

Some aspects of the role of interpreters in investigative interviews

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The article presents and examines the results of an empirical research related to the role of interpreters in facilitating communication with non-English speaking victims and witnesses during police investigations and statement taking procedures in England and Wales. The research specifically addresses the issues and challenges encountered by experienced professional interpreters in their interpreting practice when dealing with victims and witnesses. The article also analyses the engagement of interpreters in formal training and the availability of guidance documents for interpreters assisting them in police investigative interviews and statement taking procedures. Research methodology is based on a survey designed specifically in order to obtain and analyse the collected empirical data based on the perception and experiences of police interpreters. A range of inconsistencies, issues and challenges are identified and analysed in this research leading to evidence-based conclusions.

KEYWORDS: *investigative interview, interpreter, witness statement, impartiality, ImPLI*

1. INTRODUCTION

The demand for interpreting services in police investigations has been growing steadily in the UK. For example, in Cambridgeshire, the number of foreign nationals in custody has risen to over 30% in recent years and the proportion of foreign nationals amongst victims and witnesses is also at the same level (Mayfield, 2014). Subsequently, one in four investigative interviews in Cambridgeshire is now conducted with the assistance of an interpreter (Mayfield & Vanterpool, 2016). Similar situation can be observed in other counties in the

UK, many countries of the European Union, the United States of America and Australia (Goodman-Delahunty & Silvasubramanian, 2013; Goodman-Delahunty, 2015).

The role of interpreters in investigative interviews has attracted the attention of many researchers. Some scholars argue that the role of interpreters is usually seen by service users, especially in legal sector, as a mere 'conduit', or a machine translating words (Böser, 2013), while others acknowledge the complexity of interpreting in

investigative interviews and apply the term 'interpreter-mediated' police interview when describing the engagement of interpreters (Gallai, 2013; Gallez & Maryns, 2014; Nakane, 2009; Salaets & Balogh, 2015).

However, the Improving Police and Legal Interpreting Project (ImPLI) established that regardless of common perception or assumptions many users in the police environment across Europe, including the UK, frequently expected that *'interpreters would provide explanations and clarification of culturally specific references (e.g. of a geographic nature) or forms of behaviour (e.g. on how to address a person) or that they would offer guidance on the appropriateness of procedure (e.g. gender matching of interpreter and interviewee)'* (ImPLI Project, 2012, p. 29) and many other issues.

Previous studies also demonstrated that interpreters de facto play a significant role in cross-cultural analysis when interpreting messages from one language into another. For example, Krouglov (1999) studied police interpreting in the context of linguistic discourse analysis and found that interpreters make pragmatic decisions during the act of interpreting and can omit or change colloquialism or obscene terminology that the interviewee used. While still interpreting accurately the meaning of messages, interpreters were observed altering expressions of hesitation

and affirmation which may change the level of politeness used in the investigative communication. Other researchers observed interpreting as a cultural act and focused on different interpreting strategies used to render the messages (Russell, 2000; Hale, 1997; Mulayim et al., 2014; Dando & Milne, 2009). Böser (2013) highlighted that in bilingual police interviews an interpreter can be an equal 'co-creator' in relation to the participants' *'orientation towards a series of organisational objectives'* (Böser, 2013, p. 114). Filipović (2007) analysed police interview materials of witness interviews and demonstrated that interpreters were required to perform linguistic and cross-cultural analyses in the act of interpreting. She concluded that a better understanding of the problematic differences between the languages and the habitual language-specific phrasing is needed during the interviewing of witnesses via interpreters (Filipović, 2007, p. 264). The study demonstrated the importance of using the expertise of police interpreters, as they act at the level of a forensic linguist.

The dynamics of investigative interviews inevitably changes when interpreters are involved. Some scholars apply the term *presence* when discussing various aspects of investigative interviews conducted with the assistance of interpreters (Nakane, 2009; Russell, 2002; Heydon, 2005). However, an interpreter is not just present, but plays an active role in removing language barriers

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and assisting in effective communication between the interviewer and their interviewee. At the same time, the impact of the presence of an interpreter on the interaction dynamics and the power relationships is still being under-researched (Nakane, 2014). Russel (2002) noted that the traditional oppositional dyad of interviewer and suspect is transformed by the presence of an interpreter *‘into a triadic mixture of opposition, cooperation and shifting alignments’* (Russel, 2002, p. 116). However, no similar research was conducted to date to study the change in the dynamics of interpreter-assisted interviews of victims and witnesses. This field remains under-researched, and the reason for this might be the existing practices in police interviewing of victims and witnesses.

Law professionals and researchers increasingly acknowledge that interviewing victims and witnesses has a very high importance in investigations (Milne & Bull, 1999). Indeed, the

first interview with witnesses of crime had paramount and defining importance in the outcome of investigations. In an event where such an interview was not conducted appropriately, the whole investigation could fail (Milne & Shaw, 1999).

However, law-enforcement institutions are more concerned with interviewing suspects. For example, the initial training on how to conduct an investigative interview may take a week, and only two days are dedicated to interviewing victims and witnesses (Clarke & Milne, 2001; Milne & Bull, 2003).

In current police practice, an account of a victim or a witness is recorded by the interviewing investigator. When recorded by the police, the account of a victim or a witness is referred to as a *witness statement*. The actual interviews are not routinely recorded unless the victim or witness is classed as vulnerable, in which case more advanced interviewers or specialist officers would conduct video recorded interviews (Kebbell et al., 1999).

