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SPECIALIZATION IN INTERPRETING

DISSERTATION

Community interpreting in Greece; issues and challenges in the field (ReTrans program (Working with Interpreters in Refugee Transit Zones) interview analysis).

STUDENT

ELECTRA KARAMIZARI TSAKOTELLI

REGISTRATION NUMBER: Ξ2019103

SUPERVISORS

PROFESSOR STEFANOS VLACHOPOULOS

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR ANASTASIOS IOANNIDIS

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Abstract

The primary objective of the present research is to identify and meticulously record the main obstacles encountered within the domain of community interpreting or public service interpreting. For the present research, a mixed method approach was implemented and structured interviews, based on questionnaires, were conducted. These interviews targeted both authoritative figures, refugees and asylum seekers. Through this particular research, the in-depth analysis centers on two of the aforementioned interviews. The main challenges discerned throughout this study was: a) a noticeable lack of adequately trained and professional interpreters; b) the lack of compassion from all the state officials; c) the Greek state's reluctance to actively provide effective solutions to these ongoing problems.

Keywords; community interpreting, challenges, refugee, official, Greek state

Purpose of the paper

This paper is centered around the investigation conducted through questionnaires and interviews within the ReTrans program. The main goal is to identify the current challenges and requirements in the field of community interpretation and propose effective solutions to strengthen this area. The research follows a structured path: it begins with an introduction to community interpretation, introduces the ReTrans program, outlines the research methodology, analyses the collected data, particularly focusing on insights from two specific interviews. The paper concludes with essential findings and presents the full interview transcripts.

Introduction

Humanity has historically exhibited a constant state of movement, driven by the innate human desire to secure better life opportunities for both themselves and their families. Such mobility is motivated by diverse factors, including the pursuit of employment opportunities, economic betterment, familial considerations, educational reasons, as well as the need to escape situations characterized by conflict, persecution, terrorism, and human rights violations. Additionally, some individuals are compelled to relocate due to the repercussions of climate change, natural disasters, and other environmental factors.

In recent years, there has been a notable increase in population movements, primarily attributed to economic hardships in individuals' countries of origin or the transformation of these regions into conflict zones. This augmentation in movement is substantiated by a recent investigation conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In 2020, Europe hosted over 877 million refugees, a number that has witnessed substantial growth since the dawn of the millennium. Greece, in particular, emerged as a destination for a staggering 1.34 million refugees, as reported by the IOM in 2022. This research reveals that Greece ranks seventh among European nations in terms of the proportion of refugees and asylum seekers within its borders. These displaced individuals predominantly originate from Middle Eastern and African nations, such as Syria, Afghanistan, Palestine, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Iraq, and they speak a spectrum of languages and dialects (IOM UN MIGRATION. (2022). World migration report.).

Upon their arrival in Greece, migrants and refugees contact with Greek authorities to settle essential matters related to survival. These critical concerns encompass understanding the way public services function in Greece, the intricacies of the healthcare system, the asylum application process, the welfare system, and other support services. However, a significant impediment to effective communication within reception centers and other contexts is the poor language proficiency in Greek, combined with the absence of adequately trained interpreters, as noted by Vlachopoulos in 2016. This challenge has emerged as an essential obstacle, both for foreigners seeking assistance and for the Greek government, necessitating concerted efforts to address this issue. (Vlachopoulos, S. (Ed.). (2016). *Community interpreting in Greece Building the future*. Technological Educational Institute of Epirus Department of Business Administration. (p. 10))

Community Interpreting

The bridging of the communication gap between Greek authorities and refugees is accomplished through a specialized form of interpretation known as community interpreting (CI) or public service interpreting. This constitutes the central focus of inquiry and the main pillar of the present research endeavor. While numerous scholars have attempted to establish a universally accepted definition of public service interpreting, the concept remains multifaceted, characterized by diverse approaches, and ongoing efforts aiming to delineate its boundaries. Professor Holly Mikkelsen suggests that CI functions as an umbrella term encompassing various interpretation domains, including medical and judicial contexts (Mikkelsen, H. (1996b). *Community Interpreting: An Emerging Profession*. *Interpreting*, 1(1), 125-129).

The definition adopted in this study aligns with the one provided by Professor Erik Hertog of Lessius University College. According to Professor Hertog, community interpreting, often referred to as CI, plays an indispensable role in facilitating communication between individuals or communities who do not possess fluency in the official or predominant language utilized by government and public services. This form of interpretation finds significant application in diverse social service contexts, including welfare programs, housing assistance, employment services, educational institutions, refugee camps, and various social agencies. Additionally, CI plays a critical role in medical environments, such as childcare facilities, hospitals, and mental health clinics, as well as in legal settings, including prisons, police stations, and probation offices. (Hertog, E. (2010, October 28). *Hertog: Community Interpreting*). Therefore, it is imperative to distinguish public service interpreting from conference interpreting, as delineated by Jacobsen (Jacobsen, B. (2017). *The Community Interpreter: A Question of Role*. *HERMES - Journal of Language and Communication in Business*, 22, 155-166).

