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Recommendations for Interpreter Training for Asylum Interview Settings: The South Korean Case

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Abstract

The growing number of asylum applications submitted in South Korea and the recent passage of the Refugee Act (2013) call for a system for the provision of professional interpreting service and the training of interpreters for the asylum process. Although a few ad hoc training initiatives have been implemented in recent years, there is currently no training course that fulfills the requirements of the Act. This article thus aims to propose an appropriate training program for the certification of interpreters to be engaged in asylum interviews. To ensure the effectiveness of the training, the proposed training framework begins with prescreening of training candidates based on an examination of their bilingual and basic interpreting skills. In order to accommodate the specific conditions of South Korea, under which it is difficult to find candidates proficient in Korean among rare-language speakers, a separate track of intensive Korean-language training for speakers of in-demand rare languages was appended as a preparatory course to precede the main body of the training, so that those who lack Korean proficiency have training opportunities to improve their language skills prior to interpreter training. The main training program is focused on the development of interpreting skills through autonomous learning.

Keywords: interpreter training program, curriculum, interpreting skills, asylum interview, South Korea

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Interpreter Training for Asylum Interviews in South Korea

Recommendations for Interpreter Training for Asylum Interview Settings: The South Korean Case

1. Introduction

The interpreter plays a critical role in asylum interview settings in which asylum seekers must provide their accounts through interpreters.² Mistranslation can seriously hinder the ability of asylum officers to elicit accurate information and can thus impede a just determination of refugee status. Therefore, when submitting their cases to concerned authorities, asylum seekers should be provided with interpreting service from competent interpreters (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2011). Given that it is the asylum seekers who actually bear the burden of proof to show that they have a well-founded fear of prosecution, and that interpreters for refugee status determination play an important role in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps between applicants and asylum officers, there is a need to establish a system that secures the provision of interpreting by competent interpreters. As such, the UNHCR (2010) recommends that professionally trained and qualified interpreters be engaged in asylum interviews, and where this is not possible, that the authorities ensure that interpreters demonstrate at least adequate interpreting skills, such as a competent command of the relevant languages; the ability to accurately and faithfully interpret what is said by both the interviewer and the applicant without omission, addition, comment, summarizing, or embellishing; note-taking skills; and gender, age, and cultural sensitivity in interpreting. In summary, in addition to interpreting skills, interpreting during the asylum process requires an understanding of both asylum procedures and the roles of participants, sensitivity to cultural differences, and keen awareness of professional ethics (Barnett, 2006; Kolb & Pöchhacker, 2008; Monnier, 1995).

Interpreters working in asylum settings are required to faithfully interpret every utterance issued during the interview—a central tenet of the professional ethics of interpreters. They must not offer advice, provide personal opinions, or voice individual views on a matter being interpreted (Refugee Advice Center, 2010). However, interpreters working in the asylum process have often been found to prompt applicants to respond, remind them to stay on the topic, summarize testimony, or edit out seemingly irrelevant information. Some of them may even coach applicants in what to say in asylum settings (Keselman, Cederborg, Lamb, & Dahlström, 2008; Keselman, Cederborg, & Linell, 2010; Kolb & Pöchhacker, 2008; Jieun Lee, 2012a, 2014; Merlini, 2009; Pöllabauer, 2004). Researchers have attributed such deviations partly to a lack of properly trained interpreters and public officials for the asylum process, which points to the importance of training for asylum settings.

Since South Korea became a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1992, the number of asylum seekers in South Korea grew slowly until the mid-2000s (Koh, 2008), but it has increased sharply over the past decade. In 2014 alone, 2,896 asylum applications were recorded, which is almost double the figure for the previous year (Refugee pNAN, 2015). With this dramatic increase in asylum applications, the provision of quality interpreting has emerged as an urgent matter. Practices for the recruitment and training of interpreters vary by country. In the case of South Korea, where a lack of community interpreter training and certification systems has been identified (Jieun Lee, 2013; Lee, Chang, Choi, & Huh, 2014a, 2014b),

² In this article, the terms *asylum seekers* and *refugees* are used interchangeably.

Interpreter Training for Asylum Interviews in South Korea

untrained and unskilled interpreters have been allowed to perform interpreting services mainly due to insufficient budgets and practical difficulties with finding interpreters competent in languages in demand in the asylum process. Asylum applicants, refugee advocacy groups, and their legal representatives have therefore raised issues regarding the language barriers faced by asylum seekers during the interview process, including a lack of provision of interpreting and poor interpreting quality (Kim et al., 2008; Koh, 2008). Despite some progress in terms of the provision of interpreting, trust in the quality of interpreting remains lacking throughout the asylum process, from asylum interviews to asylum appeal hearings (Kim, Lee, Choi, & Ruy, 2010; S. Kim, 2013; Jaekang Lee, 2014; Jieun Lee, 2014).

