

Appendix C

INTERPRETERS

1. Background

During PO, there are occasions when peacekeepers will lack the linguistic ability to communicate personally and effectively with the local populace in the AO. The use of interpreters is often the best or only option. The proper use and supervision of interpreters can play a decisive role in the mission.

2. Selecting an Interpreter

a. In some operational or training settings abroad, CA personnel will not face the problem of selecting an interpreter; the chain of command or host government will assign one. In other cases, interpreters are chosen from a pool provided by the host government. Finally, in many operational situations, hire interpreters from the general HN population. Whatever the case, the following guidelines are critical to the success of mission accomplishment. This is an opportunity for the peacekeeper to truly influence the outcome of the mission.

b. Considerations for selecting an interpreter are as follows:

(1) Native Speaker. Find interpreters who are native speaker of the socially or geographically determined dialect. The interpreter's speech, background, and mannerisms should be completely acceptable to the target audience so that attention is given only to what is said.

(2) Social Status. In some situations and cultures, if an interpreter is considered in lower social standing than the audience, that interpreter is ineffective. This may include significant differences in military rank or membership in an ethnic or religious group. Regardless of the peacekeeper's personal feelings on social status, the job is to accomplish the mission, not to act as an agent for social reform in a faraway land. Accept local prejudices as a fact.

(3) English Fluency. An often-overlooked consideration is how well the interpreter speaks English. As a rule, if the interpreter understands the peacekeeper and the peacekeeper understands the interpreter, then the interpreter's command of English is satisfactory. Check the interpreter's "understanding" by asking to paraphrase a statement in English.

(4) Intellectual Intelligence. Find interpreters who are quick, alert, and responsive to changing conditions and situations. An interpreter must be able to grasp complex concepts and discuss them without confusion in a reasonably logical sequence. Although education does not equate to intelligence, the better educated the interpreter, the better the interpreter will be able to perform due to exposure to diverse concepts.

(5) Technical Ability. In certain situations, the peacekeeper may need an interpreter with technical training or experience in special subject areas. The interpreter may need to translate the "meaning" as well as the "words."

(6) Reliability. Be aware of the candidate interpreter who arrives late for the interview. Throughout the world, the concept of time varies widely. In many less developed countries, time is relatively unimportant. Make sure that the interpreter understands the military's concern with punctuality.

(7) Loyalty. If the interpreter is a local national, it is safe to assume that the interpreter's first loyalty is to the HN, or sub-group, not the US military. The security implications are clear. Be very cautious in explaining concepts to give the interpreter "a greater depth of understanding."

(a) Certain tactical situations may require the use of uncleared indigenous personnel as "field expedient" interpreters. Be aware of the increased security risk involved in using such personnel and carefully weigh the risk versus the potential gain. In addition, if uncleared interpreters are used, limit any sensitive information to a minimum.

(8) Gender, Age, and Race. Gender, age, and race have the potential to seriously affect the mission. One example is the status of females in Muslim society. In predominantly Muslim countries, cultural prohibitions may affect the gender of the interpreter used under given circumstance. Another example is the Balkans, where the ethnic divisions may limit the effectiveness of an interpreter from outside the target audience's group. Since traditions, values, and biases vary from country to country, it is important to check with the in-country assets or area studies for specific taboos or favorable characteristics.

(9) Compatibility. The peacekeeper and interpreter work as a team. The target audience is quick to recognize personality conflicts between the team members that can undermine the effectiveness of the communication effort. If possible, when selecting an interpreter, the peacekeeper needs to look for compatible traits and strive for a harmonious working relationship.

(10) Choose more than one interpreter. If several qualified interpreters are available, select at least two. Interpreting is an exhausting job; four hours is about the maximum active interpreting time for an interpreter's peak efficiency. Whatever the mission, with two or more interpreters, the peacekeeper can provide quality control and assistance to the active interpreter. Additionally, this technique comes in useful when conducting coordination or negotiation meetings as one interpreter is used in an active role and the other can pay attention to the body language and side conversations of others present. Many times, the peacekeeper will gain important side information that aids negotiations from listening to what others are saying outside of the main discussion.

c. Implied throughout the preceding points is the need for a careful analysis of the target population. Mature judgment, thoughtful consideration of the audience as individual human beings and a genuine concern for their receiving accurate information will go a long way toward accomplishing the mission.

d. Hire only honest interpreters who are free from unfavorable notoriety among the local inhabitants, and whose reputation or standing in the community is such that persons of higher rank and standing will not intimidate them.

e. The interpreter is a vital link to the target audience. An uncooperative, unsupportive interpreter could jeopardize the mission. Mutual respect and understanding between the peacekeeper and interpreter are essential to effective teamwork. Establish rapport early in the relationship and maintain it throughout the joint effort. Most of the time, the difficulty of establishing rapport stems from the lack of personal contact.