In recent years, the concept of community interpretation has become closely intertwined with the refugee crisis, as previously noted. The need for effective communication between incoming individuals and governmental agencies is paramount. Hale contends that public service interpreting has evolved into a hybrid profession, merging the roles of interpreter and social worker (Hale, S. (2007). *Community Interpreting*, (p. 27)). Assistant Professor Anastasios Ioannidis of Ionian University underscores that while community interpreting is a rapidly evolving field, its definition and role remain ambiguous, especially in countries with substantial immigrant populations (Ioannidis A. (2014) on Vlachopoulos, S. (Ed.). (2016). *Community Interpreting in Greece: Building the Future*, Technological Educational Institute of Epirus Department of Business Administration, p. 13). Although the term enjoys international recognition, its emergence in Greece

is relatively recent and is often associated with the asylum process and interpretation within public services.

Retrans

In recent years, the widespread issue of untrained interpreters and the resulting breakdown in communication between authorities and refugees have become a major concern for NGOs and government agencies. Efforts to address this problem have led to various initiatives, including the recent ReTrans program, which is the focus of this paper. The aforementioned ReTrans research program is undertaken collaboratively by Greece, Austria, Slovenia, and North Macedonia.

In particular, the study is conducted within the overarching framework of the ReTrans program, titled "Working with Interpreters in Refugee Transit Zones: Capacity building and awareness-raising for higher education contexts." The program has received support from the Erasmus+ academic initiative of the European Union. Its principal objective includes raising awareness within higher educational institutions regarding the complexities of community interpretation and contributing to the training of competent interpreters through the development of innovative educational materials. Specifically, the project aims to create digital educational tools to address the needs of the various stakeholders involved in the field, including interpreters, state authorities, refugees and migrants. Consequently, the primary aim of this project is twofold: firstly, to record the current needs for interpreting services, and secondly, to identify and address the persistent challenges in the field.

Methodology

The research methodology implemented for this research is a "mixed method" approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods in a single study. Quantitative research involves the collection and analysis of numerical data, while qualitative research delves into narrative or empirical data. In particular, the quantitative research is based on questionnaires facilitating the collection and analysis of specific numerical results. Qualitative research was based on interviews conducted to gain deeper insights into the questionnaire findings. (Halcomb, E. J., & Hickman, L. (2015). University of Wollongong Research Online. Mixed methods research. (p.2))

Commencing with the distribution of questionnaires, which, as previously indicated, was linked with the quantitative research approach, an in depth research was conducted. This research aimed to formulate explicit and well-structured questions, affording all potential participants the opportunity to provide their responses. The questionnaires were structured based on their intended recipients. A total of 64 questionnaires were distributed in Greece. Initially, a series of exploratory questions sought information regarding respondents' workplace, years of experience in their current roles, age, gender, and related factors. Notably, 64% of the respondents identified as female, 27% as male, with 9% choosing not to disclose their gender. Concerning age, the majority fell within the 30 to 40 age bracket. To determine their professional field, participants were presented with the question: "Which public sector do you work in?" They were instructed to select one of the following categories: Healthcare, Justice, Education, Security, Civil services and administration, or Other. The responses to this question were spread across multiple sectors, with 27% of respondents employed in the education sector, another 27% in civil services and administration, and the remaining 46% in various other sectors. Based on the responses in the questionnaires, the majority

of refugees or migrants originate from Syria and Afghanistan. The most frequently used languages are Arabic, followed by Farsi, Dari, and Urdu. In almost one-third of the cases, two interpreters are utilized, likely due to the scarcity of interpreters proficient in the required language combinations. Respondents highlight ethical and linguistic challenges as crucial, but there is no clear consensus on the level of professionalism among interpreters. Approximately half of the responses suggest that interpreters are punctual, impartial, use direct speech, and introduce themselves.

From all that has been testified based on the questionnaires, it becomes evident that specialized training is necessary, as beneficiaries include individuals who are illiterate, minors, victims of abuse and torture, and hearing-impaired. It is reassuring to note that there is a provision for counselling for interpreters when required, although such instances are infrequent. Communication and interpreting needs are substantial across various sectors, but permanent employment opportunities are rare. These findings underscore the demand for interpreting services in multiple sectors and emphasize the necessity for specific training to enhance communication through interpretation.

