

Translation in the process of immigration for Syrian refugees in Canada

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## **ABSTRACT**

Translation in the process of immigration for Syrian refugees in Canada

Vanya Mladenova

In this thesis the main focus is on one chapter of the history of immigrants to Canada: that of the Syrian refugees. The civil war in Syria and the national immigration plan for assisting Syrian refugees in their migration and resettlement in Canada motivated me to consider the needs for translation and interpretation on migrants seeking asylum and refugee status in Canada. I have drawn on themes and insights from the translation and interpretation studies literature to address my study. The thesis also reflects on subjects and issues that are addressed and examined by scholarship in the interdisciplinary disciplines of migration studies and oral history. By investigating the actual migration process and Canadian five-phase Syrian refugee plan, and by identifying the points where translation and interpreting would occur, and interviewing the Syrian refugees, it was proven that translation and interpreting needs were present and were met by unofficial and official translators and interpreters – in addition to automatic machine translation. The purpose of the research was not only to clarify translation and interpreting services as they are required in the refugee migration process, but also to ascertain whether they generally met the needs of refugees as they settled into life in Canada.

## Résumé

Translation in the process of immigration for Syrian refugees in Canada

[La traduction et le processus d'immigration pour les réfugiés syriens au Canada]

Vanya Mladenova

Dans le cadre de ce mémoire, l'accent est mis sur un seul chapitre de l'histoire des immigrants au Canada : celui des réfugiés syriens. La guerre civile en Syrie et le plan national d'immigration pour aider les réfugiés syriens dans leur migration et leur réinstallation au Canada m'ont motivé à considérer les besoins de traduction et d'interprétation pour les migrants qui demandent l'asile et le statut de réfugié au Canada. Mon étude puise certains thèmes et idées de la littérature sur les études de traduction et d'interprétation tout au long de la recherche. Le mémoire constitue également une réflexion sur des sujets et des problèmes qui sont abordés et examinés par la recherche dans les disciplines interdisciplinaires des études sur la migration et l'histoire orale. En faisant une recherche sur le processus de migration proprement dit et sur le plan « Opération visant les réfugiés syriens » mis en place au Canada, et en identifiant les points où la traduction et l'interprétation auraient lieu et en interrogeant les réfugiés syriens, il a été prouvé que les besoins de traduction et d'interprétation étaient présents et étaient satisfaits par des traducteurs et interprètes non officiels et officiels - en plus de la traduction automatique. Le but de la recherche était non seulement de clarifier les services de traduction et d'interprétation tels qu'ils sont requis dans le processus de migration des réfugiés, mais aussi de déterminer s'ils répondaient généralement aux besoins des réfugiés lorsqu'ils s'installaient au Canada.

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## **Introduction**

Why investigate translation and the migration experience? My interest in translation grew into a passion when I was still living in my native Bulgaria. Although the moment of connection between translation and languages happened a long time ago, I still retain a vivid memory of it. It was my first encounter with foreign languages. I was on a family vacation near the Black Sea in Bulgaria, when we met a British couple looking for a pharmacy. I was about eight years old and with the few English words I had learned at school, I somehow managed to show them the way to their destination. I was happy, and proud of myself for being able to help someone else with my language abilities at the time. From that moment on I had a new passion: to learn as many languages as possible in order to help other people understand each other. It was still not clear to me then what my future profession would be, but I knew I wanted to be a translator. As an immigrant myself, and passionate about translation, I was always interested in the process of immigration. Prior to my arrival here in Canada my parents were the ones completing all the necessary documents for immigration. It was carried out with the help of a translator. Upon our arrival in Montreal, the situation was reversed. They spoke very little French, and so they needed and relied on me as their personal translator.

The migration context has continued to be a source of inspiration for me, including when it involves situations of violent conflict. Widely mediatized and analyzed, the civil war in Syria motivated me to consider its concrete ramifications on migrants seeking asylum and refugee status in Canada. An opportunity presented itself as a result of my employment at a daycare in Montreal, where I met a Syrian family, specifically a young woman by the name of Christel, who had immigrated to Canada for safety in order to stay alive. Christel was my colleague, but she

also became my ‘sister’. Through her eyes and those of her little daughter I was able to empathize and familiarize myself with what was happening in Syria and to understand how refugees succeed in their efforts to come to Canada. This knowledge stimulated my curiosity as a translation studies student and inspired me to pursue my Masters thesis on the topic of translation and its relation to the process of immigration for Syrian refugees into Canada.

This thesis reflects on subjects and issues that are addressed and examined by scholarship in several different disciplines, including the interdisciplinary disciplines of migration studies, oral history, and of translation studies itself. From the perspective of translation, the nexus of translation studies, migration studies, and oral history is neither a common nor developed one, neither conceptually nor in practice. I have attempted to explore what the bridges between these disciplines might yield in terms of disciplinary contextualization in relation to a specific group’s experience. Equally important, as we regularly see in migrant literary writing, are the actual voices and narratives of those who have undergone the physical, mental, and emotional experiences associated with immigration. There are many additional paths that could be taken, and with further investigation, lead to more insights and understanding of the complexities involved. For the purposes of this Masters thesis, however, I focus on only one ‘chapter’ of many possible ones in the history of immigrants to Canada: that of the Syrian refugees. It began with a series of basic questions. Was the immigration process legally the same for everyone? At what points of the process was translation or interpretation offered or needed? What could the Syrian refugees tell me about their experiences with translators or interpreters? What topics on migration had been discussed in translation studies literature until this point in time? My research for the thesis led me to read general literature in several different areas that proved to be relevant in some way to the Syrian refugee context. They include migration studies and migrant literature;

translation and interpreting (T&I) practices and services; perspectives on migration through the optic of translation studies; oral history and interviewing; and government reports. The research and interviews for the thesis were conducted in 2019. Since then, more works on the Syrian refugee migration and resettlement, and on issues concerning migration and translation in general, have emerged.

I begin my thesis by presenting a brief summary of the categories of migration policy in Canada, both for general immigration and more specifically for refugees. An overview of the current translation studies and interpreting studies (TIS) literature relevant to migration follows. I then proceed to map out the main points of the Canadian “Operation Syrian Refugees” migration process, indicating where translation and interpreting services would be needed. I explore the roles of translators and interpreters in light of some of the important issues and questions raised in the literature. For instance, in what situations can immigrants count on the provision of official translation and interpreting services? When and how are translation and interpreting needs fulfilled in the absence of official services? Finally, I discuss how I investigated refugee translation and interpreting by conducting interviews with Syrian refugees who arrived in Canada at the start of the war in Syria. My goal was not only to clarify translation and interpreting services as they are required in the refugee migration process, but also to ascertain whether they generally met the needs of refugees as they settled into life in Canada.

## **I. Chapter One: Migrating to Canada as a refugee**

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the term ‘migration’ functions as “an umbrella term, one not defined under international law and reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons” (2020). An ‘immigrant’, simply put: “From the perspective of the country of arrival [is] a person who moves into a country other than that of his or her nationality or usual residence, so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence” (definition adapted from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1 (1998) p. 10, by the IOM, 2020). Yet, while the term ‘(im)migrant’ is relatively broad in meaning in terms of its general definition, the legal categories and sub-categories associated with the term are far from ambiguous and homogenous. In this chapter and for purposes of contextualization I present the basic immigration categories of migration as they relate to Canada. This overview of the official, legal process of immigration to Canada helps us understand how the diverse categories of ‘immigrant’ differ and what specifically constitutes the category of ‘refugee’. What basic steps and requirements do refugees need to respect and fulfill?

### **I.1: Basic categories of immigration to Canada**

According to the Government of Canada, there are eleven different types of immigrants grouped into the following four main categories: (1) Family-related; (2) Economic; (3) Other / Humanitarian; and (4) Refugee (Classification of admission category of immigrant, Statistics Canada, 2019). Correspondingly, the federal government currently has eleven different

application programs in place. They guide and facilitate Canada’s immigration process. They are summarized in the table below:

<b>TYPE OF APPLICATION PROGRAM</b>	<b>TYPE OF IMMIGRANT AND PROCESSING TIME</b>
<p><b>Express Entry for skilled workers</b>  <i>(“Immigrant through Express Entry”,</i>            Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022)</p>	<p>The immigrant can apply outside of Canada for this program. The assessment is based on education, language skills and work experience. The processing time is 6 months, and the applicant receives permanent resident status.</p>
<p><b>Provincial Nominees</b>  <i>(“Immigrant as a Provincial Nominee”,</i>            Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022)</p>	<p>The immigrant can apply outside of Canada for this program. The application is completed through the Express Entry Program of the province or territory the applicant wishes to immigrate to. The processing time is also 6 months, and the applicant receives permanent resident status.</p>
<p><b>Atlantic Immigration Pilot</b>  <i>(“Atlantic Immigration Pilot”,</i>            Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022)</p>	<p>The immigrant can apply inside Canada upon graduation from a school or on a work visa in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, or Newfoundland and Labrador. The processing time is also 6 months, and the</p>

	applicant receives permanent resident status.
<p><b>Start-up Visa</b>  (<i>Start-up Visa Program</i>”, Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022)</p>	<p>This program is intended for applicants who have the potential and enough money to start a business in Canada and create jobs for Canadians. The immigrant can apply inside or outside of Canada. The processing time is from 12 to 16 months and the applicant receives permanent resident status.</p>
<p><b>Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot</b>  (<i>Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot</i>”, Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022)</p>	<p>The immigrant can apply inside or outside of Canada once the requirements set out by the participating community are met. International students are also allowed to apply upon completing a post-secondary degree in one of the participating communities. The pilot opened to applicants for permanent residency in 2019. The processing time varies, and the applicant receives permanent resident status.</p>
<p><b>Family Sponsorship</b>  (<i>Family Sponsorship</i>”, Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022)</p>	<p>This program allows a Canadian citizen, a permanent resident of Canada or a person registered as an Indian to sponsor one’s relatives, including spouse, partner, children (biological/adopted), parents, grandparents, and</p>

	<p>others to immigrate to Canada. The applicant must prove the relationship with the person being sponsored. The processing time varies from 12 to 24 months and the person being sponsored receives permanent resident status.</p>
<p><b>Quebec-Selected Skilled Workers</b>  <i>(“Quebec-Selected Skilled Workers”, Government of Canada, Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022)</i></p>	<p>The program allows for a person wishing to apply for permanent resident status as a skilled worker in the province of Quebec. The future immigrant applies outside of Canada and the processing time is from 15 to 17 months.</p>
<p><b>Caregivers</b>  <i>(“Caregivers”, Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022)</i></p>	<p>The program allows an experienced caregiver with a job offer in Canada to apply for permanent resident status or a work permit. The caregiver can apply outside of Canada for the program. A caregiver who already works in Canada with a work permit is allowed to apply for permanent residence. The processing time varies from 7 to 12 months.</p>
<p><b>Self-employed</b>  <i>(“Immigrate as a self-employed person”, Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022)</i></p>	<p>The program is intended for people with cultural or athletic experience wishing to immigrate to Canada permanently. The future immigrant applies outside of Canada and the</p>



	processing time is 23 months.
<b>Agri-food Pilot</b> <i>(“Agri-food Pilot”, Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022)</i>	The program is intended for people who wish to work in specific agri-food industries and occupations in Canada. The future immigrant applies outside of Canada and the processing time varies.
<b>Refugees</b> <i>(“Refugees and asylum”, Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022)</i>	The program is intended for people applying for refugee status in Canada or for Canadian citizens sponsoring a refugee. The application may be done inside or outside of Canada. The process time varies from 12 to 28 months, depending on the country of origin. Upon arrival in Canada the refugee does not receive the permanent resident status. At the time, the only exception made was for the Syrian refugees accepted in Canada under the national plan, whereby they received permanent resident status upon arrival in Canada.

As mentioned earlier, these eleven programs are associated with eleven types of immigrants, which are grouped into four main classificatory categories: (1) Family-related; (2) Economic; (3) Other / Humanitarian; and (4) Refugee. In terms of their designations in broader categories, they are distinguished from one another as follows.

## **Category 1: Family-Related Immigrants**

For the first category, immigrants considered as family-related enter Canada and obtain permanent resident status through a member of their family. They are sponsored by a family member who already is a Canadian citizen, or a permanent resident, and lives in Canada (*“Evaluation of the Family Reunification Program March 2014”*, April 20<sup>th</sup> 2020). In order to be approved for immigration in this category, the immigrant and the sponsor need to prove their relationship. The approved relationships include partners, spouses, parents, children, grand-parents or other relatives (such as brother, sister, uncle, aunt). With regard to the immigration process for spouses between a Canadian citizen and another nationality, the Canadian government has special requirements, for example both parties need to prove their legal status and translate their marriage certificate into French or English. Once the marriage is officialised, the couple is able to start the process of the sponsorship program (*“Family Sponsorship”*, Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022).

## **Category 2: Economic Immigrants**

The second category is that of economic immigrants, which includes those who are selected due to their abilities to contribute to Canada’s economy, either by investing or entering the employment market. The process for this category undergoes frequent updates and changes. Immigrants who enter Canada as skilled workers through the express entry visa program are required to go through the point system (*“Eligibility to apply as a Federal Skilled worker”*, Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022). There are two different programs for economic immigration to Canada, one at the federal level and one for the province of Quebec. Certain selection factors for each have been established and are applied during assessment of the

application, for status either as a Federal skilled worker or as a Quebec skilled worker. In both cases, the categories of assessment include education, language skills, experience, age, children, and finances (“*Quebec-Selected Skilled Workers*”, Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022). Each assessment category is allocated a specific number of points. For a Federal skilled worker application, for instance, a total of 67 points must be attained in order to be approved (“*Eligibility to apply as a Federal Skilled worker*, Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022). For Quebec, a person receives the “Selection Certificate for Quebec” (Government of Canada, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022).

### **Category 3: Other / Humanitarian Immigrants**

The third kind of immigrant category is designated as ‘other / humanitarian’. The application processes associated with this category allow people who are usually ineligible to apply for permanent resident status to submit an application. In this category, immigrants who do not qualify to apply for any of the 11 application programs to immigrate to Canada are also included. The applicant must already live in Canada or apply from abroad (“*Humanitarian and Compassionate grounds, September 13<sup>th</sup> 2017*, Government of Canada, September 13<sup>th</sup> 2017). The immigration process depends on the person’s background, education, and marital status. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC] (formerly Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC]), may delay the review of an application, or even cancel it, due to criminal past, or financial or health issues of an applicant.

### **Category 4: Refugees**

The last and fourth immigrant category is that of ‘refugee’. The migration process for refugees differs from that of regular immigrants. The program is intended for a person who seeks

protection in Canada or for Canadian citizens sponsoring a refugee. The application may be completed inside or outside of Canada. The process time varies from 12 to 28 months, depending on the country of origin. Upon arrival in Canada the refugee does not receive permanent resident status – except for those Syrian refugees accepted in Canada under the five-phase “National Plan”.

Finally, as Hamilton et al. (2020) clearly state in the introduction to their analyses of the Canadian Syrian Refugee Resettlement:

In order to understand the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Initiative (SRRI), it is important to take into consideration a number of particularities relating to the Canadian policy context. Immigration policy, including provisions relating to the selection and admission of refugees, is under the jurisdiction of the federal government, with newcomer settlement programs (i.e., the provision of services relating to orientation, language instruction, employment counselling, etc.) a shared federal-provincial/territorial responsibility. The situation differs in the case of Quebec, which under the Canada-Quebec Agreement signed in 1991 (Government of Canada 1991) has more control over the selection and admission of immigrants and refugees compared to other provinces and territories. [...] Quebec – in contrast to other provinces and territories – has sole jurisdiction over settlement programs (albeit with the transfer of federal funding), including settlement services and financial support for GARs [Government-Assisted Refugees]. (Hamilton et al. 2020, 8)

## **I.2: Humanizing the category of “refugee”**

The public often sees on TV and on other media stories and narratives about refugees that are framed to show how they might be trying to enter Canada or some European countries illegitimately (Pardavi and Gyulai 2015). As a result, many may think that refugees are lying about their situation and, if accepted, will only become a burden on the host society. The situation and status of a refugee, however, are actually more complex and not easily simplified.

The word ‘refugee’ derives from “refuge”, which according to the Oxford Dictionary means shelter from pursuit, danger or trouble. Essentially, refugees are people trying to flee danger, seeking help and shelter. There are millions of refugees in our current times, and they all have their unique stories to tell. In fact, the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) states that in 2020, the number of refugees worldwide rose to 22.5 million, with more than 18.5 million of them (84%) protected by UNHCR and given shelter (UNHCR 2020).

However, it is also worth noting that 16% of the refugee population is still left to struggle and fight on its own. The situation in some countries is more critical than in others; for example, the refugee crisis that began in Yemen in 2015 (UN 2020) is considered to be one of the biggest crises in the world. The UNHCR endeavours to help as many refugees as possible. Despite the differences that do exist, the essential meaning of a refugee does not change. A refugee can be a person looking for shelter, a person trying to stay alive, a mother trying to save her unborn child, a father risking his life to save his family, and so much more. No one refugee can be exactly compared with another. Every individual person has a different story and processes their refugee experience differently. In formal terms, a refugee is defined by the IOM as:

A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Source: Adapted from Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954) 189 UNTS 137) Art. 1A(2). (IOM)

On the one hand, therefore, the immigration process for refugees is a legal, official, and bureaucratic one that accounts for different circumstances. On the other hand, however, human stories and narratives are an integral and profound part of one's life experience as an immigrant and refugee.

The Syrian civil war broke out in 2011. It forced millions of people into boats of hope for safety and a better life. According to the United Nations, by 2020,

More than 6.6 million Syrians have been forced to flee their country since 2011 and another 6.7 million have been driven from their homes but remain trapped inside the country. The vast majority of Syrian refugees have found safety in neighboring countries like Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon – Turkey alone hosts more than 3.5 million Syrians (UN/Syria 2020).

Thousands escaped the war and its related dangers, but thousands also lost their lives trying to flee. For refugees, the choice of whether to stay or go is an excruciating one. For those living in a

war zone, there are basically two options: to stay and possibly lose one's life or to leave and hopefully remain alive. As will be discussed later in the thesis, the immigration process for refugees to Canada has been a challenging one, a situation rendered more complicated by the fact that there is no Canadian Embassy in Syria. Persons applying for refugee status thus have had to travel by car or by bus, all the while dodging ISIS attacks en route, in order to reach Lebanon or Jordan where Canada still has embassies (Schmidle 2015).

My encounters with refugees during the interviews for this thesis project and at my workplace at Montreal's International Airport allowed me to see the whole process from a different perspective. Hearing the refugee stories broadened my knowledge and made me understand their complex struggles. We can only imagine how people fleeing for their safety would feel when ISIS soldiers stop their bus, and how they would need to resort to survival strategies of inventing stories, lying, or showing fake passports so that ISIS would let them continue on their way. Many are the parents who were ready to stay behind or die only to protect their children and give them a chance for a better future in another country (Schmidle 2015). During their journey of hope, thousands of Syrian children lost all of their loved ones and were left alone to look for a safer place to live (UN/Syria 2020).