Fowler (2003) studied police practice in witness statement procedures when using interpreters at Greater Manchester Police and identified two main approaches and their numerous variations and concluded that officers do not have concrete guidance in relation to interpreter-assisted

statement taking procedure.

Contrary to the myth that any bilingual can interpret, legal interpreting is a highly demanding professional field of expertise. Legal interpreting started evolving into a separate profession under a wider name of Public Service Interpreting (PSI), also known as Community Interpreting in response to the demand in the last few decades (Corsellis, 2008, D'Hayer, 2012; Hale, 2007; Llewellyn-Jones & Lee, 2014; Mason, 2006).

Police interpreters are highly skilled professionals dealing with a variety of jargons, terminology, acronyms covering a number of subjects. They are supposed to overcome cultural taboos and natural hesitations and master equally balanced bilingual fluency in obscene terminology, colloquialisms and slang. Furthermore, in addition to learning police jargon interpreters need to understand policies, procedures, interviewing styles and develop tactics and a lot more in order to place the non-English speaking interviewee in as similar position as possible to an English-speaking person (Krouglov, 1999).

In the UK, qualified, experienced and security cleared interpreters may register with National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI), the regulator for PSI established in 1994 in order to ensure a minimum professional standard and compliance with a uniform code of conduct.

Other professional bodies have also developed ethical guidelines for interpreters working in the field, such as the Association of Police and Court Interpreters (APCI), the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL), the Institute of Interpreting and Translation (ITI) that have professional codes of conduct for their members. These codes are based on the same main principles incorporating competence, accuracy, truthfulness, impartiality, confidentiality, integrity, respect and professionalism.

However, the codes are not strictly prescriptive and usually can be described as a general professional guidance, although the principle of impartiality or neutrality is specifically emphasised in all of them. In legal interpreting, and in the context of investigative interviews, interpreters' impartiality becomes paramount for securing justice (ImPLi Project, 2012). For this reason, interpreters declare their impartiality at the beginning of the assignment, strive to be as unobtrusive as possible, speak in the first grammatical person, and do not offer their personal opinion or advice, aiming at the highest level of accuracy in conveying each utterance from one language to another as part of a code of conduct.

Importantly, point 13 of the APCI Code of Practice specifically warns interpreters against taking witness statements instead of investigators, even if

they are asked to do so:

'Members shall not go to a witness' home or meet a witness elsewhere at the request of a police officer or anyone else to take a statement or for any other purpose unless accompanied by an officer in charge of the case or other police officer' (APCI, 2010).

Furthermore, in their July 2016 newsletter, NRPSI published a reminder on their website directed to both registered interpreters and the services users:

'Based on feedback that we are receiving, there seems to be some confusion about the role of interpreters in police interviews. The NRPSI's position is that the interpreter should assist the Police Officer in taking a statement: the interpreter should not take the statement themselves. Different forces take different approaches to taking statements – the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (pp 233-234) details two options. Whichever approach is taken, however, it is clear that the interpreter should never be left alone with the interviewee or expected to take the statement, as this could affect their impartiality and conflict with the NRPSI Code of Conduct' (NRPSI, 2016).

Taking into consideration previous studies in the field of police interpreting, the main focus of this research is to explore the way interpreters perceive

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their role in investigative interviews of non-English speaking victims and witnesses and the subsequent witness statement taking procedures. The research provides an analysis of collected empirical data that identify specific issues and challenges encountered by interpreters and develops our understanding of current practices and approaches in the field. As a result, the following working hypotheses have been generated and tested in this study:

- (1) police interpreters would have a range of issues specific to the interpreter-assisted interviews of victims/witnesses and the subsequent statement taking procedure;
- (2) police interpreters find interpreter-assisted investigative interviews of victims and witnesses more challenging than interviewing suspects.

Following the preliminary research and literature review in the field, the following research

questions come into focus:

- (1) Do interpreters rely on any formal training and/or guidance documents when assisting in taking witness statements of non-English speaking victims and witnesses?
- (2) What major challenges and issues do police interpreters face when assisting in taking a witness statement as part of interpreter-assisted investigative interviews?
- (3) How is the aspect of impartiality perceived by interpreters in the context of interpreter-assisted investigative interviews of victims and witnesses and the subsequent witness statement taking procedures?

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The quantitative data were obtained through questionnaires specifically designed to elicit relevant information from police interpreters in England and Wales. The target group for the study were qualified and experienced police interpreters who assisted investigators in interviewing victims and witnesses and taking statements. No parameters other than relevant professional experience were considered as being important for the validity of the data. Any other parameters, such as age, gender or background of the respondents were deemed irrelevant for the purposes of this study.

The questionnaire was designed taking into the

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account the objectives of the research and aimed at collecting the required information. The questionnaire had a combination of open-ended questions and questions with a list of ready-made options offered for selection. None of the questions were mandatory. Closed questions aimed at collecting some qualitative data, while open-ended questions aimed at collecting data for quantitative analysis. It was anticipated to obtain some thorough and meaningful responses to open-ended questions, for example option 'other' with a space for answers was provided in some questions in combination with three ready-made options in the form of statements prepared for selection (Hale & Napier, 2013). There was also a 'qualifying' question aimed at illustrating the relevant field experience of respondents, while all other questions served the purpose of eliciting data related to the research questions.