In regard to the interviews, one-on-one interviews were conducted with individuals connected to the field of community interpretation who agreed to participate in the study. Their duration typically spanned from 10 to 15 minutes, largely guided by the structured questionnaires. Topics for discussion were meticulously prepared to address key questions that have long intrigued the community interpretation field. Suitable interviewees were identified, often with the assistance of various non-governmental organizations, and interviews were arranged according to the interviewees' schedules. Most interviews took place online, except for one conducted in person. Notably, interviews were recorded via webcam or conventional cameras, with the option for interviewees to alter their voices and blur their faces. Nevertheless, it is essential to highlight that all interviews followed a conversational format and flow. This approach led to the emergence of numerous questions throughout the discussions, affording room for more extensive exploration beyond the scope of the initial questionnaire inquiries. It is noteworthy that, in several instances, the interviewees exhibited a notable degree of comfort, thereby candidly divulging numerous challenges pervasive in contemporary public interpretation services. Furthermore, they offered insightful suggestions for the amelioration of interpretation service quality. Also, it is worth emphasizing that, across all interviews, interviewees shared in varying degrees of detail about their personal experiences, which greatly contributed to our comprehensive understanding of the situation that the interpretation provided by the public sector stands nowadays.

Interview presentation

Themistoklis Gogas

The questionnaire and interviews confirmed persistent challenges and issues within community interpreting. Dr. Themistoklis Gogas, an Associate Professor specializing in Intercultural Communication at the University of Ioannina, shared his extensive academic background, including previous roles at the Technological Educational Institute of Epirus and his involvement in public service interpreting research since 2010. The interview, conducted digitally on December 5th, 2022, via Zoom, covered the following key topics: 1) Research Programs and Findings, 2) Current State of Interpretation Services in Greece, 3) Challenges in Recruiting Interpreters, and 4)

Strategies to Overcome Challenges. Dr. Gogas's insights offered a comprehensive view of public service interpreting, drawing from both academic and practical perspectives.

In his earlier research program from 2010 to 2016/17, Dr. Gogas collaborated with the Department of Translation and Interpretation at the Technological Educational Institute of Epirus, focusing on court interpretation. This initiative involved extensive research in Accommodation Facilities, Reception and Identification Centers, and urban centers like Athens and Thessaloniki, aiming to assess whether foreign arrivals in Greece had access to legal interpretation services. Subsequently, he participated in another research program funded by the European Free Trade Association countries (Norway, Iceland, and Lichtenstein), focusing on public service interpreting.

When addressing the prevailing state of interpretation services extended to refugees, the interviewee illustrated the situation with a series of examples, painting a regrettable picture. Both research studies yielded disheartening results, leading the interviewee to assert, "Reality is totally disappointing." Key findings from both inquiries underscored a critical issue—severe understaffing within Greek services, rendering them ill-equipped to deliver quality interpretation services to those in dire need. To underscore this point, particularly with regard to the initial program conducted in prisons, he highlighted cases where individuals were either partially or entirely unaware of the reasons for their incarceration.

Furthermore, the interviewee attempted to outline the difficulties of the interpretation process while highlighting the challenges unveiled during the research. Mr. Gogas has acknowledged that the collected data depicted the quality of these services as nothing short of "worse than primitive." He attributed this deficiency to the authorities' profound lack of awareness, professionalism, and coordination. Drawing from his extensive experience, he provided graphic and authentic examples to underscore the fact that the standards for providing interpretation services at a serious, dignified, and legally sound level remained unmet. Specifically, he mentions, "the terms of offering interpretation services in a serious, decent and legal level are not met".

He also elucidated a proposal conceived by his research team—an initiative aimed at establishing a centralized interpretation service staffed by professional and specialized interpreters, delivering services through video conferencing. Dr. Gogas stressed the cost-effectiveness of this approach while underscoring its potential to markedly enhance the quality of the interpretation process. The professor placed significant emphasis on the critical importance of ensuring refugees have access to high-quality interpretation services, acknowledging the inherent complexity of such provision. Nonetheless, he expressed his disillusionment that their proposal had not been implemented, concluding with a note of concern that, unless scientific findings prompt decisive political action, the prevailing situation is unlikely to experience substantive amelioration.

The impression left by Mr. Gogas' interview was notably disheartening. As he frequently emphasized, Greece's situation remains at a rudimentary stage, notwithstanding the substantial influx of refugees into the country on a daily basis and the consequent demands this has generated. He also underscored the absence of empathy and professionalism among Greek officials, a factor that increasingly complicates the work of community interpreters. As elucidated in the questionnaires findings, Mr. Gogas stressed the utmost importance of both training existing interpreters and cultivating new ones to fortify the field of public service interpreting. Lastly, throughout the entirety of the interview, Mr. Gogas maintained a persistent stance on the urgency of addressing the existing issues and urged the state to heighten its awareness of the current situation.

Furthermore, he reiterated his proposal for remote interpreting, highlighting that it would not impose a significant financial burden on the state budget.

