QUESTIONS OF DESCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION

Using Data from Anthropology and Ethnology

in the Conduct and Interpretation of Interviews with Immigrants

Helena Tužinská

Stimul

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Second expanded edition

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"Do not judge any man until you have walked for two moons in his moccasins."

American Indian proverb.

Preface

This handbook is written for all who come into contact with immigrants and who aim to understand them. Principally, the information here may be useful for state administrators, members of the police, interpreters, judges, legal representatives, and workers from the non-governmental sector. But it may be a source of inspiration for members of other professions also. They will find here guidelines for conducting an interview: information on the various methods of posing questions, on description, on human memory, and on the specifics of interpreting and intercultural communication.

The aim of this text is to describe the various methods of interviewing, based on examples of structured interviews with immigrants. The motivation to write it came from experience of observing how (even apart from institutional procedures during such interviews) the various cultural, social and institutional backgrounds of the participants intersect.

The art of interviewing is an old one. It presupposes acquisition of the craft skills of forming and posing questions, listening and recording. Where the people communicating are of differing cultures it also requires accurate translation and explanation. The interviewers bear personal responsibuility for the correct understanding of other people. They have to make difficult decisions, which may imply fundamental life changes for those others.

The handbook describes attested approaches and findings from the social sciences, particularly social anthropology and ethnology. It is written especially with a view to assisting those who communicate with foreigners. The text explains how the posing of questions is connected with the respondent's description and the interpreter's translation.

This second expanded edition has been repeatedly revised. Every chapter is supplemented with relevant new materials, together with references to current professional literature in the social sciences, and the chapters on interpreting and intercultural communication have also been furnished with new examples.

Questions of Description

For a deep understanding of the specifics of human behaviour, and hence for a high-quality description, long-term research is undoubtedly necessary. It is not unusual for anthropologists to study a single culture for decades. In practice the norm is that, if one cannot spend a whole year in the "field ", a stay of at least some months is considered necessary in order to learn a new language and understand a differnt type of kinship, economy, religious ritual, and general customs. For these reasons anthropologists, like linguists, are aware that when they have an opportunity to be with a foreigner, it is as if the "field" approached them rather than themselves having to seek it out. In contrast to the researchers, who are grateful for contact with the cultures being studied, immigrants frequently find themselves in a thankless position: they have not expected, nor have they themselves sought out, the interview situation. Nevertheless, with the immigrant also it is advantageous to adopt the position of an observer and to approach him or her as a representative of a culture of which we know nothing.

The handbook contains findings from a wide variety of research methods in anthropology and ethnology. The ethnographic interview is a concept in the social sciences which may be compared to the use of the X-ray in medicine. Following simple principles, one can penetrate to "the marrow of the bone". The ethnographic interview is an interviewing method which leads to understanding the second person's story. As with most worthwhile things, a good interview is not accomplished quickly or effortlessly. However, the advantage of the ethnographic interview compared to other techniques is that with a standard amount of effort it offers satisfactory results for both parties. Using a variety of approaches, which will be described in the text, it also uncovers essential facts which the respondents in survey research essentially have no means of explaining.

The techniques of the qualitative interview were not developed solely from the experience of ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists. In recent decades new findings on human mind, memory and communication, which often run counter to common expectations, have come to light. Resulting from this, there has been a turn--about in the interpretation of data acquired in the social sciences. Many questions arise in connection with trustworthy description and explanation, and answers to some of them may be found in this text.

Questions of Translation

The interviewers' work depends in many ways on the work of the interpreters. These latter convey the meanings of questions as well as answers, and they cannot be invisible or purely machine-like. The handbook therefore reflects this mutual dependence in all chapters, and interpreters may draw upon it for a greater understanding of the work of the interviewers. Again, for those working with immigrants the handbook contains specific findings on interpreting, from the standpoint of ethnography. Finally, those who question and listen to immigrants normally take a written record, and therefore also perform *a kind of translation*.

A number of research studies of interviewing have shown that interpreting carries a greater weight in the decision-making processes than had previously been thought. In recent years heightened attention has been given to interpreting in legal situations (Berk-Seligson 2002, Good 20007, Martinovski 2000, Maryns 2006, Russel 2000, Wennerstrom 2008). This handbook reflects on questions connected with translation, especially from the standpoint of sociolinguistics.

Language barrriers are often the basis of cultural misunderstanding: not infrequently it happens that immigrants do not have available an interpreter with whom they can communicate in their own dialects. Their uncertainty in expressing themselves, which may also have its source in their disagreeable situation, has a marked influence on the interview's overall result. The handbook therefore also provides information which is indirectly connected with translation.

Apart from language difference, one must keep in view the interview's points of departure (i.e. the cultural background of the informant; the cultural background of the interviewer; and the institutional background, including administrative procedures). Just as in translation, so also in the assessment of data the power positions of participants in the interview play a special role.

Use of Terms and Structure of the Text

The register of population in the Slovak Republic (hereafter Slovakia) provides details: of citizens, who are registered for permanent residence (1) in Slovakia or (2) outside Slovakia; of foreigners – without Slovak citizenship – who are registered for (3) permanent, temporary or tolerated residence in Slovakia; and (4) of foreigners who have been granted asylum in Slovakia.

The research material came into being from interviews with foreigners and persons who come into contact with them administratively. Despite that, I use the term *foreigner* rarely: people commonly use the Slovak term *cudzinec* not only to designate citizens of other states or stateless persons, but also incorrectly to mean people of a different origin who have Slovak citizenship and hence also permanent residence, and who are assimilated in Slovakia (Vašečka 2009).

The narrower concept *immigrant* I use to designate foreigners who are changing their countries of permanent residence, corresponding to Divinský's definition (2005). Every foreigner, however, need not be an immigrant (tourists or business travellers have no interest in transferring their residence).

The most specific term, *asylum applicant*, I use also in the abbreviated form *applicant*. This refers to people who are in the asylum procedure, and it was with this group that I had most contact during participant observation. Some of them had been granted subsidiary protection for the duration of one year (the so-called 'small asylum'). Like the applicants, they had temporary residence in Slovakia. These persons were applying for international protection because of fear of persecution on racial, religious, national and political grounds, or on the grounds of membership of a social group.

Notwithstanding what has been said above, I use the term *immigrant* in the name of the publication and throughout the text for a number of reasons. The information in the text is not restricted to asylum applicants as such but may also be used in other contexts. The applicants themselves, both before and after the asylum procedure, find themselves included in various categories of immigrants. Finally, the authorities conduct interviews with foreigners who are applying for the granting of residence but are not necessarily also applying for asylum.

Here it is necessary to stress the fact that the immigrants do not form a social group. *Immigrant* is not an explanatory term from the anthropological standpoint: it is exclusively an indicator of a change of residence to somewhere beyond the borders of the home country. Although it is used by both the lay and professional public, it is purely an auxiliary term: the categorisation of types of immigrants according to the most diverse criteria (motive for emigration, type and length of residence etc.) serves mainly for general surveys and statistical purposes (Bargerová, Divinský 2008; Divinský 2009). Similarly, the concept of *refugee/asylant* is a term of administrative law, meaning a person who has already been granted asylum and permanent residence in Slovakia. For basic reasons, therefore, it is not possible to approach immigrants as a homoge-

neous group: they do not consider themselves a social group, and their heterogeneity is expressed in every sphere.

The text is written for a range of people who themselves regard one another as members of various social groups. It proceeds from the principles of the ethnographic interview, which by its nature is an interchange of views: *inter – view*.

Most frequently I refer to an interview with asylum applicants. After they cross the state border, a brief interview is conducted by border and foreign police personnel. Where the applicants are seeking asylum, *decision-makers* conduct a longer interview with them, usually in the holding camp (based on a questionnaire – see appendix). The decision--makers are employees of the Migration Office of the Slovak Republic's Interior Ministry (hereafter MO), who decide on the granting of asylum. Taken more broadly, the concept of *interview* is wide-ranging and is used for consultations by all those who need to acquire information about the immigrant in the course of their work, e.g. the applicant's legal representatives, social workers and others.

Applicants who are not granted asylum (for a variety of reasons) as a rule have the option of appealing against this decision to a court. Courts in Slovakia may either confirm the MO's decision or cancel it. If the court rescinds a decision, the matter is returned for further processing to the MO, where normally the interview is conducted all over again and the examination of whether the asylum application is justified continues. This process may even take a number of years.

The handbook contains various *types* of information:
(1) The *foundational specialist texts* are presented as accessibly as possible for readers who have no previous acquaintance with ethnology. At many points reference is made to specialist literature, including social anthropology, linguistic anthropology, and the cognitive sciences, and especially handbooks of qualitative research and studies devoted specifically to immigrants, having regard to intercultural communication. The explanations of technical terms are as concise as possible and are adapted to the aim of the text.
(2) *Examples from interviews and commentaries* come from the author's research. In the text they are presented to illustrate the presumptions and practices of the various participating parties, well-known and less widely-diffused cultural usages, and linguistic patterns. Italics are used in examples taken from personal interviews and observations and from interviews at the Slovak Interior Ministry's Migration Office and at the Slovak Regional and Supreme Courts in Bratislava during the years 2005-2009. All details which might lead to identification of participants

have been removed or altered. Any resemblances to personal or other concrete details are therefore coincidental. Speakers are designated as *M (employee of the Migration Office/decision-maker), A (applicant for asylum), J (judge), T (interpreter), I (informant/immigrant),* and *R (researcher).* For the most part, technical recommendations in the text do not relate exclusively to immigrants, therefore in many places I employ the commonly-used term for a person with whom an interview is conducted: *informant*.

3) *Questions and answers* relate to problems frequently mentioned by people who have interviewed immigrants. Mainly I have chosen questions which are posed not only in the field of migration but also in other areas of anthropological research.

(4) *Sample proposals for questions* present an alternative which has been thoroughly tested by experts in the ethnographic interview with proven success.

These types of information alternate according to context and are grouped under main themes: how an interview is conducted; what the universal characteristics of memory are; how speech depends on context; what conditions are required for a good description; how types of questions and answers go together; and which auxiliary techniques give the interview depth.

The most extensive chapter is on interpreting (interpreters also may use the techniques of the ethnographic interview). A description is given of the culturally specific expressions and problems which most frequently occur in interviews with immigrants in Slovakia and also abroad. The text includes findings on the principles of stereotype functioning and intercultural communication. All chapters keep in view the specifics of interviewing immigrants.

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I. THE INTERVIEW AS METHOD

The Ethnographic Interview Is Like an X-ray: Acute and Penetrating

Ethnographic literally means the description of an ethnic group. When we make an ethnographic description, we observe people of a certain culture and we try to distinguish the typical ideas or schemas which are *characteristic* of the given social situation. We attempt to understand these schemas without building *our own* expectations into the explanation. In other words, in the ethnographic interview the goal is not mechanically to perform an interview, but to understand a person who represents a certain type of culture.

The human mind has a tendency to classify objects, people and events into categories. Many experts who work with people construct scholarly classifications which the people concerned do not use. Ethnographers, on the contrary, try to research and describe categories which come exclusively from the informant (Spradley 1979). Hence in many ways the ethnographer (literally, 'recorder of an ethnic group') is like an interpreter: the aim is to understand another social and cultural context. The ethnographer seeks the complete meaning of the informant's utterances, as if seeing through the latter's eyes.

This type of approach is advantageous in dealing with all categories of foreigners. Too often people perceive foreigners as refugees (Vašečka 2009), and here precisely the ethnographic interview is opportune, as a means of ascertaining who the foreigner considers himself or herself to be. Going beyond the administrative categorisation and the institutional approach, it is important to perceive people's sociocultural background in dealings with them. Many newly-arrived immigrants, when we speak with them, are experiencing the shock of being located in another culture, together with a marked feeling of uncertainty about the future (Gallová Kriglerová, Kadlečíková, Lajčáková 2009; Letavajová 2003; Tužinská 2006, 2009c, 2009d). When the people we speak with also happen to have lived through traumatising experiences, ethnographic techniques are considerate to those persons. Ethnography provides instruments which not only enable a deep understanding of another culture but also penetrate to the interview's essential core. In the case of an asylum application, that is a complex answer to the question: to what degree is the fear of persecution justified?

The Structure of the Interview May Be Varied

Of the three basic types of interview (structured, semi-structured and unstructured), the semi-structured is predominantly used in ethnography. A structured questionnaire has the advantage that it is quickly completed, but at the expense of details which may be crucial in the event of a life-affecting decision. Every questionnaire contains the same questions, which are given to each person in the same order without any variation. One may take the example of a telephone survey by a telecommunications firm, or a street-conducted marketing interview: the structured questionnaire offers informants a restricted space for *their own* opinions. If they begin to express themselves in contexts which cannot be fitted into the 'box', they are immediately halted.

The unstructured interview is a type where both parties are clear that research is involved and that the interview will be conducted on a certain theme. The questioner intervenes only minimally in the speaker's flow of speech, drawing from prepared fields of questions connected with the theme. The informant has the option of opening up another area which he or she considers to have essential importance. This is the method normally used to reconstruct the 'oral history' of periods during which events were not or could not be recorded.

There are a number of reasons why the semi-structured interview is the type most frequently used in ethnology. The semi-structured interview is neither so strict as the structured nor so free as the unstructured. The human mind, and therefore also narration, is likewise not linear like a neatly laid-out text: it has its secluded nooks and by-ways, from which it returns to the 'main road'. Hence the interview proceeds according to an outline framework, with the order of themes and questions being adapted to the informant (Bernard 1995).

Experienced anthropologists know how to make their enquiries as if their questions were coming from members of the given culture. Knowing how to ask means hitting the target, helping the informant to speak about what he or she considers essential. By this method we gain access to explanations which are not accessible through the structured questionnaire. The informant's angle of vision lends significance even to heaps of details that would otherwise be unclear. When we give space to the informant, we also guard against automatic attribution of the meanings to which our own thinking is inclined.

People in general are pleasantly surprised if they feel that someone really is listening to them. The experience is so exceedingly rare that at first they do not believe it, and they think the listener's attention is

feigned or expressed as a professional duty. However, if the interest in hearing the other person is sincere and expressed continually during the interview, with the assurance that the information will be processed only with the informant's agreement, the interview can achieve depth. For this reason also, the ethographic interview is called *in-depth*.

An Interview that Goes to the Depths

The in-depth interview might be compared figuratively to a stroll through a garden with a guide who is explaining the history of its particular nooks, as well as the arrangement and significance of the plants. Every nook has its story: there are places which are commonplace and others that are sacred; some are public, some secret. One of the conspicuous aspects of description of the world is classification. Just as West European botany has the Linnaeus classification of flora, so every ethnic group has its own description of the surrounding world. Apart from the fact that social groups use classifications (dividing persons into 'our people' and 'foreigners'; designating activities, things, phenomena...), individuals also have widely disseminated ideas about the world according to which group they move in. Some beliefs are attributed universally to all people: *"All people believe in something"*. Others relate to intercultural differences: *"People in the West are constantly hurrying"*. A certain type of behaviour is attributed in a generalised way to certain groups of people: *"Germans are pedants"*. If the stereotype fails to fit some particular person, it is not refuted; on the contrary, the exception is said to prove the rule. There are other beliefs which so-called related cultures share: *"The Slovaks, Czechs and Poles know how to bake good bread"*. Going down a level, we find ideas about certain groups, e.g. about their behaviour: *"Students go home at weekends to stuff themselves"*. On the lowest level are those beliefs which only some people share: *"A pork chop is the nicest thing you can eat"*. People may identify themselves so closely with beliefs such as these that they will maintain them to be facts. The researcher's task is not to confirm or deny the validity of these and similar sentiments. In the ethnographic interview the aim is to observe the circumstances which lead to beliefs of this kind.

Apart from widely disseminated ideas, people classify and label the world according to the most diverse principles. Typologies exist which are more widespread, and yet with some of them we may have the impression that we do not share them with anybody: for example, the

sorting of things in a wardrobe. There are things which we designate as *household wear, workwear, walking clothes, sportswear, formal wear*, and within those contexts *household ordinary, household for dirty work, normal workwear, more formal workwear, walking-the-dog clothes, walking-without-the-dog clothes, training sportswear, racing sportswear, formal wear for church, for the theatre, for a ball*, etc. The determination of what goes under a given designation is very individual. The same sweater may be workwear for one person and formal wear for another, and this need not be a question of income level. However, it is very probable that if we are members of certain social networks, our 'wardrobe classifications' will fulfil very similar criteria, insofar as clothes are a requisite of social status. Even if at first sight this may seem banal, by talking about clothes we may learn what activities their wearer performs, what his or her social milieu is, or how spheres of influence in the household are divided. We will benefit, therefore, by not using "self-evident" meanings of concepts and by asking the informant for examples.

II. MEMORY AND NARRATION

Memory Is Not a Store-room for Recollections

People describe the same event always partially and differently: no narration can therefore be considered complete and unchanging. A number of factors influence the formation of narrative at a given moment. There are 'common sense' assumptions and other widespread notions about how things function. Often, however, these ideas are untrue. This also applies to the principles of the functioning of human memory. The process of remembrance is much more complicated than what people ordinarily think of under the heading of memories: when we remember something we do not find thoughts in the mind in the manner of a card catalogue, a filing cabinet, or 'a pot on the shelf'. It is not as if we first remembered everything and then said it all at once: recollection occurs gradually, even through the very process of narration. Besides, each retrieval of information changes the memory itself in this sense, that there is a complicated process of "reconstruction" of events (Roediger 1999).

On the one hand, when we remember something, this particular memory is reinforced. On the other hand, the retrieval means a further 'recording' of the information. If a fault occurs in this process, probably it will be repeated in the future (Roediger 1999). Something happens in the mind which is similar to the children's game of the whispering telephone: at each turn something is taken away and something is added. Our repeated recollections therefore need not correspond precisely to what happened in reality, even recently. The mind is also in a position to 'manufacture' so-called false memories, where the person remembers things which in reality never happened. False memories are not merely a fault in memory. They are a by-product of reconstruction, which is one of memory's fundamental characteristics, and also an expression of creativity, i.e. of the new arrangement of familiar information (Loftus 1999).

If the brain is functioning in the correct manner, it is processing an unceasing flow of perceptual material in such a way as to 'narrow it down' to workable information. Sometimes it seems as if the mind stored in memory only the essence of the given episode and 'added on' the details later during recollection. What we remember is determined by our preceding knowledge, ideas and expectations (Roediger 1999).

Normally people 'hop about' when thinking. If one wants to be able to present details systematically in chronological order, the mind must do concentrated work. Usually memories surface gradually, responding to various mnemonic keys in a scattered order. It is natural, therefore, that

people add on extra details when reconstructing their memories (Kusá 1995). Indeed, if they modify details also, that does not mean that their intention was to deceive the hearer. The narrator does not always have the means of knowing what the listener considers a 'discrepancy'. In the interview, therefore, it is recommended to return to individual 'discrepancies' using probing questions, which may lead to clarification.

I: After waiting for two years I appeared before the court. My whole body was trembling with insecurity, I was shaking, but I believed that could not be seen. I knew I should breathe deeply, but even so my stomach was in a knot. When the judge asked me why the date I had given for leaving home in my first interview was different from the one I was giving now, I couldn't answer… In your country exact numbers are very important… Who remembers the exact date when he first went beyond the borders of this state? Despite that, I felt humiliated.

Remembrance of emotionally charged events is accompanied by so-called tunnel memory. A person can convey only those elements which directly evoke the given emotion, while the details remain 'outside'. Sometimes peripheral details surface additionally, but they may be inexact (Christianson and Endelberg 1999).

'Omission' is common for people even in what is occurring now. We may not notice things if we do not expect them, even when they appear directly before our eyes. So-called unintentional blindness or lapse of attention is likely when we are concentrating on our own trains of thought or on *another* task which we wish to perform (Chabris and Simon 2010).

