



GUIDELINES WHEN WORKING WITH AN INTERPRETER

By Ann Corsellis, OBE

Below is a summary of good practice for public service officers working with interpreters.

Before the interview

- Give the interpreter as much advance warning as possible.
- Interpreters who wish to work for the police forces and other legal organisations have been asked to provide a security clearance testifying to an absence of criminal conviction (CRB Standard or Enhanced Disclosure, Data Protection Act, 1984). Interpreters' details state whether interpreters have supplied this document under "Security Clearance".
- Users of the National Register must carry out their own vetting when required to do so by law and when no appropriate document has been supplied to the National Register.
- Give clear information about the proposed assignment when you first contact the interpreter, including:
 - the date and time you need the interpreter and the building and the room you would like the interpreter to go to
 - clear transport arrangements. If the interpreter is coming by car, give clear directions. If the interpreter is using public transport, give information. Where the interpreter does not have personal transport and public transport is unavailable, unsuitable or unsafe, arrange for transport to be provided both ways
 - the name and telephone number of the person the interpreter is to contact on arrival or in case of delay
 - the name of the client involved, so that the interpreter can say if that person is known to him/her in a way in which his/her impartiality may be at risk
 - the language and/or dialect you need. If you are unsure and the client cannot tell you, contact an interpreter in the language you think might be right and ask for advice. If the client is in your office, and it would be appropriate, the interpreter could cross-check the language match over the telephone
 - the outline of the subject matter, so that the interpreter can find out about any terminology or procedures in advance, if there is time. The interpreter should refuse an assignment which is beyond his or her competence
 - whether you would like the interpreter to translate a letter from you to the client, arranging the time, date and place of the proposed appointment and giving travel instructions

- Confirm that the interpreter has a letter of agreement with your organisation.
- Allow more time than usual because in, an interpreted exchange, everything has to be said twice and there have to be explanations to accommodate different cultural perceptions and backgrounds. Allow the interpreter to have a short break if the interview lasts longer than an hour.
- Where the case demands, such as rape or child abuse, select a male or female interpreter accordingly.

During the Interview

- Choose a quiet room and arrange the seating so that you and the client face each other, such as on either side of a small table, and the interpreter at the end of the table so that you can talk directly to the client and the interpreter is not physically perceived as being on one "side" or the other.
- Allow the interpreter to introduce him or herself and to explain the interpreter's role as being there to give an impartial, complete and confidential rendition of everything that is said.
- In your introduction establish how the client's name should be recorded for formal documents and how s/he wishes to be addressed.
- The interpreter should also explain that he or she will only intervene if he or she needs to, and will explain the reason for doing so to both parties, such as:
 - to clarify something which has been said before interpreting it
 - to alert one of the parties that, in spite of accurate interpretation, the other might not have fully understood what has been said
 - to alert both parties to a missed cultural inference - that is, knowledge of a piece of information has been assumed, when it might not be the case in one or other culture
 - to ask for accommodation to the interpreting process - for instance, if someone is speaking too quietly or too fast.
- Explain who you are and what your job is. Make sure the client understands also the function of any other professionals who may be involved. There are often no direct equivalents of some services, such as probation or social services, in other countries. Even the meanings of different uniforms are difficult to assess in another country. Anybody would be reluctant to give, perhaps very personal, information to someone without the security of knowing the professional background.
- Conduct the entire interview yourself by asking questions directly, as the interpreter is not qualified to know what information to look for or how to process the information received.
- Ask the client if you are not sure of his or her own relevant attitudes, perceptions or cultural norms. Do not ask the interpreter.
- "All that is said will be interpreted. Whatever is not to be interpreted must not be said." (The Local Authorities Handbook for Translation and Interpreting Services).

- Explain fully structures and procedures which the client may be unfamiliar with.
- Express yourself clearly and unambiguously.
- Pause at the end of every two or three sentences (never in the middle of a sentence), to allow the interpreter to interpret after you have spoken (consecutively). Speak at a sensible pace where the interpreter is whispering the interpretation at the same time as you are speaking (simultaneously).
- For the communication to be effective, check mutual understanding regularly by asking open questions.
- Different clients exchange and present information in different ways which are valid for them - some come to the point quickly, some work up to it and some are reluctant to express it.
- It helps understanding by avoiding culture-bound statements.
- Body language may mean different things in different languages and may need clarification.
- At the end of the interview, a summary of what has been decided and clarification of the next practical steps to be taken may be helpful.

After the interview

- Complete any necessary forms to ensure payment of the interpreter.
- Sign the entry in the Registered Public Service Interpreter's logbook, if requested.