



# U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

## RAIO DIRECTORATE – OFFICER TRAINING

### RAIO Combined Training Course

# CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND OTHER FACTORS THAT MAY IMPEDE COMMUNICATION AT AN INTERVIEW

TRAINING MODULE

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## **CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND OTHER FACTORS THAT MAY IMPEDE COMMUNICATION AT AN INTERVIEW**

### **Training Module**

#### **MODULE DESCRIPTION**

Through interactive communication exercises, this module describes how cultural differences may create barriers to effective communication and provides techniques for recognizing and overcoming those barriers.

#### **TERMINAL PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE(S)**

Given the field situation of interviewing an applicant for asylum or refugee status (and witnesses, if any), you will be able to elicit in a non-adversarial manner all relevant information necessary to adjudicate the asylum request and to issue documents initiating removal proceedings, if required.

Given written and role-play asylum and refugee scenarios, the trainee will correctly identify inter-cultural issues that may create barriers to communication.

#### **ENABLING PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES**

1. Explain factors that may impede communication at an interview.
2. Explain issues that may arise in interviewing individuals from different cultures.
3. Explain techniques for effective communication across cultural barriers.

#### **INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS**

- Interactive presentation, practical exercises, discussion

#### **METHOD(S) OF EVALUATION**

- Multiple choice exam

**REQUIRED READING**

- 1.
- 2.

[Division-Specific Required Reading - Refugee Division](#)

[Division-Specific Required Reading - Asylum Division](#)

[Division-Specific Required Reading - International Operations Division](#)

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

1. Kalin, Walter. "Troubled Communication: Inter-cultural Misunderstanding in the Asylum Hearing," International Migration Review, guest editor: Dennis Gallagher (Summer, 1986), p. 230-239.
2. Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. Guidelines for Immigration Lawyers Working with Interpreters: Extending Legal Assistance Across Language Barriers (New York, NY: June 1995), 5 p.
3. Rubin, Joan and Thompson, Irene. How to be a More Successful Language Learner: Toward Learner Autonomy (Boston, Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle Publishers, 1994), p. 37-41.

[Division-Specific Additional Resources - Refugee Division](#)

[Division-Specific Additional Resources - Asylum Division](#)

[Division-Specific Additional Resources - International Operations Division](#)

**CRITICAL TASKS**

<b>Task/ Skill #</b>	<b>Task Description</b>
C3	Skill in tailoring communications to diverse audiences (e.g., cross-cultural, management) (4)
IR3	Skill in responding to cultural behavior in an appropriate way (e.g., respectful, accepting of cultural differences) (4)
ITK6	Knowledge of principles of cross-cultural communications (e.g., obstacles, sensitivity, techniques for communication) (4)

**SCHEDULE OF REVISIONS**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Section (Number and Name)</b>	<b>Brief Description of Changes</b>	<b>Made By</b>
05/10/2013	Throughout document	Corrected minor typos, formatting, cites identified by OCC-TKMD.	LGollub, RAIO Training

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Throughout this training module you may come across references to division-specific supplemental information located at the end of the module, as well as links to documents that contain division-specific, detailed information. You are responsible for knowing the information in the referenced material that pertains to your division. Officers in the International Operations Division who will be conducting refugee interviews are also responsible for knowing the information in the referenced material that pertains to the Refugee Affairs Division.

For easy reference, each division's supplements are color-coded: Refugee Affairs Division (RAD) in pink; Asylum Division (ASM) in yellow; and International Operations Division (IO) in purple.

In this module, the term "interviewee" is used to refer to an individual who is interviewed by an officer in the RAIO Directorate for an official purpose.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This lesson explains how communicating through a second language, cultural factors, stress, and "personal agendas" can affect the interview process. The lesson also includes ways that you, the interviewing officer, can minimize the negative effects that these factors can have at an interview.