Initially, the designed questionnaires were piloted on a small group of interpreters. Four representatives in the population sample were carefully selected based on their significant field experience. All selected interpreters were experienced in police, court and business interpreting and held Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI) and/or Diploma in Police Interpreting (DPI) qualifications. In addition, two interpreters had an MA in Conference Interpreting. The participants were asked to note the time taken to fill in the questionnaire, identify any questions which were not clear, specify other areas for enhancement in the actual questions, and provide any relevant comments.

All four interpreters returned their completed questionnaires with related comments. Subsequently, there was a 100% questionnaires return rate. Based on the comments received, some questions were made shorter and clearer and some other questions were removed as they were perceived as similar by respondents.

The finalised survey questionnaire was transferred to administration onto an online survey platform. The survey link was circulated to all official Cambridgeshire Constabulary interpreters, approximately 250 fully qualified and security cleared interpreters, as well as circulated nationally through the closed professional interpreters' groups on social media.

The cover message accompanying the survey links explained the purpose, aims and potential benefits of the research project, and provided the assurances in ethical approach to data processing and anonymity of the respondents. The recipients were asked to forward the survey link to their qualified colleagues.

The exact number of recipients is not known as the circulation was completed through the key contacts and social media groups. The survey gathered 90 responses from the interpreters. The data was collected from the online platform in the form of detailed reports and then processed manually.

3. STUDY AND RESULTS

The collected data and comments were analysed specifically ensuring that the comments made by individual respondents supported, explained or modified the answers from the list of ready-made options offered for selection. This approach helped establish variations and some particular attitudes or views on various aspects of the role of interpreters in interpreters-assisted interviews.

All 90 respondents confirmed having relevant experience by selecting one of the options with the numbers of the interpreter-assisted interviews of victims and witnesses completed to date. Figure 1 shows the experience as the data validity parameter.

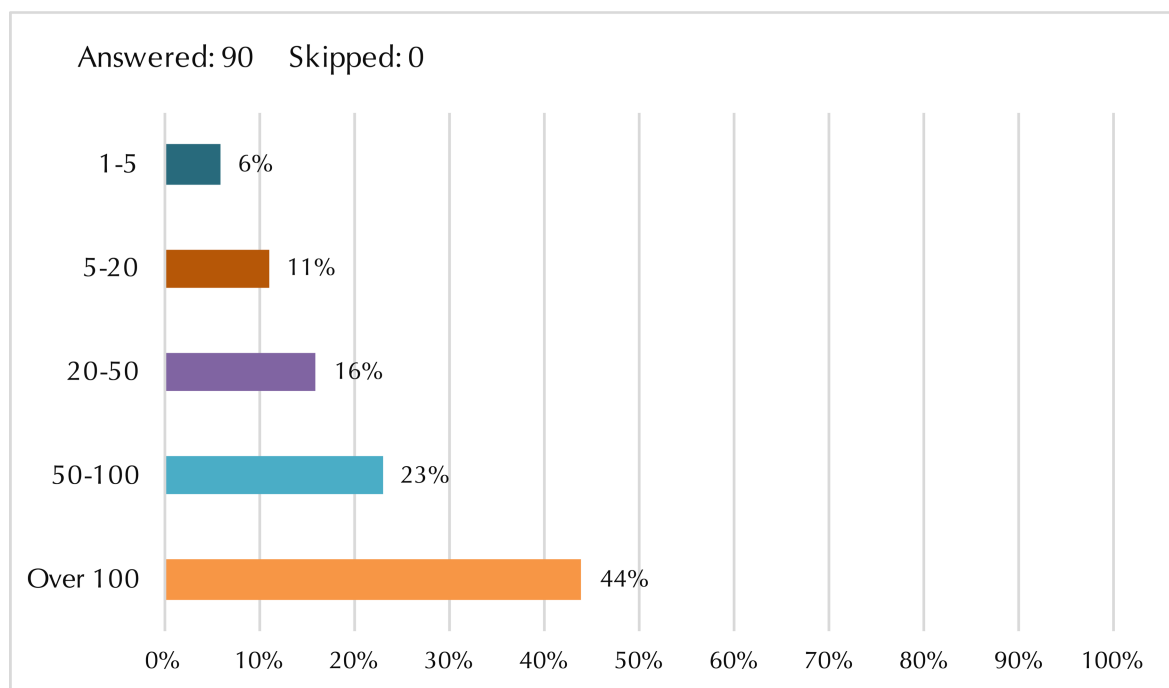


Figure 1. Responses reflecting respondents' experience in interpreter-assisted investigative interviewing of victims/witnesses measured by the number of such interviews completed prior to the survey

The majority of respondents showed significant experience in providing interpreter-assisted interviews and were qualified for the participation in the survey with 77% (61 interpreters) having completed over 50 interviews of victims/witnesses.

Almost half of interpreters exceeded the maximum mark of 100 interviews. It is, therefore, safe to accept that the data obtained during the survey is of high validity and reliability.

The survey questionnaire also asked interpreters as to how they viewed their role in the witness statement taking procedure. Figure 2 shows that only 6 interpreters supported the *statement taker*

option. Contrary to the recent survey (Gentile, 2016), the *communication facilitator* option was the least popular with only 5% or 4 responses in support.

The most popular option was in support of the independency and impartiality aspect in the role of an interpreter. This option was selected by 88% of the interpreters.

This, however, leaves over 10% of interpreters not supporting the aspect of interpreters' impartiality in the context of the investigative interview of victims and witnesses and the statement taking procedure.