Refugee

The extensive array of challenges articulated by Professor Gogas, coupled with the disheartening state of community interpreting in Greece, found unfortunate affirmation through the testimony of the second interviewee. This interviewee, a refugee from Iran, has chosen to conceal his identity, a preference we wholeheartedly respect. Hailing from Afghanistan but having spent his formative years in Iran, he is fluent in Farsi Dari. His journey initially led him to refugee camps in both Samos and Patras, from where he was eventually relocated to Athens. Initially, Greece was not his intended destination, but after numerous attempts to leave the country, he ultimately decided to forge a new life within its borders. Having successfully navigated the asylum procedure, he now enjoys official recognition as a refugee, granting him the freedom to reside within the country.

Notably, this interview transpired during his participation in the Greek Sunday School for Refugees on November 13th, 2022, conducted in person. The conversation encompassed several pivotal areas: 1) Experience with Interpreters and Interpretation: The interviewee recounted his firsthand experiences with both interpreters and the interpretation process. 2) Challenges in Interpreter Unavailability: He detailed the challenges faced when interpreters were unavailable. 3) Issues Arising from Interpreter Shortcomings: Problems stemming from deficiencies in interpreter services were explored. 4) Preferences in Interpretation Methods: The interviewee expounded on his preferences regarding the manner in which interpretations were conducted.

In essence, the second interview served to corroborate and shed further light on the multifaceted issues surrounding public service interpreting in Greece, as witnessed by an individual deeply enmeshed in the challenges and intricacies of this realm.

At the outset of the interview, a fundamental and arguably the most pivotal inquiry pertained to the interviewee's awareness of his entitlement to interpretation services. He affirmed that he had indeed been informed of this right almost from the inception of his journey and had frequently availed himself of these services. Nonetheless, a persistent issue surfaced—there wasn't always someone available to facilitate interpretation. As recounted, there were numerous occasions when he found himself in dire need of interpretation, particularly during his sojourn in camps, yet the dearth of available interpreters left him and his fellow refugees in a quandary. Consequently, to communicate with camp personnel, he resorted to fellow refugees proficient in English. Regarding interpretations conducted by fellow refugees rather than professional interpreters, he candidly acknowledged their prevalence. Often, fellow refugees assumed the dual role of interpreter and mediator.

Remarkably, the interviewee expressed a marked preference for fellow refugees as interpreters. He attributed this preference to their innate compassion, shared struggles, and mutual anxiety when communicating with authorities. Thus, in the interviewee's estimation, a fellow refugee possessed a more profound understanding of the refugee experience compared to a professional interpreter who possessed only theoretical knowledge of it.

When assessing interpreter conduct, he emphasized his profound appreciation for interpretation services overall. Throughout the interview, he iterated that his collaborations with interpreters had generally proven to be effortless and advantageous. However, he did concede that on a few occasions, interpreters had chosen not to relay his exact words and concerns to the authorities.

Finally, the interviewee offered insights into the modes of interpretation employed. As previously mentioned, the majority of interpretations transpired via telephone, with in-person interactions occurring only infrequently. More specifically, Greek authorities and camps mandated interpreter involvement on select occasions, facilitating communication via telephone. Although the interviewee consistently praised interpreters for their impeccable conduct, he expressed a distinct preference for telephone-based interpretations, as they spared him from direct interaction with the interpreter. Nevertheless, when pressed for further elaboration on this preference, he declined to provide additional details.

In summary, the interviewee acknowledged both the advantages and disadvantages inherent in his interactions with interpreters. Moreover, he expressed a fervent desire to actively contribute to a transformative process that would facilitate the integration of the next generation of refugees into their host country.

Conclusions

It is essential to clarify that this research does not serve as a fieldwork guide but rather focuses on fundamental knowledge construction procedures by meticulously analyzing and comprehending all the data gleaned from the interviews. In this context, fieldwork is perceived as an intellectual endeavor, a process demanding profound reflection in tandem with practical preparation (Blommaert, J., & Dong, J. (2020). *Ethnographic fieldwork: A beginner's guide*. Multilingual Matters. (p.2)).

Despite the interviews being conducted by two distinct individuals, a notable convergence emerged in their findings. Both Dr. Gogas and the second interviewee underscored critical issues within the realm of community interpreting in Greece. Specifically, they identified a severe understaffing problem within the Greek state's public service interpreting infrastructure, characterized by a shortage of adequately trained and certified interpreters. Furthermore, both interviewees lamented the lack of understanding and empathy displayed by various officials involved in the process. Another salient issue highlighted by both parties was the absence of comprehensive governmental provisions pertaining to public service interpreting. According to their shared perspective, the state has yet to undertake substantive and consistent measures to enhance community interpreting, rendering it, in their view, ineffectual.