Given that language and culture make the immigration experience so deeply personal, and because translation is intimately connected to both, what insights can translation and interpreting studies potentially give us about the 'faces behind the numbers'? With their professional services, translators and interpreters not only fulfill the critical roles needed for government and institutional compliance. They also act as vital interlingual, intercultural mediators, occupying a

privileged position between the entities needing accurate information and those needing the services that will lead them to safety and the possibility of a better life.



## **II. Chapter two: Migration through the lens of translation and interpretation studies**

The goal of this chapter is to present some of the migration themes covered in the translation and interpreting studies (TIS) literature, a term used in the discipline to include a body of work in translation studies, in interpreting studies, and in a combination of both where certain issues overlap. In addition to providing insights able to complement the terms, numbers, and statistics on migration, they also are indicative of the rising interest in migration within the discipline. Beyond their practical instrumentality, translation and interpretation practices are approached as cross-cultural, interlinguistic spaces that allow us to understand the migrant and refugee experiences more fully. Over the years, translation studies has put much of its focus on migration and immigration by exploring immigrant literary writing. This literature reflects migrant feelings of displacement, alienation, hybridity, and so on, particularly in modern postcolonial contexts. More recently, the focus has turned to considering other translation contexts. They include globalization, the minoritization dynamics of language and culture, the acquisition of additional languages through migration, and the mediation of languages and cultures through processes of translation and interpretation.

### **Translation and migration: a world of new relationships and power dynamics**

Translation in our contemporary, globalized world is often associated with cosmopolitanism and travel. In *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, and Translation* (2000) by Michael Cronin, the role of translation is explored through the multi-faceted relationship that exists between language and travel. Here, travel is viewed as an opportunity one has to learn more and enrich one's knowledge about other cultures and people through direct experience in a positive way. The relationship between travel, language, and translation can be considered within the borders of a

single country as well as beyond its borders. Even if a person limits travel to their own country, language can change in its variations through regions and may even require translation.

In *Translation and Globalization* (2003), Cronin further contextualizes translation, languages and cultures in our globalizing world, including the impact that new technologies and translation tools have on them. He expands, as well, on the diverse ways that travel, displacement, language and translation can affect one another, particularly in different circumstances. For instance, one important angle is the complex interplay of attitudes on the use and practice of a language (Cronin, 2003, 165). When travelling outside one's home country, a person may try to adapt by exerting effort to speak in another language, leaving aside his or her native language. The reinforcement of the new majority language can render the ability of speaking one's own native language more complicated (Cronin 2003, 165). While short term travel cannot really have a major impact on a native language, sustained contact can. In the case of refugees, and other immigrants, travelling and settling in a new country can complicate the use of their native language either by the fear of being misunderstood or by the desire to adapt rapidly to their new community (Cronin 2003,165). Importantly, language acquisition is not confined solely to linguistic ability. It is influenced by perceptions of acceptance or rejection by and in the host community.

Cronin also addresses the complexities of minoritization. Languages exist in relational relationships with one another and the power dynamics that ensue are asymmetrical.

Geographical, historical and geopolitical circumstances all influence whether, when, where, and how a language or culture is considered to be 'majority' or 'minority'.

The concept of "minority" with respect to language is dynamic rather than static. "Minority" is the expression of a relation not an essence. The relations can assume two forms: diachronic and spatial. The diachronic relation that defines a minority language is an historical experience that destabilises the linguistic relations in one country so that languages find themselves in an asymmetrical relationship. [...] The spatial relationship is intimately bound up with diachronic relationships but it is important to make a distinction between those languages that find themselves in a minority position because of a redrawing of national boundaries and those which occupy the same territory but are no longer in a dominant position [...]. (Cronin 2003, 86)

The relational dynamic has an impact on language and translation throughout migration and immigrant experiences. If and when they are displaced due to economic crises or as a result of violence and civil war, migrants who spoke a major language as a part of the majority in their home country now become identified as minority language speakers in their new country. Furthermore, and for new reasons, they are "readily identified and categorized on the basis of the language they speak" (Cronin 2003, 162). This perception changes the relationship of a migrant to his or her native language, and thus one's own identity. History shows us that identification and classification of one's own group by others is an important factor. Migration groups are perceived and identified according to the language they speak. For instance, Cronin notes that Welsh and Irish people have been identified as English, and migrants from North Africa to Europe have been categorized as Arabs because the majority of them speak Arabic (Cronin 2003, 162).

A rapidly urbanizing global landscape is also addressed by Cronin. Migrants often settle in urban centers. He notes that along with the increased migration to big cities comes both an increase in the population *and* the need for translation. Translation intervenes at various points of the migrant's integration process. "As the capacity of any individual to acquire languages is limited either by time or by ability, translators and translations are indispensable in providing access to the cultural and linguistic wealth of polyglot, multicultural cities" (Cronin 2003, 171).

Translation plays not only a significant role in defining the urban city character. Through its presence, translation also constitutes a part of the everyday life of immigrants in cities, whether they have recently arrived or have been settled for a while. In a famous megapolis like New York, small migrant neighborhoods often grow into little towns (Cronin 2003, 169), for example, "Chinatown" and "Little Italy". Even if migrants stay within their own ethnic communities, they still need to communicate with the rest of the world. They need to enter the labour market, work, study, and obtain food and housing for their families. For many, the option of learning their new country's language is hindered by lack of time or abilities (Cronin 2003, 171), thus creating a tangible, practical need for translation. Finally, Cronin points out that migration has an impact on language itself. Languages in contact have transformative effects on one another. "[...They] grow not only because of detailed interaction with a specific natural and cultural environment but because they come into contact and learn (translate) from other cultures" and other languages (Cronin 2003, 167). Translation, he states, is the science of difference (Cronin 2003, 169).

### **Translation and migration: acquiring language and borrowing tongues**

The inter-relationing between languages and cultures is manifest not only at the level of societies; it is also a deeper, personal, individual experience, as demonstrated in the work of Eva

Karpinski. In *Borrowed Tongues: Life writing, Migration, and Translation* (2012), Karpinski discusses the importance of translation through the lens of immigrant women's life story writing. Through this optic, she underscores that translation is an essential and a continual part of migrant life. On the one hand, this continuity is due to globalization, where translation and technologies act as links to connect local, national and global milieus (Karpinski 2012, 1). These connections allow for a continued transmission of information and relay of culture. On the other hand, translation functions as a practice used by migrants to create their own life narratives (Karpinski 2012, 1). They use translation to articulate their life experiences and they make use of their life narratives to also translate themselves.

Karpinski uses the term "borrowed tongues" to understand translation and these relationships. As she states,

The idea of a borrowed tongue - of living, communicating and working in a language that is not one's mother tongue or mother's tongue - has been constantly present in autobiographical narratives written in English by American and Canadian immigrant women. (Karpinski 2012, 2)

Immigrants, and in this context immigrant women, use their "borrowed tongues" in many different circumstances. When making the decision to emigrate and leave their native country, they are often conscious that they will no longer be using their mother tongue and will be adopting another one in order to blend into their new society. By learning the language of their new country, they are in fact borrowing it. In the Canadian context, people immigrating to Canada are asked to have knowledge of one of the official languages or to be capable of acquiring this knowledge by attending language classes sponsored by the government. In this

sense, immigrants take a ‘loan’ from the government by accepting to attend these language classes and to learn, or borrow, the French or English language. In reality, immigrants have no choice but to borrow tongues because ultimately, they need that borrowed tongue to survive. Whether for going to the grocery store, starting a job or renting an apartment, the borrowed tongue is necessary. Education is also a critical sector. For example, I too fall into the category of an immigrant woman borrowing English, a language that is not native to me, in order to write my thesis. Inevitably, translation has a close relationship with the acquisition of borrowed tongues. When borrowing a tongue, at some level, an immigrant undergoes a process of translation – not only when communicating and in dialogue with others for practical matters of existence, but also during the existential process of a ‘becoming of the self’ through translation.

As Karpinski (2012, 2) reiterates, when immigrant women borrow a tongue, they use it to translate their experiences, culture, and history through a non-native language. They borrow a language in order to be heard and understood. Similarly, Indigenous women often recite their own lives in the languages of the colonizers (Karpinski 2012, 2). In the current Canadian context, Syrian refugee women, men and children recount the horrors of the war through translation, from Arabic into borrowed English or French.

Translation and the use of a borrowed tongue are processes that are closely tied together, and they play a major role in an immigrant’s life, particularly when living in a language that is not our native own. In her work, Karpinski draws on Roman Jakobson’s paradigm of translation, i.e., as inter-lingual, intra-lingual and inter-semiotic, to conceptualize translation in two important ways. First, she uses it to note how language and culture are not permanently fixed or stable: “they can be influenced, divided and are completely open to the rest of the world” (2012, 3).

Linguistic and cultural expression lends itself to being open to translation. Second, and citing Kathy Mezei, she considers how the act of writing too is “always translating”, i.e., it is a “transition of thoughts, images, concepts, silence into words” (2012, 4).

Importantly, migrants whose languages are not the same as those of their new host society are always translating themselves, whether through their native language or a borrowed one. By telling or writing about their struggles in their own country or their lives as refugees, they express their observations and opinions, and describe images of war and other feelings. They translate their lives to those of us who listen to or read them. Indeed, the world first became aware of the growing tensions and civil war in Syria in this way.

These ways of understanding translation are helpful when considering the importance and value of oral history testimonies and life story narrations. Translation serves immigrants by allowing them to be themselves while living in another country, despite the difficulties of adapting to life in a new setting with new traditions, language, societal norms, and so on. In the context of life story narration, it can enable and facilitate a certain freedom of speech for immigrant women, allowing them to express themselves and share their differences with others. Karpinski (2012, 24) writes, “By taking up life writing as a project in translation, an immigrant woman makes a leap of faith in translatability and constructs her difference as transmissible.” In an immigrant woman’s life, the state of alterity-being other or different- is in the translation, connecting the immigrant’s stories with the rest of the world. In the relationship between the mother tongue and the borrowed tongue, translation is the other extra helper that provides for the smooth development and sharing of life stories.

Finally, for Karpinski, translation is fundamentally existential. “[It] shares [a] structure of supplementarity with immigrant subjects, immigrant identities and immigrant languages” (2012, 7). That is to say, it supplements the practical objective of basic communication. It serves as a tool that leads to an immigrant’s life development, at the same time that it strengthens their stories, languages and identities. Translation is transformative. It allows for immigrant realities to be discovered and better understood. Immigrants and refugees often face prejudice as newcomers and are expected by their new host society to change. Translation allows for their realities to be heard, and to some extent allows them to “be who they are” without fear of judgement on the basis of their language. Along these lines, translation is visibility. It makes its role as a bridge between languages and people visible, as well as the relationships between languages (Karpinski 2012, 8).

An immigrant’s life in translation can be envisioned as the center of a fictional feud between the mother tongue and the borrowed tongue(s). It exemplifies an ongoing tension between the two. As effectively stated by Karpinski, “Spanning the axis between mother tongue and borrowed tongue, translation for a migrant encodes the tension between the two and can be experienced through metaphors of movement and displacement” (2012, 21). It is up to the settled immigrant when and how to give more or less priority to each one of the tongues. It is not always a situation easily resolved. In many immigrant communities, there is an inclination for one to use the mother tongue, especially when there are speakers of the same language in close proximity. It is more natural and spontaneous to think and write in one’s native language than in a borrowed one. When translation enters the picture, the relationship between an immigrant’s mother tongue and the borrowed one can feel shattered. Furthermore, while an adult immigrant would be capable of perceiving the differences between the mother tongue and the borrowed one while



translating or writing, it is not as easy for an immigrant child. All the preceding reflections on Karpinski are important to bear in mind when conducting oral history testimonies and interviews with refugees, particularly when translation is the channel through which their stories are being transmitted. They enlighten and provide critical context to the very real human accounts and realities of immigrants navigating through and adjusting to their new life circumstances.

### **Translation and migration: living the immigrant experience in a connected world**

For Mary Besemeres and Anna Wierzbicka, comparing and contrasting the life stories of immigrants originating from different areas of the world provide further insights into the perceptions and realities of immigrants settling and integrating into their environments. In *Translating Lives: Living with Two Languages and Cultures* (2008), they give examples of stories from a variety of settings, pointing out how certain connections between languages, cultures and identities emerge through the migration experience. Although they focus primarily on Australia, they are able to show how translation intervenes in (or with) an immigrant's daily life. They include stories by Kyung-Joo Yoon from South Korea, Jock Wong from Singapore, Andrea Witcone from Portugal, Anna Wierzbicka from Poland, Zengdgo Veronica Ye from China, Mary Besemeres from Australia, and Eva Sallis and Michael Clyne, also from Australia. By introducing these diverse linguistic and cultural accounts, they present a picture of the various roles of translation and the challenges and benefits of living in a multilinguistic, multicultural environment.

The participants share their personal stories, experiences and the way translation has affected their lives (Besemeres and Wierzbicka 2008, Introduction XIV). For example, Jock Wong reflects on how life seems much easier for a monolingual person who does not need translation

on a daily basis, either for simple actions like going grocery shopping, or having to explain their own culture to others (Besemeres and Wierzbicka 2008, 70). The ability to blend into a society with a different culture and language is not as easy as people might think. An immigrant needs to learn the new language and culture in order to maintain a normal life, while being able to communicate oneself and one's origins to members of the new host society.

What is interesting to retain here is the strategy used by Besemeres and Wierzbicka. The comparison, contrast and combining of personal immigrant stories lead them to extract commonalities, knowledge and insight from the diverse immigrant experiences, allowing them to then look at the challenges and benefits of immigrants from within Australia's multicultural society. In so doing, and through the testimonies provided, they show how the language and culture of a nation can be enriched through the presence of immigrants in a country, and that it can lead us to better understand and appreciate the relationships between languages, cultures, societies, immigrants and translation (Besemeres and Wierzbicka 2008, Introduction XIV).

### **Translation and migration: navigating the migrant experience through translation**

From their side, Loredana Polezzi (2012; 2014) and Moira Inghilleri (2017), both prominent translation studies scholars, attempt to integrate migration studies more comprehensively within the discipline of translation studies. In different ways, they focus on how the migration experience becomes transformative through translation.

First, from her part, in her introductory chapter "Migration and Translation" (2014), Polezzi recognizes that although migration and translation are two processes that do differ from each other, they are also closely related. "They both relate the focus of mobility which deeply affects human life and have done so through history" (Polezzi 2014, 79). Moreover, they go hand in

hand to the extent that they have a deep influence and an essential impact on the way human beings communicate and perceive others around them (Polezzi 2014, 79). Communication today is enhanced by the 24/7 transmission of news and information through mass media and social media. From her perspective, movement and mobility serve as lenses to effectively compare and contrast the similarities and differences between migration and translation. “Migration relates [...] to the special mobility of people across geographical boundaries. Translation, on the other hand, principally evokes the mobility of the texts across languages, national or otherwise” (Polezzi 2014, 79). Their influences on each other are reciprocal.

Both processes relate to concepts of travel and displacement, where migration connotes the displacement of people while translation that of languages. If we explore both processes more in depth, we realize that their processes intersect and are intertwined. Translation involves the displacement of languages, but it is in some ways a migration process itself – it allows the travel of one language to another. As Polezzi points out, “Migrants carry their language with them, both as instruments of communication and in the form of cultural artifacts” (2014, 79). Karpinski might add that “the linguistic abilities migrants have by their native languages allow them to lean on them in order to communicate in another “borrowed tongue” (Karpinski 2012, 2).

The languages that migrants ‘carry’ with them are important to their identities, allowing them to communicate their thoughts and cultural mores through translation to others and to the host society. The migrants’ process of adaptation is a back-and-forth movement between the new and the familiar.

Second, Polezzi proposes that many questions emerge when the relationship between migration and translation is further analyzed. She gives us a glimpse of why this analysis is important and which questions can be asked:

Who is allowed to use which language, where, with whom, and through what channels? What or who is perceived as translated or in need of translation? Which translations are accepted as satisfactory or dismissed as inadequate? When does translation act as a visible strategy of communication? Or, on the other hand, when does its presence, like the presence of translators, have to become invisible in order to be deemed acceptable? (2014, 79)

By seeking answers to the questions posed by Polezzi, we can better understand the way migration and its related translation activity can shape a migrant individually or collectively (Polezzi 2014, 80). When talking about a collective shaping of lives, and while instruments such as official language policy will guide the extent to which language pairs and directions become a significant factor to take into account, it is important not to generalize. Through answers to these questions, we are also able to begin to understand how the migration – translation relationship guides immigrants throughout their individual lives. Every case is different and specific to each migrant, and the translation process is not the same for everyone. Except for those whose language remains the same in their new host society, all migrants face numerous linguistic difficulties along the way. The act of learning a language is unique for everyone. For some migrants, it might be easier, but for others, it is more complicated.

Polezzi's questions put particular emphasis on the pronoun 'who'. Who in fact is in charge of translation when it comes to matters of migration and the life of a migrant? Are professional

translators the only ones responsible for translating? Are there any other actors who are also capable and allowed to translate? By which criteria are translators and interpreters selected, if by choice?

Third, Polezzi notes that it may be physically impossible for professional translators to be able to cover all the necessary translation requests (official or simply daily translations) related to the migration processes of a specific group (Polezzi 2014, 79-81). Depending on the language and on language pairs and directionality, there may be a shortage or absence of professional translators who can help migrants with the official translation of documents. Moreover, not every family is gifted with the presence of a person specialized in translation. Asking these questions with regard to some settings helps clarify who translates, especially if professional translators are not the only ones helping migrants. As Polezzi writes, “[...] it can dispel some old fallacies such as the assumption that translation is just what professional translators do, rather than a pervasive dimension of our lives, often carried out by us as unofficial self-translators” (2014, 80). This leads to the need for us to better understand the conditions and circumstances from which self-translators emerge.

Self-translators are generally assumed to not possess a degree in translation or have knowledge or expertise in translation practices. Presumably, it includes within its categorization any migrant who has knowledge of a foreign language and who can act as an unofficial translator. Although unofficial translators might not produce stylistically and grammatically well-constructed translations as professional translators can, they do fill in the void or gap when professional or certified translation is not possible or available.

Finally, Polezzi links translation to migration by observing and reflecting on their outcomes.

Like migration, translation is not intrinsically good or bad, it does not lead to an inevitable happy ending: the contact between cultures, languages and traditions can be just as productive, violent or even traumatic as the encounter among human beings (Polezzi 2014, 81).