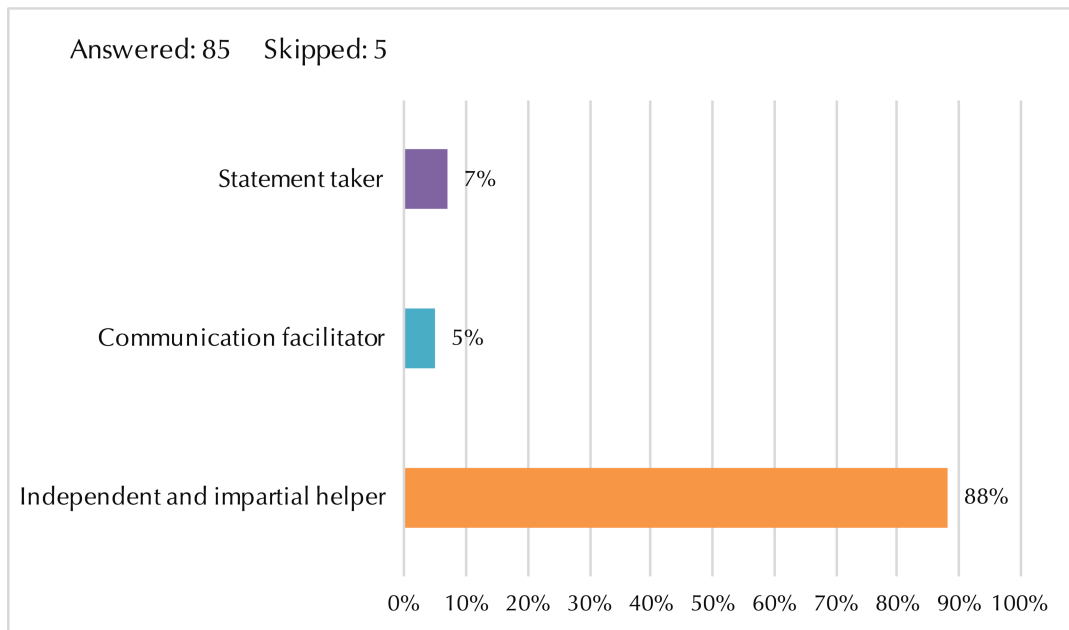


Figure 2. Responses reflecting respondents' perception of the role of interpreter in interpreter-assisted investigative interviewing of victims/witnesses and witness statement taking procedure

Some respondents provided more details with 16 open-ended responses obtained. For example, INT#89 noted that *'the role is somehow fluid in between all three mentioned above. It depends on the police officer, witness and the offence'*. However, INT#69 perceived the role beyond the given narratives supporting the idea that an interpreter is a *'communication professional as well as a writer (to be able to write clearly and unambiguously is essential in this job...)'*.

Furthermore, open-ended responses revealed that some of the respondents perceived all three definitions to be correct. INT#12, INT#62, INT#63, INT#72 and INT#75 admitted that they

were occasionally taking statements instead of the investigators. This practice appears to be in breach of the current Authorised Professional Practice Guidance. However, a number of interpreters expressed concern that they were often asked to act as witness statement takers and required to do so without a presence of an investigator. This problem will be discussed further under the *Issues and Challenges* heading. However, it is important to note here that the respondents did not know what the rest of the questions in the survey would be. Subsequently, the fact that they decided to raise this issue under this heading can be indicative of the level of pressure interpreters are under when their role to interpret impartially is

neither understood nor respected by investigators.

Based on the survey, it is appropriate to assume that the understanding of the role of an interpreter in investigative interviews of victims and witnesses is not consistent and largely depends on the interpreters' individual views and beliefs. One in ten of interpreters do not support the impartiality aspect in interpreters' code of conduct. This lack of awareness or understanding poses a risk of interpreters taking on the role of investigators in breach of the professional code of conduct.

In reply to the question about any specific training interpreters had with regards to the witness-statement taking procedure in the context of interpreter-assisted interviews, 45% (40 responses) confirmed that they did not have any relevant

training before their engagement in police interpreting assignments (Figure 3). Further analysis of the open-ended responses provided by the interpreters who chose the yes option showed what training they deemed relevant, and 20 out of 46 respondents attributed their relevant training to Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI) and Diploma in Police Interpreting (DPI) courses, 5 to Cambridgeshire Constabulary Continuous Professional Development (CPD) short courses, and 4 to some training with London Metropolitan Police. A number of professional bodies, universities and commercial agencies were mentioned by some respondents. However, interpreters were not specific as to what sort of training they had: most of them vaguely alluded to some training, own research and learning through working experience.

