



NATIONAL  
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PSYCHOLOGISTS

*Recommended Practices for Working with Interpreters*

Excerpted from *Best Practices in School Psychology IV* (2002), page 1428

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The following recommendations apply to such activities as interviews, conferences, and assessment sessions. The recommendations are made with the assumptions that the interpreters have adequate training to work in schools and demonstrate high levels of proficiency in English and the second language.

*During briefing sessions:*

- Establish sitting arrangements. Stansfield (1980) recommends that the clinician and the interpreter sit next to each other with the interpreter sitting slightly behind the clinician. According to Stansfield, this sitting arrangement allows the clients to see both the interpreter and the clinician; the client can look at both the clinician and the interpreter to receive verbal and nonverbal messages from both; and the clinician will be in a position of facing and directly talking to the client.
- Provide the interpreter with an overview of the purpose of the session. The overview should include a description of the activities that should take place such as interviews, discussions, and questions. The interpreter should be apprised of the purpose of the translation session (i.e., to obtain information about the student's developmental background; to provide parents with feedback regarding the student's functioning).
- Provide the interpreter with any information that the interpreter needs to understand the context of the situation. For example, inform the interpreter of any unusual behaviors or verbalizations that may be characteristic of the student based on the diagnostic classification.
- Address issues related to confidentiality and describe boundaries of confidentiality.
- Decide what type of oral translation will be used. Since the translation research supports the use of translation styles that provide frequent breaks for the interpreter to deliver messages with fewer translation errors, discontinuous consecutive translations may be most appropriate for school settings.
- Provide the interpreter with the opportunity to examine and translate any documents that may need translation during the session (i.e., IEPs, letters).
- Discuss technical terms that will be used during the session (i.e., diagnostic categories, special education terms, psychological terms) and encourage the interpreter to ask questions about any vocabulary or concepts that they need more information about.

- Discuss cross-cultural issues from the perspective of communication and behaviors. For example, the school psychologist may want to greet culturally different families in ways that are culturally appropriate. Also, explore with interpreters the pragmatic rules pertinent to the students' cultures (Plata, 1993).
- Discuss with the interpreter the expectation that everything said will be translated to the clients and that the interpreter should translate all communication from clients.
- If the appropriate tools are available prior to the assessment session, the interpreter should review all assessment materials and have the opportunity to ask questions relevant to the assessment materials. Discuss with the interpreter concepts related to standardization, validity, reliability, and conduct during assessment sessions (e.g., do not coax students).
- Fradd and Wilen (1990) suggest developing an agenda to follow during the translation session. The agenda should list all the issues that will be covered during the session. The school psychologist and the interpreter should review the agenda during the debriefing session.

*During sessions when interpreters are being used:*

- Take the time to welcome the children and parents. The interpreter should introduce herself or himself, you (that is, the school psychologist), and any other school professional present during the session. If sitting arrangements have been predetermined, then you should be specific as to where everyone should sit.
- Take time to establish rapport with the clients. Speak directly to the clients and direct your attention to them when they are speaking. Avoid the ping-pong effect of darting your eyes and attention back and forth from the clients to the interpreter.
- Figueroa (1989) recommends the use of audiotapes during translation sessions. They can provide school psychologists and interpreters with opportunities to review the session at a later point. If audiotapes are used, the school psychologist must obtain permission in writing from parents and other participants. The decision to use audiotapes must be made taking into consideration that the presence of a tape recorder may inhibit clients from discussing sensitive or confidential issues.
- Speak in short sentences and allow time for the interpreter to translate everything said during the session. Communicate to the clients that they need to stop periodically to allow the interpreter to translate their messages. The interpreter should be ready to ask the client to slow down or to speak in short sentences if the rate of speech is too fast or if the client is not stopping frequently enough to allow the interpreter to translate their messages. In situations where the interpreter and the clients become involved in long discussions, then be ready to remind the interpreters and the clients that all communications must be translated.
- Avoid idioms, slang, and metaphors because they are difficult to translate.

- Take notes relevant to any issues that need to be discussed during debriefing. The interpreter should also take notes. For example, terms that were difficult to translate or cross-cultural issues relevant to communication can be noted and discussed during debriefing sessions.
- During conferences and interview sessions, periodically ask the client questions to establish that they are understanding the content of the communication. Asking clarifying questions is helpful in situations where information was lost as a result of the translation.

*During debriefing sessions:*

- Discuss with the interpreter the outcomes of the translation session. In addition, discuss any translation problems that may have surfaced during the session and their implications.
- After assessment sessions and student interviews, discuss cross-cultural issues relevant to the student's responses and behaviors. Acknowledge cultural differences and discuss their role in the assessment process.
- Encourage the interpreter to ask questions regarding the translation session. Also, encourage the interpreter to discuss his or her perceptions of the translation session and the cultural issues that surfaced during the session.

**Tips for the Use of Interpreters in the Assessment of English Language Learners**  
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The FIRST option should be a bilingual evaluation by bilingual personnel.

DO NOT use on the spot translations of tests. The preference should be for tools in the student's native language that have been validated and standardized in that language.

Use informal procedures to examine language skills (e.g., interviews, language samples).

School psychologists should use nonverbal tools to assess cognitive functioning when tests in validated and standardized in the student's native language are not available.

Provide interpreters with training as to how to work with school psychologists and other related service providers and educational evaluators.

Work with interpreters who have high proficiency in English and the student's second language.

Interpret ALL results with caution!!!!