Because applicants' testimony is often a central evidentiary item for the legal determination of their refugee status, the quality of the interpreting during the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) interview is critical,³ and because immigration officials play the most important role in the determination of refugee status, inadequate interpreting at the initial interview stage can pose a profoundly serious problem to the case (Cha, 2011; Jieun Lee, 2014). When the stated facts at an appeal hearing are inconsistent with earlier testimony from the initial asylum application and interview records, the court may perceive such a discrepancy as an indication of a lack of credibility in the witness/applicant. For this reason, quality interpreting, from the initial interviews by MOJ all the way to appeal hearings, is vital (Jieun Lee, 2014). Recent asylum appeal cases overturning immigration authorities' initial decisions have acknowledged potential problems during interpreter-mediated interviews and questioned the accuracy of interpreted interview records (Seoul Administrative Court 2011. 11. 10. Judgement *kuhap6493*; Seoul High Court 2012.7.26. Judgement 2011nu41818; Seoul High Court 2015.1.28. Judgement 2014nu52093).

Against this backdrop, the Refugee Act was legislated in an attempt to raise the procedural standards for the refugee status determination process in South Korea (Kim & Kim, 2012).⁴ Since taking effect in July 2013, the Refugee Act has improved the mechanisms for verifying information collected from the testimony of asylum seekers during the interview by guaranteeing seekers' right to be provided interpretation and translation services and to check and confirm their interview records (Kim, 2012). The Act also permits them to request that the entire interview be audio or video recorded. The legal provisions also call for further improvement to interpreting quality. Article 14 of the Refugee Act stipulates that an interpreter who meets the related qualifications should provide interpreting during the course of an interview. The interpreter qualifications are prescribed in Article 8 of the Enforcement Decree of the Refugee Act. According to this decree, a person with a high level of proficiency in a foreign language who has completed a training course certified by MOJ is deemed eligible for interpreting during asylum interviews and is referred to as a "professional refugee interpreter."⁵ This is a brief expression describing professional interpreters engaged in asylum settings, not necessarily interpreters from refugee backgrounds themselves. With a provision that alternative measures for interpreting can be allowed if a professional refugee interpreter is not present or if the situation is urgent, Article 8 (3) of the Enforcement Decree indicates that the status of "professional refugee interpreter" differs from that of other interpreters who have yet to complete professional refugee interpreter training. The Refugee Act recognizes the need for professional interpreters during the refugee status determination process, as well as for specific training for such interpreters by distinguishing between the MOJ-designated training for professional refugee interpreters and a separate basic induction session for bilinguals (Lee, Choi, & Bae, 2014).

The new law calls for further improvement of interpreting quality by training interpreters and engaging trained interpreters in the asylum process. MOJ is legally obliged to provide professional quality interpreting, including translation and sight translation. Article 15 of the Refugee Act guarantees asylum seekers' right to check and confirm their interview records, which requires the participation of interpreters or translators able to accurately translate the written interview record into a language the applicant understands. In order to implement this facet of the law, it is necessary to screen interpreter candidates and train those who intend to work in asylum settings, but little progress has been made to date in this regard. It remains uncertain how interpreters are to be selected and

³ The MOJ is the authority in charge of the asylum process in South Korea.

⁴ The enactment of the Refugee Act, which was hailed by the South Korean government, has been met with skepticism on the part of some international law specialists, lawyers, and activists due to its lack of procedural rights protection and insufficient budget (Im, 2012; Jaekang Lee, 2014; Oh, 2012).

⁵ The term is based on an unofficial translation by Refworld; see <http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=search&docid=5507fa5c4&skip=0&query=refugee>

Interpreter Training for Asylum Interviews in South Korea

trained as professional refugee interpreters under a training scheme recognized by the Minister of Justice. To this end, this article outlines such a potential training program, including criteria for selecting candidates and recognizing professional refugee interpreters. These recommendations are based on results from an MOJ-funded research project that was conducted from July to October 2014.

2. Training for Interpreting in Asylum Settings

In most countries that offer community interpreter training programs, training is included as part of community interpreting training, more specifically for migration-related interpreting. In the U.K. and Australia, for example, interpreter training is provided by universities. Immigration authorities are not required to offer intensive training for interpreters, but they do provide guidelines for the conduct of professional interpreters engaged in an asylum interview. Sweden provides a rare example in that it maintains a training component specific to the asylum process within its community interpreter training scheme, called “migration interpreting” (*Migrationstolkning*, formerly *Asyltolkning*), a 35-hour course module among the six that comprise the adult education interpreting training course. The module aims to foster basic knowledge and skills related to the asylum process and police interpreting under the Swedish Aliens Act, and to build intercultural competencies such as knowledge about gender, ethnicity, religion, and LGBT issues. The main contents of the module include the Swedish migration and asylum process, permit and citizenship matters, reception and integration, interpreting for children in the asylum process, interpreting technology and ethics, LGBT issues related to asylum and migration, terminology, and role playing exercises (S. Glans, personal communication, May 2014). The language of instruction is Swedish, and it is non-language-specific training (due to the limited number of trainees in minority languages, such as those frequently used by asylum seekers, training opportunities are commonly provided in non-language-specific mode). A minimum of three trainees per language stream are necessary for training purposes.