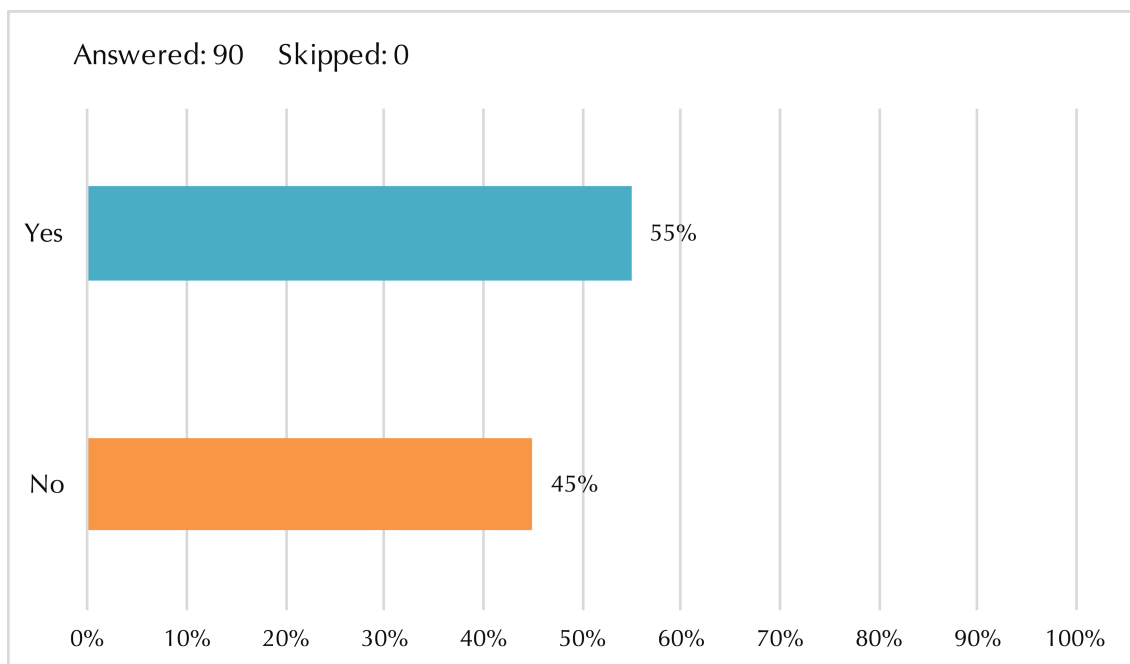


Figure 3. Responses related to the relevant training

Additionally, 46 open-ended responses were obtained showing that interpreters can only rely on optional training courses in preparation to the DPSI and DPI qualification exams and occasional optional CPD sessions. Otherwise interpreters gain experience through practice which can be rather limited and one-sided.

In their replies about any guidance documents related to the investigative interpreter-assisted victim and witness interviewing and statement taking procedures, 47% of respondents (42 interpreters) admitted that they were not aware of any relevant guidance documents whatsoever (Figure 4).

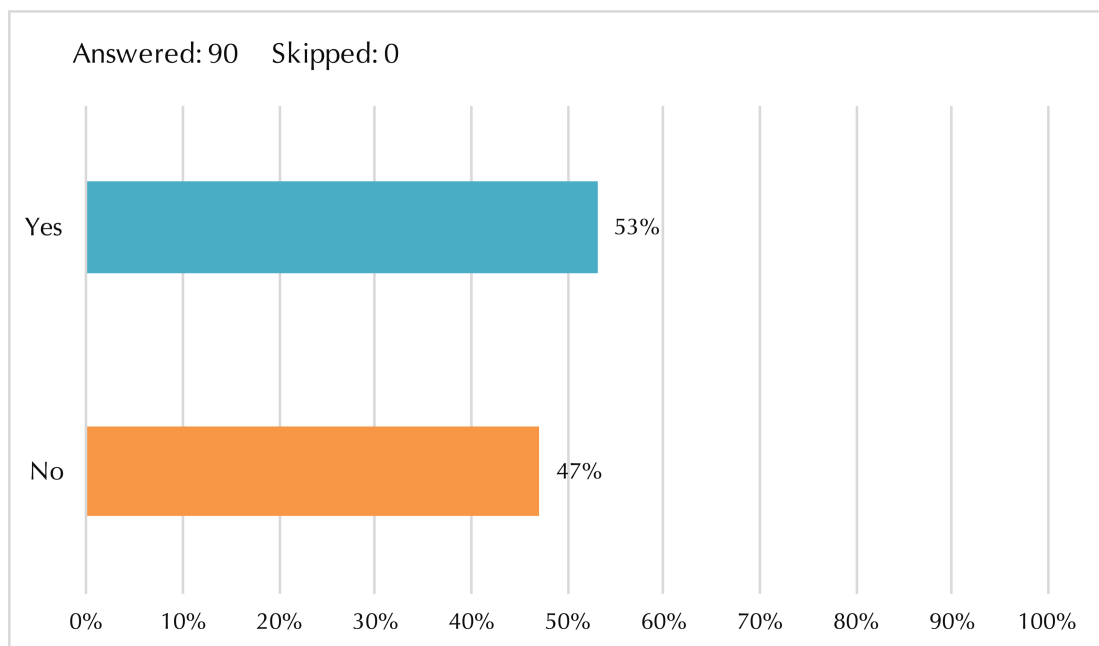


Figure 4. Responses related to the knowledge on any guidance documents

Furthermore, a number of respondents who answered yes failed to specify any such documents in their open-ended responses (a total of 43 open-ended responses were obtained). Interpreters predominantly referred to the guidance provided by 'agencies' and 'clients', police forces, some police officers, or some courses. Courses, training, or conversations with police officers, however, cannot be classed as 'guidance documents', even if they provided a useful guidance. This piece of

finding shows that a significant number of interpreters who selected a yes option are in fact not aware of any guidance documents. INT#33, INT#59 and INT#71 referred to Cambridgeshire Constabulary Standard Operating Procedures. INT#42, INT#64, INT#68, INT#69, INT#79 and INT#81 referred to Metropolitan Police Guidance. Police and Criminal Act 1984 (PACE) was mentioned by six interpreters, INT#08, INT#31, INT#38, INT#42, INT#50 and INT#73. However,

PACE is concerned with detaining persons and does not govern police dealings with victims and witnesses (Clarke et al., 2011). Based on this survey, it is fair to suggest that one in two professional interpreters are unaware of any guidance documents related to taking statements and interviewing non-English speaking victims and witnesses.