Question:
The applicants have a problem with arranging data. Their dates are not consistent. Often they can't provide exact dates of birth, even their own.

Reply:
If a person cannot immediately respond with a detail which seems to us to be a matter of course, he or she is not necessarily practising deception. One of the possibilities is that the applicant is using a different type of calendar, or indeed numeration. There are at least 38 known calendar systems, of which the following are the most extensively used: *Assyrian, Bengali, Chinese, Gregorian, Hebrew, Hindu, Iranian, Islamic, Julian, Kurdish, Nepalese, Tamil, Tibetan, Persian*. These calendars differ not only in the year count but also in the spacing of months.

For example, the Tamil Avani starts roughly in the middle of the Gregorian August and ends in the middle of September, depending on the phases of the moon. A discrepancy occurred when in two interviews the interpreters translated the word *Avani* differently, once as *August* and a second time as *September* (Good 2007).

Designation of days in the month by numbers is not customary everywhere. For example, the date of birth may be given also in non-numerical form: "*He was born at the time when the pomegranates are ripe*", or "*during the rains*". Less precise time details are more memorable when they are linked to another event.

It is therefore necessary to check whether the informant comes from a culture with a calendar other than the Gregorian. A second possibility is that the person in question had no reason to know his or her date of birth. As in the case of our (great)grandparents, who in many areas of Europe even in the 20th century did not consider it necessary to celebrate birthdays, for persons who were not in contact with officialdom it was not necessary to retain one's own date of birth in memory. Remembering one's own date of birth is therefore a culturally specific matter and not a universal phenomenon (Salzmann 1997).

Feelings Are the Key to the Thirteenth Chamber of Narratives

Just as a student's mind, even after long instruction, may 'go blank' in an examination, so it may happen that a responsible employee suddenly is unable to answer an angry boss. Later, however, in a more relaxed attitude, the answer will 'come'. Similarly, in an interview it may happen that people are suddenly unable to remember the detail of an event which they experienced.

Scientists who study human memory are agreed that it is imperfect. Memory progressively forgets; it temporarily blocks access to information; it incorrectly specifies sources of information; it tends to change memories in accordance with beliefs. Apart from that, memory changes also under various pressures: a persuasive statement may lead to false memories; inattention leads to incomplete memories. Finally, there are also the well-known importunate memories which people wish to forget and which repeatedly recur (Schacter 2001). Such memory behaviour has a standard wide diffusion.

In the majority of cases emotional events are remembered better (Christianson and Endelberg 1999), with the exception of traumatic experiences: a person may not remember anything of them throughout his entire life, or only small fragments may surface in thought (Good 2007). A strained emotional or physical state, and our evaluation of the importance of the information, all have their influence on storing information in memory as well as its retrieval. The recall of emotional events is different from remembering neutral events. In the former case memories are grouped around the causes of emotion: we first remember our thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the event, and afterwards the event itself (Ellis and Brent 1999). For this reason also, the events which are linked with stronglyexperienced emotion are difficult to put into words. Sometimes people respond with silence, which may be a defence against pain (Kusá 1996).

They didn't let me finish saying what I wanted to tell them. They interrupted me… the officials, and the court too. When I have to talk about my worst memories, I always have twinges of pain in my stomach and my head, and a cold sweat flows over me. At night I don't sleep well. I often dream that soldiers have burst into my room, massacred all who live with me and dragged me off to the cellar. I have experienced pain that people don't want to have even in their worst nightmares. They asked me about many events, but they never found out about the fear that is always with me even in my dreams.

Remembering trauma evokes the emotions connected with it: revulsion, fear, anger. These feelings may be accompanied by psychic and often even physical pain. If it is essential to discover what really happened, and the narrator wishes to talk about it, we should always respect the narrator's tempo. It is important to be aware that in reconstruction the details of little things are crucial. Recollections of the entire course of events are all the more exact the more they stimulate recollections of personal details and feelings (Cosmides and Tooby 2000). However, every further narration, even about the same thing, is necessarily different.

Remembering is bound up with feelings, irrespective of whether they are positive or negative. In the given situation older feelings surface which are linked with memories that have a similar charge, and they function as emotional triggers. Reactions are normally accompanied by heightened feelings, even from previous situations. The neuronal connections in the brain seek 'nourishment', and so an old familiar feeling is manifested (Craik and Kester 1999). Similar situations may occur also during research or while an interview is being conducted; likewise in the immigrant's case. One of the technical recommendations is to be aware of one's own emotions and to attribute them not to other persons but to one's own recollections.

Question:

Immigrants contradict themselves, sometimes even during a single statement, or when the information from a number of interviews is compared. The individuals I have in mind are not those who blatantly manufacture stories which have no coherence at all. I am thinking more of people one would be inclined to trust.

Reply:

One of the fundamental experiences from oral history research with ordinary people is that discrepancies are found when comparing interviews (Vaněk, Mücke, Pelikánová 2007). Some may be caused by time restrictions on testimony, others by limiting questions or the circumstances of the interview. The most frequent reason, however, is that there are chains of connection which have not been fully stated or explained, since they surface only gradually for the informants themselves. It is a basic characteristic of human memory in general that memories change. The interviewer is recommended, therefore, to return to the discrepancies, so that the immigrant may clarify them.

Besides, people in general have a number of social identities – they need not always behave in accordance with them, and certainly they are not always consistent either in thinking or in action (Kanovský 2009b; Kusá 2005; Ferencová 2005; Findor 2005). A useful example is the outrage that occurs when people do not behave in harmony with the expectations of their surroundings. This happens because human mind is equipped in such a way that it tries to predict the behaviour of others. Not infrequently, however, this act of 'thought-reading' is doomed to disillusion. But probing questions may lead to understanding of the 'discrepancies'.

Memories Change In Accordance With Our Current Situation

It is not at all unusual if in repeated meetings we encounter imprecisely reported information: that is normal. While reporting people always select what they say, according to the questions, the listeners and the overall situation. We are not always conscious (in fact mostly we are unaware) of how we change stories about ourselves and others. In normal circumstances we never repeat the same story in entirely the same way. Frequently repeated stories, which take on a more permanent, elaborated form, represent an exception (Whitehouse 2004). We evoke what we say from memory, with the help of so-called 'memory aids'. These

aids or keys may be emotional experiences, or indeed frequently-posed similar questions and the responses to them. In the process of remembering, which consists of the tagging, storing and retrieval of memories, an essential part is played by our current feelings, attitudes and evaluations (Roediger 1999, Bužeková 2009; Kusá 1995).

Question:

I am convinced that I remember the essential things in my life well and that I give the exact same account of them, or at least a very similar account, irrespective of whom I'm talking to. Why should I not expect that other healthy people will remember similarly?

Reply:

This belief is very widespread and natural, otherwise we wouldn't really feel 'in our senses'. However, the opposite is the reality. As the saying goes, memory is merciful. People in general change their memories, especially those which were accompanied by strong feelings. They re-evaluate their experiences according to how their life situations have changed. A typical example is the explanation of the causes of misfortune (lovers who separate; entrepreneurs who go bankrupt; persons who become seriously ill). It is not because of misfortunes that changes occur in memories – there we merely see a larger difference in comparison to ordinary memories. Thoughts change continually. It will serve as a minor proof of this if one compares one's personal memories of a single theme, jotted down uncensored for a couple of minutes, on two different days.

People generally do not present their memories in a consistent manner. Apart from that every person has different narrative capacities and it only rarely happens that someone manages a fully balanced description of the various areas of his or her life – family, professional, social, religious etc. (Kusá 1996).

In the interview stress is laid on the immigrant's personal experience. Although it is clear to both sides that this should be focused on, the reverse happens: the immigrants also mention general information which at first sight does not connect in any way with their story. They do so because of a characteristic of human memory, which classifies experiences in the process of storing and retrieving them. People therefore describe memories alternately on two levels, the general and the particular. Thus it happens in narratives that descriptions of typical and specific events overlap. Typical are those which become repeated and are well-known in the given social group: *Children are usually sent to*

private schools, because the state schools are of poor quality; those which are specific concern a particular event: *I sent my children to a private school*. If the interviewer gives space also for the general context, he or she will gain information that is indispensable for the understanding of particular data (which, taken from a Central European perspective, might sound surprising on first hearing): *In Cameroon the state schools are free, but they have classes with 50-plus pupils. The private schools have classes with up to 20 children, and financially they are accessible even for lower income families.*

Recollections therefore depend on how they were lodged in the memory and preserved there, and how they have been retrieved. The individual's memory never provides exact copies of his or her experiences. In talking about personal experiences, therefore, three processes are occurring simultaneously: (1) a re-construction of the past, (2) which is conditioned by current emotions, beliefs and purposes, (3) and takes its starting-point from the narrator's socio-cultural milieu (Schrauf 1997). There is no specific part of the brain (the store-room) which corresponds to memory: memory exists only in the moment of retrieval, while corresponding to the various memories there is activation of various parts of the brain (Tulving 1992).

The memory does not reproduce but rather produces information. People gladly devote attention to those events which recur and which provide models for behaviour in various situations. The stories of others also have an influence on the reconstruction of our own stories. Memory is therefore biased in favour of typical events. Some memories spread among numbers of people, because they touch on *their* experiences also and take on a form which makes the retention of information easier. It is usual, therefore, regardless of the theme of research and the origin of informants, that life stories use already-heard examples and likenesses. Indeed, sometimes people unconsciously adapt their own beliefs to the stories they have repeatedly heard and which are easily capable of retention (Whitehouse 2004). Even the administrative approach is powerless to change people's inclination to offer testimonies in the form of already-heard stories. Hence, in the process of retention as well as that of recall, people refer to the social context and collective remembrances: these concern the collectively experienced past, general knowledge, habits, and widely disseminated ideas.

III. DISTINGUISHING MEANINGS

The Narrative Is Always Different

In asylum applicants' narratives three extensive themes essentially intersect: the life story before persecution, the life story during persecution, and the journey from the country of origin. In most cases the asylum seekers had never previously made statements about their lives in a comprehensive form. Although the manner of testimony is always singular to the individual, narrative research distinguishes two fundamental styles by which people arrange the information described. The 'lay' person, i.e. a narrator who is not professionally trained in the interpretation of information, speaks in mini-stories which often have an emotional involvement. Description of the feelings connected with the given event is crucial, insofar as it helps to reconstruct the event. In contrast, the 'expert' is adept at constructing stories according to their more general significance. Being obliged often to formulate ideas abstractly, experts also describe their own lives more neutrally and factually. They automatically set information in a wider socio-political context. The expert may be a person who is active in the given community, e.g. a politician, priest, teacher, scientist. Narrations by experts are more infrequent; however, in certain circumstances they are popular and in an altered form they may be diffused also among lay people (Boyer 2001).

The mode of expression may be interpreted also with reference to research findings on intercultural communication. For example, as regards the structure of narratives, in eastern cultures it is customary to speak with more reliance on the context of the situation and in holistic terms ('*I see a wood*'), whereas people in western cultures are more inclined to decontextualise the expression, to give restricted answers, and to proceed exactly according to the previously defined rules ('*I see trees*') (Nisbett 2003; Buchtel, Norenzayan 2009).

Question:
People from Bangladesh usually tell long flowery stories, as if it were a form of theatre to make us understand the meaning. With Russians the narrative style is diverse. They're hard, self-confident to the point of effrontery; one has to make them toe the line. How does the interview adapt to these differences?

Reply:

Lived cultural experiences are expressed in every narrative. Repeated analysis of statements by people who have no previous experience of self-presentation shows interesting results. People usually structure their narratives indirectly, without chronological continuity, 'illogically'. The interviewer knows that a new experience is always imminent. The 'point' he or she is waiting for will come, regardless of the fact that the narrative takes an emotive form. Interviewing is somewhat like communicating with small children: if there's something we want from them very much, they show resistance. If we give them our full attention, they do what we want even without our asking. This phenomenon is confirmed by other social science research: a 'good' interview flows 'of its own accord' and we learn more in it than we expected, irrespective of cultural origins (Bernard 1995; Letajová 2003).

Every Person Knows Many Languages: at least those which are spoken in his or her groups

The language of a culture represents a set of signs whose significance is known primarily by the members of the given culture. This language may be observed, and also patiently learnt from its members. Using such language could be compared to playing a ball game: talent or hard graft is not enough in order to play well, because there can never be a precise prediction of where the ball will drop. What makes the master a master is mainly a 'feel for the game'. Similarly, every person has the 'feel for language' developed to differing degrees (Bourdieu 1991).

No language has a single pattern of meanings even for all members of a particular society: communication depends on gender, age, social class and other group affinities (Salzmann 1997). A language is comprehensible to those who consider themselves members of the given social group, whether that be a tribal, cultural, professional, caste, familial, or age group. Each of them forms its speech community: it has its 'lingo'. Ordinarily people belong to a number of groups simultaneously. It is up to the researcher to discover which group the informant is assigning himself or herself to. By being aware of cultural rules one can also understand other facts important in the informant's life, which at the beginning of the interview may appear to be secondary.

A 'feel for the game' during the interview presupposes a differentiation of meanings (i.e. so-called language registers): the language of the informant, the personal language of the interviewer, and the language of the institution. The proverb "the more languages you know, the more you're a human being" holds true also for the various language registers: they serve in various social situations. If the aim is to give a trustworthy interpretation of the interview, it is necessary to record the natural alternation of language registers, because identical categories are used there with differing meanings.

The Goal Is to Understand the Interviewee's Language

The informant's language represents a type of verbal expression which is fully comprehensible only in his closest surroundings. Slang or dialect is a somewhat wider concept, given that within the context of the dialect group there are still smaller wholes which use their own linguistic abbreviations. For example, if we overhear a conversation between close friends we may understand every word, yet the meaning may escape us. That is to say, their communication is formed of 'contextual keys' which open the doors to full comprehension. The researcher who aims to understand the conversation must follow the 'informant's language'. It is like getting to know a culture on its most basic level. The researcher therefore encourages the informant to use his or her personal language and to explain meanings which are particular to him or her. At the same time, the informant finds that he or she is translating the specific context even of commonly used terms.

For example, asylum applicants call themselves *refugees*, and when they say *documents* they mean a travel document or residence permit. Programmers, however, might understand text files by the term *documents*, lawyers might understand *legal documents*. Ethnographers are well aware that those who are doing research 'at home' must learn to understand a variety of language registers, no less than those who are doing research with foreigners. The precise interpretation of language registers means that the significances which the informant had in mind remain in the words.

The Way to the Goal Is to Differentiate the Personal Language of the Interviewer

In every interview different views of the world are mirrored: the informant's and the interviewer's. The difference between ordinary conversation and a professional interview lies in the fact that the researcher is

aware of having 'a personal filter' and may record insights which are relevant to his or her own culture. This awareness is expressed, for example, in the method of posing questions and observing the thoughts which have led to them. The researcher also records his or her own prejudices about the informant and surmises regarding the latter's behaviour. In note-taking the concepts the informant is using are distinguished from the researcher's own. The informant may tend to adopt the interviewer's linguistic forms: this is a common occurrence. It is advantageous if the interviewer strives not to use his or her personal language, thereby exerting the least possible influence on the informant's language. When the interviewer does use personal language, reference can be made immediately to the informant's own description and the informant may be urged to use his or her own concepts. For example, some people use the designation *asylants* for people who do not have asylum, meaning by it 'asylum applicants'. If one wanted to find out from applicants who were the *personnel* of the camp, they might have an idea that they were being asked about something *personal*. Insofar as the applicants do not use this expression, it is safer to ask in a descriptive way: *who are the people working in the camp?*

Institutional Language Is a Brake on the Ethnographic Interview

The language of the institution is an expression of the culture of a wider whole. It may partially coincide with 'employees' jargon' or phrases current in politics and the media. If people have been working in a particular institution for a relatively long time and willy-nilly have became part of it, or if they aspire to hold certain institutional positions, they use verbal associations which have a particular meaning for them. Members of the institution need not necessarily be conscious of their use of phrases. Indeed, their acquaintances often perceive 'professional deformation' in their behaviour outside working hours. Institutional language is appropriate only in discussions within the context of the given institution, i.e. among those members who understand the 'jargon'. For example, abbreviated terms such as *applicant* or the legal expression *tolerated residence* have only a hazy significance for people who do not come into contact with immigrants.

Researchers, if they are to be as little prejudiced as possible, will be aware that they too have a tendency to 'professionalise' the interview and thereby distort 'the informant's language'. Always they have the opportunity to adjust the data so as to fit them into the institution's

pigeon-holes. But they may decide to intervene in the interview only minimally, adapt themselves to the order of themes which the informant selects, and observe. With this approach the researcher is at first afraid that time will 'fly away', and so will the informant. However, if the latter has a feeling of being trusted and respected, he or she will begin to speak more succinctly, without needing to be repeatedly interrupted. Besides, the informant will present the inner logic of the situation being described with more clarity than we could achieve by cross examination. If conducted in this manner, the interview often takes less time, and it is more pleasant for both parties.

Question:
Aren't structured notes a pointless investment of energy? Why is it important to distinguish the informant's language, the interviewer's language and the institution's language?

Reply:
Notes where the various sources of information are not distinguished lose their vital qualities very quickly. Anthropologists say that if a person does not write notes on the same day, but instead on the following day after sleeping and waking, less than half of them will be usable (Bernard 1995). The material loses authenticity, and our thinking begins automatically, in line with our own schemas, to combine what was dissociated and to dissociate what was combined. We all, to be sure, have the feeling that we understand our own notes. However, it has been demonstrated that our memory of the given situation changes markedly with the passage of time. A correct analysis is impossible if, right from the beginning, we do not distinguish how we *asked*, how we *elicited*, what we *concluded*, what precisely the informant *said*, and how that is *referred* to outside the doors of our workplace.

The Rephrased Story Is Never Faithful

Between the literal wording and the rephrasing there is a difference like that between spring water and water from a tap. The literal wording has a force that conveys the exact meaning of what is said. This is another reason why it is worth distinguishing the informant's language, the interviewer's language and the institution's language right at the moment of recording. A useful means of distinguishing language registers in the written record is to devise symbols for all participants of the interview and also for unuttered observations by the recorder.

Irrespective of the theme and subject of research, the use of a particular language is one of the fundamental pillars of the ethnographic interview. If interviewers note down only their own rephrasing, in the final analysis they have no details which can show how they reached their generalisations. The original literal transcript of what was heard is therefore of key importance, because generalization can only be deduced from the detailed record. A literal transcript of questions and answers enables analysis of the material to be carried out in a trustworthy manner (Spradley 1979).

An analysis of court judgments illustrates the results of using the specific statements without reformulation. This study showed that in cases where immigrants were successful, the judges most frequently referred to the immigrants' direct and literal utterances, as opposed to rephrased utterances in those cases which were lost. Where the judges had culturally sensitive interpretation at their disposal and conducted dialogue with open questions, they were in a well-matched interaction with the applicants (Wennerstrom 2008).

Question

My normal practice has been to conduct the interview by posing the detailed questions which I consider necessary, putting the answers in order according to how I understand them, condensing them, and writing them down like that. Why should I change my procedure?

Reply:

It often happens that supplementary questions are asked only a few seconds before the informants themselves would have explained the context, if they had not been interrupted. To act quickly on the basis of surmises is a natural tendency of human thinking, but one is advised to resist it during the ethnographic interview. If the applicant's information is reformulated for the interview record according to the interviewer's understanding, inevitably there is a consequent shift of meaning. Hence statements appear on written record which were never uttered by the applicant, who nonetheless signs the completed record to the effect that he or she agrees with "*my statement*".

