Becoming an Expert FBI Interpreter

Preliminary research reveals common factors among the most successful interpreters

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INTRODUCTION

The Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL) was tasked to extend our investigation of high-level foreign language success in federal workplaces to include the study of expert interpreters at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Interpretation is perhaps that most challenging foreign-language skill of all. The earlier research focused on identifying pathways to successful high-level language proficiency among Foreign and Civil Service Officers from the Department of State (State) and language analysts at the National Security Agency (NSA) with a view to discovering factors important in language learning to the advanced level.1

Because expert interpreting is a highly specific skill for which advanced proficiency in a foreign language is necessary, but not necessarily sufficient, the current study focused on how FBI interpreters acquire expert interpreting skills and the factors that contribute to their success on the job. FBI clients proposed that investigating expert interpreting skills would be beneficial for identifying potentially successful interpreters, as well as in developing training courses for both novice and

1 See Doughty et. al. (2006, 2007).
experienced (but not yet high level) interpreters, or even language analysts who might become interested in interpreting if given the training opportunity.

It was agreed that the first step would be a small case study to determine the usefulness of our protocol for these purposes and the relevance to clients of the information gathered by our semi-structured interview. The three cases referred to us are all highly proficient, experienced FBI interpreters: a Spanish-English bilingual (starting English at age 6), an English native speaker who has achieved high proficiency in French as a foreign language (starting French in 7th grade), and a heritage learner of Russian, now dominant in English (starting English at age 5). These cases are representative of the range of FBI interpreter backgrounds. Because the overall purpose of this case study is to make a recommendation whether to conduct a comprehensive study investigating factors that contribute to expert interpreting skills, the findings of the case studies are discussed at length, and a research outline is presented at the end of the report.

CASE STUDY PROTOCOL

The aim of the FBI case-study analysis was to investigate factors contributing to the attainment of expert interpreting skills. In order to allow for comparing the findings from the State and NSA research with findings from a future, larger study with FBI interpreters, we retained most sections of the previously used semi-structured interview (i.e., foreign languages known, foreign language test scores, foreign language learning history, ability to perform representative tasks on the job, and biographical information). In addition, the interview format employed in our prior research built in the opportunity to ask relevant follow-up questions. Thus, at the outset of the case study, CASL researchers met with the Chief of the FBI Language Services Section and an FBI applied linguist to determine the precise goal and scope of the current research. The following guidelines were generated and used to develop additional specific questions for the expert interpreters:

- Relationship between foreign language proficiency and interpretation ability
- Factors that affect performance in interpretation
- Skills used in interpreting
- Characteristics of a good interpreter
- Benefits of interpreter training

Each of the three interpreters participated in a lengthy interview probing their language learning experiences, professional use of the foreign language during interpreting assignments, and expert techniques used to perform at a high level on the job. The interview data were transcribed and analyzed systematically using Atlas.ti, qualitative analysis software. Findings are discussed below; a full description of the research methodology is provided in Appendix A; and the complete interview schedule appears in Appendix B.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Working as a Highly Skilled Interpreter

Foreign language use at the FBI encompasses an array of tasks, language modes and settings. We begin the discussion of findings with an overview of the different types of interpretation and translation tasks – since experts do both – as generally described by our case-study subjects and noting what is and is not challenging, as well as how an experienced interpreter would approach them. Next, we include a brief discussion of the general and individual job settings in which these tasks are typically performed (e.g., courtroom, wiretap, or office). Then we turn to a discussion of the interview findings. Throughout, we include representative quotations from the case-study interpreter transcribed interview data.

A heritage learner refers to a learner who was exposed to the foreign language in his/her home and/or in the community from an early age, but typically is not exposed to all the domains of language use, such as in primary through tertiary education. Thus, heritage learners typically are not balanced bilinguals.
Interpreting

The term “interpret” describes the process of rendering one language into another, all in the oral mode, conveying the content or intent of the message. In general, most interpreters feel more comfortable rendering their foreign language to their native language, although balanced bilinguals often have no preference in many settings. There are various types of interpretation, each entailing a particular set of challenges and requiring different skills.

Consecutive Interpretation “Consecutive” is the most familiar type of interpretation. It is most commonly used in situations such as question-and-answer sessions, in which the speaker and the interpreter take turns. Although many interpreters believe simultaneous interpretation to be the more difficult of the two, consecutive interpretation has its challenges as well. First, it requires very good short term memory. Interpreters must be able to remember all that the speaker says during each segment in order to render all of the content at the moment the speaker pauses. Apart from the memory load, the difficulty with consecutive interpretation is that the speaker will not pause reliably to give the interpreter time to render the message. Interpreters must, therefore, have good control of the situation and be able to work out signals with the speaker in order to allow for adequate time to interpret. In addition to controlling the situation, they must also be able to take notes while the speaker is talking. In the words of Interpreter 1:

“One of the things about consecutive that I find is critical is that a linguist must learn two things. You have to control the situation, because a lot of times the speakers want to go on and on and on and they won’t pause. So you have to either tap them on the elbow or come up with something where they don’t want to stop. And there’s no way that you can retain five, six sentences accurately. You’re going to wind up summarizing. And the second thing is you have to have good note-taking abilities.”

Simultaneous Interpretation Often considered to be the most difficult, “simultaneous” requires both specific skills and very high level language proficiency. The primary reason interpreters find this task daunting is the requirement for quick thinking, intense focus and concentration, physical endurance, and the ability to multi-task. Simultaneous interpreters must have sufficient mental resources to be able to keep up with the speaker, while continuously rendering the content of the language. It is, therefore, essential that the interpreter be provided with the subject material in advance in order to become familiar with the topic:

“For simultaneous, what we try to do is most of the time we ask people to please give us some material of what you are going to talk about so we have some familiarity with the subject. Because otherwise it’s like coming in in the middle of the movie. You don’t know what’s the beginning and you don’t know who’s going to die or get married at the end.”

It is also important to know how to write notes and/or mentally “look up” a word while continuing to speak. This is one of the most challenging aspects of simultaneous interpretation:

“Sometimes you want to stop to look up a word in your head or rephrase it, but you can’t because they keep speaking.”

Interestingly, despite the level of difficulty, one interpreter preferred this task to others because it requires less short term memory than tasks like consecutive interpreting, which involves retaining several sentences in memory at a time.

Sight Translation Interpreters are often asked to do on-the-spot oral translations of written documents. This is known as sight translation, which falls into the category of interpretation because the oral mode is involved. Sight translation presents two main challenges. First, interpreters are often under time pressure; they are given a document with only a few minutes to review it before orally rendering it into the target language. Secondly, written language tends to be more formal than spoken:

“…because people write in a more formal way than the way you speak. So sometimes it’s difficult to explain how that person has formally written such a document. And then you’re trying to explain it in the other language without sounding like an explanation…so it can be a challenge because of that - the style, the formality of the language in writing.”

Thus, orally producing in one language what is written in another entails the ability to convey the formality and style of the language without having to explain the context. According to one of the interviewees, one way to approach this is to read
the document first, looking for the important components while thinking of the translation in the other language, then translate it for the listener(s), attempting to do so without creating a distraction, such as pausing. Apart from reading the document first, the only way an interpreter can prepare for such a task is through expanding his/her memory and developing highly specialized vocabulary.

**In Situ** This task is the reverse of sight translation in that it requires going from oral to written mode. Interpreters are often called on to listen to audio in the foreign language and write it in English. Most agree that this is one of the easiest of their work tasks as there are rarely severe time constraints, and writing the language allows for more time to think and process how to best render the language.

**Translating**

The main distinction between translating and interpreting is that translation only involves the written mode: it entails rendering one language into another all in written mode. Although translating is reported to be easier than interpreting because of the ability to look up unknown words and phrases in a dictionary, there nevertheless are a few inherent challenges. The first challenge is to understand the full meaning the author wishes to convey:

“…it’s the understanding of what is in-between the lines…what the reader wants to understand from the writer.”

This requires extensive knowledge of the language and the ability to analyze precisely the language of the particular text.

In addition to having a clear understanding of what the author is trying to communicate, translators must be able to write the translation in the same style as the original, using the same type of language the author used:

“Because now you have to put it into words from the other language that’s comparable in style and also in difficulty, because you can’t put the language lower than what is in the written context. So having said that, you have to sit down and read almost phrase by phrase and try to analyze what that phrase really means before you are able to put it into another language. That is the most difficult part of translating. Because anybody can really decode. You know, I can say ‘I was born in the United States’ and put it in another language and those words are very simple and anyone can put it- even a child actually who knows two languages can put it into another language, that’s no big deal.”

It is not uncommon to be called upon to render a document on an unfamiliar topic. Lack of subject matter expertise can present a challenge which must be surmounted by background research on the topic in English in order to understand material in the foreign language or vice versa. Since it is impossible to be an expert in every field, translators rely on this background research as well as online and personal dictionaries to help them when they come across topics with which they have limited or no expertise:

“When you get into documents that have, for example, legal documents, business documents, those are documents that are written by people that are in the field, experts. That doesn’t make the translator an expert in that field. It just makes the translator an expert in the language.”

Rendering the language in a way that matches the original, including the style, level of formality, and subject matter vocabulary and context can be challenging:

“…you need to put it into the other language’s words, which is difficult because they’re not maybe comparable. So somehow also you become also a creator. You start kind of inventing ways of putting it so that it sounds like really [an expert in the field] wrote it.”

Translation is, therefore, more than simply decoding. It requires considerable knowledge of the language, an ability to analyze the meaning of the passage (including what is “in-between the lines”), and creativity in forming the translation to match the original in style and context.
Gisting and Summarizing

Both summarizing and gisting are considered the easiest tasks for an FBI linguist. They require taking the main points of a message from a document, conversation, or audio recording and rendering them into the target language, usually (but not always) English for the FBI. One of the most common ways that gisting and summarizing are used is described in the following quotation:

“You’re trying to give people the most critical piece and letting them decide if they want more. And then if they want more, we can always go back. So for example, sometimes with a recording, I would do a gist and would be told, ‘Ok, can you give us some more’ … The kind of rule that we teach our linguists is you can’t give less once you’ve done it, so give them a good decent summary, then after that, if they want more, then they can come back.”

Because these are considered easy tasks, there are no particular strategies for completing them other than assuring that the main points of the message are adequately conveyed. This requires a good understanding of the original language, whether in oral or written mode, and the vocabulary necessary to convey that message in the target language.

Interpreter Job Settings

One important aspect of an FBI interpreter’s job is flexibility: Interpreters must be prepared to work in any setting and perform any task requested. The following is a brief description of various settings in which interpreters find themselves working, as well as the tasks they are called on to perform in those settings.

Courtroom  Interpreters may be asked to interpret in a courtroom setting. This is less common than in the past, however, since it is generally preferable to have someone less involved in law enforcement serving as a court interpreter. In the courtroom, the interpreter must render the languages “both ways,” interpreting non-English speakers’ speech into English for the judge, jury, and individuals in the courtroom, and interpreting English into the foreign language of the plaintiff, defendant, or witness. In this setting, very specific legal vocabulary is routinely used, and accurate interpretation is crucial. Occasionally, a court interpreter may need to gist conversations, for example between two lawyers and the judge, for the defendant. Additionally, an interpreter may be asked to perform sight translation of court documents.

Wire Tap  FBI interpreting may also include interpreting during wire taps or “Title III’s.” In this setting, interpreting must be done live, placing the interpreter under significant time pressure and stress. In addition to interpreting what is being said, the interpreter must analyze sounds heard over the wire tap, determine who is speaking and if coded language is being used, and assess the danger to the individuals involved. Quick decisions must be made to ensure the safety of others, but care must also be taken not to expose the wiretap unnecessarily.

Office  Interpreters may be asked to perform in situ translation of audio recordings or phone calls, taking messages from someone speaking a foreign language for an agent. They may also be asked to perform sight translation in official settings, such as a courtroom, or in their office if someone has a letter or document they need translated on the spot. Additionally, a frequent task, and for many FBI language analysts, the primary task, is to translate voice and graphic materials without immediate time pressure. As with sight translation, written translations of text documents must match the tone and formality of the original text. In instances lacking time pressure, dictionaries, glossaries, and additional research tools may be used.

Meetings/Conferences  Interpreters may be asked to work at meetings or conferences. This requires either simultaneous or consecutive interpretation. In some settings, an interpretation booth may be available, but if not, the interpreter may be asked to perform simultaneous interpretation in “whisper mode.” This entails interpreting for one person or a group of listeners in the same room as the speaker and potentially other interpreters who are also interpreting into a different language. Interpreters may be asked to do relay interpretation. In this complex situation, the speech of a presenter, a native speaker of a less commonly spoken language (e.g., Finnish), is interpreted into a more common language (e.g., English) by an interpreter in order for additional interpreters to render that speech into the languages of the listeners. Meetings and conferences may require subject matter knowledge and subject-specific vocabulary that the interpreter needs to learn prior to interpreting.
Other Settings  In addition to the tasks described above, interpreters are often called upon to do tasks “on the fly,” such as interpreting for criminals who have been arrested or during foreign dignitary visits. In some of these instances, background information, such as a briefing book for a foreign dignitary visit, may be available, but in other cases, the interpreter may not have time to prepare for the task.