Language differences and traditions can provoke clashes between languages and cultures. Migration in the context of conflicts between countries and peoples, even when its processes are peaceful and well-organized, can exacerbate these differences and clashes. However, not all is potentially conflictual, passive, or negative. In Polezzi's view, migrants keep, transmit, *and* produce culture. "[...][M]igrants must be recognized as producers, as well as co-producers of culture: subjects who are capable of agency and who are bearers of knowledge" (Polezzi 2014, 82). Through their agency and through translation, migrants contribute with their culture and traditions. Translation, furthermore, allows them to present themselves the way they want to be understood by those who surround them.

Translation can also provide a space of freedom to migrants, allowing them to escape or create on the basis of their lived realities as migrants. Polezzi sees this as a promise of change and a visible expression of the encounter of difference. In some ways, migrants cannot escape from translation. "Migrants will almost inevitably come into contact with translation, but that contact can take different forms" (Polezzi 2012, 348). It may transpire – in writing or orally – through everyday life situations (travelling, groceries, etc.) or during more formal moments of their lives (immigration interviews, court appearances, education, etc.). Translation becomes a supplement in a migrant's life. It helps, guides, teaches and most of all, eases the interactions between migrants and institutions and the host society public at large.

Inghilleri, in *Translation and Migration* (2017), also chooses to focus on the ways the migration experience is transformative through translation. “Migrants transform and are transformed by the communities and societies they become part of, and translation is central to this process” (Inghilleri 2017, 3). Similar to Polezzi, Besmeres and Wierzbicka, and Karpinski, Inghilleri shows how translation intervenes at many points in the lives of migrants, in her case with a focus on the recent migration processes of both Palestinian and Syrian refugees.

The ways migrants enter a new community and transform it through the presence of their languages and traditions occur in large part through translation. Like Polezzi, Inghilleri claims that translation goes hand-in-hand with migration processes. Similarly, she agrees that when migrants enter a new community, they not only receive but also contribute and share. Giving and receiving are two important actions that shape our societies. Acceptance and recognition are important for migrants as they resettle in their new country. Inghilleri also underscores the challenges of dealing with societal perceptions of immigrants and their migrations. Acknowledging that migration is not always associated with positive thoughts, she notes how migration and images of immigrants can be perceived negatively at first in most peoples’ minds, even while human history demonstrates the remarkable ability of humans to adapt.

Though migration is frequently associated, mainly in a negative sense, with words like uprooted, unsettled, displacement, and displacement, all of which represent movement as a break with an immovable foundation, throughout history humans have shown themselves to be disposed to and capable of adoption and change (Inghilleri 2017, 5).

In sum, translation – in both its written form or orally – permits migrants to learn, adapt, adopt, live and contribute productively in their new communities through their own ways of life. It assists migrants in feeling accepted and understood in their new country. As the preceding discussion has shown, the migration experience is transformative through translation. In our contemporary age, and with migration on the rise, it is important to understand that the human beings on the move are more than figures of statistical data. They are people with stories that help explain their movement and relocation. At every step, translation plays a role on the journey.

Finally, it is important to be aware that written and oral forms of translation are differentiated technically in the discipline, with interpreting or interpretation referred to when the mode is oral. Not only is written translation closely linked to the immigrant migration experience; oral interpretation is as well. It is to the world of interpretation and interpreters that I now very briefly turn.

### **Translation and migration: the world of the interpreter**

Any overview of migration and the many processes it entails will reveal the continual presence of oral translation, or interpretation. A more recent field of translation studies, sometimes considered as a separate or sub-discipline, interpretation or interpreting studies examines interpreting in diverse social and cultural contexts (Pöchhacker 2003; Pöchhacker and Schlesinger 2002). As articulated by Franz Pöchhacker, interpretation/interpreting is regarded as “translational activity” and as “a special form of translation” (Pöchhacker 2003, 9). Unlike regular (written) translation, Pöchhacker argues, “Interpreting is performed here and now for the benefit of people who want to engage in communication across barriers of language and culture”



(2003, 10). It is a form of translation that occurs immediately after being exposed to the source language, and where the interpreter does not have a lot of time to assimilate the information in the source language before transmitting it into the target language. According to Pöchhacker, interpreting can be defined as “[...] a form of translation in which a first and final rendition in another language is produced on a basis of a one-time presentation of an utterance in a source language” (Pöchhacker 2003, 11). As a visual aid, the following figure depicts how Pöchhacker has subdivided the field into different types of interpreting according to social context: business, commercial, legal, media, healthcare, educational, military, and diplomatic (2003, 16)



Figure 2.1 Interpreting social context types (image created by Vanya Mladenova based on the information in Pöchhacker 2003, 16)

The presence of interpretation is readily apparent everywhere around us, touching many spheres. In addition to being categorizable into different social context types, it is categorized by the types

of interaction during interpretation – dialogue and conference – as the following figure visualizes:

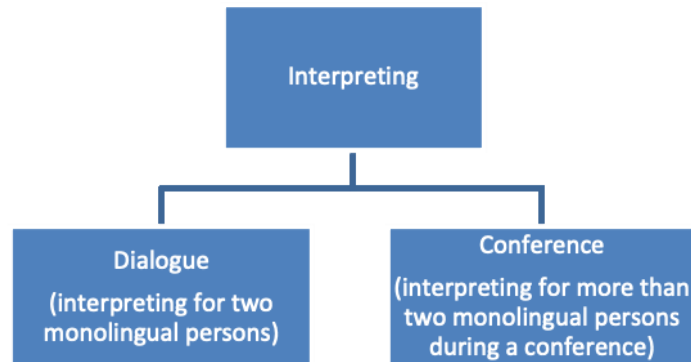


Figure 2.2 Interpreting by types of Interaction (image created by Vanya Mladenova based on the information in Pöchhacker 2003, 17)

As we shall see, interpretation – especially dialogue interpreting – played a crucial role during the immigration process of Syrian refugees coming to Canada. Dialogue interpreting refers to interpretation between two people who do not speak the same language and who need an interpreter to translate for them. During the immigration process for Syrian refugees, this type of interpreting was very often used between Canadian officials and candidate refugees. It is a method used for not more than two people (Pöchhacker 2003, 17) and is a face-to-face procedure where distances are short. Both participants in the dialogue are able to see the interpreter. To the contrary, and unlike dialogue interpreting, conference interpreting is the type of interpretation used in international G8 Summits or UN conferences and is usually intended for larger groups of people (Pöchhacker 2003, 16). In conference interpreting, the interpreter is not always visible to the participants. Very often, for example during a UN conference, a presenter is on stage and

other country representatives wear headphones which they use to listen to the interpretation given in their language.

It is also important to point out that in addition to these two basic types of interpretation, there are two working modes: simultaneous and consecutive. In the first case, the interpreter works parallel to the original speaker while in the second case, the interpreter speaks after the original speaker pauses or ends the utterance. The interpreter is not just a figure standing in between two monolingual speakers in conversation, but rather is an active participant (Pöchhacker 2003, 18). Both types require distinct skill sets and training.

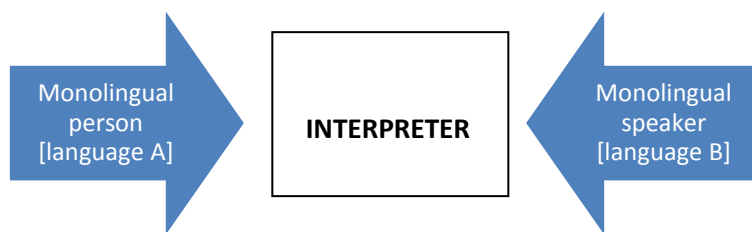


Figure 2.3 Relation of Interpreter (image created by Vanya Mladenova based on the information in Pöchhacker 2003, 88)

Finally, as proposed by Lederer (1981) and referred to by Pöchhacker, interpretation activity comprises eight mental operations (Pöchhacker 2003, 98), which I have visualized in the following diagram for illustrative purposes, in order to show the actual complexity of the interpreter's task.

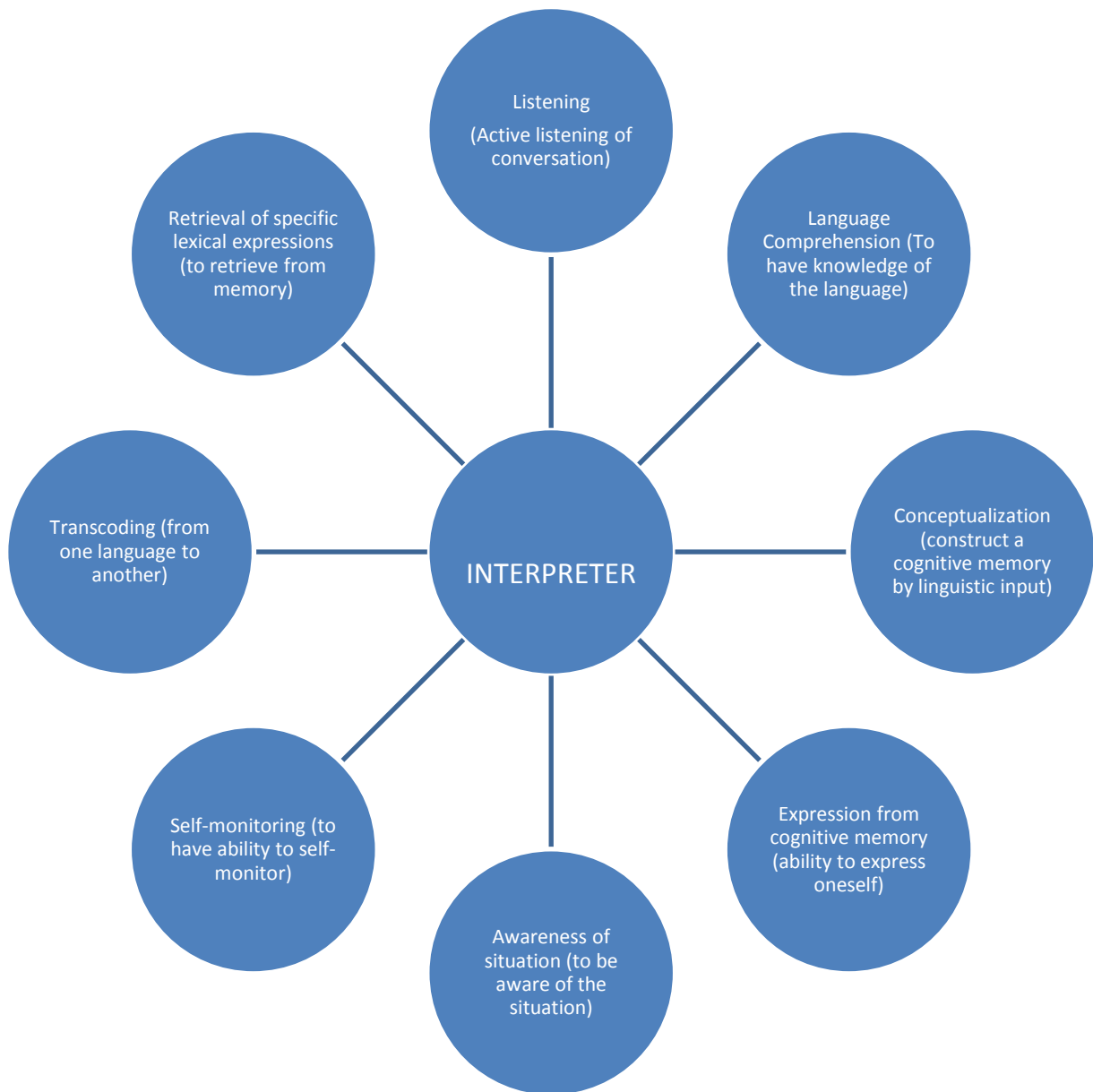


Figure 2.4 The Mental Operations of an Interpreter (image created by Vanya Mladenova based on the information in Pöchhacker 2003, 98)

From active listening to transcoding and the retrieval of specific lexical expressions from memory, the interpreter must have knowledge of both languages, construct a cognitive memory, and express and monitor oneself according to the situation at hand.

An interpreter not only needs to possess strong intellectual and personal skills in order to be able to perform the required tasks; he or she also needs to possess strong “affective qualities” in order to understand people, to be able to sense, and to be honest (Pöchhacker 2003, 100). Moreover, professional interpreters also need to perform their tasks according to best practices such as the adoption of requisite ethical consent forms. Similar to situations of translation, interpreters may be self-designated and non-professional. Self-designated interpreters can often be found assisting immigrants and refugees at various points of their immigration and resettlement processes.

It is pertinent, therefore, to end this chapter with a relevant note from the literature on community interpreting, which is the kind of interpreting most often used by and within immigrant populations. Community translating and interpreting exist in order to ensure better and more effective communication among all citizens of a community. As Mustafa Taibi and Uldis Ozolins state, “Community translation encompasses all translating (and interpreting) carried out to facilitate inter-community relations within a given country where diverse linguistic (and cultural) communities cohabit” (2016, 8). Community interpreting facilitates the integration of migrants into the new community. It assists refugees by guiding them and helping them during health consultations, education, housing research, financial matters and many other necessary activities. Refugees use services of professional interpreters provided by their community or of non-professional interpreters such as a family member or friend. The developing field of research on non-professional translation and interpretation, as exemplified by the work of Rachele Antonini, Letizia Cirillo, Linda Rossato and Ira Torresi (2017), for instance, investigates these activities with respect to the diverse contemporary waves of massive migration. Also worthy of note is the emerging research on translation and interpretation in emergency conflict situations. In the book *Mediating Emergencies and Conflicts: Fronting, Translating and Interpreting* (2016)

edited by Federico Federici, there are examples of interpreting and translating during emergency conflict situations such as during the war in Afghanistan. The book presents the various translation practices, protocols and trainings used to ensure effective communication during crisis situations.

For the specific context of my thesis research, I have drawn on the preceding body of translation literature to consider the diverse profiles of translation and interpretation in the refugee experience. Who translates and interprets? How, when, and why do translators and interpreters become part of the refugee immigration process? What impact does translation have on the refugee experience? By their responses, the interviews conducted with the Syrian refugees who immigrated to Canada give some insight into these questions.

### **III. Chapter three: The Canadian Syrian Refugee Immigration Process – a Method**

Given the vast territory and numerous contextual variables that ‘refugee experience’ potentially encompasses, it is important to determine certain markers that can fix the parameters for my interview questions and a study like this. I approached this task through a series of decision-making steps. First, it was necessary to define a certain group with characteristics in common. In this case, the focus was on Syrian refugees selected for immigration to the country of Canada. Second, in order to begin to understand the role of translation or interpreting, it was necessary to determine first the official entities that contributed to providing these services in the immigration process and resettlement. In this case, they were the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB). Third, it was necessary to establish a useful framing device within which to create questions relevant for the study and for the interviewees. In this case, I selected the five-stage national plan that had been devised by the Canadian government to organize and control the immigration process for Syrian refugees. Finally, it was necessary to construct the questions relevant to translation and interpretation within this national plan framework, linking them to points in time when the UNHCR and IRB would have possibly intervened with translation and interpretation services. Semi-structured questions would allow respondents to provide information around these points of the process.

It is important to emphasize from the outset that the data obtained through the interview questionnaires was not used to support, validate, or refute any one specific hypothesis or theory on migration or translation. As noted in Mellinger and Hanson, “In TIS [translation and interpreting studies], data are derived from a variety of sources, including text as data, survey responses, ethnographies, experiments, and observational research” (2022, 308). The sample set

was relatively small and not statistically valid for generalization of the results. Furthermore, as Mellinger and Hanson warn, “data are affected by the collection method” and surveys and the like “can be influenced by whether responses are collected online, by phone, on paper, or face-to-face” – in addition to other limitations such as effects due to an interviewer’s presence and participant reactions to their awareness of being observed (2022, 311). The interview portion of the thesis has not been designed on the basis of specific quantitative and qualitative methods that aim to verify and generalize. It confines itself to an exploratory study whose goal and collection of data were to see if, how, and to what extent translation and interpreting played a role in the Syrian refugee immigration process, and to hear about these services from the Syrian refugees themselves once they were encouraged to think about it for the interview questionnaires.

Thus, in this chapter I present contextualization for the interviews. The interview methodology, process, and data are provided in detail in chapter four.

I begin with a brief discussion on the term and category of “refugee”, followed by a description of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a fundamental organization in the implementation of the Syrian refugee strategy with Canada. I then briefly introduce some of the rules and procedures for interpretation services provided by the UNHCR and the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) of Canada, both of which were active actors in the Syrian refugee process. In the last part I focus on how the Canadian government assisted with its national five-phase refugee action plan and “Operation Syrian Refugees”, a framework I subsequently use to help guide the formulation of my questions.

### **The term “refugee”**



To begin with, the definition of “refugee” sets the terms for the individuals and families seeking to emigrate from Syria due to the civil war. What exactly does it mean, and how does it differ from “asylum seeker”? What is the status of a refugee? In general terms, a refugee is a person who fears being mistreated or abused for reasons of nationality, religion or race. According to the Canadian Council for Refugees, a refugee is “a person who is forced to flee from persecution and who is located outside of their home country” (Refugees and Immigrants: A Glossary). They are people escaping from conflict zones and trying to save their lives. It is not by choice that they have become refugees. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that anyone would dream of becoming a refugee one day. Feeling threatened or unsafe in one’s own country is a result of particular circumstances. People who seek safety within the borders of their own country are called “internally displaced people” or “IDPs” (Betts and Loescher 2011). By contrast, a refugee is a person who seeks refuge outside his or her native country. Refugee migration is often called “forced migration”. People are literally forced to cross borders for their own safety:

Refugees are people who cross international borders in order to flee human rights abuses and conflict. Refugees are prima facie evidence of human rights violations and vulnerability. People who are persecuted and deprived of their homes and communities and means of livelihood are frequently forced to flee across the borders of their home countries and seek safety abroad (Betts and Loescher, 2011,1)

Refugees are not economic immigrants; they do not leave their countries because of financial hardship. As Skeldon notes, migration studies in fact is split into two areas, “[...] those focusing more on economic ‘voluntary’ movements and those who stud[y] forced movements” (2021, 57). Over the past decade, the volume of research and studies on migration (Mavroudi and Nagel

2016; Gold and Nawyn 2013) and on forced migration (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, et al. 2014; Crépeau, et al. 2006) has increased substantially.