Formulations by another person inevitably change the applicant's statement. Reformulated information undermines the testimonial value of the record: much of what was said is omitted, and what remains does not meet the preconditions for an interview record to be called trustworthy (Maryns 2006). It is therefore recommended to transcribe the *exact words uttered and in the context which the immigrant gave.*

IV. CONDITIONS OF DESCRIPTION

Details Are Like Sinews, Making the Narrative Skeleton Mobile

One of the practical recommendations of the ethnographic interview is not to ask about meaning but instead about use or example. In everyday life people do not normally ponder over meanings: mainly they consider the practical aspects of the use of things. Apart from that, our minds are better able to remember examples than general declarations. Granted, we are interested in what things mean, but we appropriate meanings better through concrete examples. We ask, therefore, how the person experienced the time in question or the event in question, or what other example he or she may be able to offer us. With this method the interview passes onto the level of concrete details, without the two sides having the feeling of being present at an interrogation (Spradley 1979).

Interview techniques aimed at acquiring detail should, however, be applied with breaks. This is because if directed questions are posed too densely together, they may provoke an undesired effect: they weaken the immigrant's motivation to shape tortuous memories into comprehensible form. Often, too, they come up against the participants' limited capacity for detailed expression in language (Maryns 2006).

There may also be other reasons for clipped expression:

R. What did you say in the first interview?
I. I didn't go into details, because I had no idea that they could give asylum here.

Repeatedly applicants declared that in the first interview they had left many details unmentioned, because they did not know that international protection might be offered to them also in Slovakia. The above-quoted applicant further declared that he did not trust the authorities and did not feel that it would be safe for him to speak openly. There are interviews where it is exceptionally difficult to get to any points of detail at all, and there are others which have details in excess. The interview has truly been conducted in masterly style if a balance has been maintained between the narrative whole and the details, relying on open questions.

Question:

How can personal details be acquired in the course of the interview other than by a brief 'question and answer'?

Reply:

The following questions, always posed one by one, serve as examples of how to encourage narration on a certain theme:

Could you tell me, please, about your life? (…)

You mentioned that you had to leave. Could you tell me, please, something more about the time when you were making your decision whether to leave? (…)

Could you describe your journey in detail? (…)

Could you say more about your situation as regards property, when you were at home?

Each of the questions encourages a somewhat longer answer, not just a clipped item of information (which, such as it is, often results in supplementary questions). They allow informants to give their accounts in a context which can make sense. They also assess the informant's credibility in a sensitive manner.

Trust and Trustworthiness Are Like Mother and Daughter: One Implies the Other

The trustworthiness of the asylum applicant is one of the fundamental matters in the interview and also one of the most discussed themes, not only among the applicants. It seems that untrustworthiness is more easily demonstrable than trustworthiness. Each of us knows from experience that if someone is 'out to get us', each verbal reply of ours may be used to 'trip us up with words' and any discrepancy may be exploited against us. It is very difficult to persuade people who have an exact idea of what they wish to hear and how they wish to hear it. A number of studies show how greatly our beliefs are influenced by those sources of information which we consider trustworthy. Because there is not enough time for us to check *everything*, we must take many items of information on trust, and it is easier to choose between sources than between the items.

The position of the interviewer depends also on an assessment of the credibility of the account. Paradoxically, during the interview trustworthiness cannot be demonstrated unless we offer the applicant trust. An environment of trust which enables information to flow freely is possible even between mutually foreign persons. Just as people may respect each other without feeling any admiration, so trust may exist even without any

feelings of affinity. The informant may immediately sense the space for trust, or may sense it only sometimes, or need not sense it ever. We may communicate trust also by our manner of posing questions (Vaněk, Mücke, Pelikanová 2007).

If we trust the narrator, we enable him or her to describe things coherently. We encourage his or her narration with open questions, which lead to developed answers. In certain cases the opportunity to speak may be perceived as a surrender of control over the presentation of evidence to the informant (Maryns 2006). If the informant feels there is space, this facilitates his or her explanation and comprehension. In general, where there is strict adherence to the order of themes and frequent intervention the narrator not only loses the thread but also loses trust in the interviewer.

When describing situations of life importance, the informant may burst into tears or cry out quite involuntarily. A number of narrative complications also turn up in the account, which on first hearing seem to be superfluous. Paradoxically, sometimes narrative testimonies lack the power to carry credibility because they contain too much emotive language that is legally irrelevant (Berk-Seligson 2002, Good 2007).

Many immigrants are therefore not prepared to recapitulate their past before the authorities and to structure their narrative in the way that is customary for us: chronologically, neutrally and factually. As such, their speech makes an impression of untrustworthiness by its very form. Despite the unexpected form, however, when given a patient hearing the informant will get to the 'point'. If nevertheless one has not understood, probing questions help to maintain trust: *What did you have in mind when you were telling this story? How is this event connected with your position? You have given a detailed description of your negative experience. Could you please explain more clearly how this is connected with your persecution?*

That is to say, the form of the narrative is also connected with a universal characteristic of human memory: personal experiences are communicated more emotively than general knowledge of the world.

Question:

As soon as I see the person in question, or after a few minutes of the interview, I can sense whether he's telling the truth or lying. From then on, the interview only confirms this impression.

Reply:

Our judgment which evaluates whether someone is lying often 'proceeds' automatically. We are not necessarily always aware of it, and

it may change. We may retain, write down, or observe our impression of another person; during the interview one is recommended to record it and 'set it aside'. The first impression may be deceptive, for a number of reasons. One of them is that this evaluation is conditioned by the context of our own culture encountering another culture e.g. in thoughts, perceptions and experiences.

This means that if we look at a person on the basis of estimations our judgment need not correspond to reality, because we do not have enough information at our disposal. Consequently, it may happen that *our* judgment becomes an obstacle to clarifying *their* thinking and actions.

Question:
If it seems to me that the applicant is lying, I feel hostility to him, and sometimes I get quite angry. But even in cases where I feel indifferent to his fabrications, I cannot imagine how I am supposed to feel trust towards him.

Reply:
Associated with the impression that the applicant is giving false information, there may also be a feeling that the work of conducting and evaluating the interview has been futile. Human emotions are in great measure influenced also by memories. We experience many situations in a more complicated form, owing purely to the fact that some older memory of an experience with a similar point (involving other liars) is re-evoked (perhaps only subconsciously). Surveys show that if we repeatedly concentrate on the faults of some person or group (particularly an ethnic group), we are inclined to seek proofs of our negative presuppositions based on previous experience. In those cases where we succumb to stereotypes and routine, we are more inclined to overlook the present reality. Besides, if we mark somebody as a liar beforehand, and that person happens not to be one, the contrary fact is rarely proved (Fiske, Taylor 1984). One of the ways to avoid succumbing to standardised estimations is to be aware that we feel hostility. If we do not rule out the possibility that the person may be telling the truth, by posing probing questions we may arrive at new information.

It is evident that mistrustfulness during the interview does not encourage testimony and signals rejection. Conversely, an environment of trust brings important information to the surface, which may require immedia-

te action: for example, in the event of a threat to the health and safety of the immigrant or a third person. The interviewer (or sometimes the interpreter) may be the only one who discovers that he or she is speaking to a person who has been a victim of human trafficking. Regardless of their legal status, it is necessary to inform such immigrants of their rights and to contact the relevant organisations. Where human rights are violated, the essential thing is not whether the persons involved meet the criteria for the granting of asylum, or whether they have suffered inhuman treatment inside or outside their countries of origin, or even whether they are aware of their rights.

V. TYPES OF QUESTIONS

If we were to identify the questions which most frequently come up in interviews with immigrants according to *content*, they are the following: *identification* questions (origin and identity), *knowledge* questions (life and persecution), *motivation* questions (reasons for flight or other decisions) and *control* questions (verification) (Maryns 2006).

The division of questions according to their *structure* depends on the purpose with which they are posed. Some of the types mentioned may overlap; the best-known, however, are *closed* and *open* questions, *direct* and *narrative* questions, *rhetorical* and *leading* questions, *probing* and *confusing* questions, *control* and *precision* questions, *depreciative*, *unsettling* or *empowering* questions. Since the ethnographic interview is based on encouraging the informant's independent narration, I will give closer attention only to open and probing questions and their most frequently-occurring opposite poles – closed and leading questions.

Closed Questions Invite Abrupt Replies, Are Hasty and Impoverish Testimonies

The human mind prefers closed questions for two reasons: we always have presuppositions, and we need to verify them. This tendency of our thinking is best illustrated by a conversation between two people in a hurry, where each conducts a monologue without listening. In a dialogue where there is only continuous presupposition, there is no room for listening or discovering something new. The first step towards change is becoming aware of the representations that exist (whether we like it or not) in our thinking. The second step is actual observation, where the observer is not concerned with his or her own thoughts but simply follows the situation. To perceive this difference (i.e. observing one's own thoughts about the applicant; observing the applicant) is the key to success.

In the following extract we can see how closed questions are the result of certain assumptions. No matter how hard we try, closed questions cannot lead informants towards a coherent answer, because they have no opportunity to reply in any other way except as the interviewer prescribes.

J: How much did you pay the transporter?
A: 5,000 US dollars. I wanted to go to an English-speaking country. It was agreed that that could be done for 15,000 Euro, but that was a problem for me.
J: You had that much money?
A: Yes. (…)
J: Were your earnings enough to cover normal expenses?
A: Yes, quite sufficient, they were well in excess of that.
J: As regards your accommodation, were you on the police records?
A: I was registered with the local police unit as a sub-tenant.

At the start of proceedings, while examining the details of identity, the judge wanted to verify a number of facts. His closed questions, i.e. those which required in the first instance a yes/no answer, seemed to contain a part which was unsaid: "Where did you get the required sum from?" "You don't look like someone who had a high income!" "You look like an average person and a typical economic migrant!"

The applicant had originally been designated by the police as an economic migrant. The asylum procedure was protracted because the facts of the case had been insufficiently ascertained. In this case, however, the person involved was finally granted asylum after a number of years.

Open questions concerning the applicant's finances might have been posed in a number of ways:

In your country how does one go about arranging a journey with a smuggler? (…)
What agreement did you personally make with the smuggler? (…)
Normally one pays quite a lot of money for illegal journeys. How can the ordinary person get hold of such a sum? (…)
How did you yourself acquire it? (…)
Can you tell me about your profession/ way of earning a living? (…)
In what way are citizens and their places of residence registered in your country? (…)
What was the procedure in your case? (…)

Even if the closed questions were to be orientated to the immigrant's point of view, they remain closed questions: *Do you feel that your employment situation has changed as a result of the economic crisis? Has your employer's behaviour towards you changed?* Similar questions are typically found in questionnaires. Often they contain an inbuilt evaluation, presupposing the conclusions of the survey, or they require

the informant to provide an analysis which he or she does not normally make. Besides, the researcher is left without a description of the situation. Open questions, conversely, give the choice to the informant: *What is your employment situation now? How does your employer behave towards you?*

Leading Questions Produce Distorted Answers, Prolong the Interview and Change Meanings

Leading questions are considered one of the worst mistakes in an interview, because they manipulate the informant. Most people pose manipulating questions without even being aware of it. Sometimes informants may spot these shifts and continue on their own track, but this does not happen always. Unless they are 'dogged' they will give answers which lack description, depth and complete explanation. As a result, it will be necessary to pose supplementary questions, which themselves will reinforce the interviewer's presuppositions. Manipulative questions require from the informant only forced agreement, dissent, or a restricted choice. In place of the hidden presupposition, *"But you were a member of that party, weren't you?"* we could ask what we really want to ascertain, *"In what way did the party verify your loyalty?"* Instead of the reproach, *"Well, didn't you say you were at the demonstration?"* we can enquire, *"What happened at the demonstration?"* or *"How did you participate in it?"* Instead of the closed choice, *"Did you use to stay at the office or at home?"* we can come by new information: *"Where did you use to stay?"* Essentially, leading questions are not even questions in the true meaning of the word. The interviewer is trying to acquire a simple answer. The problem is that this answer may have many different meanings.

Special attention must be given to negative closed questions, because the answers to them are so confusing. The question, *"So in other circumstances you would not have gone?"* offers a dual possibility of reply in many languages: *"Yes, we would not"* or *"No, we would not"*. The Slovak language employs both forms, whereas English only has one: *"No, we would not"*. It may happen that the immigrant answers only yes/no. If he says only *"yes"* and comes from a language group which uses the dual form, his *"yes"* may mean the precise opposite (Berg-Seligson 2002). In such circumstances open questions are particularly appropriate: *"What would you have done in other circumstances?"*

The following instance illustrates how the assumptions of the person deciding on the granting of asylum manifest themselves in closed questions and prolong the testimony.

M: *So you don't wish to ask anything about your rights and duties? (…)*

M: *Were you living permanently at 243 Middle Street up to 07.08.2006?*

A: *I had permanent residence there.*

M: *But my question was how long you were resident there physically, how long you lived there.*

A: *I did not stay there the whole time, as I had to hide.*

M: *You're speaking generally. Tell me the date when you stopped Living there.*

A: *Until 07.08.2006 precisely.*

M: *Did you go to work from there?*

A: *No, at night, for example, I used to rest at my friends' place.*

M: *And by day?*

A: *I was away from the house, I just went there sometimes to have a look.*

M: *But where were you living? You are still not replying to that.*

A: *I was able to stay with friends.*

M: *I don't know how to explain this any more clearly. I'm not getting an answer to this simple question. How long were you living the life of a normal person, sleeping in that house and going to work?*

A: *Until 2002.*

M: *And afterwards?*

A: *Afterwards, because of the fact that I was (…), I didn't stay there.*

M: *Afterwards you never stayed in that house?*

A: *Sometimes I did, but very seldom. However, the ruling party thought I was living there.*

M: *How often did you stay there?*

A: *I might have been there every day, or every week. Irregularly.*

M: *Which period are you thinking of now?*

In the file the entire preceding dialogue is summarized in sentences which do not conflict with reality, but which the applicant never uttered: *"I had permanent residence, and I am registered with the police, at 243 Middle Street in Notown. It was a family house of which I was the owner. I lived there practically alone. When my mother came to me, I lived there together with her. I stayed there physically until 2006."* An interview

conducted with leading and closed questions had proved totally unsuccessful in establishing where the applicant lived before his departure from the country.

If the aim is to determine the place and mode of residence, one has the option of asking open questions: *"Where did you reside until the time when you left the country?" (…) What sort of life did you lead during the final year before your departure?"* Afterwards we can pose another question on a selected part of the statement which needs to be given in more detail, or which we felt was unclear: *"Could you please describe in more detail // explain what you had in mind…"*

In the following extract it is as if the interviewer is verifying his own belief: "a person resides in one place"; "the ideas *reside* and *live* are synonyms"; "to live a normal life means to sleep in *one* place and to go to work"; "what really happened can always be described unambiguously". Nevertheless, people can reside in a number of places at a given time, and not only during persecution. It is customary for people to say that they live somewhere when they consider that place their home, even though they do not sleep there every night. People have very varying conceptions of the ideas *usual, normal, standard, classic*. The *average* and the *norm* change, depending on which society and which historical period we have in mind. During wartime even 'ordinary reality' is not so unambiguous.

J: Where did you have permanent residence?
A: We lived in the forest.
J: Where?
A: I was at home very little, I was in the forest. My family was living in the state of Y.
J: But at some time you had a permanent place of residence.
A: No, we lived in the forest.
(…)
A: I came to Slovakia because every week the Z soldiers were coming to my home for me and wanted to take me away.
J: Mr. X, you said that they came for you to your home. Where?
A: They went to the village where I lived, I had returned home.
J: But you said you were living in the forest.
A: Yes, I lived in the forest, but from time to time I used to come home, to eat properly. People from the street were following me and passing information. I never stayed at home overnight. The soldiers used to go around with dogs, and a person couldn't escape.
J: Wait a moment, this is a bit of a mix-up.
The judge dictated for the record: *When the court asked what place*

the Z soldiers had come to, the witness replied: I used to come home once or twice a month to get foodstuffs, and when the Z soldiers learnt of this they came at night, and so I was never at home during the night. To a further question, asking him to clarify the contradiction with what he had stated, i.e. that he lived in the forest, he did not have a place of residence, and his family were living in Y state, the witness repeated that he came to the village to get foodstuffs, but he never was there during the night.

In this dialogue from a judicial hearing there is a clear attempt on the part of the judge to define permanent residence in the sense that it usually has in Slovakia. The applicant's situation, however, is dissimilar: the place is indefinable and mutable. The judge uses a further unambiguous term, *home*, to denote the place of residence of the family. But the fact is that the applicant's family had moved from their former home to the neighbouring state, and the applicant used to return to the original home sporadically. From the judge's point of view *this is a bit of a mix-up*, but in the applicant's eyes there is no contradiction: at a time when a military conflict is in progress the concept of permanent residence is inadequate.

Question:
You speak of suggestive questions being posed. If only the legal representatives too had attended some sort of training and would try to rid themselves of this evil habit! I don't understand why they ask questions during interviews in such a way as to put the answer into the applicant's mouth.

Reply:
The question is how the lawyers came by that answer which they 'put in the applicant's mouth'. In not a few cases a series of open questions outside the official interview led to discoveries which the preceding questionnaires had not produced. Ultimately, the lawyers on both sides know that what counts is what is entered in the written record (Maryns 2006).

If we are unsure about the credibility of an answer, an open supplementary question may dispel the doubts.

Open Questions Stimulate Clarifying Answers

What distinguishes open questions is that they allow people to answer openly. If we were to observe ordinary and sometimes even specialist conversations, we would discover that for people to pose open questions is rather rare. Posing closed or leading questions is so widespread a practice that if we ask an open question people may be taken aback and wonder if we mean it seriously.

There are also 'myths' going around about open questions: people have fixed ideas about the results they produce. For example, that they lead to excessively sensitive themes, or that they are crude, or that they open some imaginary thirteenth chamber which we have no business entering. The contrary is true, however: open questions are 'the fairest'. There are a number of reasons for the unwillingness to pose open questions, sometimes indeed the hostility to them. Some people avoid posing open questions for fear they might have to spend too long listening, or that they might learn something which they do not want to hear. Therefore they prefer (mostly unconsciously) to frame their questions so that they will receive the answer which most succinctly confirms what they surmise. Such an interview may be designated as manipulative and methodologically incorrect. One of the other explanations for people being less inclined to pose open questions is that open questions and open answers demand more attention.

Sustained alertness during the interview is a precondition for its smooth flow: the hearing of answers alternates with appropriately posed questions. A correct question, as ethnographers understand it, is one which in its essentials comes from the informant. That means that we ask in the informant's words. The person who is asking should assume that no concept necessarily means precisely what he or she has in mind. If one wishes to verify the meaning, one checks: *If I remember rightly, you said that…*

The following interview was conducted with a person whom we might designate as a Vietnamese migrant. The extract illustrates how open questions give the informant enough space to present us with a new meaning of a well-known concept. Hence one can see the differing modes of expression: in the informant's language, in the interviewer's language, and in the institution's language.

R: When I say the word migrant, what does that mean to you?
I: I know that they call us migrants, but among ourselves if someone says migrant it's as if he was saying, that person is here illegally. Maybe

the people in the camps call themselves that, I don't know.
R: What do you call yourselves?
I: Entrepreneurs, business people, or traders.
R: Could you describe for me, please, what life is like for Vietnamese business people in Slovakia?
I: (…)

When this is processed into a specialist text, we get a demonstration of the institutional language in use.

Some of them (legally settled Vietnamese) do not classify themselves as migrants. For them the term migrant is considered the equivalent of illegal, and so they classify themselves as business people. When coming to Slovakia their aim was to set up a business and, depending on the profits, either to return home or to carry on to a third country. They have formed a relatively coherent group, although there is minimal interaction with the majority population.

The question *what is life like for Vietnamese migrants?* uses concepts from the institutional language. It is more important, however, to learn how the concept migrant is used by the migrant community. A question which has its origin in a different environment tends mainly to produce a fudging answer. Researchers are therefore recommended to find out what meaning ideas which we treat as self-evident have for the informant. Afterwards we will be able to frame questions which have an identical meaning in the informant's environment also.