Interpreter Job Tasks, Individual Work Settings and Challenges

The previous section provided a general overview of the work of expert interpreters at the FBI. In this section, interpreter job tasks are explained in more detail, as reported by the three subjects in this study. During the interviews, the interpreters were asked to indicate frequency of and their ability to perform the job tasks. We begin with an explanation of the high-frequency tasks and show the interpreters’ self-ratings of each task. We continue with a description of the challenges the interpreters face on the job and conclude with a discussion of how the interpreters describe their skills, including use of materials, tools and techniques needed to complete their work successfully and overcome challenges.

High-frequency Tasks

The interpreters were asked to estimate the frequency with which they perform certain tasks on the job, using the Likert Scale shown in Figure 1, with ratings ranging from “never” doing a job task to performing a task “everyday or almost everyday.”

Figure 1: Self-rating Scale for Frequency of Language-related Job Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Number of Times/Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Almost every day</td>
<td>100+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Once a week or more</td>
<td>50-99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Once or twice a moth</td>
<td>11-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3-10 times per year</td>
<td>3-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-2 times per year</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Less often</td>
<td>Every other year or so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They were also asked to self report their ability to carry out their job responsibilities as a function of proficiency in their languages, using the rating scale shown in Figure 2.

Table 1: Self-rating Scale for Job-related Language Proficiency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Very Limited. (Less than 25 words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Limited. (I can handle rudimentary work-related responsibilities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Passable. (Enough to handle some work-related responsibilities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Good. (Enough to handle most work related responsibilities)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 combines the tasks most frequently done by the three interpreters interviewed with their self-reported ability ratings. As shown below, all three interviewees rated the task “understand when trying to deceive” as everyday tasks, and all reported they could do this task “as well as a native speaker.” Two of the three also rated “summarize key messages,” “understand when background unknown,” “understand when talking around subject” and “understand dialogue between uneducated speakers” as everyday tasks, and could do these tasks like a native speaker, or very nearly so. Other frequent tasks for at least one interviewee were “understand oral speculative reasoning,” “translate written material,” “translate complex materials in scientific domain” and “extract important information from text or dialogues,” again, all with very high self-reported abilities. Because they are experienced expert interpreters, the subjects in this study can do their daily job tasks extremely well.

Table 2: Most Frequent FBI Interpreter Job Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Task</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Ability</th>
<th>Interpreter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand when trying to deceive</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5·5·5·5</td>
<td>1·2·3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarize key messages</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5·5</td>
<td>2·3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand when talking around subject</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5·5</td>
<td>1·2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand when background unknown</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5·4+</td>
<td>2·3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand dialogue between uneducated speakers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5·4+</td>
<td>1·3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translate complex materials in scientific domain</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand oral speculative reasoning</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translate written material</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extract important info from text or dialogues</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For a brief comparison, we provide the findings of our earlier investigation of frequent foreign-language job tasks at State and NSA in Tables 2 and 3. It should be kept in mind, however, that, while all three data sets comprise highly proficient language users, the three interviewees in the FBI case study are all exceptional, even in this elite group. Thus, while it might appear that the FBI interpreters report higher language ability, a larger study of FBI interpreters might yield different self-reported abilities to do these frequent tasks, thus lowering the average.

Table 3: Most Frequent Foreign or Civil Servant Job Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Task</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Average Ability</th>
<th># (of 18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read non-verbals</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Most Frequent NSA Analyst Job Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Task</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Average Ability</th>
<th># (of 29)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand educated dialogue</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand when background unknown</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarize written text</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand when talking around subject</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarize written text</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand oral speculative reasoning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarize key messages</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Render fragmented material into English</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand written speculative reasoning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to providing ratings and frequencies for the specified list of tasks, the interpreters were also asked to indicate which tasks from the list they considered to be the most important in their work. In Table 4, we show the frequent tasks for FBI interpreters, State Department Foreign and Civil Service personnel, and NSA language analysts.

Table 5: Most Important FBI Interpreter, State and NSA Job Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Most Important Tasks</th>
<th># (out of 3)</th>
<th>Average Ability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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FBI Interpreters 2 and 3 mentioned “summarize key messages” as their most important task. For Interpreter 1, her most important task was translation followed by simultaneous interpretation. The second most important task for Interpreter 2 was interpreting. Audio verbatim translation was the second most important task for Interpreter 3. As can be seen above in Table 4, some of these important job tasks are shared with NSA analysts.

**Individual Interpreter Work Settings**

While the case-study participants have a number of job task types in common, their job settings and requirements are quite varied, as we describe in the following sections on each interpreter’s individual position with the FBI:

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3 The average abilities for translating spoken, quality control, transcription, and scanning are estimates, based on information the analysts gave about abilities in other tasks.
Interpreter 1  The first interpreter has worked for the FBI for fifteen years, and holds professional degrees in translation and interpretation. Her primary job is to do translations of recordings, audio or video recordings, and translations of documents from Spanish to English. She also does in situ, general translations, and sight translations from Spanish and Norwegian into English. An example of in situ translation is when she receives phone calls from people speaking one language and she has to leave a message for an agent in the other language. Sight translation is used when a lawyer directs her to tell him what is in a document.

“...The lawyer will approach me and say, ‘You’re the interpreter: can you read in the other language what this document says?’ and then they give me a minute or two to read the document so I can get familiarized with the subject, and then I render it in the other language.”

Interpreting is another important job for Interpreter 1. Once she did simultaneous interpretation for scientists talking about weapons of mass destruction. Although she works in three languages, she stated that she is interpreting “mostly into English because the agency speaks English and the courtroom speaks English.”

Interpreter 2  The second interpreter currently works as an applied linguist, but his previous job was as an interpreter. All of his training was “on the job.”  His most important task as an interpreter for the FBI was to summarize French material into English.

“We would also be asked to translate or at the very least gist anything in French that came in… I think for me my best skill is taking a 35 minute recording and distilling down to a paragraph what was in there.”

Another important component to his job as an interpreter was to evaluate material for its importance to cases. Familiarity with particular cases was a requirement when performing this task.

“Here’s a recording. Is it important? If it isn’t, discard it. If it is, write it up. Keeping track of the particular cases that we were working on….I understand that message itself, yes. Understanding it in the greater context of the case is something else. But we try to do both.”

Interpreter 2 acted as interpreter for French-speaking officials visiting the FBI. He also spent time in Africa on three assignments interpreting for a class, meetings, and for case agents as they conducted interviews. Discussing the variety of materials and assignments he faced on the job, Interpreter 2 reported:

“I mean it really is like a box of chocolates, you never really know when you come into work — You have your cases that you work. At least I did. I had certain cases that I worked every day. But then sometimes they’d come in and they’d say, ‘Oh, by the way, we just arrested this French person, come on down!’”

Interpreter 3  The third interpreter has worked as an interpreter for the FBI for eleven years. She was a self-trained court interpreter before joining the Bureau. Her most important task is to monitor conversations in Russian and summarize them in English. She also receives audio for which she has to do verbatim translations from Russian into English.

Interpreter 3 also interprets for interviews between agents and victims, witnesses, and defendants and works extensively with federal prosecutors in preparing witnesses for testifying in court. She described one instance in which she interpreted for victims:

“We did a huge case here in LA where a bunch of Russians were unfortunately murdered — kidnapped and murdered. And I’ve had to work extensively with the families. So a lot of emotional stuff.”

Other interpreting assignments involved going to Russia to interpret for meetings, interpreting for Mrs. Gorbachev, and acting as the interpreter for Russian bomb technicians visiting the FBI during a discussion on how to dismantle bombs.

Because she was a court interpreter before she came to the FBI, Interpreter 3 understands the importance of providing precise translations. She states:

“Because of my court background, I think I recognize that more than most linguists, that every word can make or break a case…My job is to make sure that the translation is true and accurate and it’s up to the agents or the prosecutors to make the case.”
FBI INTERPRETER INTERVIEW FOCUS AREAS

We now present the detailed findings from the interviews in the five areas of greatest interest to the FBI points of contact:

- Relationship between foreign language proficiency and interpretation ability
- Factors that affect performance in interpretation
- Skills used in interpreting
- Characteristics of a good interpreter
- Benefits of interpreter training

Relationship between Foreign Language Proficiency and Interpretation Ability

While high-level proficiency is necessary, it does not guarantee an ability to interpret. All three interpreters interviewed in this study have reached high-level proficiency in their first and second languages; however, they report still facing language-related challenges, such as keeping up with contemporary language usage, cultural knowledge, and dialect differences.

For example, Interpreter 1, a non-native English speaker stated that, although she is now a balanced Spanish-English bilingual, understanding African-American Vernacular English is particularly difficult for her. Also, because Interpreter 1 received most of her formal training outside of the United States, she has more experience with European translation and interpreting training and is familiar with how these tasks are approached in other countries. She notes:

“Because in other countries like in Europe where it’s been there for ages and ages, the interpreters are called linguists. They’re people who have studied not only about languages but also culturally educated meaning they know geography they know current events, and definitely the techniques of your profession. So they go to school to become interpreters. And in Latin America they have never needed interpreters, so they don’t even have schools for interpreting, they only have schools for translating.”

Interpreter 3 mentioned the challenge of understanding the significance of profanity:

“They want a true and accurate translation, because you know why profanities are particularly important, and I taught translation techniques at headquarters for new linguists, and I put together a whole PowerPoint and everything on translation guidelines, but one of the things is, if someone says, in Arabic let’s say, and they’re using all kinds of, you know, “bleeps” to describe how they feel about America. And if somebody just puts “I dislike America,” and a guy has gone on for 5 minutes describing we’re the mother of a camel or whatever, the level of hatred, the level of the emotion can be lost if you just put “bleep.”

She also noted a unique disadvantage she faces as a heritage speaker. She explained that she has difficulty with current Russian expressions, stating,

“…the expressions I use are more old fashioned then the contemporary language, because my Russian I learned from people who left there almost 60 years ago.”

Finally, Interpreter 2 discussed how motivation to seek out language speaking and learning opportunities may be a crucial factor in the development of foreign languages for native English speakers. Interpreter 2 befriended foreign exchange students during high school, pushed until he was permitted to be in the highest level French class, spoke French with French-Canadians on a school field trip to Canada, visited the home of a former foreign exchange student while in France, selected study abroad locations with the intent of finding the location where few people spoke English, and accepted FBI interpreting assignments abroad. Although the other interpreters interviewed were all highly motivated to succeed at their
jobs, they did not need to seek out additional language learning and interaction to improve their general proficiency, since this came naturally during their upbringing and education.

Due to the small number of interviews that have been completed, it is difficult to tell whether these differences between language learning profiles will hold true in a larger sample. At the same time, it is possible that, with a larger sample, additional differences among profiles will emerge.

The three interpreters commented on the relationship and differences between language proficiency and interpretation ability. Their comments are listed in brief below, following the same bulleted convention to indicate how many interpreters mentioned each aspect of this relationship.

- Anyone who speaks two languages can translate, but you need to be able to understand what is between the lines – what the reader wants to understand from the writer
- Someone who is a proficient translator may not be a good interpreter. They need more exposure, experience and training because if they are thrown into an interpreting situation and they are not ready for it, it will turn them away from wanting to interpret in the future
- It is important to keep up with the language as it is currently used through watching videos, reading news articles online, listening to music, communicating with friends who speak the language, etc.
- Language skills improve because of the frequency with which they are used
- Native speakers have cultural and linguistic knowledge that nonnative speakers do not have – they can hear idioms, adages, expressions and are able to read between the lines
- Specialized vocabulary (i.e. political, economic, legal, medical) is particularly challenging for nonnative speakers
- Even if an interpreter is proficient in a language, he/she still needs to be able to control the situation in order to interpret accurately
- It takes more time to figure out text fragments in the FL than in the NL
- Interpreters are most comfortable with their native languages because they are more certain is being said due to familiarity with the syntax/language structure and cultural nuances

**Factors That Affect Performance in Interpretation**

The two primary challenges that affect job performance were reported by all three interpreters: lack of subject matter expertise and insufficient subject specific vocabulary. Interpreter 1 summarized this challenge best when she said the following:

“I’m not a scientist…I did the simultaneous interpretation for the weapons of mass destruction, and we all struggled very much because none of us knew what the scientists were talking about. We were always looking at a dictionary. When there is a specific subject matter that we are not well educated in, it’s always difficult.”