Interpreters were asked if they experienced any issues or challenges in the course of the investigative interviewing of victims and witnesses and the subsequent statement taking procedures. Figure 5 shows that a positive response came from almost two third of interpreters, 69% of respondents (61 interpreter) answered yes in this part of the questionnaire.

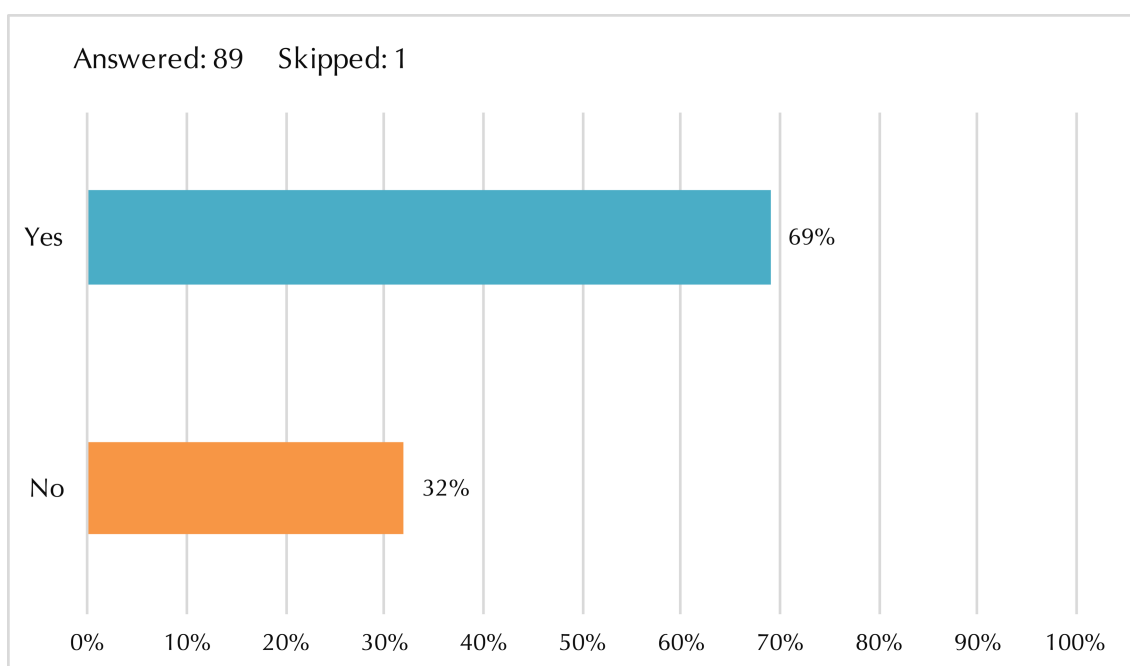


Figure 5. Responses to the question if interpreters experienced any issues or challenges in the course of the investigative interview of victims and witnesses and subsequent statement taking procedures

Many respondents provided further comments covering challenges and issues they experienced in interpreting interviews of victims and witnesses. There were 57 open-ended responses in total and additionally three interpreters provided further details in their e-mails. The majority of the respondents raised the issue of police officers

being unaware of what the role of an interpreter was, and whether they are in the position to delegate some of their duties of interviewing non-English speaking victims and witnesses and taking statements to interpreters. Such practice of job delegation was reported by 36 interpreters, which is approximately 38% of the respondents.

Interpreters reported that the lack of any training led to confusion as to what the correct procedure was, for example, INT#82: *'I was left on my own with the witness to take the statement'*, or INT#86: *'Very often an interpreter is left to be in charge of the statement taking'*.

There were some interpreters who felt extremely uncomfortable when police officers asked them to take statements on their own or left them to wait for an officer alone in the same room with a victim or witness. Many interpreters stated that it was extremely challenging to refuse to act as an investigator explaining that such practice of delegating investigative responsibilities to an interpreter was unacceptable, e.g.:

INT#31: *'Occasionally, some police officers asked me to take the statement and some felt dissatisfied with me when I had explained my role and declined their request'*.

INT#14: *'Some police officers have asked me to be on my own in the room with the witness whilst taking the statement from the witness but I always told them that the police officer should be in the room and reminded them what the role of an interpreter is'*.

These and other responses showed that interpreters felt uncomfortable when asked to act outside their remit in breach of the professional code of

conduct. Many interpreters tried to raise the issue with police officers in charge of investigation, e.g.:

INT#42: *'Occasionally expectation was that interpreter would be left alone with the witness to take statement. Officers accepted challenge but it always feels uncomfortable'*.

INT#78: *'I had a very bad experience the last time I took a witness statement. The police woman wanted to leave me to it, and after I tried to reason with her for a while, I had to tell her that I would not do the job'*.

Some respondents also reported situations when they faced the challenge of being coerced into taking a statement instead of an investigator. The example below illustrates the pressure interpreters are under in some regions in the UK: *'I politely explained to the officers that it was their duty to deal with the victim and take a statement, not mine. [The officer] then rolled his eyes and said: 'I asked for an interpreter who can do both oral and written!' I tried to explain further but both officers categorically refused to have anything to do with statement taking. It is my opinion that they deemed me incompetent as officers in [this region] always rely on interpreters to take statements for them'*.

