

Assessing Public Service Interpreters

Alex KROUGLOV

Abstract

Many public and private organisations have developed their own systems of selecting and assessing potential interpreters for specific assignments. There are various approaches which involve interviews, tests, and written assignments. The present paper investigates the selection process and quality assessment of interpreting skills and behaviours developed by Praxis Interpreting+. Praxis is a charitable organisation, which specialises in helping immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. It works closely with Médecins du Monde.

The paper examines the effectiveness of an assessment model of interpreting skills and behaviours, which represents one part of the assessment programme at Praxis. In particular, the paper considers the following criteria: factual and linguistic accuracy, completeness, fluency and delivery, register and coherence, terminology and how each candidate copes with unknowns/anxiety management. The paper analyses the assessment model through the performance of candidates during role-play situations which were created in order to assess relevant interpreting skills. Praxis assessment model is compared to assessment criteria proposed by Kalina (2002) using the same score system.

Introduction

Many public and private organisations employ interpreters mostly on a freelance basis since the demand and requirements fluctuate

in various language combinations. In view of this, employers increasingly face the issue of quality assurance and the development of selection criteria for the assessment of interpreters applying for particular interpreting assignments or a series of assignments when they take place regularly. In the latter case, it may be easier to monitor the quality of performance through feedback from customers, assessment of recordings, involvement in professional development and other means. However, when interpreting assignments are not regular, especially in some language combinations, assessment of interpreters is vital in order to assess the level of their current skills necessary for a particular multilingual meeting or event. A typical example might be when the Foreign & Commonwealth Office requires a number of interpreters may be required for a state visit of a foreign head of state which takes place only once in three or four years, and an appropriate selection of interpreters with necessary skills to complete the assignment is becoming vital. Employers may be required to test the skills of potential interpreters due to less demand in their language combination, especially in languages of less wider communication. It could also be the result of insufficient involvement in professional development.

Our current research covers the initial selection and assessment of interpreters in Praxis, interpreting services are under the official name *Praxis Interpreting* + which is a charitable organisation dealing with immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers who come to the UK from all over the world. Praxis works closely with Médecins du Monde. Their clients are usually in need of either shelter accommodation, medical attention, or advice on various problems in their life in a foreign country, in situations when they can not deal with those issues independently either due to the lack of knowledge of the UK legal system or because their English language skills are insufficient. They require assistance when they face various challenges in everyday life in a new country.

The main objective of this research is to analyse the selection process and approaches to quality assessment of candidates for interpreting work in Praxis and in particular to consider in more

detail the criteria in the assessment of performance of candidates in simulated role-play situations. The following questions will also be addressed:

What criteria best describe the qualities required in the selection of candidates for interpreting assignments in public service settings?

How can a common understanding of quality in interpreting be achieved among the assessors?

What methods best assess the quality of interpreting?

These are very broad questions which will be addressed in the research and presented in the paper.

Community or public service interpreting has been considered by many as "the least prestigious and most misunderstood branch of the interpreting profession" (Mikkelsen, 1996, p. 124), but at the same time this is arguably one of the professions where the impact of interpreting and its quality may be profound on client's welfare, health, and life. Hence, the issue of quality assurance in community interpreting which is often underestimated is vital in order to ensure reliable communication and avoid distortions. This point is crucial as background information in my research and data analysis.

Pöchhacker specified two types of research in a concrete interpreting event which may be *product-oriented*, i.e. focus on the recordable product, or *interaction-oriented* with focus on the overall process of communicative interaction (2001, p. 412). In this research, which in more general terms can be described as product-oriented, reference will be also made to interaction-oriented approach since understanding and participation of all parties should be taken into consideration, e.g. how participants respond to the target text and whether they require any additional clarifications or explanations, whether the candidate can ensure reliable exchange of information. Video recordings of role play situations and the performance of interpreters are assessed in our research. When analysing video recordings special attention is paid to how both parties are involved in the conversation, their understanding of the target text (TT), whether they resort to asking

further clarifying questions or any other means of expression. In other words, interpreters are assessed as gatekeepers, coordinators and negotiators "of meanings within a three-way interaction" (Mason, 1999, p. 160).