## 2 COMMUNICATING ACROSS A SECOND LANGUAGE<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Overview

English is not the first language of most of the interviewees you will encounter. Although some interviews are conducted entirely in English, at most interviews there is an interpreter who interprets what the interviewee says into English and what you say into a language the interviewee can understand. Not only does this increase the time spent conducting the interview, but it also creates a situation in which miscommunication can occur.

Interpreting from one language to another is not simply a word-for-word interpretation. The language structure and vocabulary of a culture evolve as an expression of what is necessary and important in that culture; therefore, language and culture are closely

<sup>1</sup> This section of the lesson plan is based in part on a presentation entitled, "Dimensions of Language and Culture," by Susan Raufer (currently the Director at the Newark Asylum Office) as part of studies in World Issues at the Experiment in International Living (World Learning), Brattleboro, VT and used with the author's permission.



intertwined. Although there are literal translations between languages for many words, there are many other words in some languages that do not have lexical equivalents in other languages and which need to be translated by multiple words or phrases. (For example, Alaska natives have many different words for “snow.” A translation into English using only the word “snow” would not capture the exact meaning of what had been said.) In addition, communication does not involve merely the spoken word; tone of voice, “body language,” and other factors contribute to the message that is conveyed.

You need to be aware of the potential for miscommunication when a second language is used, and to attempt to keep the possibility of miscommunication at a minimum.

## 2.2 Communication

Communication can be broken down into two components, verbal and non-verbal.

### *Verbal*

- Linguistic
  - vocabulary
  - grammar
- Paralinguistic
  - manipulation of speech: e.g., volume of speech, rate of speech, pitch/tone, stress
  - extra-speech sounds: e.g., groans, sighs, laughter, crying, whistling, and other sounds such as “huh” and “uh”

### *Non-verbal*

- Movements that substitute for language, i.e. body language
  - facial expressions (smiles, frowns, etc.)
  - eye contact
  - body movement
  - posture
  - physical distance
  - use of environment (tapping fingers on tabletop, drawing, etc.)
  - touching
  - use of silence; timing

### *Written language*

For purposes of this training, we will not discuss written language; whenever non-verbal communication is discussed below, it refers only to body language.

## 2.3 Verbal Communication - Linguistic

### 2.3.1 The Danger of Mistranslation

“The enormous danger of failing to communicate in the modern world is dramatically illustrated by the circumstances surrounding the bombing of Hiroshima. There is evidence that the first atom bomb might never have been dropped if a Japanese translator had not erred in the translation of one word. The word *mokusatsu*, used by the Japanese cabinet in their reply to the Potsdam surrender ultimatum was rendered ‘ignore’ rather than correctly, ‘withholding comment pending decision.’ Thinking the Japanese had rejected the ultimatum, the Allies went ahead with the nuclear bombardment.”<sup>2</sup>

### 2.3.2 The Development of Language

People develop and build for themselves a language to meet their specific needs. This language acts as a grid through which the individual perceives the world. This also constrains the ways in which the individual categorizes and conceptualizes different phenomena. Examples of ways in which different languages have evolved include the following.

#### *Tense*

Although English has several past tenses, it does not have the same specific past tenses that some other languages may have. For example, Sukima, a Tanzanian language, has the following past tenses which English does not have.

- Immediate past - Used when something happened less than 2 hours ago.
- Proximate past - Used when something happened this morning.
- Intermediate past - Used when something happened two days ago.
- Remote past - Used when something happened any time more than two days ago.

Some languages may have past and future tenses, but these tenses may not always be used in everyday speech. Instead, a “time” word may be used with a present tense verb. (e.g., Khmer [Cambodian]-speakers often do not use the marker for past or future tenses when conversing, but rather use the present tense along with a time-marking word such as “last year,” “tomorrow,” “in a while,” “next week,” etc., to denote the past or future. This is sometimes done in English also: “I’m leaving tomorrow.”)