Syria is a 'forced migration' case in point. The growing conflicts and civil war in the Middle East forced millions to leave their homes for a safer place to live. The massive waves of Syrian refugees attracted government and media attention around the world, with newspapers and televisions flooded with information about the outcomes of the war on Syrian people. Globally, the reasons for refugee displacements are numerous and are often due to political conflicts. In rarer situations, people become refugees because of a natural disaster that has occurred, such as the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. The disastrous effects of that earthquake forced many Haitians to seek refuge by leaving the country. In that case, the UNHCR had to intervene in order to ensure that the most vulnerable people were protected and placed in safer places. As Betts and Loescher note, refugees come from everywhere and go all over the world: "From the Holocaust to the proxy conflicts of the Cold War, to the occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq in the context of the 'War on Terror', refugees have emerged from just about every significant historical or despotic regime" (Betts and Loescher 2011, 7). Most often, however, refugees are described as the victims of increasing political fragility. This situation can emerge internally, within their native countries, but may also arise from conflicts between two different countries, provoking insecurity among populations and forcing people to migrate. Betts and Loescher point out, for example, how "[t]he diamond trade from Sierra Leone and oil in Angola have been factors underlying conflicts that have led to both internal displacement and refugee movements" (Betts and Loescher 2011, 1).

### **The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)**

The *Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, published only three years after the beginning of the civil war in Syria (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, et al. 2014), gives detailed and nuanced explanations in its 53 chapters on the issues related to refugees and forced migration. They draw on diverse perspectives from refugee studies, sociology, history, geography and ethics, among others. In particular, emphasis is placed on the reality of the legal procedures that influence and define refugee migration from one country or continent to another – including the major immigration waves of Asia, Africa, Australia and the Americas. Useful for the purposes of my thesis is the chapter devoted to the UNHCR and its role in protecting refugees.

The UNHCR, established in 1951 (Skeldon 2021, 57), has a key role in every conflict that involves human displacements and vulnerability. It plays a visibly significant role in situations of refugee crises and assistance. With its mandate to protect refugees, it sets out rules to assist them in various ways throughout the whole migration process. This assistance includes translation and interpretation, as manifest in the case of the Syrian civil war refugees. As Betts and Loescher write, “The UNHCR is a humanitarian organization, and as a humanitarian organization it has considerable moral and expert authority. It has used that authority to expand its protection and assistance activities to more populations around the world over decades” (2011, 2).

The “United Nations Convention for Refugees” (UNHCR 1951 Convention) was adopted shortly after World War II: “The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted by a Conference of Plenipotentiaries of the United Nations on 28 July 1951, and entered into force on 21 April 1954” (UNHCR Handbook). Currently, 110 countries have adopted the Convention. The Convention states that if a person who qualifies as a refugee according to the UNHCR

criteria is in a country that has not adopted the convention, he or she is still allowed protection by the UNHCR (UNHCR 1951 Convention).

The UNHCR has established strict rules with regard to who can qualify as a refugee. For example, a person who has committed a crime in his or her native country, and who is simply trying to avoid prosecution, is not allowed to qualify as a refugee. “It should be recalled that a refugee is a victim - or potential victim - of injustice, not a fugitive from justice” (UNHCR Convention). The UNHCR ensures that only people who are really in danger and persecuted in their countries qualify for the status of refugee and can subsequently be granted UN protection. Refugees are distinguished from economic migrants, because they do not leave their countries by personal choice. They are forced to do so.

The UNHCR Convention considers and addresses multiple scenarios, including that of potential refugees with dual citizenship. If a person holds another nationality, then that person must be considered as being protected by the other country. However, at times both countries may end up being unsafe to live in. This was the case of one couple amongst my interviewees. They fled Syria and moved to Venezuela only to find that their newly acquired Venezuelan citizenship offered insufficient protection when the situation in the country also became too dangerous for them to live in. In their case, the UNHCR intervened to help them find a safer country and they applied for refugee status in Canada; the Convention permits vulnerable people to be resettled in a country that will provide them with the necessary care and protection. However, if the situation in their native countries were to improve, they could be sent back home. In those cases, the UNHCR ensures that there are no dangers for the refugees and that they will not be persecuted again. The case of the Syrian refugees in Canada is uniquely different because refugees were

granted permanent residence status in Canada upon landing on Canadian soil. This allows them to stay in Canada and to acquire citizenship one day. Even if the situation in Syria were to improve, they would not be required to return there.

### **The UNHCR Convention and Interpreting Services**

Although migrants sometimes have knowledge of a foreign country's language, the majority of the applicants need translation at different times of their application or resettlement process. In terms of translation and interpreting services, the 1951 UNHCR Convention states that refugee and asylum seekers should be provided with the services of an interpreter: "The applicant should be given the necessary facilities, including the services of a competent interpreter, for submitting his case to the authorities concerned" (UNHCR Handbook 2011). However, as pointed out by Gibb and Good (2014) and others, the actual competence or official, legally recognized status of an interpreter, or translator, for the immigration process is under the jurisdiction of local (national) regulations and structures. Member states which have adopted the 1951 Convention have the entire responsibility of ensuring "appropriate communication between the applicant and the person who conducts the interview" (Gibb and Good 2014, 2). It is up to every country to decide how the interpreter or translation services will be managed. As we have previously seen, translators and interpreters can be official (recognized as such by government, and as having completed studies in the field) or self-proclaimed (not recognized by government, and as not having completed studies in the field, although with some knowledge of a foreign language).

Canada signed the UN Convention for Refugees on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1969. Through the Convention, Canada recognizes its obligations to protect the refugees that are accepted in the country and to respect their basic rights. Interpretation services for the refugee interviews constitutes one area of

responsibility. For its part, the IRCC (formerly CIC) requires French or English translations of documentation by duly certified translators (for example, OTTIAQ-certified in Québec). Without translation and interpretation, refugees would be unable to communicate with Canadian authorities or with the other entities (for example, social and medical services) they need for their resettlement.

During the refugee crisis involving Syrian civilians, it was known and acknowledged by my interviewees that the Canadian government was recruiting both official and unofficial interpreters to help conduct the interviews in Lebanon and Jordan. The interpreters, however, were restricted from intervening during the interviews and their sole function was to translate.

### **The Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) and Interpreting Services**

In Canada, the IRB is “the largest independent administrative tribunal. It is responsible for making well-reasoned decisions on immigration and refugee matters” (IRB Website). As such, it needs to provide professional and accurate translations to refugees in need of interpretation. It uses accreditation tests to accredit interpreters for any person who does not understand or speak any of the two official languages necessary for government procedures (IRB Website).

According to IRB rules, an interpreter must comply with the following criteria in order to be accepted: An IRB interpreter must be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident, have a secondary school diploma or equivalent, provide a minimum of two professional references, and comply with the rules that are set out in the Code of Conduct for Interpreters (IRB Website). The IRB does not require the interpreter to have completed post-secondary studies related to translation and interpretation, which means that they may also recruit non-official interpreters to assist refugees.

Even though most of their interpreters have not completed academic or professional studies in the field, the IRB makes sure that they are assessed in the languages they speak to ensure they have the ability to help a person who does not speak any of the two official languages. Once interpreters are recruited into the IRB, they are expected to “be well-prepared, ensure fairness, interpret accurately, communicate properly, respect the confidentiality of the IRB and adopt a professional conduct” (IRB Website). According to the IRB, interpreters are not allowed to influence the refugees’ answers in any way. The interpreter must be objective, must not take the part of the refugee or the immigration officer, nor give explanations or advice as to how to answer.

The role of an interpreter for the Immigration and Refugee Board is crucial for tribunal meetings and decision-making that concern the future of refugees. Without interpreters, many refugees would have neither a chance to be understood by Canadian officials nor a chance for a better future. Communication and understanding are critical in the immigration process for refugees.

### **Canadian Government and Sponsorship Assistance**

As Syrians began to exit the country due to the war, in Canada, the Stephen Harper government (in power from February 2006 to November 2015) promised to accept 1300 refugees by 2014, with only 200 of them to be government-assisted (Zyfi 2016). A government-assisted refugee [GAR] is one entirely sponsored by the Canadian or Quebec government (Munson and Ataullahjan 2016). Later, Justin Trudeau’s Liberal government (in power since 2015) would commit to accepting 25000 Syrian refugees into Canada (Zyfi 2016, page 5). His government made donations to the UNHCR, which, as previously mentioned, has continually played an important role in the lives of refugees worldwide, in particular by assisting displaced refugees

financially or morally. The Canadian government worked closely with this UN agency in order to handle the Syrian refugee situation more effectively: “Until May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016 more than 25000 refugees were resettled in Canada and over 16000 applications were in progress from the countries of Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey” (Zyfi 2016, 5).

While many refugees were sponsored by the government, many of them were also privately sponsored, meaning that organizations such as schools, churches or mosques, or family members already living in Canada, took care of the refugees and supported them financially (Munson and Atallahjan 2016). In fact, and as corroborated by my discussion with an immigration consultant, there were four programs actively contributing to sponsoring the Syrian refugees: Government-Assisted Refugee Program (GAR); Private sponsorship; Blended Visa Office-Referred Program (BVOR); and Lifeline Syria.

The first program is the Government Assisted Refugee Program (GAR). It was intended for refugees who are entirely sponsored by the Quebec government or the Government of Canada (Zyfi 2016, 10). The application may take up to six months. Once the refugee arrives in Canada, the government assumes all financial support, including housing, food, medical services, clothing, and so on. Through this program, refugees receive a monthly allowance that is dedicated to cover daily life costs. For the first year of sponsorship by the government, refugees are told in which city to live. It is not a restriction that the government imposes, but rather a measure they have put as a rule in order to avoid refugees going to remote locations where there will be no community help (Zyfi 2016, 10). The immigration consultant mentioned that the majority of refugees are guided towards Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Montreal has a long history of accepting immigrants and more specifically refugees.



The second program is the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program (BVOR). It is a program that creates a partnership between the Government of Canada, the UNHCR and private sponsors (Zyfi 2016, 10-11). The first step of this program is for the UNHCR to identify the refugees and match them with a private sponsor, or the Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH). SAH sponsors are usually religious, ethnic, community or service organizations which have signed agreements with the Government of Canada to sponsor refugees (Zyfi 2016, 10). During the first four to six months, the government ensures the entire financial support for each refugee. During the remaining six to eight months, private sponsors (SAH) are the ones responsible to assume and cover all expenses of the refugees. Large families usually arrive to Canada through the BVOR program. In cases where they do not match with any private sponsors, they need to be admitted through the GAR program (Zyfi 2016, 11).

The third program is private sponsorship: The private sponsorship program can take three different forms: the SAH, a group of five Canadians or permanent residents, or a community sponsor (Zyfi 2016, 12). The sponsors can refer a refugee (or a family) who needs the sponsorship in order to come to Canada. Usually, and what I discovered during the interviews, was that Syrian people already residing in Canada sponsor their relatives in Syria as refugees. When no one can sponsor the refugee, the government steps in and assigns them to a sponsor.

The fourth program is implemented through Lifeline Syria. This organization focuses on the resettlement process of Syrian refugees and works closely with private sponsors, community organizations, and religious groups (Zyfi, 2016, 12). The sponsorship program of Lifeline Syria needs to be composed of at least five adult members who have no criminal records and who also have the financial stability needed to support the refugees. They need to prove that they have a

minimum of \$27,000 per year for a family of four. Lifeline Syria sponsors assume all financial and moral assistance to refugees who resettle in Toronto. As with the other sponsorship programs, they need to provide housing, food, furniture, and need to assist refugees with medical appointments, school enrollment for children, and the organizing of legal papers (such as healthcare cards and driver's licences). Sponsors help not only financially, but with translation services as well (Zyfi, 2016, 13). Even though it is a program focused mainly in the Toronto area, Lifeline Syria had aimed to resettle a minimum of 1000 refugees all over Canada.

During the Syrian refugee crisis, the government of Canada made important decisions for the country and for those seeking help. In a period of about six months (from December 2015 to May 2016), Canada accepted over 27000 refugees (#Welcome Refugees-Government of Canada, 2019). As noted by Zyfi, the Canadian government showed that refugees are human beings and that they have a right to asylum (2016, 3). It also demonstrated that by organizing itself in this way, a country could increase its population successfully by accepting vulnerable refugees (Munson and Ataullahjan 2016). Concretely, it did so by creating a five-phase national action plan called “#Welcome Refugees” (#Welcome Refugees-Government of Canada 2019). The plan was devised not only to facilitate the refugees' resettlement, but also to protect Canadians. It was designed uniquely for the circumstances of the Syrian refugee crisis, and as such, differs in some ways from the usual procedures that refugee immigrants undertake.

### **The National Five-Phase Refugee Plan**

I use the five-phase Canadian Action Plan for Syrian refugees (Canadian Refugee Resettlement Plan, and “#Welcome Refugees”) as a basic framing device, in particular for identifying the points at which translation and interpreting services would realistically or likely be needed or

encountered. Basic questions help to focus on the kinds of roles played by translation and interpretation during this migration process. For example, who is responsible for ensuring that translation and interpretation requirements are met at each point? Through what agents are the services provided? Where do each of these activities fall within the five phases laid out by the Canadian national plan for Syrian refugee resettlement in the country? These five phases are also used as markers in a timeline to structure the interview questionnaires carried out with the Syrian refugees in Montreal, and to pinpoint when the services of translation and interpretation were called for during the immigration process. These services straddled multiple domains, functioning to comply with the official legal demands and requirements. At the same time, translators and interpreters became an essential part of the individual stories of the refugees, revealing the depth and scope of their collective refugee experience.

The ‘national plan’, which was initiated in 2015, consisted of five different stages. Its main intention was to identify, select and process, transport, welcome and resettle Syrian refugees. The five phases were termed as follows: (1) identification; (2) selection and processing; (3) travel to Canada; (4) arrival procedures in Canada; and (5) settlement and integration in Canadian communities (Zyfi 2016, 6). The plan was crucial for the government of Canada because many Canadians had begun to worry about their own safety when faced with the prospect of so many incoming refugees. Although terrifying images of the civil war in Syria and the European refugee crisis were flooding the media, some Canadians were not convinced of the government’s ability to maintain general peace while accepting such a high number of refugees. The five-phase plan “#Welcome Refugees” was an attempt to ease the whole process of refugee resettlement by guiding Canadians through the process of accepting refugees in the community (#Welcome Refugees-Government of Canada, 2019). In statistics compiled recently, “During

Operation Syrian Refugees, 54.6% were classified as government-assisted refugees (GARs), 35.6% as privately sponsored refugees (PSRs), and 9.8% as Blended Visa Office-Referred refugees (BVORs) (Government of Canada 2017a)” (Hamilton et al. 2020, 6)

The five-phase plan was detailed and organized.

### **Phase One: identification**

The first phase of the plan consisted in identifying the refugees. According to Zyfi (2016, 6) and her work on the Syrian refugee resettlement, Canadian representatives had to work closely with the UNHCR in Jordan and Lebanon to identify who the Syrian refugees were. Similar to the identification process in Jordan and Lebanon was the one in Turkey, the only difference being that Syrian refugees in Turkey were also registered with the state itself. The identification process of the Syrian refugees was meticulous. Candidates to be resettled in Canada needed to prove that they were Syrian citizens (or permanent residents of Syria) and that they permanently resided in Syria. Not every person who was living in Syria during the civil war was allowed to apply for resettlement in Canada. The Canadian government was obliged to create this rule in order to avoid accepting people from other countries claiming to be Syrian refugees.

In terms of some context, Syria is a multicultural country and home to many vulnerable people of different nationalities. The largest immigrant/refugee community in Damascus is Iraqi. The war in Iraq had allegedly caused an ‘invasion’ of its citizens to Syria, most of the time purportedly illegally. A powerful recounting of this refugee crisis in Syria can be seen through the author Deborah Campbell’s eyes. In her book, *A Disappearance in Damascus*, the story of Ahlam is a true example of a refugee escaping her own country of Iraq, only to become an illegal refugee in Syria and then obliged to escape to the US because staying in Syria was as dangerous

as staying in her home country (Campbell 2016). Throughout her book, the author depicts the two separate worlds of Syria: one through the eyes of a free person, and one through the eyes of a refugee. Campbell equally manages to show two different faces of Syrian life, both the rich and the poor. She leads readers on a journey through the glamorous and not so glamorous life in Damascus, allowing them to see, through the eyes of Ahlam, the life Syrian people lived before the civil war began in 2011.

The ‘invasion’ of Iraqi people into Syria contributed to destabilizing the country’s socio-economic situation. A country already overwhelmed with internal problems is not capable of helping another vulnerable population. Syrians were trying to deal with their own proliferating issues while the Iraqi population was seeking refuge. Although the growing insecurity in Syria was connected to the Iraqi refugee wave, it has not been proven that the war in Syria started because of Iraqi presence in the country. Desperate and constantly fearing to be taken back to Iraq or put in a prison in Syria, Iraqi refugees were searching for a stable and permanently safe home. If that meant escaping Syria and running away to Canada, they were prepared to do so. Even though they were living illegally in Syria, some of them believed they could try to leave Syria by presenting themselves as Syrian refugees.

For these already complicated reasons, the Canadian government created identification measures in order to avoid accepting people who were trying to abuse the system and enter Canada. At the same time, the government continually attempted to ensure the Canadian population that their own safety would not be jeopardized due to the presence of Syrian refugees in the country. In addition, it also requested that UNHCR prioritize vulnerable refugee groups such as “women, complete families and individuals identifying as LGBTI” (Zyfi 2016, 6). These individuals were

considered to be low risk in terms of danger to the Canadian population. Due to the careful background verifications, the immigration process for Canada sometimes took longer than a year. The officials, UNHCR representatives, and volunteers who were present on Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon territories were mandated to identify potential refugees.

The identification process was facilitated with the help of translators and interpreters.

Communication with the UNHCR or Canadian officials was not always achieved in Arabic. Not all officials spoke Arabic, nor did all refugees speak French and/or English. In this case, the necessary step of translation was carried out either by official interpreters or volunteers who had flown into Beirut, Istanbul or Amman from Northern Africa, Europe or Canada. Many locals who had some knowledge of English or French (in the case of Lebanon) assisted at the refugee camps. Volunteers within the UNHCR also came up with creative ideas on how to facilitate communication with refugees and better understand their needs.

The UNHCR was the agency that oversaw the identification and reintegration of refugees in Jordan and Lebanon and identified Syrian refugees for resettlement to Canada (Zyfi 2016, 6). It was also the agency responsible for ensuring that all translation and interpretation requirements were met. Providing efficient translation and interpretation services to the refugees sometimes meant relying on various translation means. As recounted to me during conversations with Syrian refugees, at times the UNHCR representatives would use automatic translation applications such as Google Translate on their phones or tablets to help them understand what the refugees were trying to say. Where use of internet was not possible, volunteers created signs with small translations or descriptions.

## **Phase Two: selection and processing**

The second phase of the Canadian refugee plan was the actual processing of the Syrian refugees. Once refugees were identified and selected, the UNHCR representatives sent them a text message in either French, English or Arabic, depending on how the refugee had been qualified in terms of his or her language abilities. They were asked to confirm if they were interested in resettling in Canada. If the refugees answered positively, the whole process of verification began, and they were forwarded to visa processing centers. At the time, the situation for the Syrian people was only deteriorating. Considering the high number of refugees to be resettled in Canada, every application had to go through important verification steps. Due to the high risk associated with the country of origin and with the safety of Canadians a priority, a refugee candidate had to proceed through these many steps. At least 500 Canadian immigration officials were dispatched to Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey to deal with the high number of applications (Zyfi 2016, 6).

