. They also need to be aware of culture-specific differences in how instructions are formulated. The use of the imperative (Do this!), for instance, may be perceived as too direct and impolite by speakers of some languages (see also Rudvin/Tommassini 2011: 104).

## BORDER CHECKPOINTS AND RECEPTION AND IDENTIFICATION CENTRES (HOTSPOTS)

Interpreters may also have to interpret for larger groups at border checkpoints and in reception and identification centres (hotspots). Often the language into which the interpreter interprets is not the first language of the applicants and they may have difficulties understanding everything.

The topics that are likely to be addressed in these settings are wide-ranging and include:

- General information for the new arrivals;
- information about the asylum procedures;
- instructions by the authorities;
- information about the rights and obligations of the applicant and other actors;
- information about the registration and identification process;
- information about reception centres;
- information about relocation from hotspots to the mainland;
- information about medical screenings and health-care.

### Questions:

- What specific challenges might you encounter in these settings?
- How can you best prepare for these settings?



- What strategies could you use if problems occur?

**Answers:**

- The topics can vary widely. The interpreters therefore need to prepare carefully and obtain advance information about the content of the presentation and the specialist terminology that is going to be used (see also Unit 11).
- The situation at border checkpoints and at the gates of hotspots can become very emotional and chaotic, in particular when larger groups of applicants arrive at the same time. Occasionally interpreters may be insulted or threatened. If this happens, it is important

that the conversation leader or the flow manager are informed immediately to guarantee the personal safety of the interpreters.

- Often many people speak at the same time and noise levels can be very high. Interpreters therefore need good public-speaking skills to be heard above the noise. This is even more important when no loudspeakers or megaphones are available.

Interpretation may have to be performed in different locations: Inside the facilities of the border checkpoints or at the gate of the hotspot, in medical centres, in waiting areas etc. In each location the interpreters will need to think about where they can best position themselves so they can deliver good-quality interpreting.

**FACT BOX**

### *Some guidelines for group settings*

- **Interpret in the first person**

Generally, you will interpret in the first person and translate the speaker's references to "I" or "we" as "I" or "we". Interpretation in the third person ("S/he said ...", "Ms XY notes ...") is used when several people speak at the same time and you need to indicate whose utterance you are interpreting.

- **Follow the Codes of Conduct or Professional Ethics (see Unit 5):**

- Confidentiality
- Accuracy and completeness
- Impartiality
- Professionalism and professional conduct

- **Start to interpret quickly when the speaker pauses**

Try to keep eye-contact with the presenter. The presenter's posture and gestures as well as certain intonation patterns provide useful cues telling you when the speaker is about to pause and you can start to interpret. This avoids long delays. It also gives you more control over the length of the passages for interpretation and so helps you produce an accurate interpretation.

- **Maintain eye-contact with all listeners**

Don't fix on one person but try to maintain eye-contact with all listeners.

- **Speak loudly and clearly and use simple language.**

- **Do not add comments or explanations.**

- **Ask speakers for clarification**

If something is **not clear**, ask the speakers to repeat or paraphrase what they have said.

- **Professionalism and role boundaries**

If listeners ask you for help, pass on their request to those in charge. Should presenters ask you about the background of members of the group, or want you to comment on culture-specific behaviour or personal traits, explain to them what the role of interpreter is (see Unit 4).





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## Useful links

EASO (European Asylum Support Office), Guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators, <https://www.easo.europa.eu/news-events/easo-guidance-reception-conditions-operational-standards-and-indicators> (Accessed November 5 2021)

IOM (International Organisation of Migration), Reception Center, <https://www.iom.int/video/reception-center> (Accessed November 4 2021)

UNHCR (2018) Guidance on Registration and Identity Management, <https://www.unhcr.org/registration-guidance> (Accessed November 5 2021)

IDA/ECRE (2021) Mapping asylum procedures, reception conditions, detention and content of protection in Europe, <https://asylumineurope.org> (Accessed November 5 2021)



### Activity 1: I (don't) agree

1

**Form of activity:** Interactive introduction to interpreting for groups. The activity can be used as a short ice-breaker or warm-up after a break, or followed up with an in-depth discussion.

**Duration:** 15 minutes; 45 minutes with subsequent discussion.

**Description:** The participants listen to various statements relating to interpretation in group settings and position themselves along a line in the room to show their agreement/disagreement.

#### Instructions to trainers:

- Mark a line on the floor with strips of paper or fabric, or tape. The line must be long enough for all participants to be able to line up along it. Place a sheet of paper with "I agree" at one end, and one with "I don't agree" at the other end. Explain to the participants that they will be asked to position themselves along the line to indicate their degree of agreement/disagreement with each statement that you will read out.
- Choose statements from the following list and read them out. How many are read out will depend on how much time is available for this activity.
  - Speak loudly and clearly.
  - Never speak fast.
  - Avoid the use of metaphors and figures of speech.
  - Keep eye-contact with the presenter.
  - Maintain eye-contact with all listeners.
  - Avoid standing alone in front of the group.
  - Stand beside a member of the group.
  - Stand between the group and the presenter.
  - You are responsible for managing and coordinating the interaction.
  - There is no need to use technical equipment.
  - If you haven't understand something you should ask the presenter or applicant to repeat what they have said.
  - In a group setting, you cannot ask for clarification.
  - When members of the group start speaking at the same time it is your responsibility to manage the conversation and ask each person in turn to speak.
- After each statement, ask the participants to position themselves along the line and show to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement.
- Discuss why the participants chose this position. Questions that could be asked include:
  - Why do you agree/not agree?
  - Have you been in a situation where you heard this statement? What did you think at the time?
  - Why or when is this statement relevant for interpreting for groups?





## Printable Worksheet **Activity 1: I (don't) agree**

- Speak loudly and clearly.
- Never speak fast.
- Avoid the use of metaphors and figures of speech.
- Keep eye-contact with the presenter.
- Maintain eye-contact with all listeners.
- Avoid standing alone in front of the group.
- Stand beside a member of the group.
- Stand between the group and the presenter.
- You are responsible for managing and coordinating the interaction.
- There is no need to use technical equipment.
- If you haven't understand something you should ask the presenter or applicant to repeat what they have said.
- In a group setting, you cannot ask for clarification.
- When members of the group start speaking at the same time it is your responsibility to manage the conversation and ask each person in turn to speak.



## Activity 2: What is different?

2

**Form of activity:** Discussion in groups followed by plenary brainstorming.

**Duration:** 20-40 minutes.

**Description:** The participants describe what they perceive as the main differences between interpreting for individuals and interpreting for groups.

### Instructions to trainers:

- Divide the participants into groups. Ask them to find examples that can illustrate differences between interpreting for individuals and interpreting in group settings and the challenges that can arise. The examples can be noted down on cards or on a flip-chart sheet.
- The groups are then asked to present the results of their discussions. If cards were used these can be stuck onto a flip-chart or a board. To avoid the repetition of examples, groups can also add new aspects.
- The presentation can be followed by a brief plenary discussion. Alternatively, use the results as the basis for a more in-depth treatment of the topic.

## Activity 3: Where should I stand?

3

**Form of activity:** Work in groups followed by plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 20 minutes.

**Description:** The participants are encouraged to reflect upon the importance of where they position themselves in the room, about closeness and distance as well as body language.

### Instructions to trainers:

- Divide the participants into groups. Each group is given one or more pictures (for examples see printable worksheets 1 to 5) and asked to answer the following questions:
  - Where would you position yourself in this setting? Why?
  - At what distance from the interlocutors would you place yourself? Why?
  - How can you detect body language signals and how can you react to these cues?
  - What body language signals can you use yourself? What do you want to communicate through these signals?
- Ask the groups to present and discuss the results in the plenary. Possible follow-up: Ask the participants to act out the scenarios in the pictures. They should try out different positions and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative.

## Activity 4: “Chaos in the group”

4

**Form of activity:** Role play

**Duration:** 45-60 minutes.

**Description:** The participants roleplay a scenario where they interpret for a larger group of people. The focus is on the difficulties that may emerge and how these can be resolved.

### Instructions to trainers:

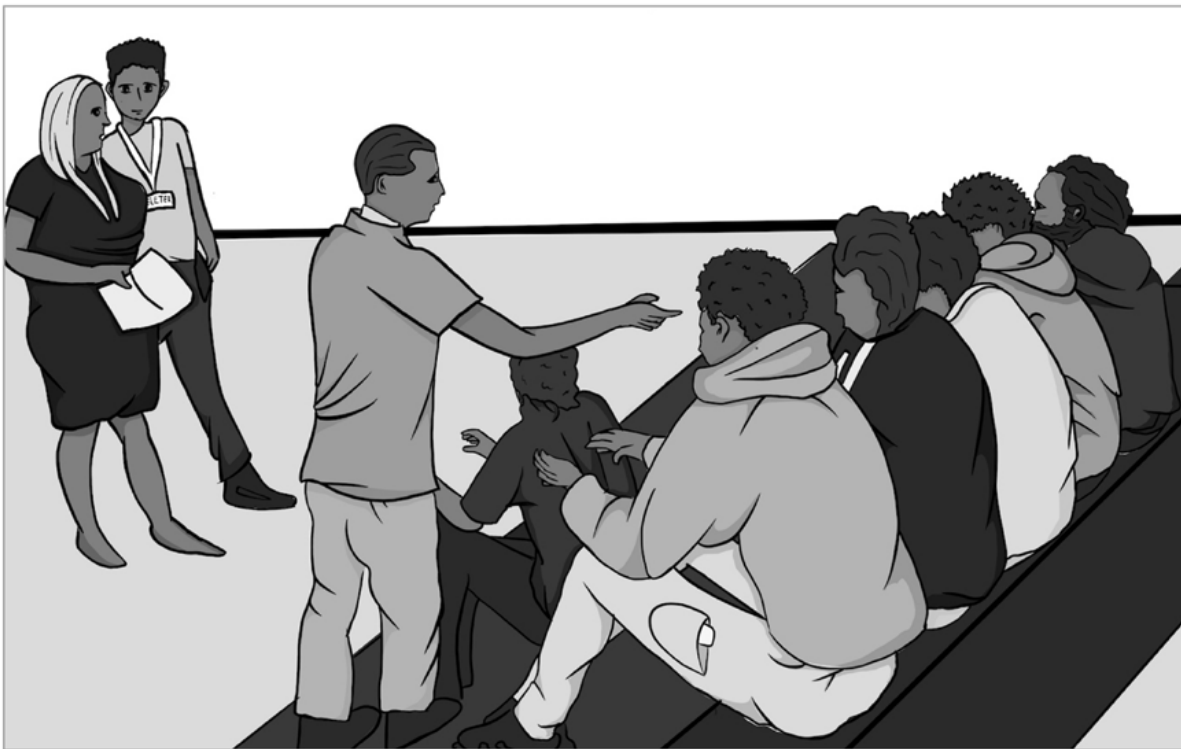
- Present the scenario to the group, either orally or hand out written instructions.
  - Scenario 1:**  
Training workshop for new arrivals in a reception centre. The group comprises people from different ethnic and educational backgrounds.
  - Scenario 2:**  
Information session for new arrivals on “Waste separation”, “Housekeeping regulations”, or any other relevant topic.  
For examples see printable worksheets 6 and 7.
- Assign roles to the participants:
  - one presenter
  - one or more interpreters
  - three observers
  - the remainder of the participants act the new arrivals
- The presenter, the observers and the workshop participants are given further instructions:  
Workshop participants:
  - Interrupt and don't wait for your turn before you start speaking.
  - Try to drown out the voices of the other participants and shout louder than the others.
  - Start asking a question before the interpreter has finished interpreting.
  - Answer a phone call.
  - Ask the interpreter to help you with a personal problem.
- Presenter
  - Ask the interpreter to manage and coordinate the interaction.
  - Do not intervene when people start talking at the same time.
  - Ask the interpreter to assist you and to resolve conflict situations.
- Observers
  - Observe the body language of the interactants and comment on whether the signals that were used were helpful or confusing.
  - Assess to what extent the speakers' messages have been communicated in an understandable way.
  - Note down renditions or behaviour that you feel might lead to problems.
- Give the participants ten minutes to prepare for their role.
- Conduct the role play. Leave room for improvisation.
- Discuss the role play in the plenary. To kick off the discussion you could ask the following questions:
  - Were there problematic situations? When did problems occur? Why did they occur?
  - How did the interpreter(s) behave? Did they clearly outline their role and protect their role boundaries? If they did, how was this communicated to the presenter and the group?
  - Are you satisfied with how the interpreter(s) demarcated their role boundaries?
  - What did you think of the body language that was employed by the interpreter and/or interactants?

Would you have done anything differently? If your answer is yes, what would you change?



Printable copies **1–5**

**Picture 1: Interpreter interpreting for a group** (© Lilith Hoffmann 2021)



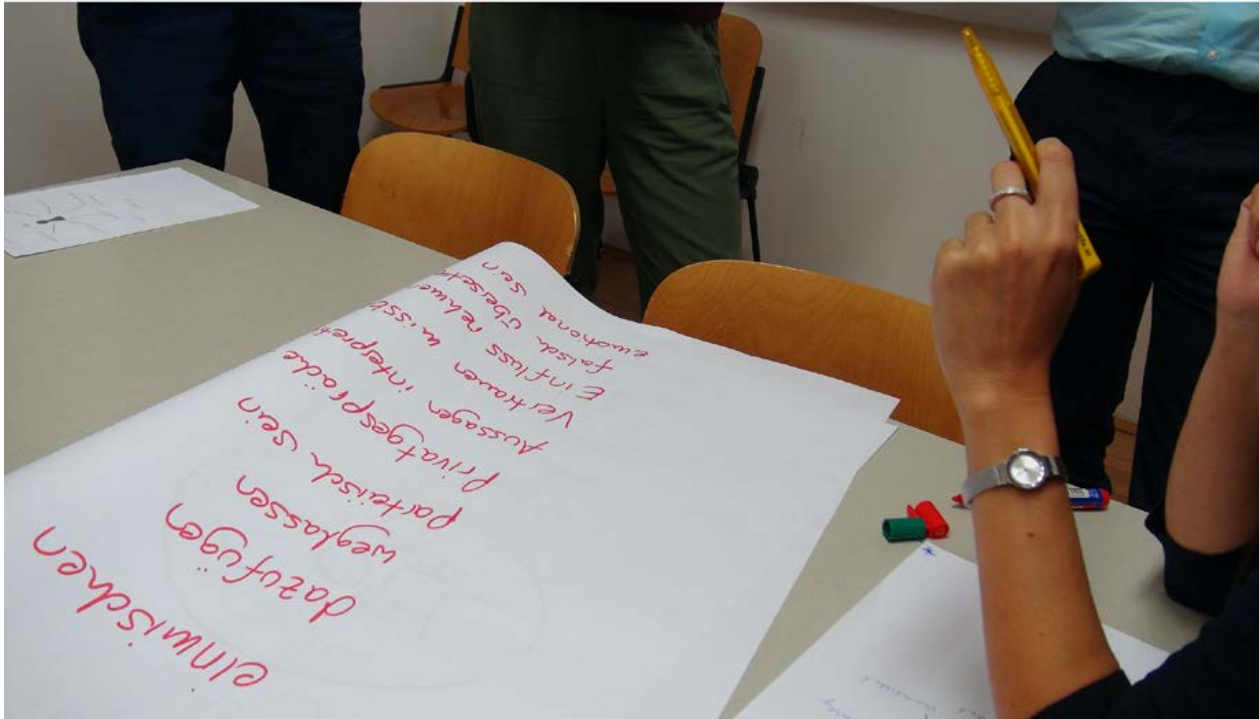


**Picture 2: Interpreting at a border checkpoint**

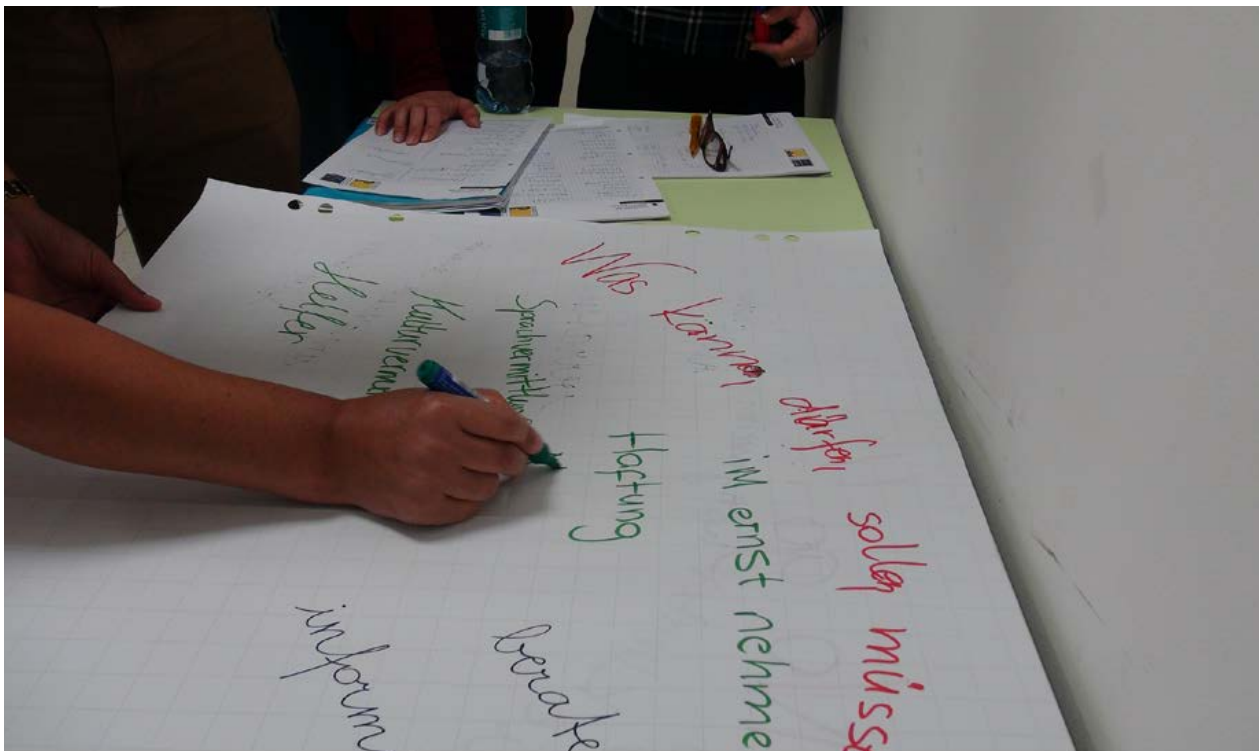
(© Lilith Hoffmann 2021; based on original picture S. Kahnert; copyright: S. Kahnert/dpa/picturedesk.com)



Pictures 3-5: Training workshops (© Sonja Pöllabauer 2021)



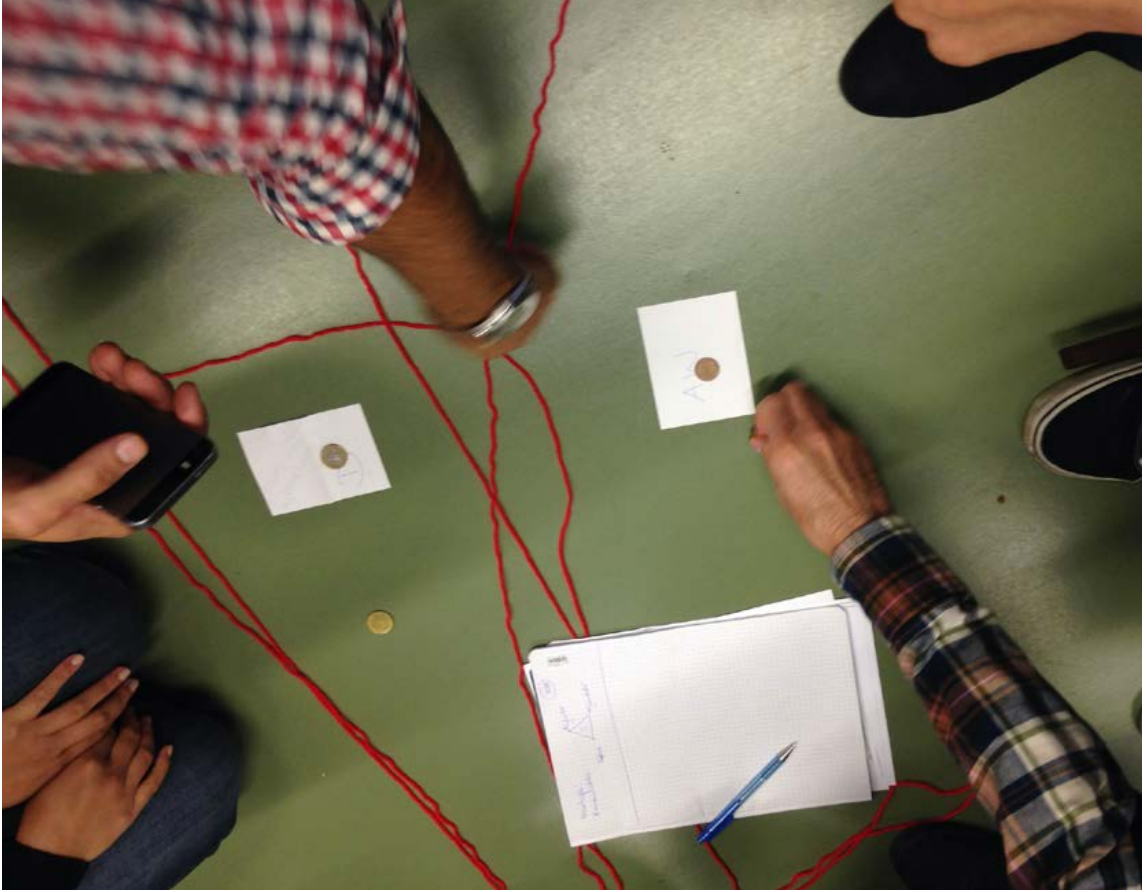
Picture 3



Picture 4



Pictures 3-5: Training workshops (© Sonja Pöllabauer 2021)



Picture 5

**Example 1: Waste separation** (© Informationsblatt, BBU 2021)



## Mülltrennung

Trash / Сортировка мусора / جداسازی زباله / فصل النفايات / فضلہ علیحدگی



<p><b>BIOMÜLL</b> Organic waste / остатки ПИЩИ (زباله مواد خوراکی) النفايات البيولوجية (بقايا الطعام) حياتياتی فضلہ</p> 	<p><b>RESTMÜLL</b> Residual waste /отходы смешанного типа باقیمانده های ذباله بقية النفايات بقايا فضلہ/النفايات المتبقية /</p> 	<p><b>PAPIER</b> Paper / бумага الورق / کاغذ کاغذ</p> 
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**Example 2:** (Picture: © Creative Commons, CC BY-NC)

### Fire Safety Law







**Everyone must avoid all actions which could start a fire or spread a fire or make fire-fighting more difficult.**

- 1.** You must not use damaged electrical cables, fuses, circuit breakers, lamps, light bulbs, electrical appliances etc.
- 2.** You must not pass connecting cables and extension cords over the sharp edges of metal parts. Always lay cables and cords out of the way of rolling chairs so that they are not damaged by the chair's wheels.
- 3.** You must not use portable heaters without guards.
- 4.** You must not use a candle, lighter or other live flame into storage rooms or spaces where there is an increased fire risk, such as storage spaces, cellar rooms and other rooms where there is an increased fire risk. Smoking is not allowed in any part of the building except in the shared kitchens after permission has been obtained from the other residents.
- 5.** You must not throw cigarettes, cigarette ends, matches or cigarette ash into waste bins or paper recycling bins. Never leave lit cigarettes unattended.
- 6.** Always place coffee makers and similar appliances on appropriately sized tiles, fire-proof mats or a similar non-flammable surface. Never leave coffee makers and similar appliances unattended. Make sure that all electrical appliances have been switched off before you leave the room.
- 7.** Immediately report all fire hazards to the Heimbetreuerin. You must also inform the Heimbetreuerin of any outbreak of a fire which you were able to put out yourself. You must know the location of the nearest fire extinguisher and the alarm push button which alerts the fire brigade and activates the evacuation alarm.
- 8.** You must not remove, damage or cover signs that show fire extinguishers, alarm buttons, escape routes and information telling you what you need to do if a fire should break out.
- 9.** Never store any objects or combustible materials in high-traffic areas and hallways where they may block fire escape routes.
- 10.** Never leave objects near or inside doorways. These objects narrow the passageway and might block your escape routes and fire exits.
- 11.** Remove all objects that might obstruct fire doors.
- 12.** Do not prop open, block or damage self-closing doors.

# UNIT 7:

## Note-taking

Florika Griessner, Ursula Stachl-Peier & Christine Springer



### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will be able to

- » identify the tasks involved in note-taking, in other words: listening and analysis, note-taking, remembering, note reading and production;
- » understand how notes can prompt your memory;
- » choose appropriate equipment;
- » develop a consistent system for notes, using layout, symbols and abbreviations;
- » use note-taking in asylum procedures.

### Introduction

When interpreters take notes, their aim is **not to produce a verbatim record** of what is being said. Rather, interpreters' notes are intended to help them remember the content and structure of speakers' utterances. This also explains why interpreters do not use shorthand or other systems of rapid handwriting. Firstly, it takes a long time to achieve such a high level of mastery that the act of stenographic writing is automatic. Secondly, and more importantly, shorthand replicates the source text and its syntax, vocabulary and grammar. According to Daniel Gile's Effort Model (Gile 1995), the production and reading of shorthand notes represents an additional mental effort. The interpreter has to convert a spoken text into a shorthand record, which they then have to decipher word by word and sentence by sentence before they can process (i.e. comprehend) the meaning of the text.

The **notation system** that has been developed for use in interpreter-mediated encounters allows interpreters to take notes at the same time as they analyse and process the text. Experienced interpreters often note the content in the target language, that is, they translate the source text before they jot down their notes. Because this notation system uses a diagonal-vertical layout, it also allows the interpreter to see at a glance the overall structure of the text, as well as the subject, verb and object, primary and secondary ideas and logical links between these. This layout, as well as the fact that the information is processed before it is written down, means that interpreters do not need to devote valuable processing capacity to deciphering and understanding their notes and so can focus all their mental energy on producing a reproduction of the original text that is as accurate and complete as possible.

### THE HISTORY OF NOTE-TAKING

The first note-taking systems for interpreters were developed by Jean Herbert (1952) and Jean-François Rozan (1956). Both were practising interpreters and trainers who wrote their manuals for students of interpreting. Based on Herbert's ideas for a language-independent system, Rozan developed seven principles which are used in training programmes to this day:

1. Note **ideas instead of words**, e.g. quotation marks " for verbs of saying.
2. Use **abbreviations and superscripts** to denote grammatical endings and modality:
  - CompPr** = Comprehension problem  
= comprehension difficulty
  - PartProc<sup>s</sup>** = Parties to the proceeding
  - stay<sup>k</sup>** = can stay
3. Note down **cohesive devices** and **logical links**:
  - SO/∴** = Cause → effect: hence, this means that, the result of this is, therefore, so that
  - COS** = Effect → cause: because, what is causing this, the main reason for this is, etc.
  - BUT** = Limitation or contradiction: but, however, nonetheless, on the other hand, in spite of this
4. Use a strike-through line for **negation**
  - ~~know~~ = don't know
  - ~~OK~~ = disagree

5. Use underline to **emphasise an idea**:  
pressure = I am under major pressure  
important = This is extremely important

6. Use verticality and write your notes **diagonally** across the page:

*so my bro + I  
 stay\*  
 Pak*

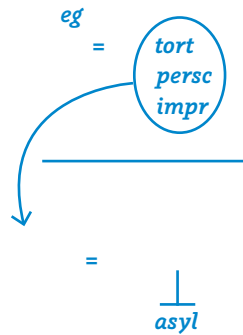
= Therefore my brother and I could not remain in Pakistan

7. Use **recall lines** to avoid noting the same thing twice on the same page.

Examples include torture, persecution and imprisonment

*Recall line*

Torture, persecution and imprisonment constitute a basis for asylum



Most of the handbooks and studies on note-taking were written for conference interpreting. Although consecutive interpreting is rarely used in conference settings today, where it has been overtaken by simultaneous interpreting, many still consider it to be the superior of the two skills for training and testing (Gillies 2005, 3). For this reason, consecutive interpreting is included in the curricula of training programmes and also used by international organisations in their accreditation tests.

## THEORY AND PRACTICE

This section reviews some of the theoretical perspectives underpinning the role of notes in consecutive interpreting and summarises various authors' suggestions for notation systems, focusing on the use of notes in asylum procedures.

For Herbert (1952), notes were above all an **aid to memory**. According to Danica Seleskovitch (1975), notes perform a double function: they help interpreters accomplish a **detailed analysis of the speaker's utterances and assist in reproduction of the content** in the target language. For interpreters in asylum settings, whose ultimate goal is to produce an **accurate and complete rendition** of the source text, all these functions are relevant.

In order to demonstrate to trainees the power of their memory and the importance of text analysis, note-taking courses typically start with exercises that focus on careful

listening and the reproduction of at first short, and then increasingly longer stretches of texts. This progression also prevents trainees from viewing note-taking simply as a mechanical exercise or a substitute for cognitive processing.

Notes are best taken on small notepads with plain pages and top spiral binding, so that the pages can be turned easily, and with a pen or pencil that writes quickly.

As has been stressed above, **active listening and comprehension** must precede the taking of notes. However, how texts are comprehended and the cognitive and processing strategies employed **varies between individual interpreters**. Trainers should therefore encourage novice interpreters to develop a notation system based on their own note-taking preferences and which draws on note-taking methods used by them for lectures in school, memos or to-do lists.

The **arrangement of the notes on the page** is important. Vertical note-taking, which was first developed by Rozan (1956), allows interpreters to capture and represent the **hierarchy** of primary and secondary ideas, as well as logical links between different elements of the text. The clearer the notes on the page, the easier it will be for the interpreter to see at a glance how the source text was organised, which will help them to produce a correct and coherent text in the target language.

Like many other authors, Ilg (1988) recommends that horizontal lines should be used to **separate units of meaning**. Other structural elements that can be used are arrows and recall lines, clearly marked gaps which must be filled at a later stage and brackets for asides and additional explanations.

Most authors also recommend that interpreters use **symbols** such as =, ≠, +, and emoticons, that is to say, **graphic elements** with which they are already familiar. As was mentioned above, there is wide variation between how individual interpreters process and remember information. For this reason, a notation system should not introduce a completely new symbol-based language, but for a short period of time should draw on interpreters' stocks of available resources, signs, symbols and abbreviations which are meaningful to them, and only to them. This is also the reason why interpreters are usually unable to decipher a colleague's notes, and may even have problems reading their own after a few days. Notes are memory prompts and become meaningless as soon as the content is no longer remembered.

How many symbols interpreters need is a matter of controversy. Matyssek (1989) developed a notation system comprising hundreds of symbols and signs. Interpreters in asylum procedure are unlikely to need such a comprehensive system; to achieve mastery would require many hours of practice. For this reason, most authors

recommend that interpreters use a small number of symbols which are meaningful, unambiguous, and easy to write and read (Seleskovitch 1975, Kautz 2000). Most also advise against long lists of abbreviations, unless these are commonly used, such as com for company, gvt for government, TU for Trade Union etc.

## NOTES IN ASYLUM PROCEDURES

**What and how much should be noted?** The answer provided by most authors is, **everything you are likely to forget**. For Ilg (1988), this includes proper names and numbers, and Matyssek (1989) recommends that interpreters write down key ideas and logical links.

In essence, how much needs to be written down **depends on the quality of the source text**. Coherent narratives are easily recalled, and a few keywords are usually sufficient to prompt the memory, especially once the interpreter has become familiar with the events that are described (Kirchhoff 1979, 131).

In asylum procedures, the accounts offered by applicants are often not coherent (see Unit 9). For this reason, the interpreter needs to develop a note-taking system that allows them to **capture the meaning of utterances without distortion**. Even the best notes cannot ensure that a very long and incoherent text is correctly interpreted, however. Here, the interpreter will need to resort to **additional strategies** and **interrupt the speaker to ask**

**for clarification or repetition, or self-correct** mistakes (for more information on conversation management see Unit 6).

Written documents, and these include the interpreters' notes, are sometimes viewed with suspicion by asylum-seekers, as one Austrian interpreter recounts:

I often heard (especially from asylum-seekers from Chechnya) that the refugees fear that what they said and all written documents produced during the interview (the transcript etc.) may be passed on to the authorities or secret services in their country of origin. For this reason, they are suspicious of interpreters taking notes during the interview.

The **issue of trust** is a particularly important one in asylum procedures, and concerns not only confidence in the interpreter's ability to interpret correctly but also trust in the interpreter as a person. If participants are confident that the interpreter has the necessary interpreting skills and competence, they will also feel confident that the meaning of their utterances is being correctly understood and their viewpoints are being faithfully represented. Trustworthiness is not like an attitude that can be acquired. Rather, it is gained as interpreters develop confidence in their skills and radiate this self-confidence.

In asylum procedures, then, the interpreter may need to explain before the interview that they will need to take notes to aid their memory, but that these notes will either be destroyed by the interpreter after the interview or handed to the interviewer.

### Taking Notes

The following recommendations have been developed for use in note-taking training. Since **interpreters' preferences vary**, you may want to modify and **adapt the suggested techniques** to suit your own style of analysing and reproducing content.



## FACT BOX

## What is Note-taking?

### Why should I take notes?

Notes capture concepts and ideas which can aid our memory when we reproduce utterances in the target language. What kinds of notes are most helpful will depend on the interpreter's personal preferences. If the interpreter is a visual type of communicator, they are likely to use many symbols; an auditory type of person usually writes more words. Some interpreters note in the source language, others in the target language, some mix words in the source and target language or may even use a third language.

### What should I write on?

Always use a notepad (no loose leaves) and a good biro or pencil.

### What should I note?

Dates, numbers, names of persons or regions, events and all other key concepts that are not easily remembered. Coherent accounts are easy to recall. Here, it is usually sufficient to jot down a few keywords.