#### *Person*

- English - I, you (singular and plural)

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<sup>2</sup> Frank M. Grittner, *Teaching Foreign Languages*, Harper and Row, NY, 1977, p. 33, citing to Lincoln Kinneer Barnett, *The Treasure of Our Tongue*, New York, Knopf, 1964, p. 292

- French - one form of “I”, two forms of “you”
- Thai - several forms of “I” and “you”, the use of which depends on the sex of the speaker, his or her relation to the other person, and the situation; in addition, there are forms of “I” and “you” which are used only by the king and royal family

### *Gender*

- English - no gender (one form of “the”)
- Spanish - masculine and feminine (the = el, la)
- French - masculine and feminine (the = la, le)

### *Use of terms*<sup>3</sup>

- In Moré, spoken in Burkina Faso, cold, hunger, or thirst “has” a person. (“Cold has me.”)
- In the Ama-Zulu culture, women are not allowed to mention the names of certain of their husband’s relatives. Instead, they must use a substitute, often a descriptive term. For example, a woman cannot refer to her husband’s brother by name but rather might call him “younger father” or “small father,” or “the father of \_\_\_\_ (naming one of his children).”
- Even the words that form the names cannot be used. For example, Chief Buthelezi’s father’s name was “Mathole Mnyama” which means “calf” (Mathole) and “dark” or “black” (Mnyama). Not only is the chief’s wife not able to refer to her father-in-law by his name, but she also cannot use the words for “calf,” “black,” or “dark,” or even “nyama” which means “meat.” If she wants to refer to a black dress, for example, she must use another term such as “color like night.”

Differences between languages such as those noted above can create problems when the exchange of information must be done through an interpreter.

## **2.4 Verbal Communication - Paralinguistic**

### **Manipulation of Speech**

The way people manipulate their speech may convey a message. Consider the implications if an interviewee’s manipulation of speech regarding the following issues is misinterpreted at an interview.

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<sup>3</sup> For additional information on the use of terminology between different versions of languages, see RAI0 Training module, *Interviewing – Working with an Interpreter*.

### *Pitch (tone)*

Pitch is not very important in English; it usually remains constant during speech. In other languages such as Chinese, Lao, Vietnamese, Thai, words may be determined by the pitch. For example in Mandarin, the word “ma” has different meanings, depending on the tone used.

- ma (high tone, level) = mother
- ma (high tone, rising) = jute
- ma (low tone, rising) = horse
- ma (lo tone, falling) = scold

In Thai, depending on the tone used, “kow” can have several meanings, including “rice,” “white,” and “I.”

### *Stress*

Stress is more important in English than pitch and usually affects sentences rather than individual words. Consider the meaning of the following sentence with the stress falling on different words: “The military put my brother in jail.”

Stress in some languages affects individual words. For example, placing the stress on different parts of the following Spanish word alters the meaning of the word.

- te'rmino - terminal
- term'ino - I finish
- termino' - he finished

### *Volume of speech*

Volume of speech can indicate anger, surprise, distress, etc. The situation, setting, and culture often dictate the appropriate volume.

### *Rate of speech*

When someone speaks quickly it may indicate nervousness, or it may be that the person's normal speech is fast. Likewise, there may be various reasons why someone might speak slowly.

### *Extra-speech sounds*

When and how extra-speech sounds such as groans, laughter, etc., are used is usually culturally determined. For example, when it is appropriate to laugh or cry is often determined by one's culture. This has implications for interviews as interviewees may laugh or cry at what may appear to you to be inappropriate moments.

## 2.5 Non-Verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication is very often culturally determined. The individuals within a culture usually know the meanings of the non-verbal signals in their own culture. The same signals, however, can have very different meanings in other cultures.

The next section of this lesson discusses non-verbal communication across cultures. Please also refer to the background reading for information on this topic.

## 3 INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

### 3.1 Overview

In addition to bringing other languages to the interview, interviewees bring their cultural backgrounds.<sup>4</sup> You also bring your own cultural background to the interview and view things through your own cultural perspective.

The individuals you interview will be from many different cultural backgrounds. Most will be from a cultural background that is different from your own. Although there are many similarities between cultures, there are also many differences, and these differences can affect the interview process.