In addition to the subject matter in general, the interpreters reported needing to know the specialized technical vocabulary associated with the topic. Interpreter 2 discussed this challenge:

“The main challenge for me personally is specialized vocabulary because they will get us into situations where we do not have the specialized vocabulary that we need — political, economic, legal. For example, one of the translations I would never take on translating or interpreting is medical. I can do it, I mean, I know the basics of, you know, the body in French and how it works and all that other stuff, but I couldn’t — if you asked me to do like a pharmaceutical interpreting — not even close. And court interpreting, I couldn’t do. I just don’t have the vocabulary for that. That’s probably my biggest challenge is not having specialized vocabulary.”

Interpreter 3 added her own story of a time when subject matter and technical vocabulary proved especially challenging:

“I had to interpret for Russian bomb techs that were coming to one of our facilities in the United States. And we were discussing how to dismantle bombs. And we were teaching them our techniques. Well guess what, I mean, like wires, bridge wires, I had to first study what they were in English. I got out
manuals from our bomb techs. And I studied primary blast, secondary blast; I studied everything so I understood the concepts in English. Then I got out and created glossaries, my own glossaries. I looked up all kinds of words. Then I was prepared.”

Other challenges mentioned by the interpreters were environmental factors, such as whether or not the interpreter is hungry or thirsty, hot or cold, or having difficulty hearing the speaker; poor quality of audio or texts that need to be translated; time pressure and stressful situations; managing the flow of communication when doing consecutive interpreting; and simply sheer exhaustion from standing and speaking for long periods of time. All of these challenges can greatly affect the interpreter’s ability to do their job well and should be managed whenever possible. While some can be mitigated through preparation as described in the previous section or management of the physical environment or turn-taking, other challenges, such as time pressure and danger, are inherent to the tasks that interpreters must learn to cope with.

Once again, preceding each factor is a bullet which indicates the number among the three FBI interpreters mentioning the skill so that common and individual factors that affect performance can be identified. All interpreters mentioned lack of vocabulary and subject-matter expertise as well as memory load as detrimental to performance. Time pressure, danger, stress, boredom, lack of experience, and physical conditions were all mentioned by at least one interviewee.

- Lack of target/specialized vocabulary knowledge
- Difficult to “chunk in your memory”
- Memory overload may be an issue when interpreting
- Having sufficient subject matter knowledge and research is very important – if it is unknown, the interpretation/translation will not be accurate
- Time-pressure of real-time speech
- Time pressure of being able to take a long recording and summarize it into a cohesive paragraph with the critical information included
- Danger, particularly with wire taps
- Rate/flow of words, being able to control the situation
- Level of interest the interpreter has in a given topic
- Working diligently when it is “very routine” and “mind-numbing”
- Lack of experience with high-level interpreting
- Defects in audio stimulus – difficult to understand what is being said
- Important or stressful situations

**Skills Used in Interpreting – Materials, Tools, and Techniques**

The three interpreters identified many materials, tools and techniques used to accomplish their job tasks and overcome their challenges. These range from materials and tools – such as the use of dictionaries, glossaries, and the internet – to techniques, such as practice, study, visualization, and multi-tasking. The following sections describe and list the specific ways in which the skilled interpreters reported using materials, tools and techniques on the job.

**Dictionaries** All three interpreters referred to using dictionaries to learn new vocabulary. Interpreter 2 described his approach:

“One of the strategies that I find useful is that I have a French/English dictionary and a highlighter. …What I’ll do is if I don’t know something, I’ll go and look it up and then I’ll highlight it. And then what I do for myself is if I find I’ve highlighted a word and I have to go back to it again I go ‘Aww…. You should know this. You’ve looked it up once’…. But for me, like I said, I try to use a dictionary as much as possible.”
Interpreter 1 described how looking up words in the dictionary can be difficult. She also mentioned the importance of being able to multi-task while looking up words in dictionaries. Multi-tasking is described in more detail in the section on techniques below.

**Cheat Sheets** A common strategy used by interpreters, making “cheat sheets” to help with subject specific vocabulary, is described by Interpreter 3:

“But then I will also, just to be on the safe side, make a little cheat sheet. So if I suddenly blank, which can happen when words aren’t something that you use everyday, I can quickly look at my little card and go, ‘ok, sludge is…,’ you know.”

**Glossaries** Both Interpreters 1 and 3 reported creating their own glossaries of words that they use often and may need in certain situations. Interpreter 1 maintained that creating a personal glossary is an important strategy that all interpreters should use on the job:

“Yes, we are supposed to build glossaries…your own glossaries beside a dictionary, because not every word is in a dictionary the way you want to use it. The dictionaries have very mechanical things, like a manual, you will open that and apply it to certain things, but it’s not always applicable to everything. So the translator is supposed to build individual and personalized glossaries.”

She also explained that a “good translator” will create a glossary divided by subjects or categories so that it is easy to look up a word or phrase from a particular situation, like business or medical words. Despite this reasoning, Interpreter 1 does not maintain subject specific glossaries and instead creates a computerized list of all the words she thinks she might find useful. She appeared to use this computerized word list specifically for translating.

“I have a little bit of a rustic, very rudimentary glossary built in my computer, but I should use it more and divide it into subjects because I don’t. I just have one big thing where I put every word that I can imagine that I have difficulty with or that I think I might use again and I just put it there. I’m not too good at the glossary. I have more lists of words.”

Interpreter 3, however, does create her own glossary and memorizes the words in her glossary in preparation for an interpreting assignment. Although personal glossaries may be helpful for some, Interpreter 2 reported that he does not use glossaries, instead relying on the dictionary method described above. He noted,

“I don’t keep personal glossaries…thankfully I have a very, very good memory, so I remember a lot.”

**Outside Resources** All three interviewees described instances in which they needed outside resources in order to complete their jobs. Interpreter 1 stressed the importance of background material to prepare for interpreting assignments.

“You would like to have material to read, you know, what it’s about – at least have an idea about what they are going to talk about so it doesn’t catch you by surprise.”

When working as a courtroom interpreter, Interpreter 3 had to find a Russian legal dictionary in order to learn the subject specific vocabulary required for her job. Without it, she would not have been able to find the words she needed to do the job.

“I tried to find a legal Russian dictionary, and I couldn’t. I went to the law library in downtown Los Angeles, and I found one book that they were able to copy for me…”

Also, while working as an FBI interpreter, she made the effort to read bomb manuals in order to be able to interpret adequately for visiting bomb technicians.

Interpreter 2 also described taking this approach to the job. He stated that he has used the briefing book provided for high-level interpreting assignments to obtain background information on the person he is interpreting for and/or to research vocabulary for what the visitor and/or the FBI representative is expected to discuss. Once obtaining the name of the visitor, he searched online for additional information about them.
“Whenever we interpret for someone, especially if it’s someone high up like the director, we’re always given a briefing book that’ll tell us who the person is, what they’re there for, the topics that are going to be discussed… And then what I would do is once I found out who the person was, go online. Find out if they’ve been in the French news. What have they been in the French news for? What have they been talking about… Then I would also, because the briefing book has things that the director wants to discuss, make sure I’ve researched the appropriate vocabulary. Especially titles. Who’s who and introducing people and that protocol part of it can be kind of big. But the biggest thing is research.”

Internet  The Internet has become a valuable tool for language analysts. Both Interpreters 2 and 3 reported using the Internet for background research and looking up words. Interpreter 3 described the usefulness of this method of research:

“And now online, ah! You can find just about anything. You know, articles in Russian about bombs and stuff, so I’ve studied.”

Interpreter 2 also reported using media from the internet (YouTube videos, news websites, songs and sound clips on his iPod) as a form of language maintenance:

“I do a lot of internet searching in French. A lot of Le Monde… I love for example anything French that I can get on YouTube, like a lot of clips from television… So I try to keep up with what’s going on in France typically with French sites but also with American sites, like if I see a story in WashingtonPost.com in French I’ll look at it. The French news is on around here once a night for a half hour, and I try to catch it. Basically anything I can do to keep it up. I have an iPod; I’ve got tons of French music on it.”

Interpreter 1 explained that interpretation is in its infancy still in the United States and lacks tools that are available in Europe (booths and microphones for simultaneous interpretation). She mentioned compensatory skills using personal amplification devices for simultaneous “whisper” interpretation:

“What I find they do a lot more here because of the lack of equipment is that they use what they call the whisper simultaneous mode. And that’s like it says, you whisper. You gather the group around you and you might use a sort of gadget…. For that you might use some sort of equipment or maybe nothing, but here in the Bureau, we use a little gadget that is more like a hearing amplifier.”

In addition to using the materials and tools described above, the three interviewees described personal techniques they use to complete interpreting assignments.

Note-taking  Interpreters 1 and 3 described when it is important for them to take notes while interpreting, either consecutively or simultaneously. Interpreter 1 stated that note-taking is necessary for numbers and names.

“Yes, it helps you to do so because it’s difficult to chunk in your memory…. There’s no segmentation in your memory for such things, so you’re better off writing them down so you say Mr. Smith and you don’t suddenly say Mr. Raphael. You know, you change the names completely and you don’t even notice you did. So chunking is difficult for numbers and names, and you should write it down.”

Interpreter 3 also added dates as something she is careful to note:

“A lot of times numbers, dates, names. You have to be able to listen, retain, and have good note-taking techniques.”

Multi-tasking  In addition to note-taking, Interpreters 1 and 3 stressed that the ability to multi-task was a crucial skill for both consecutive and simultaneous interpretation. Note-taking and looking up words in a dictionary may need to be done while continuing to listen and render into the target language. Interpreter 1 described how multi-tasking can be trained in a classroom setting.

“We teach our students to do dual-tasking first. So we teach them how to talk and write notes at the same time. That is preparing them for the multi-tasking that you’re going to do, for example simultaneous. Which would be, you are writing notes for names and numbers, money, things like that… weights, measures, things like that, but you’re also maybe looking in a dictionary for a word while you are
speaking….We have a semester in school where we have practicing a whole semester in at least 3 weeks which would be 9 hours of doing only that, simultaneously writing and looking in the dictionary and doing something else. You learn how to multi-task.”

**Advance Preparation**  As evident from the tools described above, all three interpreters emphasized the importance of preparation. Interpreter 3 repeatedly mentioned the need to study in advance. She reported having to study more difficult aspects of language such as slang, scientific vocabulary, and profanity.

“I find profanities sometimes can be very intelligence gathering, but I had to really study profanity.”

However, she also stressed the importance of studying material that an interpreter thinks he or she knows well.

“When people just go into stuff cold, big mistake. You have to study, no matter how well you know something.”

She attributes her improvement of her language skills while on the job to purposeful studying.

“Because I’ve been exposed to things, I’ve had to study.”

**Visualization**  Interpreter 1 reported uses visualization as a strategy to aid memory during consecutive interpretation, which carries a heavy memory load:

“I’ll tell you what my trick is, I visualize…I would make a movie in my head of what the speaker is talking about. So I become that person…so for me, in my head, I’m going through the whole situation as if it were me. And it’s very difficult if you have not done that before because you have to start training yourself to do so. And she’s speaking, she can speak 50, 60, 70 words and I allow her to do so because I am driving this movie in my head, so when I go back to say it in the other language, I just rewind my movie in my head…because then I have all the details in my head, you know, I put all my senses to work. I work with my hearing, I take notes-definitely take notes, and then I use the colors and the smells and everything in my head with my movies so when I go back I have all the details.”

**Signaling and Voice Over**  Interpreter 3 discussed signaling strategies used when the interpreter needs to create a break in the conversation.

“You have to control the situation, because a lot of times the speakers want to go on and on and they won’t pause. So you have to either tap them on the elbow or come up with something.”

Interpreter 1 described another technique used for managing the conversation in a situation when signaling is not possible.

“And if it’s over the phone, for example, since I cannot signal you I would do voice over, meaning I would speak louder than you, and therefore you stop talking, and then I would keep talking.”

**Stepwise Approach**  Interpreter 1 described her own technique for sight translation of documents:

“You’re supposed to read it first. Look for the parts that are important in the document like the titles, dates, signatures, things like that. See if you know that you’ve seen that document before, if you’re familiar with it. Then you read the first paragraph of it in its entirety. And then you read the first sentence and the last sentence of each paragraph thereof. And that’s for fast reading. For speed reading. Once you do that, you start rendering in the other language. You start, you know, translating in your head, and as you’re translating in your head, you are saying it in the other language.”

The following is a list of important interpreting skills mentioned by the three case study subjects. Preceding each skill is a bullet which indicates how many of the three FBI interpreters mentioned the skill. Thus, at a glance, both common and unique skills can be identified.