Question:
Mostly they're uneducated people. They don't understand our questions. For example, about movable estate and real estate. That has to be clarified for them, and it's exhausting. Wouldn't it be possible to take some other approach, so that "the wolf would be full and the sheep still in one piece"?

Reply:
In the ethnographic interview conditions are never imposed on the informants, no matter what their education. The interviewer should be able to ask about things and events unknown to him or her. People may fail to understand questions, not because they have a different education, but because of a differing cultural context. The naming of things of various kinds is specific to every culture and indeed family. Even these differences, however, should not be an obstacle to the gathering of data.

On the contrary, otherness is a challenge to comprehend differing life experience. For example, in the case of movable estate and real estate an ethnographer might ask these descriptive questions:

What were the things that your family considered as property?
How was property divided in your family?
Could you describe how property transactions are made?
How did you personally farm your property?

When a number of questions are posed at once, normally this causes the informant to choose just one of them to answer. Accordingly, it is recommended always to ask one question only and move on to another when that one has been answered.

A Question about Typical Phenomena Leads to the Discovery of General Context

There are many ways to discover more about the informant's life through descriptive questions. When the aim is to discover how the given phenomenon is perceived by a representative of another culture, who moreover speaks a different language, one is recommended to begin with general questions. *What's it like being a Slovak in the Ukraine? What's it like being a Ukrainian in Slovakia? What's it like being a decision-maker in Britain? What's it like being a decision-maker in Slovakia? What's it like being a Kurd in Syria? What's it like being a Kurd in Germany?* With questions like these we are asking about membership of a certain group. Every person has a certain place in the society where he or she lives, whether or not that is part of the person's self-image. Social hierarchy is present in every human activity and movement, ultimately even in thought. A narration of one's personal past is no exception. Setting it in the general context of the group, history, ideology, and other broader structures, is of benefit, in that it enables the interviewer to comprehend key aspects of a certain situation.

R: What's it like being a Kurd?
I: Imagine that someone keeps constantly repeating to you that you don't have a religion, you don't have a language, and you don't have a history. How would you feel? You have no chance at all of living your own life – you 'are' and you 'aren't'. At the same time, you know that

you speak your own language, but you cannot learn it in school, you have your religion but you mustn't profess it, and your history, since it isn't written down on paper, does not exist where the bureaucrats are concerned.

If we are speaking to representatives of groups whose cultural self-awareness and ethnic distinctiveness are systematically suppressed, it is recommended to encourage them repeatedly to speak. Oppressed people are not accustomed to someone genuinely wanting to understand them or even listen to their story.

Questions regarding typical activities, phenomena, events, roles of persons, are helpful also in cases where we wish to discover how the given phenomenon was evaluated in the country of origin and what it means in its original context.

Can you describe your typical day in Baghdad? (…)
What generally happens after someone becomes a member of X? (…)
Could you describe, please, what an ordinary member of the guard does? (…)
What is generally expected of women in Afghanistan? (…)
What different ethnic groups live in your village? (…) What is typical for them? (…)
What types of farms are there in Ekangte? (…)

A representative of the given culture will be able to describe that culture from the perspective of his or her own social layer more credibly than any outside observer. Specialist publications, internet sources or information databases cannot substitute for the informant's description of the situation.

A Question about Particular Things Yields Us a Description of a Specific Phenomenon

Having ascertained the general coordinates of the given phenomenon, we can ask about the informant's particular situation and the personal context of events. From the narrator's point of view this sequence of questions is also more agreeable, and the interviewer may comprehend the description better. Sometimes informants contrast a specific situation with what was going on around them, sometimes also they mention similarities, and we may encourage them to make a comparison.

The following specific questions are a free continuation of the general examples presented above.

Could you describe in detail, please, your day in Baghdad, during the last day before your departure? (…) Please also describe the city and the names of streets where you happened to be. (…)

What happened a few days after you signed your agreement of cooperation with X? (…)

What did you do as a member of the guard on the day of the attack? (…)

You mentioned that you belonged to the middle classes, but despite that you had to marry. What particular rules did you personally have to follow? (…)

What happened if you didn't follow them? (…)

What ethnic groups did you know in your immediate neighbourhood?

What particular experiences did you have with them? (…)

What was your farm in Ekangte like?

Probing questions help the flow of the interview, particularly when they link up with something the informant has already mentioned. Questions regarding specific phenomena can also be posed in such a way as to stimulate description. In description of the situation it is recommended to alternate questions regarding general and contextual information.

Question

Normally I ask control questions, on realia from the area which the informant says he comes from. I ask what river flows through the town, how many inhabitants the town has, what the main streets are. That has worked well for me. The Iraqis, for example, can rattle it off fluently. If somebody says he's from a village which lies on a certain river and he doesn't know what the river is called, that's dubious. He should also know about the political situations and events which took place in the given time. If he has discrepancies, I don't believe him; if he's speaking fluently, everything falls into place. Is there any reason to question this procedure?

Reply:

Control questions regarding realia seem neutral in quiz shows, but in interviews with asylum applicants they may damage trust. Moreover, the inability fully to answer the question posed, or the ignorance of realia,

may have other causes apart from deliberate deception. Probing questions may be posed also in descriptive form, so as to avoid the atmosphere of a police interrogation while nonetheless ascertaining specific details.

Could you give me a detailed description, please, of the village or town where you lived? (…)

Which cultural monuments would you like to show me in your country, if I came there on a visit? (…)

Which natural sights in your country would you like to show to a foreigner who happened to be in your land? (…)

You say that you never travelled before, and therefore you have nothing to tell me about interesting places in your country. (…) Maybe from things said by your schoolmates you know of some interesting places in your country. (…) Which did you want to visit as a child?

You say that you never travelled and never went to school (so you didn't talk about such things with schoolmates). Describe for me in detail, please, just those geographical places which you know well. (…)

Where would you take me in your immediate neighbourhood? (…)

What name did you have for it? (…) (if the place is too small to be found on maps, or if the informant uses local names which mostly differ from the geographical ones). Could you describe for me, please, the town which is closest to your village. (…)

You say you don't know the geographical names, because you migrated to that area only a short while ago. Can you describe for me the place where you lived previously? (…)

You mentioned that you were a driver. On which routes did you travel most often? (…)

You said you were running a garage. From which regions did you have customers? (…)

The magic of the interview consists in simple open questions. If we feel the informant is 'wandering from the point', we can pose a 'to the point' question in such a way as to focus attention on something 'graspable' by perceptions. *How did you see it? How did you hear it? How did you feel it? How do you do that?* At the same time, this approach is a good litmus test of truthfulness: the human mind knows how to lie, but the human body doesn't. Emotional memories are the most memorable, precisely because they are not fruits of thinking but an experience in the body.

When posing closed questions the interviewer can have the feeling that there are never enough of them, because they cannot evoke coherent answers. Open questions solve this problem: they open the way to the particularities from which 'the picture is assembled'.

VI. AUXILIARY TECHNIQUES

Drawing Maps and Pictures Aids Description

Drawing is one of the established auxiliary techniques in the ethnographic interview. With the aid of sketches or diagrams speakers are sometimes able to express themselves more clearly regarding what we are asking about. In some handbooks it is actually recommended that right at the beginning of the interview informants should be given paper and pencil, with the explanation that if they wish to give a graphic representation of anything, they are welcome to do so (Spradley 1979, Bernard 1995). If the informant is reluctant or does not feel skilled enough, the person who is conducting the interview may draw sketches parallel with the narration, on the informant's behalf, as it were. The latter will see the picture and will make corrective adjustments to relevant details.

Visual ideas are constantly being created and constantly changing in the human mind, even during the act of speaking. Sometimes these ideas are a barrier to understanding. The following extract provides an example. Suggestive and reproachful questions indicate that the interviewer presupposes the applicant's untrustworthiness. She keeps the conduct of the interview 'firmly in her own hands' and only rarely allows the informant to speak without interruption. She is testing her own presuppositions rather than the informant's statements. To quote one of Murphy's Laws, logic here is a systematic method of reaching inaccurate conclusions without feeling doubts.

A: The house was surrounded – though in fact I didn't know that. (…) I jumped out of bed and opened my room door, and I saw a transporter come charging into the courtyard…

M: How could you see that? It doesn't make much sense to me. You saw through a half-opened door out to the gate – but the gate is at the house entrance. Were you at the entrance?

A: ?

M: If the gate is the gate… or did you see round a corner? Oh well, I suppose, you can sketch this for me, so that I can write it down… I didn't want to get into all that, because it delays things. If you say gate, I must know what kind of gate it is.

A. sketched a house with a square ground plan and courtyard, the gate being part of one of its walls.

M: Now it's clear to me. I imagined a normal standard gate for the whole site… Was it a military transporter? (…)

The following is written in the record: *I jumped out of bed and opened the door which led to the courtyard, and I saw a military transporter in the courtyard.*

What we consider 'normal' or 'standard' is never universally valid. Every idea relates to certain agents, in a certain historical time and geographical place, all of which influence the given phenomenon and change it. A sketch may be a shortcut to understanding a situation which is unavoidably new to us. At the same time, we give the applicant a chance to describe the situation from his or her own authentic perspective.

It is particularly useful to ask the informant to sketch diagrammatic outlines when speaking of movements, routes and displacements. Speaking with reference to a picture stimulates retrieval of memories and contributes to a more comprehensive ordering of information.

However, maps and pictures also are no more than aids which, like verbal description, may be well or badly suited to the given individual. Interestingly, whether we perceive space and situation as capable of depiction is itself something culturally learned. For example, a friend of mine who knows Bratislava well wrote that if I were to judge by how she drew places, even her route from home to work, I would exclude the possibility that she had lived in Bratislava for any length of time. There are people who cannot draw streets or depict a space, though when "out and about" they can find everything.

Non-verbal Expression Is Part of Describing

If we observe group communication, normally it seems more complicated to the outside observer than to the participants themselves. Besides, if the given group speaks to us in an unknown language, we perceive only the intonation of sounds. It is similar with a language which we understand: if it is louder than we are used to, we react to it as a signal (Dunbar, Knight, Power 1999). For example, if someone shouts, at the given moment the meaning of the shouted words is secondary (hence the reaction to anger is 'illogical'). We perceive a shout first of all as a signal of danger: we feel the need to escape or attack.

One shout is not like another shout: the decibel limit of what is considered a shout, and indeed what is felt to be a shout, is conditioned by the custom of the country of origin. Equally, in common speech the loudness of conversation has a certain cultural significance in the country of origin, while beyond its borders it may arouse entirely different feelings. Outside their own group, in a foreign land, people perceive gestures and vocal colour all the more when they do not understand the words.

Expressions of disgust and smiles are among the few facial expressions which people understand regardless of ethnic affiliation. A small movement of the facial muscles can cause a much greater movement in the whole body: a disgusted facial expression automatically repels the other, while smiles and laughter attract him or her (Brown 1991). Thus non-verbal behaviour confirms the reserve or friendliness of both communicating parties on the level of expression.

In an interview between two people of differing cultures it is particularly necessary to test feedback. A downward nodding of the head, even if accompanied with a "yes, yes sir" or "yes, yes ma'am", only rarely signifies agreement. It is like when an American says "it's interesting" with a polite smile, making it obvious that the theme doesn't interest him in the least, in fact he finds it boring. Contrastingly, shaking the head from side to side need not mean disagreement: in certain parts of India that is actually how people express satisfaction. Nodding is often only a polite expression of respect towards a superior person. Silence, again, need not mean that something is not in order. Many nationalities are silent when they judge it is not necessary to speak, or when they feel sad or need solitude, and their silence need not have any other implications.

In Latin American countries, for example, it is considered impolite to express oneself with certainty, forcefully, assertively and unambiguously, even about things which are self-evident. Hesitant speech, often using words like *maybe, probably, fairly,* and other indirect expressions, is considered much more decent (Berk-Seligson 2002). In a European setting we might have an impression of uncertainty, but for Hispanic countries it is part of the expression of respect. In some Asian countries also, people perceive direct speaking as aggressive. Even quick informal responsive speech is considered suspect and unwise, and so one is recommended to be silent, observe and make no evaluations – in Indian cultures for a number of days (Salzmann 1997).

Care is advised also in the expression of agreement. In Indian and Arabic cultures, under certain conditions it is not allowable for a higher authority to answer '*no*', '*I don't know*', or not to answer at all, or to refuse to give help or to meet a request or demand. By custom people try to be amenable to others and to please them. When they find themselves in difficulties and cannot accede to what is desired, they will prefer to invent some evasion or to offer a substitute, rather than to say '*no*' (Khidayer 2009).

Similarly, eye contact is not desirable while speaking with higher authorities. Even when this may seem evasive, it is an expression of respect rather than a sign of guilt. Lowering one's gaze is a widespread custom in Asian, African, Hispanic, Australian, and in some cases also Arabic cultures. Similarly, it is improper to display emotion, even in the case of personal traumatic experiences, irrespective of whether this makes one's testimony on persecution appear unconvincing (Berk-Seligson 2002). A person who is trained not to reveal any trace of what he or she is feeling in public or before authorities will not be able to depart from that norm even in another cultural setting.

Migrants may dress above or below our expectations. 'Excessive' dressing is also a result of cultural usages, and so too is decoration of the body. For example, women in many countries are expected to wear very elaborate make-up, and even if this may give an impression of affectation in our context, it is merely a signal that the meeting in question is thought worthy of the maximum grooming, and nothing more.

Non-verbal expressions are a very effective instrument of communication, and they differ in every society: mainly they depend on social status. If people smile in a situation when we do not expect it, that does not necessarily signify mockery. If people nod, that does not always signify agreement or understanding. If people do not look us full in the eye, that does not mean they are unwilling to communicate. If people are silent, that does not mean they are unable to answer, or that they do not wish to continue speaking. An immigrant's lapse into silence may also be an ordinary part of speaking in his or her culture. That is to say, it is commonly regarded as inappropriate to 'grind on and on without ceasing'.

If it seems to us that the silence ought to be broken, it is recommended to repeat the informant's last statement and wait: *"You said you were at home at that time…"* (Vaněk, Mücke, Pelikánová 2007).

Silence is also one of the most effective approaches for boosting the interview (Kusá 1996). Only when we stop 'pecking' at the computer, thinking up the next question, testing a supposition and following the informant's eye movements, and remain genuinely quiet, only then do we give the second person a signal that we are listening. There is no connection here with the psychologically-focused type of interview. Simply, silence is what makes the interview less harsh and brings it towards the core matters. The only sound which does not deprive silence of its supportive effect is 'uh – huh'/ 'hmmm – hmmm' (Bernard 1995). Listening, with occasional natural 'uh – huh' probe, signals a tuning-in to the speaker's frequency. If we need to verify something, we will pose a supplementary question after the speaker has given us the signal that all he or she desires to say has been said.

Question
Some applicants are silent because they cannot think of anything. It sometimes happens, when they're at the interview, that they're quite unco-operative. And what really irritates me is when they're rude as well. Why should I tire myself out for them?

Reply:
Behind expressions of aggressive behaviour, there is often fear of not being successful and the hurt of having previously failed. For example, one of the reasons for leaving one's country may be that it is a point of masculine honour "to go out in the world to try one's fortune". If people are convinced that they do not want to be in a particular receiving country, for whatever reasons, they have no incentive to co-operate.

We must remember, however, that even 'unpleasant' interviews have their background stories. We are never 100% certain about the reasons for somebody's silence. The immigrant's silence may result from not knowing 'what one is supposed to say', i.e. what is expected in the given institution. Respect will not do any harm, even where there are inappropriate observations on the applicant's part. Not infrequently silence indicates a traumatising experience (which may also be expressed by rudeness and coarseness). In all cases, however, open questions produce more interesting answers than closed questions.

Interruption Severs Continuity and Protracts the Interview

In every interview the person who is conducting it comes to a crossroads: to take one road means not taking the others. Therefore there will be certain places which are insufficiently described. People habitually fill the 'blank spaces'. They are anxious to ask the questions they have devised as soon as possible, with the justification 'so that we do not forget'. In doing so, however, they may bring about the exact opposite of what they wanted: they cover the whole of the ground with superficial questions, but they have no energy left for sounding the deep wells.

Everyone has personal knowledge of the gulf between asking for more precision and interrupting. Precision questions are formed by reporting what the informant has said and connecting with it – the so-called 'echo effect'. Interruption, on the other hand, exalts the importance of the thoughts of the interviewer. The following extract illustrates how an interview is inordinately prolonged by interruption.

M: *When was that? That was what I wanted to know when I interrupted you.*

A: *The abduction was on 13.2.2006.*

M: *I wanted to have it in sequence so that it would be clear, to have it in proper order. We hadn't finished… the conspiracy – let's get back to that.*

A: *We didn't intend to fight in that house, because his wife and children were there too…*

M: *I must interrupt you. That is one of the questions I had prepared for you. What motivated you to go out by that back entrance?*

A: *Because when there's an attack, it's necessary to avoid it.*

M: *Should I understand you to mean that you wanted to escape? I want to hear why you wanted to go out.*

A: *If fighting started it could happen that the women and children would suffer too.*

M: *What was it: how am I to ask that question? You wanted to go out of that house, but beforehand something must have led you to make that move. But unless you tell me what I'm thinking of, I can't continue.*

A: *There were many factors.*

M: mentions various factors, while M. expresses dissatisfaction. She says that she wants to hear of another factor also; she suggests fear, cowardice, or inability to cope. (Author's off-record note.)

M: *Were those men in masks, or how were they dressed? What kind of weapons did they have?   A. describes. (…)*

A: *They threw us out of the car and put us up against a wall and beat us.*

M: *With what?*

A: *Boots, fists, sticks.*

M: *What kind of sticks?*

A: *Police batons.*

M: *How long did it last?*

A: *For me it didn't last long, because I lost consciousness, I had a heart spasm. I don't know how it was with the others, because we didn't talk about that.*

M: *When did you regain consciousness?*

A: *Hm, I can't tell you that, because it wasn't possible to track time.*

M: *That's logical. What happened after you regained consciousness?*

Most of the applicant's answers are shorter than the questions posed. By contrast, with appropriately posed questions the answers are mainly longer than the questions, since open questions lead to description, whereas closed questions lead to abrupt answers. One is recommended, therefore, to sort the data and intervene only after the informant has finished speaking on the given theme.

Question:

I have no assurance that the applicants will want to talk about what I need to ascertain for the purpose of assessing their applications. I often need to direct the flow of the interview. When I know what I want to discover, why should I not interrupt and ask about that exclusively?

Reply:

It happens that due to lack of time, or because of a personal idea of what form the description should take, with the best of intentions we break in upon the informant with short supplementary questions. However, frequent interruption can result not only in loss of trust but even in loss of the information which we want to acquire. Interviews deal with situations which the applicant has experienced in a certain context. Every social situation is played out in a definite space as an event in a given time, which is witnessed by people belonging to social groups. Just as three geometrical coordinates locate a point in space, similarly this triple parameter of space, time and social group membership is essential for trustworthy description of a situation: if even one of them is lacking, the description is distorted.

Question:

I have the impression that open questions are time-consuming. I need to concentrate on how to ask them, and sometimes they don't lead to the answers which I need to hear. Why shouldn't I pose the closed questions in the questionnaire just as they are?

Reply:

The manner in which questions are posed is connected with the aim of the interview. If we concentrate on filling in items from the questionnaire, we are inclined to shift to one side all the information which does not relate precisely to what is expected, making a note that "we will take up this matter later". Such an interview may be exhausting for both sides. If people are not accustomed to posing open questions, they may have the impression that the answer takes too much time.

If we give our attention fully to the informants, we can follow up what they say and let them follow 'their own thread'. The chance that we will find our way through the labyrinth of new information becomes much greater. When we interrupt the narrator with closed questions, it is as if we were boring through walls to make a shortcut. If we are able to deliberate together with the narrator without breaking in, we will reach our goal more quickly, although it may not seem so at the very beginning.

