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DOING THINGS WITH QUESTIONS. INTERPRETING IN ASYLUM SETTINGS

Performatywna moc pytań. Interpretacja tłumaczeń w systemie azylowym

Abstract: The interpreter has the demanding task of “not creating a contradiction” by employing an identical concept in a different context. The classifications of the asylum applicant encounter the institutionally determined limits. Reliable verification of the applicant’s credibility is, however, dependent on knowledge of his/her local context and demands additional questioning. In this process, a denial of interlingual and intralingual complexity may be a source of invisible injustice (Spotti 2019: 87-88). Both interpreting and interpretation is thus an inseparable part of the process in which police officers, decision-makers and judges, paraphrasing John L. Austin and John Searle, “do things with questions.” The author applies this interpretive framework to data from ethnographic research, which was conducted in Bratislava, Slovakia, in 2017-19, on interpreting for asylum applicants in the institutional settings. She elucidates the diversity of the standpoints—of refugees, court and ad hoc interpreters, representatives of the foreign police and of the migration office, as well as legal representatives from civic associations, referencing to relevant findings in linguistic and legal anthropology. In this article Helena Tužinská proposes that: (1) the discrepancies in the reports are conditioned by the context of interpreting, (2) participants “do things with questions”, and (3) inter-cultural interpretation can be a speech act.

Key words: ethnography; interpreting; asylum; context; misinterpretation.

Streszczenie: Tłumacz ma trudne zadanie „nie tworzenia sprzeczności” przez zastosowanie identycznej koncepcji w innym kontekście. Klasyfikacje osoby ubiegającej się o azyl napotyka określone przez instytucje ograniczenia. Rzetelna weryfikacja wiarygodności wnioskodawcy zależy jednak od znajomości jego lokalnego kontekstu i wymaga dodatkowych pytań. W tym procesie zaprzeczanie złożoności międzyjęzykowej i wewnątrzjęzykowej może być źródłem niewidzialnej niesprawiedliwości (Spotti 2019: 87-88). Zarówno tłumaczenie, jak i interpretacja są zatem nieodłącznymi częściami procesu, w którym funkcjonariusze policji, decydenci i sędziowie, parafrazując Johna L. Austina i Johna Searle, „działają za pomocą pytań”. Autorka stosuje te ramy interpretacyjne do analizy danych z badań etnograficznych, dotyczących tłumaczeń konsekwentnych dla osób ubiegających się o azyl w warunkach instytucjonalnych. Badania prowadzone były w Bratysławie na Słowacji w latach 2017–19. Autorka wyjaśnia różnorodność stanowisk – uchodźców, sądów i tłumaczy ustnych, przedstawicieli zagranicznej policji i urzędu migracyjnego, a także przedstawicieli prawnych ze stowarzyszeń obywatelskich, odnosząc się do odpowiednich ustaleń w antropologii językowej i prawnej. W tym artykule Helena Tužinská proponuje, by: (1) rozbieżności w raportach były uwarunkowane kontekstem tłumaczenia ustnego, (2) uczestnicy „działali za pomocą pytań” oraz (3) interpretacja międzykulturowa traktowana była jako aktem mowy.

Słowa kluczowe: etnografia; tłumaczenie ustne; azyl; kontekst; błędna interpretacja.

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The need to establish conditions for intercultural understanding poses a challenge, theoretically and methodologically, in the ethnography of communication (Saville-Troike 2003). In recent decades, influenced by the “sociolinguistic turn,” researchers have focused attention not only on the text but also on its actors, their background, and the political sidedness of the communicative event (Angelelli 2014; Berk-Seligson 2002; Štefková & Bossaert 2019; Eades 2008, 2010, 2016; Gibb 2019; Gill & Good 2019; Pöllabauer 2007; Tužinská (forthcoming)).