- Note-taking, especially with numbers, dates, names, etc.
- General preparation through building memory and vocabulary
- Assignment-specific preparation – researching the topic/subject beforehand “so it doesn’t catch you by surprise”
• Ability to make the communication flow and manage the situation
• Ability to signal the speaker to pause in order to interpreter what was said
• Building individualized/personalized glossaries
• Multitasking – ability to listen and retain while writing at the same time
• Knowledge of when/how to do a ‘voice over’ during phone conversations
• Ability to focus on details and be extremely precise, especially in criminal cases when “one word can make a world of difference”
• Ability to retain between 50 and 70 words without losing the content (comes with experience)
• Ability to compensate for lack of equipment – i.e. use of ‘whisper simultaneous mode’
• Ability to discern the difference between a serious interpreting situation and a “crackpot letter,” or false situation
• Ability to figure out when there is an actual threat under time/danger pressures without ‘blowing your cover’
• Ability to take a 35 minute recording and distill it down to a paragraph with the most critical pieces
• Ability to provide a good summary
• Ability to use context cues; knowing what can be skipped and what is important
• Ability to push yourself to get an assignment done
• Ability to be able to do a verbatim translation under time pressure
• Ability to be concise and accurate; making translations as fluent as possible while keeping the message
• Using a dictionary as much as possible
• Ability to remember words after they have been looked up
• Ability to analyze a situation to know when someone is trying to deceive or is talking around a subject
• Ability to know how to include sounds, unintelligible, inaudible, etc.
• For wiretaps – ability to figure out whose voice is whose, what they’re doing, if they’re speaking a coded language, their location, etc. – both language and analytical abilities are needed
• Willing to ask a native speaker if you don’t know, and not “fake it”

Characteristics of a Good Interpreter

The three individuals we interviewed for this case study are all expert interpreters. Their abilities, talents and experiences have led to an extraordinary level of success in their jobs at the Bureau. The questions that arise, then, are these:

• Just how did these three individuals become so good at their job?
• What exactly does it take to attain that level of ability?

The following section examines the individual and collective language-learning and job experiences of these three individuals, as well as the specific characteristics that they themselves have identified as leading to their success as FBI interpreters.

The three interpreters interviewed for this case study all came to the FBI with very high-level language proficiency in at least two languages, including English. Each one, however, achieved this level of proficiency in a different way. Interpreter 1 is a balanced bilingual, meaning she is almost perfectly balanced between her two languages, Spanish and English. Although she grew up in a Spanish-speaking country, she attended a bilingual school in which she acquired English as her second language. Upon graduating high school she felt completely comfortable in both Spanish and English. She later went on to attend American universities where she earned a bachelor’s in Spanish and translation, a master’s in Spanish and linguistics, and two PhD’s in non-language fields. Because of her experiences and exposure to these two languages in a range of domains of use, she achieved distinguished professional proficiency in both languages, which she uses daily as an interpreter for the FBI.

Unlike the other two interpreters interviewed, Interpreter 1 received formal training in translation and interpretation and used this training to work as a translator/interpreter for many years before entering the FBI. She ascribed her success as an FBI interpreter to her training and years of experience, as well as to certain personal characteristics, like a good memory and being an extrovert. Clearly it is also an advantage to be a balanced bilingual, given that she can handle interpretation and translation equally well in both directions.
“Since I learned how to translate at the university I’m not a bilingual that is using bilingual skills. I was actually taught how to use skills for the profession.”

Interpreter 2 had a very different language-learning experience. He is a native speaker of English and did not begin learning his foreign language, French, until middle school. He began taking French at age 10 and continued to study the language through high school and into college, majoring in the language as an undergraduate and ultimately earning a master’s in French and applied linguistics. In addition to academic study of the language, he was immersed in the language and culture through a year-long study abroad program in France. It was there that he was forced to speak the language and use it 95% of the time. Because of these experiences, Interpreter 2 arrived at the FBI with a score of 4 in French on the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). In contrast with the first interpreter, however, he had no formal training in interpretation or translation. Everything he has learned about being a good interpreter had to be learned on the job. He attributes his success on the job to his strong personal motivation and exposure to a variety and large quantity of language assignments:

“I tend to be a very motivated person. I want to do a good job. I want to make sure that especially the Bureau succeeds in whatever the mission is.”

With respect to flexibility on the job, Interpreter 2 is more comfortable working from French into his native-language, English, in most contexts.

Interpreter 3 is a heritage speaker of Russian. Although she grew up in the United States, her home and neighborhood language was almost exclusively Russian. Before enrolling in kindergarten at age five, she had only heard a little English from her older brother and from television. Throughout her school years, including college, Russian continued to dominate her home life, while speaking English at school and everywhere else. This experience provided her with the language ability necessary to interpret to and from Russian and English. She did not, however, have the training and skills necessary to do so when she was first hired as a courtroom interpreter. Looking back on that experience after being a courtroom interpreter for 20 years and working with the FBI for 13, she said that “it just makes me shudder.” Knowing nothing about interpreting or the legal vocabulary necessary to do the job, she fervently worked to find the information she needed and began creating her own Russian legal glossary. After that experience and years of interpreting, she believes that training is imperative for becoming a successful interpreter. Not only that, she believes a person has to be dedicated to the job and the mission, never satisfied with “close enough.” A good interpreter, she said, must be willing and able to study and conduct the background research necessary for each assignment.

Although their individual experiences were quite different, collectively the three interpreters have some things in common. Two began learning their second language fairly early in life. Two of them began as small children. All three have also studied their second language academically in college, whether through individual courses or through a bachelor’s or master’s program. They also all continue to use their languages outside of work. Their languages are integral in their lives: they use both English and their other language (Spanish, French or Russian) with friends and/or family as well as when reading or listening to news or other programs.4

With regard to their interpreting experiences, however, they differ greatly. Only one of the interpreters has formal training in translation/interpretation. Neither of the other two has ever received formal training. They were both “thrown into” interpreting and were forced to learn as they went, studying on their own and working hard to excel on the job. Despite their differences, all three agreed that being a good interpreter is more than just having high-level language ability:

Interpreter 3: And that makes me crazy. They think just because you’re bilingual, you can do it all.

Interviewer: It takes some skills.

Interpreter 3: It does!

Although understanding the experiences and personal characteristics that enabled the case-study interpreters to become so highly skilled at their jobs is both interesting and important, the likelihood of finding individuals that match them exactly is
unlikely. Therefore, we examined the general insights the interviewees offered regarding how to find and develop other individuals into expert interpreters.

Motivation  As discussed above, one of the personality characteristics of a skilled interpreter appears to be motivation. Just as the interpreters interviewed all exhibited the trait of motivation themselves, they attributed an observed lack of motivation to individuals who are not as successful at interpreting.

Interpreter 2 cited lack of motivation as the primary reason he feels there are FBI interpreters (both native and non-native) who are less able than him. He stated that he has sometimes observed a sort of complacency among FBI linguists with their government jobs, resulting in a lack of urgency towards completing tasks and a reluctance in seeking out learning opportunities for themselves. In non-native English speakers, Interpreter 2 believes that the lack of motivation manifests itself as a lack of desire to better their second language stating,

“I don’t think a lot of them are motivated to improve their B language. They figure, ‘I’m here in the States, so what better improvement is that.’”

He also noted that he does not believe the motivation for improvement can be generated by the agency, but instead must come from within.

As all three of the interpreters reported, spending time researching and studying background material related to assignments is crucial for good interpreting. Interpreter 3, however, noticed that lack of motivation harms subject matter knowledge because many people do not perform these valuable tasks due to a lack of motivation and drive to succeed.

Extroversion  Interpreter 1 repeatedly mentioned extroversion as a trait that helps with interpreting. She observed that extroverts tend to be more willing to take chances, which is an essential ability in interpreting.

“I think it has to do a little bit with personality, too. I think that people who are extroverts and take more chances, more optimistic, they will do [better] interpreting.”

She noted that someone who is not people-oriented would not like the job of an interpreter. She contrasted this with individuals who are better suited to translator jobs, stating that translators:

“Like to be quiet, collected with a book. Be 110 percent sure of what they are saying. So they don’t like to be challenged, they take it more personally if they are corrected.”

Although the other interpreters did not specifically mention this attribute in association with interpretation, Interpreter 2 exhibited many instances of extroversion as he was learning the language, suggesting that this may be a trait that he currently shares as well. While extroversion was not strongly represented as an advantage in the interviews that have been conducted, it may be an issue to be addressed in future research.

Attention to Detail  Interpreter 3 strongly stressed the importance of attention to detail while working as an interpreter, especially in a courtroom setting. She discussed her frustration with court interpreters who are not as attentive to details and accuracy as herself, sharing instances where decisions in the courtroom hinged on accurate and precise interpretation. She stressed that

“the linguists [should] understand that it can’t be ‘close enough’ for government work, it must be accurate, because it can make or break cases.”

Additionally, she reported that an interpreter who is more skilled than her also shares this desire for precisely accurate translation.

Good Memory  Interpreter 1 reported that the amount of information an interpreter is able to retain while interpreting either simultaneously or consecutively is a sign of a more able interpreter. She was particularly impressed by interpreters who are able to retain 5 to 10 seconds worth of content during simultaneous interpretation.
“I know of some people who are just incredibly fascinating to watch because they can be two or three sentences behind, so they are hearing what the person is saying and then three sentences later, they are saying what that person said, I don’t know, 5, 10 seconds ago…”

Additionally, she expressed her ability to retain approximately 50 to 70 words during consecutive interpretation, while others “go for less,” only holding around 20 words in memory at a given time. If this observation that highly skilled interpreters are able to hold more information in memory holds true in a larger population of interpreters, this trait could be a valuable insight in determining who is most likely to become a high-level interpreter, since working memory can be measured easily.

**Experience**  All of the interpreters mentioned the role of experience in their own success. For instance, Interpreter 1 stressed the helpfulness of strong translation skills in achieving quick word retrieval while interpreting:

“The more knowledge you have in translating, of course, the more secure you’re going to be when you do look for a word in your head to put it into the other language when you’re interpreting.”

Interpreter 3 described how, with enough experience, it can become easier to do simultaneous interpretation than consecutive interpretation. In future research, it may be productive to explore how other interpreting jobs held prior to starting at the Bureau helped or did not help with job tasks at the FBI.

**Native vs. Non-native Languages**  According to Interpreter 2, there appear to be some advantages that non-native English speakers bring to the job that native English speakers do not have. Since they are native speakers of the non-English languages, these individuals are often more skilled at detecting the cultural nuances of conversation between speakers of those languages. They are better able to understand idioms and expressions, and they can discern when something feels “off” in a situation.

“They can understand what a person is saying when they’re saying something else. They can read between the lines a little better because they know the kinds of topics that can be discussed. They’ll be able to see the cultural and linguistic irregularities.”

Additionally, Interpreter 3 noted that native speakers are more skilled at typing in Russian than she is and that her colleague, who is a more balanced bilingual than she, has a broader vocabulary which aids in translation.

“She’s one of the few people that I think can translate just as well from Russian to English and from English to Russian.”

However, while non-native English speakers bring certain skills to the job, native English speakers have their own strengths useful for interpreting. Interpreter 2 said that native speakers of English are naturally able to express themselves in English better than most non-native speakers, allowing them to be more clear and concise. Also, they are able to better explain American practices or concepts to non-native speakers that may be visiting than individuals who are not from the United States. Finally, Interpreter 2 noted that because native English speakers have had to study the foreign culture while learning their foreign language, they can preemptively explain differences between the two cultures and explain them better than a native-speaker who is not fully immersed in American culture.

The following are the specific self-identified characteristics of successful FBI interpreters:

- Enjoy learning different languages
- Have a passion for and enjoy what you do
- Have personal motivation to improve language and do a good job, whatever the assignment
- Have subject knowledge and knowledge of the vocabulary in both languages
- Can see both the small and the big picture
- Personal characteristics such as good memory and extroverted personality
- Have the necessary interpreting skills and practice using them
- Drive to make a perfectly accurate interpretation, knowing that “it can’t be ‘close enough’ for government work”
- Acquiring/learning a FL at a younger age
- Exposure to a variety of assignments
Benefits of Interpreter Training

All of the FBI interpreters interviewed described situations where untrained and inexperienced linguists have been sent to do interpreting tasks simply because they are fluent in the target language and also in English. However, they frequently noted during their interviews that not all individuals are able to excel in interpreting, that experience and training are necessary to do the job well, and emphasized that it would have been much better if they had been trained at the outset. Although Interpreter 1 was the only one actually to have completed formal training, all three suggested that linguists should be given at least a basic background in interpretation so that, if needed, they can interpret for last minute assignments and not feel overwhelmed. Thus, an important goal would be to determine a more efficient way to gain training than through “trial by fire” on the job.

Currently, Interpreter 1 teaches a series of three interpreting courses at a university and states. Because of her extensive experience as a teacher of interpretation and translation, we interviewed her a second time to discuss how she trains new interpreters.

“It takes me three semesters to teach someone how to become almost an interpreter. They will never be able to master this in three semesters, but at least they gain the idea that there are skills that you need to learn.”

