

"Connecting Cultures"

Handy Tips When Using Interpreters

by Dominic McCormack

Proper usage of an interpreter consists of three (3) prime steps:-

- a) Pre-Interview;
- b) Interview; and
- c) Post-Interview.

1) PRE-INTERVIEW:

- a) Introduction between interpreter and officer;
- b) Interpreter to be advised about the interview and what is to be achieved;
- c) Interpreter checks if officer has used interpreter before;
- d) If has not, explains their role including:-

Code of Ethics:-

- i) Accuracy;
- ii) Impartiality; and
- iii) Confidentiality.

Potential areas of difficulty:-

- i) Officer and client to face each other with interpreter on the side - the "Triangle" formation;
- ii) Establish mode of interpreting - Consecutive/Simultaneous
- iii) Speak clearly, slowly, without jargon - keep sentences short;
- iv) Cultural issues -
 - Potential relationship to the client;
 - Eye contact and shyness; and
 - Time to reply.
- e) Explanation to the client - the interpreter requires time to meet & talk to your mutual client about their role as an interpreter, including the aspect of confidentiality. They are also able to assess their speech level and capability;
- f) Spend time with both the interpreter and interviewee - work with Indigenous people is about establishing trust and creating relationships over time.

2) INTERVIEW:

- YOU as the interviewer are IN CHARGE;
- The Interpreter is not to say anything unless you do, or as otherwise agreed;
- Use the FIRST PERSON;
- Ensure seating facilitates direct communication between yourself and the client;
- With consecutive interpreting, keep the sentences short;
- Complete introductions and establish roles;
- Establish ground rules speaking through the interpreter to the client;
- Speak slowly and clearly although naturally, attempting to avoid jargon, numerals, dates and distances. Remember, what the interpreter is doing is:-
 - i) **listening** to you speak in English;
 - ii) **understanding** what you say;
 - iii) **storing** the information within their memory;
 - iv) **finding** the corresponding language in correct context; and
 - v) **verbalising** that language to the client;
 - vi) THEN THE PROCESS IS REPEATED.

If there is a difficulty at any of these points, the interpretation will fail.

- Do not un-necessarily raise your voice - be guided by the interpreters level;
- Allow for more TIME - this will take longer than a normal interview!
- Do prepare and structure questions in order to minimise excess word usage;
- If control slips in the interview, stop it immediately and re-state the ground rules;
- Summarise your discussions periodically.

POST-INTERVIEW:

- Conduct a de-brief with the interpreter - queries, difficulties and enhancements.

Additional Notes of Interest

R. v. Anunga (1976) ALR 412, per Chief Justice Forster:-

- When an Aboriginal person is being interrogated as a suspect, **unless he is as fluent in English as the average white man of English descent**, an interpreter able to interpret in and from the Aboriginal person's language should be present;
- It is simply not adequate to administer [the caution] ... and say, "Do you understand that?" or "Do you understand you do not have to answer questions?" **Interrogating Police Officers, having explained the caution in simple terms, should ask the Aboriginal to tell them what is meant by the caution, phrase by phrase, and should not proceed with the interrogation until it is clear the Aboriginal has apparent understanding of his right to remain silent;**
- Great care should be taken in formulating questions so that so far as possible **the answer which is wanted or expected is not suggested in any way.** ... It should be borne in mind that **it is not only the wording of the question which may suggest the answer, but also the manner and tone of voice which are used.**

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Dominic McCormack
MARLUK Link-Up
GPO Box 2874
DARWIN NT 0801

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