I apply this interpretive framework to data from ethnographic research, which I conducted in Bratislava, Slovakia, in 2017-19, on interpreting for asylum seekers in the institutional setting. To contextualize my own position, in 2005-2008 I cooperated with UNHCR and civic organisations involved in various stages of an asylum procedure as a co-researcher and co-trainer. Conducting both informal and in-depth interviews with asylum seekers, I listened to what they were mostly concerned with: overcoming obstacles in their asylum applications; the journey to Slovakia; the dynamics of coexistence with other refugees in the camp, and discovering ways of coping with uncertainty. Other participants such as the camp staff, lawyers, social workers and volunteers also gave expression to their own survival strategies. In following the trajectory of asylum applicants from their arrival to their appeal at the Regional Court, my focus narrowed to institutional encounters in the predominantly monolingual settings of the state. While lecturing at Comenius University, during the years 2017-2019 I returned to participant observation of court interpreting. Also, to understand the perspectives of all the key participants, I conducted additional in-depth interviews, from which I present several extracts. The diversity of the standpoints consists of the data from asylum seekers (identified as A), court and other interpreters (I), representatives of the foreign police (P), representatives of the migration office (M), and legal representatives from civic associations (L). If I use the plural for the representatives of any particular profession, I do not intend to generalize, as all of their narratives are, needless to say, diverse, yet institutionally conditioned.

Upholding the criteria for just assessment of an application for asylum according to the Geneva Convention of 1951 means demanding, as Barsky says, that the statements of the applicants be interpreted in their own cultural, social, economic, historical and political framework (Barsky 2000:58). Within this process interpreters ought to have legal, institutional and educational support. In this article I propose that: (1) the discrepancies

in the reports are conditioned by the context of interpreting, (2) participants “do things with questions”, and (3) inter-cultural interpretation can be a speech act.

I thought he knew the context

The asylum seeker does not know the interpretive framework of the questions which the police officer poses. The police officer thinks it possible to check whether the asylum seeker wants to go or stay by factographic questions, though actually these are derived from the widespread idea that Slovakia is a transit country for migrants (Vašečka 2009). Generally speaking, the human mind gives preference to the interpretation which confirms an already adopted schema. The “self-fulfilling prophecy” (Fiske & Taylor 1984), or a kind of partiality of the mind in favour of a certain idea. An asylum seeker’s legal representative describes particular set of questions from the police:

The report [in the detention centre] begins like this: we are beginning this procedure, relating to you, in the matter of detention, and it can lead to the issuing of a decision on detention, and so, do you wish to say something about this? (...) They [police] ask: when you came to the territory of Slovakia, through which states did you come here? And did you ask for asylum in any other country? He answers, in Bulgaria. What was your target country? (...) If he says Austria, and that is what he did say, then they can immediately make that grounds for deciding that there is a flight risk here, because he did not plan to stay in Slovakia. They began to wind him up: why do you want to stay in Slovakia? (...) Interpolated questions, which they do not put in the report, are: but what’s so super about this Slovakia that you want to stay here, don’t you? Well, he said Slovakia was a good country. Well, and what makes you think Slovakia is a good country? And now he says that it seems to be so: people behave decently towards me and it seems to be safe here. And on what basis does it seem to be safe when you are confined to [detention centre], which you’ve come from? And he says, well, I watch television. And what have you learned on television about Slovakia? Well, tell me, what do you know about Slovakia? What’s the capital city? Do you know who’s the president? How big is the country? And how many inhabitants do we have? That is not in the report. And he, needless to say, knows nothing. (...) In the decision they wrote that that man was manifestly just pretending he wanted to stay in Slovakia, because he knew nothing at all about the country. LUCIA_2018

After making a declaration to the police, an interview on the asylum application follows. Here what Blommaert (2001) calls “the domestic narrative” plays a key role. Without explanatory references, the account given cannot possibly make sense. The problem, however, is that each of the participants has access to different interpretations of the official history produced by states (Wertsch 2000). An asylum seeker describes his notions on impartiality and verification of the context.