Her courses include work on posture, voice projection, dual-tasking, note-taking, endurance, intonation, paraphrasing, and vocabulary building. Additionally, her students are able to try simultaneous interpretation in a booth and practice consecutive translation in front of the class. In order to train endurance, she uses an activity called ‘shadowing,’ in which the students repeat what they hear in the same language. Students must enunciate their speech and copy the intonation of a native speaker, which she claims builds oral and neck muscles and allows for ease of precise articulation. She noted that materials for teaching interpreting are more available now than they used to be and stated that she challenges her students by giving them a variety of materials “so they see different things coming to them and see how they are going to operate with them.” She concluded by stressing the necessity of practice and experience to use the skills learned in class to become a “master interpreter.”

Interpreter 2 suggested that linguists need support and encouragement from management to attempt interpreting and stated that the FBI needs to take a more “hands on approach.” Although he believes that anyone can be a successful interpreter with enough personal motivation, he also acknowledged that many FBI employees and contractors expect the Bureau to provide them with training and so do not seek it out on their own. Also, he expressed frustration that individuals with potential to be good interpreters are sent into interpreting situations completely unprepared, resulting in an aversion to interpreting. He suggested that individuals with excellent language skills be sent out as second interpreters to side saddle more experienced interpreters in order to learn from them.

He further argued that the FBI should be more interested in developing the skills of its employees and that it should be more supportive when individuals choose to develop themselves, stating

“At the very least give them the basics of interpreting, and then find those who are capable and want to do more. And also encourage people to do more. I think that’s the biggest thing we can do is to encourage people to want to improve their language skills. Tell them how great it is that they improve their language skills. And tell them, here we can at least offer you some training to improve that if you want to. To me, it’s motivation. We have to motivate. We have to be a little more motivating.”

Additionally, several suggestions were offered concerning how to teach translation skills. According to Interpreter 1, her translation classes assume the trainee has a firm understanding of the foreign language and how it works and do not focus on training language skills. Instead, the trainee is taught how to perform tasks of translation using their already established knowledge of the language. They are taught not just how to translate words, but how to analyze what they are reading and make sure they understand it before they attempt to render it into another language. This includes monitoring comprehension, tone, and style of the text. Additionally, Interpreter 1 suggested that students expand their vocabulary and learn “frozen sentences” that can be “plugged in” to legal, medical, and technical documents as appropriate.
Interpreter 2 shared an interesting approach to teaching translation. In a college course he took on translation, the class was taught by two teachers, one of whom exclusively taught translation from French to English and one of whom exclusively taught translation from English to French. The course alternated its focus every other week, and when the focus was on English to French translation, the rest of the course was conducted in French as well. He described this class as “excellent.”

Interpreter 3 noted that she had developed a class for the FBI to teach translation and interpretation skills such as how to render translations so that they read smoothly. Although she is no longer teaching the class, the PowerPoint presentations she developed are currently being used at the FBI in some cases. Additionally, Interpreter 3 noted that the FBI, unlike the American Translators Association, does not allow for specializations in specific fields (such as medical, legal, scientific, etc.), stating

“…we’re expected to be geniuses at it all, and I don’t agree with that.”

In addition to the recommendations discussed above, the following are interviewee comments and their frequency gleaned from the transcripts concerning the need for or benefits of interpreter training.

1. Currently no training for FBI interpreters – people just get thrown into the job
2. A lot of translation/interpretation skills learned on the job
3. Those without training are often less able
4. It would be a lot less stressful and more efficient if there were some kind of training
5. Someone who is a great translator may not be a good interpreter – need more exposure, experience and training
6. The more practice, the better understanding of how the language works makes it easier to memorize vocabulary
7. Need to have training for the specific skills that translators/interpreters want to acquire

CONCLUSION

The data in this case study indicate that FBI expert interpreters are quite different in many respects from State and NSA high-level linguists studied in the previous research. Expertise in interpreting assumes very high proficiency in at least two languages – a foreign language and – native language, and then requires the development of highly specialized knowledge, such as technical vocabulary and esoteric subject matter expertise, as well as unique skills to cope with memory load, physical demands, and environmental conditions. All three interviewees agreed that there is a significant difference between adequate translation and interpretation that might normally be acceptable in ordinary daily tasks and the kind of precision needed for many FBI tasks, such as court interpretation or monitoring dangerous situations in real time. This finding alone suggests that interviewing a larger group of FBI interpreters could be shed new light in the overall effort to understand high-level foreign language proficiency.

Perhaps more similar to linguists in other agencies – especially the NSA analysts – most of the time, FBI interpreters and translators must cope with understanding language when the speakers are not cooperating (trying to deceive; talking around a subject; using insider slang), when the signal is degraded, or when the background information to the topic at hand would not be known by the interpreter translator without advance preparation and study. It would be interesting to probe further into the methods that these highly proficient and skilled language professionals utilize to cope with such an intricate mode of language comprehension and to focus on how they acquired their skills and expertise.

Given the extreme complexity of FBI interpreting, all three interviewees bemoaned their own or others’ lack of training at the outset of their jobs. They all explained that they improved their skills tremendously on the job, but pointed out that this was very difficult and stressful, and that it would have been much better to have been trained. Even with training, however, experience was regularly cited as important in mitigating the stress and strain associated with interpreting tasks. One interviewee pointed out that management support in training and during the period when experience is being gained could go a long way toward encouraging reluctant or less able interpreters or improving the work environment of those who are more willing and able. Finally, beyond training and experience, they all cited as essential an intrinsic dedication to the FBI, a strong interest in the mission, and willingness and continuous effort to strive for improvement despite their already extraordinarily high-level of language ability and interpretation-translation expertise.
Appendices A and B of this report include the methodology and definitions of terms used for the prior research and the present case studies. Appendix C presents “FBI Interpreter Success Stories,” written in the style used for the State and NSA success-stories compendia. Finally, Appendix D provides a research outline for the recommended, larger study of FBI high-level language expertise.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

This case study investigated factors contributing to the attainment of high-level interpreting skills by three FBI interpreters.

The Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was similar in to the one used in the State and NSA high-level proficiency research, but was tailored to accommodate the additional expertise of FBI interpreters. Five sections comprise the protocol: foreign languages known, foreign language test scores, foreign language learning history, ability to perform representative tasks on the job and biographical information.

The first section, foreign languages known, focuses on the interpreter’s best language, second best language, and other languages known. Interpreters also made a global assessment of their ability to handle work-related responsibilities in each language (ranging from rudimentary to all work responsibilities, and including comparison with native speakers). While there are limitations with self-reported data, the subjects we interviewed represent a special population of foreign-language users who are experienced, especially articulate, and meta-cognitively aware of their job-related and other language skills and language learning ability.

In the second part of the interview, the interpreters reported any language test scores they recalled (i.e., DLPT speaking and listening or professional court interpreting certification), and indicated whether they considered the score an accurate reflection of their ability. The next section, foreign language-learning history, required the interpreters to review their language learning experiences, specifically indicating their first exposure to language, the type and duration of language training (i.e., learning from family members, high school, college, immersion, and on-the-job training), and any learning techniques used to enhance and/or maintain their language skills.

The fourth section of the interview probed in detail the interpreter’s use of their best foreign language on the job, including frequency and ability self-assessments on a range of job-related tasks.

In the fifth section, each interpreter was asked to provide biographical information, such as date of birth, gender, highest level of education, job title, and rank.
Several additional general questions regarding factors that contribute to high-level interpreting skills were used incorporated into the existing interview protocol. Samples of these questions include:

- What makes a good interpreter?
- What do you consider to be the necessary language skills to carry out your job?
- Which of these skills did you have upon entering the FBI and which of these skills developed on the job?
- What tasks are you most/least comfortable performing?
- What factors affect performance in interpretation (i.e., situation, time constraint, resources available)?
- What challenges do you face on the job and how do they affect your job performance?
- What strategies do you use to overcome these challenges?
- How does foreign language proficiency affect interpretation ability?
- What type of interpreter training would you recommend?
- Who would benefit from interpreter training?

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, that is, the protocol served as a guide for the interviewer, allowing for a focused conversation with the flexibility to probe and explore certain areas of interest to the FBI clients:

- Skills used in interpreting
- Factors that affect performance in interpretation
- Relationship between foreign language proficiency and interpretation ability
- Characteristics of a good interpreter
- Benefits of interpreter training

Case Study Interpreters

An FBI point of contact assisted us in identifying three expert FBI interpreters for the case study. The first interpreter is a balanced Spanish-English bilingual who learned both languages as a child. Interpreter 2 is a native-speaker of English who began learning French in a formal setting as an adult (in 7th grade). The third interpreter is heritage speaker of Russian who is currently dominant in English, but still highly proficient in Russian. These different language learning experiences exemplify the range of FBI interpreter backgrounds.

The Interview Procedure

Each semi-structured interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. One interview was conducted in person, and two were conducted over the phone. A second, follow-up interview was conducted with one of the interpreters three weeks after the initial interview. Each interpreter was asked to read and sign an informed consent form; the interpreter interviewed in person signed the consent form before the interview began, and the two interpreters interviewed over the phone were sent the consent form prior to the scheduled interview time. The interviewer followed a set format for each interview. She:

- Introduced herself to the interpreter and provided a brief overview of CASL and the purpose of the project.
- Outlined the format of the interview (overview of main sections of the protocol).
- Explained that the interview would be recorded and that the recording would be transcribed by a researcher.
- Asked if the interpreter had any questions at this point.
- Began the interview.
- At the end of the interview, thanked the interpreter for his or her time and participation.

The Interview Data

The interviews were recorded digitally and subsequently transcribed by CASL researchers. Upon finishing the initial transcriptions, a second transcriber listened again to sections of the interviews that were difficult to understand in order to

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5 See Appendix B for full protocol.
verify their work and resolve misunderstandings. Finally, a member of the research team meticulously edited the transcription files to prepare them for analysis.

Atlas.ti

The qualitative analysis software program, Atlas.ti, was employed as the tool for data analysis. Atlas.ti enables efficient and exhaustive tagging/coding soft copies of data (e.g., the transcribed FBI interviews). Atlas.ti allows a researcher to assign codes to relevant data, create relationships among and between texts through networking and hyper linking, and write notes and comments on codes and links. While this may not seem necessary for a three-person case study, the advantages multiply with every lengthy interview added to the data set. Since this tool would be essential to the analysis in a larger study, a brief description of the software and how it was used follows.

Primary Document (PD) – the name of an Atlas.ti data file. For the present research, each individual interview is a PD. More than one PD can be collected into a library, allowing separate documents to be reviewed and analyzed simultaneously. Each one is given a number: P1, P2, P3. These PD’s serve as the bases of analysis.

Quotation – marked sections of text within the PD that serve as the main units of analysis in Atlas.ti. Examples of some quotations from the FBI interview data are:

“...I tend to be a very motivated person. I want to do a good job. I want to make sure that especially the Bureau succeeds in whatever the mission is.”

“And being a translator I saw the challenge that I needed to be more eloquent and have a higher Standard English and Spanish when I was writing, so that’s why I went back to school.”

“When I am listening to someone, I use visualization. I have a great memory that I have developed so I can keep in memory a lot of the main points of the conversation and I do note taking so I can support my memory with note taking.”

The quotations are never removed from the PD, but rather receive a marking in the margin showing that they have been selected for analysis. This allows the researchers continuous access to the quotation in context and, thus, the capability to add analytical comments and assign codes from a code system, as described next.

Codes – short phrases, descriptors, or key words that indicate the referent of the quotation. A list of codes that are purposely and structurally organized is created at the beginning of the analysis. However, as the quoting/coding progresses, new codes may be added as needed. The number of codes may increase in order to improve the ability of researchers to reflect on the data at hand. Quotations can be marked with numerous codes, and one code can also be attached to many quotations. For example, the codes for the above mentioned quotation

“I tend to be a very motivated person. I want to do a good job. I want to make sure that especially the Bureau succeeds in whatever the mission is.”

were (a) motivated - very and (b) motivation – intrinsic.

Hyperlink – a tool used to connect quotations and codes that relate to one another. In this way, the researcher is able to note, for example, that in the quotation used above, the interpreter is talking about motivation which is mentioned in a statement from a previous paragraph. By hyperlinking the two quotations and choosing a relational descriptor, such as “expands” or “continues”, the analysis basis becomes richer.

Coding

Atlas.ti was employed to code the interview data using codes developed to reveal pathways to high-level interpreting skills by FBI interpreters. Based on the codes used in previous research at STATE and NSA, the interview protocol, and familiarity with the FBI interview transcripts, an initial code list was developed. Factual codes focused primarily on the factual information of each interpreter, (i.e., level of education, ILR test scores, subject language/s), and inferential codes represented potential variables contributing to language learning, (i.e., learning techniques, self-identified factors, challenges on the job).
Once the codes were created, three analysts began coding the interviews. Two of the three researchers coded each of the three interviews separately. Upon completion of the coding of each interview, the two efforts were merged together (a feature of Atlas.ti), allowing the researchers to see differences in their coding choices and to discuss changes to be made.