This phase was considered to be the most complex one. It consisted of many requirements and steps for the refugees. Each one of these steps required interaction between the refugees and Canadian officials. They included interviews, followed by medical examinations, security background verifications and additional admissibility verifications (#Welcome Refugees-Government of Canada 2019).

The interview was usually conducted in French or English; however, the majority of refugees needed an interpreter, as only a limited number of the applicants knew the official languages of Canada. At this stage, the Canadian government was in charge of providing the services of an interpreter. Some of the officials knew Arabic but the majority of them did not. According to my

interviewees, many volunteers from Algeria and Morocco were recruited and sent by the UNHCR and the Canadian government to Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey in order to assist with interviews and the remaining procedures.

The next step of this phase consisted of the medical exams. An application could not be refused due to existing health problems, but it could delay the whole process of resettlement (Zyfi 2016, 7). These exams were to be completed at hospitals approved by the Canadian government.

During this step, refugees did not need the help of a translator because the staff at the hospitals in Lebanon and Jordan spoke Arabic. It was only in the case of Turkey that refugees needed the help of an interpreter during the medical exams. There, the UNHCR stepped in and provided the interpreting and translation services. Although the refugees in Lebanon and Jordan did not need translation assistance, they were accompanied by UNHCR volunteers who helped them with the requisite papers and procedures. This whole process would be stressful for a person in normal circumstances, but it was even more so for refugees. Having someone there to guide them and give them moral support was helpful.

Following the medical exams, the refugees went through security screenings and background verifications. They were interviewed by an immigration officer and those who did not speak the official languages were provided with an interpreter. The government needed to make sure that the refugees did not have a criminal past and were not persecuted for any crimes they might have committed in Syria. They were asked questions and their records were checked by Interpol and the CIS [Canadian Intelligence Service]. This security screening procedure is regular for all immigrants to Canada; it was not created solely for the Syrian refugees.



The refugees were also assessed on their ability to adapt to life in Canada. This included their knowledge of French or English, and whether or not they already had relatives or friends living in Canada. It was assumed that a person could better adapt to life in a new country if there were family or friends to support them. Emotionally, it would be easier for the refugees to manage their new reality.

After all the steps of the second phase were completed and the security screenings were cleared, the refugees were approved and were granted permanent resident visas.

### **Phase Three: travel to Canada**

The third phase of the Canadian refugee plan focused on the actual physical travel of the Syrian refugees to Canada (Zyfi, 2016, 7). Once the refugees successfully made it through the first two phases, they entered the third phase and were officially allowed to travel (#Welcome Refugees-Government of Canada 2019). Various organizations assisted the refugees every step of the way. This assistance took different forms. It included booking their flight tickets, looking for accommodation for them in case they had to transit through another country, and helping them to transport their luggage. In Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, interpreters were available to help organize the trip. For example, they told refugees where they could purchase their tickets or how they could register for government-run flights. The role of the interpreter in that case was to transmit the information given by the Canadian officials.

Montreal and Toronto were the only two Canadian cities prepared and organized for receiving the refugees. Prior to their departures for Toronto or Montreal, the refugees were aided and accompanied by an official from either the UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration [IOM] or the Canadian government. Some refugees flew on commercial flights

directly to Montreal and Toronto with Royal Air Jordanian, an airline whose main language is Arabic; others flew on commercial flights through Europe that were served in English, French or German. They were not offered interpreting services. If they had no knowledge of French and/or English, they had to manage on their own until their arrival in Canada. For the flights organized by Justin Trudeau's government, there were interpreters on board who translated the instructions and flight information. While most of the refugees travelling on government-sponsored chartered planes arrived in Montreal or Toronto (#Welcome Refugees-Government of Canada 2019), other refugees either travelled on commercial flights to Canada or had to go to Jordan, and from there travel directly to their Canadian destination.

#### **Phase Four: arrival procedures in Canada**

The fourth phase of the Canadian refugee plan involved the arrival of the refugees on Canadian soil (Zyfi, 2016, 8). Upon landing in Canada, Syrian refugees automatically became permanent residents of Canada. At their arrival points in Montreal or Toronto international airports, the refugees needed to go through a screening process by Canada Border Service Agency [CBSA] agents one last time. Interpreters and volunteers were present to help with the arrival procedures. According to a Syrian volunteer with the Montreal YMCA who was asked to work at the airport during the arrival of the refugees, most of the interpreters were volunteers from different organizations, with some Arabic-speaking CBSA agents also able to help with translation. After passing through these procedures, the refugees were free to meet their families, hosts, or sponsors. Those who were not privately sponsored were guided to their temporary accommodations (Zyfi 2016, 8).

### **Phase Five: settlement and integration in Canadian communities**

The fifth and last phase of the Canadian refugee plan was the actual settlement and integration in Canadian communities (Zyfi, 2016, 9). Many refugees were welcomed by family members or friends in Canada, so the resettlement process was much easier for them. Looking for housing, doing grocery shopping, going to medical appointments or school, and arranging daycare for their children, were activities eased by the fact that they were accompanied by their relatives. Their own family members played the role of interpreter and could assist them, even though they were not professional interpreters. Refugees also tried to stay within the Syrian community, because at the beginning they were afraid of not being able to resettle due to language barriers. Those who did not have relatives in Canada were assisted by UNHCR volunteers. In Québec, new refugees were guided towards the language classes offered in Québec for immigrants. This program, called “Francisation”, offers immigrants the opportunity to take full-time French classes while being paid \$450 per month, and to receive a certificate at the end of a 9-month school term. The program allows refugees to learn French and slowly integrate into their new society. The language classes also allow them to meet with other refugees, share tips and information, and talk about their entire experience as a refugee. The refugees and families who had been supported throughout the long migration process were provided with services such as schooling (to learn English or French), healthcare, housing, and counseling, among other services. (Zyfi 2016, 9) The integration of new immigrants, especially refugees, in Canada can be a very delicate topic, yet Canadian communities continue to work to help refugees integrate by opening their homes or by learning their language in order to be able to communicate with them.

#### **IV. Chapter four: Translating the Syrian Refugee Experience – Interviews**

The narrow scope of the research question as a goal for the interview questionnaires of the thesis, and the limited number of interviewees and responses, do not fully qualify my research study purely as ethnographic or oral history research. The study does not, as ethnography would, involve my immersion in a particular ethnic setting to investigate cultural practices and how people give meaning to their actions and social, cultural, and material environments (Risku et al. 2022, 324). Nor does it, following the goals of oral history, seek to gather, record, interpret, and preserve the voices and memories of peoples and communities for historical purposes, research and archives (Oral History Association). However, despite its small scale, it *does* provide information and substance to respond to the research question on the role of translation and interpreting in the immigration process of the Syrian refugees, and it does make important use of concepts and procedures that also serve as a foundation for the ethical bases in ethnographic and oral history research too. In this final chapter, I will lay out these procedures, present the results of my study, and discuss some of the challenges encountered.

##### **Preparing for the interview process**

My preparations for conducting the interviews with Syrian refugees in Montreal took place on several fronts. First, I considered the questions I wanted to ask concerning the roles of translation and interpretation throughout their immigration processes, based on when they might be relevant and necessary during the five main phases of the Canadian national plan. Second, I consulted and read works on oral history interviewing, among which Donald A. Ritchie's *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (2003). Third, in addition to my readings on oral history, I consulted on-site and online with the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS) at Concordia

University for ethical guidelines, workshops, and methodological training. In September 2017, I attended an “Introduction to Oral History and Interviewing” workshop, where I was able to learn more about oral history methodology, interviewing, and the ways peoples’ memories connect with the past, present and future through the stories they tell. Four, I submitted a “Summary Protocol Form [SPF]” as part of my application to the Research Ethics Committee of Concordia University for approval of my case study and research and to obtain my certificate of ethical acceptability. The approval for my research involving human participants was approved on May 24th, 2019. I was granted the Certificate of Ethical Acceptability, which allowed me to carry out my research and complete all my interviews in a manner that respected the Ethics Committee guidelines and requirements.

The oral history guidelines, interview practices, and ethics approval were necessary steps for the method I would use for interviewing Syrian refugees. By integrating interviews into the thesis, I sought not only to discover the significance of translation and interpreting in the lives of Syrian refugees - in their own words - as they advanced through the five-phase process of migration and resettlement in Canada. I sought also to integrate their responses in order to juxtapose them with official media statements and scholarly literature on refugee migration. Through interviews, we are given the possibility of connecting with other peoples’ experiences and are given access to life history. Ultimately, they allowed me to have a clearer vision of the refugees’ memories and to better understand their responses and actions. The Syrian refugees have many memories, good and bad. Some of them have their most beautiful memories from their childhood in Syria, but others under the shock of war only remember Syria as a dangerous and bad place. Oral history approaches give us a chance to understand the real impact of the civil war on the population. It allows for a spiritual connection between a people’s past memories, the present and the future.

Sharing pain and lived experiences can make things easier and allow souls to heal from trauma. It can be an enriching function for both participants, transformative for both interviewer and narrator. As discussed by Marella Hoffman in *Practicing Oral History Among Refugees and Host Communities*,

[...Y]ou need to have some awareness of those dilemmas before sitting down to listen to refugees. Since the day they lost everything, leaving others behind in chaos and danger and laboring forward themselves into an alien world, ‘regulating, editing and navigating’ [...] are basically what they have to do now, all day, every day. Even an opening question like ‘Who are you?’ can be deeply entangled for a refugee. Who they were back home before crisis, flight and losing everything was necessarily very different from the refugee they are in front of you today (2020, 100).

Hoffman reiterates this complexity when she further explains that “the refugee experience is in fact a four-stage trauma that successively layers up”, comprising:

1. the trauma that drove them from their home;
2. the trauma of the refugee journey;
3. the stresses of ‘arriving’, if they’re lucky, at their hoped-for destination and applying to be allowed to stay, even temporarily;
4. the momentous challenge of rebuilding a new life there from scratch, if they are one of the small minority given asylum. (Hoffman 2020, 100-101)

Thus, from ethnographic research, we learn that there are “three key factors for its success”: the position of the researcher, the establishing of trust between researchers and participants, and the appropriate and ethical ways to handle person-related data, including the choice of participants,

privacy or anonymity, and data management (Risku et al. 2022, 332-335). From oral history, we learn about the ethical and critical importance of informed consent, right of withdrawal, and the mitigation of harm for the interview process (High 2014, 267). Furthermore, and in the context of oral history and refugees, as stated by Hoffman, the “four golden pillars” of the oral history method are a “guarantee of integrity”; they are: “1) Genuine power-sharing in the interview process; 2) Transparent publishing and archiving of all transcripts; 3) Ethical protections for narrators at all stages; and 4) Some ownership of products and outcomes for narrators” (2020, 40). Finally, from Julie McDonough Dolmaya’s interrogation on the potential place for oral history within translation studies, we learn that oral history and translation studies can benefit equally from interdisciplinary dialogue and exchange.

Because oral history literature has explored methodological, ethical and theoretical problems related to the collection, processing and analysis of oral testimonies, it has much to offer translation studies. [...] Translation studies has much to offer oral history, particularly with respect to issues [...] on how to address ethical and power issues when interviews are conducted in foreign languages with the help of an interpreter, how to translate interviews conducted in a foreign language, and how to analyze translated transcripts. (McDonough Dolmaya 2015, 197)

Understanding my position as interviewer, realizing the importance of establishing trust, and listening carefully during the interview process, helped reinforce the ethical procedures to put in place for my interviews.

## **Structuring the interview process**

I benefited from three main sources while structuring the interview process: the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS) guidelines; Donald A. Ritchie's *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (2003); and the Concordia University "Summary Protocol Form (SPF)" needed for my application to obtain the certificate of ethical acceptability. The COHDS guidelines initiate a broad framework comprising five main areas to address. They are, to: 1) develop key research questions; 2) plan the project and consider its ethical implications; 3) conduct the necessary background research; 4) conduct the interviews (write notes, transcribe, analyze the data); and 5) organize and present the results.

My second step was to reflect on the steps that were necessary to take within the frame of the above guidelines. Ritchie's practical guide outlines the most important steps of conducting an interview in chapter three (Ritchie 2003, 70-90). They include:

1. Get ready for the interview
  - think about the whole project from beginning to end (70)
  - familiarizing oneself with any available information (70)
  - conduct research on the topic in order to determine what questions to ask (71)
  - prepare more questions in order to get more abundant information (72)
  - be concise and conduct the interview once (72)
  
2. Setting up the interview
  - decide who or which group to interview first (73)
  - start to interview elderly people, which can be helpful for attracting more volunteers (73)



- locate potential interviewees (74)
  - initiate a preliminary contact by having lunch or having a friendly conversation prior to the interview (74)
3. Conducting the interview
- be prepared in case the interviewee wants to stop the recording (81)
  - prepare a questionnaire but be willing to deviate from the questions (85)
  - be focused on the interviewee and body language, which means avoiding distraction (88)
4. Concluding the interview
- find a way to conclude the interview with a wrap up question (89)

All these steps provided me with useful direction and led the process of interviews to be more organized and professional.

Lastly, the SPF form required me to think through the details of a variety of procedural aspects from an ethical perspective. They included providing a lay summary of my research study; assessing the study's risk level; considering the power dynamics and situations or circumstances of particularly vulnerable participants; describing how potential participants would be identified and invited to participate; specifying what the participants would have to do and explaining how I would solicit their informed consent; explaining how participants would be informed of their right to withdraw at any time; assessing risks and benefits for them; describing the procedures for data collection and storage, and indicating who would have access to the data after it was collected and stored.

## **Organizing and reorganizing the interview process: logging the steps**

The topic of Syrian refugees and the role translation had during their immigration process had intrigued me for more than a year before starting my research. I knew that the only way to better understand and learn more about the refugees' experiences was to seek out that information from the refugees themselves. Their real-life experiences would supplement the academic sources used for the research and potentially confirm, clarify, or reject what scholars had written. My friendships with Syrian refugees who had recently arrived in Montreal fueled my interest even more for the topic.

### **Step one**

Before conducting the interviews, I had previously considered who I would need to interview in order to learn more about my topic. I prepared myself by getting to know more about the people I would be interviewing. After discussions with my Syrian friends and before the interviews began, I decided to follow their recommendation of conducting the interviews at church or in their homes. This allowed my interviewees to feel more at ease when sharing their personal information. I decided, too, to conduct the interviews with around twenty Syrian refugees in the Montreal area, most of them between 20 and 50 years old. I had two specific inclusion criteria: participants had to be at least 18 years old and be a Syrian refugee who came to Canada through the legal immigration process.

### **Step two**

This step consisted in developing questions that would contribute to addressing my key research question, which was to understand the role of translation and interpretation in the Syrian refugee

immigration process. Following oral history interviewing guidelines, I created questions that were constructed in such a way that refugees would not feel pressure during the interviews. The semi-structured questions were limited to those of a general nature and did not involve deep emotional reflections. I concentrated on creating questions about ages, names, languages spoken, how and when they decided to leave Syria, what procedures they went through, and at which specific moments they needed the help of a translator or interpreter. They could choose whether or not to elaborate on their responses.

### Step three

The following step of planning the interviews was to take into consideration the ethical guidelines involving human participants. After discussions with my thesis supervisor, we decided that all participants would need to sign a consent form prior to their taking part in the interviews, and that their participation would be anonymous. That is, the information provided would never have identifiers associated with it, and the risk of identification of the individuals would be low or very low. The consent forms and the interview questionnaires – included in the thesis appendix – were created in English and later translated into French. I then submitted my SPF form and application to Concordia University's Research Ethics Committee for ethics approval. I was granted the certificate and permission to continue with my research.

### Step four

My next step of the pre-interview preparation phase was to carry out some background research. This research focused more generally on the Syrian refugees in Canada and more specifically in Montreal. I sought first to discover their preferred neighbourhood in the city of Montreal, when they had arrived in Canada, what the level of education was for adults and young refugees, and

what the importance of the Syrian community was for their resettlement. My connections with some Syrian refugees allowed me to gather all this information. An important outcome of this background research had to do with the location of the interviews. I initially organized the interviews to take place in the homes of the refugees themselves and at the Syrian church “Paroisse Notre Dame de l’Annonciation” in Montreal, where most refugees get together every Sunday. Ultimately, only a few refugees preferred to be interviewed at their homes. They wanted to keep their privacy and did not want the rest of the community to see them at the church. I also interviewed a Muslim woman who preferred to be interviewed at her home because she did not feel comfortable in a church.

#### Step five

This step focused on the interviewees and the actual interviews. It included finding interviewees, filling out the consent forms with them, setting up the recording equipment, handing out the questionnaires, recording and transcribing the paper questionnaires, and doing a backup of the data. The process of finding interviewees willing to participate in the research was long and difficult. Ultimately, they were found through my friendships with Syrian refugees and work colleagues. During the process, I planned interviews at the times most convenient for the participants. I even requested a personal leave from my airport employer in order to be available when there was a volunteer for an interview. However, refugees very often were a “no show” for the scheduled meeting and this without notifying me. I struggled from the beginning of the interview process until the end. There were days when I was not sure if I would be able to complete this part of my thesis because people just withdrew from the study. Finally, I reached my intended quota of 20 participants, all adults because I had decided not to include children.

After the consent form was signed by the participants and they were duly informed of their right to withdraw at any moment, I was able to set up equipment and papers and proceed to conduct the interviews.

In my preliminary discussions with the refugees, it was clear that not all of them would accept to be filmed. For this reason, I decided to record the interviews with a small recording device (purchased only for this research) and transcribe the responses afterwards. Enthusiastic and motivated, I had expected the interview recordings to go as I had planned. However, I quickly discovered there was an issue once I turned on the recording device. The interviewees would tense up upon seeing the recorder. Even though the purpose of the recordings was explained to them, they would become very silent, with a kind of tension emerging between us when I asked them questions. Although my research study would not harm them, I realized that they clearly were uncomfortable with the recordings. When I stopped recording and put the device back in my purse, we were able to continue conversations without being stressed. After discussing this situation with my supervisor, we came to the conclusion that it would be less stressful for the refugees if I gave them a questionnaire to fill out. In fact, the idea worked much better than the recordings did.

