

## Lesson Plan Overview

<b>Course</b>	Asylum Officer Basic Training
<b>Lesson</b>	<b><i>Interviewing Part IV: Inter-Cultural Communication and Other Factors That May Impede Communication at an Asylum Interview</i></b>
<b>Lesson Description</b>	Through interactive communication exercises, this lesson describes how cultural differences may create barriers to effective communication and provides techniques for recognizing and overcoming those barriers.
<b>Field Performance Objective</b>	Given the field situation of interviewing an applicant for asylum (and witnesses, if any), the asylum officer will be able to elicit in a nonadversarial manner all relevant information necessary to adjudicate the asylum request and to issue documents initiating removal proceedings.
<b>Academy Training Performance Objectives</b>	Given written and roleplay asylum scenarios, the trainee will correctly identify inter-cultural issues that may create barriers to communication.
<b>Interim (Training) Performance Objectives</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify factors that may impede communication at an asylum interview.</li> <li>2. Identify issues that may arise in interviewing individuals from different cultures.</li> </ol>
<b>Instruction Methods</b>	Practical exercises, discussion
<b>Student Materials/References</b>	Participant Workbook
<b>Method of Evaluation</b>	Observed Lab exercise with critique from evaluator, practical exercise exam, Written test
<b>Background Reading</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kalin, Walter. "Troubled Communication: Inter-cultural Misunderstanding in the Asylum Hearing," <i>International Migration Review</i>, guest editor: Dennis Gallagher (Summer, 1986), p. 230-239. (attached)</li> <li>2. Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. <i>Guidelines for Immigration Lawyers Working with Interpreters: Extending Legal Assistance Across Language Barriers</i> (New York, NY: June 1995), 5 p. (attached)</li> <li>3. Rubin, Joan and Thompson, Irene. <i>How to be a More Successful Language Learner: Toward Learner Autonomy</i> (Boston,</li> </ol>

Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle Publishers, 1994), p. 37-41.  
(attached)

### CRITICAL TASKS

**SOURCE: Asylum Officer Validation of Basic Training Final Report (Phase One), Oct. 2001**

<b>Task/ Skill #</b>	<b>Task Description</b>
020	Conduct non-adversarial interview.
SS 1	Ability to maintain professional demeanor at all times, including under duress, in tense situations and in potentially dangerous encounters.
SS 5	Ability to effectively communicate verbally in the English language.
SS 6	Ability to work respectfully and collaboratively in a diverse work place.
SS 7	Ability to interpret inter-cultural behavior and respond appropriately.

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**Presentation****I. INTRODUCTION**

This lesson explains how communicating through a second language, cultural factors, stress, and “personal agendas” can affect the interview process. The lesson also instructs students on how they can minimize the negative effects that these factors can have at the interview.

**II. COMMUNICATING ACROSS A SECOND LANGUAGE**

[Note: This section of the lesson is based on a presentation entitled, “Dimensions of Language and Culture,” by Susan Raufer (currently the Deputy Director at the Newark Asylum Office) as part of studies in World Issues at the Experiment in International Living (World Learning), Brattleboro, VT.]

**A. Overview**

English is not the first language of most asylum applicants. Although some interviews are conducted entirely in English, at most interviews there is an interpreter who interprets what the applicant says into English and what the asylum officer says into a language the applicant 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 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.

Asylum officers 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.

**References****Instructor Note 1****Instructor Note 2****OH #1 & #2: FPO; IPOs****Instructor Note 3**

**B. Communication****OH #3: Communication**

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

1. Verbal
  - a. linguistic
    - (i) vocabulary
    - (ii) grammar
  - b. paralinguistic
    - (i) manipulation of speech: e.g., volume of speech, rate of speech, pitch/tone, stress
    - (ii) extra- speech sounds: e.g., groans, sighs, laughter, crying, whistling, and other sounds such as “huh” and “uh.”
2. Non-verbal
  - a. movements that substitute for language, i.e. body language
    - (i) facial expressions (smiles, frowns, etc.)
    - (ii) eye contact
    - (iii) body movement
    - (iv) posture
    - (v) physical distance
    - (vi) use of environment (tapping fingers on tabletop, drawing, etc.)
    - (vii) touching
    - (viii) use of silence; timing
  - b. 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.)