Writing Notes Gives Support to the Narrative

An uninterrupted account has the advantage that the informant 'does not lose the thread' and can explain the circumstances from his or her own standpoint. The statements made cannot be recorded with full literal exactness, unless one has a dictaphone or a stenographer. Failing such resources, anthropologists use abbreviated notes, so-called scratch notes, which are later written up into complete sentences (Bernard 1995).

When the interview is recorded, one can have much better non--verbal communication, with the listener looking directly at the other person and only occasionally writing a note. One is recommended also to write down what occurs outside the scope of the sound recording. Regardless of whether the interview is recorded, one is recommended to take thorough notes. These will make it unnecessary to interrupt the narrator simply because we have forgotten something, and we will also be enabled to pose more appropriate questions. We are in an ideal position to create the follow-up probing questions if we combine a high-quality record with full attention. Questionnaire items are used as an outline, with a flexible sequence of themes.

When writing the record it is necessary also to make careful distinctions between three planes which intersect during the interview: the informant's speech, one's personal insights, and evaluations made from the standpoint of the institution. Notes are above all descriptive and concern the subject of the interview. It is recommended to jot down both private insights and professional opinions, to be used during analysis. If the interviewer uses them immediately when they come to mind, the narrative flow may be interrupted. One's own insights will be useful as regards the process of the interview, provided that their context is recorded.

For example, if one adheres to the order and form of questions from the Asylum Law questionnaire (see Appendix), the consequence may be that recording even the basic data on origin, education and employment will take up to three hours. All of the participants are exhausted before they come to the reasons for persecution. This also happens because the interviewer cannot know beforehand *which* data will be crucial. For the most part, every one of the 42 questionnaire items is addressed in detail. It is only later that many of these details turn out to be non-essential as regards the reasons for the flight. Consequently, dialogues of this type are summarised in a couple of sentences in the record (see the preceding extracts).

The following extract is an example of an interviewer who wants to go through all the items meticulously, but the closed form of the questions does not allow him to proceed fluently.

> M: *So we've got that, study, work, we've got that.*
> A: *After study I returned to the business I had been in previously.*
> M: *Was your income sufficient to live on?*
> A: *Yes.*
> M: *What did you do with your money?*
> A: *I gave it to my parents. I had more than enough both for them and for me; I lived with them.*
> M: *What did you do with the rest of the money, when you were living with them? Given that you were living at your parents' expense, you had that money as pocket money. Who paid for your clothes, your food…?*
> A: *In our home things are different.*
> M: *Where did you spend that money?*
> A: *I bought clothes for myself, and I gave presents to my nephews and nieces and friends.*
> M: *Did you make some savings also?*
> A: *Yes, I saved some too.*
> M: *How long did that go on for?*
> *(…) Ascertaining the details of various employments took a further hour. The applicant had alternately worked and studied, and afterwards she would seem to have worked in five different employments.*
> A: *And then my persecution began.*
> M: *I want to map the employment, let's leave the rest aside.*
> A: *Then I left the country, but my business was functioning and it is still functioning to this day.*

The information given above could have been ascertained by open questions, where the applicant would have answered a number of

items simultaneously: *Can you tell me, please, about your income? (...) How did you manage your money?* All further specifying questions would have unfolded from the answers to the preceding general questions. If the decision-maker in this instance was focusing on the need to ascertain whether the applicant herself would have earned enough money for the journey from her country, he could have asked: *Tell me, please, about the financial side of your departure.*

If the applicant had begun her narrative by giving the reasons for her departure, she would also have made statements on the employment issue in another context. From practical experience it is well-known how disillusioned applicants feel when no priority is given, nor is sufficient time given, to description of their reasons for flight.

Question:

How is it possible to dovetail the entry of data into a structured questionnaire with recording an applicant's unstructured narrative? If I were to consider the questionnaire as purely an outline, I can't imagine how I would process all of that narrative.

Reply:

In the ideal case there are two record - takers making entries: one conducts the interview, making notes independently during the informant's narration, while the second assists i.e. extracts items for the questionnaire according as the narrator is speaking spontaneously. Both of them, together with the informant, fill in the missing items at the end. Always, however, care is to be taken that the informant understands why a number of people are present at the interview (Bernard 1995).

Filling in the questionnaire as quickly as possible also results in both questions and answers being ordinarily more abrupt, without narrative coherence, without explanation. Setting things in the environment in which the informant lives provides contexts. The interviewer may consciously pose the questions so that this personal context is either muted or heightened.

There are considerable advantages in giving preference to the informant's own story, as opposed to the questionnaire items taken in fixed order. Not only is the interviewer 'put in the picture' in an unforced manner, but the information gained is also much more trustworthy. Even when the interview is conducted by one person, it is possible to record the informant's words in the way that he or she speaks them, and at

the same time to keep to the themes: this is done in most ethnographic interviews. It is recommended in principle to 'fill in' personal details at the end of the interview (Disman 1993). The recorder, together with the informant, will at the same time be able to clarify whether he or she has correctly understood the preceding data. This type of interview in depth saves time: it lasts one and a half to three hours.

VII. INTERPRETING IN THE INTERVIEW

Sociolinguistics: a Faithful Translation Catches the Interviewee's Language

Closer attention has been paid to the role of interpretation in legal situations in recent years (Berk-Seligson 2002, Chase 2007, Good 2007, Martinovski 2000, Maryns 2006, Russel 2000, Wennerstrom 2008). Translators conventionally agree that a translation needs to have adequacy, material accuracy, correct grammar, style and ortho- graphy, and finally also an aesthetic level corresponding as faithfully as possible to the original text (Bázlik 2009). Where interpretation is concerned, the concepts of adequacy and material accuracy also imply that the culturally conditioned meanings of the words are correctly conveyed. At this point I would like to draw attention to the overlapping research subjects of anthropology and translatology, which are studied on an interdisciplinary basis throughout the world – linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, and ethnography of communication. These describe the multiple forms which languages and speech-forms take, and they also analyse individuals' testimonies in the light of their membership of a certain social class.

There are theories which declare that it is not possible to under- stand another person or culture, because language in all its details is untranslatable. Equally, there are distinctions within a single language: for example, this is evident among closed groups who share a culture of their own and speak slang. To an outsider their communication may be incomprehensible, as if it were in an unknown language.

Handbooks on how to conduct an interview often present more complex techniques for tracking down certain information. But the surest and also, it would seem, the most interesting way is to learn the informant's personal language (Spradley 1979). The specifics of the life situation can then be clarified much more thoroughly. It is therefore essential, if the interview is to proceed properly, that the translator should 'pin down' the informant's language and respect it.

Language is so specific a mixture of layered cultural knowledge that no publication could possibly include and explain even the most frequently-occurring meanings from differing cultures. Besides, communication is always conditioned by the context in which it takes place, in time as well as in space: historical, geographical, social. For example, the languages of neighbouring nations often have expressions which sound identical but have different and sometimes opposite meanings. (Such overlaps, on matters concerning the economy and intimate life, are well-known e.g. in Slovak, Polish and Croatian.) Without needing to do an elaborate analysis in linguistic archaeology, we can avoid the trap of explaining similar-sounding expressions without taking account of the spatial and historical context of their use. Something similar happens in ordinary communication also: even in the context of a single language, speakers use identical expressions with differing meanings. Ethnographic communication therefore directs attention to the specificity of meaning, which the informant is best able to identify precisely (Salzmann 1997).

The specific quality of human communication consists in our not needing to code the entire meaning, or even the precise meaning, of what we want to say. We rely on the listener being able to comprehend the meaning of sentences even when they are less precisely spoken (Sperber and Wilson 1995). Ordinarily, the meaning of what we have in mind never fully coincides with what we actually say. Even in simple sentences the meaning depends on a whole series of details which ensue from the context of the situation. When members of two different cultures are conversing, however, things become more complex. Knowledge of the cultural rules for the use of words could be compared to knowing the secret of how to open up a cave full of treasure. *"Open Sesame!"* is a meaningless command on first hearing. But we do not need to go deeply into orientalist, anthropological or historical writings in order to gain a knowledge of meanings in other cultures. Suitably posed open questions will provide us with precisely those answers which we need at a given moment.

There are situations where an emphasis on a particular word changes the entire meaning, and failure to grasp the intonation is enough to make the translation incorrect.

J: *Did you steal that horse?*
T: *Hot ir gestohlen a pferd?*
A: *Ikh hob gestohlen a pferd?*
J: *What did he say?*
T: *He said, "I stole the horse".*
An accurate translation would have been, "What, I stole the horse?!!"

(Disman 1993).

Choosing Perspective: the Interpreter Takes Part Simultaneously in the Description

Researchers studying interprettion in legal settings have drawn attention to the fact that the interpreter is never a translating automaton and makes a greater contribution to the testimony than is generally supposed (Berk-Seligson 2002, Tužinská 2009b). Distinguishing the differing *emic* and *etic* perspectives (i.e. internal, from the informant's point of view, or external, from the observer's or the institution's viewpoint) means being conscious of the various levels at which meaning is rendered during interpretation.

A perfectly precise and neutral translation cannot possibly exist: the informant's language when interpreted is inevitably changed. The interpreter is in an exceptionally sensitive position, not only because suitable equivalents must be sought from two different languages, but also because a number of professional fields must be bridged. The differing language styles often are not comprehensible even to members of the same language group. It is not enough to understand Slovak in order, for example, to understand the language of law and the courts in Slovakia, or the language of officialdom.

To no small extent the interpreter's personality also contributes to the overall impression of the person for whom the interpreting is done. The interpreter is a co-producer of the total impression made by the narrator. Not only words but also non-verbal expression – vocal pitch, intonation, insipid or persuasive replication of the speaker's rhetoric – add to or subtract from the description. By non-verbal expression the interpreter has the power to give tacit reinforcement to a suspicion that the applicant is offering incomplete data, or alternatively to make the applicant's utterance plausible (Maryns 2006). Apart from what they contribute personally, interpreters alternately represent two differing voices: they contribute to the informant's description and also to description by the person who is posing the questions. Excessive familiarity, informal talk, and the approach "look, I know the ropes here, I know what the procedure is!" detracts from the competence of all those participating in the interview.

A translator may be exposed to differing demands from each of the participants. On the one hand, there is an obligation to interpret as faithfully as possible, while on the other hand there is pressure arising from the context of the interview. The interpreter is conscious that the interview is prolonged by the translation process. I myself noted that from the second hour of an interview (which might continue for five hours or longer) the interpreter tends to abbreviate statements by compressing entire sections of the applicant's narrative. This may have serious consequences, however, if important data are skipped over when returning to pick up trains of thought.

It may happen also that the interpreter begins to use the third person instead of the first person, speaking of the applicant as a third party. Using the construction "*he says he went away*" instead of "*I went away*" results in the applicant losing even the small amount of influence which he had by the formulation of sentences in the first person. Non-adherence to first-person interpretation is usually associated with a more passive tone of voice and impersonal-sounding formulations. By these and other means the interpreter can express an uninvolved attitude, which to the applicant indicates lack of interest and sometimes also the untrustworthiness of the institution before which he or she is testifying.

Where details are repeated, though they may appear to be insignificant, even a moderate shift in the interpretation can mean a shift in the decision-making (Good 2007). Some languages allow one formulation to be translated in two different ways: *"I forgot that"* or *"that slipped my mind"; "I lost the money"* or *"the money got lost"; "I broke the glass"* or *"the glass broke"*. Moderate stylistic changes, as exemplified here, have the consequence that in the first instance a 'culprit' is identified, while in the second an impersonal action is designated.

The nature of language allows choice between the active and passive moods. We can perceive that some statements elicit questions, whereas with others there is little likelihood of questions being posed. If the applicant says *"they interrogated me"*, *"they held me"*, as opposed to *"I was interrogated"*, *"I was held"*, the questioner is more likely to be curious about who the agents were. Interpreters are not always aware that in a finely-balanced case even such slight hints in the translation may have their importance (Berk-Seligson 2002, Maryns 2006).

The particular choice of words and verbal collocations in a question influence the informant's testimony to such an extent that it may completely change it. For example, the word *demolish* evokes an impression of greater speed than the words *pull down*. Research subjects who had seen a film of two cars crashing gave differing answers to the question of whether they had seen any splintered glass, depending on how the question was framed. If it included the expression *ploughed into each other* they answered yes, even though no broken glass was to be seen in the film; if the more moderate expression *collided* was used, they answered no (Salzmann 1997).

The following extract illustrates the subtle stylistic shifts of an interpreter who did not respect the precise wording even when translating the decision-maker's questions. She speaks of the applicant in the third person. At the same time one can see that closed questions repeatedly prove inadequate. One open question (*How are school fees paid?*) would have elicited all the answers given. If the answer was nonetheless insufficient, probing questions could have been asked on details: *Who decided when you would go to school?*

T: *Is it a private school?*
A: *No.*
M: *Did you pay for this school?*
A: *Yes, partly.*
T: *It is not a private school, but they must pay a certain proportion of the finances.*
M: *Did someone help you with payment?*
T: *Did your parents sponsor you?*
A: *Yes.*
M: *Did you yourself also contribute?*
A: *In our culture the position is that you do not have the right to pay your own fees. I used to give the money I earned to my parents.*
    [Literal translation of the applicant's words by author – off-record. Interpreter summarized:]
T: *Families live communally. She used to bring home everything she earned.*
M: *So then, I'll write that the parents paid the fees for the school.*

The interpreter's contribution to the applicant's testimony is expressed also in paraphrasing. It may happen that the interpreter compresses the statement, making syntactical changes and using words which the informant never used. If the narrative is reformulated by the person making the decision in due process or by a judge, that is their responsibility. But if the text is condensed by the interpreter, no one need know about that; indeed, the interpreter need not necessarily be aware of how he or she has changed the flow of the interview. Retaining the informant's perspective and giving a culturally faithful translation ought to guarantee that the decision on which data are and are not important is left exclusively to the authorised persons. From observations of interviews with immigrants many anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and linguists agree that the difference between what is said, conveyed in translation, and recorded, is in some cases so great that it becomes crucial for the subsequent evaluation, often to the immigrant's disadvantage (Berk-Seligson 2002, Good 2007, Chase 2007, Martinovski 2000, Maryns 2006, Russel 2000, Wennerstrom 2008, Tužinská 2009b).

The interpreter's role in the interview with the asylum seeker is of fundamental importance. If open questions are to lead to description, it is essential to emphasise in the instructions to the interpreter that the interviewer's questions should be translated without additions. Even unintentional interventions by the interpreter can change the testimony to such a degree that its information content becomes indistinct. However, the interviewer should bear in mind that closed questions provide fertile ground for intercultural misunderstanding. If closed questions are prevalent in the interview, the interpreter will be put in the position where he or she *must* pose supplementary descriptive questions in order to have any hope of conveying the meaning in translation.

Question:
  The interpreter sometimes has to clarify the question. Can this make things better or worse? Even though we try to get neutral interpreters, the situation is never ideal.

Reply:
  In cases where the interpreter learns that the applicant does not understand the question and tries to clarify the question, normally there are no means of checking the interpreter's explanation. It is more advantageous to simplify the question posed. The person who asks the question should be the one who clarifies it, since he or she knows best what it is supposed to ascertain. For the interpreter and also for the informant, it is better if the interviewer does not use a particular 'jargon' or institutional concepts. It is possible to ask an open descriptive question purely about the matter at issue, without irrelevant sub-clauses: *Tell me, please, about… Could you tell me, please, what happens in your country when… Describe for me, please, how…*

The following extract illustrates three fundamental and frequently mentioned problems: *gradual recollection* (recollection occurs while speaking), *inadequate interpretation* (if no qualified interpreter is available), and *change of data by paraphrasing* (one thing is said and something else is in the written record). The applicant is explaining the

reasons why there were discrepancies in the data in previous interviews. Sentences spoken by the interpreter are translations of the applicant's sentences.

J (to the applicant): But you have not answered my question: I asked why you did not say that at the migration office.

T: Right throughout the interview I was remembering things gradually.

J (to the clerk): I did not speak about that because I was remembering these things gradually.

T: Evidently there was also faulty interpreting, because at that time there were many things I did not understand.

J (to the clerk): I must also add that in the interview at the Migration Office there was a problem with the interpreter. I understood little of what was said.

J (to the applicant): Why did you not say that you had a problem with the interpretation?

T: When I said that at the interview, she said: it doesn't matter, you'll help me – interpreter [evidently a literal translation of the applicant's words – author's off-record note].

J (to the clerk): When I said that, the interpreter told me she would help me by her interpreting.

In this instance the applicant's objection was dealt with by the interpreter, who told him that, after all, he would be there to help her. The applicant was called on by the interpreter to offer additional clarification in those instances where she herself happened to be unclear, and not vice versa. Paradoxically, even in court the translation was not sufficiently intelligible, evidently due to a change in normal word order. The judge wrote the last sentence into the record with an opposite meaning.

The following rejoinder, combining a reference to the lack of open questions with the mention of problems in translating the context of questions, is also heard frequently.

J: Why did you not say that at the Migration Office?

A: I was not asked such a question, or I did not understand all the questions which were put to me.

More than one applicant has told of how he or she was asked by an unqualified translator for co-operation and "understanding". Many were unaware that they were not obliged to consent to unqualified interpreting. Besides, people who are distressed or exhausted refrain from defending themselves or intervening at all. The expertise of a qualified interpreter is therefore indispensable in crisis situations, and the choice of interpreter has a fundamental influence on the fates of immigrants.

Translation of the Context: Cultural Meaning Is Communicated Indirectly

The process of the interview is affected by the place and the manner in which it is conducted. Every human expression is conditioned by context, but we are rarely aware of all the factors which compose it. As an example we may take the location of courtroom participants: the interpreter is at the applicant's right hand. In many cases the applicant has to turn to the interpreter, so that while speaking he or she is not looking directly at the judge. A loss of direct communication ensues, not only through the translation but also in non-verbal communication.

What we say, how we say it, and whether we say anything at all, is influenced by the space and time in which we, the participants, find ourselves, and also by extra-linguistic factors. In every culture there are norms for what can be uttered, to whom, when and where. For applicants the interview situation is untypical, and often they do not know beforehand exactly what is expected of them. It is not easy to give an account of one's personal life to someone who is close to us, much less to tell a stranger about harsh experiences. The interpreter is therefore a person in a special position, often being the only one who understands the applicant's language. Sometimes also he or she understands the applicant's culture somewhat better than all the others.

The interpreter is the one who will be able most quickly to distinguish which language registers the informant and the interviewer are using, and what language options they have. Linguistic anthropologists explain why some linguistic expressions sound very simple and others complicated. For example, take a person who is accustomed to living in a dense social network and belongs to a certain language community. This group uses their own abbreviated language code, being able to rely on a broad and relatively stable extra-linguistic context. Now supposing the given individual is not used to communicating outside this language community also, if he or she goes outside the familiar group there will be problems: when speaking, this person will seem dull-witted, although that is not necessarily true. By contrast, persons who move mainly outside their own domestic networks must use elaborate linguistic expression, because they cannot presume that a listener will be familiar with their extra-linguistic context. Their speech

accordingly sounds highly 'sophisticated', because they want to make sure that even small details are elucidated as precisely as possible (Salzmann 1997).

Some applicants feel no assurance that they will be understood; they respond either with silence or extensive explanation of the details of their extra-linguistic context. In both cases, during repeated interviews it was discovered that it is worthwhile to wait: silence enables some people to get a feeling of orientation and after a mute interval they speak to the point, while others return to the point in the course of narration. Research confirms that people return of their own accord to the main line of narrative even after (seemingly) senseless digressions (Kusá 1996; Vaněk, Mücke, Pelikánová 2007).