### How should I take notes?

Note diagonally across the page starting on the left (or right if you take notes in a language that runs from right to left). This has many advantages: There is less writing on the page and space for later additions; the structure of the text is visible and the main details can be seen at a glance.

### Example:

I arrived in Austria by plane on 3 April 2013.

WHO (Subject)

DID WHAT (Verb)

WHERE/WHEN/HOW

*I*

→<sup>a</sup>

*AT*

*3/4/13*

*plane*

### In what language should I take notes?

Herbert (1952) recommended that notes should be taken in the target language so that any processing problems can be solved while taking notes. Seleskovitch similarly argued that notes should be in the target language, which for her was always the mother tongue. Other authors adopt a more pragmatic approach and suggest that interpreters should use the language that comes to mind most quickly, which can be the source language, the target language or a third language (Gile 1991). Symbols are also helpful. They represent concepts, not words, so it is easier to avoid source language interference when they are interpreted (see Gillies 2005, 99).

All these recommendations refer to uni-directional settings, however. In face-to-face bilateral settings, interpreters switch between languages. When they become tired, they may not remember into which language they have to interpret. For this reason, and provided an interpreter is good at interpreting simultaneously, it may be advisable to always take notes in the target language (see also Unit 6). Another solution is to indicate the language direction at the beginning of each section, e.g. [DE > EN].

## 12 Useful Tips for Note-takers

### TIP 1 – Abbreviations:

Abbreviations should not exceed four or five letters and should include part of the end of the word. The abbreviations must be meaningful and unambiguous. If you have to note “immigration”, noting *imm* is less meaningful than *imm<sup>ion</sup>*.

The following list suggests abbreviations for some common words in asylum procedures:

- *AsylProc* = Asylum procedure
- *ASr* = Asylum-seeker, applicant
- *LegRep* = Legal representative
- *InIntw* = Initial interview
- *Intvr* = Interviewer
- *PP* = Passport
- *Trsc* = Transcript
- *Gvt* = Government
- *Authy* = Authority

### TIP 2 – Slashes /:

Slashes can be used to indicate relations.

Examples:

- *bro/mum* = the brother of my mother
- *discussion/EU* = discussion about Europe
- *comment/economy* = comment on the economy

### TIP 3 – Roofs ^ and heads °:

^ and ° are useful symbols to distinguish between an institution as a whole or a member of an institution.

Example:

- *Min<sup>^</sup>* = Ministry
- *Min<sup>°</sup>* = Minister

### TIP 4 – Diagonal lay, verticality and hierarchies:

When concepts are of equal ‘value’, they should be noted parallel to one another.

Example:

My father and my mother moved to the village in 1975.

*dad*  
*mum* → *village* 1975.

The brother of my mother came to me and said that my father was admitted to hospital after being seriously injured.

*bro/mum*  
→  
“  
*dad in H<sup>^</sup>*  
*(injured)*

### TIP 5 – Dates:

Dates are not easily remembered and should therefore always be noted.

### TIP 6 – Grammatical information:

Use **superscripts** to indicate verb conjugations.

Examples:

- “ = say
- “<sup>ll</sup> = will say
- “<sup>d</sup> = said

### TIP 7 – Negating, stressing and down-toning:

Use **strike-through lines** for negation, **underscoring** for stressing and **squiggly lines** for down-toning.

Examples:

- ~~OK~~ = “DO NOT agree”
- poor = **very** poor
- *poor* = relatively poor

**TIP 8 – Symbols:**

Use symbols that are quick and simple to draw and already familiar to you, for instance from mathematics and science, or emoticons.

**Examples:**

- |     |  |      |                               |
|-----|--|------|-------------------------------|
| ○ = | equals, is the same as                     | ○ □  | country, national             |
| ○ ≠ | is not, is the opposite                    | ○ €  | economy                       |
| ○ + | plus, in addition, further, etc.           | ○ β  | budget                        |
| ○ ⊖ | (minus in a circle for better readability) | ○ π  | policy/politics               |
| ○ - | minus, less, shorter etc.                  | ○ π̂ | politician                    |
| ○ ↗ | rise etc.                                  | ○ α  | work                          |
| ○ ↘ | decrease etc.                              | ○ 😊  | pleased, happy, satisfied     |
| ○ ✓ | correct, good                              | ○ 😠  | annoyed, unhappy, unsatisfied |
| ○ ✗ | wrong, bad, poor                           |      |                               |

**TIP 9 – Links:**

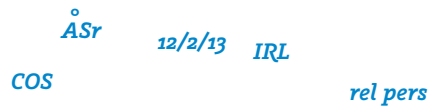
Links are always written in the left-hand margin of the page.

**Examples:**

- **COS/∴** Effect → cause: because, what is causing this, the reason for this
- **SO** Cause → effect/consequence: therefore, and so, hence, the consequence of this is, this is why
- **TO** = Purpose: in order to, so that, with the aim of
- **THO** = Contradiction: although, despite, while, notwithstanding
- **IF** = Condition: if ... then, were this to happen, provided that

**Example:**

The asylum-seeker entered Ireland on 12 February 2013. He left the country because of religious persecution.



**TIP 10 – Verticality and horizontal lines:**

Use verticality to represent hierarchy and horizontal lines to separate ideas or turns (see printable worksheet “Activity 3: Noting longer dialogues, Example 1”, p. 115).

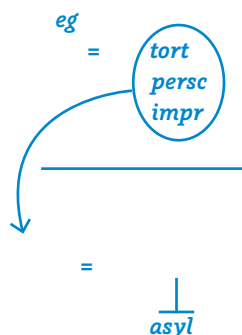
**TIP 11 – Recall lines:**

Do not note the same word or symbol twice on the same page. It is usually quicker to **draw a line** from that word or symbol to where the concept appears the second time in a new sentence.

Examples include  
torture, persecution  
and imprisonment

*Recall line*

Torture, persecution  
and imprisonment  
constitute a basis  
for asylum



See also printable worksheet “Activity 3: Noting longer dialogues, Example 1”, p. 115.

**TIP 12 – Language proficiency:**

Interpreters must be **sufficiently proficient in their working languages to be able to use simpler language** which, however, does not distort the original meaning, when interpreting for persons who have a limited command of the language. If they do not understand an utterance, they must never guess but must ask for clarification.



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- » Kirchhoff, Hella. 1979. "Die Notationssprache als Hilfsmittel des Konferenzdolmetschers im Konsekutivvorgang [The Language of Notation as a Tool in Consecutive Interpreting]." In *Sprachtheorie und Sprachenpraxis: Festschrift für Henri Vernay zu seinem 60. Geburtstag* [Language Theory and Language Practice: Festschrift for Henri Vernay on his 60th Birthday], edited by Walter Mair, and Edgar Sallager, 121-133. Tübingen: Narr.
- » Nolan, James. 2005. *Interpretation: Techniques and Exercises*. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto: Multilingual Matters.
- » Seleskovitch, Danica. 1975. *Langage, Langues et Mémoire: Etude de la Prise de Notes en Interprétation Consécutive*. Paris: Minard.
- » Schweda Nicholson, Nancy. 2008. "Consecutive Note-Taking for Community Interpretation." In *Interpreting: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, edited by David Bowen, and Margareta Bowen, 136-145. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: Benjamins.

## Useful Links

European Commission. *SCICtrain, Module 5: Consecutive interpretation. A guide to consecutive interpretation*  
[https://ec.europa.eu/info/education/skills-and-qualifications/develop-your-skills/language-skills/interpretation-training-toolbox/scictrain-training-modules-interpreting-students/module-5-consecutive-interpretation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/education/skills-and-qualifications/develop-your-skills/language-skills/interpretation-training-toolbox/scictrain-training-modules-interpreting-students/module-5-consecutive-interpretation_en)  
 (Accessed January 15 2022)

Interpreter Training Resources. *Note-taking?*  
<https://interpretertrainingresources.eu/note-taking>  
 (Accessed January 15 2022)

Streaming Service of the European Commission. *Introduction to note taking.*  
<https://webcast.ec.europa.eu/358f9e7be09177c17d0d17ff73584307>  
 (Accessed January 15 2022)





## Activities

### Activity 1: Introducing note-taking

1

**Form of activity:** Group work followed by plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 15 minutes per exercise.

**Description:**

#### Exercise 1:

The participants receive a short written text (for examples see printable worksheet “Activity 1: Introducing note-taking”, p. 113) and read through it carefully. They then put aside the text and try to reproduce the information in the source text language. After the reproduction, the participants should discuss the following questions (see also Unit 6):

- Which information was easy to remember?  
Which details were difficult to remember? Why was it easy/difficult?
- You are allowed to note down ten words to help you remember the text.  
Which words would you note down?

#### Exercise 2:

One of the group members reads a short text to the others (for examples see printable worksheet “Activity 1: Introducing note-taking”, p. 113). The other participants note down around ten words and try to reproduce the text in the source-text language.

After the reproduction, the participants should discuss the following questions about their notes:

- How were the words arranged and organised on the page?
- Did any participants try and draw a mind-map or indicate the main ideas as opposed to less important details?

#### Exercise 3:

Work with a partner. One partner reads a short text (for examples see printable worksheet “Activity 1: Introducing note-taking”, p. 113). The other partner notes down around ten words and tries to reproduce the text in the target language.

After the reproduction of the text, the participants should discuss the following questions about their notes:

- What language did you use for your notes?
- Why did you take notes in this language?
- What are the possible advantages and disadvantages of using the source versus the target language?





## Printable Worksheet **Activity 1: Introducing note-taking**

### Exercise 1:

In your screening interview you stated you were arrested for anti-regime reasons. However, in your Asylum Interview you claimed that you were arrested because the authorities could not find your brother but they could possibly get information from you and that when you were detained you were interrogated about your brother. You have advanced no information that this arrest was due to any anti-regime activity on your part.



### Exercise 2:

You did not make your statements credible with documents either, even though in your case, one could reasonably expect that you should possess the necessary documents that could prove that you had permission to enter the building where – according to you – you were working at the time. The only document that you submitted in this regard is the letter that you declare was supplied by the Ministry of Interior that confirms that you worked for them.



### Exercise 3:

The persecution of Muslim converts to Christianity has re-escalated since 2005. The Iranian police continue to detain apostates for brief periods and to pressurise them to recant their Christian faith and sign documents pledging they will stop attending Christian services and refrain from sharing their faith with others. There have also been increasing reports of apostates being denied exit at the borders, with the authorities confiscating their passports and requiring them to report to the courts to reclaim them. During the court hearings, they are coerced to recant their faith with threats of death penalty charges and cancellation of their travel documents.

Source: UNHCR. 2013. Beyond Proof. Credibility Assessment in EU Asylum Systems. Brussels: <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/51a8a08a9/full-report-beyond-proof-credibility-assessment-eu-asylum-systems.html> (Accessed January 15 2022)



## Activity 2: Model notes

2

**Form of activity:** Individual work.

**Duration:** 30 minutes (20 minutes for individual work, 10 minutes for plenary discussion).

**Description:** Based on the texts used for Activity 1 (see printable worksheet, p. 113) and the Useful Tips for Note-takers (see p. 108-109), the participants prepare 'model notes'. The notes of two or three participants are then discussed in the plenary.

The focus should be on the following aspects:

- What details were noted down?
- Was verticality used and the notes written diagonally across the page?
- Do the notes reproduce the structure of the text? Were horizontal lines used?
- Were recall lines used?
- Are the symbols easy to understand?
- Could the notes have been made more concise? Could any notes have been omitted?

## Activity 3: Noting longer dialogues

3

**Form of activity:** Group work followed by a plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 30 minutes per dialogue (10 minutes for individual work, 20 minutes for the plenary discussion).

**Description:** Two participants act out the first dialogue (see below, Example 1). The other participants take notes.

In the plenary, one or several of the participants' notes are reproduced on a flipchart or whiteboard and discussed.

Then the second dialogue is presented by two participants (see below, Example 2). The other participants take notes.

Finally, the participants are given the model notes (see printable worksheet "Activity 3: Noting longer dialogues, Example 1", p. 115, and printable worksheet "Activity 3: Noting longer dialogues, Example 2", p. 115) to compare with their own notes and revise these, if they find that the model notes offer useful solutions.

Note: In the first dialogue, the interviewer puts questions to the asylum-seeker about his reasons for fleeing his home country and his journey to the country where he is seeking asylum.

The second dialogue contains passages from the Asylum Screening Interview and Biometric Residence Permit Application which is read out to applicants at the start of a screening interview. This text is very complex and includes many long sentences and technical and administrative terms. Notes on it can only be made successfully by an interpreter who is familiar with the text. The aim of this exercise is to explore how much and what needs to be noted down to trigger the interpreter's memory and allow correct interpretation into the target language.





## Printable Worksheet **Activity 3: Noting longer dialogues**

### Example 1:

**Interviewer:** Why did you flee to Iran?

**Asylum-seeker:** I couldn't stay in Pakistan. The government sent me a conscription letter. It said I had to do my military service, else I would be detained. Moreover, I am a Shiite Muslim. But in my village there are more and more Sunnites. My village is right in the middle. The Taliban are on one side and the Americans on the other side, where there is an American military base. This is the truth.

**Interviewer:** Why didn't you claim asylum in Spain or Italy?

**Asylum-seeker:** I was never alone in any of these countries. The agent was always with me. He said that I must not claim asylum there. He was frightening. I was scared. I had never been in contact with this kind of person.

**Interviewer:** You say you left Pakistan because your life was in danger yet you did not claim asylum whilst in safe countries, this makes it hard for me to believe your claim, can you explain?

**Asylum-seeker:** I was on my own for just a few hours in Spain. I had been told that if you go anywhere else that we give you the ticket for, they will send you back to Pakistan. I have never been around this kind of people. For nearly two months I was on my own and I didn't have the courage to do anything apart from what they asked me to do.

Source: UNHCR. 2013. Beyond Proof. Credibility Assessment in EU Asylum Systems. Brussels: UNHCR.

<https://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/51a8a08a9/full-report-beyond-proof-credibility-assessment>

(Accessed January 15 2022)



### Example 2:

**Interviewer:** Are you fit and well and ready to be interviewed?

**Asylum-seeker:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** What is your primary language?

**Asylum-seeker:** Ibo

**Interviewer:** The interview will be conducted in English. Can you understand what the interpreter is saying?

**Asylum-seeker:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** You have claimed asylum or international protection in the United Kingdom. Do you believe that you have a well founded fear of persecution or that there is a real risk you will suffer serious harm if you are removed from, or required to leave, the United Kingdom?

**Asylum-seeker:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** The questions I am about to ask you relate to your identity, background and travel route to the United Kingdom. The information you will be asked to provide will be used mainly for administrative purposes. You will not be asked at this stage to go into detail about the substantive details of your asylum claim as, if appropriate, this will be done at a later interview. However, some details you will be asked to provide may be relevant to your claim.

The information you give us, including biometrics data such as fingerprints, will be held in confidence. However, this may be disclosed to other government departments and agencies, local authorities, law enforcement bodies, international organisations and asylum authorities of other countries that may have responsibility for your asylum claim. This is to enable them to carry out their functions, including the prevention and detection of fraud.

Do you understand this?

**Asylum-seeker:** Yes, I understand.

**Interviewer:** You must answer the questions fully and truthfully. Failure to do so may damage your credibility and may affect the outcome of your asylum application. You should also be aware that making a false statement or representation may constitute an offence under immigration legislation and may, therefore, render you liable to prosecution and imprisonment.

Do you understand this?

**Asylum-seeker:** Yes, I understand.

Adapted from: Asylum Screening Interview and Biometric Residence Permit Application.

<https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/207335/response/517240/attach/4/31426%20Bradford%20Annex%20A.pdf>

(Accessed January 15 2022)

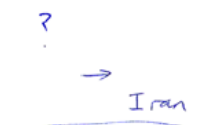


### Printable worksheet: Activity 3: Noting longer dialogues, Example 1

#### Possible notation of first half with explanations:

**Interviewer:**

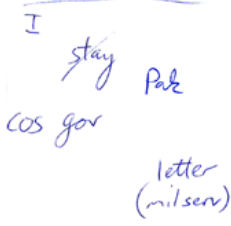
Why did you flee to Iran?



? indicates a question  
-> as a symbol indicating motion e.g. 'travel', 'flee', 'go', etc.

**Asylum-seeker:**

I couldn't stay in Pakistan.



horizontal line to separate ideas or turns  
~~stay~~ strikethrough line for negation

The government sent me a conscription letter. It said I had to do my military service, else I would be detained.



(milserv) brackets to add details

Moreover, I am a Shiite Muslim.



else cohesive link in the left-hand margin

But in my village there are more and more Sunnites.

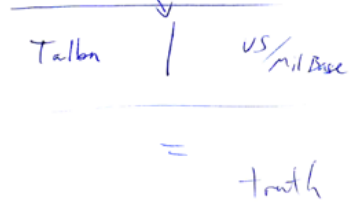


horizontal line to separate ideas or turns

+ for 'moreover' in the left-hand margin

↗ 'more and more'

My village is right in the middle. The Taliban are on one side and the Americans on the other side, where there is an American military base. This is the truth.



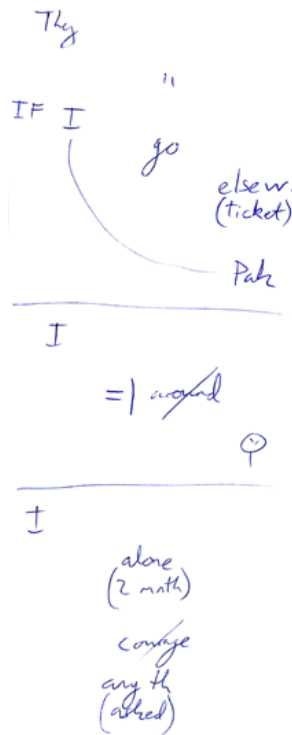
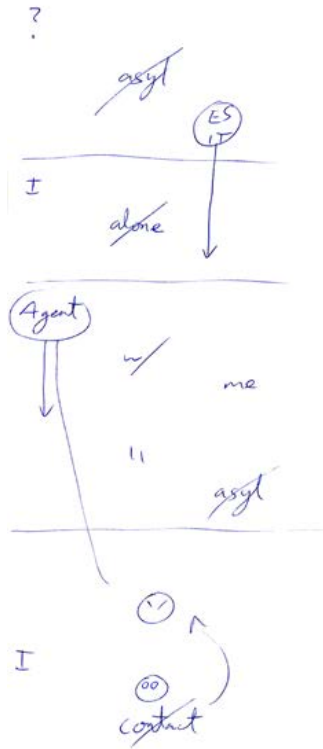
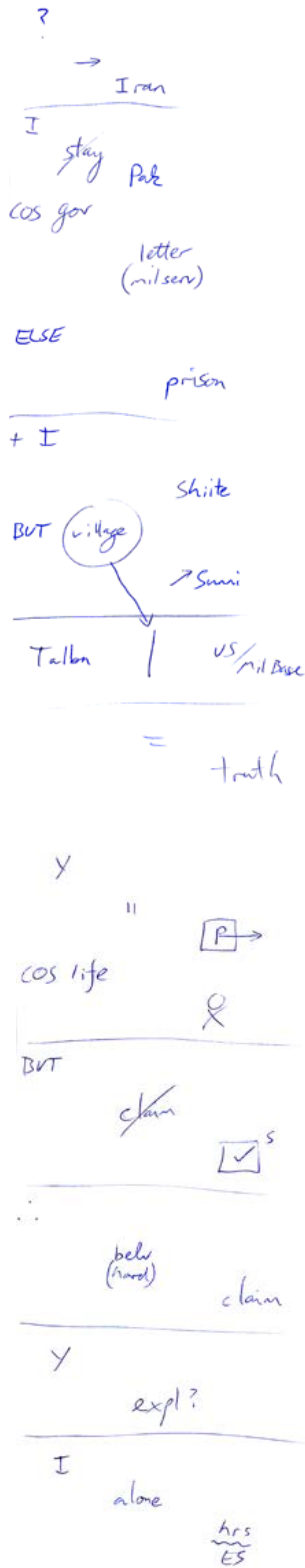
horizontal line to separate ideas or turns

recall line for 'village', | vertical line to represent the two sides  
US/mil base slash for details

horizontal line to separate ideas or turns



Possible notation example 1:



1

Question mark in the margin to indicate a question

Colon for "believe"/"think"/"feel" etc

Smiley with large eyes for "fear"/"shock"

Inverted "T" for "foundation"/"basis" (think of the foundation of the gallows as drawn in the game "hangman")

"X" with a head above it is a simplified skull and crossbones, i.e. "danger"/"risk"

Square to symbolise a nation state, arrow to indicate leaving it

Wiggly line to show slight deviation from what it underlines. In this case, "used for administrative purposes" becomes "used mainly for administrative purposes".

Parenttheses to show that "fit and OK" is in the sense of "interview"

No note necessary

Circle with downward arrow for "understand"

"I" with a circle above it (representing a head, i.e. person) = interpreter

Slash to show "international protection" connects with "UK"

? Sit  
OK  
(intrv)

✓

? 1st L

intrv

EN

? I

✓ claim  
or int prot  
UK

2

Question mark in the margin to indicate a question

Colon for "believe"/"think"/"feel" etc

Smiley with large eyes for "fear"/"shock"

Inverted "T" for "foundation"/"basis" (think of the foundation of the gallows as drawn in the game "hangman")

"X" with a head above it is a simplified skull and crossbones, i.e. "danger"/"risk"

Square to symbolise a nation state, arrow to indicate leaving it

Wiggly line to show slight deviation from what it underlines. In this case, "used for administrative purposes" becomes "used mainly for administrative purposes".

? Y

⋮

I persc  
or X/ham

IF UK

✓

I ?

info  
(you)

Y admin

IF subst details  
(asyl)

✓ later



3

Exclamation mark for "important"

BUT details you !  
+ biom data (fing pr)  
claim  
= confid.  
BUT

→ gov/dep  
loc. auth  
agenc  
police  
int. org  
asyl app

responsb  
claim

SO k do func  
(prev + detect / fraud)  
"k" for can  
?  
✓

Square for "country",  
superscript "s" for plural

Wiggly line softens "responsible"  
to "may be responsible"

4

Y ansu  
full time

ELSE x credb

Diagonal line reaching bottom of circle for "affect"/"impact"  
Wiggly

+ x statem  
asyl app

Wiggly line softens "constitutes" to  
"may constitute"

∴ Three dots for "therefore"

?  
prosc  
prison  
? ✓

cross to show negation





## Test yourself!



### Are the following statements true or false? Explain why the statement is true or false.

1. If I am good at note-taking I don't need to remember the content.

True       False

2. I can create my own symbols and abbreviations and don't need to remember the abbreviations and symbols suggested in this unit.

True       False

3. It's sufficient if I roughly summarise what has been said.

True       False

4. → always stands for 'to flee'.

True       False

5. It's important that I carefully note down everything before I begin to interpret.

True       False

6. Correct interpreting is impossible without detailed notes.

True       False

# Unit 8:

## *Sight Translating Interview Transcripts*

Karlheinz Spitzl & Jim Hlavac

*"It is not possible to step twice into the same river...  
or to come into contact twice with a mortal being in the same state."  
(Heraclitus, Fragment B91. Quoted from Graham 2015)*

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will be able to

- » critically analyse the term 'back-translation';
- » describe sight translation and its requirements;
- » understand how interview transcripts are composed and used in the asylum procedure;
- » enact sight translation as a dialogic activity;
- » understand critical interactional factors and how they operate.



### *What are 'Back-Translation' and 'Sight Translation'?*

Providing a translation of an interview transcript (also called transcript, written statement, protocol, interview report, or interview record; hereafter, 'transcript') is one of the most critical things that an interpreter may perform in an asylum procedure. As the source text is in **written form**, the term that is used to refer to this is 'sight translation'. The sight translation of a transcript functions as a **checking procedure** for the content of the transcript. Depending on the country that the interpreter works in, there may be different conventions in how oral statements made by asylum applicants are written down. In most countries, a transcript of an asylum applicant's words is then sight translated back to them by the interpreter. In other countries, the convention may be that there is no sight translation of a transcript. The information provided in this unit applies to situations in which the interpreter is required to provide a sight translation of the transcript to the asylum applicant during the course of the asylum interview, as follows:

During an interview that is conducted via an interpreter, the responses provided to the interviewer are recorded in written form. Before this written version is finalised, a translation of it is provided to the applicant so that they can make sure that it reflects what they said. Once verified, this written version then becomes an official document

(hereafter 'transcript') in the asylum application. This checking procedure therefore assumes great importance with respect to the outcome of the application and any appeal that may be made against a decision. As it can directly affect the future status of an applicant, the sight translation is something that merits close consideration.

### **THE MYTH THAT WE CAN TURN THINGS BACK TO HOW THEY WERE BEFORE**

Within the legal context in general, including asylum procedures, the **translation of a transcript** is often referred to as 'back-translation'. This concept is in stark contrast to what translation practice and research has shown it to be.

At a basic level, interpreting involves comprehension of a source text. A source text contains not only intended meanings, but also possible meanings that extend beyond these. The technical term for these possible meanings is 'potentials of interpretation'. It is therefore not possible to apprehend one single, absolute and all-encompassing meaning of a source text. What we understand is always specific to our perceptions and has a particular perspective. What this means is that the understanding of a source

text – even under optimum conditions – is always subject to an **element of choice**. The same applies to the way that a target text is conveyed. In addition to the way we intend our own interpretations to be perceived, there exist a number of other possible meanings beyond this.

From this we can conclude that an interpretation – with the proviso that it should be as accurate and complete as possible – is always accompanied by the **creation of new meaning**. Professional interpreter performance depends not only on a high degree of precision, but also on consciousness of responsibility for this aspect of the interpreted interaction that is both open and dynamic.

Interpreting in an asylum procedure, as in all interactions, involves not only a simple rendering of meaning from one language into another but also an element of transformation. When a transcript is sight translated back into the language that was used by the applicant themselves, this element of transformation is present, as is the factor that the ‘back-translation’ does not represent, in a complete sense, a ‘return’ to the words or signs that the applicant used.<sup>1</sup> This is not to suggest that the source text and the target text are not congruent with each other. What we are suggesting here is that a ‘return’ to the original form of the source text via translation is not possible, because there is rarely a one-to-one relation between the words, forms or signings when moving between languages (Mikkelsen 1999).

What we seek to demonstrate here is that ‘back-translation’, which is sometimes referred to as ‘literal back-translation’, is something that does not exist in reality. This raises the question why interviewers in the course of the asylum procedure still commonly use this term. The most likely reason for why they do this is that they view speech or signing as consisting of a sequencing of small, ‘bite-size’ entities that can be broken up and transferred between languages, and when re-transferred back to the original language, the ‘bite-size’ entities form the same pattern as in the original. For example, a directive of this kind given to interpreters: “Interpret everything word-for-word, so it stays the same in the other language,” is a completely unworkable expectation. In order to protect themselves, interpreters should challenge this erroneous expectation where they encounter it. For an interpreter, one element of discharging their duties responsibly is to be conscious of what is actually happening during the interpreting process.

To summarise: a sight translation represents an ‘offering of information’ in the target language (Vermeer 1982, 97) that is closely congruent to the source text, but with the further attribute that **it always contains something new** (Shlesinger 1991).

## COMPARING APPLES AND ORANGES

When considering the meaning of the term ‘back-translation’, it is important to note that in a technical sense, ‘translation’ and ‘interpreting’ refer to two different activities for those taking part in them, even though the two terms are commonly used interchangeably (see Units 3-5).

On the one hand, **translation**

- refers to a fixed text created in the target language,
- does not occur in a synchronous, face-to-face interaction,
- is asynchronous, allowing the translator to research, check and correct their translation,

while on the other, **interpreting**

- is a one-off verbal or signed representation of a target text,
- is not readily amenable to evaluation or correction, due to the time pressure under which interpretations are produced (Kade 1968; Pöchl 2004).

The immediacy of the asylum procedure interview means that the type of inter-lingual transfer that occurs at it will be interpreting rather than translation.

## APPEARANCES AND REALITY

An interpretation occurs through the **rendering of a source text**. The act of ‘rendering’ involves the notion of ‘departing from’ the original, not in the sense of departing from the meaning or content of the original, but in the sense that a rendition is ‘a new edition’ of something already said or signed, not ‘the same edition’. Slavishly following the structure of the source text (for example, choice of words, sentence construction and sequence of sentences) may yield a measure of similarity between the source and the target text. At the same time, such a rendition can amount to a distortion or even a complete misrepresentation, if what is expressed in the source language is ordinarily expressed in a completely different way in the target language. Notwithstanding this, in some sight translations that are performed in the course of the asylum procedure, there are known to have been declarations that have contained the following wording, “The applicant was provided with a word-for-word back-translation into their native language of the above-mentioned transcript.”

This creates a **dilemma** for the interpreter. In legal proceedings, the clarity of the language used is critically important. What this means for interpreters is that they are confronted with two problematic issues, when they are required to sign such a declaration: that they have provided an interpretation that is ‘literal’ (see Unit 4) and that is also a ‘back-translation’. As already

mentioned in this unit, in both cases these terms can only be understood in a **metaphorical sense**. From the perspective of the relevant authorities, this declaration serves the purpose of providing a quality assurance as to the accuracy of the interpretation. But within the field of **translation research and practice**, the term 'literal back-translation' refers to something that actually means the opposite.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore questionable, in an ethical sense, for interpreters to sign such a declaration in the course of the asylum procedure. To safeguard confidence in their own professionalism (see Unit 5), interpreters should request a formulation that more closely reflects the work that they do. It could, for example, be worded: "A full sight translation of this written transcript was provided to the applicant to verify that what they said or signed has been understood and for them to check its contents".

The points outlined above in regard to 'word-for-word back-translation' and the use of this term (by some) as a quality assurance mechanism suggest that we should look at this term as more than just an example of legal jargon. Its use can have broader repercussions. For example, there can be negative consequences, if the wording of this declaration influences the interpreter to feel obliged to structure their sight translation such that it facilitates a particular kind of 'back-translation'. Sight translation and interpreting are not carried out so that the sight translation or interpretation can then be compared against the source text, speech or signing. Such a belief is contrary to contemporary, empirical research on interpreting and how interpreters transfer meaning across languages. What we are dealing with here, therefore, is **not 'back-translation', but 'sight translation of a transcript'** that is provided so that the recorded version of what the applicant has said or signed has been understood and verified by the applicant.

## Sight Translation

### WHAT IS IT?

**Translation at sight** occurs in settings in which the source text is in written form and the target text is verbal or signed (Gile 2009; Loreto Sampaio 2007; Agrifoglio 2004; Changmin 2001). In the case of signed interpreting, the target text is sometimes called 'text-to-sign interpreting'.

The activity of sight translation is a form of inter-lingual transfer that has the following attributes:

- the source text is written,
- it is delivered in an ad-hoc manner,
- it is rendered into a spoken- or sign-language target text.

Sight translations can be provided in the **consecutive mode** or the **simultaneous mode**.

Consecutive sight translation involves the interpreter first being able to read through the full text, making annotations or notes on the text or elsewhere to aid comprehension or transfer, and then delivering the interpretation of the text from the perspective of knowing the text in its entirety. For a sight translation to be delivered in the consecutive mode, an allocation of time needs to be made before or during the interaction in which the interpreter is able to familiarise themselves with the full text before giving the sight translation.

With simultaneous sight translation, interpreters are commonly given little or no reading or preparation time. They are required to read and comprehend the written text and to provide a sight translation on the spot. The source text, whether printed or in electronic form, remains accessible and unchanged throughout the sight translation (see Unit 6).

The function and means by which a sight translation is provided depends greatly on the general context of the situation (for example, cultural, political or business interactions) or the setting itself (for example, peace negotiations, award ceremony or shareholder meeting).

In the context of the asylum procedure, sight translation may be performed for a number of reasons. In addition to the purpose of ensuring that an applicant has understood and verified the written version of what they have said or signed, sight translation may be employed when the following are presented: identity documents, official extracts, certifications, proof of inoculations, medical history reports, official correspondence or country-specific reference documents.

Documents may be presented for sight translation in the following ways:

- Without warning, the text is presented and a sight translation is required straight away.
- The text is presented to the interpreter, and they are given only a brief amount of time to look through it and prepare themselves before giving the sight translation.
- The text has already been made available to the interpreter from a previous interaction or through access to the applicant's documents.<sup>3</sup> (In general, it is not common for the document to be available to the interpreter in advance.)

The timeframe involved in many steps of the asylum procedure means that **it is seldom the case that an interpreter can preview and prepare** the text to be sight translated.

## THE COGNITIVE DEMANDS OF SIGHT TRANSLATION

When providing a sight translation, we can identify the following **simultaneously enacted activities** that are based on Gile's (1985) Effort Model of attention and memory capacity in interpreting. In relation to sight translation, Gile (2009, 179-180) describes effort expenditure in the following way:

Sight translation = Reading Effort + Memory Effort + Speech Production Effort + Coordination

- **Reading Effort.** Understanding what is presented in visual form;
- **Memory Effort.** Short-term memorizing speech segments to identify and understand them;
- **Speech Production Effort.** Providing the sight translation in its totality, which includes any or all of the following: voice, rhythm, gesture, body language, gaze, proxemics and self-monitoring;
- **Coordination Effort.** Managing the reading, memory and speech production effort.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF 'LETTING GO' OF THE VISUAL REPRESENTATION

In spoken- and sign-language interpreting, listening, memory and analysis effort is required to recall what has just been said or signed. This 'one-off' contact with the source text makes it easier for the interpreter to disregard the text's actual structures. With sight translation, though, the source text remains constantly accessible, and this is the challenge that sight translation presents: the need to **constantly switch between silent reading of the text and spoken or signed interpreting** that is natural-sounding and not needlessly influenced by source text constructions, so that we can speak of the interpreter 'having let go' of its visual form. At the same time, the interpreter's gaze needs to move periodically between two points of attention: the source text itself and the recipient of the sight translation (Gile 2009; Agrifoglio 2004).