When I told my story, I assumed that the person I was speaking to had heard reports about my country, since there were plenty of those in the media. I thought he knew the context, and that I was just adding my personal part of the story. Afterwards, however, I discovered that this person did not know the context. Actually, even the documentation centre for countries of origin had not covered it sufficiently; it seemed to me they were not impartial. On the internet you will find pro-regime propagandist reports, and also the opposite, which you try to base your arguments on in the report. ARNE_2017

Certain intertextual references (Verschueren 1999: 119) are taken for granted by the applicants, as a legal representative explains:

When you ask people about fear, they’ll tell you who they fear. Not what they fear. (...) They do not describe those individual things that specifically could happen to them... Sometimes they are not able to give such descriptions. Or they feel it is so self-explanatory: look, you know where I’m from, so what you’re asking me, well, if those people catch me, I probably won’t survive. Other than that, you won’t get to whether there is or is not persecution. LINDA_2018

The meaning of an answer is always locally conditioned. The applicant describes the context of conflict by references which the official may not pick up. On the other hand, decision-makers have stated that they have proofs of applicants conferring with one another about “what to say”. Arne, an applicant, has given this advice on creating space for credibility:

You need to explain to him [decision-maker] absolutely all the details from the various aspects. If I had been conscious of that earlier, I would have described the situation in more detail right from the start. If you try giving fuller explanations of something later on, they’ll begin to regard you as untrustworthy. And so, if others ask me for advice, I’ll tell them: please, do not assume that they know!

I have tried to be objective. I do not take it personally that they dismissed my application. That is my own fault, for assuming that they'd know the context.
ARNE_2017

The Migration Office's Department of Documentation and International Cooperation prepares background information on countries of origin for decision-makers. During sessions the representative of the Migration Office refers to these data as if they were objective proofs, even though facts do not speak self-sufficiently for themselves: they are subject to contextualisation and interpretation (Good 2007). Decision-makers verify the "correct" naming of things in comparison with the background information given to them: "I can ask the same thing three times in somewhat varied words in different parts of the interview, and if he gives me three different answers, then it's not likely to be truthful." OLIVER_2018

The method described here by the decision-maker has been regarded as unsettling by applicants. Maryns (2006: 99, 111) also draws attention to the encounter of a narrative rendering of traumatic experience with the rigidity of a bureaucratic questionnaire which demands a specific type of detailing. Ivor, an interpreter, observes that not only the police questionnaires but also those of the Migration Office are stereotyped, and so they ride roughshod over the particularities of each case.

It's taken mechanically, the filling of questionnaires. (...) We can't hear things out in their broader context. We keep to certain words, we keep to these questions, and this way we imagine that they'll answer us. It's done in a stereotyped way. (...) We can't have instructions and schemas for everything. They must learn to look at the case individually, specifically. And they need to be able to listen. (...) There's a frightful lot of those questions, and they're fragmented. (...) Generally, though, I have the feeling they've improved, especially in the courts. That's where I see the greatest progress: they listen more, they let people speak—there really is a shift, a good one, in that regard. IVOR_2018

In the following example, the lawyer comments on the situation in the detention centre, in which the applicant is asked factual details about Slovakia. Lucia argued that for the purpose of demonstrating the flight risk is not a test of geography. On the advice of the judge, she asked the applicant, relevant questions, namely:

How will he behave if he is not placed in detention? That is what I have asked him, and he has said he would remain in Slovakia. A policewoman responded: well, now that's amazing! Eventually, the policewoman began to tell me that we're coaching those foreigners. No one ever gave such answers! Definitely you prepared him for that! You coached him to say that Slovakia is a good country. Certainly, he didn't come up with that by himself. LUCIA_2018

If the aim is to verify authenticity, a test of factual knowledge will not necessarily lead to the desired goal, even if data have been requested on the applicant's country of origin. Belgian decision-makers tested whether the applicant knew: a firm which was a large-scale producer of bottled water; a regionally well-known musical instrument; names of mobile operators; and the seat of government. According to them, the applicant also failed to identify the state flag, the name of a football team, a marketplace, TV channels, and the name of a football stadium in the capital city (Spotti 2019: 69-90).