#### Step six

The interviews themselves were enlightening. The refugees I had a chance to meet and who were subsequently interviewed were all truly unique and had incredible stories to tell. As a trust-building exercise, I spoke with them to learn about the interviews they had undergone at the Canadian Embassy abroad. They also shared how their documents were prepared. Throughout our discussions it became very clear that there were numerous connections between translation

and the process of immigration, and the extent to which translation was involved. For example, one elderly woman told me that her family was rejected after the first interview at the embassy because of a misunderstanding between her and the interpreter. Her entire family's application was denied, and they had to restart in three months. During the second interview, the interpreter listened to her more carefully and did not interrupt her. She was more at ease with the second interpreter and felt safe to speak out in front of him and the Canadian official. The government interview was critical, and the role of the interpreter was crucial for the outcome. Another case dealt with a family of five adults and two children who were assisted during the interview by an interpreter. Because of this they were approved and could go on to the next set of procedures.

During the interviews, some of the refugees were more reserved when I asked them questions; others were very emotional and willing to openly voice their struggles throughout the whole process. I realized that male interviewees were often reserved during preliminary talks, but shared a lot of information during the interview itself. The majority of the female interviewees asked me a lot of personal questions prior to the interviews. They were interested in my origins, my job, my marital status, and my studies as well. Some of them shared that it was strange for a non-Arab woman to be interested in their culture and struggles as refugees. I realized that I needed to spend more time amongst them in order to gain their trust. As a result, I volunteered at the church at the opening of the school year for the youngest Syrians. I helped with distributing food, cleaning, assisting the elderly, and so on. The interviewees were shocked that a foreigner was not only interested in their lives but also passionate and willing to listen and understand them. Some female participants mentioned that in their community it was not appropriate to talk about the mental struggles surrounding their resettlement in Canada. With the help of others in the community, they shared how the immigration process had had an emotional impact on them.

Valuable interpretation help for the interviews came through the Syrian community itself. I conducted interviews with twenty Syrian refugees, some of whom spoke French and/or English, while others spoke only their mother tongue, which was Arabic. The consent forms and interview questionnaires were in English and in French, with Arabic interpretation provided when and as needed.

For this reason, an Arabic translator-interpreter participated during some of the interviews. For this role, I chose a well-known member of the community with a law degree from Syria and who had a very rich and specialized legal vocabulary in Arabic and French. I met him through his wife who used to work with me. She was the one who had guided me and helped me to understand the terrors the Syrian people were experiencing every day. Although he was not a refugee himself, he had fled Syria because of the war and had come to Canada through a sponsorship program. He assisted me when I first started the interviews. As a law expert, he also had excellent language skills, which helped to avoid any misinterpretation when the refugees were interviewed in Arabic. Even though he was not an official interpreter and did not work for the IRB, he was able to interpret accurately and communicate properly. As my interpreter he also helped to build trust between the refugees and me, which eased the communication. Navigating linguistically through the interviews was of interest to me. Some of the participants felt more confident speaking in Arabic than in French. Others refused to speak in Arabic and made me understand that they just wanted to express their thoughts in French. During some of the interviews we would start in French and after the third question, refugees would ask to switch to Arabic because it was easier and more natural for them to tell their life stories in their mother tongue. Culturally speaking, I found that women were not always ready or willing to speak out in front of the male Arabic interpreter. He explained to me that the women felt more comfortable

when they shared stories with another woman, and that they were afraid to be judged by males in the same way they were judged by their fathers and brothers. For this reason, when he was available and present, I focused more on interviewing male refugees who happened to be more talkative in his presence. Due to his work schedule, he was not able to be present during all the interviews.

Assistance also came by way of a Syrian refugee couple I had met through my employment at the airport. They volunteered to help me out not only by interpreting but also by receiving me in their community. They were refugees themselves but had not escaped Syria. Indeed, they had left Syria a long time ago and had moved to Venezuela looking for a better life. When the conflicts began in Venezuela, they became refugees and had to move to Canada. Even though they had been away from their native country for a very long time, they were still strongly attached to their homeland and had a unique bond with other Syrian refugees. They used to own a travel agency in Venezuela and had excellent knowledge and vocabulary in the four languages they spoke: French, English, Spanish and Arabic. They were not professional translators either, but over the course of their lives they had become self-made translators-interpreters, with the wife working for the IRB on a temporary basis and assisting during the refugee proceedings. Out of habit, we communicated in Spanish most of the time. They both admitted feeling more confident in Spanish than in French or English. We were, as Karpinski could have termed it, borrowing tongues in order to be able to communicate amongst ourselves and with the refugees. The wife's presence during the interviews contributed to attracting more female participants who felt more comfortable while she was there. I thought that at first, the refugees would consider me an outsider and might think that I would not understand the way they feel as newcomers to Canada. However, it seemed as though they were curious about me and my story as an immigrant to



Canada as well. Through the wife's interpretation during the small talk prior to starting the interviews, they asked me questions about my past and present life, which I found helped to break the ice and build a certain level of trust between us.

Finally, an immigration consultant was contacted in order to gather more information about the refugees' community. He worked closely with Syrian refugees and took part in my project by providing detailed information about the official part of the immigration process. He volunteers on a regular basis for different non-profit organizations in Montreal that assist Syrian refugees. One organization is the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, St. Ivan Rilski, which was sponsoring Syrian refugees trying to come to Canada. He assisted Syrian people residing in Montreal and whose relatives were still in Syria, Lebanon, or Jordan. We met only once in person during a gathering at the Bulgarian church. Afterwards during a phone conversation, he briefly explained the different sponsorship programs to me: Government Assisted Refugee Program (GAR); Blended Visa Office-Referral Program (BVOR); Private Sponsorship; and Lifeline Syria. The Overall, based on his experience, the consultant had concluded that the immigration process for the refugees was very lengthy and complicated. In times where Syrians were fearing for their lives, he felt the whole process could be faster and that sponsors should be allowed to know how far in the immigration process each refugee was. He also mentioned that the Syrian community in Montreal was very strong and unified.

#### Step seven

Finally, after conducting the interviews, the last step was to process them. I took notes during the interviews and once I was in my home office, I wrote the post-interview analyses and summaries of my interview sessions. The final step was to organize all the results in order to present them.

These post-interview analyses and summaries were very helpful. All the consent forms and interview questionnaires now are stored in an identified folder with access only to myself and to my supervisor.

In the next section, I am presenting the English version of the sixteen interview questions along with the charts depicting their responses and results. For the interview process, I had prepared printed copies of the three language versions of the questionnaires, leaving some space between each question so the refugees could write down their answers. Although the consent forms and the questionnaires were also made available to the refugees through oral Arabic interpretation, they only asked for the English and French versions – much to my surprise. When asked why they preferred French or English over their native Arabic language, all of them (100%) answered that it was because they now lived in Canada and wanted to feel included in the society.

### **Interview Questions, Results and Analysis**

1. What is your name? Country of origin? How old are you? [Note that all names are anonymized and all interviewees had Syria as their country of origin.]

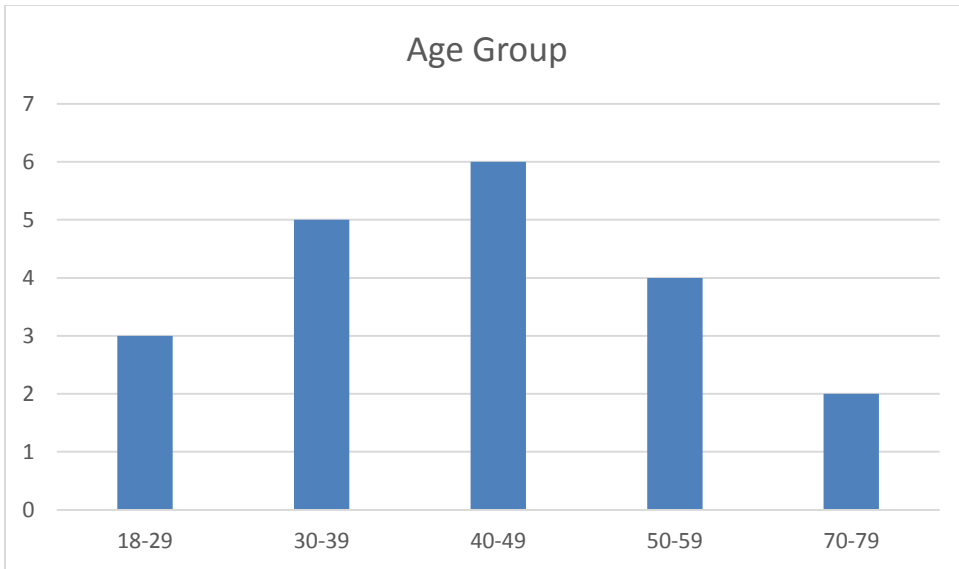


Figure 4.1

2. How many languages do you speak? Where, how, and why did you learn them?

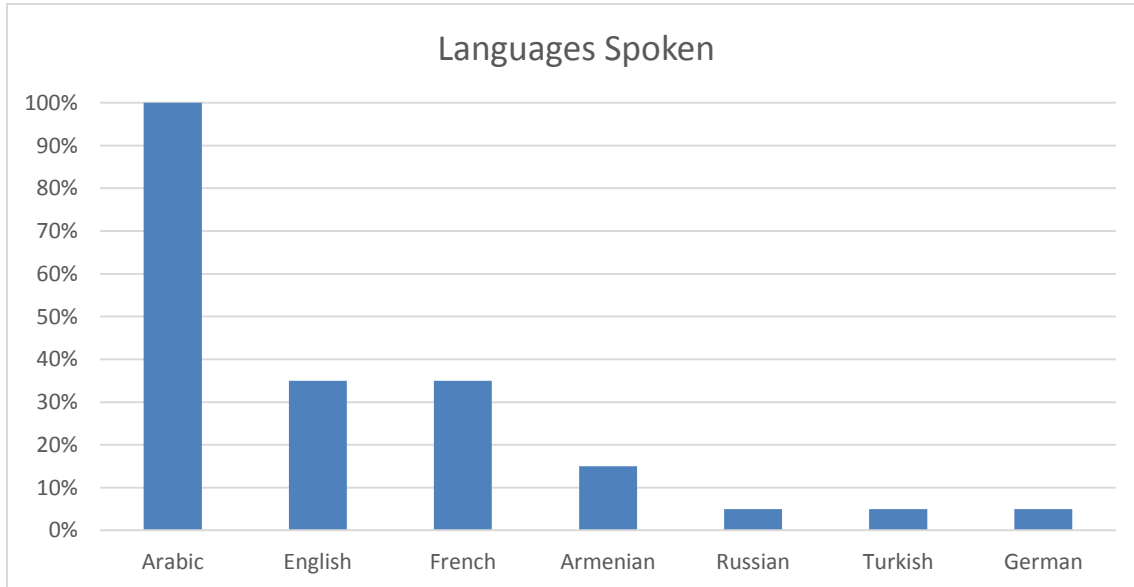


Figure 4.2

3. How and when did you decide to immigrate to Canada?

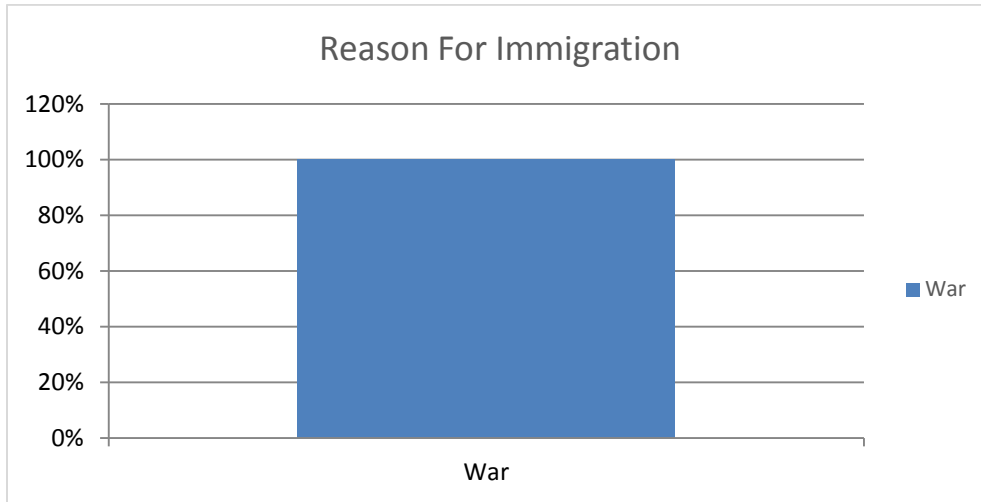


Figure 4.3

4. From the time you received the application materials, how long did the process take until you landed in Canada?

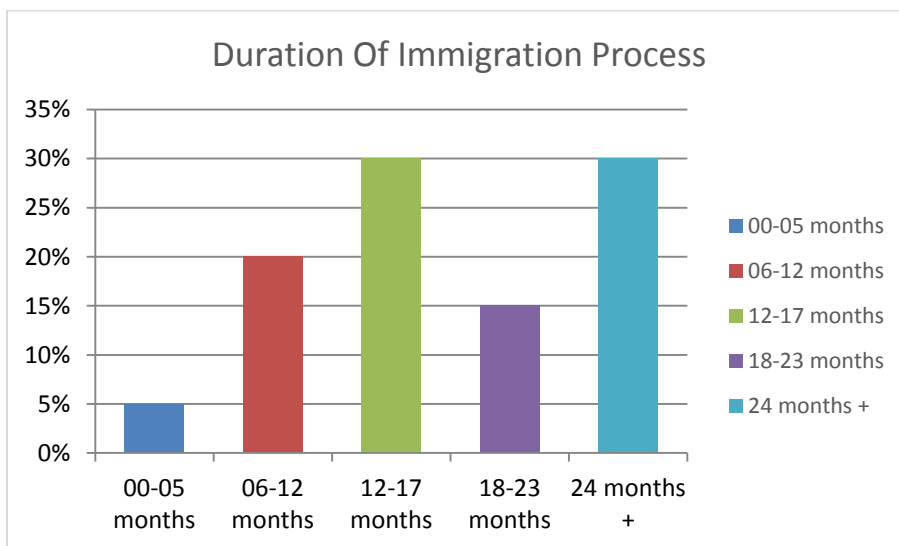


Figure 4.4

5. Canada implemented a five-phase national strategic plan for Syrian refugee resettlement. Although translation and interpreting ('oral translation') assistance are not specifically mentioned in the general information to the public, we assume that it played a critical role throughout the entire process. I would like you to think about the translation/interpreting needs you had and the positive and negative aspects of your experience with translators/interpreters.
- a) [Phase 1: identification and selection] - What was your experience with the UNCHR office at the Canadian embassies in Jordan and Lebanon?
  - b) [Phase 2: processing] - What was your experience once you were approved for processing of your application?
  - c) [Phase 3: travel] - What was your experience from the time you were given a date to depart to Canada? Did you need the help of a translator during the flight to Canada?
  - d) [Phase 4: welcoming/arrival] - What was your experience upon arrival on Canadian soil?
  - e) [Phase 5: settlement and integration] - What was your experience from the time you disembarked and were screened by the CBSA officers (including the Declaration for Entering Canada) and given permanent resident status? For example, did you need and receive the help of a translator during the medical assessment at the airport of Toronto or Montreal, and during the process of

applying for your PR (Permanent resident Card), SIN (Social Insurance Number), and Health Insurance Card? Were the forms only available in French and English?