It is impossible to understand the cultural norms of all the people you will encounter. Anthropologists and others spend many years immersed in other cultures and still are not able to learn all the nuances of the culture. You can, however, become sensitive to some of the potential problems that you may encounter and which are related to cultural differences, and learn techniques that you can use when interviewing persons from other cultures.

### 3.2 No Two People Are Alike

Even two people within the same culture will not react exactly the same in similar situations. One's ways of interacting with people and coping with situations are developed by prior experiences, family background, age and sex, culture, etc. No two people are alike – not even people who are from the same family and who share a common culture.

We bring to every situation our “personal baggage” of how we expect others to act and think.<sup>5</sup> We sometimes misinterpret the words and actions of others because we unconsciously expect that the meanings behind their words and actions are the same as

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<sup>4</sup> Each person at the interview - interpreter, legal representative, etc. - brings his or her cultural background to the interview.

<sup>5</sup> For additional information on “Personal baggage,” see RAIO Training module, *Interviewing – Introduction to the Non-Adversarial Interview*.

our own meanings if we were in a similar situation. Misunderstandings arise, feelings are hurt, and problems are encountered due to such misinterpretations. Even when we make a conscious effort to be sensitive to other cultures, we may still miscommunicate because of the difficulty in picking up on the cultural cues of others.

In the RAIO context, the consequences of misinterpretation at an interview can be grave.

### **3.3 Inter-Cultural Miscommunication**

#### **Perceptions of other cultures**

Most people have had little or no training in inter-cultural interactions. Therefore, in an encounter with someone from a culture other than our own, we rely on our assumptions about how other persons from our own culture act, as well as on our perceptions of how individuals from the other culture act.

These perceptions are formed by what we have heard or learned in school, through the media, and through other vicarious experiences, as well as any actual contact with persons from the other culture. We may have developed ideas about persons from certain cultures that have little basis in actual fact.

In addition, we have fewer points of common reference with someone from a different culture than we have with someone from our own culture and we may find it difficult to understand someone with whom there are only a few or no common points of reference.

Our “personal baggage” is sometimes magnified when dealing with persons from other cultures because we often know very little about their cultures, and may have misconceptions about them.

Both interviewers and interviewees (as well as others at an interview) bring with them to the interview culturally based perceptions of the world.

#### **Cultural perceptions at an interview**

Interviewees also have preconceived ideas of immigration officers.

Culture dictates certain behavior. You need to keep constantly in mind that you cannot assume that an interviewee’s actions and words have the same meanings as they have in your culture.

#### ***Examples***

- Certain body language may differ from culture to culture. Many hand gestures used in one culture to beckon people, to point to people or objects, to indicate agreement, to wave, etc., can have different meanings in other cultures, some of which are very insulting. Ways of non-verbally indicating “yes” and “no” also vary from culture to

- culture. What may be a gesture to indicate affirmation may indicate a negative response in another culture.
- The physical distance between two people who are engaged in conversation differs from culture to culture. In some cultures, a foot of space is sufficient between two people; in other cultures, much more space is needed for the people involved to feel comfortable.
  - The amount of physical contact also varies from culture to culture. For example, in some cultures, individuals of the same sex who are not romantically involved hold hands when walking or talking. In other cultures, this is rarely done.
  - Sitting so that the sole of your shoe faces someone is considered very rude in some cultures, whereas in other cultures, this is not an issue.
  - Time is measured differently and holds different importance in various cultures. Time in some cultures may be measured in terms of planting seasons rather than months, weeks, and days as it is in other cultures. Being on time for all functions is highly valued in some cultures while in others, it is expected that people will arrive after the announced starting time for events, especially social functions such as parties.
  - Women's roles vary greatly from one culture to another. In some cultures, very few women hold positions of authority, power, and respect in the workforce; in other cultures, women have a more active role in this area. In certain cultures, many women have little contact with men other than male family members and defer to men; in other cultures, women interact openly and freely with men.
  - People's reactions to grief differ widely from individual to individual as well as from culture to culture.<sup>6</sup> Some people may have difficulty speaking about the death of a loved one without crying while other people may be able to discuss events surrounding the death of a loved one without exhibiting any outward signs of emotion.
  - "Saving face" rules many of the actions of people from some cultures; people may do the utmost possible to avoid losing face or putting someone else in a situation where that person would lose face. In other cultures, being "forthright" in interactions often takes precedence over saving face.
    - For example, if an individual is asked to give directions to a location but does not know how to get to the location, he or she may point the questioner in a particular direction in order to avoid not being able to give assistance.