The point of all this is that the local names did not correspond to those accessible on the internet (the "web-truths", as Spotti calls them). Knowledge of the mother's tongue or the father's tongue, the language of the school or the language of the city, the language of a certain profession and the state language, can differ greatly. It is enough to recall how many Bratislava people mark their city as Pressburg or Pozsony, how many meet not on Hodžovo Square but on Mierové, not on Freedom Square but on Gottwaldák, not in front of Tesco but in front of Prior (all used before 1989); who count prices in Slovak crowns even 10 years after the introduction of the Euro; who regard the Czechoslovak flag as theirs, don't play football, don't watch television, don't go to the market, or don't know which well-known musical instrument is inscribed in the UNESCO Lists of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Disharmony between the story that the asylum seeker is telling and the type of factual information sought by the decision-makers who assess the truthfulness of the application is explained by Spotti (2019: 69) in terms of differences in naming practices—that is to say, between the official nomenclature and the local names used by the applicant. Migrants' experience is subordinated to ideas about what they should name so as to give proof of their own identity. If attention were to be shifted from "analysis of differences between languages to the differences within languages," a space would emerge for various "modes of speaking," "modes of

narration” and “modes of naming things” in the context of social groups (Spotti 2019: 85).

Decision-maker, interpreter and asylum seeker communicate in a manner which is subordinated to the creation of a specific form of text. As Maryns says (2006: 341):

Speech is the basic instrument for the justification of the application. The asylum seeker’s speech, however, is confronted with an ideology of textuality which excludes basic contextualising work in interaction and restructures statements into impersonal professional categories by means which are outside the applicant’s control. This confrontation causes the applicant’s main instrument to lose its significance.

An interpreter sees this verification of credibility similarly:

The foreigner begins to be frustrated when they ask him the same question three times, and not because they have not received answers but because they’re making sure. Many foreigners say this to me: that in Slovak we have a tendency to repeat things. If you say something plainly once, why say the same thing again? We’re making sure, and we’re making them unsure, because very often that person, do you know what his answer is? “I’ve answered that question already.” We needlessly repeat questions after a time interval. (...) I get two types of responses. Either they give the same answer as before, or “I’ve already answered that, why are you asking me again?” And that produces no good results, rather the opposite.
IVOR_2018

Decision-makers verify whether the answer is well-founded on the basis of the data accessible to them, while the applicants may be referring to another contextual meaning:

The worst thing about it is that the whole time you don’t know what you’re involved in. You don’t know why they’re doing what they’re doing, or what the sense of their questions is, what they mean by them, what their purpose is, and you don’t know that they have a bearing on the decision. If they would explain their procedure even a little, I would be aware of other possibilities. For example, that although I have only got 20 Eur in my pocket, I don’t have a problem getting more and I can take care of myself. ARNE_2017

I can't translate those bits and scraps!

Without knowing the context of information, even interpreters have no means of selecting the adequate meaning. Imre, the interpreter at a hearing on Adam, asked several supplementary questions regarding context before translating what he said. If the judge dictated only some adjacent words, he responded by saying, "I can't translate those bits and scraps!" and asked her first to say the entire sections. Similarly, Ivor could translate only after comprehending the overall meaning: "For example, the judge always felt that she need only say one word to me and I should translate the word after that. This was counter-productive during the hearing, that's what I think" IVOR_2018

Some interpreters are conscious of the complexity of meanings, which change when they are connected with legal jargon. As Maryns says (2006: 337), "the procedural ideology of textuality conditions performance." Rycroft (2005, 2011) also highlights the dilemmas the interpreter addresses in adapting to the different expectations of participants, as if being "a piggy in the middle."