To determine whether they were using the codes consistently and uniformly, the researchers reviewed codes together. Where discrepancies were found, the researchers discussed the differences and made the agreed upon change. In addition, this process allowed the researchers to ensure the code list was complete and add additional codes if necessary.

After the coding was complete and the researchers had compared and revised the merged documents, the research team turned to the actual analysis of the interview data, using the analytic tools in Atlas.ti.

Analysis

At the outset of the analysis, the research team referred back to the overarching research question (What factors contribute to high-level interpreting skills?) and discussed general trends that they had noticed during the transcribing of data and the coding process.

Working from this information, the team approached the data with ten research questions:

1. What makes a good Interpreter?
2. What are typical interpreter job tasks?
3. What tasks are difficult/easy?
4. How do interpreters approach their job tasks?
5. What experiences are beneficial for performing successfully on the job?
6. What makes someone more/less capable as an interpreter?
7. What challenges do interpreters face on the job?
8. What strategies do interpreters use to overcome these challenges?
9. What tools/materials do interpreters need to do their job well?
10. What is/isn’t important in terms of interpreter training?

The Atlas.ti co-occurrence tool, which allows the analyst to search the data to discover which codes occurred within and around the same quotations, was utilized to find patterns in the data. When the tool is opened, it displays a list of all the codes present in the entire data set, along with an indication of which codes occur within the same quotations as other codes. By clicking on a code in the list, the researcher can see which codes are combined within quotations, in addition to viewing all of the quotations where both of those codes exist. By using this tool, the researchers were able to view trends such as what job tasks are challenging and what strategies the interpreters use to overcome those challenges.

After this phase of the analysis, the research team met again to discuss the factors that appeared to be important for high level interpreting skills. The following list of these promising factors was created, and the research team exploited their knowledge of the interviews, the coding system, and the co-occurrence tool to extract information concerning each factor.

- Language proficiency
- Interpreter training
- Interpreting experience
- Memory
- Attention to detail
- Motivation
- Personality (introvert vs. extrovert)

The summary of the findings of the analysis are presented in Section II of this report.

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6 Because there were only three interviews conducted in this case study, a reliability analysis was not conducted. However, reliability among coders will be conducted for a larger scale study. Overall, all three researchers were in agreement with the codes used for each interview.
A. Languages Known

What is your native language?

What other languages (including dialects) do you know, starting with your current best language?

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Which language(s) are you currently using on the job?

Ask interviewee how he/she would rate his/her command of each language? Give interviewee HAND CARD A. Circle number above.

0 → Very Limited. (Less than 25 words)
1 → Limited. (I can handle rudimentary work-related responsibilities)
2 → Passable. (Enough to handle some work-related responsibilities)
3 → Good. (Enough to handle most work related responsibilities)
4 → Very Good. (Enough to handle all work related responsibilities)
5 → Excellent. (Enough to handle all of my work as well as a native speaker)

Can you also give the highest rating you have ever had in the languages, even if you no longer feel that you are at that level?
Were any of the languages, other than your ‘current best’ (second best, etc.), your best language at some point in time?

What circumstances made it your best and why do you think it is no longer your best?
B. Language Test Scores

Have you ever taken the DLPT? Do you know your score?

*Note: Please get assessment for all four skills. Ask for dates of tests.*

For English (if applicable) and all foreign languages:

**Speaking Test**
- Year ____
- What score did you receive?

**Translation test**
- Year ____
- What score did you receive?

Any other tests? Please describe and provide score or assessment.

Do you think these tests accurately reflect your abilities in those languages? Why/Why not?
C. Language Exposure

Let’s talk about your exposure to language(s) throughout your life, starting with your earliest exposure.

What language(s) were you first exposed to as a child?

At what age(s) were you first exposed to each language?

What type of exposure was it? (literature, music, television, family, etc.)

With whom did you speak the language(s) and where?

Ask interviewee if exposure has taken place in the following situations/places and for how many years.

At home? Years?

- In what language did your mother, or primary care-giver, communicate with you?

- In what language did your father communicate with you?

With relatives? Years?

- Were there any other adult residents in your home before age 18 (grandparents, nannies, etc.)? If so, in what language did they communicate?

In the community? Years?

At school? Years?

When playing with other children? Years?

At work? Years?

While visiting or living abroad? Years?

- Ask the interviewee to list in chronological order all the countries s/he has lived in (for at least 3 months) before the age of 18.

Other exposures? Describe. Years?

If s/he has not already mentioned best foreign language(s) ask:

At what age were you first exposed to your best language?

Did you use the language in the following situations:

At home? Years?

At school? Years?

Play with other children? Years?

At college? Years?

In preparatory training for career? Years?

At work? Years?
Other exposures? Describe. Years?

At what age did you first need to speak the language? Read? Write?

Ask the interviewee if compared to other languages studied, his/her speaking skills were:
- Well above average
- Above average
- Average
- Below average
- Well below average
D. Formal Language Exposure

Can you tell me about your formal foreign language learning experience while growing up with languages other than the ones already discussed (for example, in primary/secondary education, or at college)?

For example, did you attend primary or secondary school(s) where another language was the medium of instruction?
- What languages?
- Where?
- What ages?
- What was your proficiency at that time?

Can you talk a little about the classroom activities and homework tasks that were part of your formal foreign language education?

*Note: Go through this section for each high-level foreign language*

- Was the teacher a native or non-native speaker?
- Was the teacher effective? (i.e. good or bad teacher)
- What percent of class time was spent in the foreign language?
- What types of materials were used?
- What activities did you find the most effective?

If an interviewee had a study abroad experience, ask about the following:

- How often did you spend time with other speakers of your native language?
- What did you do in your free time?
- How much interaction did you have with native speakers of the country’s language and in what context? (i.e. Asking for something in the grocery store? Asking for directions? Dining with natives?)
- Were conversations limited to superficial 2-3 sentence exchanges or did you have the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations?
- What percent of time did you spend using the foreign language?

Ask the interviewee if he/she has studied any other foreign languages (i.e., non “high-level”) at:

- Primary or secondary school?
- College? Since college?

If yes to the above, ask:

- What languages?
- Where?
- What ages?
- What was your proficiency at that time?
- Explain why taken.

Did you study linguistics at or since college?

- How many years?
- Undergraduate courses?
- Graduate courses?
Other?

If yes to the above, ask:

- What courses (i.e. language-specific linguistics course, general linguistics)?
- Where?
- What ages?
- Explain why taken.

Did you receive any other language training in your best language(s) (e.g. FSI, NSA, DLI, CIA)?

Did you receive specific training for becoming an interpreter? If so, please describe.

- When did you receive the training?
- How long was it?
- What type of activities did you do?
- Was the teacher(s) a native speaker of the language?
- Do you feel the training you received was adequate?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the training in terms of preparing you for an interpretation assignment?

Repeat Section D (Formal Language Exposure) questions for “Second Best Language”, “Third Best Language”, and “Fourth Best Language” (if their command of these languages is ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’).
E. Current Personal Language Use

More generally, today, what are your favorite hobbies or things you like to do in your free time (another, more efficient way to ask this is just to ask if they use the foreign language outside of work)?

Do any of these involve your or other foreign languages?

(If yes) Can you tell me more about that?

Do you use your foreign language outside of work?

(If yes) Can you tell me more about that?

What do you do when you get together with friends or relatives?

Do any of these involve your or other foreign languages?

(If yes) Can you tell me more about that?
F. Use of foreign language on the job

How long have you been an interpreter? When did you begin?

What language(s) have you interpreted in?

What is your current position? How long have you been in that position?

Please describe generally what you do in your job using your foreign language.

What kinds of tasks are you most comfortable performing at work on a day to day basis?

Generally speaking, what are the most common tasks that you perform on your average work day?

Ask interviewee to estimate how well and how often he/she performs the following tasks in his/her current working language.

(It is recommended that the interviewer go through these tasks for both rating and frequency at the same time. Note, if interviewee does not perform these tasks on the job, ask them to assess their ability anyway – if they had to do the tasks, could they and how well?)

Give interviewee HAND CARDS A & B.

ABILITY

0 \(\rightarrow\) Very Limited. (Less than 25 words)
1 \(\rightarrow\) Limited. (I can handle rudimentary work-related responsibilities)
2 \(\rightarrow\) Passable. (Enough to handle some work-related responsibilities)
3 \(\rightarrow\) Good. (Enough to handle most work related responsibilities)
4 \(\rightarrow\) Very Good. (Enough to handle all work related responsibilities)
5 \(\rightarrow\) Excellent. (Enough to handle all of my work as well as a native speaker)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>APPROX TIMES/YEAR</th>
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<td>6. ALMOST EVERY DAY.</td>
<td>100+</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Once a week or more.</td>
<td>50-99</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Once or twice a month.</td>
<td>11-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 3-10 times per year.</td>
<td>3-10</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. 1-2 times per year.</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Less often.</td>
<td>Every other year or so.</td>
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<tr>
<td>0. Never.</td>
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*Note: If necessary, explain how you will use the following terms (may well not be necessary):*

**Interpret:** render spoken language from one language to another, all in oral mode, trying to convey all of the content

**-Consecutive:** type of interpretation in which the speaker(s) and the interpreter take turns speaking; often done during Q & A sessions.

**-Simultaneous:** type of interpretation in which the interpreter renders the spoken language at the same time s/he is listening to the speaker

**-In situ:** render one language to another, going from the oral mode of one to the written mode of the other

**-Sight translation:** render one language to another, going from the written mode of one language to the oral mode of the other.

**Translate:** render written language from one language to another, all in written mode, trying to convey all of the content

**Gist:** summarize the content of a message from language to another, in either oral or written mode

**Transcribe:** write verbatim in the foreign language what is heard
TASKS

Conduct meetings?

Compose letters?

Understand a dialog between two well-educated native speakers on a complex political or economic topic?

Interpret a dialogue between two well-educated native speakers on a complex political or economic topic:
  Simultaneous interpretation:
    From your native language to your foreign language?
    From your foreign language to your native language?

  Consecutive interpretation:
    From your native language to your foreign language?
    From your foreign language to your native language?

What about understanding a dialog between two uneducated native speakers who use slang?

Interpret a dialogue between two uneducated native speakers who use slang:
  Simultaneous interpretation:
    From your native language to your foreign language?
    From your foreign language to your native language?

  Consecutive interpretation:
    From your native language to your foreign language?
    From your foreign language to your native language?

Summarize the key messages from the dialog in a form that can be easily reviewed by a busy senior official?

Translate complex materials in particular scientific domains accurately and in a timely fashion:
  From you native language to your foreign language?
  From your foreign language to your native language?

Interpret complex materials in particular scientific domains accurately and in a timely fashion:
  Simultaneous interpretation:
    From your native language to your foreign language?
    From your foreign language to your native language?

  Consecutive interpretation:
    From your native language to your foreign language?
    From your foreign language to your native language?

Summarize a text written in your foreign language:
  In your native language?
  In your foreign language?

Extract important information from multiple texts and/or dialogs to convey in a well-organized report?

Interpret cohesively from spoken materials when the input is fragmented or contains errors:
  Simultaneous interpretation:
    From your native language to your foreign language?
    From your foreign language to your native language?

  Consecutive interpretation:
    From your native language to your foreign language?
From your foreign language to your native language?

Translate cohesively from written materials when the input is fragmented or contains errors
   From your native language to your foreign language?
   From your foreign language to your native language?

Do an on sight verbatim verbal translation of a written document from native/foreign language to English for an FBI official?

Understand the context of a dialog when background information is not supplied and must be inferred?

Understand speculative reasoning in spoken material?

Understand speculative reasoning in written material?

Understand when speakers are "talking around a subject"?

Understand when speakers are deliberately lying or trying to deceive unintended recipients?

Interpret general speech:
   Simultaneous interpretation:
      From your native language to your foreign language?
      From your foreign language to your native language?

   Consecutive interpretation:
      From your native language to your foreign language?
      From your foreign language to your native language?

Translate general written material:
   From your native language to your foreign language?
   From your foreign language to your native language?

Interpret in a courtroom situation:
   Simultaneous interpretation:
      From your native language to your foreign language?
      From your foreign language to your native language?

   Consecutive interpretation:
      From your native language to your foreign language?
      From your foreign language to your native language?

Interpret during professional or technical discussions:
   Simultaneous interpretation:
      From your native language to your foreign language?
      From your foreign language to your native language?

   Consecutive interpretation:
      From your native language to your foreign language?
      From your foreign language to your native language?