Egypt’s Cairo Community Interpreter Project (CCIP) provides systematic interpreting training in unique contexts. The project, affiliated with the American University in Cairo, began as a collaborative effort designed to address the challenges of refugee and migration fieldwork in migration transit countries (American University of Cairo, n. d.). Since 2002, CCIP has offered over 15 cycles of its interpreter training program in Egypt and over 13 interpreter training editions with refugee and migration organizations in other countries (A. Johnson, personal communication, August 2014). The training focuses on the acquisition of basic interpreting skills and the ability to perform appropriate roles in diverse contexts based on the analysis of specific situations. During the training phase, interpreting students develop analytic ability, discourse management, stress management, professional interpreting ethics, and practical skill development through role-play exercises. According to Alice Johnson, who has played a pivotal role in operating the CCIP as the program coordinator and teacher, it is a 12-week course with 120 contact hours, with some fluctuations triggered by sociopolitical factors. The language of instruction is English, and teachers instruct on interpreting between English and Amharic, Fur, Oromo, Somali, Tigrinya, and other languages in particularly high demand in the region. The program also requires a minimum of two students to facilitate practice and skill assessment. The training programs in both Egypt and Sweden admit students only after a screening process.

UNHCR (2010) recommends specific training for interpreters engaged in asylum procedures as a precondition for interpreter recruitment. It advises that training should cover the professional code of conduct for interpreters and include the following:

- the framework for international protection and the purpose of the personal interview;
- the importance of faithfully interpreting what is said by the interviewer and applicant;
- impartiality, neutrality, objectivity, and confidentiality;
- the role and proper conduct of the interpreter in the personal interview; and
- gender, age and cultural sensitivity in interpretation.

The UNHCR’s recommendations clearly indicate that interpreting in asylum procedures should be in accordance with community interpreters’ professional codes of ethics. ISO 13611, an international standard for community interpreting established by the International Standards Organization (ISO), also includes provisions concerning the role of interpreters in the asylum process. The ISO (2014) specifies that if requested to do so or

Interpreter Training for Asylum Interviews in South Korea

when possible, interpreters may interrupt in order to point out the existence of a cultural barrier, for example a cultural custom, health belief, or practice, when such a cultural barrier could result in miscommunication or misunderstanding. Care should be taken not to provide explanations, but to clearly identify the misunderstanding so that end users can explore and clarify it with one another. Due to linguistic and cultural differences, misunderstandings in communication between asylum seekers and immigration interviewers are likely (Good, 2007; Jacquement, 2011; Maryns, 2006; Maryns & Blommaert, 2001). In order to prevent potential or apparent cultural misunderstandings, interpreters should be sensitive to cultural differences that may hinder communication, but the extent of interpreters' mediation in asylum interviews is generally restricted (Australian Government Migration Review Tribunal and Refugee Review Tribunal, 2014; Refugee Advice Center, 2010). The ISO (2014) also makes it clear that the interpreter's role should be limited to interpreting, without offering opinions or advice (even when requested to do so) or acting as an advocate. Given the importance of the role of the interpreter in the asylum process, interpreter training programs must include components on building trainees' awareness about interpreters' professional role and ethics.

3. Training Programs in South Korea

In South Korea, there is no legally established interpreter certification system, and there are only limited opportunities for community interpreter training in general (Lee, 2013; Lee et al., 2014a, 2014b). In order to address problems with the quality of interpreting arising from interpreters' lack of skills and training (e.g., Kim et al., 2008; Lee, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2014), some initiatives have been undertaken to train interpreters specifically for asylum settings. As background for the research project described, this article briefly discusses short-term training programs in South Korea focused on interpreting in asylum settings, in which the first author has participated as an interpreter trainer.

Two one-off training programs were organized under the auspices of MOJ, one in 2012 and one in 2013. The 2012 program was funded jointly by MOJ and UNHCR, whereas the program offered in late 2013 was funded solely by MOJ. In mid 2013, there was an additional training program jointly organized by the UNHCR, Dongcheon (a Korean public interest law firm), and the Graduate School of Translation and Interpretation (GSTI) of Ewha Womans University.

3.1. MOJ Training Initiative

To qualify for the MOJ training, native Korean-speaking (NS) applicants had to be capable of interpreting and translating between Korean and one or more languages among the 30 languages for which interpreters were being sought. Nonnative speakers of Korean (NNS) were required to demonstrate native-level proficiency in one or more of these 30 languages, and also to be capable of interpreting and translating to and from Korean or English.⁶ MOJ screened the applicants and selected 64 out of 82 for the 2012 program.

People without interpreting experience often mistakenly believe that if an individual is capable of conducting a conversation in a foreign language, he or she would be similarly capable of interpreting. This misconception was reflected in the process of trainee selection by MOJ officials. Candidates were selected based on interviews conducted in Korean, without any testing of their potential interpreting skills. It was revealed only later, during the in-class interpreting exercises, that many candidates lacked the bilingual abilities required to deliver a message accurately in another language. Nevertheless, upon completion of the program, all of the enrolled trainees were endorsed by MOJ as professional refugee interpreters. (This raises questions regarding official recognition under the new Refugee Act, but the related legal implications will not be discussed here.)