This and other interpreters' responses showed their awareness of the professional code of conduct,

especially in the aspect of impartiality. Their responses clarified that they refused to act as investigators, even though some police officers were hugely dissatisfied and threatened to make complaints. A few interpreters reported that they felt bullied and humiliated by investigating officers.

However, some open-ended responses showed that in certain instances, interpreters took statements on their own in the absence of investigating officers. Their responses also confirmed that as a result of this the statements were of poor quality. INT#65, for example, reported as follows: *'Officers unaware that interpreters aren't statement takers; officers who did not care about the interpreter's personal statement and referencing exhibits resulting in angry calls/emails from Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).'*

A few respondents assumed the role of investigators and described their experience of fulfilling the investigative role. For example, INT#69 provided the following comment: *'I feel better when I sit down with the witness and let them speak without stopping them and writing down notes. Then asking questions to clarify or get more details. Once I have the full picture of the incident in my head, I write better structured less ambiguous statements. This is something that I learned during my legal studies. Recalling an*

incident requires a lot of focus and concentration for a witness, so expecting interpreters to keep interrupting them to write it down during police interviews is not right. I believe that a legally trained interpreter can write a much better statement than an officer speaking through an interpreter and, at the same time, expecting them to write down in their language'.

INT#12, who to date assisted in conducting 50-100 interviews of victims/witnesses, noted that at the beginning of her career the statements she took were not detailed enough and since then she has improved and does not have any issues, another indication of an interpreter assuming the role of an investigator.

The other key finding in the area of issues and challenges showed the perception and concerns of interpreters that police officers at times did not seem to have much of the procedural knowledge, did not have relevant forms, had little knowledge of the correct exhibiting and labelling of witness statements and interpreters' personal statements. INT#33 commented on the investigators' lack of basic understanding of how to communicate effectively via an interpreter when the investigator referred to the interpreter rather than to the interviewee: *'An officer recently talked predominately to me, marginalising the victim'.* Further explanations were provided by INT#1: *'No regulations, no guidance, different PCs having*

‘However, some open-ended responses showed that in certain instances, interpreters took statements on their own in the absence of investigating officers’

different rules of statement taking; no set up procedure one and for all’.

Another major finding was in interpreters’ observations around police practices when dealing with victims and witnesses. One interpreter sent an e-mail detailing issues and challenges from her experience. She provided an example of a 7-hour interview of a witness, who was not offered any food, refreshments or even a break: *‘It obviously also tests the interpreter’s resilience, particularly for rare languages when the interpreter has spent many hours travelling there and still has a similar return journey ahead’.*

A few issues in the key findings go beyond police officers’ awareness of the policies and the good practice guidance. For example, INT#11 highlighted *‘cultural differences’*, a very broad topic that although seriously under-researched, attracted attention of some scholars (Krouglov, 1999; Filipović, 2007, Hales & Filipović, 2016).

Linguistic challenges were also highlighted under

the rubric of issues and challenges linked to police officers training and awareness or lacking of both by INT#62: *‘When victims are distressed, they may switch to a different language learned when they were small, which may not be the language you were called in for. British police officers accuse the interpreter if the witness is incomprehensible for that reason, because British police officers do not comprehend the mind of a multicultural, multilingual person’.*

Language identification and challenges connected to witnesses’ limited fluency in additional languages were also mentioned by INT#62: *‘Some witnesses with different languages, e.g. Somalian, ask for a European language interpreter – Dutch if they have lived in the Netherlands – rather than their native language, to preserve their privacy within their own community, or because European languages command more respect than African or other languages. This can cause language problems’.*

Interpreters also highlighted the challenge of inappropriate working conditions for statement taking at some police stations and especially in people’s houses with the noise, young children, distractions and other family members influencing the interviewee.

INT#18 pointed out the issue of *‘going in chronological order’*. Although the context is not

very clear, this issue can be connected to the challenge of writing the statement in chronological order, when a victim or witness recalls the events not chronologically. Fisher et al. (2011) report that witnesses do not tend to recall the events in chronological order and that the use of the Cognitive Interviews (CI) techniques allow to retrieve memories in the reverse order.

Other interpreters raised concerns about having no access to a computer or a laptop when writing a witness statement. The convenience of having a tidy document and a logical and chronological statement is very obvious from a practical point of view, especially that currently interviews of victims and witnesses in Britain are not routinely video or audio recorded.

In summary, those who experienced issues and challenges suffered confusion and lack of clarity around the policies and procedures and the role of interpreters, especially in the aspect of impartiality. The responses indicated that interpreters suffered when police officers showed lack of any knowledge on how to communicate effectively via an interpreter. Lack of training lead to officers' hesitations to facilitate communication even when they were aware of the correct protocol.

Interpreters raised concerns that police officers often delegated or attempted to delegate fully or partially their responsibilities to interview non-

English speaking victims and witnesses to interpreters. While most interpreters refused to act as investigators, a number of interpreters admitted that they were coerced into assuming the role of an investigator and that they did not hesitate to assume the investigative role and take statements. Interpreters described in their free comments that they felt bullied, humiliated, and coerced to act as investigators. The respondents noted that the standard and quality of such statements can be questionable. Non-English speaking victims and witnesses were described as 'marginalised'.

