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## Interpreter-assisted interviews: Examining investigators' and interpreters' views on their practice --Manuscript Draft--

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<b>Abstract:</b>	<p>The investigative interviewing of victims, witnesses and suspects is one of the most frequent and important tasks undertaken by those conducting law enforcement investigations. Over the past twenty years or so there has been a substantial growth in the amount of research examining the practice. Nonetheless, little research has been conducted into those interviews where an interpreter is increasingly present. Using a self-administered questionnaire, the present study examined the beliefs of 66 investigators and 40 interpreters in the context of international criminal investigations, concerning certain key tasks in such interpreter-assisted interviews. It was regularly found that there was not always a consensus of opinion either within or between these two groups of professionals concerning whether (when participating in investigative interviews) (i) they prepared jointly with each other; (ii) interpreters assisted (or otherwise) with rapport building; (iii) interpreters could interpret accurately; and (iv) interpreter interventions were disruptive or not. Given such divisions of opinion, our findings tend to suggest that there is a lack of clarity as to the role of interpreters and, indeed, only personalised views as to what is best practice. The implications of our findings are discussed and recommendations are made to enable practice enhancement.</p>

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All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standard

The research herein has been conducted only after ethical clearance was given by the University research ethics committee pertaining to the first author which obviously included the matter that informed consent was to be obtained from all individual participants included in the study (and was obtained before their participation).

Permissions were given by the host agency to access their personnel for the data reported herein and later to disseminate this data in a peer reviewed outlet.

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## **Interpreter-assisted interviews: Examining investigators' and interpreters' views on their practice**

### **Abstract**

The investigative interviewing of victims, witnesses and suspects is one of the most frequent and important tasks undertaken by those conducting law enforcement investigations. Over the past twenty years or so there has been a substantial growth in the amount of research examining the practice. Nonetheless, little research has been conducted into those interviews where an interpreter is increasingly present. Using a self-administered questionnaire, the present study examined the beliefs of 66 investigators and 40 interpreters in the context of international criminal investigations, concerning certain key tasks in such interpreter-assisted interviews. It was regularly found that there was not always a consensus of opinion either within or between these two groups of professionals concerning whether (when participating in investigative interviews) (i) they prepared jointly with each other; (ii) interpreters assisted (or otherwise) with rapport building; (iii) interpreters could interpret accurately; and (iv) interpreter interventions were disruptive or not. Given such divisions of opinion, our findings tend to suggest that there is a lack of clarity as to the role of interpreters and, indeed, only personalised views as to what is best practice. The implications of our findings are discussed and recommendations are made to enable practice enhancement.

**Key words:** Interpreter- assisted interviews, criminal investigations, investigative interviewing, interview planning, rapport

## 1. Introduction

Investigative interviews conducted during police/law enforcement investigations are among the most important and commonly used tools to gather information/evidence (McGurk, Carr, & McGurk, 1993; Milne & Bull, 1999). The term ‘investigative interviewing’ has, for near three decades been identified as an effective, non-accusatorial and rapport-based approach, which aims to gather accurate and reliable accounts from victims, witnesses or suspects (Evans, Meissner, Brandon, Russano, & Kleinman, 2010). Due to matters such as global mobility, the use of interpreters is becoming more common across the world (Ewens et al., 2014; Tribe & Lane, 2009). However, although a great deal of empirical research has examined investigative interviewing per se, there is a dearth of empirical research which examines those where an interpreter<sup>1</sup> is present (Gallai, 2013; Lai & Mulayim, 2014; Powell *et al.*, 2017). Some of the main areas that have received very little attention include: (i) planning and preparation; (ii) issues relating to rapport-building and maintenance, and; (iii) the perceived impact of interpreter interventions upon the memory of the interviewee. All are central to investigative interviewing (Walsh & Bull, 2010; 2012). The present study explores new ground by examining together the beliefs, concerning these three areas of both investigators and interpreters, who are regularly involved in interpreter-assisted investigative interviews, all being employed by an investigations agency.

### 1.1 Interview Planning and Preparation

Walsh and Bull (2010) found that more effective planning and preparation by investigators before undertaking an interview with suspects was associated with increased information yield. However, previous research has also found that planning of interviews is not

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of clarity, the difference between interpreters and translators is that an interpreter translates orally, while a translator interprets the written word.

1 regularly conducted (e.g., Clarke, Milne, & Bull, 2011; Walsh & Bull, 2011; Walsh & Milne,  
2 2007). Some have argued that the main reason for not planning (in more general contexts) is  
3 due to perceived or actual time pressures (Alison *et al.*, 2013; Roskes *et al.*, 2013). Other  
4 findings suggest that a lack of planning was linked to the simplicity of the suspected crimes  
5 involved (Walsh & Milne, 2008). In other words, ‘simpler’ cases (e.g., volume crime) could  
6 impact on whether investigators decide to plan ahead of the interview or not due to the volume  
7 of their workload. However, a more recent study found that South Korean police officers’  
8 attitudes towards planning were more associated with issues such as organisational culture and  
9 investigators’ beliefs in their own ability to interview effectively without much planning, rather  
10 than with time pressure (Kim *et al.*, 2018). Despite the importance of planning before  
11 undertaking investigative interviews, the above barriers could have a significant impact on the  
12 overall information gained. However, (Wilson & Walsh, 2019) found that investigators and  
13 interpreters insufficiently considered each other’s concerns, which may undermine working  
14 relationships; the matter which we will now discuss.