⁶ MOJ official notice no. 2012-50 (accessible in Korean at http://immigration.go.kr/HP/COM/bbs_003/ListShowData.do?strNbodCd=noti3090&strWrtNo=186&strAnsNo=A&strFilePat h=imm/&strRtnURL=IMM_3090&strOrgGbnCd=104000)

Interpreter Training for Asylum Interviews in South Korea

The first program, held in March 2012, was initiated by a legal firm, Dongcheon, and co-sponsored by UNHCR Korea and MOJ. MOJ officials, lawyers, and NGO workers from Dongcheon, a representative of UNHCR Korea, and the first author participated as interpreting trainers. The 9-hour program was divided into two sessions composed of lectures, interpreting exercises, discussion, and a knowledge test. In the first session, training was conducted mainly through lectures on the fundamentals of interpreting for asylum seekers, the definition of refugee status, the legal procedures for refugee status determination, terminology, and certain practical matters regarding the asylum interview setting. The second session was a mix of lectures and practical exercises on dialogue interpreting. It culminated in a short test on refugee terminology and with role-play exercises aimed at instilling a code of conduct in the interpreting trainees.

The trainees were either already working or planning to work as interpreters in the asylum process and/or related legal assistance services. They were divided into two classes according to their level of Korean proficiency, and lessons were conducted in both Korean and English in order to support the learning of those with weaker Korean skills. Due to the large class size (over 30 people per class), only a limited number of participants gained a chance to perform in-class interpreting and receive feedback from the instructor, which was a major shortcoming of the program.

With the demand for interpreting services in asylum interviews continuing to rise in 2013, there was a call for additional MOJ-endorsed interpreters. As a result, a second MOJ-led training program for interpreters was initiated with expanded coverage of service languages. Given the situation in Syria, there was an acute demand for Korean–Arabic interpreters at the time. Eighteen trainees took part in this training program in 2013.

The program was split into two consecutive sessions of 4 and 5 hours, respectively. The majority of the trainees were practicing interpreters working for MOJ, but they did not have formal training. Because the group included trainees from local immigration offices outside of Seoul, the first session was held locally at respective immigration offices under their own training agenda on refugee policy and legal terminology. The second session was conducted at the MOJ building in Seoul and included the participation of all trainees from across the country. It consisted of lectures on the legal procedures involved in the granting of refugee status, legal terminology, and the code of professional ethics, followed by an additional 2 hours of interpreting exercises. Although the class size was smaller than in the previous year, it was still considered as too short to cover interpreting theories and ethical issues within the limited time frame, not to mention the difficulty of providing sufficient practice opportunities to each trainee.

From the interpreter trainer's perspective, there was unfortunately a serious issue with the linguistic capacity of the participants. The majority of the NS participants were incapable of interpreting a message accurately into their target languages, whereas the NNS participants, despite some of them claiming to be bilinguals, often struggled with performing sight translation because their reading in the Korean language lagged behind their speaking skills. The training was also non-language-specific, with Korean as a pivot. Given the combination of these disparities in linguistic abilities with the large number of trainees, it was difficult to conduct skill training effectively. As was the case in the previous year's program, the trainees had not been previously tested on their interpreting skills; they were already working in regional immigration offices as interpreters but still required basic training as interpreters. This situation clearly demonstrated a lack of understanding that the development of interpreting skill is an essential part of interpreter training. It also pointed to an urgent need to incorporate assessment of interpreting skills as a critical step in the training program for ensuring service quality. This failure to recognize the importance of the aptitude and bilingual skills required for interpreting stemmed from the lack of consultation with interpreter trainers during the preparatory stages of the training program.

3.2. Dongcheon–UNHCR–Ewha GSTI Joint Training Program

In the second half of 2013, a joint training program was organized by Dongcheon, UNHCR, and Ewha GSTI. Recognizing that learning and acquiring interpreting skills requires more than simply a few hours' training, the curriculum for this joint program was designed to span 34 class hours over the course of 6 weeks. It differed from the MOJ initiatives preceding it in that more hours were allocated to interpreting practice, on top of lectures on terminology and legal procedures related to the refugee status determination process. The target group for the training was conceived as either those who had completed one of the two MOJ training initiatives and wished to pursue refresher training, or those interested in working as interpreters in asylum settings who could demonstrate a

Interpreter Training for Asylum Interviews in South Korea

mid-to-high level of proficiency in their working languages. Unfortunately, however, many training candidates were once again admitted despite failing to meet such qualifications. In addition, because the majority of the trainees were NNSs with relatively weak Korean-language skills (with the exception of a few Korean–Arabic interpreters), there was a need to enhance their Korean proficiency as part of the interpreter training. A separate module for the Korean language was thus introduced to the curriculum. In a nutshell, unlike its predecessors, the joint training program featured a stronger focus on interpreting skills and Korean proficiency. As a result, a more balanced and effective curriculum was created in three modules: basic understanding of legal assistance for refugees, interpreting practice, and Korean language (Table 1).