**Letting go** here refers to 'letting go' of the structure of the source text. There can be differences in the way that a particular sense is rendered from the source into the target language, according to the situation and the context. In the process of practising and acquiring the skill of sight translation, interpreters should keep the following points in mind and reflect on how and to what degree they are able to let go of the visual representation of the source text:

- individual words; for example, keeping in mind that a seemingly affirmative response in one language need not be equivalent to 'yes';
- syntax; for example which elements may be in clause-initial position, which ones in clause-final position, and which ones may be elsewhere;

- voice; for example a source text sentence may be in passive voice, while its equivalent in the target language may be in active, or vice versa;
- mood; for example indicative, interrogative, subjunctive or imperative;
- time as an expressed category; for example, use of past tense in relation to past events, as against present tense in relation to past events, to express 'immediacy';
- pronouns used; for example, use of 'we' to refer to a subject not further specified, or use of 'you' as a generic pronoun;
- number as a grammatical category; for example, whether the language formally distinguishes between singular and plural forms;
- coherence markers; for example, words that perform a linking function such as showing relations of cause/effect ('because'), contrast ('but'), temporal order ('and then', 'before') or addition ('and');
- the marking and sequencing of sentences through the use of full stops or other punctuation markers, as a feature that may not be followed in the target text;
- visual delineation of text into paragraphs that accord with the thematic or rhythmic norms of the source language; these may differ in the target language.

Using a **pen to mark or annotate** particular structures can be a useful strategy for interpreters to use to capture the sense of a source text. Other aspects of the text, where these are clearly recognisable as such, can serve as text-internal visual aids that facilitate the delivery of the sight translation. These include things like clearly recognisable dialogue passages, changes in font size or style, or use of italics.

'Letting go' also relates to terms used in the transcript, such as particular concepts, procedures or events that may be conceptualised in the source culture in a different way to that in which they are conceptualised in the target culture. This may necessitate further explanation in the sight translation delivery, for example terms such as 'family', 'home', 'occupation', 'strike' or 'rainy season' (see Unit 4 and Unit 10) can have different connotations according to the language that they are used in. What this can also mean is that the **length of time for delivery can differ** from the length of time it would take to read out the source text in the source language.

## DEPARTING FROM THE NORMS OF WRITTEN LANGUAGE

Another feature of sight translation is the **shift from written to spoken or signed language**. When working from a written text, an interpreter needs to be aware of the specific characteristics and functionalities that characterise a written text and those which distinguish it from spoken or signed text. Some researchers, for example Linell (2005), go so far as to state that they are completely

different. Oral or signed communication is generally more readily comprehensible than written text. This needs to be kept in mind, especially as the applicant in the asylum procedure is likely to be listening very attentively to the sight translation.

### EYE CONTACT

Interpreting can and should be conceived of as an activity that involves not only inter-lingual transfer, but also gesture, voice modulation, facial and body language (Bahadır 2010). This goes without saying for sign-language interpreting. The challenge of sight translation is to enact elements from a written text. In dialogue interpreting, the situational dynamics alone usually have the effect of engaging all parties, but in the case of sight translation, the interpreter needs to be careful that they do not focus solely on the text to the detriment of engaging with the participants in the interaction. If the interpreter focuses too much on the text, they are unable to see how it is actually being received by the other party and whether it appears coherent to them. To avert this risk, and to ensure optimum delivery of the sight translation, **frequent eye contact with the other parties is an essential interactional strategy.**

### SPEECH OR SIGNING TEMPO AND FLOW

Sight translation should be delivered at a **similar pace and rhythm to spoken or signed language.** The interpreter is the one who determines the speech or signing tempo and flow of sight translation (Gile 2009). This is a feature that distinguishes it from interpreting, where the interpreter is largely guided by the rate or speed of speech/signing from the source speaker/signer. It is important to keep in mind that too slow a tempo can make it harder to take in the sight translation, as can other aspects of performance such as abrupt changes in voice/signing rhythm, frequent false starts and repairs or repeated insertions.<sup>4</sup> With regard to the **length of the sight translation**, interpreters **should monitor others' ability and readiness to understand and absorb the text.** In some cases, this may necessitate the insertion of a pause/pauses or the elicitation of back-channelling signals from the other party/parties.

### DEALING WITH ONE'S OWN AND OTHERS' FEELINGS

When delivering a sight translation, interpreters have an awareness of their own performance. They may be thinking or feeling things like, "I did that well", "I was a bit off the mark there", "How am I supposed to sight translate this?", "Why isn't the applicant looking at me?", "This is a really badly composed transcript", "Am I speaking too fast?", "Should I offer extra clarification about that? Can I do that now?", "The interviewer has been looking

at me the whole time in complete disbelief", and so on. What these thoughts represent is an internal dialogue or monitoring that runs alongside the delivery. Interpreters need to be careful that these thoughts do not affect their concentration such that they impact on the delivery of the sight translation itself. These thoughts have been known to distract some interpreters to the extent that their performance was severely affected.

One feature of sight translation is the fact that there are fewer interactional stimuli from others, such as the turn-taking that normally occurs in dialogue or liaison interpreting. This means that interpreters need to be especially mindful of their inner thoughts. It is important to keep in mind that it is quite normal for there to be a mismatch between one's own internal thoughts and others' perceptions. For example, what an interpreter may perceive to be awkward may not be perceived as such by others, or at least not to the same degree. In order to work out how and why this inner dialogue operates in the way it seems to, it is perhaps a good idea to reflect on when and why it occurs in the course of the sight translation delivery, and to use this self-evaluation as a guide for self-improvement (Bahadır and Pinzker 2014).

## Sight Translation in the Asylum Procedure

### THE TRANSCRIPT AS A SOURCE TEXT

The successful delivery of a sight translation in the asylum procedure depends in the first place on the source text – in the context of the asylum procedure this is the transcript – and how it is interpreted and understood. A transcript belongs to a particular text type. In order to fully understand the function and impact of this text type and to see what are the implications for the interpreter in understanding and reproducing it, a number of points that should be considered are presented below.

### WHO WROTE IT, AND WHO IS THE ‘AUTHOR’?

In the first place, it seems logical to think that the applicant is the ‘original author’ of the transcript. However, the transcript is a text that contains not what the applicant said or signed, but what was interpreted from their speech or signing. The interpreter is therefore a ‘co-contributor’ of the transcript. The actual ‘control’ over the composition of the transcript lies in the hands of the interviewers, who determine its content. The form of the transcript therefore also reflects their ‘voices’.<sup>9</sup> This makes it seem as if the transcript has a number of authors who determine its content. In fact, all parties actively present in the interview can be considered contributors to the text (Coulthard and Johnson 2007; Eades 2008). As a text, the transcript has multiple contributors to its content, but what is important to note is that where the text is signed by an applicant for asylum, in a legal sense, the applicant is the author of the text. Their signature makes it a transcript of which they alone are the author.

### WHAT IS RECORDED IN THE TRANSCRIPT?

Conventions in the collation and recording of information in an application for asylum vary from country to country. In some countries, the process may include the preparation of a transcript that occurs on the basis of information provided by the applicant to an interpreter, with the interpreter’s interpretations forming the basis for the interviewer’s or their typist’s preparation of a transcript. In other countries, there is no distinguishable transcript but a series of responses to questions asked in the course of an interview, and the responses are entered under each question. In this case, the sequence of responses forms the transcript that supports the asylum application.

It is usually not a good sign when the interpretation of an applicant’s responses to questions appear to resemble bureaucratic jargon rather than natural-sounding answers,

and when such responses are found in the transcript (for example, responses such as “Yes. I understood everything. I was able to understand everything that the interpreter said.” or “Yes. I understood everything. I have no further questions about the legal consequences of what you just explained to me.”). This may indicate that the applicant is giving a response that they feel that they have to give, or that the interpreter formulated their translation as ‘transcript-ready’ to ease the work of the interviewer or typist. It is up to the interviewer to check or to question the applicant further, if the response given by the applicant appears to be overly or unnaturally compliant, raising the possibility that what is written down in the transcript is not a reflection of what the applicant said or signed. The interviewer has no interest in recording inaccurate or mistaken information in the transcript, as this may be revealed at a later stage of investigation or at an appeal hearing. The interviewer bears the responsibility for the content of the transcript, not the interpreter. There are a number of recognised ways in which the transcript can be prepared:

- **The interpreter dictates their interpretations directly to a person responsible for the written recording of the applicant’s statements;**
- **The interviewer selects certain sections of the interpretations and assembles a text-ready version of the applicant’s statements;**
- The interviewer themselves composes the transcript on the basis of what they have heard, which they then record in translated form in place of the interpreter performing the inter-lingual transfer (That means that there is no need for an interpreter, if the interviewer chooses to do this);
- In court settings, a court stenographer follows the discourse elicited in court proceedings and prepares a transcript based on the sections of what is said.

In the preparation of a transcript, the two ways marked in bold above are usually considered the best. The third way listed above presumes that the interviewer has skills in both languages and is able to translate aural or signed text in one language into written text in another, that is ‘aural translation’. Where the interviewer occupies two roles – that of interviewer and interpreter/translator – the interviewer should declare this to the applicant, and clearly indicate to the applicant when they are performing one role or the other, and when they are performing both roles simultaneously. Further, it is likely to be common practice that the name of the person responsible for inter-lingual transfer – usually the interpreter, but in this case the interviewer – is officially recorded in the transcript or in an accompanying document. The interviewer should do this to indicate their identity as the person who performed the task of inter-lingual transfer in the transcript preparation.



There are further known ways in which a transcript may be prepared. These include the interpreter taking on a role beyond inter-lingual transfer. We do not advocate that the interpreter take on this role, and we warn against the following two ways of preparation of the transcript. We include them here as examples of how a transcript should **not** be prepared.

In the first, the interpreter is allocated the role of preparing the transcript itself by writing it in the host country's official language, based on the speech or signing of the applicant, and sight translates it back to the applicant. This way includes the interpreter taking on another's role (that of the interviewer) and taking on the responsibility for the content of the prepared transcript.

In the second, the interpreter is allocated the role of preparing the transcript in written form in the applicant's language. This way excludes the interviewer and does not facilitate their involvement in the protocols of the transcript. The interpreter then reads out orally, or signs the transcript to the applicant in the applicant's language, or allows the applicant to read the transcript (where they have literacy in this), and seeks their agreement to it. The interpreter then translates the transcript into the host country's official language. This is usually the first opportunity that the interviewer has to access the transcript document. The interpreter then sight translates their own translation back into the applicant's language, so that the applicant can verify that the translated transcript conforms to the transcript written in their own language that they had just been given access to and agreed to. Clearly, this second way, like the first one, has the undesirable effect of the interpreter taking on the role of another, which is risk-laden and contravenes the principle of impartiality that is contained in most Codes of Ethics for interpreters. This second way also requires the interpreter to undertake double the volume of inter-lingual transfer compared to what they would do in the optimum ways shown above. It also means the exclusion of the interviewer, which often leads to their disengagement from the procedure. This is not a desirable outcome (Fowler 2003; Angelelli 2015).



## COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

### Translating Transcripts

- In what way are interviews recorded in your country?
- Is a translation of the transcript provided to the applicant so that they can ascertain that it reflects what they said? If yes, in what way is the back-translation provided?
- Does the applicant have to approve of or demonstrate their agreement with the transcript?

To return to the four points listed above about how the transcript may be prepared, it is clear that one characteristic of the transcript is the 'refraction' that occurs in the repeated transfer of text via back-translation. To use the phrase 'travel literature' as an illustrative example, it is possible to imagine it being rendered in the interview statements as '**travelling texts**'. Some of these meanings arrive safely at their stated destination, while others take a detour or a wrong path before getting to where they need to go. And some of them never actually make it to their final destination and do not get included in the transcript (Rock, Heffner, and Conley 2013).

## WHAT KIND OF TRANSFER IS TAKING PLACE?

In the process of preparing a transcript, **switching between linguistic codes** occurs on a variety of levels:

- in formal linguistic terms, from the source language into the target language;
- in terms of genre, often from every-day, colloquial speech or signing into the formal, bureaucratic language of government institutions;
- in terms of macro-skill, from spoken language into written language.

## THE NEED FOR A TRANSCRIPT

The parties involved in the asylum procedure often have different needs and expectations with regard to the transcript and the purpose that it serves for them. From the perspective of the applicant, the transcript serves the purpose of being a formal representation of the details that they have conveyed to the interviewer. From the perspective of the interviewer, the transcript is a working document that collates individual and situationally-based responses that are then weighed up in regard to their validity and tenability as part of the decision-making process <sup>6</sup> (Scheffer 1998; Iedema 2003).

What else do we need to know about the transcript? A transcript is a point of reference, as well as being an expression and the concrete result of a highly dynamic interaction, in which meaning is negotiated and in which possible meanings may shift according to perspective and the flow of the conversation. It is now clear that the sight translation of a transcript is not some kind of repetition of what has previously been expressed. Instead, as a form of inter-lingual transfer, we can speak of it as a '**new target text**', with the proviso that working from a written source has consequences on delivery.

We can therefore conceptualise sight translation not so much as a formal act that concludes the asylum procedure interview but more so as a '**new or second act**' of a performed activity. In doing this, it is important for the

interpreter to mentally 'move from' what was previously spoken or signed and to approach the written document as a 'new source text'. This ensures that any differences between what is contained in the written document and what was said or signed previously are then rendered in the sight translation.<sup>8</sup>

What this means is that the interpreter should not orientate themselves according to the **patterns of interpretation from previous parts of the interaction**. Features from these previous parts may have included, for example, a change in mood<sup>9</sup> or a sense of hesitation that, at the time, had a measurable effect on the meaning of what was said and how it was understood. These things cannot really be recorded in the transcript, and so what the interpreter has to work from is the transcript and nothing more.

## Sight Translation as a Dialogic Event

### YOU AND ME

As a checking and verifying measure, the sight translation of a transcript is an important part of a process that seeks to be fair. In an immediate sense, it is directed at the applicant. But it is not a monologue, similar to a poetry reading<sup>10</sup> for example. Instead, it should be thought of as **a conversation with the text**.

In order for the sight translation to achieve its purpose, it needs to be seen as something that enables both parties – the interviewer and the applicant – to enter into a dialogue with one another. This dialogue can take the form of spoken or signed utterances directed at the other party (for example, queries or explanations) or as non-verbal cues (for example, stance, body language, gesture or gaze). What is important here is that it is clear to both parties when the interpreter is providing a sight translation of the transcript's content, and when they are using language in a phatic way to build rapport between the participants.

While the above dialogue is going on, it is important for the interpreter to **be mindful of the other parties** in the interaction. In the course of the sight translation, it can be particularly disturbing where there are passages that claim things that the applicant never said or signed or at least did not say or sign in the way that these are being re-presented to them (Eades 2010).

During the course of the interaction, there may be points at which the interviewer wishes to ascertain that the applicant has fully understood the interpretation provided to them by the interpreter. This may occur as an interjection in the course of the delivery of the sight translation. An interviewer may interject and ask questions such as, "Did you understand what the interpreter just said?"

### GIVING AND RECEIVING

The sight translation of a transcript makes sense only if what the interpreter conveys can be received by the applicant. In order for the sight translation not to sound monotonous, and to prevent the applicant from losing concentration at a time when they could be experiencing fatigue, it is important for the interpreter to consciously employ **attentiveness strategies**, such as voice modulation, variation in volume, occasional pauses, variation in voice tempo, gesture, body language, stance and so on. Where the sight translation contains figures (for example, amounts or dates) or dense factual content (for example, detailed descriptions), the interpreter should make a conscious effort to provide **pauses** in their delivery, or at least to slow the speed of their voice.

Being attentive to the other participants and to the constellation of the asylum procedure interview means that the interpreter is constantly required to reflect on their own performance and may ask themselves the following questions: "How did the others react to my interpretations? How have their reactions affected my own interpretations?" It is also important here to register strategies by the applicant that amount to an attempt to establish rapport, and to allow the applicant to use these. Where either party appears overtly to be suffering from fatigue, it is advisable that the interpreter suggests taking a break, or at least inviting both parties to have a drink of water.

## BACK-AND-FORTH ALIGNMENT

The success of sight translation delivery also depends on the interpreter being able to balance a number of challenges that present themselves, when looking at sight translation from a dialogic perspective:

- The **gaze of the interpreter** should be focused on the passage of the text being sight translated at that moment, and also looking further on to anticipate the meaning of forthcoming sections. At the same time, their gaze should, at times, be directed at the applicant, so as to be able to gauge their reaction to what is being conveyed to them.
- The **linguistic register** of the sight translation should be such that the text is accessible and readily understood by the applicant, while also retaining some of the tone of official language used by government institutions.
- The **rhythm** of speech or signing should be smooth and fluent, so that the applicant is easily able to take in longer stretches of details or courses of action. The interpreter should leave themselves open to signals from the applicant that they need the interpreter to pause, to actively clarify something or to allow the applicant to check something.

The gaze of the applicants themselves may change in its orientation. An applicant's gaze may indicate that they are comprehending and taking in what is said to them, while at other times it is clear that they are taking time to process things and to think of possible consequences. Their focus may shift from what is being said at that moment to remembering back to what happened in the past. It may be torn between the impulse to take the initiative in the interaction and the knowledge that it is best to remain calm and reserved in such situations. In order for a sight translation to be properly delivered and fully comprehended, both parties – the interpreter and the applicant – need to make themselves fully aware of what the interaction requires of them.

1) A subsequent transformation implies a transformation of the previous transformation.

2) As a basic principle that underlies training in sight translation, Weber (1990, 50) recommends that "A word-for-word translation should never be accepted."

3) Such instances are still considered examples of 'sight translation' where there is no written translation available to the interpreter. Where the interpreter does have access to a written translation and then reads it aloud or signs it, this is not 'sight translation'.

4) Within this context, it is important to note that a fluent and smoothly delivered sight translation can be a cause for concern. Sight translation is a highly complex and dynamic activity. Delivery with no sign of hesitation or deliberation at all can be an indication that the person providing the sight translation may be glossing over difficult passages (i.e. shortening some sections or even omitting them) rather than striving to provide a full and complete rendition (Pöchhacker 2005; Kolb 2010).

5) In the context of court proceedings, the court stenographer should also be included as a person responsible for the composition of a transcript. The discourse conventions that the court stenographer employs in capturing in written form what they have heard are part of the content of the text. This includes visual layout, orthographical choices and font settings that form part of the text content (Kredens and Morris 2010; Nakane 2014).

6) In some ways, the transcript can be seen as a text that 'stitches together' verbal fragments provided by the applicant.

7) It is illusionary to think that it is possible for the interpreter to completely disregard everything that was said or signed before.

8) In order to demonstrate how different the sight translation could be from the speech or signing that preceded it, an interpreter who was not previously present in the interaction could be called in to do this. It is likely that such an exercise would reveal the influence of being party to prior stages of the interaction.

9) For example "Are there guns in your head or violets?", Phipps (2013).

10) Delivery of information-dense content in such a way would eventually exceed most people's capabilities.



## Printable worksheet: *Critical factors and dilemmas*

This printable worksheet relates to asylum procedures in countries in which a sight translation of a transcript is a required component of the asylum interview. As stated, conventions on the necessity and manner of sight translation in the asylum interview differ from country to country.

### » **Having a short break to catch one's breath**

Before commencing the delivery of a sight translation, it is for the benefit of all parties that a short break be taken. If a break has not been scheduled into the interview by the interviewer, then the interpreter should request one. A short break serves the purpose of allowing the interpreter to catch their breath. It also serves the purpose of marking the end of what has been said or signed previously and interpreted, and allows the interpreter the chance to have a brief read through of the transcript.

### » **Image projected by the interpreter**

How does the interpreter deal with situations when they find it difficult to render sections of the text or to provide adequate equivalents, or even make mistakes? In terms of what the recipient of the sight translation hears or sees, it is easier for them to understand a fluently delivered sight translation, even where in places it may be incomplete or even slightly inexact. Constantly stopping, subsequently correcting mistranslations, or providing further paraphrases are intended to ensure a high degree of precision in the inter-lingual transfer, but at the same time, they make it hard for the applicant to fully absorb and understand what is being conveyed. There are risks to both such types of delivery. On the one hand, the ethical and professional standards (see Unit 5) that are incumbent on interpreters require them to **correct any mistranslations knowingly made**. On the other hand, the interviewer or the authority responsible for the interpreter being employed for the assignment may see such a course of action on the part of the interpreter as an indication of lack of professional competence. The interpreter needs to maintain a balance between these two contrasting positions, and to keep in mind that the person most at risk if a mistake or mistranslation were to occur is the applicant.

### » **Physical positioning in relation to others**

Physical proximity to and visual contact with others are key things for the interpreter to consider, whatever others may think about where the interpreter should be located (Inghilleri 2005). If the interpreter is familiar with the communicative strategies that interviewers typically employ (Dialogical Communication Method, see Unit 2), then they can apply this as a frame of reference for their sight translation delivery of the transcript. It will usually be less likely for the interpreter to be familiar with the communicative strategies that the applicant may employ, and this could cause the interpreter to align themselves more readily to the interviewer. It could also be possible for the interpreter to align themselves more closely with the applicant. This is noticeable if the interpreter verbally or visually draws attention to passages of the text that appear to be of critical importance for the applicant's case. In such instances, the interpreter is providing the applicant with an overt (or covert) opportunity to pay attention carefully to the content of the transcript and to make corrections where appropriate.

It is important to keep in mind that whatever position an interpreter takes up in relation to other parties will have consequences. The interpreter bears responsibility for the physical proximity and visual contact that they maintain with other parties, and it is important for them to reflect periodically on where they are situated in relation to others. Where a physical constellation appears to be detrimental to the interaction and seems to prevent equal consideration being given to the communicative needs of all participants, then the interpreter should consider reconfiguring the physical constellation.

### » **Peer consultation**

It is often the case that after an interpreting assignment, an interpreter will reflect on and self-evaluate their performance. It can sometimes happen that they do not realise that they made a mistake or mistranslated something until later on, upon **critical reflection** of their performance, re-visiting what they sight translated. When this happens, it can be very useful to **swap notes with interpreter colleagues**, to see how they would have managed such a situation. It is instructive to see and hear how others would respond, in a situation when a sight translation is being delivered or in an analogous context. Consulting with their peers on a regular basis is something that can not only consolidate a professional interpreter's level of competence but also contribute to their ability to deal pre-emptively with difficult situations (see Unit 12).



### » Clarification

No one can know everything. No one can understand everything. No one can be prepared for every eventuality. When the interpreter does not understand something in the transcript, the only course of action for them to follow is to ask the interviewer or applicant for repetition or clarification. In their daily work, interpreters may not understand everything that is said or signed to them, but through the context, they may deduce the meaning of what is not fully understood. This is a legitimate and commonly used strategy. But in the setting of an asylum application, this should not be considered an option. Instead, if what the interpreter hears or sees is unclear, or if there are circumstances in the interaction that hinder the interpreter's reception of what has been said or signed, the interpreter should seek clarification. The interpreter must seek clarification in order to fully understand what they are about to interpret. **Requesting clarification** is not an indication of a lack of competence. On the contrary, it is a **hallmark of professionalism**.

### » Correcting and adding to the transcript?

Interpreters should be given the opportunity to read through the transcript and to check its structure and content before providing the sight translation. If it is discovered that the transcript does not correctly represent what had been interpreted previously, or if the written text represents a qualitative change from the original source speech or signing, the interpreter should consider intervening. If the interpreter wishes to seek a correction or addition to the transcript, they should do so, by stating that the interpretations that they have provided are not fully rendered in the transcript, or not rendered in a way that reflects the interpretations provided. The content of this communication should be interpreted to the other party, usually the applicant. If the interpreter does not intervene, the transcript is sight translated in the form that it is provided to the interpreter.

*EXAMPLE: An interpreter provides interpretations that fully convey the emotional state of a person seeking protection, who suffers from constant and recurring pains. But in the transcript itself, there is only the following entries:*

*Interviewer, "Were you in hospital?"*

*Applicant, "Yes. I still suffer from recurrent pains."*

Regardless of whether the interpreter intervenes with regard to the transcript content or not, it remains the responsibility of the applicant to indicate non-agreement with the content of the transcript, if they believe that it does not reflect what they have said or signed in the interview. **The 'author' of the transcript, as stated above, is the person who signs the transcript.**

In some countries, the asylum procedure may require the interpreter to provide a declaration not only of the accuracy of their interpretations, but also of the accuracy of the transcript itself. This places the interpreter in the position of being co-responsible for the content of what is recorded in a transcript (see Unit 5 for ethical implications).

### » A repeat rendition of the sight translation?

Where the transcript undergoes **changes or additions** on the basis of interpretations of further speech or signing from the applicant, then these changes or additions are to be considered **new source texts**. They are also sight translated as new source texts, and the process of dealing with changes or additions continues until the transcript fully reflects what the applicant has recounted.

### » Withdrawal

Acting professionally means **knowing one's own limits**. Circumstances can arise which make it impossible for an interpreter, in a reasonable sense, to provide sight translation. The interpreter should first attempt to remedy these circumstances, through intervention with the interviewer and/or the applicant, or with a third party for them to be able to work as an interpreter. The interpreter should also alert others of the consequences of their inability to interpret and to work as an interpreter. It is therefore professionally acceptable, if such circumstances persist, and weighing up the possible consequences, for an interpreter to withdraw from an interpreting assignment. Similarly, it is also professionally acceptable to refuse to sign a declaration that the interpreter "has faithfully interpreted" between languages, when the conditions or circumstances have compromised the interpreter's ability to have a reasonable quality of access to the speech or signing of any party, or compromised any party's ability to have a reasonable quality of access to the interpreter's interpretations.



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## Further Reading

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## Activities

### **Activity 1: Reading and preparation time for sight translation. Getting the sense and meaning of a text.**

1

**Form of activity:** Participants initially work in small groups and come together at the end of the activity for plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 40 minutes (25 minutes in small groups, 15 minutes plenary discussion).

**Description:** Working in small groups, participants are given a newspaper text of approximately 250-300 words. Participants are given 1-2 minutes to read through the text. They are allowed to mark the text or make annotations with a pen. The text is then hidden from view, and participants are required to answer general questions about the text's content.

In the second stage of this activity, participants are given the opportunity to read through the text again – this time for 30-40 seconds only. Participants are then asked more specific questions about the text. Following this, each participant is required to briefly recount the most important parts of the text to the person sitting next to them.

The aim of this activity is to help interpreters develop the ability of quickly and efficiently grasping the main points and overall content of a text. Participants are encouraged to share the strategies that they employed to do this in group-wide discussion.

Source: Ersozlu, Elif. 2005. "Training of Interpreters: Some Suggestions on Sight Translation Teaching." *The Translation Journal*. <http://translationjournal.net/journal/34sighttrans.htm> (Accessed January 15 2022)



## Activity 2: Moving back and forth

2

**Form of activity:** Working in pairs.

**Duration:** 30 minutes

**Description:** Each pair of participants receives a fairy-tale story of approx. 500 words in length. One person in each pair gives a paraphrase of the story at sight by recounting the content of it but using different words. The paraphrase is given in the same language as the fairy-tale story. It is important for each participant to keep in mind that they should maintain some eye contact with the person they are delivering the sight translation to. Upon completion of this, each participant swaps roles.

The point of this exercise is to help interpreters develop the ability to 'let go' of the source text in a cognitive sense, that is, it is intended that the interpreter learns to disregard individual words or sentence structures, and to also 'let go' of the text visually, via eye contact with their partner. Where the interpreter fails to exchange some eye contact with their partner, the partner may make this known to them.

This activity can be concluded with a group-wide exchange of the challenges that each pair experienced in doing the task and of tips on how to manage these.

## Activity 3: Peer review

3

**Form of activity:** Working in pairs.

**Duration:** 2 hours (10 minutes for preparation, 20 minutes for recording, 30 minutes for evaluation, 60 minutes for presentation to plenary).

**Description:** Each participant is given a one-page text that they are required to sight translate. Participants should be given time to read through and prepare the text. They are given one chance to deliver their sight translation – they are not to interrupt their sight translation or attempt to start it again. The sight translation is video-recorded (e.g. via Handycam) and the recording is sent to the participant's group partner for evaluation. The group partner should prepare a report on the performance of the sight translation, focusing on the following: enactment, receptiveness and the ability to deliver the sight translation as a dialogue rather than as a monologue. Details specific to actual inter-lingual transfer need not be focused on.

Each group partner presents their evaluation report to the whole group in group-wide presentations.





### *Test yourself!*



***Answer the following questions. Feel free to talk about the issues and circumstances that influence your responses.***

- 1.** What things are problematic about the term 'back-translation' itself?
  
- 2.** What are the challenges of sight translation that are different from those of spoken or signed interpreting?
  
- 3.** Why should interpreters view the transcript as a completely separate source text?
  
- 4.** How is it possible to structure a sight translation so that it assumes the characteristics of a dialogue?
  
- 5.** Why is it that in the course of delivering a sight translation, those instances where the interpreter is tempted to correct themselves can present such a dilemma?

# Unit 9:

## Interpreting for Vulnerable Applicants

UNHCR Austria  
Translation: Elfi Cagala

*"[...] the applicant, being an asylum-seeker, was particularly vulnerable because of everything he had been through during his migration and the traumatic experiences he was likely to have endured previously."*  
(European Court of Human Rights, Judgment 21 January 2011, Case of M.S.S. vs. Belgium and Greece)

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will be able to

- » discuss vulnerability in general and with regard to the asylum procedure in particular;
- » understand the legal implications of vulnerability;
- » explain indicators of vulnerability;
- » be aware of the requirements faced by interpreters dealing with vulnerable applicants;
- » explain methods and concepts to ensure best practice in dealing with vulnerable applicants.



### Vulnerability and Flight

**Vulnerability** (from Latin 'vulnus' wound) describes a complex phenomenon which eludes direct observation. It is the subject of various scientific disciplines whose understanding of the phenomenon varies widely. In psychology, vulnerability is defined as **diminished resistance** to stress in terms of a person's relationship with their environment. It is a trait that may be innate or acquired, has both biological and psychological implications and poses a lifelong risk for personality development (Clauß 1995). All human beings are confronted with a number of **vulnerable periods during their lifetime**, arising from predictable or unpredictable crises. However, most of them emerge from these crises unscathed. **Resilience** (from the Latin verb 'resilire' to leap back) is a term used to describe a person's ability to master difficult situations and harness these crises for their personal development (in both resistance and growth) by drawing on personal and social resources.

Today, refugees are among the most vulnerable groups, with many of them having endured torture, maltreatment or violence. Forced to flee from their countries of origin, which are unable or unwilling to protect them, they prove particularly vulnerable. As there are almost no legal pathways to countries of refuge, most of them are forced to enter irregularly, exposing themselves to hazardous situations. On arrival in the host country, their situation is uncertain and sometimes compounded by detrimental conditions such as limited provision of medical care, no access to the labour market and so on. In addition, many refugees are not familiar with their host countries' culture and language.

## Particularly Vulnerable Refugees and the Asylum Procedure

Asylum-seekers are confronted by a wide variety of factors and circumstances which may make them vulnerable and which need to be taken into account during an asylum procedure, with most experts focusing on the following three aspects (EASO Training Module 6.2. Interviewing Vulnerable Persons):

- **Risk factors:** experiences encountered by the asylum-seeker before applying for asylum, either in their home country (for example, from war or torture) or during flight (for example, from strenuous flight routes or human trafficking);
- **Personal factors:** sex, age, physical and mental state, ethnicity, religion and social background;
- **Environmental factors:** the asylum-seeker's situation and living conditions in the host country; that is, medical and social care, legal advice and political climate.

Moreover, some asylum-seekers are in need of **special procedural and reception guarantees**. However, there is no standard definition of which applicants should be afforded these guarantees during the asylum procedure. For example, the EU Reception Conditions Directive (RCD, Article 21) on minimum standards for the reception of applicants for international protection states that minors, unaccompanied minors, disabled people, elderly people, pregnant women, single parents with children and persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence are entitled to special reception guarantees. In addition to the more general implications of fleeing from their home country, this group of applicants is subject to exceptional circumstances. The above list is not exhaustive, however. An applicant in need of special procedural guarantees, as defined by the EU Asylum Procedures Directive (APD), is also a person "whose ability to benefit from the rights and comply with the obligations provided for in this Directive is limited due to individual circumstances." (Article 2 d).

## How to Deal with Vulnerable Asylum-seekers

### LEGAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ASYLUM PROCEDURE

Numerous legal norms at the level of international law (for example, the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Convention against Torture) and their interpretation by competent treaty monitoring bodies (for example, European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decisions; UN Committee against Torture, general comments and concluding observations) have defined standards for dealing with vulnerable asylum-seekers which must be observed by states:

*"It should be recalled that an applicant for refugee status is normally in a particularly vulnerable situation. He finds himself in an alien environment and may experience serious difficulties, technical and psychological, in submitting his case to the authorities of a foreign country, often in a language not his own. His application should therefore be examined within the framework of specially established procedures by qualified personnel having the necessary knowledge and experience, and an understanding of an applicant's particular difficulties and needs." (UNHCR 1979)*

In addition, a number of legal norms at EU level (in particular EU primary law such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, or secondary law such as the EU asylum directives, e.g. RCD or APD and

the Dublin-III-Regulation) provide minimum standards for handling vulnerable asylum-seekers (see Unit 1), aiming mostly at **identifying** vulnerable applicants and their special needs **as early as possible**. Access to **special procedural guarantees** (for example, interviews conducted by properly trained personnel) and professional (medical and therapeutic) care also play a role. According to the EU APD, for example, EU member states are to "ensure that the person who conducts the interview is competent to take account of the [...] applicant's [...] vulnerability" so as to guarantee "that personal interviews are conducted under conditions which allow applicants to present the grounds for their applications in a comprehensive manner" (Article 15, paragraph 3). In addition, the Directive requires that the personnel be "properly trained" and that persons interviewing applicants "have acquired general knowledge of problems which could adversely affect the applicants' ability to be interviewed, such as indications that the applicant may have been tortured in the past" (Article 4, paragraph 3). Moreover, there are various legal norms and Supreme Court decisions regulating the treatment of vulnerable applicants at the national level, as well as internal instructions and guidelines issued by asylum authorities defining standards for dealing with vulnerable applicants.



## COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

### National Provisions or Guidelines for Dealing with Vulnerable Applicants

- What legal provisions or guidelines apply in your member state? For example, are interviews with victims who have suffered infringements of their right to sexual self-determination supposed to be conducted by interviewers of the same sex?
- What other national procedural guarantees are in place?