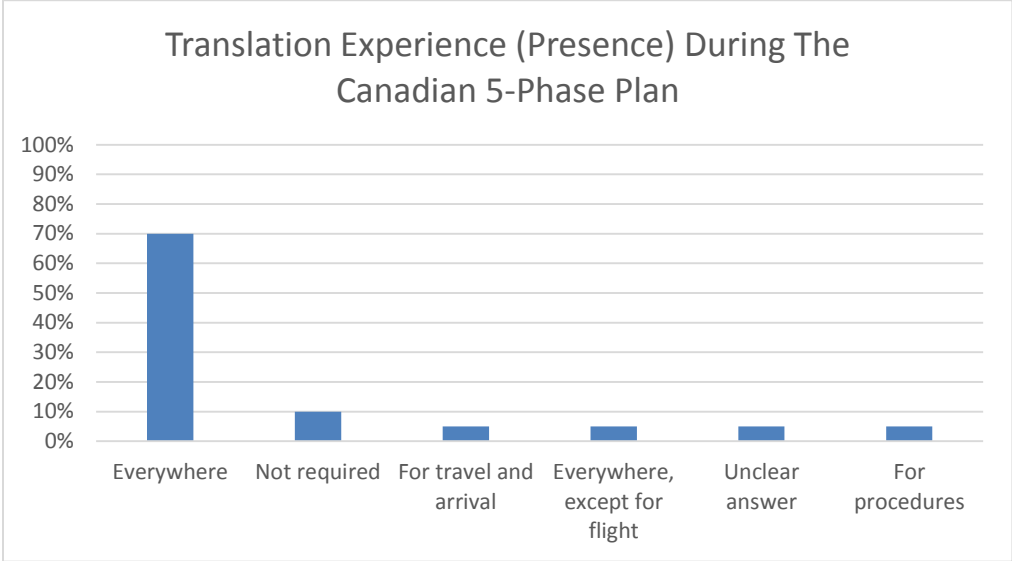


Figure 4.5

6. Have you needed and received the help of a translator or interpreter once you became a permanent resident of Canada?

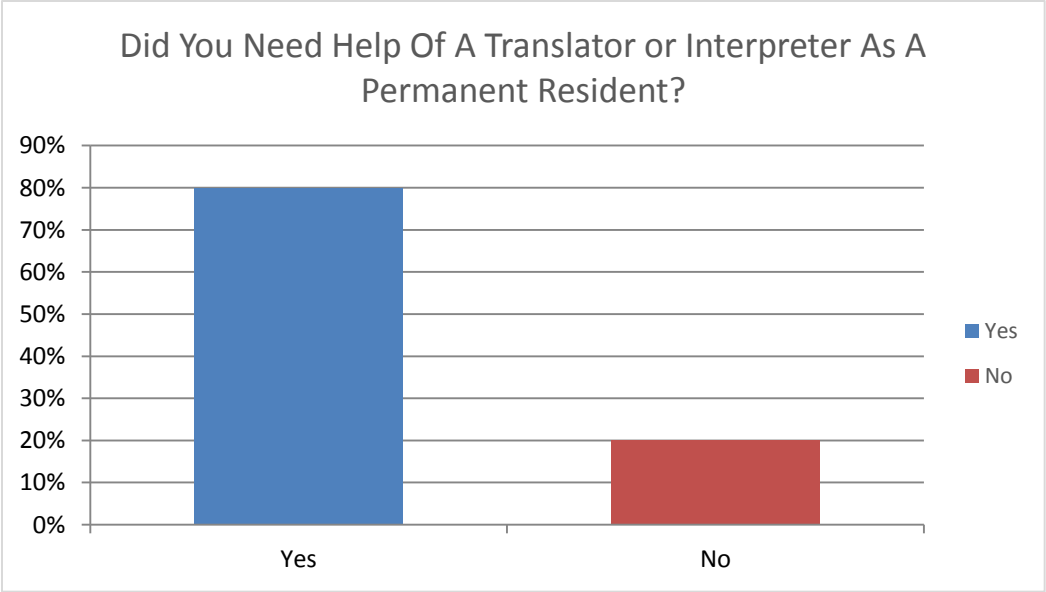


Figure 4.6

7. Were you able to find housing with or without a translator?

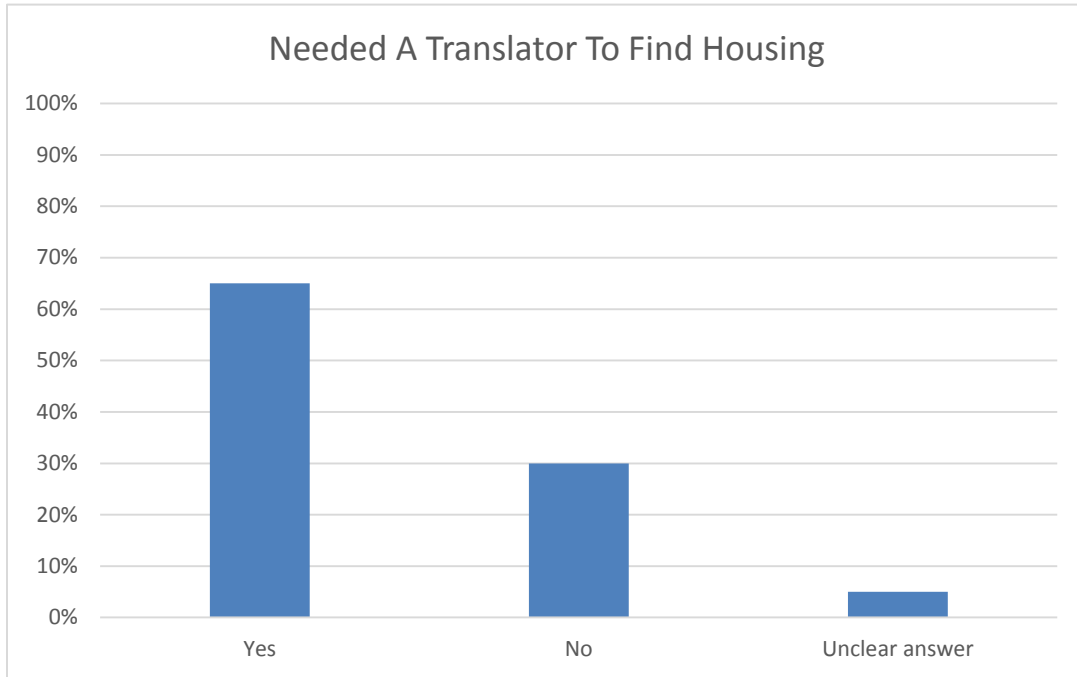


Figure 4.7

8. Have you been able to manage financial matters at financial institutions with or without the help of a translator – for instance, when applying for Social Aid and Child Support and filling out the forms, or when opening and managing a bank account?

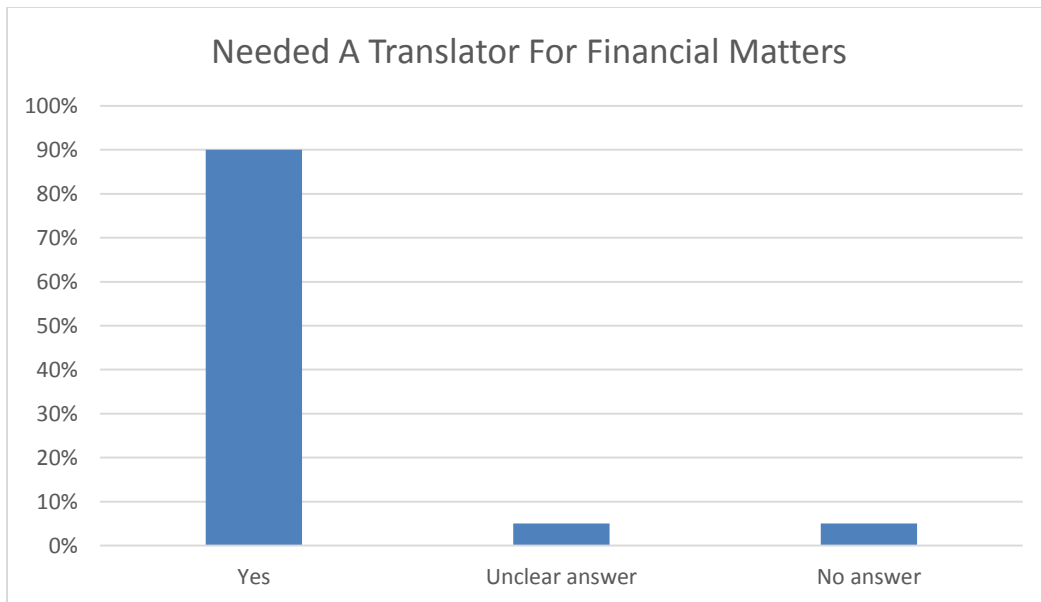


Figure 4.8

9. Were you able to manage matters of education with or without the help of a translator – for instance, when trying to find a program for language classes and registering for them (which language class did you enter - how, when, and at what moment), and/or when trying to find a school for your child/children? Who helped you in these processes and how?

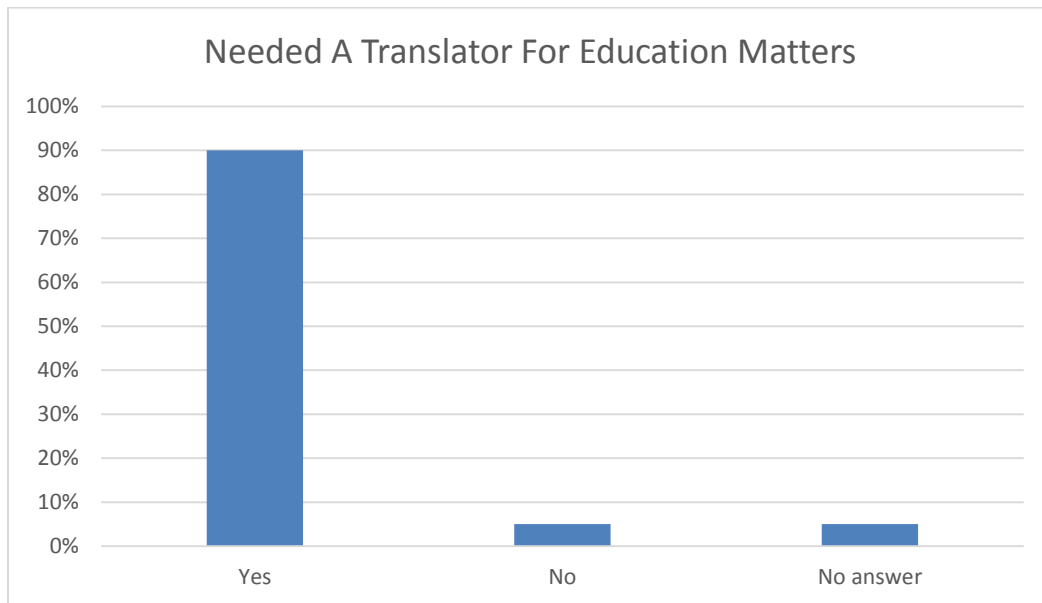


Figure 4.9

10. Were you able to find a family doctor (and/or pediatrician for your children) with or without a translator? How did you communicate with the doctor during your first visit?



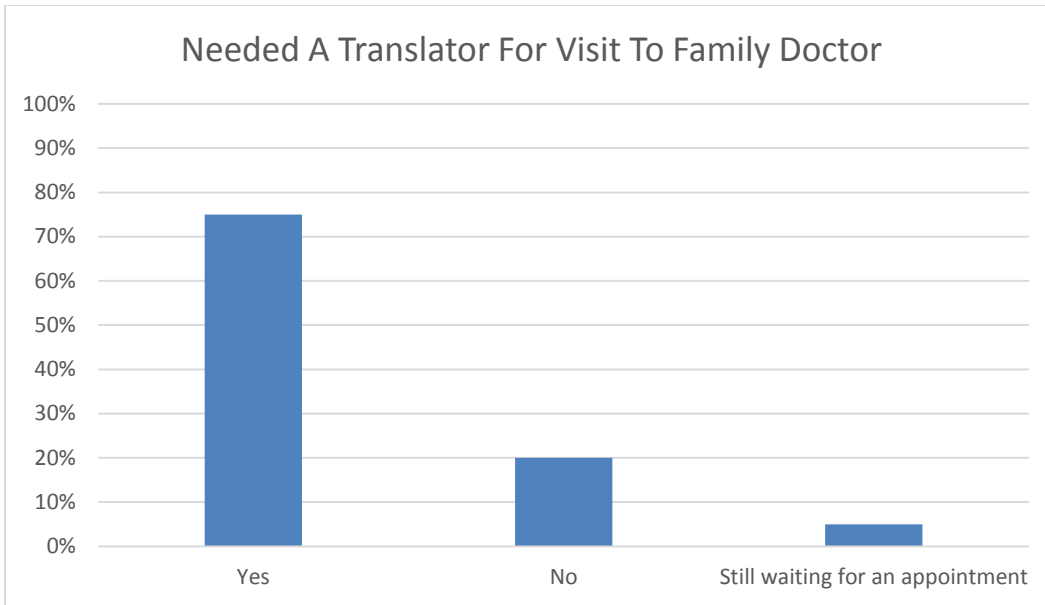


Figure 4.10

- Did you have a driver's licence in your country of origin? Were you able to register for driving lessons with or without a translator in Canada? Did you need the help of a translator for the theory and practice parts of the driving lessons? Was it difficult to prepare for the driving exam?

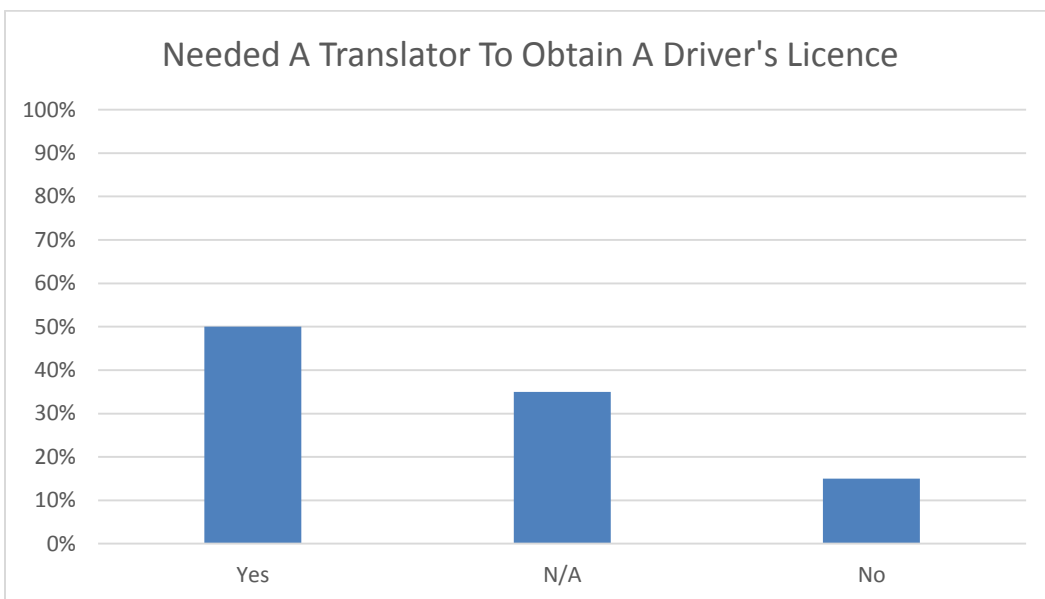


Figure 4.11

12. Have you been able to manage grocery shopping with or without a translator? Did you need translation for the products, or for understanding the differences in product names, foods, and measurements (kg/lb)?

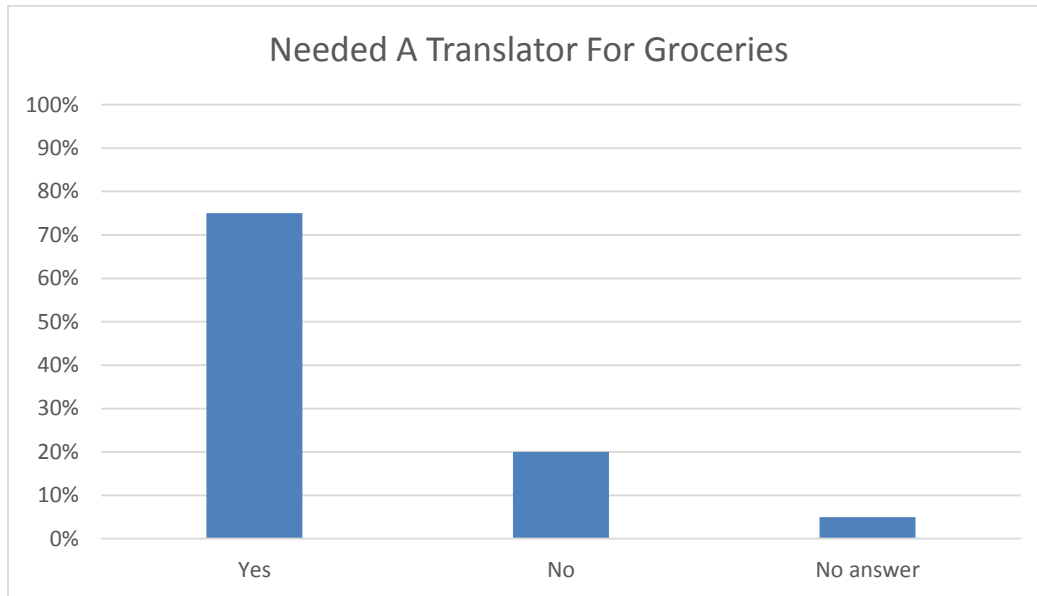


Figure 4.12

13. Have you needed any translation help for dealing with Canadian traditions and laws – including, for example, community laws for garbage pick-up, or public transportation and services, etc.?

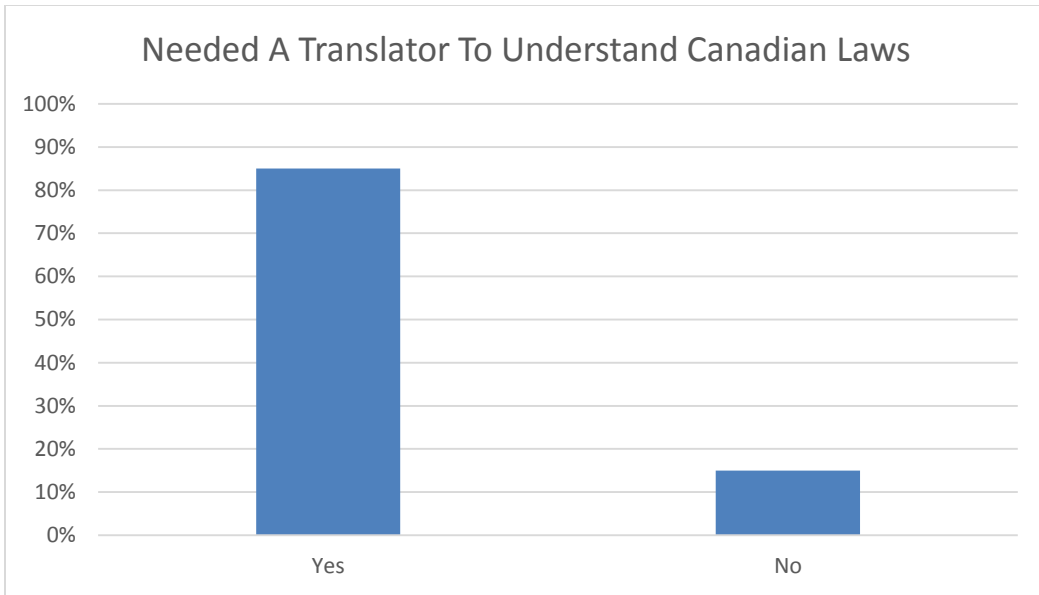


Figure 4.13

14. How long did it take for you to be more autonomous without the need of a translator?

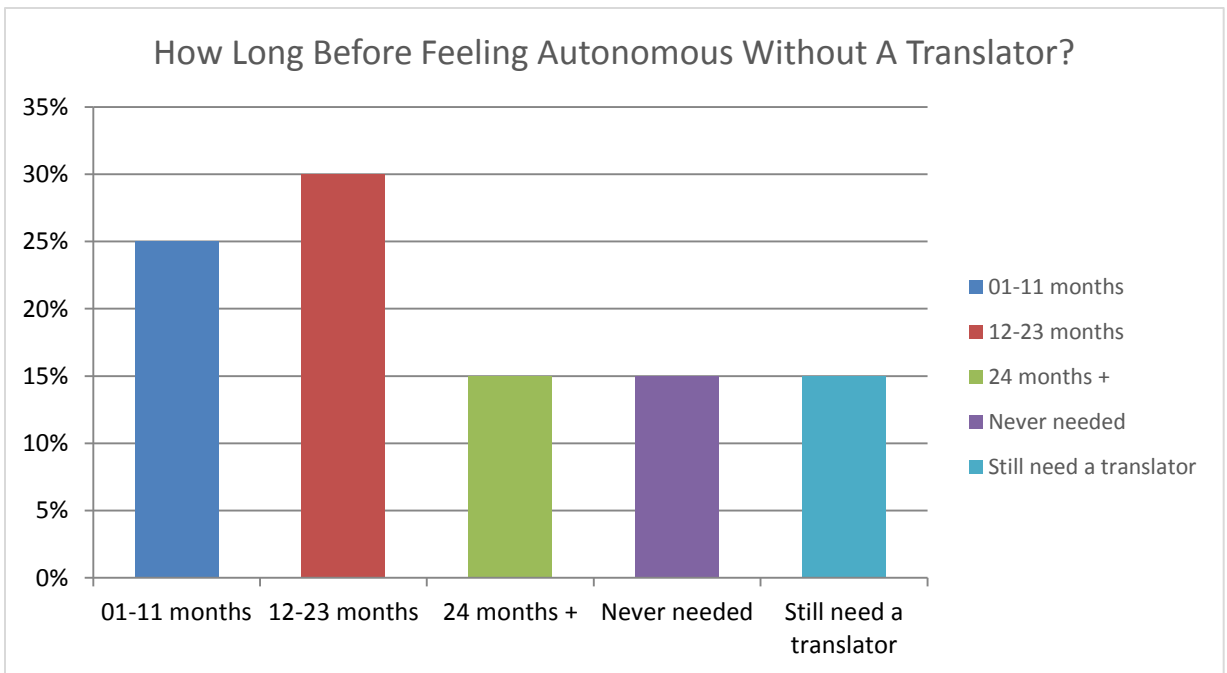


Figure 4.14

15. Do you ever use machine translation such as Google Translate?

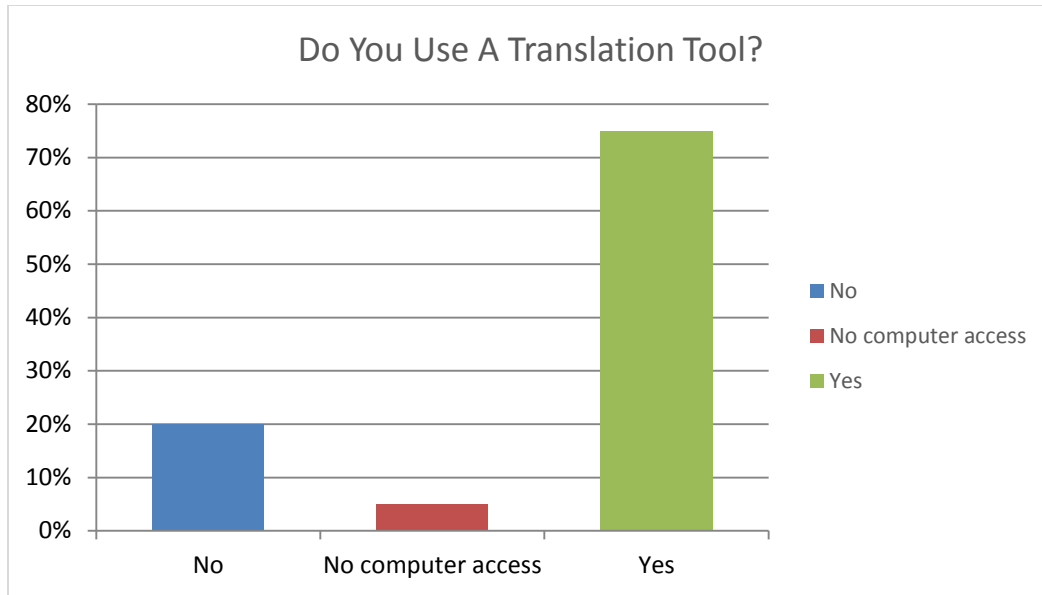


Figure 4.15

16. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

For this question, the responses varied significantly. 45% of the respondents responded that they had nothing more to add. 15% replied they were “happy to be in Canada”. 10% thanked Canada, while 5% thanked the translators involved during the process, and 5% stated that the interviewer had chosen the “right profession”, i.e., translation. 5%, respectively, remarked that it is important to have support, that they need to learn languages, that the wait for a court hearing was too long, and that everything had been organized and clean.