## 1.2 Rapport-building and Maintenance

15 Rapport-building has been argued to involve three key components: (i) positivity; (ii)  
16 attentiveness and; (iii) coordination (Tickle-Degnen & Rosenthal, 1990). Positivity relates to  
17 positive emotions, such as when people nod their heads and smile at each other; which  
18 demonstrates the degree of their mutual involvement. Attentiveness is associated with their  
19 joint concentration, for example mutual gazing which creates a cohesive interaction. In turn,  
20 coordination relates to how people correspond to each other through their body movement or  
21 postural mimicry, which thus projects the image of equilibrium between both parties (Tickle-  
22 Degnen & Rosenthal, 1990).

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Defined as a positive relationship, rapport-building is constructed upon a joint interest of two or more people (DePaulo & Bell, 1990). It has been acknowledged to be a key factor during interviews, as it allows a working relationship to build during investigative interviews (Oxburgh *et al.*, 2011). Research conducted by Evans *et al.* (2014) found that the techniques of rapport-building during investigative interviews are very effective, as this can assist gaining investigation-relevant information compared with dominant approaches (i.e., accusatory/confession-seeking).

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However, despite the significance of building better rapport during interviews, most studies relating to rapport-building during investigative interviews have tended to focus on dyadic relationships (i.e. the investigator and the interviewee). A study conducted by Driskell *et al.*, (2013) was, however, an exception. They compared rapport in interviews with either one or two interviewers, finding rapport unaffected by the number of interviewers, by examining the interviewers' and interviewees' use of words via linguistic inquiry and word count (LIWC) methodology, corresponding with Tickle-Degnen and Rosenthal's (1990) rapport conceptualisation. However, it is questionable whether Driskell *et al.*'s linguistic methodology adequately measures rapport in the absence of directly observing the interaction. In any event, relationships between the two investigators present might be expected, in practice, to be more established (say, though their existing familiarity) than the typically *ad hoc* nature between investigator and interpreter, who may have not have even met before.

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Indeed, Kosny *et al.* (2014) found that the presence of interpreters during interviews was viewed by interviewers as being socially awkward, inhibiting rapport-building. Baker *et al.*, (2008), whose study was conducted within medical settings, found that when interpreters are used, this increased the negative rating by patients of their interactions with professionals. Salaets and Balogh (2015) note the importance of mutual confidence and trust in the working relationships between interviewers and interpreters, as interviewers are surrendering a degree

1 of control to interpreters. Wilson and Walsh (2019) found that mistrust exists between  
2 investigators and interpreters, exemplified in their study through police officers' reluctance  
3 either to engage with interpreters in interview planning or (where planning did occur) to discuss  
4 their role/s within the interview in a collaborative manner, preferring to focus on each of their  
5 individual roles instead. Shaffer and Evans (2018) found, in their survey of US investigators,  
6 a preference to use bi-lingual colleagues as interpreters. One source of mistrust appears to be  
7 disagreement concerning the specific role of interpreters. On the one hand, a belief exists that  
8 the interpreter's task in interviews involves verbatim interpretation (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2012),  
9 whereas on the other hand, they may do more than just translate language faithfully, but also  
10 consider nuances of culture and/or social factors (Angelelli, 2004).  
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24 In contrast to the research cited above, Houston *et al.* (2017) and also Ewens *et al.*  
25 (2014) found in their experimental studies (set in the context of law enforcement) that there  
26 were no negative consequences concerning the interpreter's presence regarding rapport-  
27 building during investigating interviewing. Houston *et al.* also examined whether seating  
28 positions of interpreters in interviews can help or hinder rapport-building. Specifically, they  
29 examined two such seating positions (i.e., either when the interpreter sits behind the  
30 interviewee or where the interpreters sits between the interviewer and the interviewee in a  
31 triangular configuration). The latter position was found to be associated with a better quality  
32 of rapport-building between the investigator and interviewee.  
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### 49 **1.3 Interview Interruption**