Having received and analysed the data with regards to the issues and challenges, it was established that only 7% (6 responses) of interpreters reported that it was easier to deal with victims and witnesses. This is clearly a sign that interpreter-assisted interviews of victims and witnesses and the statement taking procedure pose significant challenges and difficulties. The results further revealed that indeed a third of the respondents, 33% (30 responses), found it easier to assist in interviewing suspects.

One of the working hypotheses of this study was that interpreters would find dealing with suspects less challenging. Nevertheless, the majority of the respondents, i.e. 60% (54 responses) reported no preferences whatsoever as to the category of the interviewees whether a suspect, a victim or a witness (Figure 6).

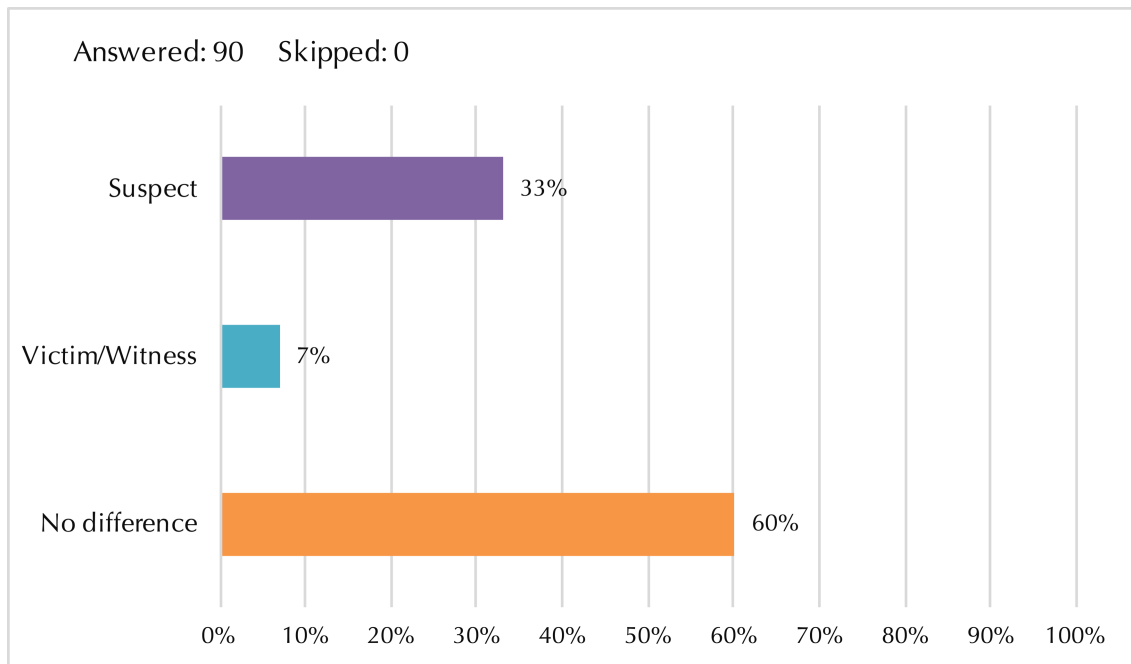


Figure 6. Responses related to respondents' preferences in the category of the interviewees: suspects, victims/witnesses or no significant difference?

Thus, the main finding in this section confirms the hypothesis suggesting that practicing specialists would find the interpreter-assisted investigative interview of victims and witnesses more challenging than interviewing suspects.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirmed the two hypotheses, i.e. (1) that interpreters have a range of issues specific to interpreter-assisted interviews of victims and witnesses and statement taking procedure, and (2) that interpreters find it easier to deal with suspects' interviews.

The interpreters identified a range of challenges for

both groups of interviews which included lack of awareness and knowledge regarding good practice guidance, absence of a national standard operations procedures protocol and lack of specific training.

Half of respondents in this study are not aware of any guidance documents and have not had any training relevant to investigative interpreter-assisted interviews of victims and witnesses and statement taking procedures. Police interpreters rely mainly on learning through practical experience, which poses high risk of developing poor practice habits and inconsistency that inevitably affect non-English speaking victims and

witnesses.

Survey results suggest that interpreters' understanding of their role in investigative interviewing of victims and witnesses largely depends on their individual views and beliefs. Their perception and understanding of the impartiality principle vary significantly, while one in ten interpreters do not support or understand the aspect of impartiality in the code of conduct of interpreters. This lack of awareness or understanding of the role of an interpreter poses a risk that interpreters may take on the role of investigators in breach of the professional code of conduct.

The respondents provided numerous comments and examples. Two thirds of interpreters experienced various issues and challenges in the course of investigative interviews of victims and witnesses and subsequent statement taking procedures. They reported some instances of

confusion around the role of an interpreter during interviews and statement taking procedures, i.e. who should do what when taking statements of non-English speaking victims and witnesses.

The most common and challenging issues for the interpreters were when police officers fully or partially delegated their responsibilities to deal with non-English speaking victims and witnesses to interpreters. Interpreters sometimes felt bullied, humiliated, and coerced to act as investigators and felt that non-English speaking victims and witnesses were 'marginalised'.

While most interpreters refused to act as investigators some gave in and took statements instead of investigators. The complexity of issues and the confusions around the role of interpreters in the investigative interviewing of victims and witnesses requires further study and analysis involving all participants in the interview and statement taking process.

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