### **Outcomes and results of the interview questionnaires**

The research study was conducted through individual interviews and the filling out of questionnaires. The questionnaire was comprised of sixteen questions. During the interviews, behaviours of the interviewees were observed but were not considered a part of my research outcomes and results.

There was a total of twenty Syrian refugees, aged 21 to 73, twelve of whom were men and eight of whom were women. The majority had families with children (17 children in total). Only three were single and had arrived with other family members (i.e., parents or grandparents). All the participants in the study were Syrian nationals; 19 of them came from Syria and one participant via Venezuela.

The languages spoken by all the participants involved were Arabic, Armenian, Russian, French, German, Turkish, and English – including one interviewee who spoke Spanish but did not indicate it in the questionnaire. The four who had knowledge of English stated that they were able to adapt easily and settle into their new life in Canada.

All the interviewees stated that war was the reason they left Syria. It turned out that the interviewees had experienced deep psychological traumas while living in Syria. They constantly had fears that ISIS was looking for them even though they were in Canada. The majority of the refugees mentioned that they needed psychological help for themselves and especially for their children. With the help of my interpreters, some interviewees shared how their children were traumatized due to having witnessed bombings and killings. Despite all the difficulties, the interviews were done in a favorable atmosphere and in an organized manner.

The length of the immigration process was different for each participant; in some cases, it took anywhere between six months to two years, with the only exception being five years for one interviewee.

Only four of the participants did not need translation assistance during the immigration process because they spoke English. They also played the role of interpreter for their relatives and friends. The rest of the interviewees stated that they did need the help of translation services

while completing immigration procedures in Lebanon and Jordan (including when they filled out their application documents), while during their flights to Canada, and upon arrival in their new country. According to the answers submitted by the refugees, we see that they were provided the services of an interpreter throughout the whole immigration process. They also acknowledged that they were always treated warmly by Canadian officials.

The role played by interpreters did not end once the documents were filled out, the flight instructions understood, and the arrival procedures at the border of Canada completed. The refugees also needed translation services and assistance during their resettlement. Some participants mentioned that they were afraid to ask for help at the beginning, but afterwards realized that there was nothing shameful in asking for translation help. The refugees talked about the challenges of needing to adapt to their new conditions of life, new laws, new systems of measurement, and so on. For some, a relative or friend would ease the transition by acting as an unofficial translator or interpreter and guide. For others, it was quite a complicated process without any assistance of translators or interpreters. Approximately 75% of all those interviewed did use Google Translate as a tool to assist them in translation when they needed. According to the questionnaire results, a large number of refugees are studying French in the program offered by the Government of Quebec.

It became clear throughout the research study that the refugees needed the help of an interpreter or a translator for even the most basic of daily life activities. They stated needing translation and interpretation to:

- make an appointment with a family doctor or pediatrician, for example, when visiting a doctor, they relied on a translator to be able to explain what pains they had and what health problems they had experienced when they were still living in Syria;
- enroll their children in schools and daycare centres;
- complete the exam for a driver's licence (only the theory exam can be completed in Arabic with the help of a translator, the practice exam is only done in French or English);
- fill out documents in institutions, such as banks, for example;
- and shop for groceries or go to the hairdresser.

The majority of the refugees mentioned that they missed their homeland but that they are ready to do everything in order to adapt to their new communities.

Finally, I have selected four questions (#5, #6, #9, #10) and their results from the interview questionnaire to demonstrate the link between translation and interpreting needs and their presence in the process of immigration for Syrian refugees.

Question 5, guided by a series of sub-questions, asks the interviewee respondents about the need and presence of translation and interpretation in terms of their experiences during the five phases of the national plan for Syrian refugee resettlement. They ask about their experiences (1) with the UNCHR office at the Canadian embassies in Jordan and Lebanon; (2) once they were approved for the processing of their application; (3) from the time they were given a departure date to Canada; (4) during the flight to Canada; (5) upon arrival on Canadian soil; and (6) from the time they disembarked to their screening by the CBSA officers. They were also asked if translation or

interpretation assistance was needed during the medical assessment at the airport and during the process of applying for a permanent resident card, social insurance number, or health insurance card – and if the forms were available only in French and English? The results show that 70% of the participants needed translation and/or interpreting assistance at every stage of the five-phase process of immigration to Canada.

Question 6 asks whether or not the interviewee respondents needed or received the help of a translator or interpreter since when they became a permanent resident of Canada. The results show that 80% of the participants did have need or were helped by a translator or interpreter since becoming a permanent resident of Canada. The subsequent questions, #7 and #8, further confirm this need, with 65% needing translation in order to find housing and 90% needing translation to deal with financial matters.

Question 9 asks the interviewee respondents if they have needed translation assistance when managing matters of education, such as when finding a program for language classes and registering for them, and when trying to find a school for their child or children. 90% of the participants indicated that a translator or interpreter was also needed for these activities.

Question 10 asks the same question, i.e., whether or not interviewee respondents needed translation or interpreting assistance for needs they encountered in the medical and healthcare sectors. The results demonstrate that 75% of the participants did need the help of a translator or interpreter in order to find a family doctor and for their first medical visit.

All told, the interviewee comments indicate that until the refugees acquired a sufficient working vocabulary in French or English, they needed the help of translation. They relied on both official and unofficial translators and interpreters and on machine translation too. Translation thus played



a major role in the adaptation process of Syrian refugees. Most of the interviewees mentioned that they felt helpless when shopping or going to the hospital, since they only knew how to speak Arabic. Their stress was relieved when they were helped by a translator.

### **Self-Reflection**

I would like to add a few words of my own personal reflection. Through my research study on the relation of translation to the migration process for Syrian refugees, I was able to substantiate that refugees did need the help of a translator or interpreter as they prepared for their new life in Canada and after they had arrived on Canadian soil. It is certain that the war in Syria had created an emergency situation and that citizens needed to flee the country in the most expeditious way. In that sense, preparation for the migration process to other countries had to be executed in the fastest and safest way for the population. It meant that an official translator could not be present to assist the refugees in every case. There were not always enough official translators to respond to the high volume of assistance requested by the UNHCR. This is how non-official translators entered the task force to help the refugees. Although official translators would have been better prepared and more skilled than unofficial ones, it is clear that non-official translators were needed and were filling a void. In the case of the Syrian refugees, it would have been ideal to at least have official translators for the pre-departure procedures at the embassies and upon arrival at Canadian airports. Official translators are skilled and because of professional ethics would not be as biased. They would not have taken anyone's side nor would they have translated or been emotionally attached to the situation. It is my sense that in order to avoid mistakes or problems of miscommunication, it would have been necessary for unofficial translators and bilingual volunteers to receive mandatory training prior to assisting the Syrian refugees.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the premise of my thesis was that translation and interpreting played a major role in the migration process for Syrian refugees immigrating to Canada. By investigating the actual process, identifying the points where translation and interpreting would occur, and interviewing the Syrian refugees, I was able to determine that translation and interpreting needs were present and were met by unofficial and official translators and interpreters – in addition to automatic machine translation. In this sense, we can see that the ongoing research on unofficial translation and interpretation as well as community interpreting practices would be of interest in the context of refugee translation research. However, the important dynamic of relations amongst one's languages as an immigrant or refugee should not be underestimated either. The shift from 'majority' to 'minority' status can cause feelings of shame. However, it was also clear that through translation the refugees were gaining a sense of pride as they acquired the languages of their new host country. In this sense, the themes and insights from translation and interpretation studies literature resonate.

Yet, equally important would be a subsequent step to analyze in more depth the intersections between the interdisciplinary perspectives of translation and interpreting studies, migration studies, and oral history – in addition to conducting more interviews with a greater variety of sponsored refugees. For ethical purposes, my point of entry for following the best practices for interviewing came by way of oral history methodology. Oral history places a high value on empathy, shared authority, and partnership and transparency in the production of knowledge – not all of which were addressed in my study. Finally, finding a balance between my own empathy and subjectivity and the critical distance that research method and verification imply,

was a challenge given the scope of this study. The problematization of certain assumptions and beliefs could be further integrated into the methodology for a more objective result, especially if the goal is to obtain a statistically valid and generalizable result from the interview responses. This could take into account cultural perceptions and differences on the part of the interviewees and the subjectivity and positionality of translators and interpreters themselves as they inevitably become involved in some way in the refugee stories.

The civil war in Syria and the national immigration plan for assisting Syrian refugees in their migration and resettlement in Canada initially motivated me to consider the needs for translation and interpretation on migrants seeking asylum and refugee status in Canada. They continue to inspire me. Throughout my thesis I have addressed diverse topics linked to this migration process. I hope it will have been able to contribute in a small way to translation studies research on migration in the specific context of the Syrian refugee migration to Canada.

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## APPENDIXES

### English version of questionnaire:

#### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your name? Place of birth? How old are you?
2. How many languages do you speak? Where, how, and why did you learn them?
3. How and when did you decide to apply for the immigration process to come to Canada?
4. From the time you received the application materials, how long did the process take until you landed in Canada?
5. The Five-phase national plan (2 questions each):
  - a) Identifying and selecting- what was your experience with the UNCHR office (translation and interpreting needs, challenges?) at Canadian embassies in Jordan and Lebanon?
  - b) Processing- what was your experience (translation and interpreting needs, challenges?) once you were approved for processing of your application?
  - c) Travel to Canada-what was your experience (translation and interpreting needs, challenges?) from the time you were given a date to depart to Canada? Did you need the help of a translator during the flight to Canada?
  - d) Arrival in Canada-what was your experience (translation and interpreting needs, challenges?) upon arrival on Canadian soil?
  - e) Resettlement in Canada-what was your experience (translation and interpreting needs, challenges?) from the time you disembarked and were screened by the CBSA officers (including the Declaration for Entering Canada), etc., and given permanent resident status?
    - a) During the medical assessment at the airport of Toronto or Montreal, did you need the help of a translator?
    - b) During the process of applying for your PR (Permanent Resident Card), NAS (Social Insurance Number) and your Health Insurance Card, did you need the help of translator to fill out the different forms that are only provided in French & English?
6. What is your experience as a permanent resident of Canada? (translation and interpreting)
7. How were you able to find housing-with or without the help of a translator?
8. How were you able to cope with the financial institutions upon your arrival?
  - a) How did you apply for Social Aid and Child Support? How did you fill out the forms? (translation and challenges)
  - b) How did you open a bank account in Canada? (translation and challenges)

9. Education in Canada:
- a) Language classes- was it easy to find program for language classes? How did you register for language classes? Did you need translation in that process? Which language class did you enter (how, when, and at what moment)?
  - b) School for your children- How did you find a school for your child/children? Who helped you in that process and how? (Translation and challenges?)
10. How did you find a family doctor (and/or pediatrician for your children)?
- a) At your first visit at the doctor's, did you need the help of a translator, how were you able to communicate with the doctor?
11. Did you have a driver's licence in Syria?
- a) Did someone help you to register for the driving lessons? (translation and challenges)
  - b) During the driving lessons theory/practice, did you need the help of a translator or you completed the lessons with someone who spoke Arabic?
  - c) During the exam for theory did you use the help of a translator?
  - d) Was it difficult to prepare for the driving exam (language/translation)?
12. Another important question is how did you cope with doing your grocery shopping? Did you need translation for most of the products? How did you cope with the difference in the names of products, measurements (kg & lb)? The translation of different fruits and vegetables? (translation and challenges)
13. Did you have help with the accommodation to the Canadian traditions and laws? Accommodation with the community laws (taking out garbage at certain days and times, make the lines at bus and metro stations, etc.) (translation and challenges)
14. How long did it take you to be by yourself without needing the help of a person to translate for you?
15. Do you ever use machine translation such as Google Translate?
16. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

## French version of questionnaire:

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN FRENCH

1. Quel est votre nom? Pays d'origine? Quel âge avez-vous?
2. Combien de langues parlez-vous? Où, comment et pourquoi les avez-vous appris?
3. Comment et quand avez-vous décidé d'immigrer au Canada?
4. À partir du moment où vous avez reçu le matériel de demande, combien de temps a duré le processus d'immigration jusqu'à votre arrivée au Canada?
5. 5. Le Canada a mis en œuvre un plan stratégique national qui constitue en cinq étapes pour la réinstallation des réfugiés syriens. Bien que l'assistance à la traduction et à l'interprétation (traduction orale) ne soit pas spécifiquement mentionnée dans les informations générales au public, nous supposons qu'elle a joué un rôle critique tout au long du processus. J'aimerais que vous réfléchissiez aux besoins de traduction / d'interprétation que vous aviez et aux aspects positifs et négatifs de votre expérience avec les traducteurs / interprètes.
  - a) [phase 1: identification et sélection] - Quelle a été votre expérience avec le bureau du UNCHR dans les ambassades canadiennes en Jordanie et au Liban?
  - b) [phase 2: traitement] - Quelle a été votre expérience une fois que vous avez été approuvé pour le traitement de votre demande?
  - c) [phase 3: voyages] - Quelle a été votre expérience depuis le moment où vous avez reçu une date pour partir au Canada? Avez-vous eu besoin de l'aide d'un traducteur pendant le vol pour le Canada?
  - d) [phase 4: accueil / arrivée] - Quelle a été votre expérience à votre arrivée en sol canadien?
  - e) [phase 5: établissement et intégration] - Quelle a été votre expérience depuis le moment où vous avez débarqué et avez été examiné par les agents de l'ASFC (y compris la Déclaration pour entrer au Canada) et le statut de résident permanent? Par exemple, avez-vous eu besoin de l'aide d'un traducteur pendant l'évaluation médicale à l'aéroport de Toronto ou de Montréal et pendant le processus de demande de carte de résident permanent, de numéro d'assurance sociale et d'assurance maladie? Les formulaires étaient-ils seulement disponibles en français et en anglais?
6. Avez-vous eu besoin d'un traducteur ou d'un interprète et avez-vous reçu l'aide d'un traducteur lorsque vous êtes devenu résident permanent du Canada?
7. Avez-vous trouvé un logement avec ou sans traducteur?
8. Avez-vous été en mesure de gérer des questions financières dans des institutions financières avec ou sans l'aide d'un traducteur - par exemple, lors de la demande d'aide

sociale et de pension alimentaire et de remplir les formulaires ou lors de l'ouverture et de la gestion d'un compte bancaire?

9. Étiez-vous capable de gérer les questions d'éducation avec ou sans l'aide d'un traducteur - par exemple, lorsque vous essayez de trouver un programme de cours de langue et de vous inscrire (quel cours de langue avez-vous suivi? Quand/où et à quel moment), et / ou lorsque vous essayez de trouver une école pour votre enfant / vos enfants? Qui vous a aidé dans ces processus et comment?
10. Avez-vous pu trouver un médecin de famille (et / ou un pédiatre pour vos enfants) avec ou sans traducteur? Comment avez-vous communiqué avec le médecin lors de votre première visite?
11. Aviez-vous un permis de conduire dans votre pays d'origine? Avez-vous pu vous inscrire à des cours de conduite avec ou sans traducteur au Canada? Avez-vous eu besoin de l'aide d'un traducteur pour les parties de théorie et de pratique des cours de conduite? Était-il difficile de se préparer à l'examen de conduite?
12. Avez-vous été en mesure de gérer les courses avec ou sans traducteur? Avez-vous eu besoin d'une traduction pour les produits, ou pour comprendre les différences dans les noms de produits, les aliments et les mesures (kg / lb)?
13. Avez-vous eu besoin d'une aide pour la traduction des lois et des traditions canadiennes - y compris, par exemple, les lois communautaires sur la collecte des ordures, les transports en commun et les services, etc.?
14. Combien de temps a-t-il fallu pour que vous soyez plus autonome sans avoir besoin d'un traducteur?
15. Avez-vous déjà utilisé la traduction automatique telle que Google Traduction?
16. Y a-t-il autre chose que vous aimeriez me dire?



CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY  
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

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Name of Applicant: Vanya Mladenova  
Department: Faculty of Arts and Science\Études françaises  
Agency: N/A  
Title of Project: Translation in the process of immigration for Syrian refugees in Canada

Certification Number: 30011115

Valid From: May 24, 2019 To: May 23, 2020

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard DeMont".

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Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee