

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

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What is a police interview?

- 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

- 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

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

Standard interviewing techniques

1) Kinds of questions

- 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

- 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

- Behaviour observation questions
(perpetrator/suspect)

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

2) The police officer's attitude

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

3) Mutt and Jeff

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

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

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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 ...

- 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

- 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).

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Solutions /proposals / questions ?

Thank you very much for your
attention.