The quality of interpreting is not always easy to ascertain since there are various parameters according to the needs and requirements of a specific mode of interpreting and situation. Having analysed the quality of interpreting with specific reference to simultaneous interpreting, Brian Fox pointed out that it "will vary depending on who does the defining: the service providers; their management; their client organisations; the end user. It will also depend on individual tastes/preferences" (2009, p. 24). This confirms to the idea raised by Kurz, that the quality expectations may depend on the diversity of user groups involved as well as their approaches (2001). Viezzi looked at the quality further and also considered the perspective of the "external observer" who performs qualitative assessment and possibly a research study on interpreting and is interested in weighting the "objective" characteristics of the interpreted texts (1996, p. 12). The approach when an independent observer does not only analyse the TT and assesses how faithful it is in relation to the source text (ST) but also evaluates the overall process of communicative interaction is adopted in this research. At the same time special attention is paid to the level of comprehension by TL interlocutors and their involvement in the interview.

What are the major criteria in the quality assessment of interpreting? Many authors, trainers and professional interpreters agree that they represent concepts such as accuracy, clarity or fidelity which are all "associated with the product-oriented perspective and focus primarily on the interpretation or target text as a 'faithful' image" (Gile, 1991, p. 198) or "exact and faithful reproduction" (Jones, 1998, p. 5) of the ST. While the notion of clarity or, for example, linguistic acceptability and stylistic correctness relate to a second aspect of quality, which sometimes can be described for obvious reasons as 'listener orientation' or target-text comprehensibility (Pöchhacker, 2001, p. 413).

There are many examples of approaches to criteria for the assessment of quality in interpreting in the literature, however our task is to investigate further how those criteria, often subdivided as major and minor, are used in the assessment process of the analyzed data, e.g. target and source texts, involvement of interlocutors, the flow of information exchange in public service settings.

Selection process at Praxis

In order to understand the process of assessment of interpreters' performance in role-play situations it is important to have a wider perspective of the application and selection process adopted by Praxis. It consists of the following stages:

- application form;
- English language assessment;
- other language assessment;
- interpreting of a role-play;
- medical terminology test;
- interview.

At the beginning of the selection process candidates receive an application form which consists of seven pages together with the job description and person specification. The person specification or essential entry requirements are broken into six categories: knowledge, experience, qualifications, skills, disposition/aptitude/personal qualities and other. Some of the essential requirements are:

- knowledge of NHS Primary Healthcare structures, services and procedures and Tower Hamlets Social services and their structures, provision and procedures;

- experience in public service interpreting;
- minimum completion of secondary education;
- skills: ability to sight translate routine documents, to carry out liaison/ad hoc interpreting; to speak English and another language fluently; to read and write in both English and another language.

Praxis gives preference to candidates who completed training in the UK and were awarded Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI) or a University level degree in Interpreting. Candidates are asked to provide information about their experience in interpreting in public services in the UK or another country, interpreting qualifications, advanced language qualifications, as well as the ability to carry out consecutive or simultaneous interpreting, the latter is perhaps desirable in this particular context.

Assessment of interpreters' performance in role play situations

Our current research focuses on the assessment of performance of candidates in interpreting role-plays at Praxis. It received ethical approval and consent for the study. For the purpose of our investigation we selected recordings of four candidates who performed Russian - English interpreting in role-play situations which follow a script. Both interlocutors do not read the script of the role-play but are involved in a spontaneous conversation very close to the text. In short, it consists of two parts:

Part A: taking details of a Russian speaking visitor, filling in the Praxis form in English, identifying the problem the client is facing, e.g. inferior housing conditions which cause medical problems, issues related to schools and children, health problems, immigration issues, etc. Praxis official participating

in the role-play asks for more details, provides advice or relevant information to their clients and sets up next appointment or other appointments, e.g. with a doctor.

Part B: sight translation of a letter from a receptionist of a hospital in Vladivostok, Russia. It is a handwritten letter with some grammar mistakes in which the receptionist advises Galina, Russian speaking visitor, to see her GP first before she can do a blood test and an X-Ray. Galina is also asked to consult her GP whether she needs to continue taking antidepressants. The conversation which follows the sight translation of the letter centres on a few issues raised in it.

All candidates were assessed according to the following 20 parameters which were developed in Praxis. The parameters are divided into three categories: language, voice and professionalism (see Table 1).

Table 1. Assessment criteria: quality parameters developed in Praxis.