**Instructor Note 4**

### C. Verbal Communication - Linguistic

#### 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 ‘modusat[s]u,’ used by the Japanese cabinet in their reply to the Potsdam surrender ultimatum was translated ‘ignore’ rather than correctly, ‘withholding comment pending decision.’ Thinking the Japanese had rejected the ultimatum, the Allies went ahead with the nuclear bombardment.”

F. Grittner, *Teaching Foreign Languages*, Harper and Row, NY, 1969, p. 32.

#### 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.

**OH #4: Development of Language**

Examples of ways in which different languages have evolved include the following.

**Instructor Note 5**

##### a. tense

- (i) 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.

- (ii) 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.”)

b. person

- (i) English - I, you (singular and plural)
- (ii) French - one form of “I”, two forms of “you”
- (iii) 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

c. gender

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

d. use of terms

- (i) In More’, spoken in Burkina Faso, cold, hunger, or thirst **has** a person. (“Cold has me.”)
- (ii) In the Ama-Zulu culture, women are not allowed

The use of terminology between different versions of languages is also discussed briefly in lesson, [Interviewing Part VI](#), [Working with an Interpreter](#).

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 interpreters translate at an asylum interview.

#### D. Verbal Communication - Paralinguistic

##### 1. Manipulation of speech

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

##### a. pitch (tone)

Not very important in English; 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

**OH #5: Verbal  
 Communication –  
 Paralinguistic**



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

b. stress

(i) This 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.”

**Instructor Note 6**

(ii) 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

c. volume of speech

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

d. 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.

2. 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 at asylum interviews as applicants may laugh or cry at what may appear to the asylum officer to be inappropriate moments.

**Instructor Note 7**

## E. 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.

### III. INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

#### A. Overview

1. In addition to bringing other languages to the asylum interview, asylum applicants bring their cultural backgrounds to the interview. Asylum officers also bring their own cultural background to the interview and view things through their own cultural perspective.
2. Asylum applicants and asylum officers are from many different cultural backgrounds. Most applicants whom an asylum officer interviews are from a cultural background that is different from the background of the asylum officer. Although there are many similarities between cultures, there are also many differences, and these differences can affect the interview process.
3. It is impossible to train asylum officers to understand the cultural norms of all the applicants whom asylum officers encounter. Anthropologists and others spend many years immersed in other cultures and still are not able to learn all the nuances of the culture. Asylum officers can, however, become sensitive to some of the potential problems which they may encounter and which are related to cultural differences, and learn techniques which they can use when interviewing persons from other cultures.

#### Instructor Note 8

Each person at the interview - interpreter, legal representative, etc. - brings his or her cultural background to the interview.

#### B. No Two People Are Alike

1. 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 – even people who are from the same family and who share a common culture.
2. We bring to every situation our “personal baggage” of how we expect others to act and think. We often misinterpret

“Personal baggage” is discussed briefly in lesson,

the words and actions of others because we erroneously expect that the meanings behind their words and actions would be the same as our own meanings if we were in a similar situation. Misunderstandings arise, feelings are hurt, and problems are encountered due to such misinterpretations.

[Interviewing Part I, Overview of Nonadversarial Asylum Interview.](#)

In the asylum context, even graver consequences can result from such misunderstandings.

## C. Inter-Cultural Miscommunication

**Instructor Note 9**

1. Perceptions of other cultures
  - a. 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.
  - b. 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.
  - c. 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 find it difficult to understand someone with whom there are only a few or no common points of reference.
  - d. 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.
  - e. Both asylum officers and applicants (as well as others at the interview) bring with them to the interview culturally based perceptions of the world.

**Instructor Note 10**

2. Cultural perceptions at the asylum interview

**Instructor Note 11**

- a. Asylum applicants also have preconceived ideas of

immigration officers.

- b. Culture dictates certain behavior. Asylum officers need to keep in mind that they must not assume that an applicant's actions and words have the same meanings as they have in the asylum officer's culture.

**Instructor Note 12**

3. Examples

- a. 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.
- b. 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.
- c. 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.
- d. 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.
- e. 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.