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51 The final issue examined here concerns the possible disruption caused by the  
52 involvement of interpreters when the interviewee is being encouraged by the interviewer to  
53 provide lengthy and comprehensive accounts. There are essentially two types of memory (short  
54 and long-term memory). Baddeley (1986), in his working memory model, argued that short-  
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1 term memory may begin to decay after around 30 seconds and is involved in carrying out the  
2 temporary preservation of information humans need to perform different mental tasks, such as  
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4 cognitive operations and daily thinking tasks (Majerus, 2009). In other words, working memory  
5 is limited by the processing of new information (Seeber, 2011). Conversely, long-term  
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7 memory, in turn, is identified as  
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12 *“...a vast store of knowledge and a record of prior events, according to all theoretical*  
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14 *views; it would be difficult to deny that each normal person has at his or her command*  
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16 *a rich, although not flawless or complete, set of long-term memories”* (Cowan, 2008,  
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18 p.3).  
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22 Investigators are trained to allow interviewees to give uninterrupted accounts  
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24 otherwise the memory of the interviewee may be disrupted, causing potential loss of  
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26 information (Fisher & Geiselman, 1992). However, in such circumstances, the amount of  
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28 information provided by interviewees, if uninterrupted, may lead to the possibility that  
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30 interpreters may well experience difficulties managing their own cognitive load (Ewens et al.,  
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32 2014). Cognitive load refers to the matter that there is only a finite amount of mental activities  
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34 that humans can undertake at any one time. Todd and Marois (2004) have identified cognitive  
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36 load as a barrier to interpreting due to such cognitive difficulties. Other previous studies have  
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38 also suggested that interruptions are disruptive to the completion of a primary task (see  
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40 Hodgetts & Jones, 2006; Monk *et al.*, 2004; Trafton *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, Gillie and  
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42 Broadbent (1989) found that when an individual primary task is being disrupted, it will hinder  
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44 the performance and accuracy of the recall when gathering and translating lengthy information.  
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51 As such, this understanding of memory presents the cognitive challenges interpreters  
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53 might encounter when gathering and translating lengthy information during interviews (as  
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55 memory can only hold so much information for certain periods of time). An interpreter might  
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57 cope with their own cognitive load by stopping or pausing the interviewee (while they were  
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1 giving an account to the interviewer) in order for them to interpret that witness account  
2 accurately. However, such interruptions could disrupt interviewees' recall, as memory retrieval  
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4 (at the most detailed level) involves concentration and attention, having a subsequent impact  
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6 on information yield.  
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#### 10 11 **1.4 Present Study**

12 The present study aims to bridge the gap in knowledge concerning interpreter-assisted  
13 interviews and explores new ground by examining the beliefs of both investigators and  
14 interpreters who are regularly involved in interpreter-assisted interviews. Based on previous  
15 research undertaken in the area, whereby investigators have found planning and preparation as  
16 important (Walsh & Milne, 2007), we hypothesised that respondents will state that they rarely  
17 undertake joint preparation before conducting interviews (H<sup>1</sup>). We also believed that  
18 respondents will disagree with each other concerning the use of interpreters in rapport-building,  
19 and whether interpreter interruptions were believed disruptive to the interviewee (H<sup>2&3</sup>). Cades  
20 *et al.* (2011) found that when individual memory is disrupted during free recall by interruptions,  
21 it adversely affects the investigator's primary task (i.e., obtaining fulsome, accurate accounts).  
22 Such interruptions might also be expected to disrupt the rapport between interviewer and  
23 interviewee (Evans *et al.*, 2014). However, while interpreters, understandably, might be  
24 expected to believe that they assist the interviewer to achieve their primary goal, they may not  
25 necessarily be aware of how their interventions might affect interviews (Moser-Mercer *et al.*,  
26 1998).  
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## 2. Method

### 2.1 Design

This study utilised a specially designed self-administered questionnaire which included both quantitative elements (Likert-scale questions) together with space for respondents to also provide qualitative responses (from which a thematic analysis was conducted). Thematic analysis involves identifying recurring themes from the collected data with particular regard (among others) to locating repetitions, cultural typologies, and linguistic connectors (that would give rise to common justifications or common causal relationships (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Given that all the participants were from the same organisation, and involved in one of two key sub-tasks (either interviewing or interpreting) that contributed to one overall task (helping interviewees provide information), it was felt that both organisational culture and task focus would lend themselves to participants providing data that would enable regular and consistent themes to emerge.

### 2.2 Respondents

Both investigators (N=66) and interpreters (N=40) from the same investigation agency took part in the study. The research team approached seventy-five investigators and 66 took part (n = 38 males; n = 28 females). Fifty-nine percent (n = 39) had served the agency for less than five years, 36% (n = 24) possessing between five- and ten-years' experience, and 5% (n = 3) had more than ten years' experience. A total of 40 interpreters took part (n = 35 males; n = 5 females) of around 50 interpreters employed on a permanent basis by the agency. Forty eight percent of interpreters (n = 19) had less than ten years' experience in this role (both with and prior to them joining the agency), 42% (n = 17) possessed between 10-20 years' experience, with 10% (n = 4) possessing more than 20 years' experience. A total of 45% (n = 18) had undertaken their present roles for three years or less, whereas 32% (n = 13) possessed between

1 3-10 years' experience, while 23% (n = 9) had at least ten years' such experience. Table I  
2 provides details concerning the relevant interviewing experience each of the investigators and  
3 the interpreters who responded to the survey, both prior to their joining (and with) the agency.  
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5 Sixty-two of the investigators (93%) and 68% (n = 27) of the interpreters reported receiving  
6 similar training. All of the interpreters were bilingual in either English or French and at least  
7 one of another six languages.  
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### 22 **2.3 Questionnaire**

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24 The self-administered questionnaire, which was largely similar for both investigators  
25 and interpreters, included the demographic details of all respondents (i.e., gender, job role,  
26 training and investigative interview experiences, together with their experiences of interpreter-  
27 assisted interviews). Interpreters were also asked the language they were accredited to interpret.  
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34 The questionnaire included a series of questions which respondents were required to  
35 answer using five-point Likert scales. Questions included: (i) investigators perceptions as to  
36 how effective interpreters were at interpreting accurately; (ii) whether interpreters felt it was  
37 possible for them to interpret accurately; (iii) how difficult interpreters found it to interrupt an  
38 interviewee in order for them to interpret accurately; (iv) how disruptive (if at all) investigators  
39 felt interpreters were during the interview; (v) the role of an interpreter; (vi) the most difficult  
40 aspect of conducting an interpreter-assisted interviews; (vii) any cultural issues that affect  
41 interpreter-assisted interviews; and (viii) their preferred seating position in the interview for  
42 (or as) interpreters. Questions were also asked of all participants as to the frequency of their  
43 involvement in joint interview planning and preparation and whether interpreters assisted in  
44 rapport-building during interviews.  
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## 2.4 Procedure

