

USE OF INTERPRETERS: BEST PRACTICE

KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE AND INTERESTS. Ideally interpreters should not only have the required linguistic abilities, but also be trained in the research field so that they might best understand the line of thought or objectives of the researcher.

CONTINUED TRAINING. Training is not something to be done at the outset and then dispensed with: it should be understood as lasting throughout the research. Discussions and debriefings after interview sessions should be a regular practice, where difficulties of translation can be discussed.

BACK TRANSLATING. For quality assessment. This involves having one interpreter translate a text from the investigator's language into the local language, and thereafter have another interpreter translate it back again. The two versions are then compared and the discrepancies discussed with the interpreters.

USE OF MULTIPLE INTERPRETERS. Although continuity of relationship with one interpreter is important using several interpreters during the fieldwork offers advantages. It may facilitate access to different spheres. Boredom and tiredness will also influence the interpreter's work. Multiple interpreters can serve as checks on each other.

BEWARE INTERPRETER EFFECT. Can work both ways: just as informants may react to one interpreter by closing up and denying information, another interpreter may serve as a gate-opener.

UNDERSTAND INTERPRETER BACKGROUND. The interpreter may have mixed loyalties depending on who is being engaged with. The primary loyalty may not be with the researcher and certain data might thus get filtered.

BUILD RAPPORT. Building rapport is a process and is essential to establishing trust and ensuring data quality. Once achieved, having a good relationship can aid the researcher in approaching informants in a way which builds trust and confidence.

REDUCE DISTORTIONS. Loss of direct contact between the researcher and the informant may make the communication process more formal. Body language and meta-communication may be lost on the way. In an interview, seating arrangements and direct eye contact may be important.

SIMPLIFIED QUESTIONING. To remove ambiguities and allow easy translation. Deeply personal and experiential issues are difficult to study through the use of an interpreter. One does not want to lose the nuances of the local language.

CULTURAL/SOCIAL SENSITIVITY. Loyalties to the locality, embarrassment at certain themes, or personal interests, may all result in translations that are less than complete.

LEARN THE LANGUAGE. Even if minimal, by actively using whatever has been learnt of the local language, for greetings, simple questions, and interjections, the researcher may establish a more central role in the steering of the conversation that could otherwise be lost when going through a third party.

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY. Be mindful of the conditions and material the interpreter is being exposed to. You are most directly responsible for their health and safety.