**OH #6: Inter-Cultural Miscommunication – Examples**

**Instructor Note 13**

- f. Women's roles vary greatly from one culture to another. In some cultures, very few women hold

**Instructor Note 14**

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.

- g. People’s reactions to grief differ widely from individual to individual as well as from culture to culture. 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.
- h. “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.

A particular reaction to grief may also indicate that the applicant is suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or other trauma-related condition. See lesson, [Interviewing Part V](#), [Interviewing Survivors](#).

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.

- i. 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.
- j. 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.
- k. 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

**Instructor Note 15**

rude.

4. 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. Asylum officers, however, must try as much as possible to recognize and put aside their own preconceived ideas about how people act and the meanings of their actions in order to avoid making decisions based on cultural misperceptions.

#### IV. STRESS AND PERSONAL AGENDAS

##### A. Stress

1. Overview

**Instructor Note 16**

The asylum interview is a stressful situation for all of the individuals involved. People routinely deal with stressful situations 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. Each person responds to stress differently and has developed personal mechanisms for handling stress, and applicants and asylum officers bring this to the asylum interview.

**Instructor Note 17**

2. Why asylum interviews are stressful

Some of the reasons why asylum interviews are stressful are as follows:

**Instructor Note 18**

a. applicant

**Instructor Note 19**

- (i) future depends on the interview
- (ii) nervous about an interview with government official
- (iii) is dealing with an unfamiliar environment
- (iv) worried about communicating through an interpreter (concerned that information may not

- be communicated correctly)
- (v) may be apprehensive about retelling painful or humiliating experiences (This will be discussed in depth later in this lesson.)
  - (vi) may be concerned about forgetting important information or becoming confused
  - (vii) may be suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or other trauma-related condition, in which case his or her stress level may be heightened
- b. asylum officer
- (i) concerned may not get all of the necessary information (especially if the asylum officer is new)
  - (ii) concerned about time pressure—the next applicant may have arrived
- c. interpreter
- (i) has responsibility to interpret accurately
  - (ii) may not speak English or the applicant's language well
  - (iii) may be under time pressure -to interpret for another applicant or to leave quickly in order to be on time for work
  - (iv) may also have experienced trauma; the applicant's story may trigger symptoms in the interpreter relating to his or her own trauma
- d. representative
- (i) concerned applicant will have difficulty answering questions due to the stress of the interview or because the applicant may be suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, etc.
  - (ii) afraid of surprises: applicant tells asylum officer

something the legal representative has not yet heard

(iii) may have another appointment – anxious to complete interview

**Instructor Note 20**

(iv) concerned asylum officer will not elicit all pertinent information

3. How people react to stress

**Instructor Note 21**

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:

**OH #7: Reactions to Stress**

- a. change in voice and speech patterns
- b. forgetfulness
- c. need to feel in control
- d. deference to authority
- e. defensiveness

In stressful situations, individuals may easily remember the least important things and forget what is most important.

**B. 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. Some possible agendas are as follows:

**Instructor Note 22**

1. Applicant
  - a. to get story out; not to forget anything; to avoid discussing particularly painful or humiliating experiences
  - b. to convince the asylum officer to grant the requested benefit
  - c. in the case of fraud, to present a convincing claim which is untrue—not to get caught in a lie



2. Asylum officer
  - a. to finish the interview in approximately 45 minutes
  - b. not to overlook any procedural points
  - c. not to miss any important facts
  - d. to focus on the important issues and not spend time on non-relevant topics
  - e. to determine credibility
  - f. in cases where fraud is suspected, to “get” the applicant on negative credibility
3. Interpreter
  - a. to translate correctly
  - b. to understand all of the asylum officer’s words without having to ask for clarification and appearing not to know English well
  - c. to help the applicant present a good claim
  - d. to please the person who hired him or her
  - e. to project a professional image
  - f. to avoid losing face
4. Representative
  - a. to notice if any points are missed by the asylum officer
  - b. to present the applicant in a favorable light
  - c. to be given time to comment or ask questions at the end of the interview or to be allowed to do so during the interview
  - d. 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

**Instructor Note 23**

### C. How Stress and Personal Agendas Can Negatively Affect the Interview Process

Although stress most often can have a negative effect on the interview process, some personal agendas may have a positive effect. Agendas may help both the asylum officer and applicant get the story out.