<i>Language</i>	<i>Professionalism</i>	<i>Voice</i>
Factual Accuracy	Number of times requesting clarification	Speed
Linguistic Accuracy	Introduction of self/professional/client	Quality
Grammar	Placing of self	Volume
Use of third person	Note-taking	
Completeness	Appropriacy of dress	
Fluency	Manner/disposition	
Delivery	How did the candidate cope with any difficulties?	
Register		
Terminology		
Coherence		
How did the candidate cope with unknowns?		

The performance of each candidate for interpreting work was assessed on the scale of one to five for each parameter, where 1 was the lowest mark and 5 – the highest in terms of the quality of performance: 1 – was unsatisfactory; 2 – low and generally unsatisfactory; 3 – satisfactory; 4 – good and 5 – excellent.

The question arises between content and form related criteria, and what makes the most decisive criteria. In view of this, it will be important to compare criteria with the results of the assessment. There is a general consensus among scholars and practitioners that sense consistency with the original message represents the decisive criterion in both languages (Kahane, 2000, p. 4). The message should be clear, transparent and up to the point, and in this particular mode of interpreting and situations it should be free from information losses since they may lead to misunderstandings or inappropriate decisions. The transfer of information becomes vital especially when it concerns possible medical solutions. However, it is appropriate to point out the findings of Collados who wrote that interpretation with melodious delivery and mistakes in content was generally rated better than interpretation with a monotonous delivery and total sense of consistency (Collados, 1998). This is perhaps the view of clients as discussed above (Fox, 2009, p. 24). In our research we will consider how the four interpreters were assessed in all three categories, i.e. language, professionalism and voice, by an independent external assessor who was not present in the room where role-plays took place. The assessor was properly briefed and trained before marking the assessment. For this purpose, we will analyse several charts where performance of four candidates is presented in a graphical form.

Figure 1 represents mostly content based criteria. Interpreter 3 gets the highest marks for her performance and is followed by interpreter 2. These two interpreters gain adequate marks to pass the test. The other two make many omissions and regularly resort to generalisations which in this type of interpreting are not always permissible. Obvious mistakes in content transfer led in

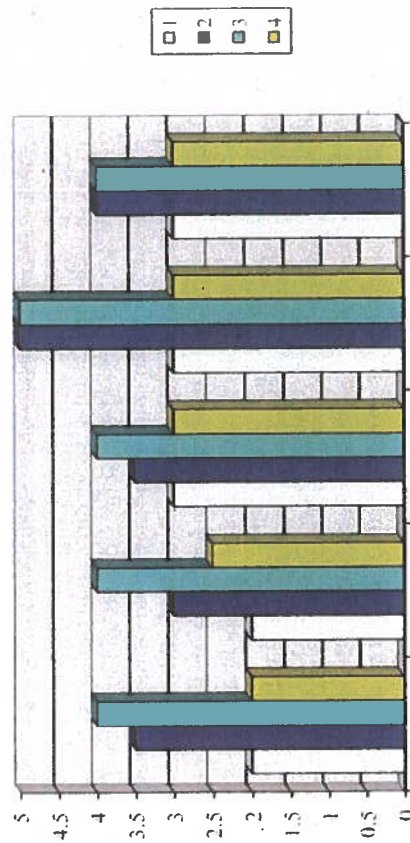


Figure 1. Quality Assessment (category "language") of performance of four interpreters according to the following criteria: factual and linguistic accuracy, grammar, the use of third person, and completeness.

several cases to misunderstandings between two parties involved and additional questions for clarification. There were also minor lapses when very important adjectives were missing in the TT, e.g. adjectives describing inferior standards in the hotel the client was staying. In another case, instead of rendering the explanation that the client does not speak English and does not know how to deal with the teacher at school, interpreter 1 said 'She does not know how to talk to the teacher' which may mean that the client does not speak English, but it may also mean that the teacher has poor listening skills, is rude, or perhaps the client does not know procedures and is not aware how to voice her complaint, as in the example 1 below.

Example 1

Client:

Я живу в такой гостинице, и она очень грязная, и я думаю, что из-за этого у меня вся кожа покрылась какими-то красными пятнами, и я хочу как-то выяснит, пожаловаться, что б это рассмогрили не знаю где. И второй вопрос у меня будет... Мой старший сын, которому 6 лет, он ходит в школу, но я думаю, что его там обижают,

но я не имею английского, и не знаю, как с учителем обходиться... где обходиться.