When I don't understand the question, or I don't understand exactly what they're asking, then I ask them. That's actually a great dilemma in court translations: are we going to interpret from language to language or from culture to culture? (...) Because when I dictate that to the judge and he translates it on further to other words, then it strikes me that often he loses his way in it. IVAN_2018

On the other hand, a legal representative equally feels the need to know the context of a conversation:

Sometimes they go on a bit—they mean well, there are certain things they want to say because they're conventional in their culture, but I've explained to them that it isn't comfortable for me to sit there and just turn my head and follow two people speaking in what for me is a completely unknown language. LENA_2018

Fragmentariness and insufficient placing in context are problems described by all participants in the interview. Just as asylum seekers have a right to translation of the legal context, equally the police, decision-makers and judges have a right to translation of the sociocultural context. Diana Eades (2008: 319) draws attention, however, to the problematic

nature of “using entextualisation to determine witness credibility. [This] relies on a number of problematic assumptions about storytelling. For example, it assumes that people always tell the same story in the same way,” while in actual fact the perspectives may shift and particular details may be added or omitted, emphasised or de-emphasised.

According to Eades, the problem is that inconsistencies of witnesses are regarded as proof of deception or lack of credibility, while the inconsistencies of lawyers are accepted. Although the statements in the report are products of an interactive process, they are presented purely as products of one person, namely the interviewee. „This ideology relies on the ‘prevalent’ and ‘tenacious’ cultural notion of the ‘true story,’ but ignores the collaborative nature of storytelling, as well as its situated interactional nature” (Eades 2008: 320-2; Jacquemet 2011: 481).

Police and officials have often believed that if no explanation is given of the context of questions, the statements of asylum seekers will be “genuine” and “unmanipulated”. The idea that some “virgin” version of their story exists is, however, erroneous. In reality, this does not correspond with our knowledge of how speech formation functions. When a person speaks about his/her life, memory functions in such a way as to adapt the representation of the past to the present moment in which the narration is occurring. It follows from this that a testimony on a past situation is always dependent on the present (Bužeková 2018).

If inconsistency is rather the result of interactive work during the session, various types of questions are a component part of it. Open questions signify interest in knowing the context of the person testifying, in contrast to closed questions, which confirm the context of the one who is asking (Briggs 1984; Bernard 2005; Eriksen 1991; Spradley 1979; Tužinská 2011).

A good question is one which is directly to the point. As far as possible it is short, simple and uses simple words. A complicated question, in my view, is any question which is too long, too protracted. It contains several sub-questions, for example. It is uncompleted or sometimes, maybe, it is a leading question, or a closed question. The good ones are mostly open, because that person then has the feeling that they are asking him about something which may be very important for him. IVOR_2018

An interpreter makes a suggestion about creating space for questions:

Excuse me, can we stop at this for a moment? I see that on your side maybe you've come to have doubts, either about me or about the participant. (...) What I can suggest to you now is to change the form of the question, if you were dissatisfied. OK, so ask him, if you please. (...) If he doesn't know how he should change the question, I can steer him, but always it must stem from his initiative. If he can't manage it, then—perhaps you could use... such-and-such a word which I think he might find comprehensible. Or to shorten the question, or divide it in two halves. You've a compound sentence in this question, it's too long a question. It's hard even for a Slovak to understand. I would divide this question, if you'll agree. I leave it to you. Respectfully. IVOR_2018

The interpreter understands the bureaucratic format and legal jargon, and at the same time, during the process of interpreting he is perceptive regarding the context of the asylum seeker's expressions:

I'll tell you plainly, I can paraphrase my participants. I can't say it better than them. Persecution is that if I go back, they will kill me. I cannot simply go back there, because this and that will happen to me; they give specific descriptions, because persecution can have diverse forms. (...) That interpreter considers it entirely appropriate to use the applicant's words, because in that way there's a better foundation of trust and it creates a feeling in the applicant that they are on the same wavelength. They actually often whisper those words many times, so that they can use them again in a similar situation. IVOR_2018