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<sup>6</sup> A particular reaction to grief may also indicate that the applicant is suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or other trauma-related condition. For additional information, see RAI0 Training module, *Interviewing Survivors of Torture*.

- Gift-giving is a way of assuring that things get done in some cultures; gifts are expected and are given to thank people for performing a service or act, or in anticipation of a particular service or act. In other cultures, such practices may be viewed as inappropriate or may be seen as a form of bribery. In addition, in some cultures, if you admire a possession of someone, you may receive it as a gift; not accepting it may offend the giver.
- Eye contact varies from culture to culture. What may be considered a normal length of time for eye contact in one culture, may, in another culture, be termed “staring” and considered rude, causing the other person to feel uncomfortable.
- In some cultures, the left hand is only used for bathroom functions, and so giving or receiving anything with the left hand is considered extremely rude.

### **Application of knowledge of cultural differences**

There are many such examples, and it would be impossible to list or understand all of them. The point is not to try and learn about every situation and cultural nuance, but to recognize that our expectations about how people react and what they say are often culture-bound. It is not uncommon for individuals to make judgments based on preconceived ideas of cultures. You must try as much as possible to recognize and put aside any preconceived ideas about how people act and the meanings of their actions in order to avoid making decisions based on cultural misperceptions.

## **4 STRESS AND PERSONAL AGENDAS**

### **4.1 Stress**

People deal with stressful situations in ways that vary in degree of intensity. For example, a job interview, taking a test, becoming a parent, and the death of a loved one are all stressful situations. An interview before a U.S. government official involving a possible benefit, can be a stressful situation for all of the individuals involved. Each person responds to stress differently and has developed personal mechanisms for handling stress, and you and the interviewees bring this to the interview. For example:

#### *Interviewee*

- Future depends on the interview
- Is nervous about an interview with a government official
- Is dealing with an unfamiliar environment
- Is worried about communicating through an interpreter (concerned that information may not be communicated correctly)



- May be apprehensive about retelling painful or humiliating experiences (See RAIO Training module, *Interviewing – Interviewing Survivors of Torture or Other Severe Trauma.*)
- May be concerned about forgetting important information or becoming confused
- May be suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or other trauma-related condition, in which case his or her stress level may be heightened

### *Officer*

- Concerned you may not get all of the necessary information (especially if you are new to the position)
- Concerned about time pressure—the next interviewee may have arrived

### *Interpreter*

- Has heavy responsibility to interpret accurately
- May not speak English or the interviewee's language well
- May be under time pressure to interpret for another interviewee or to leave quickly in order to be on time for work
- May also have experienced trauma; the interviewee's story may trigger symptoms in the interpreter relating to his or her own trauma

### *Representative (trusted adult in the context of children's interviews), etc.*

- Concerned that the interviewee will have difficulty answering questions due to the stress of the interview or because the interviewee may be suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, etc.
- Afraid of surprises: interviewee tells you something that the legal representative has not yet heard
- May have another appointment – anxious to complete interview
- Concerned you will not elicit all pertinent information

### **How people react to stress**

Each person brings to the interview his or her individual ways of reacting to and dealing with stress. This can interfere with the interview process. Some of the ways people react to stress include:

- Change in voice and speech patterns
- Forgetfulness
- Need to feel in control

- Deference to authority
- Defensiveness

In stressful situations, individuals may easily remember the least important things and forget what is most important. This addition to the dynamic of the interview can result in miscommunication and misunderstanding.