Lit.: I live in such a hotel, and it is very dirty, and I think that because of that my skin has covered with some red spots and somehow I want to find out... to complain so that they could consider it, I do not know where... And I have a second question... My elder son who is six years old, goes to school but I think that someone offends him there but I do not have English and I do not know how to deal with the teacher... where to deal with.

Interpreter 1: Galina... she got two problems... two questions... First of all, she lives in hotel with very bad conditions and she has developed a rash on her skin and maybe it's because of that living. The second problem she has a son, who is 6 years... he goes to school. Galina thinks he is bullied at school and because her English is quite poor, she doesn't know how to talk to the teacher.

From the above example, we can see how interpreter 1 dealt with a number of issues here. The adjective 'dirty' which is important for the understanding of the situation was generalised in interpreting. The interpreter consistently uses third person and misses the point that the client wants to sort this problem out and complain about inferior living conditions. Apart from numerous grammar mistakes, the interpreter makes wrong logical stress in her interpretation of the second problem. In another example, interpreter 1 distorts the meaning of the phrase "how we could potentially help you" in her rendition – see example 2 below.

Example 2

Praxis official: OK, Galina, first of all I'm going to tell you about Praxis and what it is we do here, so that you understand who we are and how we could potentially help you.

Interpreter 1: Ксения собирается рассказать вам, что такое Праксис и, чем они занимаются, чтобы помочь вам.

Lit.: Ksenia is going to tell you what Praxis is and what they deal with in order to help you.

The Russian interpretation of the phrase is more direct and makes a promise of help to the client. The meaning of the ST where a modal verb "could" was used in combination with the lexical item "potentially" was modified in the TT and was presented as unconditional promise of help. As a result, the TT distorted the meaning of the ST which may eventually lead to misunderstandings in further conversation.

Both interpreters 1 and 4 resorted to expanded rendition or in other words added information in the target language (TL). Interpreter 1 was willing to reorganise or rather organise her client's speech, and on one occasion when the client described the living conditions and some issues which should be resolved with the school, the interpreter started by saying that 'Galina has two problems...two questions' which is an interpreter's addition (see example 1).

Interpreters were also influenced by the source language (SL) in the TL sentence formation, and they often sounded foreign in Russian, although it was their native language. They often produced phrases heavily influenced by the English language syntax, lexis and style. As to grammar, interpreters 1, 2 and 4 made a few errors especially when interpreting into English which had an impact on transferring the message of their clients. All interpreters were not consistent in using definite and indefinite articles and prepositions in English, which complicated comprehension and in certain cases led to misunderstandings.

Only interpreter 1 resorted to the use of the third person in her interpretation of the introductory remarks made by her client (see examples 1 and 2 above). In some cases interpreter 4 also moved between 3rd and 1st person pronouns in the TL. However, in my view this is not a typical mistake, at least in English – Russian interpreting. The use of the right pronoun in the TL can be incorporated into other parts of the assessment, for example delivery.

Interpreters 1 and 4 did not complete a few phrases in the TL. Some other TL phrases sounded incomplete due to wrong intonation patterns chosen by interpreters. According to our observations,

this happened when interpreters were to interpret longer texts consisting of at least four or five sentences. One possible explanation for such errors was that interpreters' short term memory was not trained sufficiently to perform this type of interpreting without making notes, as in example 3 below.

Example 3

Praxis official (non native speaker of English): OK, that is something that I'm going to deal with straight away. I'm going to write a complaint letter and because they have responsibility to ensure that this situation doesn't actually happen in hostel because they are responsible for the cleanliness of the place. So, after the interview we will write a little letter and I'll send it to them as well as your advocate... If they don't take actions we will make a formal complaint to the actual hotel... hostel management. I'm going to find out all the details.

Interpreter 1: Значит так, что они должны сделать это написать письмо...
обжаловать... за то, то происходит в отеле... и так как... то, что это письмо...

Lit.: OK, so what they must do is to write a letter... to complain...
about what is happening in the hotel... and as... this is the letter...

Interpreter 1 made an attempt to summarise comments made by the Praxis official in the example above. As a result, the ST message was not transmitted but was actually distorted in the TL. The TL sentences were unfinished and made no sense. The use of personal pronoun 'they' complicated comprehension even further since it was not clear who will actually act upon this. Similar mistakes can be found in the interpreting made by interpreter 4.