Following full ethical clearance, investigators and interpreters were requested to participate. Questionnaires for investigators were written in English, while the questionnaires for the interpreters were sent in either French or English, depending on the first language of the interpreter.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Interview Planning and Preparation

Seventy-seven percent of the investigators ( $n = 51$ ) said they undertook planning and preparation jointly with interpreters at least sometimes. Conversely, fewer interpreters (58%;  $n = 23$ ) stated they jointly prepared with investigators at least some of the time. A 2 x 2 Chi-square test (job role/frequency of preparation) found that investigators were significantly more likely to say that they jointly prepared for interviews than did interpreters;  $\chi^2(1, N = 106) = 0.26, p = 0.01$ . We considered whether such a significant difference in tendency to jointly prepare was associated with their levels of experience in interpreter-assisted interviews. A further 2 x 2 Chi-square test (level of experience/frequency of preparation) was conducted, comparing those interviewers and interpreters, who had undertaken twenty or less interpreter-assisted interviews with the agency ( $n = 51$ ) with those ( $n = 55$ ) who possessed greater levels of such interview experience. No significant difference was found,  $p = 0.27$ . However, when examining investigators alone (who would be expected to make the initial decision whether to jointly plan), it was found that those who had undertaken more than 20 interpreter-assisted interviews were significantly more likely to say that they would jointly prepare with interpreters than their lesser experienced counterparts;  $\chi^2(1, N = 66) = 0.32, p = 0.01$ .

Respondents were also asked, if they undertook joint preparation, what such planning involved. Forty-five investigators stated that they would brief the interpreters regarding the

1 background of the investigation, identifying any concerns. For example, investigator (#24)  
2 stated:  
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5 *“I will brief my interpreter before the interview on the background and type of*  
6 *witness we will be interviewing. I will point out any issues or problems that could be*  
7 *expected and also brief the interpreter on the expected schedule to be followed”.*  
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12 The minority of investigators who stated they did not undertake any form of preparation with  
13 interpreters, argued that time pressure, (what they perceived to be) the ill-defined role of  
14 interpreters, and the culture of their agency are key factors why they did not undertake this  
15 task.  
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24 For interpreters, the common view was that joint preparation involved them learning of  
25 the outline of the intended interview. An example from one respondent was that:  
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31 *“Depending on the investigator's planning and preparation, I get a briefing about the*  
32 *expected nature of the interview. Though I don't participate in the logistics or*  
33 *planning of the content, I consider "briefing the interviewer" as a standard element*  
34 *of interpreted interviews. If I don't get invited to such briefing, I will request one”*  
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41 (Interpreter #7).  
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46 Of those seventeen interpreters who said that they did not participate in planning, five indicated  
47 that they did not do so since they viewed such preparation as the domain of the investigator.  
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### 50 51 52 53 **3.2 Rapport-building and Maintenance** 54

55 We found that 32% of the investigators (n = 21) believed that the presence of an  
56 interpreter during interviews always assisted in rapport-building, with just a minority (6%; n =  
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4) offering the counter view. The remainder (n = 41) believed that interpreters helped rapport building ‘sometimes’. Comments were received from 64 investigators explaining their answer and, of these, 41% (n = 27) related how interpreters’ knowledge of cultural issues was crucial to maintaining rapport, as was their professed assistance in making interviewees feel at ease (stated by nine investigators). However, four investigators stated that interpreters made interviewees feel ‘uncomfortable’ (although of course it is not known if this perception of discomfort was actually one experienced by interviewees), while a further three said that rapport building was not the interpreter’s role.

On the other hand, 68% of interpreters (n = 27) stated they believed that, in their interpreting role, they always assisted with the development of rapport-building. They explained their beliefs by saying that they helped build trust, whilst helping the interviewee to relax, while also providing support to the investigators (as they considered themselves as the vital link in the communication between them and interviewees). However, those interpreters who argued that rapport-building was not achievable between them and interviewees, explained their views by claiming rapport would compromise their neutrality in interviews, and thus it was not their role to aid rapport (also stating that rapport would change the meaning of what was being said by either investigator or interviewee). Nevertheless, a 2 x 2 Chi-square test (rapport building/job role) found no significant difference between investigator and interpreter opinions concerning whether interpreters aided the construction of rapport either always or at least sometimes;  $p = 0.58$ .

We also asked all respondents for their preferred seating positions of interpreters in interviews (found in prior studies to be important in rapport-building- see Houston et al., 2017). Table II shows that the majority of participating investigators (79%) preferred either the interpreter to sit next to the interviewee, either on their left or right (facing the interviewer), or in a triangular formation (where the interpreter sits in the middle of such a configuration). As

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Table II shows, there was a similar number (78%) of interpreters electing for these three options as their preferred seating positions. These findings tend to indicate that there is some general consensus between investigators and interpreters, though not one for a single seating position either within or between either group of professionals.