## 4.2 Agendas

In addition to the interview being stressful for all concerned, each person has a personal “agenda” which, whether an appropriate or inappropriate agenda, may impede open communication. Agendas may be conscious or unconscious.

### *Applicant*

- To get the story out; not to forget anything; to avoid discussing particularly painful or humiliating experiences
- To convince the interviewer to grant the requested benefit
- In the case of fraud, to present a convincing claim which is untrue—not to get caught in a lie

### *Officer*

- To finish the interview in an established amount of time
- Not to overlook any procedural points
- Not to miss any important facts
- To focus on the important issues and not spend time on non-relevant topics
- Not to let previous interviews have an impact on your approach to the current interview
- In cases where you suspect a lack of credibility or fraud, to remain neutral in tone, demeanor, and attitude

### *Interpreter*

- To interpret correctly
- To understand all of the interviewer’s words without having to ask for clarification and appearing not to know English well
- To help the applicant present a good claim
- To please the person who hired him or her
- To project a professional image

- To avoid losing face

### *Representative*

- To present the applicant in a favorable light
- To make sure the applicant doesn't forget to relate any important information
- To notice if any points are missed by the interviewer
- To be allowed to make comments on behalf of the applicant
- To distance himself or herself from fraud if he or she discovers fraud during the interview; to help cover-up the fraud if he or she is involved in the fraud

## **4.3 How Stress and Personal Agendas Can Negatively Affect the Interview Process**

Agendas may help both you and the interviewee get out all of the important information. There are often situations, however, in which stress and agendas can have an adverse impact on an interview.

The individuals at the interview are often overwhelmed by dealing with the stressful environment of the interview and may be too intently focused on pursuing their personal agendas. This can result in the following:

- Material facts of testimony missing
- Inaccuracy in interpretation or the appearance of inaccuracy
- Appearance of incredibility on the part of the interviewee, such as nervous demeanor and inconsistent testimony or appearance of inconsistent testimony
- Attention not entirely focused on questions and/or responses and therefore what is said is not accurately heard and understood
- "Pushiness" to get points across
- Impatience; non-adversarial nature of the interview is jeopardized

## **4.4 Ways to Minimize the Negative Effects of Stress and Personal Agendas**

You are in control of the interview; the interviewee has little control over how stressful the interview is. Therefore, you need to be aware of your actions during the interview and adapt your behavior to fit the situation in order to minimize as much as possible the negative effects of stress and personal agendas. To this end, you can:

1. Attempt to put the interviewee and others at ease at the beginning of the interview.
2. Assure the interviewee that he or she will be given a full opportunity to present his or her claim.

3. Explain the process of the interview and the roles of each person so that everyone will know what to expect.
4. Focus on the interviewee and listen to what he or she is saying.
5. Have patience when the interviewee does not answer a question. Keep in mind the variety of factors that may have prevented the interviewee from hearing or understanding the questions. Remember that although the interview process may become routine for you, it is not routine for the interviewee and others who may be present. You may need to give the interviewee a few seconds of silence to organize his or her thoughts.<sup>7</sup>
6. Recognize your own agendas, such as the need to get all the information within a certain amount of time, but do not let that interfere with your ability to listen to the interviewee. Consciously set aside inappropriate agendas.
7. Use your time wisely during the interview so you do not feel rushed near the end of your time: structure and pace the interview, and avoid discussing information that is irrelevant to the interview at hand.

## **5 OTHER FACTORS THAT MAY IMPEDE COMMUNICATION AT AN INTERVIEW**

### **5.1 Additional Factors**

There are a number of other factors that may impede communication at an interview:

- The interviewee may be suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or other trauma-related condition that may impair his or her ability to follow your questioning, to answer questions, and to relate his or her story in a credible manner.<sup>8</sup>
- The interviewee may be experiencing physical discomfort or impaired cognitive ability due to torture or other abuse he or she experienced (or may have a physical condition unrelated to such abuse but which may cause physical pain or discomfort).
- The environment of the interview may not put the interviewee at ease during the interview. For example:
  - The interviewee may not feel comfortable disclosing information to you because he or she is of the same or different sex as you
  - The interpreter may be someone to whom the interviewee feels uncomfortable telling parts of his or her story

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<sup>7</sup> For additional information on the use of silence during the interview, see RAIO Training modules, *Interviewing – Eliciting Testimony* and *Interviewing Survivors of Torture*.