Only interpreter 2 showed good fluency when switching between two languages, while it was obvious that interpreters 1 and 4 had some problems and did not sound fluent, especially in English (see *Figure 2*).

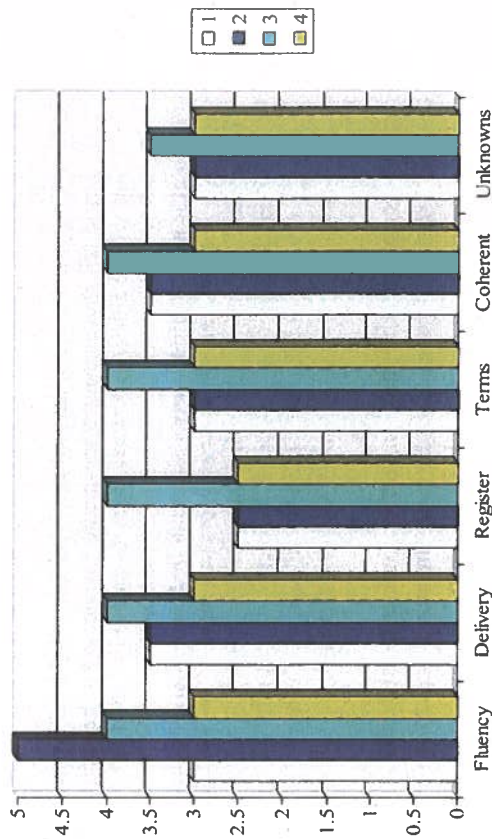


Figure 2. Quality assessment (category 'language') of four interpreters' performance according to the following criteria: fluency, delivery, register, terms, coherence, and dealing with unknowns.

The delivery was generally satisfactory, apart from those places where interpreters had certain problems with decoding and encoding information in the TL and had to find solutions quickly. In these cases, there were numerous hedges, e.g. 'eh', 'um', 'so' in the TTs.

As to register used by interpreters 1, 2 and 4, they still need to work on expanding their lexical and grammatical repertoire in both languages, especially when differences in style are involved. As to terminology, even very general terms which were used in the role-play posed some problems to all interpreters. They could not find easily equivalents for various general terms, such as 'solicitor', 'advisor', 'hostel', 'shared kitchen', 'GP', 'proof of ID', 'proof of residence', 'sexual orientation', 'blood test', 'benefits', and a few other lexical items. In most cases, interpreters resorted to transliteration in the TL which led to misunderstandings, additional questions and unnecessary discussions, as in the example 4 below.

Example 4

Praxis official: When you see the doctors from *Medicine de Monde* you also should tell them about these health problems you've had, and they will be able to give you advice if you need a blood test or an X-Ray.

Interpreter 2: Когда вы пойдете к врачу в *Медицин Де Монд*, куда мы советуем вам обратиться, вы можете спросить, нужно ли вам брать кровь...

Lit.: When you go to a doctor in *Medicins du Monde* where we are advising you to refer to, you can ask if you need to take blood...

In the above example, the interpreter 2 inaccurately translates 'blood test' as 'брать кровь' instead of an accepted phrase in Russian 'сделать анализ крови', while 'X-Ray' is omitted in the TT. This is an example of reduced rendition. Interpreter 1 and 4 made similar errors in the TL which led to additional questions for clarification from the client.

Coherence was generally satisfactory in the performance of interpreter 3. In some instances all other interpreters failed to show consistency in delivering coherent messages due to various problems, e.g. lexical issues, unfinished sentences, differences in the structure of sentences in two languages, inability to memorise short sequence of phrases and many others. Our previous examples show that some ideas were not always logically connected in sentences and phrases. When interpreters were not able to control their perspective on the text, they sometimes could not transfer the message and intentions of the speakers involved in the role-play. In these cases, speaker's perspective on text progression was changed by interpreters, which impaired text perspective coherence.

Dealing with unknowns was generally satisfactory but there were several lapses made by all candidates. For example, interpreter 1 had a problem finding an equivalent phrase for 'sexual orientation', while interpreter 4 asked the female client whether she slept with men in the same situation (see example 5).

Example 5

Praxis official: What is your sexual orientation?

Interpreter 4: Какая у вас сексуальная ориентация?