**INSERT TABLE II ABOUT HERE**

### **3.3 Interview Interventions**

We asked interpreters how difficult it was for them to interrupt interviewees while they were providing an account (using a five-point Likert scale, where 1= no difficulty, and 5 = very difficult). Eighteen per cent (n = 7) rated interruptions as ‘difficult’, at either ‘4’ or ‘5’ on the scale, while 53% (n = 21) provided a ‘1’ or ‘2’ score (i.e., ‘not difficult’). In turn, investigator participants were asked how disruptive they perceived interpreters when they interrupted interviewees (using a scale where a rating of ‘1’ denoted such interruptions as “not disruptive”, while a score of ‘5’ reflected them as “very disruptive”). It was found that 47% provided a rating at the lower end of the scale of either a ‘1’ or ‘2’, whereas 17% (n = 11) gave a score at the upper end (i.e. ‘4’ or ‘5’).

### **3.4 Additional Findings**

Fifty-seven percent (n = 38) of investigators believed interpreters should facilitate communication between the investigator and the interviewee by interpreting questions and answers accurately. For example, investigator (#59) claimed:

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*“An interpreter is here to make communication possible between two people who do not speak the same language (...) their role is to propose interpretation of what is being said by the both sides of the meeting”.*

It was also found that 16% of the investigators (n = 11) identified that a further duty of interpreters was to clarify aspects investigators may not understand. Eight investigators also recognised that the interpreter’s role was to explain any cultural issues that might arise during interviews.

Seven investigators stated that the interpreters should not just interpret the words, but also assist in building rapport with the interviewee. In contrast, nine of the investigators indicated that the role of interpreters is only to interpret what is being said. An example is investigator (#40) who stated that:

*“I think some people believe that the interpreters can (or must) have direct contact with the witness, or create a rapport with him/her, which is wrong. It should be clear from the beginning, both with the witness and the interpreter that the interpreter's role is only to translate everything that is being said”.*

In exploring the interpreters’ views; 77% (n= 31) believed that an interpreter's role is to accurately bridge the linguistic gap between investigator and the interviewee. Interpreter (#12) provides a good example:

*“I think the interpreter's role is to facilitate communication between the two parties by helping them overcome the language, cultural and ethnological differences. But some people think the interpreter should be invisible and interpret only what is said and not intervene because it might cause the speaker to lose their train of thought”.*



1 We also examined the beliefs of investigators and interpreters relating to what were the most  
2 difficult aspects when conducting interpreter-assisted interviews. Forty per-cent (n = 26) of the  
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4 investigators identified disruption and misinterpretation (whether actual or perceived) of  
5 information by interpreters. For example, investigator (#27) stated that:  
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10 *“If the interpreter is not correctly interpreting what the witness has said, the*  
11 *interviewer needs to stop for clarification. This can be disruptive and can affect the*  
12 *witness' confidence in the interview process. It also puts in doubt the accuracy of the*  
13 *statement content”.*  
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20 While, (since they needed interpreters to enable them to understand their interviewees,  
21 and enable themselves to be understood by their interviewees) it would be expected that  
22 investigators would not be able to provide valid answers to our questions concerning how  
23 effective were interpreters, nevertheless they provided views. For example, 41% (n = 27) of  
24 the investigators thought that interpreters were effective or very effective at undertaking  
25 faithful interpretations (on a Likert scale where ‘1’ = not at all effective, and ‘5’ = very  
26 effective). Fifty-three percent gave a ‘3’ score. Of the 59 investigators who chose to provide  
27 further reasons for their score, eight said that inaccuracy occurs because some interpreters were  
28 felt not to understand local accents and, as such, they made approximate interpretations.  
29 Further, 13% of the investigators (n= 9) mentioned that (since memory can only retain so much  
30 information for finite periods) there is likely often a low degree of accuracy of interpretation  
31 due to cognitive challenges. Familiarity with certain words, expressions, and the case itself,  
32 along with the extent of interpreters’ professional experience were also suggested by 54% of  
33 investigators as key factors that could hinder accurate interpretations. For example, investigator  
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*“The experienced interpreters are very accurate but less experienced interpreters can be inaccurate and can over-simplify and miss out details from what the interviewee has said”.*

Such findings are believed troublesome given that it is unlikely that interviewers would know if the interpretations were accurate for most obvious reason. We will return to this matter in the Discussion section. Indeed, interpreters were asked if they thought it possible for interpretations to be entirely faithful (again a Likert scale was used where a score of ‘1’ referred to it “not being at all possible”, whereas a ‘score of ‘5’ related to a rating of it “being entirely possible”). We found that 85% (n = 34) provided a score of either ‘4’ or ‘5’ on the scale, reflecting a strong belief in their own ability to interpret effectively, with only one interpreter believing that it was not possible to provide wholly accurate interpretations.