The linguistic mediator ascertains the precise meanings of the participants' and is content to be guided by them. Ivor checked the contexts of what all of the actors "whispered" to him. By doing so he created space for meanings that might possibly have been suppressed:

Following, observing, it's terribly important. My father, who's a sports commentator, told me once: see now how this player whispered to the other one. It's a beautiful word. He had actually whispered by his movement how exactly he should play the ball to him, or whatever. And to my mind, that's very important for the interpreter. To listen. To observe. Incessantly to observe, because afterwards you'll find that the applicant helps you greatly. He whispers to you, and when you use the word that he uses equally in that situation, when it's suitable,

needless to say, an experienced interpreter is capable of judging that accurately, in my view. He shouldn't have any problem with that. So it will work out very well. That's how it should be, to my mind. IVOR_2018

The “whispering” that serves for linguistic mediation is an ordinary research instrument in the ethnographic interview. Listening requires researchers to be aware of the need for detachment from their own concepts (Tužinská 2017). Also, this is one more reason why the handbook which social workers have often called for, on the unwritten rules of a particular society, which would fix their cultural significance, cannot be written. If the Eurocentric view is dominant, that does not mean that it is also useful in interpretation, rather the contrary—it produces “cultural (mis) translation” (Good 2007: 170-182; also Nisbett 2003; Kälin 1986; Škop 2016). As Solan and Tiersma (2005: 243) observe: “Even though we all use prototypical reasoning in understanding what a word means, most people think that meaning is something found in a dictionary, rather than our brains.” The adequacy of interpreters' interventions may thus at first sight seem disputable, but in a multilingual setting (Pavlenko 2014) it is necessary to distinguish the possibility of a different framing of what is said.

Grandfather's House

Details without context are a basis for inconsistencies, which may be used as evidential material showing applicants' lack of credibility. There are many examples of this type in the grounds given for the unfoundedness of an asylum application (Good 2007, 2008; Eades 2008, 2010; Berk-Seligson 2002; Barsky 2000; Donovan and Anderson 2003; Maryns 2006; Wadensjö 1998); the following example of literalness in interpreting also makes the point:

When sorting out contradictions the decision-maker asked the applicant about her grandfather's house: where exactly is it situated? Then the interpreter began to laugh and he said: “There is no such grandfather's house as you're asking about, in the sense of a physical house, but what she meant was that her grandfather came from that region. But this is said in that way.” That was beautiful. It must be that whoever was interpreting previously, though they understood Arabic, did not know this meaning, so that it was well translated verbally, but in a literal way.

That applicant had never spoken of a particular house, yet they wanted an address from her. She had simply gone to the region that her grandfather came from, and there she had an extended family. LINDA_2018

Another who notices the place of concepts in the context of a certain social system (Saville-Troike 2003: 30) is the interpreter Ivor, who makes careful distinctions in relation to his own classifications:

The cultural specifics are important, if we are to know the system (...) it's necessary to ask (...) sometimes they may say, we're living in a certain community, and it doesn't have to be a community, it might be a caste or closed group. (...) Education too was interesting: we worked our way round to the fact that in the last analysis it wasn't university education, it was a kind of secondary technical. (...) What group can I think of him as belonging to, where to assign him? (...) If the first job of interpreting is bad, it will entangle the rest of the proceedings. IVOR_2018

More than once at the hearings I have come across situations where applicants tend to show assent to higher-placed persons as a token of respect for authority, as Ivan describes:

The judge told me afterwards that the first hearing had gone like this: Good day, so then, you are from Marinia? Yes. And your name is such-and-such? Yes. And since when have you and your husband not lived together? Yes. What she came up with was that she'd nod agreement to everything the judge said, and the judge discovered that she did not have a proper grasp of the Slovak language. IVAN_2018

Applicants express the adaptation of their own version to institutional needs by non-verbal means also. Hesitant answers, silence, or a frequent "yes, yes" and not making eye contact may be regarded by police and courts as an indicator of the client's lack of credibility. Gratuitous concurrence or lip-service does not mean agreement as such but rather "desire to suit the other," "fear of authority," "not making a scene," "they won't believe me if I tell my version of the story," "I don't want to admit that I don't understand." Eades observes that "the attempt to fit in" is a strategy of the oppressed, often in countries with a colonial past (Eades 2008: 94-95).

