

From Human Disaster to Economic Development: Diversity in Interpreting

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My professional life as an Interpreter and a translator (both directions), spans over 16 years. However, given the international political environment, there has been an increased influx of Arabic speaking refugees as well as Arabic speaking delegates, given the increased trade relations between Australia and Arab countries, especially the Gulf countries. As a professional interpreter sometimes I feel that my job is so overwhelming because of the great differences in the settings I work in and the diverse and varied situations that I find myself in. The bulk of my work is with refugees and asylum seekers from different Arab countries and Africa, in different settings and situations, ranging from their visa applications through to all services and situations they need to deal with in their settlement and life in Australia.

I interpret a lot at the Refugee Mental Health Service between Senior Practitioners (Psychiatrists), Counsellors / Advocates and Iraqi and Sudanese refugees who are new in Australia and suffer from post traumatic stress disorders. The nature of this work is highly demanding and requires a lot of concentration and flexibility to move from one topic to another, to distance myself from the horrible stories that I would come across, to explain the psychological state or feelings or to help clients using cognitive behaviour therapy. The sessions are also emotionally challenging. However, I always maintain a very professional manner. I have had to interpret matters of great sensitivity such as childhood experiences, traumatic events and feelings of loss and grief over some family members, precise instructions about relaxation exercises and positive thinking strategies to help the client deal with panic attacks.

At the other end of the spectrum of my professional life, I work with high ranking delegates from Arab countries, who participate in various training courses in Australia and I accompany them interstate. It is only then that I feel the big difference and great diversity and variety of the interpreter's job! I will talk about the diversity of the Interpreting and Translating field.



Mona JABBOUR has worked as an interpreter and a translator since 1993. Over the years, she has observed a steady growth in demand for Arabic interpreting. Mona speaks three languages fluently: Arabic, English and French. She also enjoys learning words and phrases in other languages from interpreter colleagues.

In Lebanon, Mona and her family lived in an area just half an hour from Beirut. They migrated to Australia in 1984. It was a difficult time. The country was at war. She was sponsored to come to Australia by her uncle who has lived here for 61 years.

'We felt we had been forced to leave our homeland. Migration is a big turning point in life with many changes to adjust to. But we also maintained a positive attitude to life. With time and hard work we were able to establish a new life from scratch.'

Over time, Mona was able to continue her studies. She went to university and completed a Diploma of Social Sciences and then went on to acquire a Post Graduate Diploma in Translating and Interpreting from Deakin University.

Mona enjoys her role as an interpreter because the work is valuable. She is empowering people whose first language is not English. 'I help Arabic speakers deal with authorities, fulfil their duties and access their rights. The profession is also rewarding because I assist English speakers to communicate with their clients, it has broadened my knowledge and made me thirsty for professional development.' She strives to keep up to date with technical changes and she is

stimulated by the variety of interpreting assignments.

Mona is passionate about the interpreting profession. She is committed to the ongoing campaign to ensure it is well regulated and recognised as a profession. This is one of the reasons why she is a member of the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT).

Last year, Mona was honoured to be named the AUSIT interpreter of the year. The institute hosts regular excellence awards.

Mona received an e-mail from the committee to advise she had been nominated by TIS National. Mona said it was thrilling to be recognised by her peers. The excellence awards were held at the Adelaide Town Hall and industry achievers were recognised in a range of categories.

When asked to advise professionals with little experience working with an interpreter, Mona always tells them to conduct the interview as normally as possible: 'speak to the Arabic speaking client directly and use the first person. Speak normally and maintain eye contact with the client and not with me. Use short but complete sentences to allow me to interpret fully and accurately. Just imagine that your client speaks perfect English.' Mona also tells professionals that her role is to interpret everything that is said and that she is neutral and impartial.

For colleagues who aim to achieve the highest level of professional excellence, Mona also has some tips: 'be committed to the profession and adhere to the AUSIT code of ethics at all times. Language is a living thing so it is vital to keep your linguistic skills up-to-date in both languages.