

IENE 6

“Contemporary large migration waves into Europe: Enabling health workers to provide psychological support to migrants and refugees and develop strategies for dealing with their own emotional needs”

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Intellectual Output 8

INTERPRETING IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS



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Interpreter:

An interpreter verbally translates spoken material from one language (source language) to another language (target language). She/He is present physically or interprets remotely, e.g. on the phone. This can take three main forms: a) simultaneous interpreting, performed generally from an interpreting booth in a conference environment; b) consecutive interpreting, where the speaker leaves pauses for the interpreter to relay the speech one section at a time; c) bilateral interpreting, the most common in humanitarian field operations, where the interpreter relays both (or all) sides of a conversation between speakers of different languages, working both into and out of their main language.

1. Translators without borders. 2017. *Field Guide to Humanitarian Interpreting & Cultural mediation*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://translatorswithoutborders.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Guide-to-Humanitarian-Interpreting-and-Cultural-Mediation-English-1.pdf>.

The role of the Interpreter:

Interpreters are key allies for humanitarian actors. Communication is aid and words build trust. Recognizing these essential principles of a people-centred humanitarian intervention, it is essential to build effective language bridges between people in need and those providing aid and services. Whenever humanitarian responders do not speak or understand the mother tongue of the person they serve, the risk of miscommunication, loss of critical information or misinformation is high, potentially leading to unnecessary suffering or loss of life.

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The 4 types of interpretation

- I. **Consecutive interpretation**
- II. **Summary interpretation**
- III. **Verbatim interpretation**
- IV. **Simultaneous interpretation**

1. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *RLD3 - Interpreting in a Refugee Context*, 1 June 1993, RLD3, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3cce9bbb4.html> [accessed 2 February 2018]

The 4 types of interpretation

I. Consecutive interpretation

This is by far the most common type of interpretation in a refugee context. As interpreter, you listen to a segment of speech, then repeat what you have heard in the language of the listener(s). The speaker then resumes his/her statement, before pausing again to allow the interpreter to translate. In this way the interpreter alternates with the speaker (in contrast with simultaneous interpretation described later). The length of what you can retain before rendering your translation will depend upon the complexity of the statement being made, and upon your experience.

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The 4 types of interpretation

II. Summary interpretation

This is a condensed form of consecutive interpretation, and one that requires considerable experience and skill. The interpreter listens attentively to a lengthy statement, taking notes, and then provides a summary in the language of the audience. It is far less precise than consecutive interpretation and it is **not** appropriate for a refugee interview, nor whenever detailed information is important.

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The 4 types of interpretation

III. Verbatim interpretation

This type of interpretation implies a word-for-word interpretation after each phrase or sentence. The interpreter thus gives an exact translation of the speaker's words, rather than interpreting the speaker's meaning. This type of interpretation is chosen in order to exclude any possible misunderstanding on either side.

IV. Simultaneous interpretation

With this type of interpretation, the interpreter listens to the speaker and translate at the same time. Simultaneous interpretation requires a high degree of concentration, good short-term memory and high level of language skills. Experience and intense practice is needed for this technique.

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Guidelines on attitude & conduct

The task of an interpreter is difficult in any circumstances. Interpreting in a refugee context can make even greater demands. The conditions in which you work may be challenging, there may be wide cultural gaps between the various parties or you may meet vocabulary or notions that are new or unfamiliar to you. There is also the possibility that you will be asked to perform tasks that are not those of an interpreter. Therefore, it is extremely important for you to be clear on your attitude and conduct as an interpreter.

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Rights

- Adequate briefing
- Defining your role
- Obtaining respect
- Gaining the right support

Responsibilities

- Maintaining a high level of performance
 - Remaining neutral
 - Maintaining confidentiality
- Refraining from abusing your power

Maintaining accuracy & neutrality

- Pay attention to all details. Do **not** attempt to shift the information given by the person, but faithfully translate all factual and anecdotal details.
- Avoid conversation with the recipient
- Translate all his/her questions, even if you know the probable answer
- If there is a conversation that which either of the parties cannot understand, give a summary of what is said
- Avoid expressing a personal opinion, it is not up to you, as an interpreter, to react either verbally or through facial expression, to what a speaker says.

Confidentiality & Interpretation

It is the act to protect information entrusted to you by an individual, or group of individuals, a secret. It is the respect of an individual's right to privacy. It is, also, the responsibility of the humanitarian worker to protect the beneficiary's private information and ensure that only those persons who need to know have access to the beneficiary's records or personal information.

It is a standard practice for professional interpreters to maintain strict confidentiality as to the content of any discussions to which they are party. They must not share any information to any person outside the session without the permission of the service provider and the beneficiary. Before and after each session reassurance of the confidentiality must be provided to the beneficiaries.

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2. Médecins du Monde. 2018. *GUIDANCE FOR INTERPRETERS/Working with interpreters*

Why confidentiality is important?

