

Cultural Bias in Interpreting

From Ana Sas – Romanian interpreter

MultiLink Community Services Inc. ensures that professional development for all staff is an integral part of our daily business therefore staff have the opportunity to attend various workshops. The knowledge which is gained, helps to develop skills that are used in delivering a quality service to the wider community. It gives me great pleasure to work with this fantastic organisation.

On Saturday 20th February I attended the 'Cultural Bias in Interpreting' workshop which was organised by AUSIT. The aim of this workshop was to help community interpreter's deal with their cultural, religious, racial biases, etc., especially when it comes to interpreting in sensitive situations. This workshop has been delivered by one of the best and most experienced trainers, Dr. Wendy McIntosh who has over 30 years' experience as a health professional.

Some of the points that have been discussed in the workshop are:

What is cultural bias – it is the phenomenon of interpreting and judging phenomena by standards inherent to one's own culture. Cultural bias exist when an individual navigates the experiences of others through the framework of their own personal compass of cultural experience.

Cultural groups; We learn about other groups, culture through information and perceptions from other people, books, news, media, newspaper direct contact with different groups and these experiences may develop into assumptions which may Bias our perception leading to cultural bias.

Most of us belong to more than one group. It was interesting to discuss some of the many cultural groups that one person belongs to and which groups interfere with each other and which one stand out alone. Some examples of the groups a person may belong to are: being a female, mother, loyal, Romanian, Christian, educator, interpreter, parent, grandparent, office worker etc.

The obvious and less obvious aspects of culture.



On the surface is: language, food, clothes.

What lies beneath gives meaning to life greatly affected wellbeing, driving force behind behaviour and reactions.

Communication style: verbal, non-verbal, body language e.g. tone of voice, respect, empathy, personal space, generalisation, facial expressions, attention to details, to the point observation, silence

Beliefs: e.g. religion, tradition, family values, political beliefs, experience, social practices, education, media

Attitude: Make gratitude your attitude, respect

Perception: is based on the beliefs that you have about something or someone, e.g. the way a person dresses.

Cultural and social norms

Consequences of culturally biased assumptions are; stigma, stereotyping and discrimination

In summary – it is important to consider what factors would influence your decision to terminate a relationship with a client or refuse an interpreting job that has been offered to you. It's also important to avoid cultural bias. If that is not possible, acknowledge the presence of cultural bias and reflect on the impact it has on your relationship with the client.