(1) Background. The peacekeeper begins establishing rapport even before meeting the interpreter for the first time by obtaining basic facts about the HN. Basic

information may include population, geography, ethnic groups, political system, prominent political figures, monetary system, business, agriculture, exports, etc. Obtain a good general outline from recent almanacs or encyclopedias. More detailed information is available in the area handbook for the country, current newspapers, and magazines such as *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, and *US News and World Report*.

(2) Interpreters' background. The peacekeeper should show a genuine concern for the interpreter's family, aspirations, career, education, etc. The investigation of the interpreter's home life should reveal the comparative emphasis based on family versus career. Another potential area to research is cultural traditions, both to find out more about the interpreter and the HN. Though the peacekeeper should gain as much information on culture as possible before entering a HN, the interpreter can be a valuable source to fill gaps.

(3) The peacekeeper should gain the interpreter's trust and confidence before embarking on sensitive issues such as religion, likes, dislikes, and prejudices in conversation. The peacekeeper should approach these areas carefully and tactfully. Although very revealing and useful in the professional relationship, draw deeply personal beliefs gently and tactfully out of the interpreter.

(4) Orientation. Early in the relationship with the interpreter, the peacekeeper should ensure that they are briefed on their duties and responsibilities. Orient the interpreters with the nature of their duties, standards of conduct expected, interview techniques, and any other requirements necessary. The orientation may include the following:

- (a) Current tactical situation.
- (b) Background information obtained on the source, interviewee, or target audience.
- (c) Specific objectives for interview, meeting, or interrogation.
- (d) Method of interpretation to be used – simultaneous, alternate, etc.
 - Simultaneous – when the interpreter listens and translates at the same time.
 - Alternate – when the interpreter listens to an entire phrase, sentence, or paragraph, then translates during natural pauses.
- (e) Conduct of the interview, lesson, or interrogation.

(5) Interpreters must not inject personality, ideas, or questions into the interview.

(6) Interpreters should inform the peacekeeper of inconsistencies in language used by interviewees. Example – an interviewee who claims to be a college professor yet speaks like an uneducated person. During interrogations or interviews this information will be used as part of the assessment of the information obtained from the individual.

(7) Physical arrangements of site – if applicable.

(8) Possible need for interpreter to assist in after action reports, assessments, etc.

3. Training the Interpreter

a. As part of the initial training with the interpreter, tactfully convey that the military member must always direct the interview. Put the interpreter's role in proper perspective. Stress the interpreter's importance as a vital communication link between the military member and the target audience. Appeal to the interpreter's professional pride by clearly describing how the quality and quantity of the information sent and received is directly dependent upon their interpreting skills. Also, mention how they function solely as a conduit between the peacekeeper and the subject.

b. Some interpreters, because of cultural differences, may attempt to "save face" by purposely concealing a lack of understanding. The interpreter may attempt to translate what is said or meant without asking for a clarification or vice versa. Because this can result in misinformation and confusion, and impact on credibility, the peacekeeper should emphasize the need to ask questions when there is any doubt.

(1) Other points the peacekeeper should cover while orienting and training the interpreter are:

(a) Importance of the training, interview, or interrogation.

(b) Specific objectives of the training, interview, or interrogation, if any.

(c) Outline of lesson or interview question, if applicable.

(d) Background information on the interviewee, or target audience.

(e) Briefing, training, or interview schedules. It may take two to three times as much time using an interpreter to convey the same information. For that reason the interpreter may be helpful in scheduling enough time.

(f) Copy the briefing, questions, or lesson plan if applicable. Give special attention to develop language proficiency in expected technical fields. This will give the interpreter time to look up unfamiliar words or ask questions to clarify anything confusing.

(g) Copies of handout material – if applicable.

(h) General background information on subject.

(i) Glossary of terms – if applicable.

4. The Interview

a. Preparing for an interview. Select an appropriate site for the interview. Position and arrange physical setup of the area - this can be significant when conducting interviews with VIPs, or individuals from different cultures. Instruct the interpreters to mirror your tone and personality of speech.

b. Conducting the interview. Whether conducting an interview, or presenting a lesson, avoid simultaneous translations; that is, both of peacekeeper and interpreter talking at the same time. The peacekeeper should speak for a minute or less in a neutral, relaxed manner, directly to the individual or audience. The interpreter should watch the peacekeeper carefully and mimic your body language as well as interpret your verbal meaning during the translation. Do not to force the interpreter into literal translation by being too brief. Present one major thought in its entirety and allow the interpreter to reconstruct it in their language and culture.

(1) Although your interpreter will be doing some "editing" as a function of the interpreting process, it is imperative that the exact meaning without additions or

deletions is transmitted. A good interpreter, especially if they are local, can be invaluable in translating subtleties and hidden meanings.

(2) During an interview or lesson, if questions are asked, the interpreter should immediately relay them to the peacekeeper for an answer. The interpreter should never attempt to answer a question, even though the correct answer is known. Additionally, neither of peacekeeper or interpreter should correct the other in front of an interviewee or class; settle all differences away from the audience.

5. Communication Techniques

a. An important first step in communicating in a foreign language is to polish personal English language skills. This is true even if no attempt is made to learn the indigenous language. The clearer the peacekeeper's English, including diction, the easier it is for the interpreter to translate. Other factors to consider include use of profanity, slang, and colloquialisms or military jargon. In many cases, such expressions cannot be translated. Even those that can be translated do not always retain the desired meaning. Examples such as "Gee Whiz" or "Golly" are hard to translate. In addition, if a using a technical term or expression, be sure the interpreter conveys the proper meaning in the target language. Speak in low context, simple sentences. For instance, the military member may want to add words usually left off such as "air" plane. This ensures the meaning will be obvious, and not talking about the Great Plains or a wood plane.

(1) When speaking extemporaneously, think about what to say, break it down into logical bits, and give it out a small piece at a time. Use short, simple words and sentences and low context, for quick and easy translation. As a rule of thumb, never say more in one sentence than the interpreter can easily repeat word for word immediately after saying it. Each sentence should contain a complete thought.

(2) Transitional phrases and qualifiers tend to confuse and waste valuable time, so use them sparingly. Examples are "for example," "in most cases," "maybe," "perhaps," etc. Be cautious of using American humor. Cultural and language differences can lead to misinterpretations by foreigners. The peacekeeper should determine early on what the interpreter finds easiest to understand and translate meaningfully. In summary:

- (a) Keep the entire presentation as simple as possible.
- (b) Use short sentences and simple words (low context).
- (c) Avoid idiomatic English.
- (d) Avoid flowery language.
- (e) Avoid slang and colloquial expressions.

(3) Whenever possible, identify any cultural restrictions before interviewing, instructing, or conferring with particular foreign nationals. For instance, when is it proper to stand, sit, or cross one's legs? Gestures, being learned behavior, vary from culture to culture. Have your interpreter relate a number of these cultural restrictions, and observe them, whenever possible, in working with the particular group or individual.

b. Working with an interpreter:

(1) Position the interpreter by the peacekeeper's side (or even a step back). This will keep the subject or audience from shifting their attention, or fixating on the interpreter.

(2) Always look at and talk directly to the subject or audience. Guard against the tendency to talk to the interpreter.

(3) Speak slowly and clearly. Repeat as often as necessary.

(4) Do not address the subject or audience in the third person through the interpreter. Avoid saying, "tell them I'm glad to be their instructor," rather say, "I'm glad to be your instructor." Address the subject or audience directly.

(5) Speak to the individual or group as if they understand English. Be enthusiastic and employ the gestures, movements, voice intonations, and inflections that would normally be used before an English-speaking group.

(6) Side comments to the interpreter that are not for translation tend to create the wrong atmosphere for communication and are a distraction.

(7) While the interpreter is translating and the subject or audience is listening, avoid doing anything distracting. Do not pace the floor, write on the blackboard, teeter on the lectern, drink beverages, or carry on any other distracting activity while the interpreter is actually translating.

(8) Periodically check the interpreter's accuracy, consistency, and clarity. Have another American, fluent enough in the language sit in on a lesson or interview. This should assure that the translation is not distorted, intentionally or unintentionally. Another way to be sure, is to learn the target language, which will allow a check of the interpreter's loyalty and honesty as well. Check with your audience whenever misunderstandings are suspected, and clarify immediately. Using the interpreter, ask questions to elicit answers that will tell whether the point is clear. If not clear, rephrase the instruction differently and illustrate the point again. Use repetition and examples whenever necessary to facilitate learning. If the class asks few questions this may mean the peacekeeper or the interpreter are talking "over the heads" of the audience, or not getting the message across.

NOTE: Finally, when the military member has acquired an effective interpreter, make them feel like a valuable member of the team. Give the interpreter recognition commensurate with the importance of their contribution.