Lit.: What is your sexual orientation?

Client: Нормальная (laughs)

Lit.: Normal.

Interpreter 4: Живете с мужчинами?

Lit.: Do you live with men?

Client: Да.

Lit.: Yes.

Interpreter 4: Has relationships with men.

In the above example, interpreter 4 felt somewhat uncomfortable interpreting the question and was not sure whether the client understood it properly. The interpreter asked an additional question for clarification whether the client lived with men. Although the interpreter was trying to help the service provider, she was not acting in the role of invisible intermediary anymore and broke the rules of professional conduct by initiating her own questions.

Only interpreter 3 produced the TT which was delivered at good speed all the way through and with very little pauses (see Figure 3). All other interpreters due to certain difficulties with decoding or encoding of information had to slow down significantly and had pauses in delivering the TL message. However, in some instances interpreters rushed to interpret the ST message without listening to the end of the sentence which led to interruptions of speakers and making assumptions as to how the client may finish the message – see Example 6.

Example 6

Client:

И у меня появились какие-то красные пятна на всей коже, и я думаю, что это все из-за этой...

Lit.:

And some red spots appeared all over my skin and I think that it is because of...

Interpreter 2: I've got rash on my body, I think because of the dirt.

In the Example 6 we can observe that the interpreter assumed the word 'dirt' should have been used by her client in view of the wider context of the situation. However, this assumption may have proved to be wrong if the client could be given the opportunity to finish the sentence.

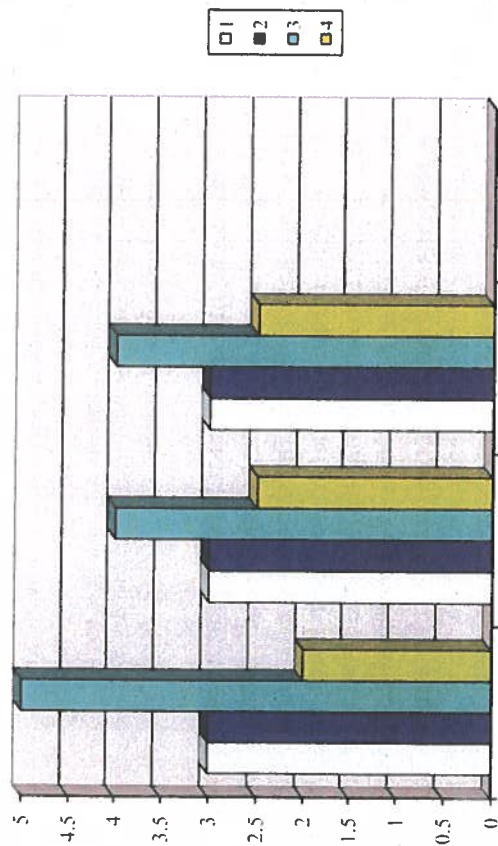


Figure 3. Quality assessment (category 'voice') of four interpreters' performance according to the following criteria: speed, quality, and volume.

The issue of 'voice' as a parameter for assessment of interpreters has been an arguable issue in previous research – see Eduardo Kahane (2000) and Daniel Gile (1995). However, both Kahane and Gile agree in principle that voice qualities could have an impact on listeners. Both Praxis and Sylvia Kalina (2002) included this category in their assessment systems. As to our candidates and their individual assessments, the quality of voice was generally satisfactory. Perhaps, interpreter 3 showed more confidence in her tone and the way she presented the information.

The volume of voice in the delivery was generally good, apart from interpreter 4 who was not confident enough and spoke at a very low voice which was close to chuchotage.

All interpreters tried to avoid asking questions for clarification except in one or two cases (see Figure 4). Interpreter 4 resorted to this more often. In general, formulating quick and to the point questions was good, and all clarifying questions were well constructed and clear and in most cases interpreters received appropriate replies from both interlocutors involved in the role-play.

Apart from interpreter 3, all other interpreters introduced themselves at the beginning of the interview in English and Russian using appropriate language for the situation. As to placing, it was very difficult to assess the performance of interpreters since the interviewers or interlocutors involved in the role-play suggested the sitting arrangement from the very beginning. Perhaps this parameter could be combined with another one, and candidates could be given more options.