Interpret in a situation that requires using financial vocabulary?
   Simultaneous interpretation:
      From your native language to your foreign language?
      From your foreign language to your native language?
Consecutive interpretation:
- From your native language to your foreign language?
- From your foreign language to your native language?

Interpret in a situation that requires using legal vocabulary?
- Simultaneous interpretation:
  - From your native language to your foreign language?
  - From your foreign language to your native language?

Consecutive interpretation:
- From your native language to your foreign language?
- From your foreign language to your native language?

Interpret in a situation that requires using technical vocabulary?
- Simultaneous interpretation:
  - From your native language to your foreign language?
  - From your foreign language to your native language?

Consecutive interpretation:
- From your native language to your foreign language?
- From your foreign language to your native language?

Interpret in a situation that requires using scientific vocabulary?
- Simultaneous interpretation:
  - From your native language to your foreign language?
  - From your foreign language to your native language?

Consecutive interpretation:
- From your native language to your foreign language?
- From your foreign language to your native language?

Interpret for a person touring a facility like a museum?
- Simultaneous interpretation:
  - From your native language to your foreign language?
  - From your foreign language to your native language?

Consecutive interpretation:
- From your native language to your foreign language?
- From your foreign language to your native language?

Interpret in a very formal social setting?
- Simultaneous interpretation:
  - From your native language to your foreign language?
  - From your foreign language to your native language?

Consecutive interpretation:
- From your native language to your foreign language?
- From your foreign language to your native language?

Interpret in an informal social setting?
Simultaneous interpretation:
   From your native language to your foreign language?
   From your foreign language to your native language?

Consecutive interpretation:
   From your native language to your foreign language?
   From your foreign language to your native language?

Interpret under stressful conditions?
   Simultaneous interpretation:
      From your native language to your foreign language?
      From your foreign language to your native language?

   Consecutive interpretation:
      From your native language to your foreign language?
      From your foreign language to your native language?

Interpret during a training session or conference?
   Simultaneous interpretation:
      From your native language to your foreign language?
      From your foreign language to your native language?

   Consecutive interpretation:
      From your native language to your foreign language?
      From your foreign language to your native language?
G. Job-related challenges and strategies

Now, which in the above list was the most important task?

What strategies do you use to complete that task most efficiently?

Now, which in the above list was the second most important task?

What strategies do you use to complete that task most efficiently?

Were there any tasks you needed/would have liked to have been able to perform, but which your knowledge of that language prevented you from performing? If yes, please describe.

Were there any tasks you needed/would have liked to have been able to perform, but which your knowledge of non-language matters (such as subject-matter expertise) prevented you from performing? If yes, please describe.

How important do you feel visualization is in completing your interpreting assignments?
   Not important
   Somewhat important
   Very important

How important do you feel vocabulary study is in completing your interpreting assignments?
   Not important
   Somewhat important
   Very important

How important do you feel background research is in completing your interpreting assignments?
   Not important
   Somewhat important
   Very important

How important do you feel multitasking is in completing your interpreting assignments?
   Not important
   Somewhat important
   Very important

How important do you feel note-taking is in completing your interpreting assignments?
   Not important
   Somewhat important
   Very important

What other strategies/techniques might you use to carry out an interpreting assignment? What about a translating assignment?

What do you typically bring with you to an interpreting assignment (note paper, dictionaries, cheat sheet, glossary, subject background notes, etc.)?

How much time do you typically spend researching before the following interpreting assignments?
   • Formal
   • Informal
   • Courtroom
   • Professional conference

Can you tell me about some of the language-related challenges you face in your daily work?
Ask the interviewee if the language problems were due to deficiencies in the following areas and if the deficiency was:

**VERY SERIOUS**

**SOMEWAY SERIOUS**

**NOT VERY SERIOUS**

General vocabulary?

Technical/subject-specific vocabulary?

Command of the appropriate register, e.g., with respect to conveying politeness, friendliness/solidarity, or formality?

Pragmatic knowledge (e.g., how to deny a request politely, how to inquire indirectly, how to disagree firmly but politely, how to discern a speaker’s or writer’s level of supportiveness or irony)?

What was your biggest challenge when you first started consecutive interpreting?

How did you overcome that challenge?

What was your biggest challenge when you first started simultaneous interpreting?

How did you overcome that challenge?

Is there any training you could have received that might have helped you overcome these challenges?
H. Characteristics of a good interpreter

Were there other interpreters (speakers of that language) who began doing your type of work at the same time who turned out to be less able to do the work as efficiently as you are now?

What do you think made them less able than you?

What about other interpreters (speakers of that language) who began doing your type of work at the same time who turned out to be better able to do the work as efficiently as you are now?

What do you think made them better able than you?

If you were working on an interpreting assignment with someone less able than you who appeared motivated to improve his or her language ability, what advice would you give him or her?

Do you know of any extroverts who are currently working as interpreters?

Do you know any introverts who are currently working as interpreters?

I. Job-related experiences and recommendations for training

How do you think your foreign language skills have improved (or not improved) since working on the job?

How do you think your interpretation skills have improved (or not improved) since working on the job?

How many of the necessary language skills did you have when you started and how many of them developed on the job – and wouldn’t have developed in other situations (classroom, abroad, etc.)?

Could you describe any previous language training/education that you had that was beneficial for becoming an interpreter?

What kind of interpreting/translating experience did you have before coming to the Bureau?

If you had experience interpreting prior to the FBI, do you think that experience adequately prepared you for working as an interpreter for the FBI? Why? Why not?

-If not, what kind of training/assistant would you have liked to have received when you began working for the FBI?

What kind of training/assistance did you receive when you first began translating/interpreting?

What skills/tools helped you the most when learning how to interpret/translate?

If you could create a training for FBI interpreters, what would you want to include in it?

In general, what skills do you think are necessary to be a good interpreter?

How can those skills be developed?

J. Background biographical data

Year born?
Gender?
Education (highest year completed)?
Job title?
Government Rank?
How long have you been in that position? How many years?
Our last question is this:
Is there anything else about your language learning history that you think led to your own high level of success in language
and interpreting?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND COOPERATION!
APPENDIX C: COMPENDIUM OF SUCCESS STORIES

Interpreter 1 – Balanced Bilingual

“I think I’m what is called a very complicated lady. We interpreters have a very vast area in our brain that we have developed, like a painter or musician. It's a talent but it's also a skill.”

Complicated, perhaps, but precocious, smart, and accomplished also characterize this linguist most aptly. Leaving her country at the tender age of 16, Ana ultimately settled in Norway, a country with a language very unlike her own. Ana now works flawlessly in both Spanish and English with Norwegian very close behind. Ana thrives in the rarefied world of the consecutive and simultaneous interpreter, in all three languages, and, while translation has taken over as a priority in her work, she is still easily able to take on interpreting duties whenever required. Ana gives herself the top rating for her Spanish, English and Norwegian, and she has a good knowledge of at least six other languages - French, Italian, Portuguese, German, Swedish and Danish.

Language Background

Born in Bogota, Colombia, Ana lived there until the age of 16. Being the child of parents who could afford an excellent private education, she was able to take advantage of immersion in the English language throughout her entire education there. She naturally became fluent in English as well as her mother tongue Spanish. Being especially precocious and gifted, she was able to graduate from school at 16, whereupon she met her future husband, a Norwegian. After marriage, she traveled with her husband around the world for three years, using her Spanish, English and Norwegian wherever she could. Then they moved to Norway, where she lived for nine years, gaining fluency in the Norwegian language, attending university there, teaching Spanish and English, and raising two children. Moving to Miami, Florida, she continued her education there, obtaining two doctorates in addition to a bachelor’s and master’s in the Spanish language.

“They immerse you in that type of language so that you will learn from it when you are little the correct way.”

The private school Ana attended in Bogota provided her with English-speaking teachers who spoke no Spanish so that she would be immersed only in English for certain classes. Since Colombia mandated that its students learn a second foreign language, Ana chose French. Again, the school brought in a French teacher directly from Paris who knew no Spanish, and Ana became almost as fluent in French as her other three languages.

“I was young and didn’t care about making faux pas. I spoke Norwegian within 3 months, I think.”

“I found it very easy. It's not a very complicated language. And because I had had those 3 languages I kind of based it, associated it... I don’t know in my head what I did, but I learned it pretty fast.”

During her nine years in Norway she perfected her pronunciation and acquired more vocabulary in Norwegian. She had a good ear for the language but also obtained the help of Norwegians to “sound better.” She attended university in Norway, where she also picked up some German and Danish, since the course books were in Norwegian and those two languages.

“I’ve been a professional student all my life. I’m a professional student.”

In the U.S. she earned a bachelor’s degree in Spanish and translation at Florida International University. Even with the stress of family responsibilities, she was subsequently able to complete her master’s in Spanish literature and language, which was called Arts in Spanish. She felt compelled to study Spanish even though it was her native tongue because having left Colombia at such a young age, she felt that she “really didn’t have a high standard of the spoken or written language.”

Interpreting Experience

Ana has worked for the FBI since 1993. Her language job at the Bureau is all-encompassing: She translates audio and video recordings and documents and does simultaneous and consecutive, sight and in situ interpretations, primarily from Spanish to English. She is able to keep in memory a whopping 50 to 70 words while interpreting.
“I get bombarded with both audios and documents.”

At the moment, she does more translating than interpreting, so “of course translation is taking priority.”

“I’m not a bilingual that is using bilingual skills. I was actually taught how to use skills for the profession.”

Ana utilizes the professional strategies for translating she was taught: Read everything, analyze the context, do a rough draft, do a second draft, and then finalize your work.

“Interpreting actually calls for a lot more skills than translating.”

Ana uses various strategies to prepare for the five different types of interpreting she does. These are, in what she considers the order of difficulty: sight, simultaneous, consecutive, relay and in situ. For consecutive interpreting, for example, she utilizes visualization when listening to someone speaking. She becomes the person who is speaking. “For me in my head, I’m going through the whole situation as if it were me.” She uses the great memory she has developed to remember the main points of the conversation and takes notes to support her memory.

**Characteristics of a Good Interpreter**

Among the keys to her success, especially as an interpreter *par excellence*, Ana cites personality as a very important component. She believes that interpreting is not for everyone and that it requires someone who is “a little bit more of an extrovert,” someone who “needs to be spontaneous and take chances and the initiative.”

Her love of languages has also contributed to her success. “I have a soft spot in my heart for languages. I excelled in school because I liked [learning languages]; it was something that I loved doing.”

Finally, age is important. She believes that language is learned easily when a person is young. That is the reason she feels she learned English and Norwegian so easily as opposed to the other languages she attempted at a much older age.

**Interpreter 2 – Native English Speaker**

“I tend to be a very motivated person. I want to do a good job. I want to make sure that especially the Bureau succeeds in whatever the mission is”.

Frank began studying French at the age of 10 and has not stopped ever since. Taking French courses from middle school through high school did not tire him of learning the language, but only inspired him to major in French and go on for a master’s in French and applied linguistics. His dedication to learning the language has certainly paid off as he earned an OPI score of 4 in French and has used his language extensively on the job as both a language analyst and interpreter for the FBI. His experience working for the FBI as both an interpreter and a manager provide great insight into what is necessary for succeeding as an FBI interpreter.

**Language Background**

Frank began taking French when he was just 10 years old. He felt fortunate to attend a middle school that devoted a full 40-minute, five-day-a-week class to teaching language. That class served as the foundation for the classes he took all through high school where he was really “pushed” to learn the language, especially in his AP French classes. After graduating high school he had the opportunity to visit Canada and France over a two week period where he strove to speak the language as much as possible.

“And of course the [French literature] teacher was very fond of me because I would always speak French to her... [she] spent as much time with me outside of class as she could and she gave me bunches of books.”

His enthusiasm for French continued in college as well. Able to by-pass the grammar courses because of his previous French studies, Frank jumped right into French literature courses conducted entirely in French. Although it was challenging, he enjoying diving in and using the language to read and discuss French literature.
“I didn’t want to be in Paris, because I knew there’d be Anglophones all over….I think that was one of the reasons that Nantes worked out so well for me is because you- very rarely, I think once or twice did I ever hear English spoken.”

Motivated to truly learn the language well, he chose a study abroad program that would take him to a city in France where almost no one spoke English. That experience truly helped Frank’s language ability reach a new level.

Wanting to do something practical with his French, Frank went on to earn a master’s in French and applied linguistics which he used to teach high school French for a couple of years before working for the private sector. The combination of academic study in the US and abroad and teaching/working in the language helped Frank reach the high-level of proficiency in French that he had when he started working for the FBI. Even with this solid background in French, Frank’s language continues to improve while working on the job. The variety of materials and assignments given to language analysts and interpreters has helped Frank fine tune his already exceptional skills in the French language.