While the current state of community / public service interpreting may be characterized as rudimentary, both Dr. Gogas, an established expert in the field, and the refugee, who has frequently relied on interpreters' assistance, are enthusiastic about actively participating in the efforts to ameliorate the prevailing situation. Although the findings presented in this study may not unveil entirely new ideas, they hold significant value as they encapsulate the lived experiences of two individuals deeply engaged in and directly affected by the challenges confronting community interpreting today.

Transcripts

This section comprises the transcripts of the interviews that have been examined and scrutinized within the scope of this paper.

Themistoklis Gogas

1.30 – 1.34 Could you introduce yourself and tell us a few words about your employment?

1.35 My current employment or the previous one?

1.37:Your current one.

1.38 – 2.01 I see. So my name is Themistoklis Gogas and I am an associate Professor of Intercultural Communication at the department of Primary Education of the University of Ioannina. In the past, I have served also as an associate Professor at the Department of Translation and Interpretation of the Technological Educational Institute of Epirus and previously at the Department of Business Administration of the same institute.

2:01 – 2.22 Very well. I would like to talk about the programs that brought you in contact with the refugee/immigrant issue and interpretation specifically in order to learn more about them generally.

2.23 – 4.11 Of course. Since the mid -2010's, 2010-2016/17 we started –the Department of Translation and Interpretation of the Technological Educational Institute of Epirus to carry out a big researching program about court interpretation. This program was funded by the sums of the broader program Archimedes. This gave us the opportunity to carry out a large-scale research both in Accommodation Facilities and Reception and Identification Centers for Refugees or immigrants, mostly at the Aegean Islands but also in big urban centers like Athens and Thessaloniki to gather the data that we need in order to find out what extend the foreigners that come in contact with the Greek Authorities are entitled to a decent and of course legal interpretation process. After this program ended a second one begun, funded by the European Free Trade Association, that is to say Norway, Iceland, Lichtenstein and the subject of this large scale research as well, was community interpreting. That is to say, the foreigner's contact with services concerning the broader public sphere for example Hospitals, Municipalities, Utilities and the ability to provide interpreting services to them. Both of those programs were under the academic responsibility of Professor Stefanos Vlachopoulos, a colleague with whom we cooperated in both programs.

4.12 – 4.30 So based on this specific research you have experience regarding the current situation in this field. Would you say that there is enough staff in the Greek state services for the refugee/interpreter contact?

4.31 – 9.07 I like the use of the word enough. I would ask if there is staff at all. There is no staff. Reality is totally disappointing. I'm not talking about private initiatives or NGO's who are involved in this entire process for their own reasons. This is indifferent. We examine here, the ability of the Greek services, the ability to provide interpreting services. When we carried out the first research, part of which took place in prisons as it was the most suitable place in order to meet with foreigners who experienced the process of arrest, the pre-investigation procedure, the investigation procedure or the judicial procedure. Besides, where else could we find foreigners who had experienced that. So we visited on the spot three Detention Facilities: two men detention facilities and one women detention facility. We carried out interviews with the help of the social workers of those facilities. For the interviews, we used an interview guide, a questionnaire printed in Greek and some other language known to the foreigners. We had translated those interview guides towards many

languages- about ten. I do not exactly remember which. Both European and non-European languages in order to acquire more information. What was the point? The point was to find out in which extend those foreigners were entitled to a decent and of course legal interpretation process-zero. We discovered many absurdities, part of which we fished out of the publications of the time like for example a lady who operated in northern Greece courts and declared herself as a proficient in Slavic languages and she had convinced that Albanian belonged to the Slavic languages. She also took up interpreting services from and towards Albanian because it was a “Slavic language”. Of course that wasn’t much of a scandal and when it was revealed all the culprits were brought to justice. That reveals exactly the whole process of... the void in interpreting services. We found that there were foreigners under arrest who had very little knowledge of the case files. We also found that non-professional interpreters were used in those procedures: pre-investigation, investigation and judicial. As a result they ended up in prison perhaps. Fairly or Unfairly it doesn’t matter. We will not decide about that. We will criticize the quality offered by the interpretation services- who was in it’s infancy at the time. In the second program, community interpreting, we visited hospitals, social services, public services, utilities, we asked foreigners who were involved in this process and employees who contacted foreigners about their communication ability and which interpreting abilities-interpreting service abilities- they used. The result was also disappointing. We didn’t have any data, a solid Interpretation Service, community, judicial, to undertake in a scientific and legal way the communication process from one language to the other and vice versa in order to have the best level of communication. Those were revealed through the specific programs, they were imprinted and of course they were published. We had submitted our proposals to the political leadership in order to make the whole process easier but as you understand some years later they remain at the debate level not to say they went down the drain.

9.07- 9.30 Would you say that there were cases when there was not an interpreter available for a specific language so there was not any possibility of communication between a foreigner, immigrant or refugee and the sector or person whom he would like to address?