## FACT BOX

### *Istanbul Protocol*

The Istanbul Protocol is the UN's first "Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment" (OHCHR 2004) and an effective instrument for the assessment of victims of torture and ill treatment, for investigating cases of alleged torture, and for reporting such findings to the judiciary and any other investigative body. It provides international standards for the diagnosis and documentation of such cases, establishing a number of standards for the examination of instances of torture, including interviewing survivors and witnesses, choosing medical experts and witness protection. A major focus of the manual is the intensification of cross-disciplinary cooperation between medical, counselling and legal professions.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

There are several aspects of the situation of vulnerable asylum-seekers that must be taken into account when assessing applications for international protection. These include child-specific reasons for leaving the country of origin (see Unit 1) and gender-specific acts of persecution.

Many vulnerable applicants have difficulties telling their stories. They stop in mid-sentence, hesitate, fall silent for some time, make incoherent statements or get caught up in contradictions. Trauma victims frequently experience a profound sense of alienation (Butollo 2009, 58), which may cause them to relate their personal experiences like impersonal accounts of distant events, as if learned by heart. In order to cope with these problems adequately, professionals dealing with asylum-seekers need special training in interviewing techniques. The individual circumstances and experiences of vulnerable applicants are particularly important when it comes to establishing their credibility (see Units 1 and 2), a key element in determining refugee status,

as many of the general requirements for assessing them as credible (for example, no external or internal contradictions, a full account early on) are incompatible with the options and abilities of vulnerable asylum-seekers.

In addition, when dealing with vulnerable applicants, asylum authorities must relieve the burden of proof, which in principle rests on the applicant, by obtaining evidence from other sources, for example friends, relatives or the applicant's guardian, and in particular by referring to objectively available sources of information, for example about the refugee's country of origin. Determining the refugee status of vulnerable applicants may also require the involvement of expert witnesses, for example when it comes to establishing their fitness for interview or assessing statements that include accounts of rape and maltreatment.



## FACT BOX

### Trauma Dynamics in the Asylum Procedure

According to a study on psychotherapeutic and legal aspects of war and torture in asylum procedures, conducted by Hemayat\* and the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Human Rights (Ammer et al. 2013), applicants feel particularly stressed by the way interviews are conducted and by certain behaviours on the part of interpreters. A particularly distressing experience for victims of violence and abuse is when their story is dismissed as “unbelievable”, which may have serious implications such as retraumatisation. Recognising the wrongs and violence sustained by traumatised victims is a major prerequisite for mitigating their suffering. An atmosphere of trust, sympathetic and open-minded interviewers, sufficient time and adequate information (for example about confidentiality) are required for refugees to be able to provide an adequate description of the events that have caused them to flee from their home countries. In addition, providing professional supervision may help to prevent interviewers and interpreters from developing defensive attitudes towards trauma victims (see Unit 12).

\* Hemayat is a politically independent and not-for-profit organisation that provides interpreter-mediated psychotherapy, psychological consulting and medical support for survivors of war and torture

### THE INTERVIEW – DEMANDS ON INTERPRETERS

Just as interviewers need **special training** for working with vulnerable applicants, so do interpreters. The interaction between interviewer, applicant and interpreter during the interview takes the form of triadic communication, while also involving two different languages. The cooperation required for this is very challenging and needs to be trained for and practised by interviewers and interpreters alike. Above all, interpreting for vulnerable applicants requires the interpreter to be able to **act in a professional manner**.

#### Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

*“I spent a night in a trafficker’s hideout. Then I travelled to Austria through unknown countries, mainly in windowless vehicles”*

*(Interpretation “directly for the transcript”, interview with a 12-year-old)*

The unexpected and violent outbreak of crises, the separation from their families and strenuous flight conditions, frequently compounded by a lack of opportunities to gain a livelihood, impact profoundly on the physical and mental well-being of UASC. EU law includes a number of **legal provisions** referring to UASC (see Unit 1). This is complemented by **internal guidelines** issued by national asylum authorities aimed at defining standards for dealing with this group of people. Accordingly, under-age asylum-seekers e.g. UASC must be interviewed

by trained interviewers. In addition, interviewers need to adapt their interviewing techniques to the applicant’s age as well as mental and cognitive development. Among other things, they must provide for adequate time at the beginning and end of the interview to create a friendly atmosphere and for calming down (see Unit 2).

Interpreters working with under-age applicants e.g. UASC face similar requirements. Accordingly, only interpreters qualified in working with minors should be used during interviews. For example, interpreters need to **adopt the special techniques** used by interviewers (e.g. active listening). They must also render, as precisely as possible, the specific **linguistic modes of expression and argumentation** used by minors, which are different from those of adults. Interpreters must **preserve the registers** used by them, that is to say refrain from changing the language used by children and young people.

Interpreters working with UASC must also be aware of a large number of factors impacting on their communication skills. For example, UASC may be unable to cope with administrative procedures, as they are even less likely to be familiar with a country’s legal and administrative norms than non-refugee children and young people who have grown up there. Their ability to communicate may also be impaired by strong emotion and the experience of exceptional emotional states, as the coping mechanisms available to young people tend to be less effective. Moreover, minors in general are more easily influenced, which means that **leading questions and suggestive phrasing must be avoided**.

## Traumatised Asylum-seekers and Victims of Torture

*“[...] Well, it is fairly simple; she gets overwhelmed by emotions. And then she simply relates what is on her mind, and she can't put that in chronological order, not right away; she is not able to do that, even today. [...] and then she starts weeping and trembling and says whatever comes into her mind.”*

*(Therapist commenting on her client;  
Ammer et al. 2013, 159)*

The lifetime prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder, that is to say the proportion of a population that have experienced the condition at some point in their life (up to the time of assessment), is 25 to 50 per cent in **vulnerable groups** such as refugees, which is much higher than for the general population (7 to 8 per cent). **Man-made disasters**, in particular, may give rise to **serious disorders**, causing torture victims to suffer not only from post-traumatic stress disorder but from a number of other conditions that make it difficult for them to communicate. Torture not only damages or even destroys a person's psychological structure but their interpersonal relationships and social ties as well. Victims may experience a complete loss of trust; they feel excluded from society, suffer from loneliness and isolation and do not feel understood. This inverse proportion of the rarity of an event to the risk of post-traumatic stress (that is to say, the rarer and more serious an event and the more difficult it is for a person to integrate it into their “usual” conception of the world, the greater its traumatising effect) is particularly prevalent in refugees who, among other things, suffer from chronic pain, flashbacks, sleep disorders, nightmares, psychosomatic disorders, inability to concentrate and disturbances of memory, as well as severe depression.

Victims of trauma and torture may have difficulties talking about their experiences for a number of reasons. For example, they may **not trust** the authorities or interpreters. Interpreters may be regarded as representatives of their countries of origin due to their command of the refugees' native languages. Victims may also **fear** that by telling their story, they are putting themselves or others at risk. Frequently, the asylum interview triggers coping mechanisms such as **denial and avoidance**. **Feelings of shame and guilt** also compromise the applicants' ability to make a statement. Interpreting for asylum-seekers in general, and for victims of trauma and torture in particular, requires an ability to empathise, as it is not only words that must be rendered but also emotions. An **empathetic and open-minded attitude** on the part of

the interviewer is a prerequisite for interviews with traumatised applicants, and the interpreter must be able to communicate this attitude. At the same time, interpreters must be aware of and able to protect their own **boundaries**. In addition, although most statements made by victims of traumatising are fragmentary and incoherent, they must be rendered as they are, as precisely as possible, with the interpreter explaining to the interviewer what the vulnerable applicant is saying and in what way.

Due to the fact that victims of torture are highly distrustful and fearful of other people, interpreters in particular should pay attention to **non-verbal communication**. Victims may feel even innocent movements or facial expressions to be extremely menacing. Accordingly, interpreters must avoid facial expressions showing horror and pain caused by accounts of torture as these reactions might cause victims to feel even worse. Survivors of torture may also have difficulties answering certain questions. In this case, interpreters should not urge them, but instead inform the interviewer that the applicant is not able to provide an answer.

It is important that survivors of torture feel that they are in control. Many victims have experienced extreme loss of control during torture, so interpreters must refrain from any authoritarian behaviour when working with them. To avoid feelings of distrust, they also need to explain why it is necessary to take notes during the interview and be prepared to show these notes to the applicant at any time before visibly destroying them at the end of the interview. In this context, it is also necessary to avoid any disruptions (mobile phones must be switched off before starting the interview, and so on).

## Applicants Suffering from Mental Disorders

*“Then they came to fetch me. They have been watching me everywhere since I was released. They are here now, watching us. Over there.”*

*(Statement made by mentally ill woman  
during the asylum interview)*

Mentally ill applicants are faced with overwhelming, **irreconcilable inner conflicts**, impairing their perceptions, memories, thoughts, feelings and speech. Others have withdrawn from reality; e.g. they hear voices or think that they are being influenced by alien powers and forces. Typically, relationships and contact with other people are affected. In most cases, arriving in a new country and being faced with asylum procedures cause additional stress. Therefore, it is important that interviewers and interpreters act in accord. For example, as in other cases, trained interviewers will treat the applicant with due respect, regardless of their mental problems. Interpreters, too, must develop an attitude of **respect** and “normality”

when dealing with mentally ill applicants. During the interview, stress and overwhelming or disruptive stimuli should be reduced to a minimum, requiring interpreters to constantly check and, if necessary, reduce their own emotional (over)response. However, excessive sympathy is as detrimental as is a constant display of impatience.

**Communication** with mentally ill applicants should take place in a calm and quiet manner. This means that interpreters must be able to listen, keep silent, refrain from interrupting, deal with pauses and wait. They must wait until the applicant has finished speaking or thinking and cope with digressions and evasions. Both interviewers and interpreters must avoid complicated questions and incomprehensible words.

Interpreters need to be aware that mentally ill persons may perceive a situation completely differently from healthy persons. For example, they may easily mistake a sceptical look for an expression of aggression. Interviewers and interpreters should refrain from provoking the applicant and make sure that all dangerous instruments are out of reach. In addition, interviewers should inform interpreters in advance of available escape routes. If necessary, interpreters should ask for specific information. In case of acute emotional crisis, interpreters are required to stay calm and patient. Trained interviewers will also try to arrange help, which must be communicated to the applicant by the interpreter in a clear and transparent manner.

Generally, interpreters should be aware that many of the reactions displayed by mentally ill applicants are not caused by the interpreters themselves or their actions, but by the applicant's illness and/or emotional state. Therefore, aggressive or disconcerting emotional responses by mentally ill persons should not be perceived as assaults by the interpreter, who should, however, be aware of, and communicate, their own **boundaries and feelings of distress** (see Unit 12).

### Victims of Gender-based Violence or Persecution

*“My Grandma caught hold of me and gripped my upper body. Two other women held my legs apart. The man, who was probably an itinerant traditional circumciser from the blacksmith clan, picked up a pair of scissors. [...] Then the scissors went down between my legs and the man cut off my inner labia and clitoris. A piercing pain shot up between my legs, indescribable, and I howled. Then came the sewing: the long, blunt needle clumsily pushed into my bleeding outer labia, my loud and anguished protests. [...] My sister Haweya was never the same afterwards. She had nightmares, and during the day began stomping off to be alone. My once cheerful, playful little sister changed. Sometimes she just stared vacantly at nothing for hours.”*

(UNHCR, *Too much pain*, 2013: 9)

Victims of gender-based violence or persecution are particularly vulnerable, and they need a **supportive and trusting environment** to be able to disclose their experiences. Being associated with fear, shame, guilt and loss of respect, sexuality and sexual violence are taboos in many countries and cultures. Victims of rape and sexual abuse have lost their ability to trust other people; they fear that their secret might be revealed to others. For fear of being rejected or accused, they hardly ever describe the true extent of violence or persecution they have experienced. For example, victims may be scared of officials or they might be afraid of being disowned or punished by their families. Because of these factors, measures must be put in place to ensure that applications are examined in accordance with the regulations (see Unit 2). For example, the **interview should be conducted by interviewers and interpreters of the same sex**, unless the victims themselves ask for another arrangement. Furthermore, men and women who have suffered gender-based violence or persecution should have access to extensive social care and legal advice.

It is very important to ensure a sympathetic and quiet atmosphere when interviewing survivors of gender-based violence or persecution, who especially need sufficient time to tell their stories. Interpreters in particular should be careful not to interrupt them. It is crucial that the relationship between the interviewer and victims of gender-based violence or persecution be based on trust, so interpreters must adopt **interviewing techniques** which promote the building up of trust (for example, asking questions about neutral topics at the beginning of the interview). This particularly applies to questions about acts of violence and persecution. For example, it is not necessary for interviewers to inquire into the details of an incident of rape or sexual violence. Interpreters must render interviewers' questions accurately, so as to avoid in-depth interrogation resulting from imprecise phrasing. In addition, interpreters must be familiar with the ways sex characteristics are described in the relevant country of origin, including colloquial designations.

In general, interpreters should not urge asylum-seekers to answer questions during the interview. Applicants refusing to answer a certain question should be treated with respect, with the interpreter informing the interviewer about the refusal. Moreover, an interpreter sharing the applicant's background should point out any cultural or religious inhibitions to the interviewer to enable them to deal with them with consideration.

Interpreters dealing with victims of gender-based violence or persecution should **behave** particularly **neutrally and objectively**, while also showing empathy and avoiding intimidating or inappropriate body language or gestures. They must inform the interviewer if their personal emotions or attitudes make it impossible for them to act accordingly. In this case, another interpreter may have to be brought in, if necessary.



**Several interviews** may be necessary to allow victims of sexual violence or other forms of trauma to build up a relationship based on trust and provide the information required. For example, interviews may have to be interrupted due to the applicant becoming agitated. If several interviews are necessary, all interviews with an applicant should be conducted by the same interviewer and interpreter.

### Victims of Human Trafficking

*“[...] and on the other hand I think, well, if I tell the police everything, maybe they’ll let me go home. Well, I wasn’t sure, and I was afraid that the police would not be able to protect me. Things like these go round in my mind and there was an uncertainty regarding myself and that’s why I didn’t say anything.”*

*(Helferich, Kavemann, and Rabe 2010, 102; own translation)*

Human trafficking is a modern form of slavery and takes on a wide variety of forms, some of which, including **sexual and labour exploitation, trafficking for the removal of organs or trafficking for criminal activities**, may apply to applicants for international protection. Human traffickers use certain tactics in order to bring victims under control, making them dependent and putting pressure on them: they confiscate their passports and provide them with forged identity documents, or

they spread misinformation on asylum procedures (for example, by claiming that applicants must pay for the assessment of their asylum claim). Debt bondage, restriction of movement and threatening of relatives are other forms of coercion used to intimidate victims, whose fears may be very real and cause them to behave in a restrained, **fearful and obsequious** manner during the interview. For example, some victims will constantly give the persons present questioning looks while others **behave very aggressively**. During the interview, some victims tell of poor housing conditions (large number of people living at the same address) or working conditions (for example, long working hours). Many of them are in a poor state of health or display signs of ill treatment and injuries (IOM 2014). Interpreters noticing such indicators should immediately inform the interviewer about what they have observed.

Creating a supportive and sympathetic atmosphere during interviews is of great importance, as many victims of human trafficking do not see themselves as victims or feel ashamed of the kind of work they have been doing. Interpreters, in particular, can help to create a reassuring atmosphere. It may also be helpful to use **interviewers and interpreters of the same sex** as the victim for the interviews. Moreover, an environment characterised by trust and confidentiality is essential due to the fact that many victims of human trafficking are extremely suspicious of judicial and other authorities, possibly because of misinformation and threats.

#### FACT BOX

### Victims of Human Trafficking in the Asylum Procedure

Some victims of human trafficking qualify for asylum or subsidiary protection if they fear human rights violation upon returning to their country of origin. These persons are eligible for asylum if they are liable to be persecuted (for example, in another instance of human trafficking) in their country of origin, for the reasons laid down in the Geneva Refugee Convention (race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion; see Unit 1).





## Printable Worksheet: **What interpreters should keep in mind**

### ☐ **CHECK 1: Do not accept interpreting jobs that put too much strain on you**

Working with vulnerable applicants places particular demands on interpreters to act in a professional manner. Interpreters must undergo special training to enable them to deal with vulnerable asylum-seekers. Interpreters who do not possess these capabilities or who, for whatever reason, do not feel up to these demands must not accept such interpreting jobs, so as to avoid additional strain on vulnerable applicants (see Unit 5).

### ☐ **CHECK 2: Make sure you are adequately prepared**

All interpreting work should be carefully prepared. When working with vulnerable applicants, special attention should be paid to linguistic features and case-specific information. Interpreters should receive information on individual cases in advance, allowing them to prepare themselves for the specific situation or context (see Unit 5) and avoid mistakes. This also helps to reduce the level of stress experienced by vulnerable applicants during the interview. If necessary, interpreters should ask interviewers to provide them with the information required. For their part, interpreters should inform interviewers of any cultural peculiarities, traditions or taboos that might be relevant to the interview.

### ☐ **CHECK 3: Break off interviews or do not accept jobs if you are biased**

Effective and smooth communication with vulnerable asylum-seekers hinges on the quality of the relationships between those involved. If the interpreter is not able to help to build up a trusting and neutral relationship between interviewer and applicant, for example, because of their rejection of, distancing from or over-identification with the applicant, they should inform the interviewer accordingly (see Unit 3).

*Example: During the interview, an Iranian interpreter who comes from a family of dissidents discovers that the asylum-seeker was a supporter of the regime and actively involved in the persecution of dissidents until he suffered severe maltreatment and fled from the country. This perpetrator-victim-dynamic makes it extremely difficult to develop a trusting relationship (EASO Training Module on Interviewing Techniques).*

### ☐ **CHECK 4: Provide clear information regarding your role and task**

When working with vulnerable asylum-seekers, it is essential that they receive full information about the role and tasks of interpreters. In this context, interpreters' neutral and impartial position should be pointed out, as well as their duty to maintain confidentiality. This is particularly important in view of the fact that vulnerable asylum-seekers, that is, victims of violence or persons who have suffered infringements of their right to sexual self-determination, may find it very difficult to provide information of a personal or intimate nature during the interview (see Unit 2).

### ☐ **CHECK 5: Be aware of your influential role**

Interpreters working with asylum-seekers are not invisible; they play a vital and active part in the asylum procedure and they should be aware of their position. All factors and components influencing the interviewer-interpreter-applicant triad must be taken into account, especially when working with vulnerable asylum-seekers. In particular, different backgrounds in terms of social class, religion, age, and so on may impact on the relationship between interpreters and applicants coming from the same country of origin (for example, minors showing respect for older interpreters or female applicants for male interpreters from the same culture). Being aware of their role and position and being aware of potential areas of conflict is an essential prerequisite for interpreters to act in a professional manner.

### ☐ **CHECK 6: Leave it to the interviewer to lead the interview**

In general, it is the interviewer who is in charge of the asylum procedure, and it is up to them to draw the right conclusions from the information gained during the interview. Although interviewer and interpreter work as a team, both must adhere to their respective roles and tasks (see Unit 4). This is even more important when interviewing vulnerable applicants. A triangular setting may serve to emphasise this arrangement (see Unit 2): it allows the interviewer and applicant to keep eye contact, while the interpreter, in spite of their neutral position, remains fully integrated in terms of communication. What is more, the triangular setting creates spaces, enabling interpreters to draw boundaries and keep a professional distance when working with vulnerable applicants. However, interpreters may ask for the setting to be changed at any time, for example, when they feel that the triangular arrangement has a negative effect on the communication process or prevents them from fulfilling their task adequately. When interpreting for minors, for example, it may be helpful for the interpreter to sit closer to the applicant to create a reassuring atmosphere.



□ **CHECK 7: Be empathetic but professional**

Interpreters play an essential part in interviewing vulnerable applicants. For example, some applicants will trust interpreters more who come from the same country of origin, while others require interpreters from a completely different background in order to be able to tell their story. However, interpreters need to make sure that their professional boundaries are observed. For example, applicants should not be offered private support (see CHECK 16).

□ **CHECK 8: Make sure that applicants are addressed directly**

It is essential for both interviewers and interpreters to address vulnerable applicants directly. However, when faced with threatening or traumatic accounts, it may be helpful for interpreters to opt for indirect forms of rendering the applicant's story (see Unit 6).

□ **CHECK 9: Adopt the interviewer's interviewing techniques**

In some cases, interviewers will employ specific techniques to facilitate comprehensive statements on the part of the applicant (see Unit 2). Interviewers also have full information on individual cases, and they are trained to deal with vulnerable asylum-seekers. Therefore, interpreters must, at all times, adopt phrases and interviewing techniques deliberately chosen by the interviewers, for example positive feedback such as "I see" or "thank you".

□ **CHECK 10: Verbatim interpretation and untranslatable passages**

Producing a full and accurate interpretation that allows the interviewer to grasp the exact meaning of an applicant's statement is a very difficult task (see Unit 6). To this end, the applicant's statement must be rendered as precisely as possible, including metaphors and proverbs. If necessary, interpreters may add an explanation. In some cases, it may not be possible to render the meaning of a statement into another language. However, being unable to translate a statement, does not automatically cast doubt upon an interpreter's competence. On the contrary, a competent interpreter will be aware of, and draw the interviewer's attention to, any breakdown in communication or untranslatable passages.

□ **CHECK 11: Stick to the language registers used by interviewers and applicants**

When working with vulnerable applicants, in particular, interpreters must adopt the asylum-seekers' linguistic registers and levels of usage and refrain from interpreting "directly for the transcript"; that is, interpreters should avoid phrases and expressions commonly used by authorities or in court. As an example, the way that children typically speak must be accurately rendered (see Unit 6). This also helps interviewers to adapt to the applicants' particular way of communicating (for example, by using simple words and phrases). Interpreters are also required to put across the register chosen by interviewers, that is, formal expressions or technical terms. However, they may point out to the interviewers any difficulties in understanding on the part of the applicants and ask them to rephrase their questions. Interpreters may also ask the interviewers for permission to rephrase a statement themselves.

□ **CHECK 12: Confused and aggressive statements must be rendered accurately**

Vulnerable applicants, in particular, may have difficulties telling their stories in a clear and coherent manner. However, confused accounts (for example, hesitant, incoherent or interspersed with pauses) may be just as informative as easily understood ones. Many interpreters, especially those sharing the applicants' ethnic background, try to "smooth" the expressions used by asylum-seekers. An apparently muddled statement, however, does not make an interpretation insufficient or inadequate, as it may contain hidden meaning. Therefore, interpreters must not sum up, complete, or otherwise improve chaotic, contradictory or incoherent descriptions. Rather, they should relay everything that has been said in an accurate manner (see Unit 4), including awkward expressions such as blasphemous, obscene or abusive words or phrases. They are not required, however, to imitate the speakers' volume or emotions.





□ **CHECK 13: Stick to your role as cultural mediator**

Language is steeped in customs and traditions which determine people's activities and decisions. These concepts, norms and conventions may differ profoundly between cultures. As a consequence, during the asylum procedure, interpreters may encounter situations that require them to act as cultural but strictly impartial mediators (see Units 4 and 5). Vulnerable applicants are especially likely to recount unimaginable, indescribable or painful experiences which those present find difficult to comprehend. Nevertheless, interpreters must refrain from providing generalising explanations or judging asylum-seekers' reactions, even if these do not make sense in a particular cultural or social context. They must also bear in mind that as interpreters, they do not act as expert witnesses and that there is a clear distinction between the respective roles and tasks of interpreters and expert witnesses. Interpreters must not comment on asylum-seekers' statements, nor should they remark on cases in general. If necessary, though, they may draw interviewers' attention to the fact that they are about to commit a cultural faux pas, causing the interview to take an undesirable turn. They may, for example, ask for a short break to do so (see Unit 2).

□ **CHECK 14: Be mindful of your own feelings and make it clear when you feel uncomfortable**

Interviewing vulnerable applicants is particularly likely to be associated with extremely intense emotions. Interpreters are immediately exposed to these affects, with applicants bursting into tears, getting furious or unable to find words. Descriptions of traumatic events, for example, may cause interpreters to feel depressed or bring back memories of their own traumatising experiences (see Unit 12). Interpreters should be mindful of these feelings and, if necessary, inform the interviewer in time when they cannot bear to listen any longer.

□ **CHECK 15: Ask for breaks**

Working with vulnerable applicants may be highly distressing and exhausting. For this reason, interpreters must be aware of, and inform interviewers of, any situation in which they feel strained or unable to concentrate. For example, they may ask for a short break, some fresh air or a glass of water (see also Unit 2).

□ **CHECK 16: Make sure that the scope and boundaries of the interview are clear**

Defining the scope and boundaries of the interview clearly helps to protect you as an interpreter. It is the interviewer who is in charge during the interview, but neither the interviewer nor the interpreter is responsible for the applicant's wellbeing outside the interview room. Hence, the interpreter should not take on any further obligations towards the applicant. It is essential that interpreters maintain a certain distance, to protect themselves from feeling overwhelmed and forming a symbiotic relationship with vulnerable asylum-seekers.



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## Useful Links

European Asylum Support Office (EASO). *Training Modules*.  
<https://training.easo.europa.eu/lms>  
 (Accessed January 15 2022)

Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Protecting its Victims, and Replacing Council Framework Decision.  
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### Activity 1: Reflecting on vulnerability

1

**Form of activity:** Participants work in small groups and subsequently discuss their findings in plenary.

**Duration:** 45 minutes (15 minutes work in small groups, 30 minutes plenary session).

**Description:** At the beginning of the unit, participants are asked to discuss the following questions in small groups,

- What does vulnerability mean? Why are refugees and asylum-seekers particularly vulnerable?
- How does vulnerability affect asylum interviews?
- What are the implications of interpreting for vulnerable applicants?

Participants are asked to write the main points of their ideas and conclusions on a flip chart / blackboard before presenting them to, and discussing them with, the plenary.

### Activity 2: Case discussion

2

**Form of activity:** Participants work individually or in small groups and subsequently discuss their findings in plenary.

**Duration:** 30 minutes (15 minutes individual work or work in groups, 15 minutes plenary session).

**Description:** Based on Ahmad's story, participants are asked to imagine a situation in which Ahmad's asylum interview is conducted by a male interviewer, assisted by a male Muslim interpreter who was born in Iran.

Participants are then asked to discuss the case with the plenary (see printable worksheet "Activity 2: Ahmad's story", p. 150).





## Printable Worksheet **Activity 2: Ahmad's story**

Imagine, while reading Ahmad's story, that both the interviewer conducting the asylum interview and the interpreter are male. Like Ahmad, the interpreter is Muslim and was born in Iran.

*"In Iran I wasn't safe anymore. It was difficult for me. It is hard for me to talk about it. I have had to keep this secret all my life. I was 17 or 18 when it became really clear to me that I am different. I grew up in a very religious family. Our religion denies the existence of homosexuality. Our religion says that we are all the same and that we should marry and have children. [...] I looked it all up on the Internet. That was all I could do. A friend of mine then introduced me to other people. We used to meet in the park. Some of my fellow students got wind of it, and they shouted at me and beat me up. They continued to attack me. Later I was also kicked out of university. That was how my parents found out. I couldn't go back. And my father was looking for me. I heard some very bad things. [...] Two friends of mine hid me and after some time I had enough money to leave the country. [...] Now I am here. I feel very bad whenever I think of my family. I am not a bad person. But I can no longer live with my family, or in Iran. Sometimes I am afraid that my family might go after me even in this country. That's why I am very cautious here too and I do not talk to all Iranians."*

Why might it be difficult for Ahmad to speak in an open and unrestrained manner about his reasons for fleeing from his home country? What points should be considered by the interviewer? How would you behave if you were asked to take part in the interview as an interpreter? What information should be given to Ahmad at the beginning of the interview (especially with regard to the interpreter's role)?

Source: European Asylum Support Office (EASO). Training Modules. <https://training.easo.europa.eu/lms/>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)





## Test yourself!

### *The dos and don'ts of working with vulnerable applicants*

Are the following statements true or false? Please give reasons for your answers.

1. Interpreters must adapt their linguistic register to that of vulnerable applicants.

True       False

2. Interpreters are required to render insulting or obscene statements.

True       False

3. Interpreters must infer the meaning of statements made by applicants which are difficult to comprehend.

True       False

4. Interpreters are allowed to show their emotions.

True       False

5. Interpreters must not ask for breaks when they are tired, as this might confuse vulnerable applicants.

True       False

# Unit 10:

## *Interpreters as Experts in Multi-lingual and Transcultural Communication*

Martina Rienzner

Translation: Kirsty Heimerl-Moggan



### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will be able to

- » understand transcultural communication processes and factors, which can contribute to the success or failure of communication;
- » reflect on their own multi-lingualism;
- » deal with one's own life story as well as recognise the resultant limits to one's work as an interpreter in asylum procedures;
- » identify ways of showing other actors in asylum procedures the limits of their own multi-lingual and transcultural competencies;
- » identify situations where the boundaries between your own role as an expert for transcultural and multi-lingual communication and that of the expert are sometimes fluid, as well as develop and use methods of making these boundaries clear to other participants;
- » recognise the different areas of asylum procedure interviews which are particularly prone to misunderstandings and know conversational techniques which can be used to intervene in the communication process to ensure understanding.

### Basic Knowledge – Transcultural Communication

As an introduction to this unit, please imagine the following: You are on the underground. At the other end of the carriage there is a man standing opposite a passenger who is looking for something in their bag. What do you think is just happening? The man's posture, his gestures and the way in which the passenger and other passengers are reacting leads you to believe that the man is currently checking tickets. It is a situation with which you are familiar; you understand the reaction expected of you and get your ticket out of your bag.

Everyday social situations are interpreted in the same way as this example. If people are in a certain place, observe a certain interaction or participate in such an interaction themselves, they draw conclusions about the environment,

what is currently happening and the expected reaction. This often happens subconsciously, and there is generally very little time to think about possible consequences. However, sometimes you are completely sure that you understand what your collocutor wants to tell you by a particular statement, or what they are hinting at. On the other hand, you can sometimes get the feeling that you do not understand what someone wants to say, or what is happening at a particular point.

The key issue when dealing with **transcultural communication** is the question: Why do we understand what is involved in some situations better than others? Also, why can we express ourselves "better" in certain situations than in others?

## PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE AND PREVIOUS LINGUISTIC AND COMMUNICATIVE EXPERIENCES

Utterances (i.e. communicative realisation, of verbal and non-verbal kinds) nearly always convey **several messages** at once. Which message is then understood and in which way depends upon several factors, including understanding of the situation and available understanding of the linguistic and content aspects, as well as willingness to accept the intended message of the speaker. So the meaning of an utterance is a result of **interaction** – that is, the interaction of all participants in the communication. Not only the **spoken word** is relevant here; **non-verbal signs** that accompany the utterances also play an integral part. Whether intended or not, body posture, facial expressions, gestures and outward appearance “speak to us” just as much as the way in which we speak (pitch, speed, accent, emphasis, speaker style).

In general, verbal and non-verbal communication do not simply convey a particular content, but also intend a particular **effect**. For instance, speakers want to make someone act in a certain way. Other elements of communication include the negotiation of roles and identities as well as positioning within a social environment (see Unit 4). For their part, the listener’s interpretation of a certain statement does not only incorporate understanding of content. Every interpretation also goes hand in hand with an **evaluation of the utterances** and the **drawing of a conclusion**, as to why the particular utterance was made in that particular way. This is why a speaker’s accent can determine whether others categorise them as one of them or as “a foreigner”.

### FACT BOX

#### *Contextualisation*

The works of John J. Gumperz (1982) point out that people contextualise utterances when speaking; in other words, they create a **framework for the interpretation of their own utterance**. When speaking, certain (often subconscious) signals are used which are intended to show the collocutor in which frame or context the utterances can be interpreted. Gumperz calls these signs **contextualisation cues**. For instance, if something is narrated with a smile, then the collocutor will interpret it differently to when it is recounted with a very serious facial expression. People have many linguistic and non-linguistic ways of creating such frameworks: for example, giving something more or less emphasis, speaking faster or more slowly, leaving short pauses or talking without pauses. It is possible to switch from one way of speaking to another (e.g. from everyday language to technical language).

Gumperz assumed that a large percentage of **misunderstandings** that arise in transcultural communication situations stem from such contextualisation cues being interpreted differently in different “cultural” contexts. For example, raising your voice at the end of a sentence can be interpreted differently by people with a different “cultural” background.

However, new works in interactional sociolinguistics do warn about being too quick to interpret misunderstandings as being “inter-” or “transcultural”. Sarangi (1994), for example, emphasises that the experiences of migrants in particular are rarely influenced by only one particular socio-cultural context, and that the concept of “cultural” affiliation per se cannot be assumed to be decisive in the production and interpretation of contextualisation cues. What is far more relevant is the sum of all the experiences that shape a person throughout their life in different contexts and, as Jacquemet (2011) emphasises, which communication methods and actions a person expects because of these experiences.



The key to understanding transcultural communication processes is the question of why verbal and also non-verbal utterances and the way in which something is uttered in a certain context are so frequently interpreted (i.e. understood, judged, evaluated) differently. A number of academic research papers in linguistics, just as those listed above from the field of interactional sociolinguistics, point out that this is highly dependent on the amount of knowledge and linguistic and communicative experience brought to the particular communication setting (Hinnenkamp 1995; Maryns and Blommaert 2002; Piller 2011). People encounter different **types of interaction and social situations** in the course of their lives and learn which **way of speaking, communicating and behaving** is suitable and which is less suitable in a particular situation.

The more linguistic and communicative experiences and knowledge that speakers share with their collocutor, the easier it is for them to **evaluate the collocutor**, and the more they can **judge what has been said** and **understand it as it was intended**. They will also try to understand what needs to be said or which action needs to take place in order to interpret the collocutor's meaning as they intended. Some aspects will be presumed to be accepted facts, and others will need to be addressed explicitly and explained.