The cultural significance of words is communicated indirectly: only rarely by words, more by context and non-verbal behaviour. For example, the meaning of the word *peasant* one hundred years ago differed from its meaning now; it had one meaning for the higher social strata and another for the lower, one meaning for the village and another for the town. Each word may have differing, even opposite, meanings for speaker and hearer. Informants, however, only rarely elucidate the concepts they use: people ordinarily speak the language of their culture without analysing it. Faithful interpreting always takes into account the contextual meanings of words and in the event of uncertainty points out to the person posing the questions that something may be understood in a different way.

The following extract is an example of why it matters to an applicant to be able to communicate directly, without any intermediary, with the person making the decision on the granting of asylum.

I: I would have said everything if I could have spoken directly to the person who was deciding whether I would be granted asylum. I would have been glad to tell him everything, like I'm telling you now. Transla-tors can add or subtract something and they don't understand what I feel, they have no conception of that. I know many languages and I don't need a translator (English, Spanish, French). I feared the translator, because he is an X (member of the aggressor's culture – author's note) and I don't know what that implies, you understand, my case is special. In the interview I had time enough, but I gave only partial answers – I did not explain everything that I should have explained, because I was afraid, and I skipped over certain details. I felt humiliated, both by the type of questions and the mode of translation. There was a fundamental lack of trust.

It is well-known from oral history research that people in general are inclined to speak less openly in the presence of a third person. Ideally, therefore, the interview involves two people (Vaněk, Mücke, Pelikánová 2007). As regards the translator's origin, it has been demonstrated that informants reported fear of two types of interpreters: those who belonged to the aggressor's culture, and those who came from a nearby region of their own country of origin (Berk-Seligson 2002). In both cases they suspected that the interpreters might reveal details about them which would lead to their further persecution.

The establishment of trust between all participants in the interview is the most fundamental condition for its success. In the given context not only each person's origin but also education, socio-economic posi-tion, age, gender, upbringing, and personality is manifested. Hence one cannot generalize the behaviour of a given cultural group, given that its individual members all have their differing personal points of departure, and so different approaches are appropriate also in the interview. Alone among the participants, the immigrant is in the position of "having no choice". (Berk-Seligson 2002, Tužinská 2009b). It is therefore up to the person who is conducting the interview, and also it is up to the interpre-ter, to check whether the interview may proceed in the given context.

A separate issue is the choice between consecutive interpretation and simultaneous translation whispered in the ear. Immigrants who have someone whisper in their ear during court hearings are guaranteed to be much better orientated in what the various parties say concerning them than when they merely gather small fragments of their own proceedings. At present there is consecutive interpretation for immig-rants in the majority of cases. This means that the immigrants do not understand the greater part of what has been said and therefore have no way of responding even if they would wish to.

Culturally Specific Expressions: the Informant is the Expert

No language has anything like a comprehensive dictionary describing all meanings of words in their varying contexts. The good news is that if culturally specific expressions are clarified as they arise, that is suffi-cient. Meanings that are fundamental for the informants and accord with their usage should be fundamental also for those listening. Experts in a language may be familiar with many culturally specific phrases, but nevertheless it may happen that the informant does not respond to them, e.g. if he or she belongs to another social class. The following section

describes the most frequent mistakes made during interpretation because of not knowing the cultural specificities of other countries.

Cultural differences in the interview are expressed in three areas above all: in the style of expression, in non-verbal behaviour, and in use of the concepts of ordinary life. (For the first two areas, see the detailed treatment *in preceding chapters.*) The mode of description of ordinary life differs fundamentally in many countries: all over the world people make everyday use of similar concepts of time, space, postal address, earnings, colours, kinship terms or naming of parts of the body, but with varying meanings.

When silences occur in the interview on questions concerning the exact date and time, most frequently it is for one of two reasons: the ongoing process of recollection and the use of a different style of calendar or time designation (see the chapter on memory). 'Imprecision' arises from not being accustomed to using 'exact' time data, and also from the use of other language means for time definition. For example, some languages have identical concepts for a past event and a hypothetical event, others for a future phenomenon and a hypothetical phenomenon. In Tamil there is one term with the meaning of expectation, idea, presumption, and also pretence (Good 2007). In many cultures the conditional mode or the modal verbs *"could you?" "would you be able to?" "can you?"* are understood as suggestions and not as hypothetical questions (Salzmann 1997).

Orientation in space is described in various cultures according to various principles. For example, postal address formats differ essentially: there are countries where the houses are not numbered, or they are numbered according to other principles than in Europe; there need not even be names for streets or districts. The mode of recording orientation data is not connected with the level of civilization of the given area. If it seems that the immigrant is giving too abbreviated an address, we can ask him or her to explain how the standard address is written, e.g. if we wanted to send a letter to his or her country of origin. Orientation points also originate from lived situations and activities, personal and communal, in the given place. It may happen that the applicant will be able to name places according to locally used names which are not indicated on the map.

Question:
The interpreter sometimes shows embarrassment at my questions, as if she felt they were inappropriate. But I am restricted by the questionnaire – it is 'handed down from above' and I have no way of changing it.

Reply:
In a number of EU states the questionnaire is treated as a list of questions which need not be posed literally and in numerical order. Question boxes are not filled in, but the whole course of the interview is recorded. It is disturbing when explanations are 'guillotined': the informant wishes to give them, but is stopped with the words, *"I will ask about that later"*. The principal reason for fleeing one's country is listed as question 39 in the standard questionnaire (see appendix), but it is bound up with many of the preceding questions. The interpreter is in an ambivalent situation when required to satisfy contradictory demands. First he or she must interpret a question for the immigrant, then suddenly interrupt the latter's response and halt the explanation. Many interpreters have agreed that *"people facing issues of life or death cannot answer questions with a mere 'yes' or 'no'. For essential things there is no partial answer. I'd put the question about the reasons for persecution somewhere at the beginning. That would cover a number of questions all at once. The applicant wouldn't be wondering why a question was being asked at the end which he or she had already tried to answer, only to be interrupted – and everybody wouldn't be so exhausted by that long list of closed questions."*

A second cause of disturbance arises when the question posed is considered absurd in the interpreter's country. For example, in many orthodox Muslim and Christian regions, when it has been established that someone is single it is extremely humiliating to be asked immediately *"do you have children?"* Generally, it is recommended that questions about personal data should be asked after ascertaining the context: *Tell me about your relatives. (…) In what circumstances do people in your country establish families? (…) How is it in your case?*

The naming of relatives differs throughout the world and is categorized on the basis of rules that vary greatly. Kinship systems are flexible according to the needs and ideas of the given society: people become relatives if they sleep under one roof and eat from one pot; if they perform a certain communal activity; or if they undergo a specific ritual through which their relationship is socially recognized. The rules of kinship apply to all members of the given group, they are strictly upheld, and their breach is punished.

One of the most frequent misunderstandings occurs in translating the fundamental kinship designations: *mother, father, sister, brother, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, maternal/paternal uncle and aunt.* In families where social bonds are stronger than is customary in Europe, the

kinship bond is also expressed in synonymous appellations: an informant who designates the same person as *sister, mother* and *maternal aunt* may be telling the truth. By blood she is known to be the informant's mother's sister, but this designation may change according to context. Similarly, a father's brother may be referred to in narrative as *father*, a male cousin as *brother* and a female cousin as *sister*. The designation of parents' siblings as *mothers* and *fathers* has a factual aspect also: they have obligations towards their siblings' children as if they were their own.

In many cultures the designations of male and female cousins on the mother's and father's side are distinguished according to whether they are children of the parent's sister or brother. Likewise, the brother-in-law and sister-in-law may be addressed as *brother* and *sister*, especially if it is the husband's brother or the wife's sister. In some regions there is a customary marriage of male and female cousins (i.e. between the children of the mother's brother and the father's sister; not, however, between children of the mother's sister and father's brother, because children of two sisters or two brothers are considered 'the same kind'). Hence it may happen that marriage partners have the same grandparents (Berk-Seligson 2002).

Some Indian cultures do not have a word for *brother* as such: there is a specific word for elder brother and another for younger brother. The same terms as for brothers are used also for older and younger male cousins (Good 2007). In India and in other cultures also there is a widespread practice of addressing one's close female friend as *blood sister* and one's male friend as *blood brother*.

Muslims may enter into various forms of marriage with varying degrees of legalisation and for varied times of duration (Khidayer 2009). In the event of discrepancies regarding change of status, it is therefore necessary to check which form of relationship was actually entered into.

If the decision-maker in due process or in court proceedings suspects that the applicant is interchanging the terms *brother* and *cousin*, before concluding that the applicant is lying he or she may ask a control question: *Can you list for me all the designations that you use for the children of your parents' siblings?* In many cultures the designations for sisters and female cousins, brothers and male cousins, will be found to be identical. They are used as synonyms, and someone who distinguishes them may be seen to betray contempt for kin relationships and indeed to insult a family member. There are situations when the synonymous alternatives are perceived only by the interpreter, who should bring this fact to the attention of the interviewer.

The use of one concept for several objects is widespread also when designating parts of the human *body* (Good 2007). Every language has a different way of defining health: some cultures use an exceptionally intricate classification of diseases and also have a popular explanation of their causes and treatments. The use of *colour* designation also differs, especially for mixed hues and shades. Designation of *sounds, images, scents, tastes* and *surfaces* varies similarly. For all human beings the universally given possibilities of perception are influenced by various inputs and expectations. What our senses feel is influenced by many years' cultural experience. Elsewhere I have dealt in detail with the perception of diversity and its impact on communication with foreigners (Tužinská 2009a).

In linguistic anthropology special attention is given to kinship expressions in language. There are languages which do not know the distinction of the pronouns *he/she, his/her*. There are also well-known themes on which men and women virtually never speak. Accordingly, it may happen that in the interview the immigrants will be speaking for the first time about relationships, emotions or finances, which may be accompanied by a pronounced feeling of shame. Similarly, there is a fixed attitude in language regarding private property: there are languages in which we do not find the possessive pronouns *my, your, his, her, our, your, their*.

Even concepts from the institutional set-up such as *president* and *spokesman* are used synonymously in some languages. With probing questions *Describe for me, please, the positions which persons in the leadership of that party can hold. (…) In the previous written record a spokesman is mentioned, not a president. What difference is there in the activities of the spokesman and the president?* one can ascertain whether these are functions of one and the same person, because the distinct role of spokesman does not exist in that particular party.

Definition in language applies not only to the vocabulary (the various meanings of concepts) but also to spoken expression (overall communication). Speech variants and styles are used according to the social standing (Salzmann 1997). The significance of this goes beyond the commonly observable phenomenon that people adapt to the context when speaking. In many cultures the social layers have a vocabulary and speaking style which is precisely determined from the start.

Question:
Through the interpreter we get data in distorted form, and sometimes there is even double interpreting. Not much chance to distinguish whether someone is using terms in the style of a militant member of some organization, or a terrorist…

Reply:

Interpretation inevitably influences the form and indeed even the content of what is being spoken about. Besides, the translation of words can diverge to such an extent that even though the rendering seems correct, there is actually a change of meaning in the context of the applicant's culture. This is one of the reasons why it is said that a good translator must thoroughly know not only the language but also the cultures in which the given language is employed. But even given that, the interpreter has no way of knowing the *specifics* of the applicant's situation. In anthropology an "exchange of roles" is customary in this type of situation: the informant is in the role of expert. All other participants for a little while play the part of lay people, the interpreter included. Precise meaning is clarified by probing questions: *What does this expression mean? In which situations do you use this expression?*

In some languages emotions are described in a virtually untranslatable way. Most difficult of all is describing trauma. Without distinction of sex, people find it a problem to specify and describe pain, as well as to name illnesses. In settings where people may happen to undergo pain regularly, there are well-known euphemisms to describe it. For example, in Cameroon *'morning coffee'* is a description for the brutal morning whipping in prison (Berk-Seligson 2002). In many countries the vocabulary of torture is not sufficiently elaborated (though it is in Europe, perhaps because of a tradition of torture coming down to medieval times) to describe the various practices. It therefore happens that victims say they *"were beaten"* when they actually have in mind much worse forms of injury, but they are not accustomed to expressing these in any other way (Berk-Seligson 2002). Many research projects have shown evidence that people keep silence about the deepest forms of injury, especially in the case of rape, and particularly where men have been violated by men. Also, in many cases it is impossible to localise these deeds in time and space, because the aggressors deliberately disorientate their victims by long confinement in darkness, without the benefits of light, food and sleep.

A special chapter might be written on those topics of which it is forbidden to speak fully. In many cultures people believe that speaking about a taboo causes illness or other misfortune to the person speaking or spoken of. For example, in a number of African states one must not speak of a *pregnant* woman before she gives birth, for fear of casting a spell on the woman and child. A number of peoples have a complete prohibition on speaking about *the dead*: one must not utter their names or use those names for the *newborn*. Similarly one is expected to refrain from mentioning not only forthcoming *additions to the family*, but

even *expansion* in working life. One does not speak of projects not yet signed; one must not refer even to the expected *yield* (Hall 1966) or the achieved performance, profit, or hunters' kill. Sometimes it is considered at the very least inappropriate to speak of highly-placed persons and authorities. In the interview a taboo may be expressed by silence, evasive answers, or lowered gaze.

Informants may feel surprised if somebody asks them to confess to something that is unknown to them. For example, some ethnic groups do not have a concept for *guilt* – or if one exists then it is only collective, but not personal (Berk-Seligson 2002).

Question:

Some interpreters are inclined to 'waffle' in the interview with their explanations about the immigrant's country of origin. I proceed on my own lines, but I can see in their faces that they're anxious to give a complete explanation of the situation.

Reply:

Interpreters are under obligation to translate the meaning of what is said as accurately as possible. The pressure to translate literally compels them, however, to narrow down the meanings which they are conscious of. When the interpreter is seen to be attempting to give a fuller explanation of something, it is a *signal* that the question might have been better posed. If interpreters were in the role of mediators, the information they convey to both parties would be enriched with a full explanation of the cultural context. 'A good question', however, leaves this opportunity of clarifying the context to the immigrant. An interpreter who is anxious to dispel what he or she regards as plainly a misunderstanding may suggest an appropriate open question, rather than commenting on a closed question.

The immigrant may be surprised by a question whose answer is self-evident to the interpreter. It is therefore opportune to point out to the immigrant at the start of the interview that he or she is welcome to explain descriptive data in the context of his or her country's customs.

In reality there is no such thing as a literal translation – the fact scarcely needs to be emphasized. Slovak *lámem si hlavu* does not mean *I am breaking my head* (the word-by-word version) but *I am trying to make sense* (of something puzzling). It will suffice if the interview participants keep in mind that the cultural context also is always translated – without that the translation will be gapped, sometimes even incomprehensible.

For a translation to be complete it is necessary to strike a balance between retaining the distinctiveness of the informant's speech and precision of content. An audio recording and detailed note-taking are recommended for fuller comprehension. Open questions serve to aid description and explanation by the person who knows his or her culture best.

Ethics: the Interpreter's Pledge Is Not a Religious Oath

No profession is pleased if doubts are cast upon its professionalism or ultimately on its adherence to an ethical code. Society keeps track of professional ethics especially in those callings whose members have human life 'in their hands', such as doctors, geneticists, and so on. There are also, however, professions which decide about other people's lives 'purely by the word'. This is one of the reasons why, from the immigrants' point of view, the interpreter's pledge[1] is not a guarantee of the translation's quality – many of them come from cultures where *'pledges are pledged'* without serious repercussions should they be broken, even when they involve a profession. Here I would like to mention the most frequent situations where unintended misunderstandings arise, resulting from interchanges of roles and from lack of qualification and cultural incompetence.

Interpreters sometimes are assigned the role of instructor. As a result, it is as if they represented the institution for which they are interpreting. It also happens that applicants address the interpreter as their legal representative. Sometimes the interpreters themselves identify with the role of spokesperson for the applicant. Even when all participants know that shifts like these are undesirable, it may be difficult to hold the line demarcating the roles. The person making the decision in due process, or the judge, has the right to stop any explanations whatever on the interpreter's part.

On the other hand, one of the problems interpreters frequently face is that they must 'change and simplify' interviewers' questions which are too long and incomprehensible. Many errors result from complex closed questions. The interpreter must clarify ambiguities and sometimes

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1   On being registered the interpreter takes a pledge, as follows: "I pledge on my honour and conscience that in my interpreting duties I will adhere to the legal regulations, that I will perform my interpreting duties personally, impartially and disinterestedly with the greatest diligence, that I will use all my professional knowledge and that I will mantain silence about matters which I become aware of in the performance of my interpreting duties".

ascertain what a given term means. It may also happen that the applicant does not understand the questions, despite (or precisely because of) a precise translation. The interpreter, faced with the need for a dual translation – not only from language to language, but also between language registers – must translate technical expressions into common speech, and so willy-nilly ends up in the role of instructor (Berk-Seligson 2002).

Question:
Sometimes the applicants take a long time to think about the question that they have to answer. Sometimes they even ask the interpreter what they should reply. The interpreter tells us that afterwards.

Reply:
Silence in the interview does not necessarily mean that the applicant is untrustworthy (Kusá 1996). It may happen that an applicant trusts the interpreter, and perhaps also feels that this is a person who really understands. In such cases there can be an emotional transference with inflated expectations, and indeed illegitimate demands, on the applicant's part.

There are cultures where conversation about facts proceeds in an entirely different manner: people customarily give advice even on things which we would find self-evident or personal. Therefore the question, *"What should I reply?"* may also be an appeal for simpler questions.

Discrepancies in the translation may influence the course of the asylum procedure unfavourably. For example, if the same interpreter happens to use different concepts with the same person on different days, there will be divergences in the official record. The concepts may have a number of meanings and the interpreter may translate them 'correctly', yet in the second language the record will say something different. Where the legal representative understands the applicant's language, there may be a sharp exchange of opinions with the translator there and then, regarding what precisely was said. In most cases, however, the interpreter is the only one who understands the applicant's language, and there is no one on the spot who can check the impartiality of the translation. Even if applicants have the impression that the translation is inaccurate, often they do not raise any objection, being overawed by the surroundings. If during the following interview or hearing they claim that the interpreter was not thorough, in most cases they have no means of proof (Good 2007).

The following extract features an applicant (one of the few) who was aware of the interpreter's influence and defended herself on the spot. As she pointed out, this was possible only because she partially understood the translation and was certain that there was a shift in meaning.

A. I've gone through hell. I have nothing to lose. Besides, I understand a little Slovak. The translator took a dislike to me and she was changing my answers, or not saying all that I had said. As if she was the one deciding – that was the decision-maker's task, after all, not hers! The translator was convinced I had left my country for money, but that was never the case. I knew that she wanted to influence the decision. At a certain moment I became so angry that I told her she was there to translate and not to evaluate.

Appeals against decisions on the granting of exile, on the grounds of unintentional inaccuracies in the translation, the translator's lack of qualification, or the style of translation, and also because of deliberate misrepresentations due to ethnic or ideological malice against the immigrant, are also not infrequent abroad (Berk-Seligson 2002; Tužinská 2009b). Despite the fact that in most cases registered translators are present during interviews and hearings in Slovakia, even in their cases doubts may arise. However, in some cases an unqualified interpreter is employed and police records are written on that basis, and then there is a high probability of errors. These records serve as the base material throughout the entire asylum procedure, and they can considerably prejudice the credibility of any further statement by the immigrant. Casual interpreters may come either from the ranks of the police or from the immigrant body, but in neither case is there any guarantee of their impartiality (Maryns 2006).

The following extract demonstrates the immigrants' absolute dependence on interpreters. Only with the passage of time do applicants discover what serious consequences a poorly qualified interpretation may have for the course of their proceedings.