Aid workers are in a position of trust with the beneficiaries, who share with them a considerable amount of personal information. This process of sharing information is part of a relationship building, it's one of the keys to effective counselling. Breaking this trust by revealing facts that concern a beneficiary's story could:

- a. Cause the beneficiary to no longer feel comfortable to speak freely about their experiences
- b. Be of great danger, for example, for family members or relatives or for the beneficiaries themselves
even

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Kinds of information to remain confidential

- ✓ Any information revealed during a session
- ✓ Any information given to you by another service provider/humanitarian worker
- ✓ Case/medical records
- ✓ Any information obtained by you about the beneficiaries

Exceptions to the rule of confidentiality

- Beneficiaries life in danger
- Others life in danger
- Discuss a clinical case with the permit of the patient

Humanitarian interpreting Do's & Don'ts

Do's

- ✓ **Two-way proficiency:** Do ensure you are proficient in the languages you translate from and into
- ✓ **Cultural competence:** Do develop your knowledge of the cultures you are interpreting between. This is essential to relay information accurately
- ✓ **Accuracy:** Do convey information as accurately as possible. Relay messages between the parties without omission or distortion

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Humanitarian interpreting Do's & Don'ts

Do's

- ✓ **Neutrality:** Do remain neutral with regard to gender, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc. If at any point you feel you cannot do so, you should withdraw from the assignment.
- ✓ **Confidentiality:** Do respect the confidentiality of the parties and their discussion at all times.
- ✓ **Use of resources:** Do use the resources provided to you including glossaries and reference material

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Humanitarian interpreting Do's & Don'ts

Don'ts

- × Do not seek to take advantage of information acquired during or as a result of your work
- × Do not accept assignments that require knowledge or language or other skills beyond your competence
- × Do not interject personal opinions or counsel
- × Do not attempt to exercise power or influence over your listeners

Humanitarian interpreting Do's & Don'ts

Don'ts

- × Do not disclose information gathered during the course of your assignments
- × Do not use your position to gain favours from clients
- × Do not accept an assignment when family or close personal relationships affect impartiality
- × Do not interfere with the flow of communication between the parties

What if...

- **You cannot understand an expression or a word?**

If this happens, ask for clarification. You will need to signal to the other party that you are asking for additional clarification

- **The beneficiary expresses a notion that is very typical in his/her culture?**

You must take time to explain, rather than allow a misunderstanding to arise

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What if...

- **The beneficiary makes an embarrassing or offensive statement?**

In principle it is your duty to translate whatever is said. In practice, you may warn the service provider as to the character of the beneficiary's statement, and ask his/her permission to check that the beneficiary really wants to use such language, before giving a translation. The slight pause may be enough for the speaker to adjust his/her tone.

- **The language used by the beneficiary is primitive and unsophisticated?**

Do not seek to polish or embellish – this is not your role. You may sometimes make a statement more clear and concise but this must never be at the expense of accuracy.

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Working with Interpreters

Before the session...

- Be aware that if the service provider finds something psychologically difficult to handle, the interpreter probably does too. The service provider should check that the interpreter is comfortable to interpret in terms of the expected content of the meeting. Moreover, the service provider should ask if he/she wants support, and provide it if so.
- Be aware that interpretation requires concentration, which is difficult to maintain in unfamiliar or dangerous environments. The interpreter will need regular breaks to ensure that they can remain focused.

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Working with Interpreters

Before the session...

- Ensure that the interpreter understands and abides by the organization's code of conduct and the humanitarian principles
- The interpreter should be provided with appropriate comfort and facilities
- The service provider should spend time with the interpreter before the session and explain relevant background for the case, the purpose of the interview, and style/behaviour of the case (if known)
- The interpreter should let the service provider know how much content they can translate at a time

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Working with Interpreters

Before the session...

- The service provider should remind the interpreter of the principle of confidentiality and that they will be asked to explain this principle
- The possibility of personal contact outside the session between the interpreter and the case should be avoided

Working with Interpreters

During the session...

- Attention must be paid to the seating/positioning so that everyone is clear that the conversation is with the service provider, and not with the interpreter. The service provider should speak directly to the session participants and not the interpreter.
- The service provider should speak unhurriedly, clearly and with pauses and the use of jargon, technical terms or abbreviations should be minimized. Words or concepts must be explained to the interpreter if needed.
- The service provider is responsible for ensuring understanding between all the parties and he must check with the interpreter if he thinks there is any kind of misunderstanding.

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Working with Interpreters

During the session...

- The service provider should allow the interpreter to answer questions on behalf of the participants, and must ask for full interpretation of side conversations.
- If it seems that the interpreter is struggling to interpret, or is uncomfortable/too upset by the session, it is the service provider's responsibility to stop the meeting and assess whether to continue after a short break or end the meeting entirely.
- The service provider should never leave a male interpreter alone in the interview room with a woman. This is vital to safeguard both the interpreter and the woman and to ensure that the service provider remains fully in control of the session.

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Working with Interpreters

After the session...

- The service provider should spend time with the interpreter after the end of the session to debrief and address issues or concerns and get suggestions on how he/she can work better with the interpreter.
- If the meeting has involved discussion of particularly emotive, violent or upsetting events, the service provider should actively discuss the interpreter's own wellbeing, take a break and encourage them to seek any available support if required.

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Setting boundaries & Self care

Boundaries

- i. Try to avoid body contact, as it is important to keep boundaries and professional roles
- ii. It is not the interpreter's role to offer personal support or direct advice to individuals
- iii. Interpreters should ensure that neither their verbal nor body language show any indication that they consider a person's behaviour or disclosures inappropriate

Setting boundaries & Self care

Self care

- a) Working in humanitarian settings involves sometimes interpreting traumatic events, this can have an impact on all parties concerned, including the interpreter
- b) Interpreters should make use of staff-care as well as debriefing after sessions
- c) Ensure schedules allow for enough breaks between sessions

Interpreting for refugee children

- Explain carefully to the child before the interview begins that he/she is being asked to respond to a few questions and why
- Be reassuring and understanding if the child shows signs of anxiety
- Resist the temptation to act as an advocate, since this may distort proceedings
- Sit closer to the child than to the interviewer, in order that you should not be perceived in a position of authority and inhibit his/her ease of expression

Wherever people are!