From this perspective, it is vital that every communication situation is described as "transcultural", because speakers in every situation only share a certain amount of presumed knowledge and level of experience. The **term "transcultural"** itself was coined by the philosopher Wolfgang Welsch (2010). He uses the term as an alternative concept to those such as "intercultural" and "multicultural", which are often based on the idea of distinctly separate and homogenous "cultural" groups. The term "transcultural" demonstrates that we can have several affiliations at the same time, and that in the course of our lives we can be part of different social worlds and spaces, which are all interconnected.

The level of strangeness or intimacy between collocutors depends not only on whether they are from the same country or region but also whether they grew up in the same place. Two people who may have lived in the same place for many years could still encounter difficulties in understanding each other. This can be put down to the fact that they have lived in the same place but grown up in different social environments, restricting their shared linguistic and communicative experiences. As a result, what one person may be speaking about and how they speak about it can be only partially understood and comprehended. This can apply to a whole conversation or can vary over the course of a conversation, and often depends on the topic that is being covered.



## Lifeworlds

In the context of the above, it is helpful to consider the term “lifeworlds” as used in phenomenology – a philosophical movement. Phenomenology uses the term “lifeworlds” for **unquestioned and unreflected action knowledge** upon which we base our daily activities. Lifeworlds can be described as “**horizons of interpretation**” including all aspects which are experiences taken as accepted fact without question. These “horizons of interpretation” are the result of actions and experiences. Both a person’s own experiences as well as those of others create that basis upon which another person’s actions can be interpreted and ensure that people can interact with others. In the words of sociologist Hans Joas (2004, 234; own translation), speaking and action always happens “within a particular ‘horizon’ of that which is known and natural; we have certain patterns of perception and recipes for behaviour which we can apply in highly different and specific contexts, which is why we do not question them.” However, lifeworlds knowledge or its resulting pattern of interpretation are only valid until a situation is experienced that cannot be resolved in the currently “valid” way.

## TRANSCULTURAL INTERACTION PROCESSES

The **meaning of an utterance** is largely dependent upon the **situation** and the **context** in which it is produced. The same utterance can have a different meaning in different contexts. A red flag on a beach indicates danger, whilst a red flag being waved at a political protest expresses a left-wing world view.

Meanings are also **negotiated interactively** and therefore are the result of social interaction. Successful communication is largely based on whether what can be presumed obvious or expected is questioned, especially in transcultural communication, that is, in situations where people are communicating who have different patterns of action and interpretation acquired from differing lifeworlds. This means that the big challenge faced by all participants is to **achieve a joint basis for communication** through **interactive work**:

- Initially, in transcultural communication, a large amount of what can be left unsaid in interaction between collocutors with a similar horizon of experience and knowledge needs to be rendered explicit – that is, **explained or covered in more detail**. The volume of knowledge and experience which are important for an understanding of a specific communication and which are assumed to be not accessible to the other person have to be explained – in so far as this is possible (see Fact Box: Translocal Narration in Asylum Procedures, p. 156).

- Creating a common basis for communication also requires more intense use of **action to ensure understanding**, which avoids or can repair misunderstandings. Speakers can ask questions to ensure that what they explained was understood the way they had intended. Listeners, in turn, show by their reactions how they have interpreted certain utterances and situations. This opens up the opportunity for other interaction participants to repair misunderstanding. An interpretation initially interpreted wrongly can also be put into context.

Quite often, however, people find themselves in **asymmetrical communicative situations**, where there is no possibility of explaining certain content in more depth or asking others whether the utterance had been understood “correctly”, for example in interaction processes with authorities and/or courts, such as asylum interviews. This is where the onus is on the official to direct the communication process. Interrupting for clarification by the other participant in the conversation, as well as more detailed narration, are often undesirable and rejected. In asylum interviews, interpretations resulting from the interaction process may also be taken down in a transcript; however, some of those who have participated in the communication process are excluded from the transcript (see Unit 8).

Asymmetry in communication can also arise, if the **communicative and linguistic range of expression** required for a particular situation is **unevenly distributed**. Whenever linguistic and communicative resources are insufficient to express a matter in a certain situation, speakers run the risk of having a different meaning attributed to their utterance than that originally intended

(Blommaert 2010). At asylum interviews, for example, there is often a large imbalance due to the interpreter using a different language variety to the asylum-seeker, for example, when interpreters who are not familiar with West African varieties are booked for asylum-seekers from Nigeria or other West African countries (Rienznner 2011a; Slezak 2010).



#### FACT BOX

### *Translocal Narration in Asylum Procedures*

Asylum-seekers are faced with a big challenge, when upon interview they recount their reasons for flight. They have to give a comprehensible and believable account of what they have experienced in a certain context which is alien to the lifeworld context of the interviewer. Elements of their recollections which make sense “there”, in their home country, require additional explanations and descriptions, in order to be understood and believed “here”, in their host country.

Different studies (Blommaert 2001; Maryns 2005; Rienznner 2011b) have shown that asylum-seekers often give additional information on social and political context to supplement their story. These narrations referred to as Home Narratives by Blommaert (2001) are often identified by interviewers as “avoidance techniques”, as the content narrated is already known to interviewer because they generally use databases collecting information on the different countries of origin to prepare for interviews. (Rienznner 2011a).

## *Interpreters as Mediators between Different Lifeworlds*

Just like other participants, interpreters bring certain linguistic, communicative and socio-cultural experiences as well as levels of knowledge to the interaction. In their translational actions, they draw on this knowledge and experience and participate in the interaction process, which – as outlined above – incorporates the negotiation of meaning within an asymmetrical institutional setting. Both the inherent level of knowledge and experiences and participation in the transcultural interaction process pose many challenges for interpreters (see Unit 12).

same place and speak the same language. This perception is especially misleading in the interpretation of immigration procedures. People will have followed different paths in their lives and spent their lives in different lifeworlds. Even if someone has lived in the same town as another person for ten years, it does not mean that they share a language, the same experiences or the same knowledge; their lifestyle and the societal environment in which they have lived may be completely different to that of their communication partner. This is even more relevant if people moved away from a place 20 years earlier, and their lifestyle and way of speaking, and the knowledge relevant to that place, have changed considerably in the meantime.

### BIOGRAPHY AND TRANSLATION

It is often assumed that people from the same country or region should be able to understand each other properly – after all they belong to the same culture, grew up in the

It is part of an interpreter’s vocational competence to **know the limits of their personal knowledge and experience** and to have the ability to make these known to other

interview participants in asylum procedures. These limits can vary considerably from one individual to another, and during their working life, every interpreter has to identify over and over again which limits are particularly relevant to their work, and which less so. This process of reflection for interpreters might include asking themselves the following questions, for example:

#### Working languages:

- For which languages do I currently interpret in asylum procedures? (Please consider not only the languages you “bring” to the process but also the official language of the asylum authorities);
- In which stage of my life or in which contexts (e.g. within the family, with friends, at work, pursuing hobbies, on the internet, in clubs) have I used these languages so far?
- During which situations, or when covering which topics, do I find it easy to express myself in these languages, and in which do I find it harder?
- How does it feel to me when I speak these languages? What do I associate with these languages?
- Which regional and social varieties of these language do I know? With which variations am I more familiar, and with which less so?
- Which variations do the people speak, for whom I am interpreting during asylum procedures? With which am I more familiar, and with which less so?

#### Experiences and knowledge:

- Where, and in which social worlds, have I spent my life so far? With which am I particularly familiar, and which did I simply “experience in passing”?
- Have the lifestyle and the social worlds changed in the places where I have not lived for a while? Are there aspects of them that are now alien to me?
- From which places and social worlds do the people for whom I am interpreting come? What do we have in common, and what do we not? What do I understand immediately, based on my own experiences, and what can I not access?
- What do the other participants in the interpreted situation not explain to me, because they assume that I know or understand, and on what do they elaborate?

Different researchers on interpreting in asylum procedures have observed that frequently, interpreters interpret for asylum-seekers, with whose **ways of speaking** they are not familiar or only somewhat familiar, for example in the context of the different variations of English (Rittsteuer 2010) or Arabic (Good 2007). Good reports that in Great Britain it is often the case that Urdu-speaking interpreters are booked for asylum-seekers who speak Punjabi, or the reverse, Punjabi-speaking interpreters for Urdu-speaking

asylum-seekers. Frequent communication problems have also been observed in Austria, when asylum-seekers from Afghanistan have had Dari interpreters. Dari comes in many different variations, and it often happens that different ones are used by the interpreter and the asylum-seeker. For example, many asylum-seekers use Hazaragi, which differs from other variations of Dari.

Additionally, many interpreters have not been to their home countries for a long time. Since they migrated, the socio-political situation and lifestyles will have changed extensively, as well as styles of speech. Good (2007) reports that whilst undertaking his study on British asylum procedures, he often met Tamil interpreters, who had emigrated to Great Britain in the 1970s. The stories of young traumatised asylum-seekers from Sri Lanka were alien to them. In one situation observed by Good, the asylum-seeker referred to the Red Cross in their statement. The interpreter, however, did not understand the term used for Red Cross in Tamil. The Red Cross had not played any role in his life so far, and the Tamil term for it meant nothing to him.

Other aspects such as **“ethnic” affiliations attributed** to the interpreter can also play a role. Rycroft (2005), who herself interprets between Romanian and English in asylum procedures, recounts an incident, where a Roma accused her of laughing about him due to his ethnic origin. She had, however, at least according to her own report, done no such thing. She also reports frequent problems when Turkish interpreters are used for Kurds. She heard that the Turkish interpreters used did not interpret sentences such as “I come from Kurdistan”, supposedly because they did not acknowledge the existence of Kurdistan.

Speaking the same language(s) and/or being from the same country or region as a particular asylum-seeker does not, in itself, ensure that the role of the interpreter can be taken on with mutual agreement. Any issues should be **communicated to the interviewer.**



## FACT BOX

## Multilingualism

It is often assumed that languages are **countable items**. There are Dari, Wolof, English, German, Igbo, French, Pashtu, Russian, Xhosa and many others. The idea is that these languages are clearly distinguishable from one another and can always be allocated to specific countries, regions and places. We are also used to comparing ways of speaking to each other in a **hierarchical way**. This is not just the case for dialects or sociolects, which we often consider to be less important than so-called “standard language”, but also when comparing languages in general. English or Chinese are referred to as “world languages”, while we often assume that languages such as Armenian, Tamashek or Pashai only have a regional relevance.

Authority over the “correct” way of speaking is given to the native speaker – a further assumption that is not often questioned. However, if we take a closer look at languages used as a means of communication by speakers of different first languages, such as Swahili, English or Chinese, it is not so easy to answer the question of, for example, who is or may be a native speaker of English. Is a person who has grown up in Benin City, and has mainly spoken English their entire life, not a native English speaker? And what about the many people world-wide who have grown up with several languages? What is their mother tongue?

Applied linguistics is progressively moving away from seeing language(s) as objects. Instead, the approach is far more to research language in its usage – that is, **speaking instead of language** (Makoni and Pennycook 2005). In recent research tradition, multilingualism is no longer seen as an addition of different languages, but as the sum of linguistic and communicative practices used by speakers in certain situations in order to achieve meaning. Depending on the situation and the context, people use different ways of speaking. For example, people talk differently with their friends than they would with their parents or work colleagues. People also use different ways of speaking and communicating within one and the same conversational event. This simultaneous use of different ways of speaking is what linguistics researchers refer to as **translanguaging** (Wei 2011).

Meaning, then, is created by all the approaches to speaking, communicating and expressing oneself which are used in a certain situation. This includes **verbal means of expression as well as non-verbal ones**, such as posture, gestures, facial expressions, volume, speed of speaking, pitch, emphasis or accent. The whole range of linguistic and communicative possibilities available to a speaker in a specific situation is referred to by applied linguists as **language repertoire** (Busch 2013).



## ACTIONS TO ENSURE UNDERSTANDING

As was outlined in the previous section, an interpreter's transcultural competence is characterised in particular by an understanding of the limitations of their own experience and knowledge and by making these clear to the other participants in the communication. Moreover, they require the necessary communicative competencies to use the available knowledge and experiences reflectively.

This means it is not the task of the interpreter to answer questions such as whether a certain "linguistic colouring" of an asylum-seeker makes it possible to draw conclusions as to their "origin", or whether what they are recounting is the truth or not. However, it is the task of the interpreter to intervene in the communication process, if they suspect that there is a misunderstanding, or that a misunderstanding could be avoided, if certain aspects of the utterances to be interpreted were explained.

The first requirement for such competence in reflective and professional translation is **clarity about their own role in the process** (see Unit 4). **Interpreters are not expert witnesses.**

### FACT BOX

## *Actions to Ensure Understanding*

(adapted from Kameyama 2004)

Just like the other participants, interpreters have access to certain discussion techniques to ensure understanding:

- **Asking questions of clarification** on the part of the listener(s) (*"Does that mean X?"*) and on the part of the speaker(s) (*"Do you understand what I mean by that?"*)
- **Request for further details**, for example a request to explain something further, describe it differently or to repeat it (*"So how should I understand that?"*; *"Could you explain that in a little more depth, please?"*; *"Pardon?"*)
- **Making certain**; that is, paraphrasing of what was understood, to ensure that it was understood as it was intended (*"You meant X, didn't you?"*)
- **Paraphrasing** on the part of the speaker (*"I mean X."*)
- **Correction of understanding** on the part of the speaker (*"That is not what was meant."*)
- **Metalinguistic comments** (*"When I say it like that, I mean X."*)
- Addition of **contextual information and explanations** (*"In order to understand that, you need to know that X"*)

In the case of such additional explanations or questions, it is vital that interpreters indicate to all parties in the conversation in a very transparent and comprehensible way, when and how they have intervened to further understanding, and also which parts of their translation incorporate explanations they have added themselves, or which explanations were added upon their request.



## Misunderstandings in Asylum Procedures

Over recent years, research in the field of social sciences has demonstrated the complex and multi-faceted nature of interaction in asylum proceedings (e.g. Bohmer and Shuman 2007; Jacquemet 2011; Maryns 2006; Kolb and Pöchhacker 2008; Pöllabauer 2005; Scheffer 2001; Rienzner 2011a). Institutional requirements, routines and asymmetries come up against multilingual and transcultural communicative settings. This often leads to misunderstandings, to the detriment of asylum-seekers. As the studies listed above show, these misunderstandings mainly occur in these particular areas:

- **Incorrect or different names** (Bohmer and Shumann 2007, 156; Good 2007, 170-171)
- **Names or expressions, with which the interpreter is not familiar** (Ammer et al. 2013)
- **Expressions used to describe the degree of familial relationships** (Good 2007, 179)
- **Times; for example, when different calendar systems or different chronologies are used** (Good 2007, 173)
- **Nonverbal communication** (Rienzner 2010, unpublished survey results).
- **Interpreting ambiguous terms** (Inghilleri 2003, 257)
- **Stories told by asylum-seekers about their lifestyle and their survival/life strategies** (Rycroft 2005)



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## Useful Links

Language & Asylum Research Group.  
<https://www.essex.ac.uk/larg>  
 (Accessed January 15 2022)

Research, projects and information on multilingualism.  
[www.heteroglossia.net](http://www.heteroglossia.net)  
 (Accessed January 15 2022)

Center for Multilingualism in Society across the Lifespan, University of Oslo.  
<http://www.hf.uio.no/multiling/english>  
 (Accessed January 15 2022)



### Activity 1: Observe yourself and others when speaking

1

**Form of activity:** Activity in pairs, followed by plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 30 minutes (15 minutes in pairs, 15 minutes for plenary discussion).

**Description:** In this activity, participants team up with the person sitting next to them. They tell each other what their journey to the training venue involved. After that, each describes what they noticed when they were the speaker and also what they noticed when they were the listener. The participants should also take note of how the way in which they told their story influenced its meaning. Subsequently, the most important findings are collected and discussed in a plenary session.

### Activity 2: Autobiographical storytelling

2

**Form of activity:** Activity in pairs, followed by a plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 60 minutes (10 minutes in each of phases 1 and 2, 20 minutes in phase 3, and 20 minutes in a plenary setting).

**Description:** This activity consists of 3 phases, during which participants meet in pairs. Each pair consists of a storyteller and a listener.

**Phase 1:** All storytellers choose an event from their childhood and tell their respective listener about it. Listeners can interrupt the storytellers during their story if there is something they do not understand, but should, in the main, listen and not contribute with their own story.

**Phase 2:** All the storytellers move along one seat and now tell their story to another listener.

**Phase 3:** During this phase participants, together with their current team partner, will discuss the following questions and then note down the most important aspects for discussion in the whole group.

- Listeners: Which elements of this and previous stories were familiar to you and could you identify with, and which less so? Why?
- Storytellers: Which elements were difficult to convey? Where did you need to expand, and where was it not necessary to give a more in-depth explanation?

The findings of the listeners and storytellers will then be collated and discussed in the plenary setting.





### Activity 3: Language portrait(s)

3

**Form of activity:** Individual work followed by a plenary presentation and discussion of the portraits.

**Duration:** 60 minutes (10 minutes for each of phases 1 and 2, 40 minutes for the plenary).

**Description:** Participants should work on their own and create two “language portraits” (according to Busch, 2013: 36ff):

**Phase 1:** For the first “life language portrait”, participants should think about which languages or which methods of speech, communication and expression play a part in their life. It can be helpful if participants also think about the way in which they communicate in various situations and with various people. Participants should then insert these different languages or methods of speech, communication and expression in different colours into the body silhouette (see printable worksheet “Activity 3: Language portrait(s)”, p. 165).

**Phase 2:** The second step involves the participants thinking about which languages or methods of speech, communication and expression play a role in their work as interpreters. These should be noted down in a second “work language portrait”.

Finally, participants will show their language portraits to the plenary and analyse how the two portraits differ and where there are similarities.





Printable Worksheet **Activity 3: Language portrait(s)**





## Activity 4: World Café – “Experiencing language”

4

**Form of activity:** World Café with 4 small groups per sample scenario, followed by a presentation given by “hosts” and plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 2 hours (15 minutes per “table”, 60 minutes in plenary).

**Description:** For this activity, create teams/“tables” each consisting of 5 people. Each team consists of a “host” and three to four “guests”. Every café table is given a short text (see printable worksheet “Activity 4: World Café – ‘Experiencing language’”, p. 167). This is first read and will then be used as the basis for a discussion by participants about whether they have had similar experiences, how they would deal with this or similar experiences when working and what advice they would give the interpreter being interviewed at the time. The most important points are noted down on a sheet of paper.

After 15 minutes the “guests” move to another table and work with another text; the “hosts” remain at their table. The most important points are added to the previous group’s sheet of paper.

The “guests” move tables until they have commented on all texts. To complete the activity, the respective “hosts” report the most important results of the conversations that took place at their tables.







## Printable Worksheet **Activity 4: World Café – “Experiencing language”**

### Excerpt from an interview with a male interpreter at asylum procedures in Austria

*„You must explain that our way, so the way people from my country will actually understand. In particular, you must word it in a more placatory way, for example by saying: “I am only here to help you and to translate” and also word some things more sensitively. (...). You really can contribute a lot, for example when the authorities are of the opinion that the person should be made to leave the country. You can express that differently. For example, if someone applied for asylum in Italy, you can say: “You have to go to Italy” and not say to their face: “you have to leave the country”. In my language it can be expressed in a more diplomatic way. (...) It really depends very much on the way you express it. That way, you calm people down, too.”*

(Rienzner 2009, unpublished survey results)



### Excerpt from an interview with a female interpreter at asylum procedures in Austria

*“One of the interviewers said: “I never want another interpreter”. I was really happy about that. Yes, she said: “You are really good.” I said: “No my German is not good.” (...) When they say something, I understand it immediately. However, when I interpret something into German and then I hear what they tell the note-taker to note down, I immediately think: “Oh, I’d love to speak like that.”*

(Rienzner 2008, unpublished survey results)



### Excerpt from an interview with a female interpreter at asylum procedures in Austria

*“There are moments when I am deeply moved. For example, before Christmas there was a case where the lady asylum seeker said: “I wish you a Merry Christmas” and so on. That was at the asylum court and she then said to them, that God loves them and blah blah blah. So many things, that I thought to myself that they were going to think: “Yeah whatever, don’t get on our nerves with that.” (...) I do find that uncomfortable. I think to myself, it would be better just to say nothing. Just to say: “thank you”. It’s not that terrible, but if you are dealing with Austrian atheists, it seems a bit strange.”*

(Rienzner 2011, unpublished survey results)



### Excerpt from an interview with a female interpreter at asylum procedures in Austria

*“Some have experienced an awful lot, so much that sometimes I ended up crying a lot too. Really. At the beginning I often felt really bad, as well. I didn’t want to interpret anymore. But then I thought that I should help people, too. What those people have experienced is what I have experienced as well. (...) That somehow made me stronger. And somehow you also see people who are not being one hundred percent truthful. That’s when you start thinking a lot: ‘My God, how many cases have I been involved in where lies were told?’ (...) But sometimes I still don’t feel so good. For days. If we have a difficult case, I can’t sleep and get migraines. It takes me at least two days to get over it. It’s really bad. Often. It brings back images from back then; they resurface. If they talk about certain things, use certain words, then the images resurface.”*

(Rienzner 2010, unpublished survey results)





## Test yourself!



***Upon completion of this unit, you should be able to answer the following questions. Later, compare your answers to the content of the unit.***

1. The interpretation of an utterance consists of understanding, as well as.... (Please complete.)
2. How is understanding achieved in situations involving transcultural communication?
3. Which factors can obstruct the success of transcultural communication processes?
4. Please list at least three conversational techniques, to which you have access to in your work as an interpreter and which can be used to intervene in the communication process where a misunderstanding might have occurred.
5. "Such an intervention should always be equally transparent and comprehensible to all parties involved in the conversation." What does that mean and how can it be implemented in your own translational activities?

# Unit 11:

## Information Mining for Interpreters

Maria Eder, Alexandra Jantscher-Karlhuber, Irmgard Soukup-Unterweger,  
Gernot Hebenstreit, Frank Austermuehl & students of the  
MA Translation in a European Context at Aston University  
(Fabian Barthold, Viktoria Brood, Melanie Martin, Lisa Scheck, Megan Stevenson)

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

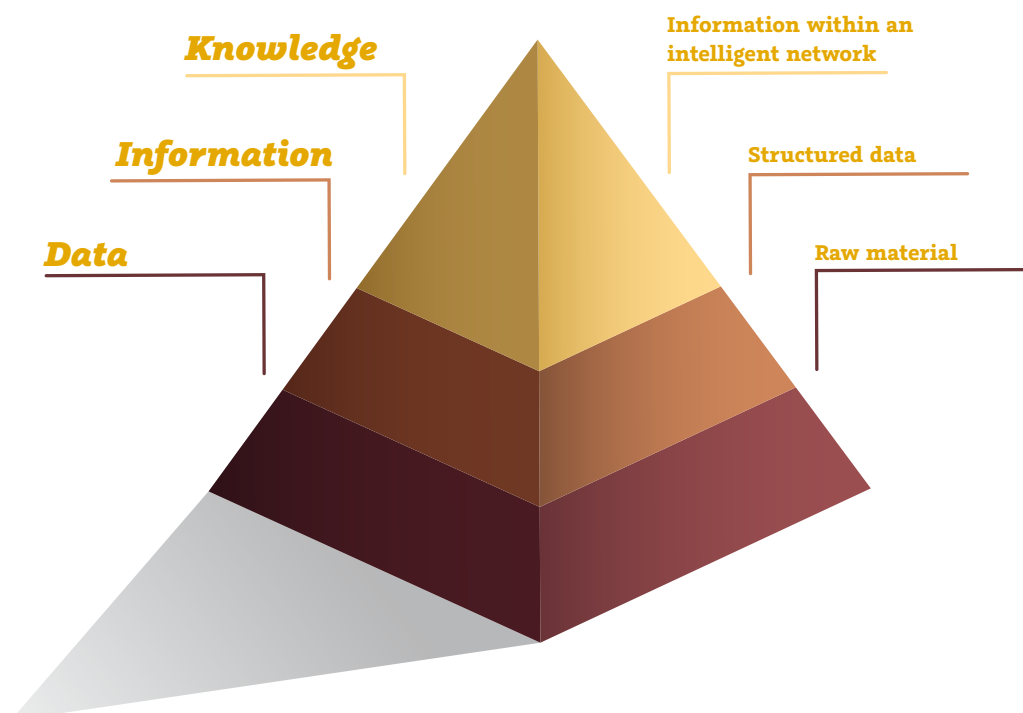
Participants will be able to

- » recognise individual knowledge needs and identify possible knowledge gaps;
- » use appropriate search strategies and tools;
- » understand how to use relevant sources and assess the quality of search results;
- » acquire knowledge of specific topics (in particular information about countries of origin);
- » research and acquire relevant terminology.



### Knowledge

The nature and development of knowledge can be illustrated in many different ways, for example in the form of a knowledge pyramid (Ladenthin 2010).



**Recommended citation:** Eder, Maria, Alexandra Jantscher-Karlhuber, Irmgard Soukup-Unterweger, Gernot Hebenstreit, Frank Austermuehl and students of the MA Translation in a European Context at Aston University. 2022. "Information Mining for Interpreters." In *Handbook for Interpreters in Asylum Procedures*, edited by UNHCR Austria & Sonja Pöllabauer, 187-204. Vienna: UNHCR Austria. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/59c8b3be4.html>

In this pyramid, the bottom data layer symbolises the conditions and events that surround us. Take, for example, typical ways of presenting the date, time and temperature, such as '19/11, 10.00 am, 4 degrees'. By embedding this 'raw material' into a specific context, in other words, by interpreting and structuring the data, you create information. Thus, by linking the date, time and temperature indicated on a display to its location, you get the information that the temperature in location X on the 19th of November at 10.00 am is 4 degrees. If you then connect this knowledge to other information in a logical and functional way, that is to say, if you link information with other information, process it and use it in a certain context, you are creating knowledge: It is cold, therefore I need to put on warm clothes.

Knowledge that has been created in this way is initially implicit; in other words, it is personal, subjective and often subconscious. It only becomes explicit once it is communicated and thus made accessible to others.

Acquiring knowledge, or moving from data to knowledge, is hence a step-by-step process of collecting, linking and contextualising information. This (often lengthy) process enables people to carry out goal-oriented actions (Rütten 2007).

## RELEVANT AREAS OF KNOWLEDGE

Working as an interpreter in asylum procedures is a highly sensitive task, in which successful communication depends greatly upon the interpreter's knowledge. The following types of knowledge are particularly important for interpreters:

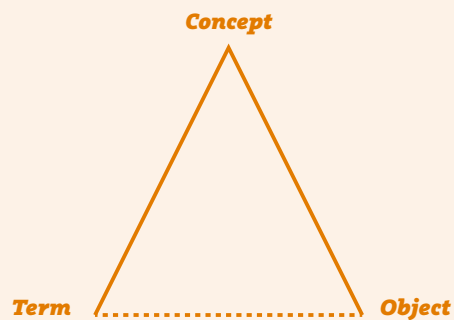
- **Linguistic knowledge** (for example, grammar, language use, lexis),
- **Communicative knowledge** (use of non-verbal signs and para- and extralinguistic communicative forms),
- **Terminological knowledge** (specialised vocabulary of certain areas, for example, law, medicine, social work),
- **Knowledge of interpreting methods** (interpreting strategies, intercultural knowledge),
- **Domain-specific knowledge** (for example, migration law, health care, education),
- **Knowledge of information mining and management** (where to access relevant and reliable information efficiently, and how to assess, structure, document and update information; Budin 2002).

In the area of translation and interpreting, research carried out to fill knowledge gaps is usually aimed at acquiring terminological knowledge, which links linguistic knowledge and domain knowledge. Here, we are not looking only for domain-specific knowledge (the 'what') but also always for the linguistic options available to express this knowledge in the (two) working languages (the 'how').



## Concept and Terms

In everyday language, words such as ‘concept’, ‘word’, ‘expression’ and others are often used interchangeably. However, in the fields of terminology and languages for special purposes (LSPs), ‘concept’ has a very specific meaning. The image below of the so-called semiotic triangle makes this meaning clear by illustrating the link that exists between the linguistic and extralinguistic signs (such as symbols and gestures) we use when we talk and the specific instances of reality (the objects) that we talk about.



When we use words or other linguistic or extralinguistic signs to talk about ‘objects’ (or about the world), the words we use do not directly refer to the object as such but to a mental construct, that is to say, a representation of the object in our mind. This mental construct is referred to as a **‘concept’**. The linguistic sign that refers to or designates a specialised concept is called a **‘term’**.

An object can be anything we perceive or imagine. This includes (tangible) objects in a conventional sense (for example a house, car, passport and travel document), or people (parents, asylum-seekers or unaccompanied refugee minors), but also more abstract, intangible ‘objects’ (such as country of origin, reason for asylum, and rights and obligations).

A **concept** does not refer to one particular object but rather **represents the common characteristics** shared by a number of individual objects. When, for example, you look at the individual passports of a group of citizens from different countries, these different objects clearly have different properties (format, colour, material, layout, number of pages, security features and so forth, with personal data obviously also varying from person to person). Yet, despite these differences, the concept [passport] consists of elements that are present in all these different passports (and also in all other objects of the same type [passport]). Furthermore, these elements are internationally standardised and include, among other things, the designation of the object as a passport, certain units of information that allow for the identification of the passport holder, as well as information about which institution issued the passport and until when the document is valid. **Terms** that can be used to refer to the concept [passport] include **linguistic signs**, such as, for example, ‘passport’ in English or ‘Reisepass’, ‘nacnoprt’ and ‘pasaporte’ in other languages. In general, terms can also consist of more than one word (such as ‘travel document’, or ‘unaccompanied refugee minor’).

When searching for the equivalents of a term in another language, translators and interpreters need to ensure that both terms refer to the same concept. In other words, the two words have to have the same basic characteristics in both languages. The linguistic similarity between the terms ‘passport’, ‘Reisepass’, ‘nacnoprt’ and ‘pasaporte’ is no more than an indicator that there might be an equivalence but does not offer certainty. Often, so-called ‘false friends’ can be very misleading (for example, ‘sensible’, which means ‘reasonable’ in English, but ‘sensitive’ in French, German and Spanish) (Arntz, Picht, and Schmitz 2014).

## Knowledge: Terminology

The concept of terminology, which can also be called specialised vocabulary, refers to **a set of terms and expressions used in a domain-specific area** (Collins 2016a). Efficient, specialised communication depends to a very large degree on the correct use of domain-specific terms. Interpreting in asylum procedures is a type of specialised communication (in this case, of expert-to-layperson communication), and, consequently, interpreters involved in this type of communication require a high degree of domain knowledge and, in particular, of domain-specific terms (Hebenstreit and Soukup-Unterweger 2011).

The compilation of domain-specific terms and other terminological information is called 'terminography' (Collins 2016b). Generally speaking, there are two ways of collecting terminology when working with two languages:

1. Carrying out a comprehensive, systematic search for terms in the target language, comparing and matching them to terms in the source language, and adapting equivalences where necessary.
  - Advantage: the compilation of terms is based on comprehensive research in both languages and cultures,
  - Disadvantage: this is a very time-consuming process.
2. Identifying target language terms based on existing source language terminology.
  - Advantage: this is a focused, efficient research process,
  - Disadvantage: not all domain-related terms that might come up during an interpreting assignment will be included.

### COLLECTIVE TERMINOGRAPHY

Working together with other interpreters is an efficient way of compiling terminology. Terms specific to asylum procedures in one language, for example, English, are the same, so whatever other language(s) an interpreter is working with, the English terms can be compiled collectively by a group of interpreters from a number of different sources (for example, a dictionary of asylum-related terms, a legal information system, or glossaries). As a result, interpreters with different target languages will have created together a rather comprehensive list of relevant terms (with short explanations where necessary) in their common source language.

### INDIVIDUAL TERMINOGRAPHY

Of course, it will not always be possible to work with others to prepare for an interpreting assignment because of time restrictions or different levels of knowledge of the target language in question. Under such circumstances, an individual interpreter might have neither the time nor the resources to carry out systematic, comprehensive terminology work. Instead, a more selective, ad hoc approach to terminography is needed, focusing on the potential domain(s) which might be expected to be discussed during the assignment (such as searching for terms related to post-traumatic stress disorder, when preparing to interpret during a psychiatric evaluation of a client). In this case, accessing material from previous assignments and updating it with new material can also be quite useful.

### NEOLOGISMS AND LOANWORDS

In the field of asylum, some expressions have no equivalents in other languages, so in certain situations, and for certain purposes, interpreters might have to coin new expressions. However, this strategy should only be employed in very specific circumstances and should not encourage the creation of neologisms in general. A further lexical phenomenon for which asylum interpreters must be prepared is the use of loanwords. Immigrant communities often borrow words from the lexicon of the host country's language and integrate them into their own language (for example, the English loanword 'shayyak' in Arabic for 'to check', 'to examine'; the German loanword 'anmeldant' in Arabic for 'angemeldet' (German for 'registered'). Interpreters must be familiar with such loanwords.

## Basics of Searching for Domain-Specific Information and Terminology

When preparing assignments, interpreters generally search for **'information'**, as illustrated in the knowledge pyramid above. Based on the data and information found in their search, and drawing on their own individual knowledge, interpreters then apply this information to a concrete situation, in other words, an interpreting assignment.

In searching for relevant information, interpreters can use **electronic resources**, for example, online or offline dictionaries, terminology databases and encyclopedias, or **print media**. The latter might be part of the interpreter's own collection at home or could be accessible in a library. While online resources have become the most important way to research information, as they are fast and widely available, traditional print media should not be neglected. Print dictionaries or encyclopedias as well as parallel texts (see below) are useful for certain topics and language pairs. In the following, we will focus mainly on online resources but, where necessary, will also refer to print resources.

Before you begin your research, it is important to be aware of what type of information you require (general or specialised information, background information or linguistic information) and how you can find this information. Once you know this, you can develop a suitable, **systematic research strategy**, following these six steps:

1. Assessing personal information needs (knowledge deficit),
2. Choosing suitable research tools,
3. Researching with suitable search techniques and search features,
4. Evaluating the relevance and quality of the search results,
5. If search was unsuccessful: resorting to alternative problem solving strategies,
6. Organising and archiving (recording, storage) of search results for future use.