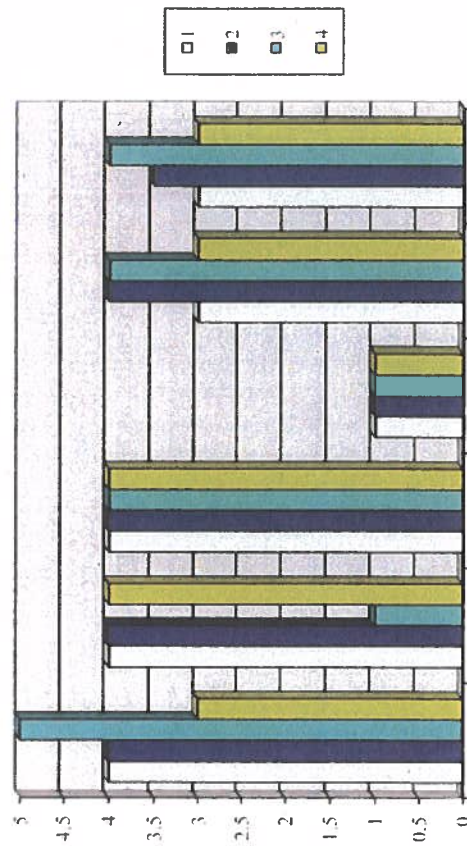


Figure 4. Quality assessment ('professionalism' category) of four interpreters' performance according to the following criteria: number of times requesting clarifications, introduction of self/professional/client, placing of self, note-taking, appropriacy of dress/manner/disposition, coping with difficulties.

None of the candidates used note taking. They did not have even a piece of paper and/or a pen. The candidates could have avoided

many errors they made in their interpreting if they used their note taking skills.

Appropriacy of dress, manner and disposition was generally good and all candidates received good marks.

How did the candidates cope with any difficulties? It was generally satisfactory and overall perhaps interpreter 3 performed better followed by interpreter 2, they employed sound strategies and could manage information transfer. Interpreters 1 and 4 had a few problems in dealing with some lexical items which had a negative effect on the content and form of the TT message.

As part of our experiment marks received by interpreters for their performance according to all criteria developed by Praxis were summed up at the end of the assessment process. Then the performance of all interpreters was assessed according to each criteria proposed by Kalina (2002) using the same score system of 1 to 5, and the overall mark was drawn at the end. The remit of this paper does not allow us to analyse all parameters used by Kalina in detail. Our main objective was to compare two systems and analyse the overall results as they are presented in Figure 5.

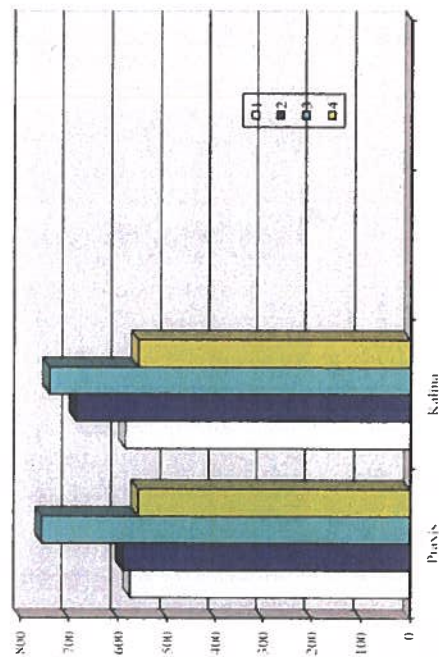


Figure 5. Comparing the overall performance of four interpreters using two systems of assessment: Praxis (20 parameters) and the one which was proposed by Kalina (19 parameters).

When analysing the overall results received using both systems it was interesting to observe that interpreter 2 was only slightly above the interpreter 1 in the Praxis system of assessment, although in content qualifying parameters she was well above the interpreter 1. This difference is clearer in Kalina's system, where interpreter 2 is only slightly below interpreter 3 and significantly above interpreter 1. This reflects the position of interpreters on the scale in content qualifying parameters. Nevertheless, the use of Kalina's parameters in comparative assessment of candidates shows that the general approach developed by Praxis is right and enables them to select candidates with appropriate skills for their specific assignments which take place regularly in their organisation.

Further development of assessment system in Praxis

Praxis regularly monitors the results of assessment of interpreters in all language combinations and analyses how criteria are applied by assessors with a view of further development of their assessment system paying special attention to interpreting skills in role-play situations. Following the advice of their assessors and taking into consideration the results of assessments, some parameters were revised and new elements were introduced.