A. The first time they first deported me to the Ukraine, they conducted an interview with just one member of the entire group which was brought in, with the help of an interpreter. Afterwards I found out that I was banned from entry, but I didn't know about that. I didn't even

know that it was possible to appeal against the decision on detention,… nothing was translated for me. I had no idea that I was entitled to legal aid. The translators don't read the whole of that paper for us, they don't explain things, and there's nobody else who could translate it for us.

An unqualified interpreter may harm the immigrant through ignorance, lack of concentration, or deliberate misrepresentation. While at first sight it may seem that a few badly translated words cannot make a material difference, for example, to a decision on granting asylum, a number of studies show that if there are many such 'minor blunders', they will ultimately serve as proofs of the applicant's untrustworthiness (Good 2007). Applicants are aware of the interpreter's influence both from their own experience and from accounts by other immigrants.

Question:
Applicants have told us that the interpreter dissuaded them from seeking asylum directly at the border, telling them they didn't have any chance of that here – they should just sign papers.

Reply:
Interpreters say that the applicants often ask them about asylum procedure and the situation in the country. During their time in police detention the immigrants are in a state of stress and fear. The police confer with them in order to write a record of how they explain their unauthorised crossing of the state border, and here the immigrants are supposed to say how and why they left their countries of origin. If they also indirectly ask for protection (without using the word 'asylum') and the police ascertain that they were persecuted, this should be adjudged an indirect application for asylum.

If the immigrant does not understand the questions, which are mainly aimed at mapping his or her journey, and does not say anything about persecution, within 24 hours he or she is returned to the Ukraine, or else detained and deported later. Such persons are banned from residing in all EU countries for one to ten years and the details, including fingerprint evidence, are entered in the Schengen information system.

Applicants repeatedly declare that the interpreter told them only that they should not seek asylum in Slovakia, but not that this would result in a ban on entry to all countries of the EU. The rarely translated 'small

print' also mentions the duty to declare all facts truthfully; the option of contacting international and non-governmental organisations; the right of appeal; and the right not to testify, if by doing so they would incriminate family members.

According to correct procedure, all information about their rights and duties should be interpreted for immigrants, this to be arranged by the police or other responsible personnel. Similarly, the written record also should be translated verbatim for the immigrant after its compilation. If this is not done, there is no opportunity to learn whether a shift of meaning has taken place during communication. Blurring of information is normal, and under stress this happens all the more. All details which are incorrectly (though unintentionally so) stated in the police record, cause serious complications in further proceedings (for all of the parties involved). The applicant signs that he or she agrees with the content of the record and has understood the guidance given. It should not happen that immigrants fail to understand how they are being dealt with because of an unprofessional translation. The interpreter, no matter how 'knowledgeable', should not assume the responsibilities which belong to the state organs or the immigrants.

Question:
The interpreter had it all under his thumb, he was "making himself at home". He'd been interpreting for a long time; he knew the structure and form of questions, and he assumed control of the situation even without the interviewer noticing. That's not even to mention his body language: he adopted a contemptuous pose. During translation, not infrequently he gave a commentary on the foreigner's testimony.

Reply:
In later evaluation of the actual statements of immigrants they declared that they felt distrust or considered it pointless to testify before any persons whatever who showed disrespect, hostility, tiredness, or boredom. People notice even minimal indications of basic emotions without regard to their origin, and all the more they perceive observations made regarding them, even when those are in a foreign language. Interpreters who "interpret in their own way" are interpreting themselves and their beliefs, even if automatically and unconsciously. Even when interpreters are aware of their own observations, it is recommended that they leave the burden of proof to the interviewer. If the applicant has the impression

that the institution does not object to the interpreter conducting the interview, the entire proceedings suffer a loss of validity. The process of rectification is extremely long drawn-out and imposes a needless burden, not only on the judiciary.

However, I have also noted cases where an interpreter felt annoyed by the disrespectful manner of the interviewer. He stated that he himself felt ashamed before immigrants who *"knew more than I did – one could gather that purely from the styling of sentences"*, and who were treated as "*nobodies*". Actually they were "*somebody*", but *"they were all thrown into the one basket, just because they were immigrants"*. It is interesting that all the participants (immigrants, interpreters, decision-makers, police, legal representatives, social workers and observers) mentioned fundamental distrust and arrogant conduct in various situations.

A. I am afraid the translation will not be good. I hear that sometimes the interpreter doesn't want to be thorough (understandably that's more demanding) and then abbreviates and simplifies what has been said. So the whole meaning can be changed.

A special problem arises if immigrants who are not speaking their native language during an interview are considered uneducated because of their linguistic deficiencies. Their speech may suggest something crude and makeshift, given that they speak haltingly, in a foreign language, with grammatical mistakes. This may produce an impression of untrustworthiness. Sometimes it suffices to create this effect if the interpreter and the immigrant are using mutually remote dialects of the same language.

For example, when an immigrant described how a man had carried her off during persecution, she said, *"The man carry me…"* which was translated as *"The man called Karimi…"* (Maryns 2006). During a court hearing an applicant was explaining how his father was a prince who had been prophesied: *"My father was a prince from oracle"*. The translator incorrectly rendered the sentence: *"My father was a prince from Orakle"*. In both cases the judges wanted to know who Karimi was and where Orakel was, and of course the asylum applicants could not tell them: they gave an impression of being notably confused, but the interview continued in a similar vein. Immigrants have a dread of unqualified interpretation, and they do in reality suffer its negative consequences. Much greater fears, however, are expressed regarding the deliberate breach of confidentiality.

Question:

Kurds are not willing to testify with Turkish interpreters. We try to explain to them that the interpreters are bound by the interpreter's pledge.

Reply:

A different accent may be so emotionally charged that it causes the applicant to feel unwilling, and indeed afraid, to testify. Even though this may be a myth, there was a widespread belief among the immigrants that the interpreter could betray them to their persecutors and that this had already happened in certain cases, even without the knowledge of the state organs. Professional pledges in many countries do not have the gravity of a religious oath, and it is thought that in certain circumstances they may be broken without serious consequences.

Immigrants may also on occasion express unwillingness to testify before interpreters who are their compatriots. Frequently immigrants do not speak of their own cases even with other compatriots, from fear that these may betray their secrets to hostile persons in their native country.

Question:

The interpreter is convinced that the applicant comes from a different area to the one he claims to belong to. She tells me that he has a different accent.

Reply:

In the ethical code of interpreters abroad, especially in cases of interpretation for immigrants, it is stated that the interpreter must not betray the fact even by indication, if he or she feels or is convinced that the applicant speaks with a different accent. Nor should the interpreter be asked such a question – it is up to the person who is making the decision on the granting of asylum to acquire the evidence which would prove that the applicant is telling lies. Probing questions normally unmask the untruthful speaker relatively quickly. In particular cases there may be a resettled person who is telling the truth but has not lost the accent of his or her original community. Some people keep a lifelong dialect intonation which they cannot hide; others can imitate a foreign accent without having lived in another country.

Question:

During the hearing they asked the applicant if he had asked for resettlement within the country, and he answered no. I knew, however,

that this meant nothing, because registration is centralised in that country and for internal resettlement one must have a visa from the police. That would mean, however, that the person announces himself to the people he is fleeing from. The next question in the sequence came up, and the applicant did not get a chance to explain why he had made no application. Can I explain that as interpreter?

Reply:

The interpreter is often the only one who has access to contextual information from the immigrant's country of origin. This knowledge, however, need not necessarily be relevant to the individual being interviewed. The interpreter may ask the interviewer whether he or she may impart information. Ideally this will be scrutinized to see how far it relates to the immigrant's situation.

During the interview the immigrant's trust in the interpreter may exceed the scope of the interpreter's pledge. Applicants may ask the interpreter about details which they believe will be helpful, while at the same time asking that these should not be translated. They may appeal to the interpreter to make discreet efforts to discover the facts about their applications. Outside the interview, applicants may give the interpreter data which indicate their involvement in criminal acts. All the situations described here may be considered borderline, and undoubtedly they are emotionally exacting. It is recommended, however, that the interpreter should behave like a confessor, maintaining silence. Even if he or she is convinced that the applicant is lying, assessing the evidence lies exclusively in the competence of the interviewer. The interpreter should not give even the slightest hint of suspecting deceit. Besides, there may be a unique combination of circumstances, or a cultural rule unfamiliar to the interpreter, who might therefore bring suspicion upon the immigrant unjustly.

When determining the immigrant's origin according to his speech, one needs to take exceptionally great care. In recent years sociolinguists (Kol. 2004) have examined the use of various language registers by migrants and the people who come in contact with them, mainly police, migration personnel, lawyers and interpreters. They have published collectively prepared recommendations concerning language analysis, which should be useful when there are problems in determining the nationality of asylum seekers. The authors proceed from the basic fact that language expression is more the result of applicants' socialisation than of their origin. For language expression the more essential surroundings are those where the applicant is a member of the local society, as opposed

to birthplace or place of dwelling. Similar surroundings which have influenced the given person may be bilingual, minority, or diasporic. *One cannot therefore determine ethnic origin, nationality or citizenship with complete certainty on the basis of linguistic expression.* Likewise these authors warn against taking as evidence the statements of compatriots or interpreters, who are not qualified to conduct linguistic analysis. It is as if we were to take a world-ranking tennis player as an expert on anatomy: the fact that he controls his body perfectly during play proves nothing about his knowledge of any other human body. The compatriot or interpreter may have a perfect command of the language but is not trained to conduct an analysis of the language and compare it with neighbouring dialects (Maryns 2006). An interpreter exerts immeasurable influence on the result of an interview. A faithful translation is based on the comprehension of cultural realities in their momentary context, and ethnographic techniques make such comprehension easier of access.

VIII. STEREOTYPES AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Schemas are Like Self-fulfilling Prophecies Made by Our Minds

People have a tendency to perceive, interpret and remember information according to stereotyped schemas. Schemas serve to arrange our memories and also the production of new ideas. Our minds like to standardize and schematize things, including groups of which we are not members, indeed even those about which we have no information at all. All new information which does not 'fit' in the schemas demands more effort for processing, and therefore we have a tendency not to notice it or to modify it (Fiske, Taylor 1984).

Schemas serve as an aid to comprehension of ambiguous information and to drawing conclusions about things which our sources do not cover. If the information is classified according to a certain schema, it may not correspond to it perfectly, but despite this our minds tend to tailor it according to the schema rather than to change the schema (Fiske, Taylor 1984).

We are more inclined to remember a judgment or attitude of ours (e.g. to an applicant) than the concrete evidence (e.g. behaviour) which evoked it. People like to seek out information which confirms their past judgments. Similarly, they look for evidence in their surroundings which confirm their personal attitudes. For this reason what we 'remember' about other people is chiefly those details which we had presupposed about them.

Many research projects point to the striking reproduction of stereotypes about foreigners in the media, which are far from corresponding to reality (Divinský 2009; Gallová Kriglerová, Kadlečíková, Lajčáková 2009; Vašečka 2009). Prejudices subsequently serve as an 'incontestable' reason for discriminating against migrants (Popper, Bianchi, Lukšík, Szeghy 2006).

As well as the human mind, however, there are a number of social agents which contribute to the process of production and duration of prejudices (Kanovský 2009a): from the academic community and non--state and state institutions, through the government, parliament, bureaucracy and propaganda agencies, to the media and the public (Dráľ 2009). It is essential to distinguish what the given individual or group itself identifies with and what it is identified with by the above-mentioned institutions (Brubaker, Cooper 2000; Kusá 2005).

Question:
Those people are on the make. I wouldn't say anything to them about grounds for asylum… though it does happen that they don't know what asylum is… but they ought to say plainly why they have left their country.

Reply:
People without exception unconsciously (and sometimes also consciously) change their account according to who they are speaking to. They choose a speaking style, vocal coloration and all their expressive means, in accordance with the opinion they have of themselves and of the person who is listening to them. Everything we are talking about also changes under the influence of the stories we have heard from other people and their credibility. It follows that if immigrants are in embarrassment, this need not necessarily serve as evidence against them.

The reasons for an asylum application cannot be easily or quickly explained. Immigrants do not communicate with such accomplished ease and 'clarity' as is normal for people who have not had the experience of losing their homes. A number of immigrants have declared that the very word *asylum* left them terror-stricken. On account of ignorance, disinformation and the myths which manipulative people spread, many tell untruths at first and the truth only later. Stereotypes and schemas inhabit the field of immigration also: we meet them in accounts by applicants and immigration officials alike.

Question:
They always come late to the interview. How can this be explained?

Reply:
Apart from applicants who are planning to avoid the interview, there are also some who do not come late intentionally. A looser attitude to the conception of time may be expressed also in people's meetings. Arrival two hours late for a meeting is therefore not necessarily to be taken as an insult, because in the country of origin this may be customary or positively expected behaviour. In fact, even if someone does not turn up for the meeting at all, when the parties involved meet again they sometimes do not even raise the issue of why one of them failed to arrive. It is simply assumed that circumstances changed. This does not mean, however, that these people do not perceive time, or that they wish to give offence to someone in this way.

What we find 'odd' in the behaviour of foreigners is normally connected with our internalised patterns which we perceive as 'correct' and 'objective'. Cultural specificities are closely linked with what we consider as worthy of notice, as the norm and the received usage (Tužinská 2009a).

The use of schemas saves people the effort of processing new situations: schemas are like an autopilot in everyday life. The automatic linkage of information may even cause the individual to 'remember' something which did not happen, because what actually did happen does not fit into his schema. One can take the example of a research experiment: people observed a scene where a well-dressed white man pulled a knife on a black man. A large percentage of the spectators 'remembered' precisely the opposite: that the black man pulled a knife (Fiske, Taylor 1984).

People categorise others not only according to their own life experiences, but also according to information received in the most various ways. The fact that our perception is very subjective is manifest also in the fact that each person 'filters' all information through a different 'sieve'. If we have a foot in plaster, suddenly we see more people limping; if we're competitive we feel that everyone is straining to get ahead; if we're fleeing from something it seems to us that there's no place of refuge; and from our surroundings we 'filter through' proofs of our beliefs.

The human mind makes its contribution to the perception and processing of facts also by adapting them to its own beliefs. In other words, what we think is always only one of the possible culturally conditioned interpretations. Therefore the assertion that the applicant is behaving in a stereotyped way by no means explains the reasons for this behaviour. On the other hand, the mind's tendency to typologise and classify can be used during the interview to acquire data: we can ascertain the classifications which are peculiar to the informant and his or her cultural background.

Intercultural Differences May Be Discovered: by Contrast Questions

One of the universal characteristics of the human mind is to classify and in this way arrange experiences, feelings and information. People ascribe various qualities to persons and everyday things, according to the context in which they are found. They group characteristics and their significances into classes, and within those into sub-classes. Some classifications are diffused throughout society, others are known to smaller groups of people.

So as to understand the precise meaning of the concepts which informants are using, it is appropriate to ask about the classifications which they know and use. Firstly, we may ask basic probing questions of the type: *Could you describe X in detail for me, please?* Here we will also learn what X is called in the informant's 'jargon': (*…Y*). To understand the content of Y we ask: *How many different types of Y do you know?* (…A, B, C). Subsequently we will explore the difference between varying types: *What is the difference between A and B?* (…) (Spradley 1979). This type of examination is suitable for ascertaining categorisations of any kind, particularly those which are entirely unknown to us.

The following extract illustrates how the cultural background of informants influences their replies. It is not essential for the quality of the interview that informants should express themselves with technical correctness. What is important is that they have a chance to explain the meanings with which they use what we consider 'common' concepts.

Could you tell me, please, what you understand by the term immigrant? What would you call him? … *A foreign settler.*

Who would be a foreign settler? … *Everyone who comes here for an indefinite time.*

What different types of foreign settlers do you know? … *Voluntary and involuntary.*

What kind are voluntary? … *Husbands and wives, and employees.*

Where would you assign tourists and students? … *I don't think of them as settlers, because students leave when their courses of study are completed. But it's something they can think about, they might find a wife and a job here.*

And the involuntary? … *Those are the ones who are trying to save their lives and manage to get here somehow.*

And for example, the Bulgarian vegetable sellers at the market? … *Their great-great grandparents, surely? People who are born here aren't settlers.*

Can you think of any other types? … *Maybe illegals, but I haven't had any dealings with the legal side of things, that's something else.*

Intercultural differences can be clarified in this way for any of those matters which play a significant role in asylum application. The focus may be on name, ethnic origin, family, religious affiliation, education, employment, property status, or the political situation. It is recommen-

ded to make in-depth soundings of this type at the end, particularly where the informant's personal data are involved. If enough space is left at the beginning for description of the reasons for asylum, gradually it will become evident which of the questionnaire entries can be filled relatively briefly and which require supplementary probing questions.

As an example we may take ascertaining the immigrant's names. In explaining their names people also clarify their origin, type of kinship and social background. Similarly structured questions may be employed for other entries also.

Could you tell me all your names, please?
(…) (…)
How are names given in your country? (…)
What types of names are normally given in your country? (…)
What are names taken from? (…)
What kind of difference is there between individual names? (…)
How was it with your own naming? (…)
What do your names mean in translation? (…)
What consequences have you experienced as a result of bearing your name? (…)

Even in the context of the family, names can have different meanings. Bearing a particular name can bring various persons so close that they start to consider each other as relatives. A name may incorporate kinship status, a preordained relationship to various members of the family, and even what is expected of its bearer. In some cultures it is customary that each member of the family gives the child a different name: the child has many names with a variety of bonds. Names and surnames are spread not only horizontally in cultural and geographic space, but also vertically on the social ladder. For its bearer a name implies that the whole family is assigned to a certain social class (ordinarily by surname, sometimes also by forenames). Membership of some classes involves drastic restrictions on internal migration even within the country of origin, choice of marriage partner, or even options for education and profession. In many countries the Latin saying *Nomen omen* ('*Name is Fate*') is a fact of everyday experience.

How social groups are perceived and represented in the minds of their members contributes fundamentally to the shaping of those groups (Kanovský 2009b). A possible means by which verification of

membership in various social groups might proceed is the following:

Could you tell me, please, what different types of people were in your surroundings? (…)
What variant names for those groups do you know? (…)
Describe the groups in more detail, please. (…)
How are differences between them expressed in real life? (…)
What have you experienced personally as a member of that group?
Could you describe what designations the members of those groups use for each other? (…)

The division of society into groups is most often done according to racial, ethnic, familial, religious or political affiliation. From a description of the general situation we learn the context, and from a description of the particular situation we learn the degree to which the given division affected the applicant. All things considered, applicants should be able to speak in greater detail about their own groups. If the situation was threatening for them, they should be able to mention detailed instances of what they experienced because of belonging to the given social groups. Membership of a certain social group is often conditional on a combination of various identities, i.e. race, ethnic group, nation, religion or some other activity or characteristic, which even independently and singly may become a stimulus for persecution.

Intercultural differences exist always even in the context of one state. Every state political grouping, that is to say, represents a mix of various micro-cultures, which each has a life of its own as if forming 'a state within a state'. We can meet with a variety of types of behaviour towards social groups, from tolerance to extermination. One of the many reasons for this is that membership of a social group is essentialised.

Essentialisation is a universal phenomenon of psychology which is cognitively and socio-culturally conditioned. Various social groups may be essentialised: ethnic, racial, gender, religious, professional, estate, age, interest, and others. This means that 'indelible' and 'unalterable' characteristics, which are signs of the hidden 'unique essence' ascribed to its members (Kanovský 2009a; Findor 2005; Ferencová 2005). In the decision-making process it is therefore necessary to examine whether the given group in its particular socio-historical and cultural conditions is 'essentialised'. Currently in European societies ethnicity is essentialised; five hundred years ago estate and class membership were

essentialised, as caste membership is in present-day India. For the emergence of conflict it is sufficient if people are convinced of the 'mentality', essence, or strange practices of certain social groups.

Question:
Refugees from African states generally are in a very bad human rights situation. But there have also been cases which we don't meet with in our cultural context, witchcraft for example. How should one proceed in such exotic cases?