To be able to research a specific topic comprehensively and gain access to print resources, membership of a public library can be helpful. Some university libraries also allow access to non-students. In addition, there are a number of institutions and publishers that provide access to digital books and journals (some are free, while others are subject to a charge). For an overview, visit the British Library (<https://www.bl.uk/learning/online-resources>) or the Online Books Page ([onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/lists.html](https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/lists.html)).

Direct contact with experts in individual areas (for example, doctors, lawyers, social workers, interpreting colleagues from the country of the target language, professional organisations and so forth) can be another valuable source of information.

### EVALUATING INFORMATION SOURCES

It is important to take a critical approach to researching and mining all types of information, both online and offline. Evaluating the reliability of sources and the information found is vital. The more reliable the sources, the higher the quality of the materials in them. An assessment can be carried out using the following criteria (adapted and expanded from Harris 2000; Enríquez Raído 2011):

■ **Check 1:**

How relevant to the aim of my research is the information I have found?

■ **Check 2:**

How up-to-date is the source and the information I have found?

■ **Check 3:**

How reliable is the information source (author, objectivity, acceptance in the community)? How trustworthy and plausible is the information it contains?

■ **Check 4:**

To what extent does the information found concur with information from other sources?

■ **Check 5:**

Who is responsible for the information? What ideology do the owners of the internet site uphold (check imprint, information about publisher)?

■ **Check 6:**

How has the information been presented within the source? Is evidence for the information provided? Does the information result from a scientific study? Is it made clear how the data was collected?

■ **Check 7:**

Which factors need to be taken into account, when choosing an appropriate term in the target language and using it in an interpreting situation?

## RESOURCES FOR INTERPRETING-RELATED RESEARCH

### » *The Internet*

The internet represents an easy way to access different types of interpreting-related resources, among them dictionaries, glossaries, encyclopedias and (terminology) databases. Nevertheless, it is very important to remember to assess information acquired on the internet critically. The main advantages of the internet are the amount of information available and how quickly it can be accessed. Another benefit for users is how topical many sources are, something that print media cannot match. The major disadvantage of using the internet as a source of information is the lack of quality control and consequently the unreliability of many sources. In addition, the lack of structure of the internet and the sheer number of available documents and sources often make it difficult to locate the right kind of information. However, specific internet tools are available to help with finding relevant information. Knowing what these tools are and how to use them is crucial for high-quality search. There are many manuals on internet research, with guidelines on how to search for specific information, one of which can be found here: <http://www.questionpro.com/images/Online-Research-Handbook.pdf>.

### » *Online Search Engines*

Many internet search attempts start with entering a one-word or multi-word search term into an online search engine like 'Google'. It is often a good strategy to use various search terms and compare the respective results.

In addition to Google, which is currently **the most widely used search engine**, there are other search engines that can be used for information mining (for example, [www.bing.com](http://www.bing.com), [www.yandex.com](http://www.yandex.com), [duckduckgo.com](http://duckduckgo.com), [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)). Apart from such wide-scale search engines, smaller national engines may be available in different countries. Frequently used search engines are listed online (search term: 'list search engines'; see also About Web Search, [websearch.about.com](http://websearch.about.com)). While the different search engines may offer similar potential search options, their individual search features (for example, search operators, see below) might vary, so it is good practice to consult each search engine's help pages.

In addition to individual search engines, you can also use so-called **meta search engines**, which forward a search query to numerous other search engines and deliver an edited, compiled version of the information found by these different engines (for example, [www.dogpile.com](http://www.dogpile.com), [www.search.com](http://www.search.com)). Furthermore, there are **specialised search engines** for searching for specific media and file formats, such as search engines for news, pictures and videos.

In the following, we will use Google to demonstrate how to do different kinds of searches with a search engine.

Among other things, Google allows users to search among the following resources: websites, books, articles, pictures and discussion forums. Detailed information on how to use the search engine can be found on Google's help page ([support.google.com/?hl=en](http://support.google.com/?hl=en)).

The results listed by the search engine, their context and the frequency with which they occur can inform the user how the respective search terms are used and how often they occur in the respective languages. However, the order in which search engine results are presented follows its own rules. These vary from search engine to search engine, depending on the respective search algorithms applied (results might, for example, be sorted according to the frequency of key concepts, the number of links to a site or whether the owner of a website has paid to be listed on top of the search results).

#### Examples: Search Engines

##### Google search engines:

Google: <http://www.google.com>

Google maps: <http://maps.google.com>

Google images: <http://www.google.com/imghp>

Google help page: <http://support.google.com/?hl=en>

##### Search engines for videos:

Aol Video: <http://www.aol.com/video>

Blinkx: <http://www.blinkx.com>

Google Videos: <http://www.google.com/videohp>

##### Search engines for news:

<http://news.google.com>

<http://news.yahoo.com>

##### Search engines for pictures:

picsearch: <http://www.picsearch.com>

Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com>



## » Dictionaries and Online Dictionaries

There are different types of dictionaries (print and online) available for research:

- **Monolingual dictionaries** (definition dictionaries) are used to determine the meaning of words and expressions in the source or target language. Meanings are defined at an abstract level, which allows users to free themselves from the source text wording and to find alternative target language solutions. The use of monolingual dictionaries generally requires a high level of linguistic competence and some grammatical knowledge.
- **Bi- or multilingual dictionaries** are used to determine equivalents in the target language(s). However, they only offer some of the possible equivalents, that is to say, only those which are used most frequently, and only provide a little information on how to use words or idioms in a specific situation.
- **General language dictionaries** (mono-, bi- or multilingual) provide information about general language use.
- **Specialist dictionaries** (mono-, bi- or multilingual) provide information about specific language use in specialised domain areas.
- **Picture dictionaries** (mono-, bi- or multilingual) supply illustrations and the corresponding vocabulary (general or specialist). Pictures may help to clarify the meaning of an expression, and comparing pictures in the source and target language allows the user to identify (culture-specific) differences in denominating certain terms.

In principal, all of these dictionaries can be helpful when searching for asylum-relevant information. However, not all of them are available for every single language and language combination. Sometimes, there are only a few dictionaries available, which may not be particularly comprehensive, or there may be none at all. Some of the dictionaries at hand may have been published some years ago, which can be a disadvantage when looking for current terms, but can also be an advantage when looking for words that are used infrequently or outdated.

The following criteria may be applied when choosing a dictionary (Kautz 2002):

- Extent of the dictionary,
- Quality and presentation of the content,
- Publication date,
- Intended target audience,
- Author(s).

**Online dictionaries** are used very frequently for information mining. An advantage of online dictionaries is that they are often very “interactive”, or collaborative, in that entries can be edited or added by users. However, as these entries are not exclusively written by specialists

or lexicographers, their quality and accuracy cannot always be guaranteed. An advantage of online dictionaries is that they often offer information in **different media types or file formats**, such as images or audio and video sequences. Additionally, online dictionaries often offer **hyperlinks to other files, texts or websites**. Information in online dictionaries can be accessed in different ways. Searches can either be conducted based on simple lists of keywords, through simple search boxes or complex query forms that provide additional search features, which allow access to lexical information, such as gender, singular or plural, or additional background information.

**Many online dictionaries are available free of charge but they are not always suitable for specialist research. In general, it is important to compare and verify search results across a number of sources. Dictionaries offered by well-known dictionary publishers (for example, Collins, Duden, Larousse, Merriam-Webster) and reputable institutions (for example, universities or research institutes) are usually reliable and of high quality.**

### Examples: Dictionaries

PONS: <http://en.pons.com/translate>

The Free Dictionary: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com>

Logos Dictionary: <http://www.logosdictionary.org>

Oxford Dictionaries: <http://en.oxforddictionaries.com>

Cambridge Dictionary: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org>

Collins Dictionary: <http://www.collinsdictionary.com>

WordReference.com: <http://www.wordreference.com>

Dict.cc: <http://browse.dict.cc>

List of dictionaries:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_online\\_dictionaries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_online_dictionaries)

## » Encyclopedias

Another important information source for interpreters are encyclopedias. As in the case of dictionaries, encyclopedias are also available **online or in printed form** and can be categorised into **general and specialist encyclopedias**. Concerning the quality of the entries, they are subject to the same criteria as dictionaries.

Like online dictionaries, online encyclopedias can be interactive and offer hyperlinks and multiple media formats. The full versions of online encyclopedias of renowned publishers are usually subject to a charge but, in exchange, they offer high quality. Here are some examples for online encyclopedias that are subject to a charge:

### Examples: Encyclopedias

Encyclopedia Britannica Online: <http://www.britannica.com>  
(partially free, full access only by subscription)

**Here are some more examples of free online encyclopedias:**

Encyclopedia.com: <http://www.encyclopedia.com> (including The Columbia Encyclopedia, Oxford's World Encyclopedia and the Encyclopedia of World Biography)

Infoplease Encyclopedia:  
<http://www.infoplease.com/encyclopedia>

Wikipedia: <http://www.wikipedia.org>

List of encyclopedias:  
<http://www.refseek.com/directory/encyclopedias.html>

Wikipedia also offers a so-called portal, which allows users to access information by browsing through larger, systematically structured subject areas, such as, for example, "Geography". Wikipedia offers a list of all topics that have their own portals:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Contents>

Since its foundation in 2001, Wikipedia has become one of the most comprehensive and most frequently used encyclopedias on the internet. Wikipedia is a **free, open-source encyclopedia** which allows its users to write and edit entries themselves. The fact that entries are not exclusively written by experts has often led to criticism, since this might result in false information, subjective reporting or the intentional omission of information. Such concerns about quality make it important that you are always circumspect when using Wikipedia. You should assess information critically and verify it by using additional sources. Looking at the different versions of a Wikipedia article (click 'View history') can give you an idea of its quality, as it allows you to compare the evolution of the different versions, look up the respective authors and obtain information on their specialist background.

In addition to extensive encyclopedias, you can also find a vast variety of **glossaries and terminology databases**.

### Examples: Terminology Databases

IATE glossary (InterActive Terminology for Europe):  
<http://iate.europa.eu>

EuroTermBank: <http://www.eurotermbank.com>  
(here you can also find non-EU languages, for example, Albanian and Russian)

Terminology as a Service: <http://www.taas-project.eu>

UNTERM (The United Nations Terminology Database):  
<http://unterportal.un.org/UNTERM/portal/welcome>

Termite 6L Terminology of Telecommunications:  
<http://www.itu.int/online/termite/index.html>

Refugee and Asylum Seeker Glossary:  
<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/glossary>

## » Parallel and Background Texts

As we have seen above, the internet offers a variety of useful tools for interpreters. As well as the suggestions we have already provided above, you can find further terminology and domain-specific knowledge in so-called **parallel and background texts**. These texts supply interpreters **with information about their research topic** in the form of both **terminological and domain-specific knowledge**.

**Parallel texts** are texts that deal with the same topic and are of the same text type as the source text. They provide information on vocabulary and language, such as collocations and other typical word combinations. In addition, parallel texts illustrate text type-specific conventions, for example, with regard to the layout of different text types such as asylum applications, tenancy agreements and court decisions. **Background texts** aim at providing the interpreter with domain-specific knowledge. They do not necessarily belong to the same text type as the source text, but they provide relevant background information about the domain.

Useful parallel and background texts can be drawn from a number of different sources. These include popular scientific publications, specialised literature and academic journals, although the latter sometimes have to be paid for. Databases or academic libraries are good sources for finding and accessing these specialised journals (see, for example, the Directory of Open Access Journals, accessible via [www.doaj.org](http://www.doaj.org)).

A database offering legal terminology and information about text type conventions can be found on the European Union's website (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html>).

It provides information about pertinent legal EU regulations and the respective national regulations of its member states (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html>).

### » Text Corpora

A corpus (plural 'corpora') is a mono-, bi- or multilingual **collection of texts**. These texts can be in written and spoken form. Such text collections can be used to search swiftly for certain words and phrases or to identify specific grammatical structures and text-specific characteristics (Austermuehl 2012). The internet is a major source of freely accessible corpora. However, as these often include general texts, they are sometimes of limited help for interpreting-related queries.

There are also online dictionaries that are based on text corpora. These corpus-based dictionaries can be used for terminology research and verification, as they show the words in question (and their foreign-language equivalents) embedded in sample sentences (as in Linguee: [www.linguee.com](http://www.linguee.com) or WordReference: [www.wordreference.com](http://www.wordreference.com)).

However, since it is not always possible to guarantee the quality of the texts included in the corpus, you should assess these dictionaries critically.

of special software, users can read and write comments and articles in newsgroups. Users also have the option of accessing newsgroup discussions directly through websites such as Google Groups or Yahoo Groups.

Mailing lists are e-mail distribution lists that have been set up by certain institutions (such as translator and interpreter organisations). In order to read and write articles, users usually need to register with these lists.

#### Examples: Internet Forums and Mailing Lists for Interpreters and Translators

ProZ.com: <http://www.proz.com>

TranslatorsCafe.com: <http://www.translatorscafe.com>

The Translator's Home Companion:  
<http://thclai.com>

Translation Directory:  
<http://www.translationdirectory.com/forum>

Aquarius: <https://aquarius.net>

Monster: <http://www.monster.co.uk>

#### Examples: Corpora

British Library:  
<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues-and-collections/digital-collections>

Brigham Young University: <http://corpus.byu.edu>

British National Corpus: <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk>

Leeds Collection of Internet Corpora:  
<http://corpus.leeds.ac.uk/internet.html>

Национальный корпус русского языка  
(Russian National Corpus): <http://ruscorpora.ru/en/index.html>

Linguee: <http://www.linguee.com>



### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Resources for Interpreting-Related Research

- What are useful dictionaries, encyclopedias, terminology data bases, text corpora, internet forums and mailing lists in your country or for your language (pair)?

### » Experts, Communities and Forums

Expert opinions can also be a source for finding terminology. **Internet forums**, for example, offer the chance to exchange opinions with colleagues or to consult experts in different domain areas, for example doctors on medical or lawyers on legal matters. Websites that are specifically directed at translators (for example, ProZ.com, TranslatorsCafe.com) often offer such **discussion forums** for the exchange of ideas and opinions.

Another possible medium for the exchange and discussion of ideas are newsgroups and **mailing lists**. With the help



### USING THE CORRECT SEARCH TERM

The success of a search is highly dependent on the **search strategy**, also referred to as '**search syntax**', that is applied. A search has higher chances of being successful, if special **search operators or advanced search features** are used. With the help of these tools, the search results can be narrowed down to certain websites, languages or file formats. They also allow users to define precise inclusion and exclusion criteria for the search. As an overall rule, search queries should be as precise and specific as possible. As search features and operators vary from search engine to search engine, it is useful to consult their respective online help texts.

Queries in search engines should not be entered in full sentences but in **keywords** (for example, 'torture Iraq prison' instead of 'Are prisoners tortured in Iraq?'). In general, searches can be initiated with broader terms and then successively narrowed down with more specific queries.

The following overview describes some frequently used search strategies. These different strategies can also be combined for a specific search. Keep in mind, as well, that not all search engines support every strategy listed below.

### PHRASE SEARCH

Unlike a standard search for individual words, a phrase search allows you to search for **combinations of words, phrases and idioms**. These searches are made by enclosing phrases in quotation marks (""). The engine will then search for all the words in the query, in the exact same order they were entered (for example, "apply for asylum", "application for subsidiary protection"). This strategy is especially useful when searching for multi-word terms and to verify potential translations of idioms and other expressions.

### BOOLEAN OPERATORS (AND OPERATORS, EXCLUSION OPERATORS)

By using the so-called AND, or inclusion, operator within the search query, several keywords can be combined. Conversely, the use of the NOT, or exclusion, operator excludes certain words. By combining words with AND or '+', the engine lists only texts where all entered words occur (for example, asylum AND Europe AND legislation). Many search engines combine the entered keywords automatically in this way. However, they also exclude certain words due to their frequency of occurrence (such as articles, single letters and numbers). By using an AND operator, these words can be included in the query (for

instance, World War +2). Another useful operator is OR, which allows users to search for synonyms (for example, dictionary OR glossary).

Some search engines also offer so-called 'proximity operators'. This feature, often represented by the operator NEAR (or n), defines how many words are allowed between two keywords. 'Asylum NEAR<sub>2</sub> applicant' (also NEAR<sub>2</sub> or NEAR/2) indicates, for example, that the search engine will only list results where no more than two words are between 'asylum' and 'applicant'. In Google, the proximity search is carried out using the (undocumented) operator AROUND. A search for 'interpreting AROUND(3) asylum', for example, will bring documents in which the two words appear together separated by three words or less, in whatever order.

### TRUNCATION THROUGH WILDCARDS

So-called wildcards (for example, '\*', '?') serves as placeholders in a search. You can use them to replace either single characters (?) or a string of multiple characters (\*). Thus, if you enter the search expression 'behavi?r', different ways of spelling are being considered ('behaviour', 'behavior'). Similarly, a search for 'legis\*' will bring up results such as 'legislation', 'legislate', 'legislator'. Wildcards can also be combined with a phrase search to search for specific words within a collocation (such as 'to \* for asylum') (Austermuehl 2012; Enríquez Raído 2014).

### LIMITING THE SEARCH

A search can be limited to certain websites, domains, languages, file formats, text parts (such as definitions), and so on. Some possible search scenarios include the following.

- **Limiting to certain country top-level domains:**  
[site:fr]: only websites from France or  
[site:europa.eu]: only websites from EU institutions,
- **Limiting to a URL:**  
[inurl:]: The search words have to be part of the URL (internet address) of a webpage,
- **Limiting to visible texts only:**  
[intext:]: Limits the search to visible page content only (excluding keywords and other metadata),
- **Limiting to webpage titles:**  
[intitle:]: Limits the search to the title of a webpage,

- **Limiting to certain file types:**  
**[filetype:pdf]:** Searches only in PDF files,
- **Limiting to definitions:**  
**[define:asylum]:** Limits the search to websites that contain definitions. This can also be done using a 'what is' phrase search (Austermuehl 2012).

## RESEARCHING SYNONYMS AND ANTONYMS

Another way of searching for terms is by combining the term you are looking for with the words 'synonym' or 'antonym' (in English or in another language). To diversify and refine search results from dictionaries and other sources, search terms can also be combined with the additional keyword 'thesaurus'.

### Examples: *Thesaurus*



Thesaurus (English): <http://thesaurus.com>

The International Thesaurus of Refugee Terminology:  
<http://www.refugeethesaurus.org>

International Thesaurus of Refugee Terminology:  
<http://www.huridocs.org/2010/11/international-thesaurus-of-refugee-terminology>

## ARCHIVING SEARCH RESULTS

Archiving your search results for further use can be very useful, especially if you expect to work on similar assignments in the future.

You can easily save documents and texts as text files in separate folders. **Special archiving programs** allow the user to download complete websites, including all web pages that belong to the same site (such as WebResearch or Evernote). Other useful strategies include collecting frequently used websites in **link collections** and using the **bookmark feature** of your internet browser ('favourites').

Terminology or vocabulary lists can be managed, sorted, annotated and filtered according to certain criteria with **simple spreadsheet applications** (for example, Excel and Numbers).

**Dedicated terminology management systems** (for example, SDL MultiTerm, TermStar) allow you to archive researched information in a more comprehensive way. However, in order to use such systems properly you need to know about the basic principles of terminography and the proper handling of the respective terminology management system.

## Asylum Specific Information for Interpreting Assignments

### SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT ASYLUM

Interpreters working in asylum settings should be familiar with the asylum procedure in the host country and the specific vocabulary they need (see Unit 1 and Unit 2). To find appropriate multilingual information and terminology about asylum procedures, you can use material from a number of institutions, for example the British Refugee Council and the UNHCR.

#### Examples: Asylum Specific Information

##### Information and terminology:

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/glossary>

<http://www.unhcr.org>

<https://asylumineurope.org>

<https://easo.europa.eu>

##### Glossaries:

[https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-glossary\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-glossary_en)

[https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files\\_en?file=2020-09/interactive\\_glossary\\_6.o\\_final\\_version.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files_en?file=2020-09/interactive_glossary_6.o_final_version.pdf)

##### Links: Laws and opinions

<https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/Asyl/Fluechtlingsschutz/asylfluechtlingsschutz-node.html>

<http://www.asylumlawdatabase.eu/en>

<http://www.refworld.org>

Also see Unit 1 (Useful Links)

It is always useful to research specific information about the legal system of the country of origin in the respective language (for example, civil and criminal law). You may also find relevant information in the source and target language on governmental and non-governmental websites from other European countries. Nevertheless, you should use such information carefully and with circumspection. For example, it is particularly important to consider whether the information can be used in a specific legal situation in the target country. It is equally as important to ensure that the vocabulary and terminology used can be understood by the asylum-seeker.

### INFORMATION ABOUT COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

During interviews in an asylum setting, asylum-seekers are commonly asked to address topics which reflect specific events in their countries of origin. In situations like these, even experienced interpreters need more than just average general knowledge. Therefore, it is important for interpreters to familiarise themselves before their interpreting assignment with topics relating to the countries of origin in question and with the accompanying vocabulary. Such issues are often particularly important when it comes to assessing the credibility of an asylum applicant, and thus for the final outcome of the procedure. The following subject areas can be relevant to an interpreting assignment in an asylum setting (UNHCR 2009):

#### Theme group 1:

##### Circumstances in the country of origin

- Names of political and religious institutions and groups from the country of origin,
- Culture-specific terms for traditions, morals and customs from the country of origin,
- Terms relating to the legal system in the country of origin,
- Expressions for departments and authorities from the country of origin,
- Expressions for professions (professional titles),
- Expressions for professional ranks in government departments and the military,
- Specific military terms, in particular: military and paramilitary structures, groups and special forces; expressions for weapons and types of weapons.

*Example: An asylum applicant from Afghanistan claims that he served as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Afghan army. However, due to the lack of knowledge of the special military terms, the interpreter interprets that the asylum applicant was only a soldier in the Afghan army. Which problems could occur as a consequence of this interpretation?*

#### Theme group 2:

##### General language expressions and medical

**terminology** (often important: taboos, euphemisms, metaphors and profanities)

- Parts and organs of the human body,
- Diseases, injuries and mental illnesses,
- Medical and other types of treatment,
- Symptoms and ailments.

*Example: A Chechen asylum-seeker states that her medical condition is very poor and that she is not able to sleep, because the drugs which the psychiatrist prescribed had barely helped. She does not want to take the drugs regularly because she is afraid that she will become addicted to them. However, after a cupping treatment given by an alternative practitioner, the headache had got better for a while. She explains that during the treatment the bad blood was sucked out of her head and therefore eased the headache.*

### Theme group 3: Location and time

- Expressions for the time and location of an incident,
- Expressions for places and distances,
- Geographical information (countries, regions, areas, cities, mountains, rivers),
- Expressions for cultural assets of a country (such as monuments),
- Expressions for social, political and religious events.

*Example: A Kurdish asylum-seeker, a farmer by trade, refers to the date of a certain incident by saying 'at the beginning of the wheat harvest'.*

In addition to the sources mentioned above, country of origin information can be found on the following websites:

#### » Online-Databases

**The European Country of Origin Information Network** (ecoi.net) is an open-access online database containing information about countries of origin. The database, which is run by the Austrian Red Cross and currently offered in English and German, gathers, structures and processes publicly available, country of origin information with a focus on the needs of asylum lawyers, refugee councils and others involved in deciding on applications for asylum and other forms of international protection. The database regularly scans information about more than 160 countries from the United Nations and other international governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as different media outlets.

Other useful sources are the **ACCORD Training Handbook** and the website of the Red Cross EU Office (see below).

'**Refworld**' is also an online database containing country information from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Compared to other databases, Refworld also offers information gathered about legal documents and position papers. The site also allows users to search for specific topics such as 'statelessness', 'resettlement' and 'children'.

#### Examples: Online Databases for Information about Countries of Origin

ecoi.net: <http://www.ecoi.net>

Handbook ACCORD: <https://www.coi-training.net/handbook/Researching-Country-of-Origin-Information-2013-edition-ACCORD-COI-Training-manual.pdf>

Red Cross EU Office: <http://www.redcross.eu/en>

Refworld: <http://www.refworld.org>

#### » Media

Media reports (print media, radio, TV, internet) are also essential sources for finding information about events in the asylum-seeker's country of origin. Nevertheless, when doing research about such events, it is important to bear in mind that different information sources (especially from countries and regions where a war is going on) can reflect different social and political ideologies and opinions. Information from online blogs and internet forums have to be used particularly carefully, and so it is important to take note of more than one source of information for an event or incident. It is also important to consider the perspectives and opinions expressed in the different news sources, for example, when these are from different countries. Lists of media in foreign languages can be found on the following websites:

<http://www.onlinenewspapers.com>

<http://www.newspaperindex.com>

<http://www.listofnewspapers.com>



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(Accessed January 15 2022)





## Activities

### Activity 1: Asylum-related domain knowledge

1

**Form of activity:** Group discussion based on terminology example.

**Duration:** 15 minutes.

**Description:** In small groups, participants read the paragraph given below. They discuss which terms need to be researched and possible research methods to enable full understanding of the paragraph. They also discuss what would be the right terms in their target language(s). As an additional activity, participants can conduct research on immigration detention practices and the relevant terminology in their country and language(s) and discuss research methods and useful resources. Alternatively, you may want to use an example paragraph describing asylum-related practices in your country.

**Example: Immigration Detention in the UK**

The UK has one of the largest networks of immigration detention facilities in Europe. After the re-purposing of the Morton Hall prison as an immigration removal centre (IRC) in June 2011 and the opening of a short term holding facility at Larne House in North Ireland in July 2011, UK detention capacity expanded to approximately 3,500 places. As shown in Figure 1, over the past years there have been between 2,000 and 3,500 migrants detained at any given time. As a snapshot example, there were approximately 3,500 non-citizen detainees in UK facilities in any given time between September 2014 and September 2015. By December 2015 the number of people detained under Immigration Act Powers decreased to approximately 2,607, a change that the Home Office notes “may be partially attributable to the closure of the Dover IRC in October 2015 and changes to the detained fast track asylum process.

Source: The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford. 2016. Immigration Detention in the UK.

<http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/immigration-detention-in-the-uk> (Accessed January 15 2022)

### Activity 2: Researching culture-specific terminology

2

**Form of activity:** Working in small groups and presenting the results to the whole group.

**Duration:** 30 minutes (20 minutes group work, 10 minutes presentation).

**Description:** Some culture-specific terms are difficult to translate because they have two or more different meanings, or do not have corresponding concepts in other cultures. Below are some examples of such terms. Working in small groups, participants are asked to think of additional terms, like the ones in the example but from other countries and languages. The results of the group work are presented to all the participants.

**Examples\*:**

- *Amm* (عمّ): Arabic for ‘father’s brother’ (uncle on father’s side), ‘father-in-law’, and used by children to politely address parents’ male relatives or other male adults.
- *Khala* (خالّة): Arabic for ‘mother’s sister’ (aunt on mother’s side), ‘mother-in-law’, and used by children to politely address parents’ female relatives or other female adults.
- *Queen Mother*: traditional female leaders in West African countries.
- *Juju*: West African spiritual belief in magical power.

\* We kindly thank Alexandra Marics for providing examples.



### Activity 3: Collective terminology

3

**Form of activity:** Working in small groups and presenting results in front of the whole group.

**Duration:** 60 minutes (work might be continued at home, and results can be presented at a later stage).

**Description:** Participants work as a group to compile general asylum-related terms (for example, asylum application, asylum procedure, decision on the asylum application, complaint, appeal, primary care, subsidiary protection, and so on). This exercise can include terms that they have already researched or plan to research. Participants need to compile source and target language terms, definitions and information about the sources that they use. To avoid repetitions, the list of terms can be divided up and assigned to smaller groups.

When collecting the terminology, the participants should use the same file format (for example, Excel, Word, Google Docs), so that the collective work can later be sorted alphabetically.

Participants are asked to document how they have researched the terms and definitions, and the compiled lists should include the respective sources and the dates of the search.

After the terms have been collected, participants are asked to discuss which of the terms and definitions were easy to find, where they had difficulties and what reasons there might be for these difficulties (such as research technique or subject area). If there are terms that have been researched by more than one group, the groups can be asked to compare their results and discuss possible differences.

Following the presentation to the whole group, the terms can all be combined in a glossary, so that all participants have a long list of asylum-related terms at their disposal.

**Note:** The participants can also create bilingual or multilingual glossaries.

### Activity 4: Recognising when to ask for more information

4

**Form of activity:** Group discussion of case study.

**Duration:** 20 minutes.

**Description:** The participants should discuss how to react in a situation like the one in the example below. They should take into consideration any previous similar experiences they have had.

*Example*

*Interviewer: 'Why didn't you attend school?'*

*Asylum-seeker: 'I lost my youth to the gun.'*

*The interpreter does not understand and cannot interpret.*

Source: UNHCR. 2009. Interpreting in a Refugee Context.  
<http://www.refworld.org/docid/49b6314d2.html> (Accessed January 15 2022)





## Test yourself!



Are the following statements true or false? Explain why the statement is true or false.

1. I come from the same country as the asylum-seeker; therefore, I have sufficient knowledge and information about the country of origin.

True       False

2. Six years ago, I applied for asylum myself; therefore, I know how asylum law works.

True       False

3. I should probably not depend on information found on the internet.

True       False

4. I can use terms available in bilingual or multilingual glossaries without hesitation.

True       False

5. If there is no equivalent word in the target language, it is best to use the original from the source language.

True       False

## Unit 12:

# The Interpreter's Emotional Experience

Uta Wedam

Translation: Elfi Cagala

*"In language man's inner life materialises."*

(Norbert Elias)

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Participants will be able to

- » consider the psychodynamic aspects of interpreting;
- » understand the importance of "reflexive knowledge";
- » understand the significance of individual migration processes;
- » recognise the risks of role confusion;
- » understand the concepts of transference, countertransference and vicarious traumatisation;
- » discuss mental hygiene as well as preventive and quality assurance measures such as supervision, peer review and specialised training courses.



## Psychodynamic Aspects of Interpreting

Language is essential for human beings to be able to tell their story, to communicate and express themselves – and to be heard by others. Humans deprived of their communicative skills may experience a sense of voicelessness, accompanied by feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. Not **being able to communicate** with others diminishes their sense of being equal members of society capable of mutual understanding. For refugees and migrants in particular, communication is essential.

In order to ensure optimal communication with asylum-seekers with little or no command of the local language, interpreters are used. Providing well-trained interpreters is one of the challenges presented by asylum procedures. In fact, developing and implementing quality standards for this highly sensitive field is equally important for society as a whole. Interpreters are **bridge-builders** in terms of both language and culture, and interpreting is a multi-level, two-way process, which helps refugees and migrants make themselves heard by institutional representatives of the host society and vice versa.

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN INTERVIEWERS AND INTERPRETERS

The collaboration between interviewers and interpreters has a decisive influence on the communication process that takes place during the interview. The unique arrangement of communication in a **triangular setting** (applicant-interviewer-interpreter; see Units 2 and 9) results in an intermeshing of different **levels of communication and interaction**, whose highly complex nature should be borne in mind by interviewers and interpreters alike. The process of interpreting invariably involves several levels (cultural, emotional, etc.).

Among other things, **intrapersonal translation processes** will occur, such as assessing the interview in relation to the interpreter's own value system. Transference, countertransference and counterreaction are also phenomena that frequently impact on the outcome of the interview and therefore need to be taken into account.

All the factors and components influencing this relational

web, with all the persons present in the interview room acting both consciously and unconsciously, must be factored in. **Cultural interaction**, both cooperative and confrontational, takes place within this communicative situation. Each of the persons involved has a specific (conscious or unconscious) concept of culture (see Unit 10) and holds certain ideas, attributions, prejudices, judgements and views concerning the others and their respective cultures. The different social and cultural backgrounds from which the individuals involved come is part of professional and private life and leads to particular interpretations of behaviours and events. Hence, the

interpreter's personality (their identity, self-image, values, attitudes, and understanding of their role) is present in the interview, as are those of all others involved. As these factors have a bearing on the interpretation process, they need to be appreciated by all the participants in the interview, and an awareness of the complex make-up of this triad and "reflexive knowledge" should be integral to that collaboration. "Reflexive knowledge" (or "knowing how to know") includes general skills of reflection and basic knowledge to question assumptions, self-awareness and reflection, and knowing methods of obtaining knowledge.

#### FACT BOX

### *Intercultural Competence*

Interpreting is a highly complex activity, and asylum procedures in particular pose a challenge for interpreters, requiring cultural and intercultural competences in addition to their basic language and translation expertise (see Unit 10).

Intercultural competence consists of various skills, facilitating reflectiveness and agency where cultures overlap. It comprises a repertoire of cognitive knowledge and individual faculties. Intercultural competence is marked by ability to avail oneself of this cluster of skills in various cultural contexts in a way which is professional, appropriate to the situation and underpinned by ethical considerations (Simon-Hohm 2002).

### ROLE CONFUSION

The intricate nature of the interpreter's tasks can be seen in the large variety of **interdependent** (and potentially contradictory) **expectations** that they face (see Unit 4). Accordingly, both the interviewer and applicant make great demands on the interpreter, who bears a great amount of responsibility.

It is the task of interpreters to facilitate communication. As bridge-builders, they act as mediators between majority and minority groups, both in terms of language and culture. At the same time they are expected to be loyal, both to the institution by which they are employed and to their "compatriots".

Interpreters perceive this diverse set of expectations and demands as an unconscious appeal to their faculties, pressuring them to take on professional and personal responsibility. However, they are also **unconscious invitations to enter into a relationship** with the respective person. As a result, some interpreters **take sides with the asylum-seeker**, running the risk of building an unconscious "coalition" with them, particularly when both have the same cultural background. On the other hand, some interpreters

see themselves as "seasoned migrants" and tend to forge a **"coalition" with the interviewer**, usually in the role of a co-worker supporting the interviewer. This in turn undermines the applicant's sense of security and causes them to become suspicious (see Unit 4).

### TRANSFERENCE AND COUNTERTRANSFERENCE

Interviewing the asylum-seeker serves the purpose of gathering information and enabling assessment of their credibility (see Units 1 and 2). In addition to the applicant's personal data, the interviewer seeks to find out about the reasons for, and circumstances of, their flight. Asylum-seekers recount events from international crisis areas along with their own life stories, most of which are marked by suffering and loss. Hence interviewers and interpreters alike are inevitably confronted with suffering, emotional pain, intense feelings, and emotional outbursts. In many cases, this is associated with processes of transference and countertransference/counterreaction.