9.30 – 13.11 I will tell you a simple example, so that you understand the process that proves...or that in any case is an indication of the level of awareness of the Greek services. When we asked certain sectors-I will not mention which- to state which were the most common “communication” languages amongst the foreigners they started writing down countries and the language next to them ex. Egypt-Arabic, we noticed that many people spoke Swedish and we thought who speaks Swedish in Africa? As a result, there was confusion between “Swedish” and “Swahili”. I don’t know why this employee considered “Swahili” to be a branch of “Swedish” or the Scandinavian languages anyway. This shows a first level of awareness. A second level of awareness shows that ... how the process takes place. We have a foreigner during the preliminary or any other procedure. Then they search around to find someone that looks similar to him racially. If we have someone from Africa we walk into a café and ask “Guys is anyone here from Africa?” “I am” says someone “Do you speak Ghanaian?” “I don’t speak Ghanaian” he says “I speak Sudanese” three hundred thousand kilometers separate the two languages “c’mon whatever”. He transfers what he understands to the other language, we have data that points towards a primitive level and even worse. So we try to appear typically right, we used an interpreter, the interpreter signs, he gets paid by that outrageous sum of thirteen euros per session, I think or per trial and everyone is happy because they meet the typical terms but we are interested in the essential ones. If the foreigner in front of the Greek Authorities has language services appropriate for our era, when humanism is a command, humans first and then everything else. In which extent is it possible for him (the foreigner) to communicate. I will mention a personal example at the tax office where a couple of

Hindus – it was evident from the clothes and the mark on the lady's forehead. So the employee asks with an air of a boss their baptismal names. Anyway after he repeated the question one or two times while the poor couple looked each other awkwardly I looked at him and said "You know they don't baptize them", he asks me shocked "Really?" "And what do they do?" "They just give them names". He couldn't even imagine that the question «Πώς σε βαπτισαν» like we say here in Ioannina seems a little incomprehensible for someone that barely speaks Greek. We are not talking in this moment about serious interpretation services. We are talking about basic communication that even someone from Peloponnese or Crete would find it difficult to understand what the employee said. I am a little disappointing when I say those things. But our experience after years of research shows that the terms of offering interpretation services in a serious, decent and legal level are not met.

13.12 13,50 Yes this situation is very disappointing but that's the reason why we conduct research and deliver results. We have already mentioned some of the important challenges that we face while communicating with refugees. Do you want to add any challenge that we have not mentioned? I would also like to ask if you know any strategies implemented to overcome the communication barriers we face in those situations or if you could suggest any strategies based on your research.

13.51- 17.54 Look during the community interpreting research process we had the opportunity to visit Oslo as guests of the Interpretation Service of the Justice Ministry, responsible for reception, identification and asylum procedures. In fact, we had the luck to meet some of the interpreters that worked at the Breivik trial, the mass murderer of Norway that had operated in an island where a summer camp took place, if you remember, he had killed many people and injured even more. The trial took place in Oslo in many languages because the victims had different national origins. We met those people, we watched the interpretation process at the Asylum Service where we got accepted and we are grateful for that. We collected a lot of elements useful to our research later on. We watched the entire process even how the identification takes place; they register the process – foreigner, interpreter, employee- in order to identify, to find out if the person is Ascaris or Eritrean for example and if he is entitled to an asylum or not to mention a random example. The recorded interviews go to Sweden to a larger database where the phonetic identification takes place. This means that there is a set database or many cooperating databases that use the primer material and then they qualify it either identifying or rejecting it. But there are many levels of accountability, responsibility in every part of the process. So any other manipulation or effort to distort the process cannot happen. Our proposition was something simple. Imagine that we have many language varieties even from the same country; Kurdish who speak two different varieties Kurmanji and Sorani. Is it possible to have interpreters for both languages in every reception and identification center and interpreters for seven or eight official languages or dialects of Afghanistan and four of Pakistan and fifteen from Kenya and so on. We want an interpretation service located centrally in an Interpretation Center in Athens, Thessaloniki, Larissa it doesn't matter where and to carry out those procedures via video conference. We simply press a button, like we did for our discussion today, and thus takes place the entire procedure which is digitally registered and then it goes for qualification. The interpreter does not take part in this process, he just transmits meanings without concerted talks because there have been scandals. Interpreters saying different things from what they hear, being informed beforehand etc. An effort to undermine the procedure. You understand that there are great interests behind granting asylum to some people. Because it can wipe out entirely someone's criminal record for example. It is not a simple procedure. Someone came here, we identify that he is from Syria, he is a refugee and we are done. It needs further process of data. It was a proposition of ours that never went through. I am sorry to say that.