**Interpreting Experience**

Apart from a few requests for impromptu interpreting, Frank had no experience with either interpretation or translation when he arrived at the FBI. All of his skills in both of these tasks developed entirely on the job through working various assignments. His most common assignment was gisting audio and/or written messages that were important for intelligence analysis. His personal motivation and enthusiasm for the job drove him to develop these skills as a language analyst and interpreter which he now uses with great success and ease.

**Characteristics of a Good Interpreter**

Frank also mentioned a few personal characteristics that he felt contributed to his success in both language learning and on the job. The primary characteristic he felt contributed to his success was strong motivation and interest in the job:

“I definitely was very, very interested in what we were doing. And I feel like I was very invested in what we were doing.”

Finally, Frank looks to the variety and quantity of exposure to French he received on the job as an important factor in his success:

“My foreign language skills have definitely improved… because of the frequency with which they’re used. And of course, because we get all kinds of different assignments, that tends to push us outward.”

**Interpreter 3 – Heritage Speaker**

“I’m fanatical about it. I’m never satisfied with ‘close enough’…I’m always trying to learn, I’m trying to study, and I’m always trying to improve, even now, I’m always trying to improve. In Russian we say, if you live for a century, you’ll continue to learn for a century, and still die ignorant. There’s just so much to learn, in our language and in our jobs too…there’s always something you could do better. And I’m always striving to do better.”

With more than 20 years of experience interpreting in the court room and 13 years as an interpreter/language analyst with the FBI, Lena has immense experience working in her languages. Having grown up in the United States speaking Russian at home with her parents, brother, and extended family, she handles both Russian and English like a native, although English has become her more dominant language over the years. Driven by a “fanaticism” for excellence in her work and a love of working to catch the “Russian bad guys” Lena is an exceptional individual whose talents and experiences have led to her great success as an FBI interpreter.

**Language Background**

Born to Russian immigrants in the United States, Lena’s first language was Russian. Apart from learning a few English words from television and her older brother, she essentially grew up in her own Russian enclave until she began kindergarten. From that point on she was educated in American schools. Russian remained an important aspect of her life; however, as she continued to speak it at home with her family and at a Russian parochial school she attended on Saturdays.
from ages 7 – 17. In this way, Lena grew up speaking English in school and Russian at home, feeling equally comfortable in languages in their relevant settings.

In college, Lena almost majored English, but ultimately graduated with a degree in criminal justice. She also took a few Russian courses meant for nonnative speakers as well as a translation course. Apart from that one translation course, Lena had no training in translation or interpretation before taking a job as a court interpreter.

“I had never done any formal interpreting. I had no idea of court vocabulary. And when I asked for things like this, they gave me a notebook for interpreters that was all in Spanish, and it would say like ‘arraignment’ and it would show the Spanish word, so I took this notebook, I thought, ‘This is better than nothing.’”

Thrown into an unknown situation, Lena quickly learned how to study and create her own glossary of words to use in the court room, which became automatic after so many years using the same words/phrases. To keep up with modern-day Russian, Lena makes an effort to read newspapers from Moscow as well talk to her family who lives in the United States.

Interpreting Experience

Lena had no formal training in interpretation and, thus, began the job unprepared.

“I tried to find a legal Russian dictionary, and I couldn’t. I went to the law library in downtown Los Angeles, and I found one book that they were able to copy for me…And I came up with my own dictionary.”

She was forced to create her own Russian legal dictionary to keep up with the legalese used in her job as a courtroom interpreter. After 20 years working in that field, the vocabulary and the setting became automatic. She brought this experience with her when she joined the FBI as a language analyst.

“The live monitoring…we call them Title III’s or wiretaps…I love those. I’m in my element. I’ve done more of those than most linguists.”

Thirteen years into her FBI career, her favorite job is interpreting during wire taps, which are stressful, high-stake situations that require perfectly accurate interpretations. Apart from wire taps, she has also done a wide range of interpreting assignments for the FBI, including translating documents, interpreting for interviews between agents and victims, and even interpreting for Mrs. Gorbachev! Her deep knowledge both of English and Russian as well as her vast experience interpreting in the courts and for the FBI make her an incredibly successful interpreter.

Characteristics of a Good Interpreter

In addition to the experiences described above, Lena personally identified a few characteristics that have led to her success as an interpreter. She points out that a good interpreter must be dedicated to the mission of the FBI and willing to put in the effort to conduct the research necessary to complete tasks efficiently. Research, she says, is one of the most important tools an interpreter has to do the job well. Her motivation and desire to improve as well as her “fanaticism” about getting translations just right have helped her to flourish on this job and become an exceptional interpreter.
For a larger study, would recommend using the same methodology as we followed in the State and FBI studies. First, we would discuss the case-study findings with the FBI points of contact, and determine whether any more information should be probed. We would use the newly adapted interview schedule (shown in Appendix B), and a slightly adapted interview protocol (shown below), which would allow for telephone interviewing, shown in the case study to be both convenient for the FBI interpreter population and not at all detrimental to the data collection. We would use the informed consent procedures and document (shown after the Interview Protocol) that we used for the case study.

With regard to the analysis, we would develop concept maps to guide the coding based on the findings of the case studies. As we have done with other agency points of contact, we would discuss what kind of knowledge transfer product would be most beneficial to the clients, and we would ensure that our analysis would support this effort.

During the case-study interviews, the three FBI interpreters identified characteristics of successful interpreters and made suggestions for future training. However, as with the case of data collected at State and from the NSA, it is important to compare the insights of the expert interpreters with those who are less skilled in order to determine the uniqueness of the self-reported information to the highly skilled language users. Therefore, and finally, we would also collect data from a comparison group.

### Interview Protocol

1. Before beginning the interview, make sure you have the following:
   - Interview schedule
   - Informed consent form (2 copies and pen); this should be emailed ahead of time, if this is a telephone interview.
   - Digital Recorder
   - Name and location of FBI Interpreter; telephone number, if applicable.

2. Once you meet the FBI Interpreter, introduce yourself and give a brief overview of CASL and the purpose of the current project. The following information should be included:
   - Your name and affiliation (i.e. retired FBI Interpreter; UMD grad student; etc.)
   - The Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL) is a research center at the University of Maryland. It was created to enhance the ability of federal employees across all agencies and branches to develop proficiency in foreign languages.
   - The current project was designed to investigate what learner or situational factors enable FBI Interpreters to develop proficiency in foreign languages. Specifically, we are interested in learning which factors enhance or inhibit foreign language learning. We would like to learn from you what aspects of your job requiring foreign language are easy/difficult and how your language learning experience has helped to prepare you to perform these tasks.

3. Outline format of interview:
   - Explain that you have full clearance. While you are not looking for classified information, it is not a problem if something classified comes up.
   - The interview will be recorded. The recording will later be transcribed by a fully cleared individual within NSA and will be only be read by cleared members of the research team.
   - The interview has three main sections: foreign languages known & ability (self-rated and test scores); foreign language learning history; and job-related language use and ability.
   - Allow the FBI Interpreter to read the consent form. Mention that human subjects protection coincides with some of the security concerns the FBI Interpreter might have.
   - Ask if the FBI Interpreter has any questions at this point. If not, obtain the signatures and initials on the consent form, and provide a blank copy of the consent form to the FBI Interpreter to take away.
   - Mention how the long the interview will take – about an hour.
• Begin recording the interview.

4. Begin interview. (Have the note-taker check that all questions are asked.)
• It is easiest to begin by asking what foreign languages and dialects the FBI Interpreter knows and then going back and asking them to assess their overall ability (according to the hand card) and then their ability in the four skill areas (reading, writing, listening, speaking).
• Next, ask them about the language tests they have taken and the scores they received.
• The second section is designed to find out about their language learning experience. It is easiest to get a chronological overview of their exposure to foreign language(s), starting with their earliest memory (which may be a grandparent who spoke a foreign language or listening to music or even something like trying to figure out instructions that are written in a foreign language next to the English) and continuing to current experiences.
• After jotting down all the various experiences, go back through each one and ask more detailed questions. The questions will vary depending on the type of experience. All the questions that should be asked are in the interview schedule although it may be unnatural to try to follow them in order. It is useful to have an idea of the kinds of questions to ask about each type of experience. Below are some examples:

Exposure at home
• Who spoke the foreign language?
• In what contexts?
• Did the FBI Interpreter speak the language as well? With whom?
• Did the FBI Interpreter also read/write?
• How proficient was the FBI Interpreter at this time?
• (refer to interview schedule for more questions)

Classroom exposure
• Was the teacher a Native Speaker (NS)?
• Was the class conducted in the foreign language?
• What kinds of tasks took place in the classroom and for homework?
• What kinds of skills were emphasized in the class?
• Did the FBI Interpreter do anything extra (outside of classroom/assignments) to enhance learning?
• Did the FBI Interpreter use the language with others in/out of the classroom? If so, with NSs or Non-Native Speakers (NNS)?
• How would the FBI Interpreter rate his/her abilities (all four) after completing that class? (When discussing speaking ability, be sure to ask about accent)
• (refer to interview schedule for more questions)

Immersion experience
• What was the living situation (with host family, NSs, other NNSs, Americans)?
• What percent of the time was spent in the foreign language?
• What kinds of tasks did the FBI Interpreter do during that time (job related, language classes)? Describe…
• How did the FBI Interpreter use the language in daily life?
• How did language skills improve during this experience (be specific)?
• (refer to interview schedule for more questions)

The last section relates to the FBI Interpreter’s current job. It may be easiest to follow the interview schedule for this part. However, whenever the FBI Interpreter mentions an important factor, be sure to probe and follow up. For instance, any time cross-training is mentioned, ask
• What was that experience like?

When going through the lists of job tasks, when the FBI Interpreter is multilingual, please use the BEST language unless the FBI Interpreter has never used that language for work. Even if the FBI Interpreter is currently working in another language, have them rate the best one, when they were at their peak. Draw points of comparison with the current working language. For example, if the FBI Interpreter is rating Russian, ask for key tasks:
• How about in Serbo-Croatian?

5. At the end of the interview, thank the FBI Interpreter for their time and stop the recorder.
Informed Consent

Foreign Language Professionals Profiles Project

Center for Advanced Study of Language
University of Maryland

Please read through the following information, and sign the form, if you understand the material and consent to participate. If you have any questions, please ask them before consenting.

Statement of Age
Your signature indicates that you are over 18 years of age and wish to participate in research being carried out by the Center for Advanced Study of Language, a University-affiliated Research Center (University of Maryland).

Purpose
The purpose of this study is to investigate factors that may lead to successful foreign language learning by adults.

Procedures
The procedure involves an interview with a cleared interviewer. The interview should take less than two hours to complete. You may be contacted at a later date and asked to participate in a second phase of this research, an online survey. You may choose to decline to participate in the survey.

All interview and survey data will be overseen by a Data Classification Officer (DCO), to ensure that (a) no classified data is communicated to un-cleared researchers, (b) your identity is not compromised, and (c) you can easily be contacted for follow-up information. The DCO will be responsible for reviewing all interview and survey data for classification issues, and will work with two in-house data managers to ensure the reliability and confidentiality of all data.

Response data will be maintained in a manner to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents in both the interview and survey phases. Interview data will be stored as two files: (a) the interview results file, which will contain all response data indexed by the identifying code value, and (b) the subject identification file, which will link the code numbers to the name of the respondents. The subject identification file will be maintained in a secure file only accessible by the two in-house data managers. Both interview and survey data will be provided to un-cleared researchers once it has been reviewed by a classification officer who will guarantee that it does not contain any classified or subject identifying information.

Confidentiality
All information collected in this study is confidential to the extent permitted by law. The survey data will be grouped with data that others provide for reporting and presentation, and your name will not be used. If data from your interview are used in reporting, all
identifying information will have been removed. Furthermore, special precautions will
be taken, as described above, concerning classified information and subject identifying
information. Neither un-cleared researchers, nor the management personnel at any USG
agency will have access to your survey data.

Risks
Without proper precautions, a risk could be that classified information, which you, by
law, are not permitted to share with un-cleared researchers, could be released, and
perhaps even associated with you. However, special precautions are built in to the data
collection procedures (described above) to minimize this risk.

Benefits, Freedom to Withdraw, and Ability to Ask Questions
There will be no immediate benefit to you from this research; however the data gathered
may provide information valuable to the design of foreign language enhancement
programs for FLPs in your workplace. Your participation in this research is voluntary,
and you are free to withdraw from the research without any sort of penalty. Even if you
participate, you may elect not to answer some questions during the interview.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about the research, you may contact:

• Dr. Catherine Doughty, Principal Investigator, Center for Advanced Study of
Language, University of Maryland: (301) 226-8828, or cldoughty@umd.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a
research-related injury, you may contact:

• Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park,
Maryland 20742; (310) 405-0678; irb@deans.umd.edu

Signature
Your signature indicates that:
you are at least 18 years of age;
the research has been explained to you;
your questions have been answered; and
you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.

Printed Name: ____________________________________________

Signature: ________________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________________