Table 1. Curriculum of the Dongcheon-UNHCR-Ewha GSTI joint training program

Week	Modules		
	Basic understanding of legal assistance for refugees	Interpreting practice	Korean
1	UNHCR and refugee protection	Interpreting 101	Korean I
2	Refugee status determination in Korea	Dialogue interpreting	Korean II
3	Refugee terminology	Consecutive interpreting	Korean III
4	Code of conduct for refugee interpreters	Sight translation	Korean IV
5	Role playing	Interpreting Exercise I (Relay interpreting)	Korean V
6	-	Interpreting Exercise II, Assessment	-

As can be seen in Table 1, the most distinctive feature of the joint program was the introduction of interpreting-skills assessment at the end of the program. Due to the lack of any such assessment in the previous short-term training courses, service users had no means to be apprised of the level of competency of their interpreters. In this program, however, information regarding the interpreters' skills was made available, as the assessment results were kept and made available for service users. The trainees themselves were also provided with feedback on their test performance from their Korean-language and interpreting teachers in the form of instructor comments on the back of their graduation certificates.

Despite the above-mentioned enhancements to the curriculum, challenges remained in the recruitment and screening of training candidates. Many applicants did not possess the necessary qualifications; many demonstrated only a limited command of Korean. The NGO responsible for recruiting trainees was not appropriately stringent in terms of the Korean-language requirement for trainees, and the interpreter trainer was not sufficiently consulted during the trainee screening process. Due to the weak linguistic competency of some trainees, it became difficult to teach even the most basic interpreting skills, and doubts arose regarding the effectiveness of the program. It is therefore strongly advised that candidates be selected based upon a rigorous screening process and that precautionary steps be taken to prevent the admission of trainees who lack bilingual proficiency. However, some exceptions should be allowed for minority-language speakers among whom it may be extremely difficult to find fluent Korean speakers. Because there is a need to provide interpreting services in these minority languages during the refugee status determination process, it is unavoidable to offer speakers of such languages training despite their falling short of the required Korean proficiency. In sum, although a training program should seek highly proficient bilinguals as its candidates, it is also important to remain open to minority-language speakers with

Interpreter Training for Asylum Interviews in South Korea

limited Korean proficiency. Without a doubt, training may be more effective if the trainees are grouped according to their linguistic abilities and provided with customized training.

This review of the interpreter training initiatives implemented to date in South Korea reveals certain issues and challenges. First of all, there is a lack of systematic training opportunities for prospective interpreters for asylum settings. The previous training initiatives were primarily one-off and short term. Their curricula focused on the unilateral transfer of specialized domain knowledge and can hardly be recognized as proper interpreter training curricula due to the lack of interpreting practice components. Screening prior to training and assessment upon the completion of the training are required in order to support the intended training outcomes.

4. A New Training Model for Professional Refugee Interpreters

As mentioned above, the newly enacted Refugee Act mandates formal training of would-be interpreters prior to their official nomination as professional refugee interpreters. Unfortunately, however, prior training arrangements have lacked the necessary rigor, and the trainees who completed the programs often fell short of the interpreting skills required to fulfill the legal requirements. Hence, MOJ commissioned a research project directed at the development of a new interpreter training program.

As a first step, a review of the related literature and interviews with foreign experts were conducted as a means to gather information on the current practices in training and certifying interpreters in the public sector in general, with a special focus on the training and accreditation of interpreters working in asylum settings in Australia, U.K., Sweden, and the Netherlands. To gain a clear local perspective as well, a review was conducted of several emerging training programs for community interpreters in Korea in the areas of legal interpreting, medical interpreting, and interpreting for marriage migrants (e.g., Kwak, 2010; Lee, 2013; Lee et al., 2014b). (See Sections 2 and 3 for discussion of these findings.)

The training model subsequently proposed was devised from a broader point of view, taking into account all the relevant elements required for nurturing a pool of qualified prospective interpreters for engagement in the asylum process. Unlike the preceding short-term training initiatives, the suggested training model consists of multiple stages, beginning with a prescreening of the applicants, progressing to testing and certification of graduates, and finally deployment in the field. In other words, the proposed model not only focuses on training per se, but also includes a framework for testing and certification. This represents a marked divergence from existing training arrangements which primarily provide brief, lecture-type lessons on domain knowledge without proper screening or testing of trainees' bilingual proficiency and interpreting technique, and thus lack measures for managing and assuring the quality of interpreting service.

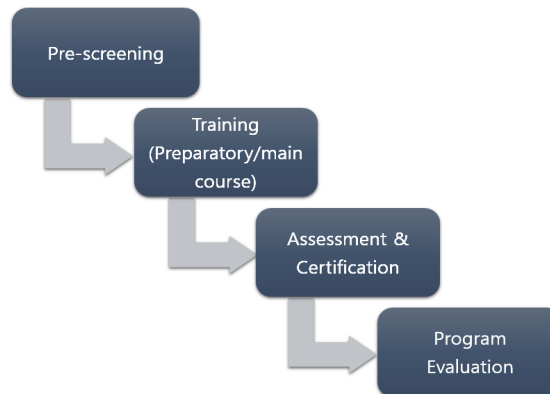
In order to maximize the benefits of training within the constraints of limited time and budget, it was deemed critical to promote self-disciplined and autonomous learning. Trainees themselves are encouraged to build their knowledge base and acquire know-how, while instructors provide supervision and scaffolding for learning. In other words, the proposed training program demonstrates strong elements of social constructivism. For example, interactivity is clearly emphasized in all classes, with teachers refraining from delivering instruction unilaterally and instead promoting a learning environment conducive to student participation. Trainees are encouraged to share their knowledge and opinions in support of the learning experiences of their peers.