Interpreters were also asked of the major difficulties they encounter when undertaking their role, finding that 12% (n = 5) identified time pressures as a challenge (they stated that investigators want to obtain much information within timeframes). Thirty-five percent (n = 14) stated that translating localised expressions to the investigator is among their major challenge. Such an example is that of interpreter (#7), who stated:

*“Some interviewees tend to use ambiguous words which then become difficult to interpret because it may bring out a completely different meaning or remain unclear to the investigator”.*

Other findings included being affected by emotions during interviews, where matters of physical torture or sexual abuse were discussed, where being emotionless was said to be difficult by 17% (n = 7) of the interpreters. Furthermore, 55% (n = 22) of the interpreters indicated that cultural issues relating to sensitive topics can affect interviews. An example of this is investigator (#15) who argued:

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*“in some cultures, it can be difficult to talk about sexual and gender-based crimes in the presence of the opposite sex”.*

Twenty-five percent (n = 10) of the interpreters claimed that the actual language used by the investigator (that they, as interpreters, deemed culturally inappropriate for the interviewee) was also a challenge during interviews as this might upset the interviewee or send the ‘wrong message’. However, 12% (n = 5) of interpreters indicated that they have not witnessed any cultural issues arising in interviews.

#### 4. Discussion

The present study aimed to bridge the gap in knowledge concerning interpreter-assisted interviews and explored new ground by examining the beliefs of both investigators and interpreters who are regularly involved in interpreter-assisted interviews.

##### 4.1 Interview Planning and Preparation

Firstly, we hypothesised that respondents would say that they rarely undertook joint preparation before undertaking an interview and our hypothesis was not found supported given that we found the majority of investigators and interpreters stated that they jointly involved themselves in interview preparation. However, 30% (n = 32) of our respondents stated that they do not jointly prepare, a finding which suggests there is no universal understanding of the significance of joint preparation prior to interviews (and what should be involved in such a process). The latter is a concern that was borne out by some of the respondents, suggesting there may be a misunderstanding as to the nature of preparation. Respondents offered the view which inferred that such groundwork ahead of interviews more concerned planning the interview structure (for example, considering the order of questioning strategies) than preparing (which involves ensuring matters as background factors, such as culture etc, are

1 known and understood when considering the structure of the interview). In line with our  
2 findings, a recent survey of investigators and interpreters in the UK also found that joint  
3 preparation between the two sets of professionals was not common practice (Wilson & Walsh,  
4 2019). In the present study, interpreters voiced their concerns that investigators were not always  
5 aware of the cultural challenges presented in some interviews. It seems appropriate therefore  
6 that preparation is an opportunity to advise investigators of such matters, and as such,  
7 preparation needs to be embedded as a prerequisite activity.  
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17 Kim *et al.* (2018) found that such lack of attention to the planning task was associated  
18 with organisational culture, and also investigators' own beliefs as to their capability of  
19 effectively interviewing without adequate preparation. Walsh and Bull (2010) found that such  
20 beliefs by investigators concerning their own skills were misplaced, since their own interviews  
21 were actually often poorly planned and prepared, and it was these particular interviews that  
22 were often associated with a lack of information yield from interviewees. Walsh, King, and  
23 Griffiths (2017) also found that investigators regularly exaggerated their own interviewing skill  
24 levels (suggesting that such faith by investigators in their own ability may be mis-placed).  
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36 Such findings from prior research suggests a connection apparent between attitudes  
37 towards planning, inconsistent approaches towards its undertaking, and interview outcomes (as  
38 they relate to information gathered). However, despite most of our survey respondents  
39 revealing that they are involved in joint preparation, what remains to be understood is what  
40 they actually do when undertaking such joint preparation. Thus, what might be best practice  
41 remains unclear. Wilson and Walsh's (2019) study revealed similar obscurity concerning the  
42 preparation task. Indeed, in the present study, a lack of clarity as to the overall role of the  
43 interpreter was found. However, we found that more experienced investigators said that they  
44 jointly prepared more so than their lesser-experienced colleagues. This suggests that it is only  
45 with experience that the ability and tendency to jointly prepare emerges. In turn, this further  
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1 suggests that there is a greater need during training to support investigators, new to interpreter-  
2 assisted interviews, with the skills they require to jointly prepare.  
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#### 7 **4.2 Rapport-building and Maintenance**

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9 It has been found that rapport is very important in assisting investigators in gaining  
10 information from interviewees (Bull, 2013; Evans *et al.*, 2014; Walsh & Bull, 2012). In the  
11 present study, we found little consensus between the two groups as to whether interpreters aid  
12 rapport, supportive of our hypothesis. Investigators appeared less confident than interpreters  
13 that the latter were beneficial in aiding rapport. To some extent, of course, this finding may not  
14 be too surprising. Interpreters might be expected, at least in a self-report survey, to place  
15 themselves in a more favourable light. However, from studies undertaken in medical settings  
16 (e.g., Baker *et al.*, 2008; Kosny *et al.*, 2014), rapport was felt reduced when an interpreter was  
17 present. However, in those studies (possessing as they do a different context with different  
18 stressors) the length of the interaction might be expected to be relatively brief, when compared  
19 to investigative interviews which, not unusually, might be of several hours' duration (and as  
20 such, any social awkwardness, initially apparent, might become less as time proceeded). In  
21 contrast, Houston *et al.* (2017) found that interpreters were not detrimental to the quality of  
22 rapport in their laboratory-based study of investigative interviews.  
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43 Indeed, the study by Houston *et al.* found rapport to be enhanced when the interpreter  
44 sat in the mid-point of a triangular arrangement. The present study, however, found neither  
45 investigators' nor interpreters' choice of seating position (for the interpreter) to be dominated  
46 by one particular option. While the favoured position in the Houston *et al.* study was preferred  
47 by some of our respondents too, such a preference was not in agreement with the majority of  
48 other respondents (indicating that there is considerable division of opinion in this regard).  
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It is, of course, highly unlikely that interpreters have actually occupied all the seating position options that we mentioned in our questionnaire. It seems more reasonable to assume that their choice was based on the position they have adopted (probably early in their careers), and have quite possibly not thought overly about whether another position might be better for rapport building. Indeed, anecdotally, we are advised that interpreters do not feel empowered to make (or have any) choices in interviews and sit where they are advised by the interviewer, notwithstanding their own preference. Regardless, what remains unknown (since Houston *et al.*'s experimental study only examined two seating positions) is what is the optimal position, if any, in real-life interviews for interpreters to assist with building and maintaining rapport.