17.55 – 18.22 Your proposition had to do with the development of digital tools, like video conferences but we know that sometimes they even resort to phone calls to cover this void. Do you think that video conferences are a sufficient tool that responds to this specific situation?

18.23 – 18.25 To begin with it is better than phone calls.

18.26 Of course

18.28 – 21.45 For many reasons. First of all for management reasons; I'm holding the headphone, you take another headphone, I'm speaking, everyone is speaking on top of the others. During a video conference we have "windows" open, everything is recorded, we can see everything and everything is substantiated we can easily run a phonologic, or any other identification. Secondly, real time video conference shows the face and someone could collect lots of details and elements. A spotter for example could do so by studying the face of the person. After all video conference is cheap. It just needs a good connection and nothing more. It does not require much more and a portable router connected to the hotspot of a cellphone is enough to do the job anywhere without anything else. It's a "go figure" situation with the Greek services using old dial phones. Technology has made so many steps giving us a variety of tools and mostly tools regarding voice analysis and record which have to be installed nevertheless. This is a matter of political decision and not of a scientific one. Our job as researchers is to end up to a proposition. From then on it is a matter of politics; if this thing would be acceptable and then implemented. So yes I am in favor of digital innovation and secondly and most importantly we cannot stay at the era of carts and donkeys against –to say it out loud- trafficking networks which use a variety of methods in order for people with a lengthy criminal record to penetrate our country for example. I say that to clear out that not everything is innocent in this process. Similarly, we do not know what part the various interpreting service providers play, something that needs to be examined because it does not concern only the Greek Services. Providing interpreting services specifically, is a process that in the end offers a "card": residence permit, asylum, green card, employment card etc. It is after all it is a complex administrative process and we cannot leave it to chance. We see to everything else and we leave the most important part the distribution of residence permits, green cards and employment cards to a random process with anyone who happens to be around and we do not know who he is and what part he plays. So I'm trying to see besides the scientific part which is providing interpreting services, the administrative part as well, regarding the entire reception process; identification first then reception and in the end granting asylum.

21.48 – 22.11 You are right about video conferencing because it has many advantages that you have noticed through your research and this is very important. At this point I would like to thank you. We didn't have much time but you gave us important and useful information. Thank you for your cooperation.

22.12 – 22.23 Thank for the invitation and for giving me the opportunity to be with you even remotely. I wish you achieve the best result possible when it comes to education.

Refugee

01.30 -01.32 What is your mother tongue?

01.33-01.36 The language spoken in my country is called Farsi Dari.

01.37-01.46 Do you know if there is an interpreter for this language in the services where you do your paperwork?

01.47- 01.53 Yes, I know that there is someone who interprets in this language.

01.54-02.00 Have you ever been informed either verbally or in writing that you have the right to interpretation?

02.01 - 02.11 Yes, I have been told.

02.12- 02.20 Have you ever used interpretation services to communicate with the services that issued your papers?

02.13- 02.29 Yes, I have used them to get my papers, so back when I didn't know Greek they had called someone to do the interpreting.

02.30 - 02.33 So you called them on the telephone, these services are only provided to you by telephone?

02.34 - 02.35 Yes!

02.35- 02.37 So you've never had a face-to-face interpretation?

02.38 - 02.43 There are some face-to-face interpreters, but most of the times I have used interpretation services have been over the phone.

02.44 - 02.50 So in order for the authorities to interpret for you, do they call someone in order for you to talk to them?

02.51-02.52 Yes, I am talking to the interpreter and he is also translating what I am saying.

02.53 - 02.55 How do you evaluate this process? Was it easy or difficult for you?

02.56 - 03.06 Since I couldn't understand the truth is I can't tell if it was easy or difficult. I just spoke my language, Farsi, and the interpreter conveyed what I was saying. I still couldn't understand what he was saying in Greek.

03.07 - 03.08 Did the interpreter still help you?

03.09 -03.17 Yes it helped me a lot, since I didn't know any Greek and I couldn't communicate what I wanted, I think it helped me a lot.

03.17 - 03.27 Did you feel comfortable in general with the interpreter? Did he manage to communicate all your problems to the authorities?

03.28 -03.33 The truth is that I can't be sure of that.

03.35 -03. 47 Do you know if there were always interpretation services available in the places where you had stayed temporarily e.g. shelters, centres, hot spots?

03.48 - 03.55 While I was in camp there were times when I was in a hurry and wanted to communicate but there was no interpreter available.

03.56- 04.00 Can you give me an example?

04.01 - 04.13 I wanted to ask something from the camp manager, and I didn't know Greek yet, so I couldn't talk to him, and there was no interpreter available to explain what it was that I needed.

04.15 - 04.18 So what did you do in this case? Did you try to show it using body language or did someone else come to help you?

04.19 - 04.29 I tried at first to show it and find a way to say it myself, but I couldn't, so I tried to find someone who knows either English or Greek to help me.