With a learner-centered, social constructivist approach as its key training philosophy, the new training program is designed to be delivered in a blended learning format. *Blended learning* refers to a training methodology in which traditional classroom-type teaching is complemented by online learning activities (Secară, Merten, & Ramirez, 2009). Because the bulk of the trainees for the new program are projected to be working adults, it is not feasible to deliver training over extended continuous blocks of time. A short-term arrangement is equally inappropriate, given that properly acquiring interpreting techniques requires more time than a few weeks (except in the cases of accomplished bilinguals). Interpreter training programs in other parts of the world faced with a similar challenge have also found a solution through blended learning (e.g., Middlesex University and London Metropolitan University in the UK). Benefits of this approach include self-paced learning, so students can adjust the pace of their learning or even repeat the activity as many times as they wish. Convenient and individualized

Interpreter Training for Asylum Interviews in South Korea

access to training materials and additional interpreting practice opportunities compound its value. The overall structure and flow of the proposed training program is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Overview of the proposed training model



4.1. Screening of Trainees

The recruitment and selection of qualified training candidates is a critical first step toward ensuring the effectiveness of an MOJ training program and managing the quality of the interpreting services provided by its graduates. The screening criteria proposed for the new training program are three-pronged: legal status requirements, aptitude, and basic interpreting skills.

Legal status requirements are the fundamental standard for determining the eligibility of a candidate. An individual applying to the training program must be a Korean national or a foreigner with legal residency status. Generally, permanent residency is required for service as a legal interpreter in many parts of the world. However, this type of legal requirement would be too strict for application to the special circumstances of refugee status determination, where there is frequent demand for interpreting in rare languages but it can be extremely difficult to find candidates with permanent residency status to serve as interpreters.

Training candidates must be prepared to render services professionally in accordance with a code of ethics, and their demeanor and attitude may be subject to scrutiny during the screening stage. Korean and foreign-language proficiency tests and oral interviews assess aptitude for the program.

The most important consideration in the prescreening process is a candidate's basic interpreting skills. Candidates who are Korean native speakers must establish intermediate-to-advanced-level proficiency in their foreign working language. Any Korean national or foreign citizen whose native language is not Korean must provide evidence of Korean proficiency equal to or above Grade 5 on the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK), a standardized Korean proficiency test recognized by the Korean government. Candidates in rare minority languages with relatively weak Korean proficiency should be accepted to the program, however, as long as their level of Korean is equivalent to TOPIK Grade 4 or above. Rare-language speakers who do not meet this Korean proficiency standard may be referred to a preparatory course focused on advancing their proficiency prior to being allowed to join the training program. Those who meet these criteria may sit an entrance examination that assesses both bilingual and basic interpreting skills, based on the candidates' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in their working languages.

The number of trainees accepted into the program depends on the available training budget and the language combinations in demand. There should be no more than 15 participants per class, because in a larger group it is difficult to allow individual students sufficient opportunities to engage in practice exercises. As for language pairs, it is necessary to keep track of the variance in the national makeup of the asylum seekers over time and make adjustments to the language combinations for which training is offered.

Interpreter Training for Asylum Interviews in South Korea

4.2. Training

4.2.1. Preparatory course

Under the proposed model, training is offered in two sequential but separate tracks of preparatory and main courses. This dual structure was adopted to accommodate the limited number of bilinguals with an appropriate command of Korean. One of the key principles of the new training model is to admit as trainees only those demonstrating strong bilingual skills. However, as discussed above, the reality of the situation is such that it is often difficult to find a rare-language speaker who is fluent in Korean. In such cases, *relay interpreting*, in which interpreting takes place through the pivot language of English, can be the only available option. This will serve over the short term to meet interpreting service demand in rare languages, but the long-term goal remains establishing a reliable pool of bilinguals with strong Korean proficiency. The preparatory course is designed to encourage foreign nationals, especially rare-language speakers, to apply for the interpreter training program, by helping them obtain Korean proficiency sufficient for entrance to the main course. Accordingly, the objective of the preparatory course is to deliver intensive Korean language training.

The proposed preparatory course is aimed at providing 40 hours of class over a period of 10 weeks and is offered to trainee candidates whose Korean proficiency is TOPIK Grade 4 or lower. The Korean-language subjects delivered in the preparatory course cover the four fundamental linguistic skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In pursuit of maximum efficiency, the subjects are offered in a modular manner to allow enrolling students to choose the subjects they will study. This eclectic scheme was proposed based on the observation that on top of the variability of their Korean proficiency, candidates for training often lack balance across their various linguistic skills. Such a module-based arrangement is expected to allow students to concentrate on their areas of need.