Regardless of seating positions, we do not yet fully understand (since rapport studies in investigative interviews have almost exclusively focussed upon dyadic relationships) rapport in the triadic relationship such as in interviews that involves interpreters. As such, further research is required to examine this aspect.

### 4.3 Interpreter Interventions

The present study found there was no difference between the opinions of the interpreters and investigators concerning the matter of disruption by interpreters during interviews, counter to our hypothesis. Just under half of investigators believed that interpreters did not intervene during interviews, while just over half of interpreters did not find it difficult to intervene. Interpreters might be expected to defend themselves, stating that they do not affect the memorial performance of interviewees (through their necessary and understandable interruptions). Yet it is known from the extant memory literature that interpreters would likely find it very difficult to provide an accurate relay of uninterrupted interviewee accounts of substantial duration, particularly if they were not making notes (as memory aids). On the other hand, we are also aware of the established position in the literature concerning how

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interruptions adversely affect interviewee's recall (e.g., Fisher & Geiselman, 1992). However of course, in real-life situations this may never be fully known, since we would not be aware of the full memory that the interviewee has.

We are also not fully aware how well interpreters actually undertake real-life interpretations when they choose not to intervene, allowing the interviewee to speak freely (and at length). Nor are we aware as to the quality of interviewee recall if interpreters did not make (what they might consider) appropriate interventions. Despite our concerns as to their reasoning, the majority of investigators felt that interpreters were not wholly effective in their prime duty (though half said that their view depended on the interpreter's experience). Regardless of whether investigators were supportive or more cautious, what is unknown is how they arrived at such conclusions, since they would not understand the interviewee's language! Indeed, such findings may well be a legacy of the continued argument as to whether interpreters should (and can) provide entirely faithful interpretations or more nuanced versions. On the one hand, the argument proceeds that the interpreter is a passive actor, relaying information to and fro parties, as would a mechanised interpretation device (Hsieh 2006). On the other, verbatim accuracy by interpreters is argued neither desirable nor possible in order to achieve successful interpretation (Jacobsen, 2002). Hale (2002) regards such deviation as inevitable (even desirable) in order to undertake their task. However, if investigators in our survey may not be aware as to why interpreters undertake their task in this fashion in order to effect successful interpretations this may lead to such (arguably incorrect and inappropriate) misgivings concerning both accuracy (and, indeed as Wilson & Walsh, 2019, found) interpreter neutrality.

#### 4.4 Limitations of Research

The present study possessed the well-chronicled limitations concerning the usage of a self-administered questionnaire. Thus, it is recommended that future research examine planning, rapport-building and the effects of interventions (or non-interventions) through

1 observation and in more naturalistic settings (since prior research has tended to be laboratory  
2 based). Further, the present study was conducted with a single agency and therefore, the results  
3 might not be generalisable, since they may be more due to the particular context or operational  
4 framework of this agency. As such, it is suggested that further research be conducted using  
5 other criminal investigation/law enforcement agencies. That said, many of our findings run in  
6 parallel with previous studies suggesting that ours may not be unique to this agency.  
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#### 17 **4.5 Conclusion**

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19 The present study found there was some agreement concerning several key interview  
20 tasks between (and within) the two sets of professionals who took part. One exception,  
21 concerned joint planning and preparation ahead of interviews, where many of our participants  
22 either said they do not jointly participate in the task, or no consistency was found as to what  
23 such groundwork involved. This should not be too surprising given that (as far as we know)  
24 there has been no research concerning what happens, when conducting preparation and  
25 planning in mono-lingual interviews either.  
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36 While, however, investigators and interpreters each (and together) generally agreed on  
37 how interpreters can aid rapport, the findings from the study suggest that the investigators and  
38 interpreters may require further clarity as to what is good practice during such interviews. As  
39 such, if the disparity is typical of investigators and interpreters more widely (and we suspect  
40 that it might well be), a framework needs to be developed that will define how best to use  
41 interpreters during investigative interviews and how best interpreters should undertake their  
42 important duty. Given the current state of knowledge (and the increasing number of  
43 investigative interviews conducted with an interpreter present), there exists a need for further  
44 research. Such continued endeavours would enable investigators and interpreters to better  
45 understand what represents good practice in interpreter-assisted investigative interviews. The  
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primary goal of investigative interviews is the gathering of reliable and fulsome information. The present study suggests that investigators and interpreters may require further support in terms of understanding how they can achieve this goal together. A continuation of obfuscation concerning what is good practice in interpreter-assisted investigative interviews, as found in the present study, likely acts as an impediment to such an important goal.

