

Interpreters and the Police.  
Do interpreters need to know  
interviewing techniques?

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# What is a police interview?

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- A conversation ?
- A chat ?
- A question and answer game ?
- A search for the “truth” ?
- An attempt to obtain a confession ?
- A literal reproduction ?
- The development of a mutual understanding ?

# Observations

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- In the last decade: a remarkable increase of scientifically substantiated, legal interviewing techniques.
- Increased number of police interviews and improved interviewing know-how.
- Attention for attitude and empathy from the interviewing police officers.
- Increased number of interviews with an interpreter.

# Police interviewing techniques

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- Backbone of the judicial investigation
- Reveal the truth
- Gather verifiable elements
- Obtain accurate and reliable information

# Standard interviewing techniques

## 1) Kinds of questions

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- Open-ended questions (Wh-questions)  
“Describe the sex offender”
- Closed-ended questions  
“ So, he stood just in front of you ?”
- Multiple choice questions  
“ What was the colour of his jacket, brown, grey or another colour ?”
- Leading questions  
“ I think the offender stood on the left side?”

# 1) Types of questions

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- Probing questions: more intrusive questions that require a more specific answer
- Opinion/statement questions.  
“What do you think the offender had in mind?”
- Bait questions (perpetrator/suspect)  
“Could there be any reason why later on the lab colleagues will come and tell me that they found your DNA at the crime scene?”

# 1) Types of questions

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- Behaviour observation questions  
(perpetrator/suspect)

“What kind of person would commit this type of crime ?”

## 2) The police officer's attitude

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- Vulnerable victims (minors, victims, intimidated witnesses)
- Interracial / multicultural
- White-collar crime
- Psychopaths
- Sex offenders
- Disputed confessions

### 3) Mutt and Jeff

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- Good cop / bad cop
- Interviewer / note taker
- Make clear arrangements

## 4) R.P.M. (Inbau & Reid US)

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- Rationalize
- Project
- Minimize
- Very suggestive interview method = fake confessions
- Not used in most Western countries

## 5) The cognitive interview method used to interview cooperative witnesses - suspects

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- Prof. B. Milne (UK).
- Less is more = no such thing as a poor witness, only a poor interviewer.
- Aim: witness to generate information, not the interviewer to extract information.

## 5) Cognitive interview ...

### Several steps

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- Free story = pure version statement (open-ended questions).
- Avoid interrupting the witness in the middle of an answer.
- Allow for long pauses and silences after the witness stops talking.

## 5) Cognitive interview ...

### Different steps

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- Tell your story (or part of it) in reverse order.
- Change the point of view (pretend to be a video camera .. Pretend to be the perpetrator).
- Change your sensory perception (appeal to your sense of smell, sense of touch).

## 6) The lie

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- Several techniques to expose lies and deception.
- Attention for the non-verbal channel – micro facial changes (What the face can tell us) Prof. P. Ekman US.
- Sometimes analysis of the written statement (Scan-technique = Scientific content analyses N. Sapir US).
- Polygraph.

# Pitfalls for interpreters at police interviews

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- No or poor introduction at the start of the interview (strict description of the task – no private conversations – the police officer is in charge of the interview).
- Failure to follow the system of open-ended questions = change to closed-ended questions.

# Pitfalls ...

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- Failure to translate everything.
- Failure to translate more than a synthesis of what is said.
- Change the specific choice of words – sentence structure used by the police officer or the person interviewed (translate “take something away” by “steal”).
- No respect for the pauses/silences that occur during the interview.
- Give a personal opinion to the police officer.
- “Take over” the interview.

# Pitfalls for the police officer during an interview with an interpreter

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- No or poor guidance/steering of the interview.
- Failure to give the interpreter a short briefing before the start of the interview (if necessary, with a description of the police interviewing technique to be used).
- Some police interviewers let the interpreter do the job, because they know the interpreter has sufficient experience in the subject matter (standard questions in case of a marriage of convenience, drugs).

Solutions /proposals / questions ?

Thank you very much for your  
attention.