Toward the end, successful students who demonstrate marked progress in their Korean proficiency during the course may be offered additional training in basic interpreting techniques. This will allow the preparatory course to be better aligned with the main course while providing the trainees a strong incentive toward learning. Given that the minimum Korean proficiency required for entry to the main course is TOPIK Grade 5, all students must prove upon graduation that they have achieved the required level. Students with high scores may be granted an exemption from sitting the entrance exam for the main course, which serves as a means to attract a greater number of potential candidates to the preparatory course and to motivate the students once enrolled.

In selecting and formulating training materials for the preparatory course, it is important to use linguistic materials that have a direct bearing on the domain of specialized interpreting for asylum seekers. For example, texts, audio/visual materials, and scenarios used in role plays must be derived from authentic, refugee-related situations. Also of great importance is collaboration with the Korean-language teachers. Because the preparatory course targets individuals learning Korean as a second language, instructors specializing in teaching Korean as a second language should be included among the faculty or be consulted regularly throughout the course.

4.2.2. Main course

The main course is proposed to run over 9 weeks with a total of 68 hours of both face-to-face and online classes. A detailed breakdown of the main course is shown in Table 2.

Interpreter Training for Asylum Interviews in South Korea

Table 2. Proposed training model for professional refugee interpreters

Mode	Subject	Training hours	Note
Offline	Interpreting	24	Interpreting-degree holders are exempted.
	Thematic lecture	13	-
	Supervised practicum	4	-
Online	Korean	18	Korean natives or native-level speakers are exempted.
	Interpreting practice & glossary-building assignments	9	Interpreting-degree holders are exempted.
Total		Max. 68	-

Off-line training includes 24 hours of interpreting, 13 hours of thematic lectures, and 4 hours of a supervised practicum. Interpreting and thematic lectures are scheduled for 5 hours per day on weekends, out of which 3 hours are allocated to interpreting followed by a 2-hour thematic lecture. An online mode is proposed for Korean language training and interpreting-related assignments. Eighteen hours of Korean lessons and 9 hours of autonomous interpreting practice and glossary-building assignments are to be delivered online. Korean NS trainees are allowed to opt out of Korean lessons and therefore may receive a total of 50 hours of training. Likewise, trainees who already hold an interpreting degree may be excused from all interpreting lessons and simply enroll in the remainder of the course. As is illustrated in the breakdown of the training hours, the face-to-face off-line training is the main pillar of the proposed training model, and the online lessons are a supplementary component. In addition to online and off-line classes and activities, students make field visits to observe professional refugee interpreters at work during a 4-hour supervised practicum.

In interpreting training, the core of the curriculum, practice hours mainly consist of student participation rather than lectures delivered by an instructor. An ideal learning environment for an interpreting class is one in which trainees perform interpreting of a source text into a target text under the supervision of an instructor who is also a professional interpreter, along with an ensuing interactive feedback session featuring open discussion with the instructor and among students regarding interpreting errors and suggestions for improved expressions. For the sake of effective transfer of the procedural knowledge involved in the job, the instructor may occasionally perform interpreting as a form of demonstration. Among the various modes of interpreting, the proposed training model focuses on short consecutive interpreting, dialogue interpreting, and sight translation—the most frequently requested forms of service in the refugee status determination process. To maximize the training benefits within the limited time allowed, online activities through which more detailed feedback can be supplied by both the instructor and student peers can supplement face-to-face classes.

The program includes thematic lectures that deliver domain-specific knowledge, helping trainees to acquire bilingual glossaries of terms and expressions. As with interpreting lessons, interactivity during the thematic lectures allows active discussions to take place among class participants as they share information and opinions. Topics covered in thematic lectures include the refugee status determination process and refugee law, legal assistance for and protection of refugees, and interpreter stress management and emotional well-being—which is particularly important in this training context (see Splevins, Cohen, Joseph, Murray, & Bowley, 2010). Because asylum-interview interpreters deal with refugee narratives that often include accounts of traumatic experiences,

Interpreter Training for Asylum Interviews in South Korea

the job can be emotionally taxing, particularly so for those who have refugee backgrounds themselves. It is therefore necessary to instruct them in how to manage work-related stress and nurture their emotional well-being.

Aside from in-class role plays in which trainees can simulate real interview settings, the supervised practicum offers trainees the opportunity to experience work as a professional interpreter. Trainees may visit immigration offices where asylum interviews are conducted and observe interpreted asylum interviews. Field visits may be followed by debriefing sessions allowing trainees to discuss what they have seen in terms of issues and challenges arising in the actual interpreting environment. With the supervised practicum, trainees can learn how to better cope with some of the difficulties related to interpreting in asylum interview settings and become better prepared for their future employment.

As mentioned earlier, two subjects are projected to be delivered online: Korean language instruction and interpreting-related assignments. Over the course of the 9-week program, 2-hour weekly Korean lessons are offered online. Trainees are asked to read or listen to a text and perform a task based on the linguistic input. They are then provided with an instructor's feedback as scaffolding for their learning of comprehension skills and expressions in Korean. Online Korean lessons take a variety of formats, including pronunciation clinics, listening tests, and online discussion.

Interpreting-related assignments constitute the other leg of the online training component. Specifically, in interpreting practice assignments, trainees are asked to collect texts and materials for interpreting exercises and submit recordings of their interpreting performances. This is expected to inspire autonomous and reflective learning while providing the trainees with more individualized attention through detailed feedback on their interpreting performance. Following each thematic lecture, trainees complete glossary-building assignments for which they compile a bilingual glossary and collect parallel texts on the topic in question and share them with the other students, to encourage interactive learning within the group.

4.3. Assessment, certification, and program evaluation

To be recognized as having officially completed the program, in addition to a skill test, trainees must have met the specified graduation standards, including 90% required class attendance and the submission of all assignments. Summative assessment is recommended because it encourages self-study and enables quality control of the graduates, as well as providing input for program evaluation. Under the proposed training program, the skill test serves the twin purposes of evaluating trainee achievement upon program completion and granting official recognition as professional refugee interpreters on the basis of test scores. The composition of the skill test is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Overview of the skill test

Skill test variable	Korean	Interpreting
Mode	Written	Oral
Score weight	20%	80%
Test task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple-choice questions • Short essay writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sight translation (100 words each) • Consecutive interpreting (1 minute each) • Dialog interpreting (6–8 minutes)

As illustrated in Table 3, the test consists of two parts: Korean (allocated 20% percent of the total score) and interpreting (80%). For the Korean test, test takers are first required to answer multiple-choice questions, written in Korean, about their knowledge of refugee status determination procedures. They then write a short essay in Korean on an open-ended ethics question related to interpreting in asylum interview settings. The interpreting test consists of sight translation, consecutive interpreting, and dialogue interpreting in both language directions. The

Interpreter Training for Asylum Interviews in South Korea

formation of a jury for the assessment of interpreting performance during the test is advised, ideally consisting of an examiner capable of assessing the foreign language in question along with an interpreting teacher or a practicing interpreter with sufficient teaching experience.

It is proposed that those scoring 70% or higher on the graduation test be officially certified as “professional refugee interpreters” under the Refugee Act, whereas those in the range of 60%–70% be recognized as “refugee interpreter candidates” with an opportunity to sit a retest after a predetermined lapse of time, before they are officially inducted. Only those certified as professional refugee interpreters should be allowed the legal status under the Refugee Act to interpret in refugee status determination procedures. However, in the case of a shortage of interpreters for certain language combinations, refugee interpreter candidates may be allowed to be deployed. This dual-qualification system is recommended as a means to fully utilize the human resources who have received formal training while informing service users of the qualifications or level of competence of the interpreters with whom they are working.

5. Conclusions

The growing number of asylum applications being submitted in South Korea and the passage of the Refugee Act call for a system for the provision of professional interpreting service and the training of interpreters for the asylum process. The Act mandates the use of “professional refugee interpreters” who have completed a training course recognized by the MOJ and been certified as such under the Act. Although a few ad hoc training initiatives have been implemented in recent years, there is currently no training course that fulfills the requirements of the Act. One-off, short-term programs developed without sufficient consultation with interpreting professionals and interpreter trainers have failed to deliver effective training, and no means are available for service quality management in terms of the provision of interpreting service to asylum seekers.

It should be noted that training and certifying professional interpreters must be performed from the outset in close consultation with interpreting experts (Amato & Garwood, 2011). All of the previous ad hoc programs implemented in South Korea were headed by individuals without a particular understanding of professional interpreting. In training and certifying professional refugee interpreters, interpreting experts must be involved and consulted from the design phase all the way to training delivery and program evaluation.

The MOJ-commissioned study is critical both for the effective enforcement of the Refugee Act and for the provision of quality interpreting service to asylum seekers in South Korea. To ensure the effectiveness of the training, the proposed training framework begins with prescreening of training candidates based on an examination of their bilingual and basic interpreting skills. In order to accommodate the specific conditions of South Korea, under which it is difficult to find candidates proficient in Korean among rare-language speakers, a separate track of intensive Korean language training for speakers of in-demand rare languages who lack Korean proficiency was appended as a preparatory course to precede the main body of the training. The main course is focused on the development of interpreting skills through autonomous learning. Most importantly, in order to meet the goals of the newly enacted Refugee Act, the proposed training program includes assessment and certification of trainees via a rigorous skills test.

Although the study discussed here was initiated upon MOJ’s request, it remains unclear whether the proposed program will be fully actualized, due to a lack of government funding. Still, there is a need to raise awareness, not only within MOJ but also among service users, of the need for and importance of nurturing qualified and competent interpreters in order to ensure fairness throughout the refugee status determination process. Therefore, a critical next step is to secure funding to initiate the program from the government budget and through financial contributions from related stakeholders. It is hoped that although this article deals with the South Korean case, the training model described here may be of use in other contexts.

Interpreter Training for Asylum Interviews in South Korea

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