The most important task was to revise the existing scale which only allowed assessors to work within 1 to 5 points system which was insufficient in reflecting nuances and diversity of skills demonstrated by candidates. Some assessors often resorted to marks which were between, for example 2 and 3 – '2/3' or '3/4' (between 3 and 4, or 3.5). The proposed new scale system of 1 to 10 offers more flexibility and better reflects demonstrated skills in role play interpreting: 'excellent' – 8–10, 'satisfactory' – 6–7 and 0–5 – 'unacceptable'.

Two columns for assessment: 'into English' and 'from English' were introduced in sections 'Language' and 'Voice'. This enables assessors to differentiate the performance of interpreters in each TT. As a result, Praxis employers have more information and may form a better view as to when to use or not to use the interpreters who went through the assessment.

Two parameters 'Linguistic Accuracy' and 'Grammar' were combined into one parameter. This is due to the fact that assessors were often not sure how to differentiate these errors in the system which was used before. Some assessors incorporated grammar mistakes into 'Linguistic Accuracy' since there was no clear guidance.

There were changes in the parameter 'completeness' where 'additions and omissions' appeared in parenthesis. This provides a better guidance to assessors. Four other parameters were combined into groups of two: 'fluency and delivery' and 'register and coherence'.

Some additions appeared in the category of 'Professionalism'. They provided a better guidance to assessors and allowed Praxis managers to have more information on various issues of interpreters' performance, e.g. 'placing of self' was added to the category 'Introduction of self/professional/client'. 'Body language' was introduced as a new parameter in this category and 'Number of times requesting clarification' was expanded by an additional phrase 'number of times intervening & reasons'.

However, the most important change which appeared in the new assessment system was a separate assessment of sight translation. It was assessed as part of the whole role-play before, and since this was a small part of the exercise the actual assessment was often diluted and considered in the assessment of other parameters. There are two parameters for sight translation: one for 'Language' (accuracy and speed) and 'Delivery' (time taken to prepare, confidence, hesitation).

In total, instead of 20 parameters in the previous assessment system, there are 30 parameters now. They will enable a better

assessment and selection of candidates and contribute to a higher quality of interpreting in this organisation. Special attention was paid to raising the weight of content parameters. It is vital that the system of assessment is regularly reviewed and analysed by assessors and employers. This approach will inevitably bring positive results.

Concluding remarks

The preceding analysis of assessment system and parameters developed in Praxis shows that it is difficult to design universal tests which determine the quality of interpreting objectively across a wide range of requirements. The issue of content and form parameters and their weight in the assessment system should be flexible and balanced and linked to specific characteristic features of the planned interpreting situation or event. In public service interpreting, content should have a decisive role especially in identifying candidates for jobs or more specific interpreting assignments. Quite often small and seemingly irrelevant factors may play a crucial role in, for example, medical assessment or police investigation, and if they are overlooked and eventually omitted from the TT this may lead to irreversible results or inappropriate decision making. In this respect, the current research and my own experience as an interpreter, trainer and assessor confirms the findings of Franz Pöchhacker that "concepts such as accuracy, clarity or fidelity are invariably deemed essential", while notions of linguistic acceptability, stylistic correctness and others mentioned in this paper can be described as "a second aspect of quality", which tend to reflect "listener orientation" (2001, p. 413).

A second finding of this study is that organisations using public service interpreters should introduce professional tests or assessment procedures for new interpreters or those interpreters

who were not involved in professional development and did not have substantial interpreting practice for a long period of time. The tests should be flexible in incorporating specific parameters or criteria depending on the particular interpreting assignment or specific function of an interpreter during a multilingual event. Variable parameters may include the mode of interpreting, type of encounter, participating parties, topics of discussion, confidentiality and many others. The results of assessment where variable parameters are taken into consideration should enable the employers to identify and employ the most suitable interpreters for the meetings or events.

Organisations using public service interpreters should review professional tests and assessment system regularly. All new changes and adjustments should be introduced and monitored accordingly taking into consideration prior experience, previous testing results and feedback from clients/users and assessors. This will not only enable them to improve the existing system of assessment but also ensure that employers, assessors and professional interpreters have a clear common understanding of quality and measurable parameters and criteria.

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