The concepts of transference and countertransference were originally developed within the theoretical framework

of psychoanalysis. They have since been adapted, and in some cases modified, by almost all schools of psychotherapy. **Transference processes** play a key role in human relationships. In therapy, these processes – emotions projected onto the therapist by the client – are analysed and brought to a conscious level. The concept of **countertransference**, on the other hand, refers to the therapist's conscious and unconscious reactions to the client, which are incorporated into the therapeutic process and which may also be described as **counterreaction**.

In human relationships, these phenomena are inextricably linked. In the process of communication, we inevitably trigger unconscious feelings in others taking part which are part of our own personal history. Accordingly, some of the asylum-seeker's intense emotions may communicate themselves to their interlocutors. It is the interpreter, sharing the applicant's mother tongue, who is particularly susceptible to these emotions in the triadic setting of the asylum interview. Countertransference and counterreaction give rise to a wide variety of immediate **emotional reactions**, which are associated with past or present life situations. For example, the interpreter may **remember or re-experience events related to their personal life**. They may also use **various forms of defence mechanisms** such as repressing, and hence meeting with disbelief, the story told by the asylum-seeker. There is a particular risk of the interpreter falling back on these defence mechanisms when they are dealing with refugees who recount extremely traumatising experiences, most of which are associated with extreme violence. This may result in **empathic distress**, followed by a refusal to empathise, pretending that such horrible events are "simply unbelievable".

As these unconscious and entangled processes may have a bearing on the interpretation, the interpreter must be aware of, and reflect on, the dynamics of transference, so as to be able to control them, thus appreciating their own intense emotions and ensuring quality of interpretation. Recognising and consciously dealing with these phenomena allows the interpreter to distance themselves from the situation, so as to protect themselves and avoid vicarious traumatising. Achieving this distance therefore requires an immediate examination of, and confrontation with, one's own emotions, instead of repressing or denying them (Bahadir 2007).

## VICARIOUS TRAUMATISATION

Refugees are faced with extremely difficult situations. Many of them are under constant stress caused by everyday problems, fear, uncertainty, humiliation and frustration, which makes them even more vulnerable. These conditions may also affect professionals working with asylum-seekers, giving rise to **parallel phenomena**. Symptoms of vicarious traumatising are an equally normal response to working in such a demanding environment.

The **risk of vicarious traumatising** is highest for people **dealing with victims suffering from direct traumatising**. Being confronted with their fates and experiences also affects the emotions of professional helpers. Interpreters, too, are confronted with, and required to translate, accounts of traumatising situations or depressing and tragic life stories. Depending on their personal involvement and identification with the asylum-seekers' problems, interpreters may be affected by vicarious traumatising.

The psychological distress experienced by many interpreters repeating such stories manifests itself in a wide variety of phenomena and symptoms:

- **Parallel phenomena**, that is, emotional symptoms similar to the victim's problems, such as feelings of powerlessness and helplessness, anger, feelings of guilt and shame or despondency
- **Physical symptoms of stress** such as sleep disorders, exhaustion and fatigue, emotional restlessness, nervousness and tension
- **Extreme consequences**, for example, mental or physical illness such as hypertension, heart attack or stroke
- **Shattering of the interpreter's self-image and conception of the world**, that is, shaken values and no longer perceiving the world as a safe place.

## THE INTERPRETER'S OWN MIGRATION PROCESSES

Most interpreters who work with asylum-seekers and have no training in interpreting are migrants or refugees themselves, and interpreting in asylum interviews causes them to re-experience their own migration process. Being faced with **personal experiences and problems associated with migration** may also compromise their performance as interpreters.

These psychological and ethnic aspects will have a general and unconscious influence upon the interpreter's work, turning it into a highly demanding task. Being aware of one's own role, position and potential conflicts (see Units 4 and 5) is essential for professional reflection. This means that in order to ensure effective performance, reflection on these issues should be integral to interpreters' work, which will assure professional quality and, even more importantly, protect interpreters themselves.

## COPING WITH EMOTIONAL STRESS AND MENTAL HYGIENE

The above observations illustrate, on various levels, the psychological issues and challenges faced by interpreters working with asylum-seekers and migrants. In order to maintain their fitness for work and protect their own health, interpreters must be able to deal with situations of emotional stress and possible conflicts in a mindful and responsible way. Taking care of their own mental hygiene ensures the interpreters' **expert handling** of emotionally taxing interpreting tasks.

**Mental hygiene** falls into the area of mental health, within the field of preventive health care. It describes all **measures** aimed at protecting, preserving, and improving the mental health of human beings by taking care of one's own **physical, mental and social well-being**. There are various options for coping effectively with emotional stress. For example, the interpreter may develop a number of **personal strategies** intended to "nurture their inner self" (see also Unit 9 on potential strategies to be employed during the asylum interview):

- *talking about distressing events*
- *asking for help*
- *maintaining supportive relationships*
- *relaxing (for example: meditation, going for a walk or using the imagination)*
- *being active, physical exercise*
- *being creative, having new experiences*
- *learning something new*
- *accepting oneself*
- *crying*
- *imagining oneself in a safe and happy place*

In any case, it is essential that the interpreter be aware of and explore their intense emotions, as this exploration is a prerequisite for detachment and guaranteeing professional handling of stressful situations. (Bahadir 2007, 224-225, referring to the fact that in most cases this professional distance only extends to the intellectual level, while it is impossible for the interpreter to avoid a certain form of involvement, which can only be repressed and usually finds expression at the physical level.)

On the other hand, institutions working with emotionally distressed or, particularly, traumatised people should offer their employees a number of supportive measures ensuring mental hygiene and professional reflection on a continuous basis. **Specific concepts** such as peer review, supervision and specialised training courses focussing on crisis intervention or trauma, traumatisation processes, and trauma consequences can help assure the quality of performance of language and cultural mediators.



### FACT BOX

#### *Supervision, Peer Review*

**Supervision:** Professional supervision is mainly concerned with enhancing the supervisees' professional skills by enabling them to better cope with their job. This is achieved by reflecting on professional issues supported by supervisors. The aim is to review and optimise professional behaviours and methods and to (further) develop the practitioners' professional role and identity. Examining these issues together with their supervisors in a reflective process is intended to help the supervisees rediscover and/or use, or even enhance, their skills and strengths.

**Peer review:** Exchange of experience among practitioners sharing the same professional background. Professional situations and cases are reviewed and discussed based on the participants' practice.





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Mothertongue. Multi-ethnic counselling and listening service.  
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Muller, Robert T. 2013. "Vicarious Trauma and the Professional Interpreter: An interpreter shares her experiences." *Psychology Today*.  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/talking-about-trauma/201308/vicarious-trauma-and-the-professional-interpreter>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)

RCC. Dublin Rape Crisis Centre. *Interpreting in Situations of Sexual Violence and other Trauma: A Handbook for Community Interpreters*.  
<https://www.translatorsassociation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Dublin-Rape-Crisis-Centre-Interpreting-in-Situations-of-Sexual-Violence-and-other-Trauma.-A-handbook-for-community-interpreters-2008DRCC-Interpreting-in-situations-of-sexual-violence.pdf>  
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Resiliency Resources. *Training for Interpreters*.  
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<http://voice-of-love.org/why-the-voice-of-love>  
(Accessed January 15 2022)



## Activities

### Activity 1: Becoming aware of one's own migration processes

1

**Form of activity:** Participants work in groups of two before discussing their experiences in plenary.

**Duration:** 45 minutes (20 minutes for work in groups of two, 25 minutes for plenary session).

**Description:** Using the guided fantasy technique, participants are asked to imagine a situation that they found difficult to cope with after arriving in a new country. The guided fantasy technique provides a framework for the process, requiring no (overly) extensive description of the problem but a single image that symbolises many things. Usually, various levels (personal, political, social, etc.) are addressed in the process, resulting in a matrix of problems with which interpreters having a migrant or refugee background are repeatedly confronted. It highlights the topics and issues that the participants have difficulties handling. All images reflect conflicts that need to be identified and discussed. One aim of the analysis is to understand the complex nature of the situation, so as to find appropriate ways of dealing with it.

Participants are then asked to share their image with one of the other participants before presenting, and drawing up a list of, the main aspects of their discussion in a plenary session.

### Activity 2: Trauma/Confrontation with victims of trauma and their experiences

2

**Form of activity:** Participants work individually and subsequently discuss their findings in plenary.

**Duration:** 60 minutes (20 minutes for individual work, 40 minutes for plenary session).

**Description:** All participants are asked to write down a story depicting the encounter with a person who has been in a traumatic situation and talked about their experience. The aim is for the participants to describe and express the emotions caused by this event. Their stories are then read out in plenary and all interpreters join forces to discuss possible ways of handling such feelings in future.





## Test yourself!



**Please answer the following questions and compare your answers with the topics discussed in Unit 12.**

1. What does “reflexive knowledge” mean?
2. What is “intercultural competence”?
3. What examples of role confusion in the asylum interview can you think of?
4. Why is it important to be aware of the dynamics engendered by transference phenomena?
5. What symptoms may be caused by “vicarious traumatisation”?

# Unit 13:

## Distance interpreting in asylum proceedings

Ivana Havelka, Katia Iacono, Sonja Pöllabauer & Ursula Stachl-Peier<sup>1)</sup>

*"I missed the personal contact. [Normally] I first shake hands with people when I arrive."*  
(Comment of an interpreter; Korak, 2010: 143; our translation)

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

- » describe different types of remote interpreting;
- » understand the specific challenges of remote interpreting;
- » know what technologies are needed for different remote interpreting constellations and scenarios;
- » identify the specific skills and competencies needed for remote interpreting;
- » select suitable strategies to tackle the challenges of remote interpreting.

### FACT BOX

**Distance interpreting, remote interpreting, teleconference interpreting, videoconference interpreting, video remote interpreting, telephone interpreting, over-the-phone interpreting:**

#### Definitions

There are various and sometimes contradictory definitions of these terms.

**Distance interpreting** is used as a superordinate term covering all types of Information and communications technology (ICT)-enabled interpreting of a distant speaker (Constable 2015).

**Remote interpreting** (RI) "refers to the use of communication technology for gaining access to an interpreter who is in another room, building, city or country and who is linked to the primary participants by telephone or videoconference." (Braun, 2015b, 346).

The terms distance interpreting and remote interpreting are often used synonymously.

**Teleconference Interpreting** covers both telephone and videoconference communication (Braun, 2015a, 352).



<sup>1)</sup> "We would like to thank our colleagues from the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees for their valuable comments and the pictures they have contributed."

**Videoconference interpreting** (VCI) refers to interpreting in a setting whereby the participants themselves are distributed across two or more sites, and the interpreter is located at one of these sites and connected via video link. (Avidicus, n.d.).

**Video remote interpreting** refers to the use of video links to gain access to an interpreter in another room, building, town, city or country. (Avidicus, n.d.). The term is also sometimes used synonymously with VCI.

**Video-mediated interpreting** (VMI) is used as a cover term for VCI and VRI. (Avidicus, n.d.)

**Telephone interpreting** and **over-the-phone interpreting** refer to interpreting by telephone; **audio-mediated interpreting** (AMI) covers telephone interpreting and interpreting via video technology when the video has been deactivated and only auditory information is available.

#### **From telephone to distance interpreting**

The first remote interpreters relied primarily on telephones which were available almost everywhere and required little technical know-how and adaptation. With the growth of ICT and increased access to computers and the internet, video remote interpreting (VRI) became more widespread (see Braun, 2019).

Telephone interpreting is easy to implement but has the major drawback that interpreters have no access to non-verbal clues which often constitute a vital part of the message. Video-mediated interpreting transmits visual information, yet also requires more advanced technical equipment and familiarity with communication technologies.

## **The development of distance interpreting**

Distance interpreting is not a new phenomenon. The development of DI was first supported by **supranational multilingual institutions** which saw it as a way of overcoming linguistic and logistical problems. The first international conference to use RI was organised by UNESCO in 1976 and linked the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, where the simultaneous interpreters were located, with a conference centre in Nairobi (Braun 2015a). Subsequently, trials were also organised by the United Nations and the European Parliament. Several studies were conducted (see Moser-Mercer, 2003, Mouzourakis, 1996, 2003) to assess the physiological and technical challenges of RI and their impact on performance quality. They found that RI entailed a greater mental load which resulted in faster fatigue and decline in performance. Recent research suggests, however, that with the improvements in technology, RI is no longer perceived as more stressful or detrimental to quality (Seeber et al., 2019: 301).

### **RI IN LEGAL AND HEALTHCARE SETTINGS**

Increased migration and the recognition that interpreting was a vital element in adequate judicial and healthcare provision created an enormous growth in the demand for interpreting. Many countries, however, struggled to meet the surge in demand. Apart from the considerable

cost of face-to-face interpreting provision, they also had difficulties finding qualified interpreters for the 'new' migrant languages in some geographical areas (see Connell 2006: 312). The use of remote interpreting presented a cost-efficient alternative enabling authorities to provide interpreting services anywhere in the country (see also Havelka 2018).

In **legal settings**, RI was first used in the United States. Initially, interpreters relied mainly on telephone interpreting, which was gradually replaced by video remote interpreting as video technology became more widely available.

In Europe, the legal basis for the use of RI in legal procedures is the European Directive on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings (2010/64/EU), and the Directive 2012/29/EU of the *European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA*. These mention RI as a possible modality, yet do not elaborate details of how and when it may be used.

The viability of RI in legal proceedings was examined in, amongst others, three AVIDICUS projects which were carried out between 2008 and 2016 (see USEFUL LINKS,

see also Braun 2015a, Devaux 2017). The findings suggest a more rapid decline in interpreter performance which can be at least partly remedied through training and the use of advanced equipment (Braun 2015a: 347, Salaets/Brône, 2020).

Access to qualified interpreters in less widely used languages, interpreting provision in remote regions and cost efficiency were also driving factors for the introduction of RI in **healthcare settings** (see also Ozolins 2011, Braun 2019).

The impact of RI on interpreter performance and the acceptance of RI by interpreters, healthcare staff and patients have been investigated in several studies which have, however, produced inconclusive results. While some found that patients' and doctors' satisfaction with RI was the same as with face-to-face interpreting, other findings indicated a preference for in-person interpreting (see Kelly and Pöchhacker, 2015).

## UNIVERSAL ACCEPTANCE

Despite the widespread use of RI in some domains and its growing popularity, many interpreters, as well as interpreters' associations, were long doubtful as to whether RI could provide the same standard of quality as face-to-face interpreting. There were also fears that a lack of protocols and regulations on working conditions would lead to harmful impacts on those that used the service. The development of new and better technologies helped to allay some of these misgivings, yet in many countries, RI continued to be viewed as a second-rate substitute that was acceptable in emergency situations, such as natural disasters (see Kelly 2008, Rogl 2011) and public health crises (see EASO 2020), but which was to be discouraged in regular practice. The final breakthrough for RI came in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic when RI was often the only mode of interpreting delivery that was available.

## INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND CODES OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Over the last few years, a series of standards and codes of professional practice has been developed to provide guidance on best practice. These include *ISO 13611:2014 Interpreting – Guidelines for Community interpreting*, *ISO 20228:2019 Interpreting services - Legal interpreting – Requirement*, *ISO 21998:2020 Interpreting services - Healthcare interpreting – Requirements and recommendation*, and

*the Guidelines for Remote Interpreting*, published by AIIC (*Association Internationale des Interprètes des Conférences/International Organisation of Conference Interpreters*) in 2019.

## DI IN ASYLUM PROCEEDINGS

In asylum proceedings, remote interpreting has been used since the 1990s when videoconferencing was trialled in the US and Australia in refugee claim hearings (Federman, 2006: 434; see also Ellis, 2004).

In Europe, the recommendation generally used to be to use face-to-face interpreting in personal interviews. Some countries made exceptions and allowed remote interpreting with applicants who were in detention or in remote reception centres, or when no professional interpreter was available on-site (EASO, 2020: 5). Some countries permitted only video-based interpreting since telephone interpreting was not seen as sufficiently safe to guarantee confidentiality and data protection.

The situation has changed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic when many interviews were suspended because of health concerns. Several EU states consequently started to explore the use of remote interpreting (ibid). Based on their experience with VRI, EASO, the European Asylum Support Office, drew up guidelines in relation to technical aspects, security and confidentiality considerations as well as procedural safeguards (EASO 2020; see also UNHCR 2020).

## RESEARCH INTO THE USE OF RI IN ASYLUM PROCEEDINGS

To date, only a few studies have examined the use of RI in asylum proceedings. Licoppe/Verdier (2013), Licoppe/Veyrier (2017, 2020) and Licoppe/Boéri (2021) investigated conversation coordination and turn allocation in asylum hearings and found that interpreters found it more difficult to ensure that applicants were given the floor and tended to replace gaze orientation with verbal instructions. Problems in turn allocation were, however, at times viewed as obtrusive by judges or misunderstood as disorderly conduct (see also below) or made the interpreter appear as a kind of facilitator. Eagly et al. (2018) analysed asylum adjudication in family detention and concluded that remote interpreting reduces mutual trust and understanding and makes cultural difference in non-verbal communication more salient.



## FACT BOX

**Guidelines**

- AIIC (2019): Guidelines for Remote Interpreting
- EASO (2020): EASO Practical recommendations on conducting the personal interview remotely
- UNHCR (2020). Selbstcheck für Einvernahmen und Verhandlungen unter Verwendung technischer Einrichtungen zur Wort- und Bildübertragung im Asylverfahren

**Standards**

- ISO 13611:2014 Interpreting – Guidelines for community interpreting. International Organization for Standardization.
- ISO 20228:2019 Interpreting services – Legal interpreting – Requirements. International Organization for Standardization.
- ISO 21998:2020 Interpreting services – Healthcare interpreting – Requirements and recommendations. International Organization for Standardization.
- DIN 8578 Konsekutives Ferndolmetschen – Anforderungen und Empfehlungen. Deutsches Institut für Normung.

**Directives**

- European Directive on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings (2010/64/EU)
- Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA

**RJ training courses and materials**

- University of Surrey, Interpreting MA (<https://www.surrey.ac.uk/postgraduate/interpreting-ma>)  
The programme includes video-mediated and telephone interpreting modules.
- Zertifikatskurs zum Dolmetschen mit neuen Medien (<https://www.postgraduatecenter.at/weiterbildungsprogramme/kommunikation-medien/dolmetschen-mit-neuen-medien-cai-tools-telefon-und-videodolmetschen/>)  
Postgraduate course specialising in technology-mediated interpreting. The course is delivered in German.
- SHIFT (n.d.): SHaping the Interpreters of the Future and of Today (<https://www.shiftinorality.eu/en/project>)  
SHIFT in Orality was an Erasmus+ 3-year project funded by the European Commission which developed resources for training in remote interpreting in Higher Education and Lifelong Learning.



## DISTANCE INTERPRETING AND FACE-TO-FACE INTERPRETING: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Many of the challenges posed by remote interpreting are similar to those encountered in face-to-face interpreting. For both, interpreters require an excellent knowledge of their working languages, advanced text and intercultural competencies and a high level of interpreting skills, as well as psychosocial competence and good research skills (see Unit 3).

The specific challenges of remote interpreting are linked to the **limitations and constraints of technology-mediated communication**. To overcome these, interpreters need to develop additional sets of skills, including advanced **digital competencies** and the **flexibility to adapt their interpreting strategies and procedures** to the more demanding working conditions of RI, in order to minimise **physical and mental stress**.

## COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AND TYPES OF REMOTE INTERPRETING

The last three decades have seen the evolution of a multitude of communication technologies that can be used to provide distance interpreting. As new technologies have become available, the scope and application scenarios of DI have widened.

The terminology used to denote the various DI constellation types is not always consistent (cf. Braun & Taylor, 2012a, Havelka 2018). Generally, though, typologies use as their basis either the location of the interpreter (e.g. remote

interpreting, teleconference interpreting), the type of communication technology that is being employed (e. g. audio interpreting, video interpreting) or the location of the interpreter and the participants in relation to each other (e.g. interpreting via remote link) (see also Braun and Taylor, 2012a: 34)

## INTERPRETING HUBS

Remote interpreters can work from anywhere where they have access to the necessary communication technology. Workspaces that are specifically equipped for remote interpreting are called **hubs**.

Depending on their location and the available technical equipment (see FACT BOX Equipment), a distinction is made between **permanent** and **temporary hubs**:

- **Permanent hubs** are studios fitted with all the necessary teleconferencing equipment and supporting infrastructure. They can be located on-site (in-house) or off-site. **In-house hubs** are located inside the premises of the client that has commissioned the interpreters. **Off-site hubs** are either hubs that were installed by the client outside their premises for the purpose of RI or hubs that are hired by the client for the duration of an RI meeting.
- **Temporary hubs** are set up for the duration of the assignment, either by the client or by interpreters. Temporary hubs may not meet data protection and safety regulations (see FACT BOX Data protection and safety regulations) and their use is therefore not recommended (and may not be legally permitted) for asylum proceedings.

### FACT BOX

#### *Data protection and safety regulations*

To protect the participants' data safety, interpreters must

- comply with data protection regulations (e.g. Regulation (EU) 2016/679, the General Data Protection Regulation of the EU);
- not record remote interpreted conversations, or parts of it, without the prior consent of all participants. If a conversation is recorded, the rights of all copyright owners must be protected;
- ensure that no unauthorized persons are present and can listen in on the conversation. This is particularly important when interpreters are not working in in-house hubs;
- ensure, by using password protection, that no unauthorised person has access to stored data.
- comply with the code of professional practice (see Unit 5);
- immediately inform the data protection officer or agency if they lose any technical equipment such as a laptop, mobile phone or other devices they have used for RI.



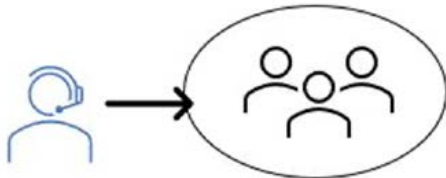
## Virtual space and possible constellations

Distance interpreting in asylum proceedings can take place in a variety of different constellations. A constellation here refers to the distribution of the primary participants (applicant, interviewer or judge) and the interpreter across the virtual space.

- All primary participants are in the same premises, either in the same room or in different rooms; the interpreters are in a different location and are connected via video or telephone link;
- The interpreters are in the same premises as one or more of the primary participants; other participants are linked via video or audio conference technology;
- All primary participants and the interpreters are in different rooms which may be located in the same or different premises. All are linked via video or audio conferencing technology.

Each constellation presents a different scenario and places different constraints on the interpreter's scope for action.

### Constellation 1: Interpreter located at remote site



In the first scenario, the **primary participants** are **all in the same location**, while the interpreter is at a different location and works via video link or audio link.

#### How does this DI constellation differ from a face-to-face setting?

- The interpreter can hear and see only what is relayed via the video or audio link and has very limited access to contextual (aural and visual) information.
- Generally, the video or audio link is established on-demand, immediately before the interpreter's services are required. The interpreter, therefore, has no or very little information about the content of the conversation or discussion that took place before he or she was linked in.

#### What are the benefits of this constellation?

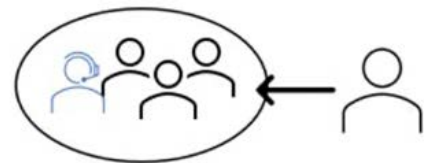
- Interpreters working from their own premises have greater flexibility and do not need to travel;
- Access to interpretation is also available in remote and inaccessible locations and for less widely spoken languages. Moreover, interpreting can take place in settings where risks to the safety of participants (e.g. risk of infection) would normally prevent the presence of an interpreter;

- Primary participants and/or the interpreter can remain anonymous if the video is not used;
- Interpreters can connect a second screen to their computer to consult terminology databases (see Unit 11).

#### How can interpreters ensure good quality DI?

- Interpreters must ensure that the communication technology they employ and their work environment comply with data protection and data security regulations;
- Interpreters must possess the digital competencies necessary to efficiently manage the communication technology. They must know what to do should the technology fail and either be able to remedy technical problems themselves or know whom to contact when using the client's hub. Should video technology fail, they should know how to deliver over-the-phone interpreting, provided the latter is a legally permissible alternative;
- When using VRI, interpreters should ensure that all primary participants are visible on the screen;
- Interpreters working over the phone must develop specific strategies to compensate for the lack of visual information.

### Constellation 2: Interpreter on-site with primary participant(s)



In this scenario, the interpreter is on-site with one or more of the primary participants; other participants are linked via video or audio conference technology. If the interpreter is in the same location as the applicant, it is recommended (or may be legally required) that a representative of the authorities also be present with them. This prevents undue alignment between the interpreter and the applicant.

#### How does this DI constellation differ from a face-to-face setting?

- Interpreters are present on-site. They have access to contextual information, hear and see everything that goes on in the room and can react accordingly;
- Audio- or video-linked participants are connected one by one.

### What are the benefits of this constellation?

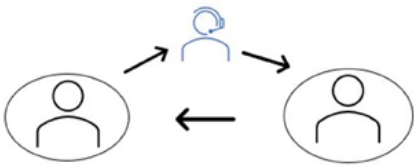
- Interpreters have sufficient time to prepare for the assignment;
- Access to interpretation is enabled across long distances and in situations where risk of infection or stricter security regulations would otherwise prevent participants' attendance.

### How can interpreters ensure good quality DI?

- Interpreters should ensure that they are visible for the remote participant;
- Technical support should be available on-site for rapid troubleshooting.

### Constellation 3: Multi-point conferencing

All primary participants and the interpreter are at different locations and are linked via video or audio conferencing technology.



### How does this RI constellation differ from a face-to-face setting?

- All participants and the interpreter have the same – limited – access to contextual (visual and aural) information;
- Conversation management and the coordination of turn-taking become increasingly difficult as more participants are connected.

### What are the benefits of this constellation?

- This constellation permits great flexibility since all participants can be at different locations and linked via videoconferencing technology;
- All participants are visible;
- Interpreters can connect a second screen to their computer to consult terminology databases (see Unit 11).

### How can interpreters ensure good quality DI?

- For successful multi-point conferencing it is essential that all participants comply with conversation rules. Ideally, a protocol should be established in advance and communicated to all participants at the beginning of the session.

## COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS

Remote interpreting is complex and cognitively demanding. In RI settings, interpreters do not have access to the same amount of contextual information as they would have if they were on-site. To facilitate their task

and help ensure successful communication, a protocol should be agreed before the session which specifies rules for conversation management and turn-taking and also outlines what is to be done if technical problems arise. This protocol should address the following questions:

- Who introduces the primary participants and presents their roles and functions?
- Who ends the conversation?
- What should be done in case of technical problems?
- Who checks that all participants can hear and understand each other?
- What cues will be used to manage turn-taking?
- What will be done with written documents that are exhibited during the conversation?
- How will the sight-translation of the interview transcript be organised?
- Will participants that do not hold the floor be muted? If they are, when and how will they be muted?

These rules can be explained by the interviewer or institutional representative to all participants at the beginning of the session.

### Verbal and nonverbal communication

For effective communication, interlocutors need access to both **verbal** and **nonverbal information**. Nonverbal information includes visual cues, such as body language, eye contact and gaze, as well as **paraverbal cues**, such as pitch, tone of voice and stress (see below).

In remote interpreting, the sensory perception is limited: **Visual cues** are often not relayed or not clearly visible on the screen. Even paraverbal cues may be difficult to perceive when the internet or telephone connection is poor.

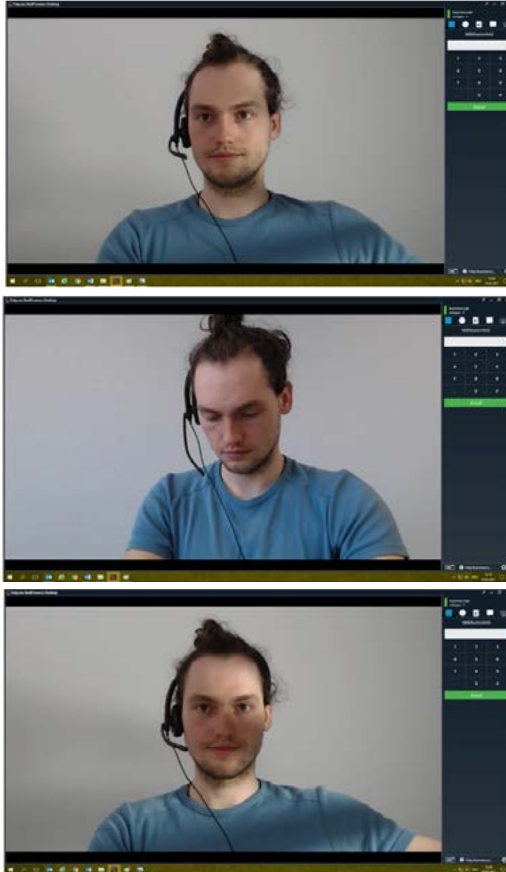
The absence of non-verbal information increases the cognitive load on interpreters, making their task even more taxing.

### Eye contact and gaze orientation

Eye contact and gaze orientation (i.e. where participants look) play an important part in interpreted communication. In face-to-face interpreting, eye contact can convey understanding, affiliation and solidarity which facilitates the building of trust (cf. Braun et al., 2016: 30ff; Davitti 2015, see also Unit 2). Gaze orientation is used to indicate the wish to communicate (cf. Knapp and Hall, 2006: 296), to coordinate interaction and allocate speaking turns (see Unit 6). Both eye contact and gaze are also powerful backchannelling devices for demonstrating listeners' interest, attention and empathy.

In remote interpreting, eye contact and gaze orientation are less perceptible (in telephone interpreting they are completely unavailable, see below) and therefore less useful as a resource for conversation management (cf. Braun & Taylor, 2012b: 97).

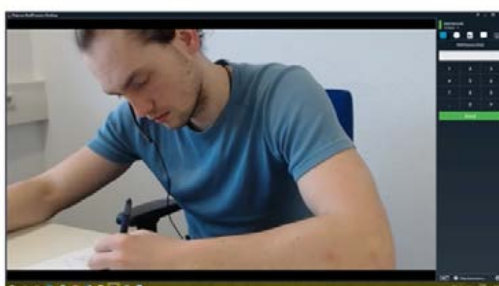
**Photo 1-3: Camera positions and perception of eye-contact** (© BAMF/Kaźmierczak)



Web cameras are usually positioned either at the top or at the bottom of the screen. When interlocutors (or interpreters) look at their audience on the screen, they do not look into the camera and so do not establish direct eye contact with their listeners (cf. Havelka, 2018: 133). As a result, gaze cues that are employed to coordinate the conversation or assign speaking turns are often missed by the participants.

To make gaze orientation more visible and create the perception of eye contact, the camera should be placed at eye-level midway on the screen (see DIN 8578, 5.4.2).

**Photo 4: Lack of eye contact when the interpreter takes notes** (© BAMF/Kaźmierczak)



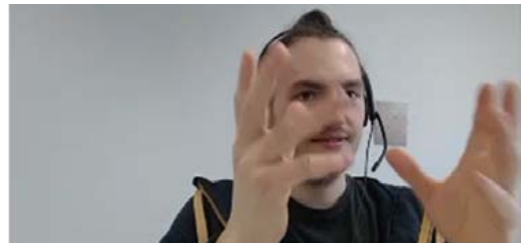
### Body language

Body language, such as body posture, facial expressions, lip movements, gestures, head movements, etc., constitutes an essential part of the message helping interpreters understand nuances of meaning and resolve ambiguities. Often, body language replaces verbal language: for instance, a wave of the hand can signal “hello” or “good-bye”. Body language signals can also be used as backchannelling cues: head movements (nodding, shaking), for example, can be employed to indicate agreement and disagreement.

In remote interpreting, such nonverbal components are often not captured by the camera, or they are difficult to make out on the screen when the quality of the connection is poor (cf. BAMF, 2020b).

**Photo 5: Indistinct mimicry**

(© BAMF/Kaźmierczak)

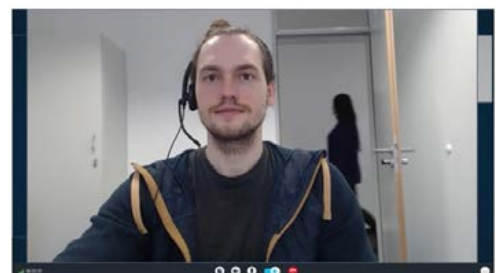


### Contextual information

Cameras also often fail to capture contextual information, for instance, a wheelchair or a leg injury, which interpreters would need for a full understanding of the interaction. Participants must therefore be reminded of the importance of mutual visibility and ensure that all relevant information is visible to all interlocutors and the interpreter (see DIN 8578, 5.4.1).

This, of course, does not apply in situations where the privacy or safety of one or several participants needs to be protected.

**Photo 6: Anonymity and private sphere are not protected**



### Absence of visual information in telephone interpreting

Telephone interpreting conveys none of the visual cues that normally facilitate comprehension and assist communication, making it even more challenging and cognitively demanding than video-mediated interpreting.

Remote interpreters, therefore, need to pay particular attention to **paraverbal communication** components which can offer information about how an utterance is to be understood. Paraverbal components are pitch, tone of voice, stress (emphasis on certain syllables or words in a phrase or sentence) and silences. However, even paraverbal components may not always be clearly perceptible when, for example, the line or mobile phone reception is poor and voices sound distorted or foreign.

Interpreters will also need to consider how they can effectively replace visual backchannelling cues through verbal cues, e.g. using “I see”, “right” or “I understand” instead of nodding (cf. Havelka, 2018: 303).

Because of these limitations, it is recommended that telephone interpreting should be used only for short assignments and for conversations addressing less complex subject matters (cf. BAMF, 2020a).