Roxana Rycroft (2011: 214) describes a similar example of Romanian immigrants who, although they did not understand, nodded to the

authorities and asked her, an interpreter, for the meaning. However, the tendency to agree does not necessarily relate to the experience of being in a dictatorial regime. As Sommers and Bohns point out, voluntary consent is more related to the psychology of compliance: “It is time to abandon the myth that notifying people of their rights makes them feel empowered to exercise those rights” (2019: 1962).

If applicants ask the interpreters what they should answer, or if they are silent, that may be a signal that they do not understand the ultimate aim of the question. Eades points out that the silent place in the answer is therefore not proof either of guilt or confusion but rather of a need to think something through. The confusion stemming from a “yes, yes” which meant “maybe, maybe” is linked with the fact that applicants may have grown up in an environment where refusal is improper. An excessively unambiguous and swift answer may be associated in their minds with weakness and deception. Downcast eyes may also be an expression of respect; the hesitant response “I don’t know” to “simple questions” may be rather an expression of modesty and prudence (Eades 1994: 242). One of the reasons why applicants are reluctant to lodge an appeal is that they do not want to be complainants against another organ of the same state which they are asking for protection.

Susan Berk-Seligson (2009) in *Coerced Confessions* analyses the discourse of bilingual police investigation. She demonstrates how and why people confess to actions which they have not done, under what conditions “yes” need not mean agreement, and what the risks are for proceedings in multilingual environments (see also Pavlenko 2017). Officials believe that they test the participant’s understanding with the question “Do you understand?”: to this they may receive a compliant answer which nonetheless does not signify real, but only polite, agreement (Gibbons 2003; Eades 2008: 182).

Final remarks

Culturally sensitive interpreting cannot be Slavo-centric, Anglo-centric, Euro-centric or centered on any other language axis. As Wierzbicka and Goddard point out, the culture-specific configurations can be understood through „language universals“. Cultural scripts manifest themselves, for example, in what may and may not be said, and how one is to

speak and ultimately even think and feel. However, none of the cultures can be reduced to a few standards and patterns, and at the same time, none of them is static. Even those people who claim that they do not identify with specific scripts relate their narration to them (2014: 245). Therefore in a multilingual environment it is crucial to form an institutional space for the acknowledgement of diversity in the following areas:

- terminology of affinity with kin, class, caste, gender, religion, political group, education, profession, and other determinants, whose names refer to actual social norms;
- structuration of the place of residence, depiction of topography, various types of registration of postal addresses;
- classifications of time and modes of orientation in them; non-numerical description for the recording of time; dozens of different calendar systems;
- numerical systems; distinctions of colours; nomenclatures for parts of the body; description of perceptions and feelings;
- modes of speaking about major life events; cause-and-effect associations;
- tabooing of information (unborn, dead, health, pain, etc.);
- other culture-specific expressions in speech communities, dialects, sociolects and jargons.

In each of the areas mentioned the interpreter has the demanding task of “not creating a contradiction” by using an identical concept with a different contextual meaning. What is required is to bring the institutionally determined assumptions into harmony with the classifications of the applicant, which at first the interpreter does not necessarily know. Reliable verification of the applicant’s identity is, however, dependent on knowledge of his/her local context and demands additional questioning. Denial of interlingual and intralingual complexity may be a source of invisible injustice (Spotti 2019: 87-88). Interpreting and interpretation is thus an inseparable part of the process in which police officers, decision-makers and judges, paraphrasing John L. Austin and John Searle “do things with questions”.

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