



The Inns of
Court College
of Advocacy

Interpreters

Danger Signals

Transcript of video

Narrator: Trained interpreters will display a defined set of professional competencies in their practice, which will build the necessary trust that questions and answers are being properly interpreted. The following examples highlight a number of danger signals, suggestive of unprofessional and potentially inaccurate information.

Advocate: Could you just tell me how many incidents you've witnessed with your sister of violence?

[Interpreter translates question to witness, receives answer in native tongue]

Screen Text: *Selective interpretation*

Interpreter: Quite a few.

Advocate: How did your sister react to that incident?

[Interpreter translates question to witness, receives answer in native tongue]

Screen Text: *Reporting in the third person*

Interpreter: She said she was very upset of course; she started crying.

Advocate: And you're saying that your sister did not react in any way whatsoever?

[Interpreter translates question to witness, receives answer in native tongue]

Screen Text: Not conveying intonation

Interpreter: She said she didn't want to give a reaction because she didn't want to make the situation any worse.

Advocate: And what did you do?

[Interpreter translates question to witness, receives answer in native tongue]

Interpreter: Nothing.

Advocate: OK, thank you.

Screen Text: *Private conversations*

Advocate: Moving on to paragraph four of your witness statement...

[Interpreter engages in private conversation with witness]

Interpreter: OK

Advocate: OK, you state here other things that...

Interpreter: What do you mean it's not true?

Advocate: Well surely she would have reacted if these incidents were ongoing?

Screen Text: *Personal intervention from the interpreter*

Interpreter: Well I... sorry I don't think you entirely understand Turkish culture, I mean it's quite normal for a woman not to challenge her husband in that...

Advocate: Our judge is going to make an intervention at this point.

Screen Text: *Brooke Townsley, Interpreter and Trainer*

Brooke Townsley: An interpreter who is... appears in court should be working to a set of professional norms, just as you do. They should know what they should do and shouldn't do, and here's what they should not be doing:

- They should not be interpreting in the third person, in other words if Judge Easterman says something and then [unintelligible] along the lines of "he just said the following", or vice versa. It should be interpreted in the first person, where the interpreter is as it were the voice of the speaker they're reflecting.
- There should be no unratified conversation; it's a term we use in the trade meaning literally "I will not have a private aside with the witness", appearing to be commenting on a question which has been asked, asking them to clarify something but not bothering to tell the court what we've just been talking about.
- If it is evident that a witness has spoken at some length and made a number of points you can just follow the intonation, they raised you know a rhetorical question, they've said something, their intonation, and what comes out is a "yes it was very bad", it's so obvious you're not getting the whole story.
- And a final point is this; a professional interpreter is well aware of the fact that what somebody says substantively, the factual content of what they say is one thing, the way that they say it is also very significant - yes? If I sound... if my witness sounds very hesitant, uses a lot of linguistic hedges, is evidently sending the message to you as an observer that they're not entirely sure about what they're saying or whatever it is, and the interpreter says factually exactly what they said, but presents them in a different way - in other words they don't reflect their linguistic behaviour; the meta messages they're sending - again I would be saying "is this interpreter working to a set of professional norms?"

The conclusion from any one of these danger signals and certainly all of them put together is: where's this interpreter come from? Have they actually received a proper professional formation in how they should be practicing? And how badly might this be affecting the progress of this case? Either my client or the court as a whole...

- Screen Text:** Danger Signals:
- Interpreting in the 3rd person
 - Unratified conversation
 - Selective Interpreting
 - Not conveying intonation
- Narrator:** If questions or answers appear to be truncated or embellished, or there are non-English exchanges left interpreted, ask the interpreter to explain what is happening.
- Screen Text:** *Ask the interpreter to explain*
- Narrator:** If you are concerned about the standard of interpretation, check the training and qualifications of the interpreter.
- Screen Text:** *Check training and qualifications*
- Narrator:** Have they undertaken professional training in legal interpreting? Do they hold the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting or another level 6 qualification? And is it specifically for the law, rather than medical or social welfare?
- Screen Text:** *Diploma in Public Service Interpreting*
- Narrator:** The relationship relies heavily on trust; there is a National Register of Public Service Interpreters, and a number of professional associations.
- Screen Text:** *National Register of Public Service Interpreters*
- Narrator:** If you experience any of these danger signals, further investigation is advisable.

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