<sup>8</sup> For additional information, see RAIO Training module, *Interviewing Survivors of Torture*.

- You or the physical environment may remind the interviewee of the place where he or she was abused in his or her country at the hands of a government official
- Something about the interviewee or his or her story may trigger a response in you that may distract you momentarily from your task of conducting a non-adversarial interview.

## 6 CONCLUSION

You cannot possibly be aware of all of the factors that impede communication at a particular interview; each interview is unique, and each interviewee is unique. What you can do, however, is to be aware that a number of factors may impede communication, and when communication appears to be impaired, you should attempt to discern what the problem may be and attempt to alleviate it.

## 7 SUMMARY

### **Communicating Across a Second Language**

Although some interviews are conducted entirely in English, there is usually an interpreter who interprets what the interviewee says into English and what you, the interviewing officer, say into a language the applicant can understand. Interpreting from one language to another is not simply a word-for-word interpretation between two languages.

Although there are literal translations between languages for many words, there are many other words in some languages that do not have lexical equivalents in other languages and that need to be translated by using more than one word. In addition, communication does not involve merely the spoken word; tone of voice, “body language” and other factors contribute to the message that is conveyed. You need to be aware of the potential for miscommunication when a second language is used, and to attempt to keep the possibility of miscommunication at a minimum.

### **Inter-Cultural Communication**

Culture plays an especially important role in the communication at an immigration interview. There are many differences between cultures regarding body language, physical closeness, views of time, women’s roles, reactions to grief, etc.

Because of the many differences between individuals, it is often difficult to determine how someone will react in a given situation. We often misinterpret the meanings of the words and actions of others because we assign our own meanings to their words and actions, and our meanings may not be the same as theirs. You need to keep in mind the effects of culture in evaluating an interviewee’s behavior.

### **Stress and Personal Agendas**

Interviews with a U.S. government official are stressful situations, and the individuals at an interview bring with them the methods they have devised for dealing with stress, any personal agendas they may have, their cultural backgrounds, and their “personal baggage.” In addition, an interviewee may be affected by trauma experienced in his or her country or during the flight from the country. All of these factors influence the behavior of the individuals at an interview, and may impede communication.

You must attempt to reduce the stress of the others at the interview and recognize the existence of possible agendas in order to assist the flow of communication. You also need to recognize your own ways of dealing with stress and personal agendas and minimize any negative effect your own stress and agendas may have on the interview process.

## PRACTICAL EXERCISES

There are several practical exercises that will be conducted during this class. The materials for the exercises will be distributed during class.

### Practical Exercise # 1

- Title:
- Student Materials:

**OTHER MATERIALS**

There are no Other Materials for this module.



**SUPPLEMENT A – REFUGEE AFFAIRS DIVISION**

There is no RAD Supplement for this module.

**REQUIRED READING**

- 1.
- 2.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- 1.
- 2.

**SUPPLEMENTS**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>RAD Supplement</u></b> <b>Module Section Subheading</b></p>
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**SUPPLEMENT B – ASYLUM DIVISION**

There is no Asylum Supplement for this module.

**REQUIRED READING**

- 1.
- 2.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- 1.
- 2.

**SUPPLEMENTS**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>ASM Supplement</u></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Module Section Subheading</b></p>
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**SUPPLEMENT C – INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS DIVISION**

There is no IO Supplement for this module.

**REQUIRED READING**

- 1.
- 2.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- 1.
- 2.

**SUPPLEMENTS**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>IO Supplement</u></b> <b>Module Section Subheading</b></p>
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