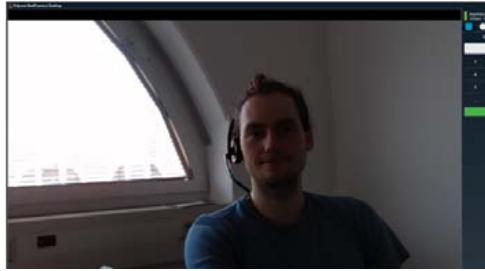
## DIGITAL COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

Remote interpreters need a wide range of digital competencies to ensure a smooth workflow and, thereby, efficient communication. Some of these competencies involve general digital skills, such as the ability to use computer-assisted technical tools ahead of and during an assignment (see Computer-assisted Interpreting Tools). In addition, remote interpreters need to know what technology is required for different types and constellations of RI. They need to be able to operate the equipment and know how they can adapt their interpreting techniques to the requirements of the chosen technology. They must also be able to create a working environment in their own or their client's premises where they are not distracted by external noises or other activities (see FACT BOX External and internal stress factors). If they cannot

lock the hub, they should hang a “Do not disturb” sign on the door. They must also consider their positioning and lighting and ensure that the light faces them and is not behind them. And they must ensure that no personal objects distract from the interpreter (see also AUSIT n.d.).

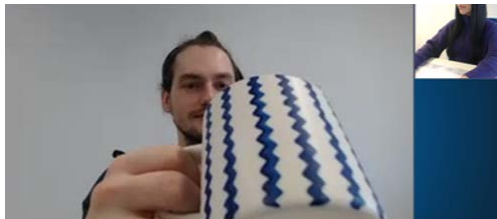
### Photo 7: Incorrect positioning of lighting

(© BAMF/Kaźmierczak)



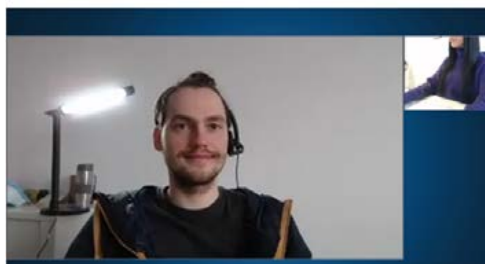
### Photo 8: Private objects distracting from the interpreter

(© BAMF/Kaźmierczak)



### Photo 9: Light behind the interpreter

(© BAMF/Kaźmierczak)





## FACT BOX

## Equipment

- **For video-mediated interpreting, you will need:**
  - a fast and powerful computer with at least a 20-inch screen;
  - a second screen for viewing terminology databases or online information searches (e.g. geographical data);
  - an interpreting console or software-based interface;
  - a headset with cable (USB) connection to the console;
  - a stable and fast LAN connection;
  - a webcam with HD resolution;
  - an ergonomic workspace;
  - plus optionally, a digital pen or tablet with recording and note-taking functionalities.
  
- **For audio-mediated Interpreting you will need:**
  - Either**
    - a fast and powerful computer from which a videoconference platform can be accessed, even if only the audio and chat functions are used;
    - an interpreting console or software-based interface;
    - a headset with boom microphone;
  - or**
    - a fixed-line telephone or a mobile telephone.

## FACT BOX

## Computer-assisted Interpreting Tools

Computer-assisted Interpreting Tools (CAI) are tools that assist interpreters ahead of, during and after an assignment. Glossary management tools facilitate the creation of terminological databases and enable quick searches during the session. A digital pen (see Orlando, 2010; Orlando & Hlavac, 2020) or tablet with recording and note-taking functionalities allows interpreters to record speech as they take notes. The interpreters then produce a simultaneous consecutive, that is, they listen to the recording and interpret simultaneously while also consulting their notes.

## DIGITAL COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

The following list is based on the Digital Competence Framework 2.0 (DigComp2; cf. EU 2018) of the European Union and defines the key components of digital skills for interpreters in five areas (cf. Havelka, 2020).

### 1 Information and data literacy:

Distance interpreters need to be able to

- locate and retrieve digital data and assess the relevance and accuracy of terminological information;
- select and use appropriate terminology and data management systems.

### 2 Communication and collaboration:

Distance interpreters need to be able to

- extract relevant information from aural and visual sources;
- interact through digital technologies and coordinate interaction in RI settings;
- adapt interpreting strategies to the requirements of the communication technology that is being used;
- use computer-assisted interpreting tools.

### 3 Digital content creation:

Distance interpreters need to be able to

- understand how different types of digital content can be used and integrated into an existing body of knowledge while understanding how copyright and licences are to be applied;
- know how to use digital functionalities in order to improve interpreting performance, e.g. activate 'selfie' mode for self-monitoring during an assignment.

### 4 Safety:

Distance interpreters need to be able to

- protect devices, content, personal data and privacy in digital environments.
- protect physical and psychological health.
- be aware of the need for digital well-being through, for example, using peer feedback or supervision and ensuring that there is sufficient time for recovery (see also Unit 12).

### 5 Problem solving:

Distance interpreters need to be able to

- identify their own and others' gaps in digital and technological knowledge and to suggest remedies.

## RI AND STRESS

Lack of context, the absence of visual information and poor acoustic quality render remote interpreting cognitively very challenging and can lead to mental and physical stress. Studies of the impact of remote interpreting on interpreters' health and well-being showed that RI leads to greater fatigue, increased stress levels, aching neck and headache (cf. Moser-Mercer, 2003), a feeling of loss of control (Moser-Mercer, 2003) and alienation (Mouzourakis, 1996, 2003). They also found a more rapid decline in performance quality (Moser-Mercer 2005).

Interpreters should therefore try to minimise internal and external stress factors (see FACT BOX External and internal stress factors). They should also practise self-care and establish how many hours of contracted RI work they can perform per day without compromising their physical and mental well-being (see also Unit 12).



## FACT BOX

### External and internal stress factors

In order to avoid chronic stress and occupational burn-out, interpreters should try to reduce external and internal stress factors and practise self-care.

External stress factors	
Stress factor	Possible solutions
Use of technical equipment	Get the equipment set up well ahead of the assignment (see FACT BOX Equipment): Adjust the camera and check that the headset is working. Check that all electronic devices are plugged in and that you have a stable internet connection. Do not place beverages close to electronic devices.
Background noise	Close all windows and doors and hang a <i>Do not disturb</i> sign on the door.
No lighting	Ensure you have adequate and accurately positioned lighting.
Physical pain	Adapt your workplace so that it is ergonomic.
Distraction of other devices	Switch off messaging tools on your computer or laptop and other electronic devices. Do not use other communication channels during the assignment.

## DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE WORK PROCEDURES

Distance interpreting is very demanding. Effective work procedures help reduce stress and improve the quality of the performance (cf. Iacono/Havelka, 2020).

### AHEAD OF THE ASSIGNMENT

After receiving an interpreting commission, the interpreter first analyses the **interpreting brief**: What is the setting? Will the interpreter be working from an in-house hub, off-site hub, or the home office? Will audio or video RI be employed and what constellation will be used? What is the purpose of the meeting and what communicative needs do the participants have?

If interpreters use a **job management system** they can enter key data, such as date and duration of the assignment, names of the client and participants, to produce a detailed quote.

After the quote has been accepted, the interpreter can start **preparing for the assignment** (see Unit 11) and **research the subject matter and specialist terminology** (see Unit 11). One advantage of working remotely over

working on-site is that it is easier to consult (electronic) glossaries and reference materials. Interpreters should, however, decide in advance whether they want to print off glossaries and reference texts or prefer to display them on a second screen. They also need to decide what terminology software system they will use. Useful systems enable not only the easy compilation of terminologies but also quick searches during the session.

Shortly before the session starts, the interpreter needs to **set up the workplace** and check the **equipment**.

This includes checking that the microphone, headset and webcam are functioning properly, that all electronic equipment is plugged in, that data security regulations are observed, and that the workplace is protected from distractions. The interpreter should also adjust the chair, computer, keyboard, screens and lighting to ensure ergonomic working conditions, and check that any printed or written reference materials they may wish to consult are at hand, as well as a notebook with at least two pens or a digital notepad.

With careful and detailed preparation, the interpreter can fully focus on interpreting during the session which reduces the stress level and also benefits the quality of the performance.



## DURING THE ASSIGNMENT

Before the session starts, the interpreter should check that he or she can be seen and/or heard by all participants by asking “Can you hear me?” or “Can you see me?” (cf. Havelka, 2018). In telephone interpreting, interpreters should use verbal backchannelling to acknowledge that the speaker can be heard and to affirm that the interpreter is still connected.

RI requires an adaptation of interpreting strategies (see Unit 6) to the constraints of technology-mediated communication. For instance, **chuchotage** (see Unit 6) could be used if the interpreter sits beside the recipient of the interpretation. Often, however, the resulting overlapping of speech creates background noise and may render incomprehensible what is being said.

The strategies used for **conversation coordination** also need to be modified since participants may not notice the visual cues that are normally used to coordinate turn-taking.

**Self- and other monitoring** (checking that the chosen interpreting strategies enable successful interaction) is another area that requires adaptation. Some interpreters feel distracted by their own image on the screen.

**Transparency** (see Unit 5) is as essential in RI as it is in face-to-face interpreting. If an interpreter asks a speaker for clarification this needs to be communicated to all participants.

In order to be able to quickly resolve technical problems that may arise during a session, interpreters can put together a checklist that identifies potential problems and suggests troubleshooting solutions (e.g. if the internet connection slows down the interpreter could deactivate the video function; see Activity 2).

## AFTER THE ASSIGNMENT

At the end of the assignment, the working time should be logged so it can be used as the basis for the invoice.

Before interpreters leave the workplace or set it up for other activities they must **save and protect all data**. For **quality management**, interpreters should also update the terminology database and glossaries. They should also review their performance, reflect on any problems that may have arisen during the assignment and assess the efficiency of their solutions. If possible, there should be a debriefing meeting where problems can be addressed.

Interpreters should also reflect on how they can ensure their social, physical and mental wellbeing (see Unit 12) and whether they need self-care measures or to talk to a supervisor.



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## Useful Links

- » Avidicus (o.J.): Video-Mediated Interpreting, <http://wp.videoconference-interpreting.net> (Accessed November 2021).
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**Activity 1: Differences between audio- and video-mediated interpreting and face-to-face interpreting**

1

**Form of activity:** Brainstorming in groups followed by plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 30 minutes (10 minutes in the group, 20 minutes in plenary).

**Description:** The participants are divided into groups of no more than four. Each group tries to identify the main differences between audio- and video-mediated interpreting and face-to-face interpreting.

The following table lists some of the differences.

<i>Interpreting an interview</i>		
<b>Question</b>	<b>Face-to-face</b>	<b>Remote</b>
<b>1) Positioning:</b> Where do the interlocutors sit or stand? Where is the interpreter?		
<b>2) Field of vision and contextual information:</b> What can you see? Can you see everything the interlocutors see?		
<b>3) Interaction management:</b> How can you interrupt interlocutors in order to ask for clarification etc.?		
<b>4) Empathy:</b> How can you show empathy?		
<b>5) Eye contact:</b> How can you try to establish and maintain eye contact?		
<b>6) Terminology:</b> How do you prepare terminology for an assignment? Give examples of entries in your glossary or terminological database. Do you print the glossaries or export them for use on an electronic device? Can you consult them during the assignment?		





## Activity 2: Interaction in RI: Technology-related challenges

2

**Form of activity:** Work in small groups followed by plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 30 minutes (15 minutes in the group, 15 minutes in plenary).

**Description:** The participants are divided into groups of no more than four. Each group makes a list of interaction situations that may present a challenge for interpreters working in remote mode.

The following table lists some challenges that might arise.

Interaction situation	Audio-/Video- mediated interpreting	What can I do?	What can I say?
You want to briefly introduce yourself at the beginning of the session.			
You have not been informed what subject matter is to be discussed.			
The interviewer has not explained the communication protocol to the participants.			
The interviewer talks too fast and you can no longer follow.			
You have not been able to hear what has been said.			
You need to sneeze or cough and want to do it discreetly.			



You have not understood something and would like to ask for clarification.			
You would like to take the break that you are entitled to when working remotely.			
You were interrupted and unable to finish your interpretation. Now you would like to present the information that you noted but have not yet interpreted.			
There is background noise and you find it very difficult to hear and understand the speakers.			
The image quality is poor because of a slow internet connection.			
The sound quality is poor and there are intermittent breaks so you miss portions of what is being said.			
The interlocutors refer to a document that you cannot see so you do not understand what they are talking about.			
The interlocutors point to something that you cannot see.			
The interlocutors wear face masks and physically distance from one another. They are difficult to understand and not all are visible on your screen.			



## Activity 3: Sight translation in video-mediated interpreting

3

**Form of activity:** Initial brainstorming in plenary followed by role-play and a final plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 30 minutes (10 minutes plenary brainstorming, 10 minutes, if possible in small groups, 10 minutes plenary discussion).

**Description:** This activity comprises three parts.

### 1 Brainstorming

First, ask the participants to name types of texts they have sight translated in asylum proceedings and to classify the texts into categories. Then, discuss the challenges of sight translation when interpreters are working in remote mode.

The following questions may be useful prompts:

1. What types of texts have you been asked to sight translate? When and for what purpose were these presented?
2. How can sight translation be done in video-mediated interpreting?
3. What problems might arise?

### 2 Role play: Sight translating an interview transcript

For this role play you need:

- several computers equipped with VR technology;
- access to several rooms or, if this is not possible, to a large room where groups can spread out and avoid disturbing
- other groups;
- an interview transcript (see example below).

#### Setting:

The interview has been concluded and the interview transcript has been written. The interpreter is asked to back-translate the transcript (for details about sight and back translation see Unit 8).

#### Instructions for role play:

Divide the participants into groups of four: one will be the interviewer, one the applicant, one the interpreter and one the observer.

The interviewer and the applicant sit together in front of a computer screen. The interpreter and observer are at another computer and are connected by video link.

The interviewer holds the transcript up to the webcam and asks the interpreter to sight translate it. The observer notes down any problems that occurred during the sight translation and how these were resolved by the interpreter.

### 3 Plenary discussion

The participants reflect on the challenges that arose during the sight translation and discuss possible solutions.





X entered into a love marriage in Pakistan on 17 February 2012. Both families were against the marriage and X was disowned by her family. She later resumed contact with her mother, yet long kept the contact a secret from the remaining family. X continued to use her parents' address in Karachi as her address for correspondence.

X and her husband lived together at first in a village outside Karachi, for seven to eight months, but her husband decided to leave Pakistan and move to Dubai due to family disputes over property. X joined him there in March 2014. They remained in Dubai for a few months, but then the husband came to Ireland. X visited him for a month in September/October 2014 but returned to Pakistan to see her mother. While in Pakistan, she lived in a rented property in a suburb of Karachi, in the same area as her husband's family.

In May 2015, her husband asked her to go and live with his parents. Living with her parents-in-law was not successful: X was treated badly by her husband's family. When she told her husband of her ill-treatment, he arranged for her to join him in Ireland, at his address in Dublin. X entered Ireland in December 2015. She came as a visitor, but with the clear intention of staying permanently. She gave her husband her papers and passport to sort out her status and has not received them back from him.

Shortly after her arrival, X realised that her husband was drinking alcohol and seeing other women. Her husband became abusive and eventually violent towards X. In June 2016, her husband ordered her to leave the matrimonial home, after he saw her talking to a male neighbour.

X had nowhere to go after her ejection from the marital home, so she approached their landlady (referred to by the X under the courtesy title of 'auntie'). The landlady gave X a room in another property that she owned, also in Dublin. Early in 2017, X learnt that her estranged husband had returned to Pakistan and that he had gone to her family's home to say that X was a woman of 'low character'. When X's brother defended his sister, he was beaten up by X's estranged husband.

In June 2020, after living in Ireland unlawfully for four and a half years, X claimed asylum. In the meantime, X had a child by a man other than her estranged husband. X claims that if she were to return to Pakistan, her husband would kill her.

Adapted from SM (lone women – ostracism) *Pakistan v. Secretary of State for the Home Department*, [2016] UKUT 00067 (IAC), United Kingdom: Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber), 4 February 2016, available at: [https://www.refworld.org/cases,GBR\\_UTIAC,56b34bd74.html](https://www.refworld.org/cases,GBR_UTIAC,56b34bd74.html) [Accessed 25 November 2021]



## Activity 4: Interaction management in video-mediated interpreting

4

**Form of activity:** Role play followed by self-reflection and feedback

**Duration:** 55 minutes

**Description:** This activity allows participants to try out strategies for coping with challenging interaction situations.

### Preparation:

For this role play, you need several computers equipped with VR technology.

### Instructions for role play:

If you have access to several rooms, divide the participants into groups of four to six people. Assign roles: one or two interviewers, one applicant, one interpreter, and one or two observers who will give feedback.

The interviewer(s) and the applicant sit together in front of a computer screen; the interpreters and observers sit at another computer and are linked via video link.

If you have access to only one room, all participants except the interlocutors and the interpreter act as observers and give feedback.

Ask the participants to choose a scenario which they would like to role-play, and to describe:

- the roles and functions of the interlocutors,
- the place where the interaction takes place,
- the communicative purpose of the interaction and
- challenges that may arise.

Ask the interlocutors to incorporate some problematic situations (see Activity 2) into their interactions.

### Feedback:

After the role play, the interpreters are asked to reflect on the scenario and their work. The following questions could be asked:

- What did you find challenging or difficult?
- What strategies did you use to tackle the problems? Which strategies worked and which did not work?
- What could you have done differently?
- How did the limitations of VMI affect you?
- Did feelings of not being in control impact your performance?
- How can you avoid negative feelings?

The observers are then asked for their feedback.



## Activity 5: Interaction management in telephone interpreting

5



**Form of activity:** Role play followed by self-reflection and feedback.

**Duration:** 55 minutes

**Description:** This activity allows participants to try out strategies for coping with challenging interaction situations.

### **Instructions for role play:**

If you have access to several rooms, divide the participants into groups of four to six people. Assign roles: two or more interviewers, one applicant, one interpreter, and one or two observers who will give feedback.

The interviewer(s) and the applicant are in one room and sit together in front of a computer screen; the interpreters and observers are in other rooms and are linked by telephone.

If you have access to only one room, all participants except the interlocutors and the interpreter act as observers and give feedback.

Ask the participants to choose a setting which they would like to role-play, and to describe:

- the roles of the interlocutors,
- the place where the interaction takes place,
- the communicative purpose of the interaction and
- likely challenges that may arise.

Ask the interlocutors to incorporate some problematic situations (see Activity 2) into their interaction.

### **Feedback:**

After the role play the interpreters are asked to reflect on the activity. The following questions could be asked:

- What did you find challenging or difficult?
- What strategies did you use to tackle the problems?
- Which strategies worked and which did not work?
- What could you have done differently?
- How did the limitations of telephone interpreting affect you?
- Did feelings of not being in control impact your performance?
- How can you avoid negative feelings?

Then ask the observers for their feedback.





## Activity 6: Obtaining an interpreter in the appropriate language and technical problems

6

**Form of activity:** Role play followed by plenary discussion.

**Duration:** 30 minutes

**Description:** This activity confronts interpreters with the challenge of obtaining interpreters in the appropriate language and technical problems.

### Instructions for role play:

Divide the participants into groups of four: One interviewer (case-worker), one operator, one applicant, and one observer. Based on the example from Gibb (2019: 164-165) describe the scenario for the participants:

- The applicant is in the interview room with the case-worker. The applicant does not speak the language of the country and the case-worker rings the operator of the interpreting services provider.
- First call: No interpreter in the language of the applicant is available. The operator suggests an interpreter in another language which the applicant may understand. The applicant does not understand the interpreter.
- Second call: An interpreter in the language of the applicant is found and comes online. The case-worker briefly explains the situation and starts the interview by asking the applicant to confirm his name, age and other personal details. After a few questions the telephone connection breaks.
- Third call: The case-worker rings again and asks the operator to find an interpreter.

### Plenary discussion:

After the role play, the participants discuss the challenges and problems that arose during the role play.



**Case-worker:** *(Introduces himself and explains why he is ringing.)* Do you have an interpreter available in (name of language) for an asylum application by a man from (name of country X)? Just one case (*dossier*).

**Operator:** *(There is a pause while she checks.)* In (language) of (country X), there is no-one available at the moment. However, there is an interpreter available in (same name of language) from (country Y). Do you want to try?

**Case-worker:** OK. We'll see how it goes.

*(After a few minutes, during which time the music of the company's telephone hold system is relayed through the loudspeaker, the case-worker is connected to the interpreter. After establishing that the interpreter has worked with the OFPRA [Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless People (Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides)] before, the case-worker asks him to explain the procedure to the applicant. The interpreter then exchanges some words with the applicant, before addressing the case-worker again in French.)*

**Interpreter (to C-W):** He says to me that he doesn't understand me.

**Case-worker:** He doesn't want to continue with you?

**Interpreter:** No.

**Case-worker:** Okay. Thank you.

*(The case-worker hangs up and then phones the operator again.)*

(2.39 pm)

**Case-worker:** We tried using an interpreter in (language) of (country Y) for an asylum application, but my applicant says that he doesn't understand. Can you try to find me another interpreter, in (language) of (country X).

**Operator:** Okay, I'll try.

*(For the next six minutes, the case-worker and applicant wait. The latter looks tired and anxious and sits with his arms crossed. Then the operator's voice comes through the loudspeaker again.)*

**Operator:** *I'm sorry, but I haven't been able to find an interpreter in (language) of (country X). Do you want me to keep trying?*

**Case-worker:** Yes, please.

*(After waiting a further nine minutes, the case-worker calls the operator again.)*

**Case-worker:** I was just phoning to see how things were coming along. **Operator:** I'm still trying, but I'm not certain I'll be able to find an interpreter. **Case-worker:** Shall we give up then? What shall we do?

**Operator:** I'll keep trying.

(2.58 pm)

**Operator:** I've found an interpreter! Please wait a few moments.

**Case-worker:** In (language) of (country X)?

**Operator:** I hope so.

**Case-worker (to RG):** I hope so too!

(3.08 pm)

*(The second interpreter comes on the line, and soon the case-worker starts to interview the applicant, asking him in turn to confirm his name, age and other personal details. This proves to be quite time-consuming, due to the fluctuating quality of the telephone line. Several times the case-worker has either to repeat his own question for the interpreter or ask the latter to repeat what he has just said, and the applicant sits hunched over the conferencing phone unit with his ear close to the loudspeaker in an effort to hear the interpreter better.)*

(3.32 pm)

*(Suddenly, the telephone connection with the interpreter breaks. The case-worker phones the operator.)*

**Case-worker:** I have been cut off with my interpreter.

**Operator:** I'll try to reconnect you.

*(After a further eight minutes of the holding system music, the operator comes on the line again.)*

**Operator:** I've been unable to reconnect you with the interpreter, but I've found another interpreter in (language) of (country X).

**Case-worker:** Okay. Let's go then.

*(The case-worker is connected to the third interpreter, a woman, and resumes the interview with the applicant. There are no further 'technical problems' and the interview ends at 4.23 pm.)*

From Gibb, 2019, 164-165.





## Test yourself!



1. How do audio- and video-mediated interpreting differ from face-to-face interpreting?  
List at least five differences.
2. What additional skills and competencies do interpreters need for audio and video interpreting?
3. Describe three technical problems that may occur during audio and video interpreting and suggest troubleshooting solutions.
4. What work procedures do you need to follow before, during and after a session to ensure quality performance?
5. How can you compensate for the lack of visual cues in remote interpreting?
6. What interpreting modalities (consecutive, simultaneous, chuchotage) can be used in remote interpreting?



# Short Biographies

**Margit Ammer** is a senior researcher at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Fundamental and Human Rights. Her research focuses on displacement from a human rights perspective, including the topic of mobility in the context of disasters and climate change. She is also a lecturer at the University of Vienna.

**Frank Austermühl** is Professor of Translation Studies at Aston University in Birmingham, where he also serves as Associate Dean International for the School of Social Sciences and Languages. His main research interests include the interrelationship between translation and technology, as well as political discourse analysis. Frank has an MA in Translation Studies (with German, English, and Spanish) and a PhD in Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies from the University of Heidelberg. He has taught at the Universities of Auckland, Heidelberg, and Mainz.

**Alexandra Bergaus** is an interviewer at the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (Styria regional office).

**Ursula Böser** is Professor emeritus of Intercultural Studies and Languages in the Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, UK. Her special areas of interest are Public Service Interpreting, conference interpreting and audio-visual translation. Her research in Interpreting Studies focuses on interpreting in police settings. She is a member of the Centre for Translation and Interpreting Studies in Scotland (CTISS) and the Intercultural Research Centre (IRC).

**Elfi Cagala** is a freelance translator of English and Hungarian and a lecturer at the Department of Translation Studies, University of Graz.

**Maria Eder** is an interpreter and translator of Russian in the areas of economy and export management, community and asylum settings. She is the co-author of a guide for asylum terminology “Basic Concepts of the Austrian Asylum Procedure. Terminology Guide. German/English” and a member of the Committee for Community Interpreting at UNIVERSITAS Austria, the interpreters’ and translators’ association.

**Florika Griessner** is a senior lecturer at the Department of Translation Studies, University of Graz. She works in the areas of translation and interpretation as well as didactics of translation and interpretation, and career studies. She also works as a freelance translator and interpreter, as a court interpreter and is a member of the Committee for Community Interpreting at UNIVERSITAS Austria, the interpreters’ and translators’ association.

**Ivana Havelka** is a postdoctoral university assistant at the Centre for Translation Studies at the University of Vienna. Her research interests include multimodal perception in technology-mediated and -supported interpreting settings, hybrid forms of translation and interpreting, and digital skills in interpreting.

**Gernot Hebenstreit** is a researcher at the Department of Translation Studies, University of Graz. He is a member of the Austrian Standards Committee ON-K 033 “Terminology and Other Language and Content Resources” and lecturer in the areas of translation theory, terminology management, and information technology in translation. His research interests are translation theory, ethics in translation and terminological information modelling.



**Kirsty Heimerl-Moggan** is a senior conference, business and legal interpreter currently based in Manchester, in the United Kingdom. Her face-to-face and remote simultaneous interpreting work over the last two decades has covered international organisations, industrial Health & Safety settings as well as Crown Court Commercial and Criminal interpreting in German, Swiss German, Austrian and English. Kirsty worked as a senior lecturer and course leader for the MA in Conference Interpreting at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) for 12 years and has also lectured in conference interpreting at Munich University of Applied Languages, Leeds University and Salford University.

**Jim Hlavac** is a senior lecturer in Translation and Interpreting Studies at Monash University, Melbourne. He is an accredited, practising professional interpreter and translator for Croatian, English and German. He has published widely in the field of Translation and Interpreting Studies and also in the related disciplines of multilingualism, contact linguistics, intercultural communication, pragmatics and language maintenance/shift.

**Katia Iacono** is a freelance translator and interpreter as well as a postdoctoral university assistant at the Centre for Translation Studies at the University of Vienna. Her main research interests are dialogue interpreting, translation/interpreting management and teaching interpreting/translation.

**Elvira Iannone** was senior lecturer at the Department of Translation Studies at the University of Innsbruck from 2011 until 2018. She has been involved in numerous training programmes for lay interpreters in Austria and Germany, including the Certificate Course in Community Interpreting of the University of Innsbruck. In 2018, she was appointed Vice-President of the German Federal Association of Interpreters and Translators (Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer e.V., BDÜ). She is also a practising conference interpreter.

**Alexandra Jantscher-Karlhuber** is a freelance interpreter and translator of English. She has been teaching interpreting for 15 years and holds workshops for interpreters (quality assurance, introduction to Community Interpreting, mentoring and internships and early career workshops). She is a member of UNIVERSITAS Austria, the interpreters' and translators' association.

**Mira Kadić** is Professor of Interpreting Studies and Didactics of Translation at the University of Vienna. Her research is devoted to critical social research of Interpreting Studies, empirical work on Legal Translation and Interpreting, and pedagogical issues of Translation and Interpreting Studies. Her other scholarly and professional activities include workshops for teachers, judges and prosecutors, workshops for advanced training for court interpreters and courses for trainee lawyers.

**Klaus Krainz** was the regional director for Carinthia at the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum. Since 1983, he has worked as a university lecturer for the Department of Criminology and Criminalistics, teaching interrogation techniques. Since the establishment of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum in 1992, Klaus Krainz has trained advisors in interrogation techniques and working with interpreters. He is the co-author of the handbook "Interpreting in the Asylum Process" and author of other relevant publications.

**Alexandra Marics** is a freelance translator and interpreter of Arabic and French in asylum settings and teaches translation-relevant subjects in Arabic at the Department of Translation Studies, University of Graz. Her research interests are community interpreting, as well as the history of translation.

**Emanuel Matti** was a research and teaching assistant at the Institute for Austrian and European Public Law at the Vienna University of Economics and Business. He regularly publishes in the areas of asylum rights and aliens law and also works as a legal advisor was a research and teaching assistant at Deserteurs- und Flüchtlingsberatung (legal support for refugees).

**Eloísa Monteoliva** is an Assistant Professor in Spanish (Translation & Interpreting) and the Director of Postgraduate Taught Programmes at LINCS, the Languages and Intercultural Studies Department at Heriot-Watt University in Scotland. She is also a sworn translator and interpreter accredited by the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs since 2008. In 2017, Eloísa completed her PhD on stand-by interpreting in police settings at CTISS, the Centre for Translation & Interpreting Studies in Scotland at Heriot-Watt University. Her thesis was awarded the CIUTI 2020 Award for the most outstanding PhD thesis completed at a CIUTI institution which has contributed significantly to the development of research in the discipline. Her research interests include public service interpreting, interpreting in police and legal settings and interpreting pedagogy. She is the author of several publications on these topics and has collaborated in several research projects on language and interpreting in legal settings.

**Sonja Pöllbauer** is a Professor of Interpreting Studies at the Centre of Translation Studies at the University of Vienna. She has led and collaborated on numerous / led several research projects on public service interpreting and interpreter-mediated communication in an asylum context, and has been involved in the design and teaching of public service interpreter training courses. She has also served as Consultant for interpreting for UNHCR and as External Expert for the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). Her research interests include interpreter-mediated communication in asylum interviews, healthcare interpreting, and interpreter education.

**Sylvi Rennert** is a freelance translator and interpreter of German, English, Finnish and Spanish, based in Vienna. She also teaches translation, note-taking technique and consecutive interpreting at the Centre for Translation Studies at the University of Vienna. In her research, she focuses on quality in simultaneous interpreting.

**Martina Rienzner** is a linguist, from 2009 to 2015 she was a researcher and lecturer at the Department of Africa Studies at the University of Vienna focusing on multilingualism and transcultural communication in governmental authorities. Currently she is working in Adult Education.

**Maggie Sargeant** is an Associate Professor at Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh. She has long experience in the training of translators and interpreters, working from German to English. She was Director of Postgraduate Programmes in the Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies (LINCS) from 2010 until 2015 and is now Director of Learning and Teaching in the School of Social Sciences.

**Karlheinz Spitzl** works as senior lecturer at the University of Vienna's Centre for Translation Studies. He is a freelance interpreter and founding member of the linguistic-rights based Plus Research Group (Plurilingual Speakers in Unilingual Contexts). His research focuses on translatorial action in the face of violence. Unfinished PhD project on Language Analysis for the Determination of Origin (LADO): Linguistics as Gate-Keeping or Refuge by Shibboleth.

**Irmgard Soukup-Unterweger** has worked as a professional translator and interpreter in various fields for over 35 years. She holds a Mag.phil. in Translation Studies from the University of Graz and a Professional MSc (Technical Communication) from the Danube University of Krems. As a court certified translator and interpreter of Russian, she gained wide experience in legal translating and interpreting. From 2007 to 2011, she has been part of the research staff at the Centre for Translation Studies, University of Vienna (Translation Technologies and Terminology Studies). She participated in establishing a termbase on the terminology of Austrian asylum law.

**Christine Springer** is a freelance translator, conference and court interpreter (Italian). From 1981 until 2018 she was the president of the Austrian Association of Court Interpreters. She was closely involved in the development of a certification system for court interpreters and the corresponding amendments of expert and court interpreter laws. She also taught court interpreting and translating regularly at the Department of Translation Studies, University of Graz.

**Ursula Stachl-Peier** was, until her retirement, a senior lecturer at the Department of Translation Studies, University of Graz. Her research interests include discourse analysis, translation and interpreting teaching and curriculum design, speech-to-text interpreting and ethnology. She is also a practising translator and interpreter, and a member of the Committee for Community Interpreting at UNIVERSITAS Austria, the Austrian Interpreters' and Translators' Association.

**UNHCR**, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, is responsible for the protection of refugees throughout the world. The office in Austria was opened in 1951 and its key task is to ensure fair asylum processes. The project "QUADA – High-Quality Interpreting at Asylum Proceedings" made a significant contribution to this task. As a member of the legal department, Annika Bergunde Dipl.-Psych. contributed greatly to this training handbook.

**Uta Wedam** is a Gestalt theoretical psychotherapist and supervisor, teaching therapist and teaching supervisor for the Austrian Association for Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy. She teaches at the University of Graz and the University of Klagenfurt and also gives lectures on topics such as: trauma, intercultural psychotherapy and interpreting in the healthcare sector. Additionally, she works on a variety of EU-funded projects on the topics of trauma, escape, interpreting/language in the health sector and evaluation.

# Handbook for Interpreters in Asylum Procedures

Interpreters play a crucial, yet often underestimated role in asylum interviews. They mediate between the asylum-seeker and the interviewer, who would not be able to communicate without the help of the interpreter. As it is often not possible for applicants to provide written evidence to substantiate their claims, their oral accounts of what has happened to them are usually the sole basis for an official's decision and ultimately a pivotal point in the applicant's life. Given the significant consequences of such decisions during the asylum procedure, interpreters carry a great deal of responsibility both in terms of their professional behaviour and with regard to the quality of interpretation.

This handbook, now in its second, updated and expanded edition, responds to the need for qualified interpreters in asylum procedures by offering a theoretical insight into a variety of topics relevant to interpreters in the asylum context, as well as activities and exercises enabling experiential and interactive learning. It is aimed both at interpreters in asylum procedures who have no formal training and trained interpreters who wish to specialise in the field. In addition, the handbook is intended for facilitators and trainers to use in face-to-face training courses. The handbook is also relevant to asylum authorities and interviewers, providing them with insights into and guidance in working with interpreters.