04.30 - 04.38 Have you ever had something very urgent happen to you, such as being ill, and there is no one available to mediate communication with the doctor?

04.39 - 05.08 The truth is that this hasn't happened. But in the continent where I stayed at the camp, at one point the cooker broke down, and we also had frequent problems in the bathroom, problems that we had to inform the manager about. But I still didn't know Greek and couldn't communicate. So I found a friend of mine from the camp who knew a little English and he tried to explain in English what had happened. But we didn't have anyone who could speak Greek.

05.09 - 05.12 So in this case you were not able to call someone for telephone interpretation?

05.13 - 05.19 We are not allowed to have contact with an interpreter. The camp officials must call him when they think it is necessary.

05.20 - 05.21 So in this case they didn't call someone? Were you alone?

05.22- 05.23 Yes yes!

05.24 - 05.33 Do you consider that through the interpretation services you have received, during your communication with the authorities, or at the camps, or anywhere else, and regardless of the way the interpretation was carried out, either by telephone or in the physical presence of a professional interpreter, all your problems were adequately communicated?

05.34 - 06.08 I can't be sure of that. I tell the interpreter my problem and he translates it into Greek, so I can't know whether everything he says is exactly what I want to say or whether the interpreter has understood exactly what my problem is.

06.09 - 06.15 There were times when you were worried that what you wanted to say was not exactly what the interpreter said.

06.16 - 06.22 The anxiety yes of course I had it, but I couldn't understand it.

06.23 - 06.29 Overall, do you think your interpreter was useful?

06.30 - 06.37 Yes, I think it was useful because they didn't understand me and I didn't understand them.

06.38- 06.40 Most of the times you needed help was there an interpreter available?

06.41 - 06.56 Most of the time yes there are people to do the interpreting. There are times when you need someone Ki is not there, but most of the time there is someone there to help us.

06.57 - 07.00 Is the interpreter usually available by telephone or physically present?

07.01 - 07.14 Both, on the phone and normally. So when I went to issue my papers to the police and similar services the interpretation was done over the phone, but in the camp it was mostly done face to face.

07.15 - 07.22 How did you feel more comfortable, with telephone interpreting or with the physical presence of the interpreter?

07.23 - 07.31 I felt more comfortable on the phone, I didn't need to have direct contact with anyone, I just asked for what I wanted over the phone.

07.32 - 07.40 Have you ever had a problem with a professional interpreter? Why do you prefer telephone interpreting and don't want to have real contact with the interpreter?

07.41 -07.42 I would not like to answer that.

07.43 - 08.09 Okay, but in general would you say that professional interpreters have treated you well or badly?

08.09 - 08.13 Yes yes in general I have been treated well.

08.14 - 08.40 Have you ever found yourself in a situation where another refugee or relative was acting as an interpreter in your communication with the authorities? How did you feel?

08.41 - 08.45 Yes, I have happened to need interpretation and a friend of mine helped me.

08.46 - 08.58 Do you think a professional interpreter would do it better than your friend? Would you feel more secure with your friend or with a professional interpreter?

08.59 - 09.07 I felt better with my friend because I thought he would say it better than the interpreter.

09.08 - 09.17 Is this because you have more confidence in your friend, or because you think the interpreters don't know your language that well?

09.18 - 09.32 I feel that the interpreters don't always convey what I want, whereas my friend does.

09.33 - 09. 38 Why do you think this is happening?

09.39 - 10.04 I can't know exactly why, but a similar incident happened to me recently. Now I can speak and understand Greek. So it has happened that I have to go somewhere, but not speak alone, I need an interpreter. With the Greek I know, while he was speaking I could tell he wasn't saying exactly what I was saying, and he was saying something else. Then I stopped him and told him that I understand that you are not saying what I am saying.

10.05 - 10.08 So he conveyed your words very briefly?

10.09- 10.10 Exactly!

10.11 - 10.18 Why do you think this happened

10.19 - 10.20 I don't know why they do this thing.

10.22 - 10.36 So in general do you think that someone you know, or even someone you don't know but who is a refugee or migrant and speaks your language, could help you more?

10.37 - 10.39 Yeah, sure.

10.40 - 10.44 Do the interpreters you have met so far speak exactly your own language or a similar dialect?

10.44 - 11.02 There are some people who are from Iran, we Afghans speak generally the same language as Iranians, although some words are different.

11.03 - 11.12 Have you met an interpreter whose native language is Greek and who speaks your language?

11.13 - 11.14 Yes yes I have met.

11.15 - 11.16 Did it help you?

11.17 - 11.18 Yes, it helped me a lot.

11.19 That's what I had to ask you, thank you very much for your honest answers, your help was very important. And based on what you said we will try as interpreters to improve the situation and to strengthen more this space that we know it needs.

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