**Instructor Note 24**

There are often situations, however, in which agendas have a negative effect on the 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.

**OH #8: Negative Effect of Stress and Agendas on Interview Process**

1. Material facts of testimony missing
2. Inaccuracy in translation or the appearance of inaccuracy
3. Appearance of incredibility on the part of the applicant such as nervous demeanor and inconsistent testimony or appearance of inconsistent testimony
4. Attention not entirely focused on questions and/or responses and therefore what is said is not accurately heard and understood
5. “Pushiness” to get points across
6. Impatience; nonadversarial nature of the interview is jeopardized

### D. Ways to Minimize the Negative Effects of Stress and Personal Agendas

**Instructor Note 25**

The asylum officer is in control of the interview; the applicant has little control over how stressful the interview is. Therefore, asylum officers need to be aware of their actions during the interview and adapt their behavior to fit the situation in order to minimize as much as possible the negative effects of stress and personal agendas. To this end, the asylum officer can:

**OH #9: Minimizing Negative Effects of Stress and Agendas**

1. Attempt to put the applicant and others at ease at the beginning of the interview.

2. Assure the applicant 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 applicant and listen to what the applicant is saying.
5. Have patience when the applicant does not answer a question. Keep in mind the variety of factors that may have prevented the applicant from hearing or understanding the questions. Remember that although the interview process may become routine for the asylum officer, it is not routine for the applicant and others who may be present. The asylum officer may need to give the applicant a few seconds of silence to organize his or her thoughts.
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 the ability to listen to the applicant. Completely set aside inappropriate agendas.
7. Recognize that important lines of questioning about material elements of the claim should not be omitted due to time constraints. Interviews on average should take 45 minutes to one hour. While some interviews may take less time, others may take longer in order to elicit the material facts necessary to determine eligibility.

The use of silence during the interview is discussed in lessons, [Interviewing Part III, Eliciting Testimony](#) and [Interviewing Part V, Interviewing Survivors](#).

## V. OTHER FACTORS THAT MAY IMPEDE COMMUNICATION AT AN ASYLUM INTERVIEW

### A. Additional Factors

#### Instructor Note 26

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

1. The applicant may be suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or other trauma-related condition that may impair his or her ability to follow the questioning of the asylum officer, to answer questions, and to relate his or her story in a credible manner.
2. The applicant may be experiencing physical discomfort or

See lesson, [Interviewing Survivors](#).

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).

3. The environment of the interview may not put the applicant at ease during the interview. For example:
  - a. the applicant may not feel comfortable disclosing information to the asylum officer because of the sex of the asylum officer;
  - b. the interpreter may be someone to whom the applicant feels uncomfortable telling parts of his or her story;
  - c. the room or the asylum officer may remind the applicant of the place where he or she was abused in his or her country at the hands of a government official.
4. Something about the applicant or his or her story may trigger a response in the asylum officer that may distract the asylum officer from his or her task of conducting a nonadversarial interview.

**Instructor Note 27**

## **B. Asylum Officer's Role in Assisting the Flow of Communication**

Asylum officers cannot possibly know what all of the factors that may be that impede communication at an interview. At each interview it may be something different. The asylum officer should be aware that a number of factors may impede communication, and when communication appears to be impaired, the asylum officer should attempt to discern what the problem may be and attempt to alleviate it.

## **VI. SUMMARY**

### **A. Communicating Across a Second Language**

Although some interviews are conducted entirely in English, there is usually an interpreter who translates what the applicant says into English and what the asylum officer says into a language the applicant can understand. Translating from one language to another is not simply a word-for-word translation between two languages.

**OH #10: Summary A**

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 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. Asylum officers 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.

## **B. Inter-Cultural Communication**

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

**OH #11: Summary B**

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. Asylum officers must keep in mind the effects of culture in evaluating an applicant’s behavior.

## **C. Stress and Personal Agendas**

Asylum interviews are stressful situations, and the individuals at an asylum 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 applicant 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 the asylum interview, and may impede communication.

**OH #12: Summary C**

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

**OH #13: Summary C (cont.)**