Reply:
The boundaries of the cultural context are set by the members of the given culture. What we consider close to or remote from our cultural context depends on people's angle of vision, terminology and beliefs. One must point out, however, that in Slovakia also witchcraft not only has its history but even has contemporary forms, which are the subject of scholarly studies (Bužeková 2009; Djurišičová 2010).

Cultural beliefs are an enduring subject of research for this reason among others, that they strikingly influence the behaviour of their bearers. For example, in many cultures one must not speak of dead people, pregnant women and newborn babies, sometimes even of infants who have not reached the age of one year. These beliefs may result in applicants preferring to give 'untrue' details in interviews rather than betray their faith and possibly injure some other person. In the ethnographic interview it is well-established that an unexpected or even suspicious detail may be an outcome of the immigrant's cultural beliefs. Such statements can be tested thoroughly with probing questions.

Question:
In Arab countries uneducated women have less independence and are afraid to speak without a man. They only repeat that their husband has said everything already. I don't know how that can be improved.

Reply:
When a strange man asks a woman something, certain women (particularly in Arab countries) may take it as a sign of respect if their husband answers for them (Khidayer 2009). In such a case it is essential that the interview should take place without the presence of another man. In general, it is recommended that the interviewer should be of the same sex as the applicant. (Much information may be lost even when a woman conducts an interview with a male applicant, simply because

the man feels ashamed, or his culture forbids him to share his thoughts and emotions with a woman.) If the personnel situation does not permit this, it will suffice if the interviewers are aware of this fact and can ensure that where there are signs of intimate inhibitions the case is handed over to a male or female colleague. If the problem persists even when all the participants in the interview, including the interpreter, are of the same sex, it is necessary to contact a psychologist. In these instances also the ethnographic interview is suitable on grounds of method, because open questions are simple, culturally sensitive and considerate, and they promote trust.

Question:
When examining, everyone keeps to their own procedure… We work with diverse people, and it's a big problem finding an access route to them and a correct approach. Sometimes I don't know what tactic to choose for conducting the interview.

Reply:
A correct approach or tactic, if it is aimed at addressing diverse people, must have diversity in its nature. The ethnographic procedures set out above are tailored or 'made to measure' on the spot. Hence, in the ethnographic interview the person who is conducting it intervenes by taking up key words that the informant uses. The interviewer finds the route indirectly, walking alongside the informant, and to a certain extent lets the informant lead the way. Ultimately, it is the informant who is the best guide to his or her own world, providing interpretation and commentary in response to our questions. For these reasons it is advantageous to put the question regarding the reasons for applying for asylum at the beginning, not to interrupt the narration, to return to key areas afterwards, and to ask for personal details only at a late stage.

The Diversity of Cultures Knows No Boundaries

There is a universally prevalent opinion that the differences between cultures are greater than the differences within one culture. Let us imagine, however, a situation where, despite having a similar upbringing, people behave entirely differently from what their milieu expects. Even among members of one family the differences are sometimes so great that it is as if each person spoke a different language. If we transfer the metaphor of the single family to a single culture, there too we find

a broad palette of manifestations in the behaviour of individuals, to the point where it sometimes seems they do not belong together. If we compare two cultures, we learn that similar standards and anomalies are evidenced in them. In both of these wholes people appropriate methods of surviving; in both, people believe in supernatural matters, cultivate 'strange' usages, feel afraid for their near ones; in both, people do not think that is does not matter what they say; in both, take care of being together (Brown 1991).

Customarily people stereotype ethnic groups and races, focusing more on the others than on themselves. Stereotypes are used mainly in casual chat; they oversimplify and distort situations, and in the great majority of cases they are directly or indirectly injurious to the given group of people. People have a tendency to seek proofs for their presuppositions, and so repeatedly they hone in on the faults of some person or group (Fiske, Taylor 1984).

Ideas are a view of the world. The thoughts of individuals and societies differ 'from door to door', in geopolitical space and in historical time. For these reasons among others, the concepts 'ethnicity' and 'race' have not been scientifically demarcated to this day, because each researcher has a different idea of which features are 'ethnic' and 'racial'. Brubaker therefore points out that ethnicity and race are not an actually existing *thing in the world,* but rather one of the possible *perspectives on the world* (Brubaker 2004).

Ultimately, 'otherness' is not explained by the fact that we designate it as the result of ethnic, racial or cultural affiliation. The choice of a non-ethnicising perspective (Drál' 2009) does not mean that we look at otherness from the point of view of the "blackened sheep", rather we look at who is 'blackening' it.

We have many reasons to accept that cultural particularities will exist independently of our desires, ideas or hypotheses. Perhaps there is no necessity for them to be logically explained. In contacts between people from various cultures we may attempt to comprehend otherness in a different way: through human senses and feelings (if only for the reason that genuine diversity cannot be invented and sometimes cannot be expressed, though it may be felt, touched, heard, seen, smelt and tasted). I address these aspects of intercultural communication in detail elsewhere (Tužinská 2009a).

In almost everything that a person does, our biological traits, feelings and appropriated ideas are co-operative agents. To seek simple affirmations that something is either innate or learned is like insisting that water be either oxygen or hydrogen. Each of our senses consists of

detectors, which make estimates of the outside world, and peripheries, which dispatch signals to the centre. Our minds, however, do not process these signals impartially, but in cooperation with all preceding perceptions, feelings and thoughts (Brown 1991). From this stand-point, the statement that an unchanging objective reality exists does not hold up. We co-operatively form reality by our own perception, the sense which everyone has of something else. Though we all have the same biological premises, we shape them against a different cultural background (Sperber and Hirschfeld 1999). A homogeneous culture is a construct of thought and not an objectively observable phenomenon (Barth 1969).

Question:
The immigrants sometimes declare a variety of ethnic affiliations. Isn't this a contradiction in terms?

Reply:
Identification with membership in various socio-cultural groups exists throughout the entire world and plays an important role in the interview. People can be convinced that they're 'different stuff' or 'the same stuff' regardless of the opinions of statesmen. They feel themselves to be of various ethnic groups despite cultural similarity, or alternatively of one ethnic group despite cultural difference and greater similarity with cultures 'over the border'. For example, Zahorie people, Rusyns and Gorals may consider themselves Slovaks, despite the fact that Moravians, Ukrainians and Poles understand their dialects better than Slovaks do. It depends on the society and on the historical-political situation which levels are identified as determinant: membership of a family (X), lineage or tribe (Y), geographical area (highlanders), ethno-cultural group (Gorals), nationality (Slovak/Polish), nation (Slovak), state (Czecho-Slovak Republic). It is not unusual in the world to find a number of ethno-cultural groups in the context of one nationality. These are distinguished one from the other by religious affiliation, geographical area, and estate or other social identity.

People living in border areas or ethnically mixed areas do not sharply differentiate themselves in time of peace. By contrast, in wartime border zones come under pressure from a number of interest groupings, which impress beliefs of cultural difference upon the people. Ideas of ethnic identity can thus be compared to gunpowder: they do not explode unless they are enclosed and politically ignited. It is common and quite typical for people to feel themselves members of various ethnic (or other) groups simultaneously, or even exclusively, depending on the social situation (Kanovský 2009b). The 'Pressburgers' of Bratislava are not fragmented personalities simply because in accordance with their family tree they profess German, Hungarian and Slovak nationality together. All over the world people's genealogies are ethnically tangled and culturally variegated, without regard to the changing borders of states.

Conclusion

A man is nearest to himself when he can be as present as a child at play.

Heraclitus

The aim of this text was to make useful information from anthropology and ethnology accessible to those who conduct and interpret interviews with immigrants. Taking extracts principally from the asylum applicants' milieu, I have illustrated some research techniques and findings which are well-known and established in practice in the social sciences. My assumption was that many of them can be applied, with benefits for all the parties participating.

Anthropology is useful on two levels in work with immigrants: *methodological* and *epistemological*. From the rich anthropological methodology I have focused here on the principles of the ethnographic *interview*, with particular reference to the benefits gained from open and probing questions. Selecting from the mass of information in 'the science of man', I have briefly outlined a number of themes in this handbook: the principles of how human *memory* functions in connection with narration and emotions, the principles of interpersonal *communication*, and the most commonly occurring cultural *differences*. I have devoted particular attention to the sociolinguistic aspects of interpreting and to culturally specific concepts.

The aim of anthropology is to understand people from a variety of cultures, including our own. Certainly, for many professions which come into contact with immigrants, *understanding* other people is not part of the job content. In this handbook there is no attempt to insinuate that people are obliged to invest effort (mainly on their personal initiative, and often outside working time) in the study of other cultures. Indeed, it was the acute pressure of work on people in these professions which suggested the idea of writing such a text: so that communicable expert knowledge which they do not have the means of acquiring might be at their disposal.

If I were to select a single basic characteristic of quality description in anthropology, which would also be a precondition for a good interview, it would be *taking the position of the observer*. In bridging different cultures one of the key principles is *not to judge*. Taking the position of the observer means that the person who is describing tries to be impartial. Paradoxically, that can be done only when this person is aware of the judgments which willy-nilly are running through his or her mind. He or she sets these aside provisionally, knowing that they are not objectively real, they are simply produced by the optics of one's location when observing – they are *cultural* boundaries of *his* or *her standpoint*.

One of the most important and frequently mentioned insights of social scientists observing the migration field is this: officials have a general unspoken working assumption that asylum applicants are lying. Attention has also been drawn to the conditions which institutions create: the applicant's speech is in all aspects subordinated to the *organization* and *structure* of the interview. For these reasons also, the one thing that the immigrants have, their own story, often goes unheard. Besides, the *format of proceedings* with *frequent interruption* disables their testimony. It follows that the records are sum totals of impersonal résumés, over which the applicant has no control. In such confrontations the applicant's fundamental instrument of communication loses significance (Maryns 2006).

On the other hand, one of the basic problems involved in using the anthropological standpoint as such is this: anthropologists maintain that *culture is not a given fixed object* of established institutions, customs and forms of social organization, but rather relational reaction to changing inner and outer conditions. Because of this, *relationally-oriented* anthropological research may seem over-complicated and unreliable to legally-established institutions with *rule-oriented* reasoning such as the courts, ministries and police (Thuen 2004, Good 2007, 2008). The solution is neither to change the anthropological understanding of culture to 'hard fact' nor to adhere to a strict legalistic position, but rather to acknowledge *that both approaches are productive* and necessary: one for understanding and the other for the practical resolution of complex situations.

Anthropology is primarily interested in what it means to *be a member* of the given group, at a certain *time* and *place*. As the Indian proverb tells us, *do not judge any man until you have walked for two moons in his moccasins*. Given that we rarely have such an opportunity, we can ask to have those 'two moons' described for us. But whether we have a description of two months or only of two hours, we must reconcile ourselves to the fact that all answers will remain incomplete. There will always be something not fully said, or even unsayable. In communication we are dependent on what we ask about. It is necessary to point out, however, that the fact that something is not in language does not necessarily mean that it has no existence. If we wish to learn more, we cannot change the informant, but we can change our method of acquiring data.

A large quantity of recorded data about an informant is no guarantee that there is sufficient information for making a decision. If we go through the interview mechanically and automatically, the filters of our beliefs guarantee maximal subjectivity in the data acquired. One of the few countermeasures is to perceive the person as part of a system: apart from the elements (persons, facts, entries, things, numbers, etc.), it is essential to see the *relationships* between the elements. By setting the elements in relation to one another one can perceive their social network and cultural background, as conveyed by the informant.

Everyone who has conducted an interview and 'failed' at it knows the feeling of facing a lifeless heap of opaque data: they have to be processed, but one postpones the task. Finally, against one's inclinations and with immense effort, one achieves a result that gives little satisfaction. When I conveyed this impression to an experienced colleague, he said: "Remember that the fault is never the informant's. A good researcher will get research done anywhere with anyone."

The ethnographic interview mediates understanding and penetrates into the life of other cultures through a *process of asking questions*. The more successful the in-depth interview at the beginning, the fewer "insufficiently ascertained factual states" there will be and the less need for repeat interviews afterwards. Even if it only affected three cases out of a hundred, those three people would be spared some years of waiting before finally receiving asylum – among other things, because 'incon-sistent' data had been explained in the course of repeated hearings. The use of ethnographic techniques helps to avoid taking discrepancies as facts. Open questions, which give more space to the immigrant and higher quality material to all involved, ultimately save everyone's time.

If I were to mention one special feature of 'a good interview', it would be *genuine interest* in the person. The information imparted will then lead to understanding, empathy and acceptance of otherness. The interview participants will stop 'playing at something' and begin to 'play'. It is worth noting that if people sense trust and genuine interest, their answers go more to the gist of things. Maybe this is also why children ask the best-targeted questions: their sincere curiosity makes their questions disarming. The overall atmosphere of personal dealings always contributes to the result and quality of research. If the interview is conducted with *respect*, all those involved may be left with the feeling of 'a good interview'.

In conclusion, I will present one of the principal recommendations of ethnographers and anthropologists (even researchers who have been studying other cultures for years): *during research we know nothing at all about the other culture*. Even if we happen to have a great deal of information, indeed personal experience, the ethnographic interview is of higher quality if we temporarily *stop thinking* about what we think we know about the other person. It is a kind of professional game, an experiment which pays off for many: regardless of which territory we are actually on, we imagine that we are in the foreigner's land, in the role of observer, in silence. For a while we adopt an attitude as if the narrator were his or her own cultural ambassador to us, the foreigners… *Could you tell me, please, how you live?*

Appendix

Appendix No. 2, Law No. 480/2002. From the Slovak Republic's Register of Laws.

Holding Camp Stamp, No: ; Photo 3, 5 X 4, 5 cm ;

QUESTIONNAIRE for those applying for the grant of asylum

PERSONAL DETAILS OF THE APPLICANT

1. Surname: ; Woman's maiden name: ;
2. First name(s): ;
3. Do you use (have you used) other names, surnames, or nicknames? Yes/No; What were/are they?
4. Date of birth:
5. Place of birth: ; District/region: ; State: ;
6. Statehood: (mention all) (a) current: ; (b) previous: ; (c) none/stateless: ;
7. Nationality and ethnic origin: ;
8. Religious confession: ;
9. Sex: Man/Woman: ;
10. Mother tongue(s): ; Knowledge of other languages: ;
11. Highest level of education attained: ;
12. Place of permanent residence in the country of origin: ;
13. Performance of military service in the country of origin or another country (where, when and how long): ;

PERSONAL DETAILS OF FAMILY MEMBERS

15. Father: ; Date of birth: ; Residence: ; Employment: ;
16. Mother: ; Date of birth: ; Residence: ; Employment: ;
17. Siblings: (surname, first name(s), sex, date of birth, place of birth, residence, employment): ;
18. Marital status: Single, Married, Widowed, Divorced, Partner: ;
19. Wife(husband)/partner: (surname, maiden name, first name(s), sex, date of birth, place of birth, residence, employment): ;
20. Children: (surname, first name(s), sex, date of birth, place of birth, residence): ;

PROPERTY STATUS OF THE APPLICANT

21. What financial means do you dispose of at present? ;
22. What movable estate and real estate do you own? ;
23. Do you receive financial or material support from a physical person or a legal person? ;

PREVIOUS ASYLUM PROCEEDINGS

24. Have you already applied for asylum or other form of protection on the territory of the Slovak Republic or in another country? Yes/No; When and where? ; Was a decision given on this application? No/I do not know/Yes/the application was rejected ; When was the decision given? ;

DOCUMENTS OF IDENTITY

25. Passport: Yes/No, Number: , Day when issued: , By whom: , Valid until: ;
26. Document in lieu of passport: Yes/No, Number: , Day when issued: , By whom: , Valid until: ;
27. Other document: Yes/No, Number: , Day when issued: , By whom: , Valid until: ;
28. Documents not available: (state whether they could have included a valid visa or residence permit: if yes, state the name of the issuing organ and the date of issue, also the term of validity): ; Departed without documents: ; Documents lost: (When? Where? Was their loss notified? To whom?) ; Documents stolen: (When? Where? Was their theft notified? To whom?) ; Other reasons: (state in detail) ;

DOCUMENTS OF RESIDENCE/VISA

29. Do you have documents of place of residence/a visa for the Slovak Republic? Yes/No ; Type of document: Residence permit: , Entry visa: , Transit visa: , Day when issued: , By whom: , Valid until: ;
30. Do you have documents of place of residence/a visa in another member state of the European Union? Yes/No, Which state? , Type of document: , Residence permit: , Entry visa: , Transit visa: , Day when issued: , By whom: , Valid until: ;

ROUTE

31. State the country in which your journey began (country of origin or residence, when): ; The route from the country where your journey began to the point of entry to the territory of the Slovak Republic: ; Dates and times of the journey: ; Day of crossing the border: ; At border crossing: ; or Outside border control (illegal entry): ; Means of transport used: Public transport (which form?), Own vehicle, Other means (which?) ;
32. What is the target country of your journey? ;
33. While resident abroad, have you entered into contact with the diplomatic missions of your country? ;
34. When and how did you enter the territory of a member state of the European Union? Whose territory, i.e. of which member state of the European Union, did you enter first? Did you cross the border at a border crossing, or outside border control (illegally)?; Purpose of residence: ;

DATA ON FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING IN MEMBER STATES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

36. Does any member of your family live in one of the member states of the European Union? Yes/No ; Name of the family member: ; Date of birth: ; Marital status: Single, Married, Widow, Divorced; Kinship relation: Wife(husband), Mother, Father, Child, Brother, Sister, Legal Representative ; Other: (state); Member state: ; Address in this state: ; Form of residence: Acknowledged asylant with permanent residence/Asylum applicant/Illegal ;

OTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE APPLICANT

37. Have there been, or are there now, any criminal proceedings brought against you? (when, where, on what grounds and with what outcome?) ;
38. Have you been a member of a political party, movement, or other organization (state which)? ;

APPLICATION FOR ASYLUM ON THE TERRITORY OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

39. State all reasons why you decided to apply for the granting of asylum on the territory of the Slovak Republic: ;
40. State the names, surnames, dates of birth and sex of your children up to 18 years, in whose name you are applying for the granting of asylum: ;
41. State the names, surnames, and dates of birth of any further family members, in whose name you are applying for the granting of asylum together with yourself: ;
42. Are there any other facts and proofs which you believe would support the grounds of your application for the granting of asylum? ;

DECLARATION

I have been advised of my rights and duties during residence on the territory of the Slovak Republic, including the right to choose a legal representative and to have recourse to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the right to make contact with other organisations concerned with the care of asylum seekers.

I declare that I have understood the questions presented in the questionnaire, and all statements of fact which I have made in the course of the immigration interview are truthful.

Signed on …….. (date) ;

Signature of the applicant;
Signature of the interpreter;
Signature of the authorised official of the ministry.

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Helena Tužinská's book encourages a thoughtful approach to what seems a straightforward encounter, the open interview. Writing in an accessible style, she describes how a routine use of language, or a schematic notion of how human memory functions, can be obstacles to knowledge. Her book is a valuable demonstration of the fact that analytical acuteness and respect for the other person need not be mutually exclusive alternatives. I therefore warmly recommend it to social scientists and all who use the interview as a means towards understanding the life experiences of others.

Zuzana Kusá, sociologist

Even the title of Helena Tužinská's book indicates that it will be useful on a wide scale. She uncovers links in the process of communication, revelations which are not only instructive and beneficial but also interesting. Many of the author's reflections offer us a way of looking, thinking and acting so that we can respect and accept things which previously, for us, were invisible.

Said Babakhel, interpreter and translator

I feel assured that this book will fulfil its purpose. The reader will find a broad spectrum of examples from working practice. Many issues are addressed regarding the quality of description and translation, which are relevant to almost all interviews with immigrants. For this reason I recommend Helena Tužinská's book to the attention of all who are practically concerned.

Boris Divinský, expert on the question of foreign migration

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