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**Table I: Interview experience of interviewer and interpreter participants**

<b>Number of Interviews conducted</b>	<b>0-20</b>	<b>21-40</b>	<b>&gt;40</b>
Number of investigators (prior to their joining the agency)	15	5	46
Number of investigators that have conducted interpreter- assisted interviews (since joining the agency)	38	11	17
Number of investigators (since joining the agency)	28	14	24
Number of interpreters (prior to their joining the agency)	22	3	15
Number of interpreters (since joining the agency)	23	8	9

**Table II: Investigators and interpreters preferred seating positions for the interpreter**

Preferred seating positions for interpreter	% of investigators (n)	% of interpreters (n)
To sit behind the investigator	Nil	Nil
To sit behind the interviewee	2% (1)	Nil
Seating to the left of the investigator and facing the interviewee	13% (8)	5% (2)
Seating to the left of the interviewee while facing the investigator	29% (20)	7% (3)
To sit triangular formulation	26% (18)	39% (16)
To sit to the right of the interviewee facing the investigator	24% (16)	32% (13)
Seating to the right of the investigator and facing the interviewee	4% (2)	7% (3)
To sit in 'another' position	2% (1)	10% (4)



This is a very interesting and needed study as the globalization of society has increased and there is a more constant interaction between law enforcement officers and those who may speak another or multiple languages.

*Author response: Thank you*

I witnessed this myself while in law enforcement and saw how at times interpreters did not always accurately interpret what was given to them and even at times advising the accused of what to do/say.

*Author response: We also found this in our survey with investigators making the same comments. Of course, interpreters wondered how investigators came to this point given their expected unfamiliarity with the language being spoken by the interviewee and interpreter*

There were a few points of concern with your manuscript from my view; You have some dated references (from the 1990's) and used these even when you had more recent references supporting the same point, in this case the older reference is no longer needed.

*Author response: Where appropriate, older references have been deleted. Thank you for pointing this out*

In your portion on rapport building your source supported the aspects you present but, something 30 years old is not sufficient when this area does have more recent information.

*Author response: The reviewer is right in pointing out that the Tickle Degnan and Rosenthal paper was published in 1990. However, while there have been several studies conducted on rapport since then (including several by the first two authors of the present manuscript) , it is important that it is understood that the Tickle Degnan and Rosenthal paper is not a representation of current research on rapport but that their paper continues to be seen as a contemporary way of conceptualising rapport (as witnessed the many studies that continue to use their definition as a basis of measuring rapport). That is, this paper is regarded as a landmark one that today's researchers still use.*

I also did not see any literature or discussion on male/female differences in interviewing, this is very important as it will affect their approaches and techniques.

*Author response: I am afraid we draw different conclusions to that of the reviewer. The two main authors have a combined practical experience of near 50 years, alongside our academic prowess of (combined) near 40 years alongside our PhDs and around 80 publications (most of which have concerned investigative interviews) lead us firmly to the view that there are no gender differences as investigators undertake their interviewing duty. Indeed, in the last ten years the first two authors have trained over 1000 officers around the globe and we note that our training is not geared towards gender differences, nor do officers differ in their approaches according to gender. However, if the reviewer can provide a scientific evidence base for this made assertion, we would be willing to examine such evidence. However, we are not aware that any exists.*

Your investigators leaned more towards the less experienced side while your interpreters had high levels of experience.

This too can affect the outcomes.

*Author response: We tested for experience being an influential variable but found no significant differences among our results from our participants.*

One question I had was; Are interpreters randomly assigned or do investigators contact (as needed) and continually use just one or a small amount of interpreters? This use or lack thereof will affect rapport building if there is or is not experience between the two.

*Author response: Interpreters are assigned as requested by the investigation team. The paper discusses that the number of interpreters employed by the agency at the time of the study being conducted amounted to around fifty (of whom 40 took part in the survey). This agency is constantly undertaking investigations around the world. As such, most of their interviews require interpreters. Such common usage has led to the agency employing full time their own interpreters (unlike local police forces who tend have an on-call arrangement). Undoubtedly, then there will be an increased familiarity between (effectively) employees of the same agency. Whether this increases rapport levels between the two sets professionals remains speculative, but we did not examine this in any event. When we discussed rapport, we were examining the dyadic relationships in the interview between interviewer and interviewee, and wondering whether presence of the third party (i.e. the interpreter) helped build rapport between interviewer and interviewee. It is possible that an existing relationship between interviewer and interpreter may have positive effects on rapport development with the interviewee, although no research has examined this element. That said, of course regardless of any pre-existing relationship between interviewer and interpreter, the interviewee would be expected not to have any pre-existing relationship and in that regard the challenge of building rapport between interviewer and interviewee is the same for any interview*

You also mentioned the use of French or English as languages but did not specify if these were the only two languages the interpreters and investigators used.

*Author response: Indeed, we mentioned at 2.2*

*“All of the interpreters were bilingual in either English or French and at least one of another six languages”*

*Those other languages tended to be those used throughout Africa*

You also mentioned credentials, what is accepted and what is not for the interpreters as sufficient?

*Author response: As noted earlier, these interpreters are employed full time by the agency. As part of their recruitment, given the global importance of their work, it is the case, as might be expected, that interpreters (as part of the recruitment process) have to meet high standards set by the agency (that are periodically re-tested)*